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**The
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**Trinity College, Toronto
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Trinity Review

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To the Review Board and our sub-committees
thank you for your tireless efforts.
A little masochism never hurt anybody.

Contents

	Cover
	4
<i>Self-Portrait 1</i> , Rosy Rong	7
Interview with Nick Thran	8
Nick Thran, <i>Seriously, it was the Biggest Cricket</i>	9
<i>Glowworms</i>	10
<i>Letter to L From Spencer Ave</i>	11
<i>The Good People of Santa Eugenia de Ribeira</i>	12
<i>In an Old Diner</i> , Eric Foley	13
<i>Fall</i> , Allison La Sorda	14
<i>The Darkness and Harold</i> , David Bowden	15
<i>Zombie Movies</i> , Josh Stewart	16
<i>Fish</i> , Rosy Rong	17
<i>The Attack of Dolly</i> , Sophia Balagamwala	18
<i>Advertisements</i> , Sophia Balagamwala & Shannon Garden Smith	19
<i>Into the Polish Countryside</i> , Weronika Czaplá	20
<i>Nostalgia</i> , Yeong Hwan Kwon	22
<i>Untitled</i> , Elisa Pelaia	23
<i>Twice. Again, Twice</i> , Katarina French	24
<i>Wings</i> , John Estabillo	25
<i>After Hopkins</i> , Caroline X. Aksich	26
<i>On Saying Goodbye to Rogue</i> , Emily Swinkin	27
<i>Comedy</i> , Anne Vikhrova	28
<i>Where Are My Pants</i> , Katharine Howard	29
<i>RoboMike</i> , Emma McKee	29
<i>See You Wednesday</i> , Emily Hofstetter	30
<i>The Rash</i> , Lara Solnicki	31
<i>The Day I Drowned</i> , Andrew MacDonald	32
<i>Purple Stains</i> , Andrew MacDonald	33
<i>Afternoon</i> , Anne Vikhrova	38
<i>Anne Enright</i> , E.A.L. Jordan	39
<i>Dating</i> , Claire Marie Stancek	40
<i>Nursed With Ice</i> , Lara Solnicki	41
<i>Robert</i> , Victoria Hetherington	45
<i>William</i> , Eric Foley	46
<i>Chimney Smoke</i> , Katie Jordan	47

Nick Thran is the author of *Every Inadequate Name* (Insomniac Press, 2006), and a finalist for the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award. His poems have appeared in *Arc*, *Geist*, *Maisonneuve*, and the *National Post*, among others. He lives in Toronto.

The Trinity Review is pleased to feature four of Nick Thran's poems, including *Seriously, it was the Biggest Cricket*, previously published in his book, as well as three new poems, *Glowworms*, *Letter to L from Spencer Ave* and *The Good People of Santa Eugenia de Ribeira*.

We also feature the following interview with Thran, in which he speaks about **basketball**, the experience of publishing his first book, and the craft of **poetry**.

Interview

Trinity Review: In Every Inadequate Name you included poems from your first Chapbook Coastline Variations, which you wrote four years ago. How do you find the poems themselves change upon re-reading?

Nick Thran: If I picked them up everyday and read them to myself, I'd go crazy. How I feel about them fluctuates. I'm proud of them, but I want to expand my field of inquiry and do different things.

TR: You began to discuss youth in Seriously, It Was the Biggest Cricket; do you find that your new poetry continues to explore youth?

NT: In that instance [*Seriously, It Was the Biggest Cricket*] yes, though I'm conscious of not dwelling on youth so much in my newer work. It seems to me that a lot of first books capture youth very well. A lot of older poets I admire seem to return to themes of youth. I think there's something natural about that, something relating to the whole dichotomy between birth and death. And older poets have had enough space to become, not necessarily wise, but pretty sure about what's kept them going.

TR: How are you influenced by other writers?

NT: I read all of the time. I love a lot of peoples work and I'm trying to steal from everyone. I'm pretty confident that the more I pillage, the better my work will become, and the harder it will be to trace

the original sources. Every writer is part of a long conversation with the past. If you wanted to get into it, you could pretty much trace the lineage of any writer, no matter how original their work may seem.

TR: Do you find art in pop culture and everyday life?

NT: I'm interested in the texture of our day-to-day life... I want to keep pace with how the lives of people around me are going, because I hang out with them and play basketball with them, and talk to them about, you know, whether they believe in God or not.

TR: Any guilty pop culture pleasures?

NT: Lyle Lovett Live is pretty fucking awesome.

TR: We were expecting Celine Dion.

NT: No, No, No.

TR: It seems that there's been urban, rural and suburban settings in your poetry, where some poets tend to stick to one. Do you feel like an aspect of your poetry is being open to whatever experience comes your way?

NT: I don't know if it's being open so much as it's just adding texture. It's a memory upon a billboard, upon a sky, upon some other kind of memory. I'm not as concerned with making sure that I'm traveling to each place I've lived or been to so much as I'm thinking a poem through. It's non-linear. As I'm thinking through these things, I'm bumping up against this and that and I just have to work my way to the end of the poem.

TR: With some poets there's a pressure to write about nature. For example Don McKay often writes about the Canadian landscape. A lot of poets feel a relationship to one area, do you?

NT: A poet like Don McKay, he's trying to bump his head against the sky, against geological time. That's everywhere. There's nothing regional about that. That said, you have your obsessions... you say 'wow!' I write about my own physical and geographical surroundings-the prairies, whatever-but it's an unconscious thing.

TR: The poems in Every Inadequate Name are not strictly formal. What can we expect as far as formalism in your next book?

NT: It's a diabolical mixture sometimes. You have to look at everything, or you're gonna' sell yourself short. People divide themselves into camps. Doing this, especially as a young writer, is a disservice to your work.

Robert Hass has a good essay on free verse in his book *Twentieth Century Pleasures*. Every good poem has it's own internal logic. I am very interested in rhyme, but not married to it. I try and avoid what I think are some of the more ornamental aspects of formalism, but at the same time I'm weary of some free verse tendencies to rely on personality -- the quirky detail, the heavy sentiment -- as its lone driving force. I'm trying to look for ways to trim the fat off both, and I found by doing so I've worked more with formal structure than before.

My new manuscript is something that I'm very uncertain about, and it's quite different, but I'm very convinced that uncertainty is important when you're in the middle of writing a book.

TR: Is it challenging?

NT: Challenging, no, it's terrifying. Older writers I meet, the ones who are still writing their most vital work, they're still probing, still questioning, still uncertain -- but they're always ready to give it a go. That said, writing is a lot of fun. When you have bent and prodded a few words kicking around in your head and turned them into a line that sounds right to you, that's the first reward. To find out later that it actually sounded right to a few other readers is a privilege and, well, a good start.

Seriously, it was the Biggest Cricket

I should have propped something else beside it-- an empty can, or the last half of my sandwich. As it stands, the cricket's size grows in the telling, spreads like the news, years ago, of abandoned stacks of dirty magazines stowed at the creek behind the street where I grew up. When my bicycle tires edged over the lip, boys were already clutching the rain-soaked pages in their fists, the ink of my first glimpses of flesh were already starting to pale, to bleed into the leaves. Seriously, we'd say in the schoolyard, it was the coolest. Later, actual

clothing would melt off actual flesh; yes, melt, not just fall to the floor, because, seriously, she was the hottest. Then gossip flares up in the yard's kindled corners. When she finally calls up, crying, I don't relay how her how could yous clutched at my throat, pinned me to the receiver, silent, ashamed, because I knew I'd been the worst.

Then what? I left, took a few bum jobs humping rich peoples' luggage, spent two years in Seoul, Korea, navigating through crowds where, for the first time, I was the tallest, so I stuck out to this gorgeous backpacker who speaks fluent Italian, recites whole blocks of the *Inferno* aloud, and moved in with her as soon as I came home, because, seriously, it felt like the real thing. Though I'm no longer sure

"real" is the right word, because it's years on,
and I'm no longer sure of this house, or this town,
or my job, and with her, lately, well let's just say
this stretch has been tough. So I stuff the last three
cans of a six-pack, a camera, and a sandwich
into a knapsack, set out to hike along a creek
where leaves brushing against my bare forearms
still feel erotic. Rambling, I turn this corner to find
there, on a bare patch of dirt, the world's biggest cricket,
this freakishly massive thing, and clutch at my mouth
as the air fills with the orchestral swell of its legs,
and gather myself enough to snap a single photo
before it leaps so high I think it must be heading
into someone else's life. Shit, I whisper further on,
realizing my shot on the bare patch will show nothing
of its largeness. Hear myself having to try to explain,
struggling, because it was amazing, and, seriously,
I've never been able to help myself. One way or another,
I will have to try to tell her every single thing.

Glowworms

Halfway down guy wires
in broad daylight,
these critters not too proud
to crack their first beers
before noon.

Miss you. Love you.
Wish you were here.

Balloons. Balloons.
Balloons.

[Nick Thran]
from *Every Inadequate Name*
(Insomniac Press, 2006)

Letter to L From Spencer Ave

I've been thinking a lot about trying to do something outside
of the literary world since your visit. We've been setting up
the new bookstore alongside carpenters and electricians.
The dust has been terrible. Most of the staff has gone down
with the flu. I've been reading Bolaño's *The Savage Detectives*
and L., you would love it; desperate young poets too frail
for this world, barreling through Mexico and Europe toward
an awareness, I think, that they'll have to make some other life.
The bookstore is replacing an electronic repair outlet. Yesterday
a Hindu man walked in asking where the owner of it was. I
couldn't tell him. The whole neighbourhood is "in transition,"
whatever that really means. Hing's *Antique Lights* is going out
of business. Everyday that I walk by there's less and less glow
from the window, more and more silver hooks and black cords
hang like sad hairs from the walls. I've been talking a little
with the security alarm installer - my age - about hourly wages.
He makes twice as much as I do, and it's only temporary
until he can get his foot in the door of the fire department
and (I can already see you smiling) start to fight some fires.
Inspecting alarms somewhere the size of the convention centre
can take up to four months. Imagine four months of tinkering
with panels and cameras to keep the world at night outside!
That place is a fortress, while the storefront signs around here
seem to re-brand in the breeze. As for what I've been doing,
I've been reading *The Savage Detectives*, and keeping close tabs
on the worsening condition of Hing's. Say our new store follows
the same trend; only no lamps are plucked from the outlets,
there's no deteriorating glow, none of the tell-tale signs. I don't
need to tell you that the spirit's not broke, just reroute the lines.

[Nick Thran]

The Good People of Santa Eugenia de Ribeira

aren't coming outside.
Not while the sea is still a grave
and the smell of cod lingers like aftershave
in the city's old harbour. The good people
aren't coming outside.

There's a new plan, but there's not a new reason.

So the high winds sob at their doors through the night,
clutching fists full of bronze girls from Sweden.

In An Old Diner

At the edge of a quiet town
in January, perched near blinds
against the sun, watching the white
abdominal flesh of a young mother
as she stands and slips
her belt back on, the brown
belt she had used
to strap her infant to his chair.

Outside the sky moves
safe and slow, cold
licking clear blue,
steam rising
from the backs of salt-stained trucks
sputtering to ecstatic life.

Fall

Our empty rhetoric is silenced by
blank stares, exhausted sighs: we retire.
I'll scrape this conversation under my fingernails
save it for digging later.

But in sleep
we are relieved from flexing muscles of babble
and from the fear of toppling.
Instead, we become bestial forms –
confer with grunts and snuffles,
curve into and around each other.
Scratching, throbbing and digesting
we fall
withholding blankets,
complete and vulnerable.
In and out of consciousness, our
eyelids flutter like bat wings;
we dream of fucking and talking.

The Darkness and Harold

An hour and a half in the dark, Harold figured the lights weren't coming back on by themselves. Still, he waited for a change -- nervously rubbing his palms against the worn velvet of his armchair, drying them of sweat. Another twenty minutes crept past, and the necessity of action became increasingly unavoidable. Yet he could not bring himself to move, and glanced nervously from side to side at the room he knew had to be there, somewhere beneath the dark.

He was at the outer reaches of his patience, and soon enough, his faith began to falter. Although he was unsure of the strength of his legs, he knew that the darkness required a now unavoidable series of actions. Despite his infirmities, he knew that the unavoidable time for action had arrived. So Harold rose slowly and timidly, senseless of any change in relation to his surroundings, aware only of the straightening of his own spine and the increased weight on his feet.

He rubbed his eyes with the heel of his palm, pushing them into his eyesockets, hoping they would then pick up on some faint traces of light to help him find his way. Several blinks and still the only relief from the darkness was the flickering green static of his retinas' efforts, vainly dancing against the shapeless world around him. He began to walk, cautiously, testing the weight on each foot before timidly proceeding.

The room was navigable through feel, and he palmed his way around, following the wall with his shoulder, trying (and often failing) to avoid the amorphous outlines of furniture, which played invisible tricks in the absence of light and frequently collided with his shins and knees. Five minutes of profanity and broken glass passed before his left hand firmly gripped the banister, while his right traced the corrugated cardboard and seal of duct tape lining the adjacent windowpane. The stairs posed a new challenge; by pulling with all his might up the banister, he slowly managed the steady incline. His feet struggled over each step, brushing the rough, uneven wood with their sensitive soles. Before he had realized it, all stairs had been ascended, His last overambitious step found no footing, and he toppled painfully forward into the upstairs hallway.

Muttering curses to recover, he once again struggled to his aching feet and groped blindly in the dark for the cord to the attic. His fingers clumsily brushed at the hanging rope, but his palm could not close fast enough to grasp it. Instead, the rope was sent swinging wildly to and fro, while Harold (his temper now wearing thin) grabbed violently at the air, clutching several handfuls of nothing until the cord snagged between his left index and middle finger. He jerked the rope down and, by leaning

forward, just narrowly missed the attic ladder as it crashed to the floor millimeters away from his back and skull.

Panting, he began to recover. A few minutes later he was back on his feet, and he grasped the first rung of the ladder with anxious trepidation. Once more he began to haul himself up, struggling against the dead weight of his mostly useless legs. The minutes passed, and sweat began running in rivulets down his brow and over his cheeks. After what had seemed like millennia, he reached the cold wooden platform of the attic floor.

Nearing his goal, Harold imagined he could finally see a light at the end of the tunnel. The fuse box was a large, cold rectangle at eye level, and one smack located it with a satisfying metallic whoomp. The door swung open, and Harold located the replacement fuse, removing the last one from its package. He carefully searched the fuse box with the other hand, attempting to locate the spot where the old fuse had shuffled off this mortal coil. His fingers traced the fried fuse and removed it, throwing the useless cylinder over his shoulder. He felt for the empty socket and began to position the replacement at the vacancy, but the fuse, lubricated by the sweat on his palm, slipped through his fingers, making a faint, metallic tink on the attic floor.

On his hands and knees, Harold combed the floor in large, arcing hand movements. Fifteen minutes in this employment, the edge of his pinky located the cold cylinder. He lifted himself to his feet, fuse in hand; he was satisfied with this successful search. Once again he located the empty socket with one finger while carefully positioning the fuse with the other hand. With intense concentration, he pushed the cylinder slowly in place.

For a tenth of a second, a hot flash of blue plasma filled the attic, searing through the darkness and instantaneously filling the room with a thousand daylights. It was as if in that fraction of a moment Harold's whole world was caught in the same magnificent brilliance, radiating out from his dusty attic and illuminating the cracks in the house's siding with supernatural intensity. The kilowatt hours spun recklessly on Harold's meter, and a mile away the transformer shot forth incandescent sparks into the moonless night, each juncture exploding in its own fireworks display, surging forth mountains of electricity to the cosmic event occurring in Harold's attic. A second later, the power company registered a prodigious spike in usage in his vicinity, and sent trucks to investigate.

The coroners joked that the event must have been visible from space.

Zombie Movies

"Forget the dead you've left; they will not follow you." – Bob Dylan

It's an old struggle, of course –
man against his nature
as a mortal being,
trying to put death into a corner
and leaving it there to gather dust.
But I wonder why the dead

and the un-dead have so much in common,
and why they always walk so slowly.
And I can't help but ask myself
why the zombies so often have sharp objects
protruding from their necks or torsos.
What kind of small, remote town
with an isolated house on top of a hill

produces so many corpses
that haven't been cleaned up properly
for the funeral?
Doesn't anyone die of natural causes –
heart attacks, old age, blood clots –
in this kind of town?
And why are all the dead so young?
Zombies or not,
I don't think many people would choose
to live in a town

where the life expectancy is so low
and the chances of a spectacular death
are so high.
Not to mention that even the living
seem to have a lot of faults.
I mean, someone always blows himself up
doing something unthinkably stupid,

and there's always one woman
whose role is to scream and pull ugly faces
while someone else saves her ass.

There tends to be a good chance
that at least one of the six survivors
will kill some of the others
in a flurry of selfishness.

And even the leader, who shows occasional
signs of possessing greater intelligence
than the zombies,

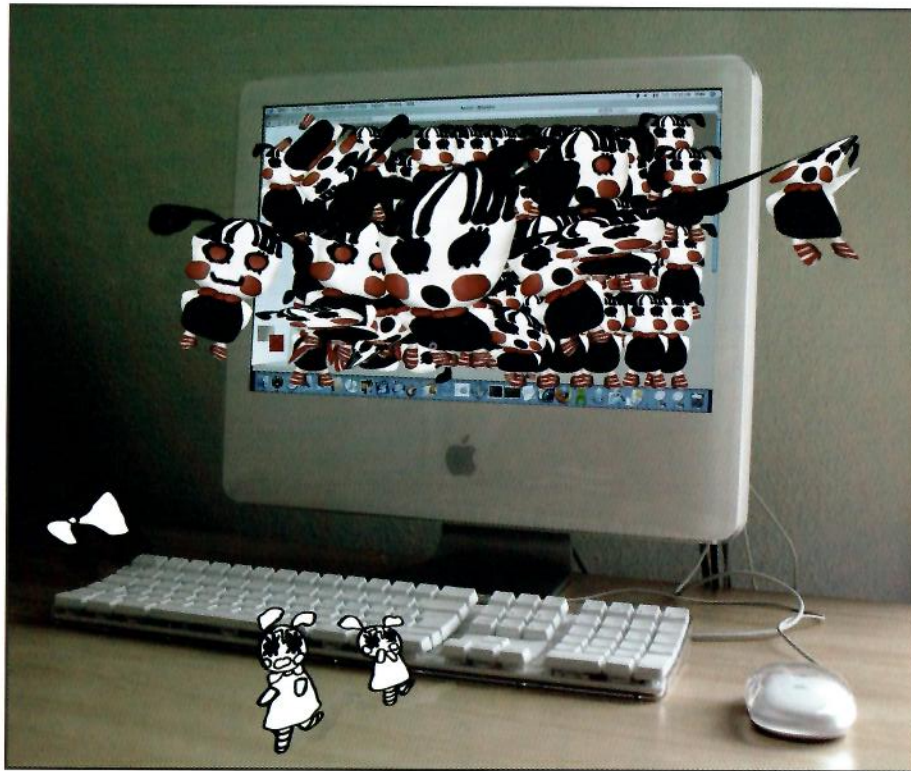
always stands too close to a window
with his back turned,
where he will be pulled into death's arms
half-way through his explanation
of the plan that will lead them all
to salvation.

[Josh Stewart]



Anatomy Study No 2

[Rosy Rong]



The Attack of Dolly

[Sophia Balagamwala]

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Vol. I.

TRINITY COLLEGE, TORONTO, JANUARY, 1888

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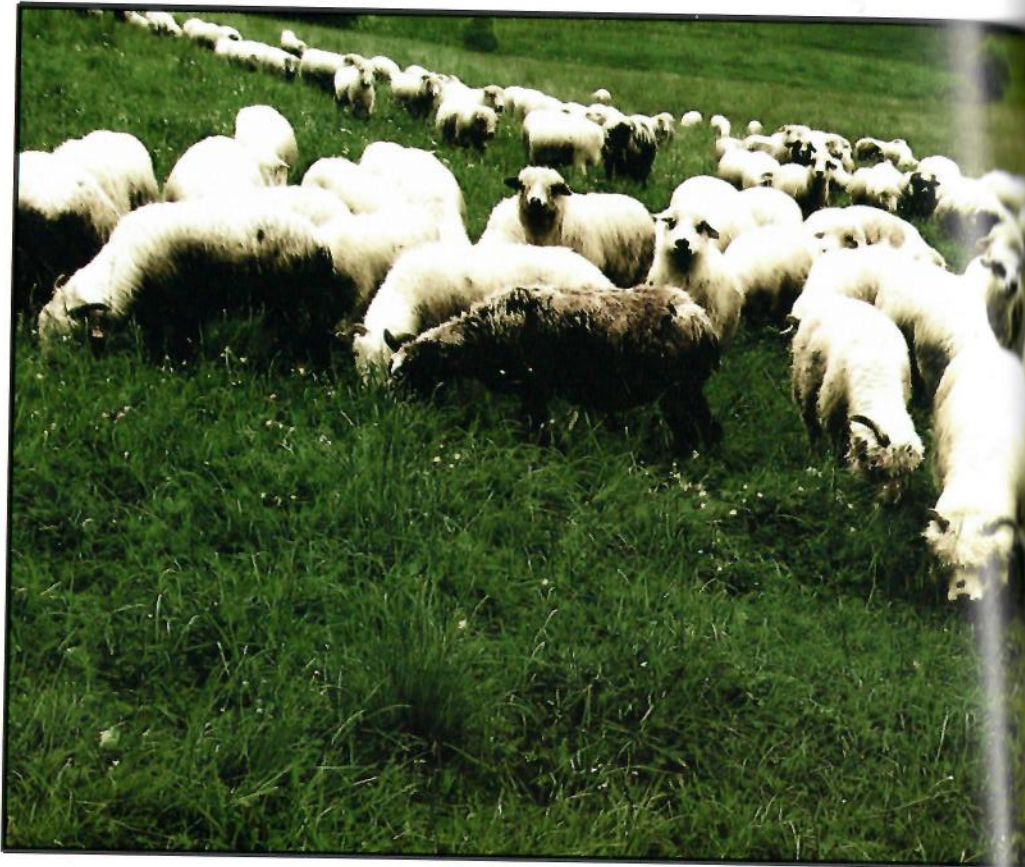


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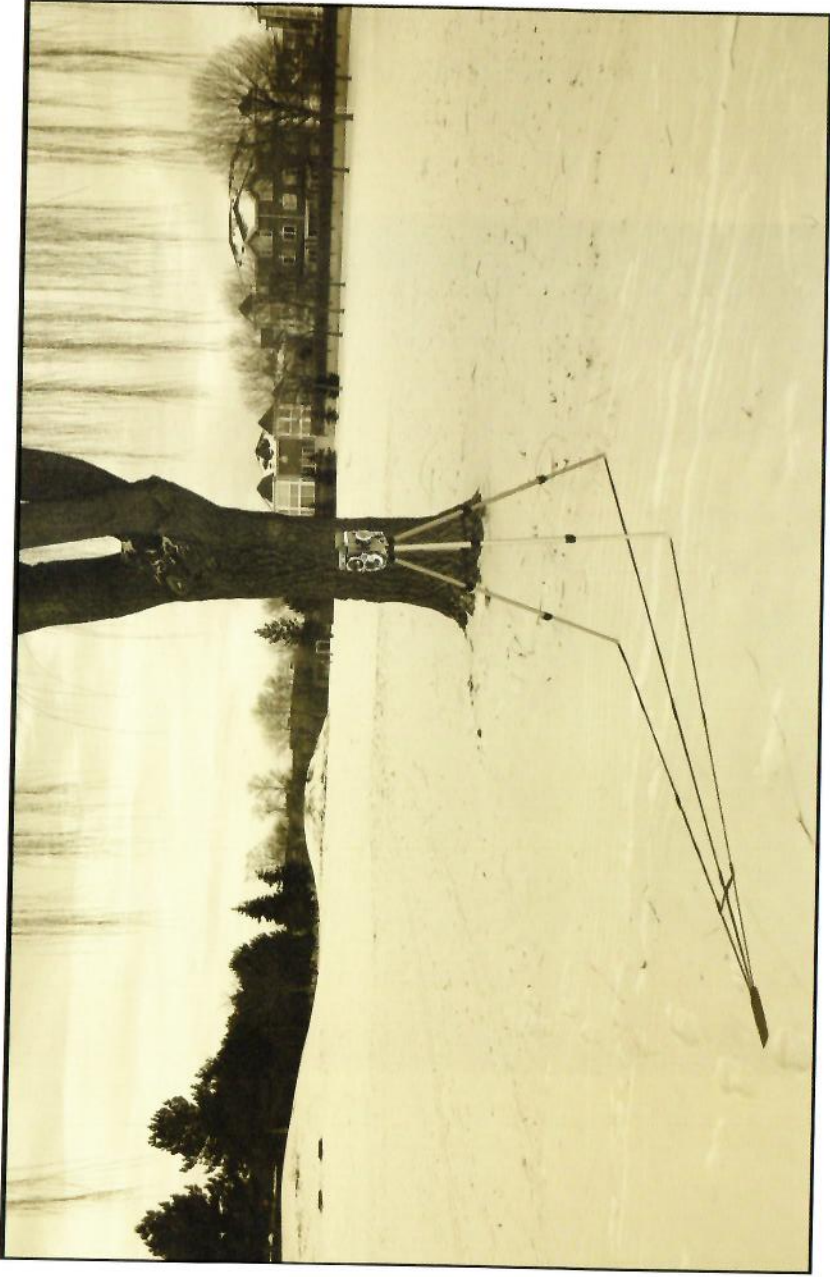
[Sophia Balagamwala,
Shannon Garden Smith]



Into the Polish Countryside



[Weronika Czapla]



Nostalgia

[Yeong Hwan]



Untitled

[Elisa Pelata]



Twice. Again, Twice.

[Katarina French]

Wings

Waiting for the earliest train
I try to transpose this moment
into the overwhelming silence before
the heron's wingbeat
pushes still water.

It is a farce.
There is no heron
and the half-wilderness across the tracks
offers its own sad beauty.
The morning cracks its gleaming egg
over the horizon and the distant thump of the train
beats the ground like the ascent of vast metal wings.

[John Estabillo]

After Hopkins

The glory of God: not found in the sky;
Nor in the portrait of naive Hydra,
Bathing in the pitch sea next to that sly
Crater crow. No, God dwells in the umbra
Of grandeur— fresh figs cut open reveal
Flesh, skin and broken seed rings.

No, God's smaller yet, lodging in plump peel:
A pupil sized wasp that has lost her wings
Forcing through a fig's mouth, pollinating;
Blind and limbless the dance begins anew.
Flesh deep fig flowers and larvae are growing,
With greed-bead-eyes that crow begins to coo.
Despite all this splendour, Adam and Eve sew'd
Fig leaves together and made coverings?

On Saying Goodbye to Rogue

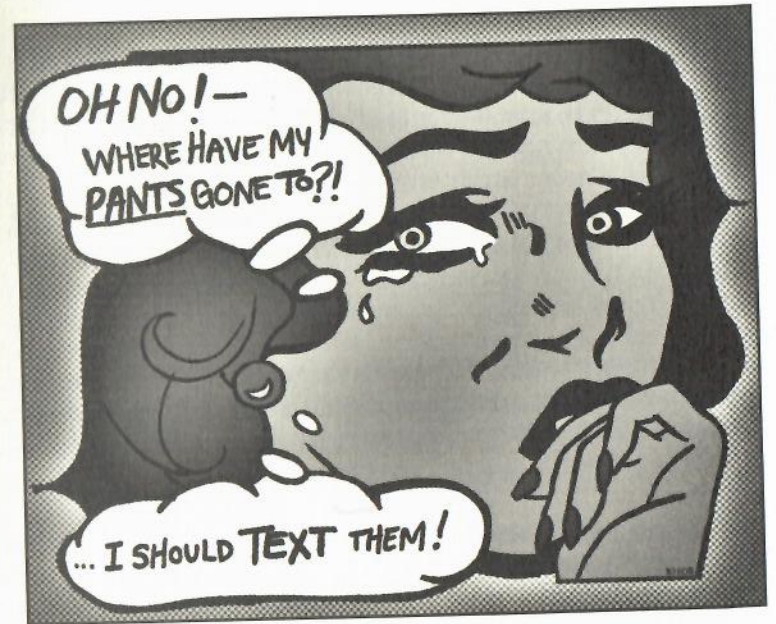
I lied when I said I didn't pray
for you.
After I poured you
a glass: tenderness.
I stumbled over the ashes
to ashes bit
because I thought it fit.
They never mentioned sea
to sea.
I buried you my swimmer
In the sea, at least that's where
I told myself you'd end
eventually.

Comedy

When the curtain at your mouth
draws up
slim shadows tease the flesh of your eyes

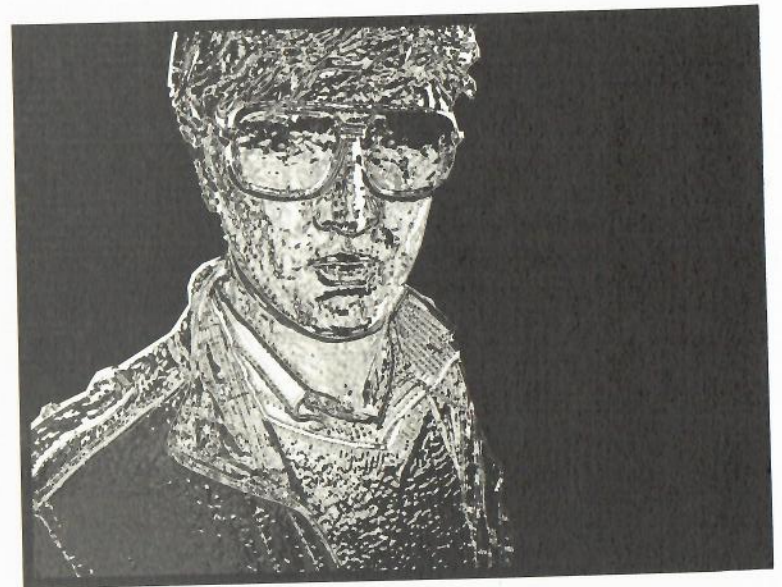
your glistening wet teeth are the full
admission of what is still
teetering
upon a canine's crest
or at the cusp of an incisor
where a flock of vowels grows unsettled, taking flight
with a brief skirmish and beating of wings
to alight inside my throat
and shake me

to the root shafts of my hair
then circle back
to collapse you
in cataclysmic shuddering
at how we are a pair
of crooked masks.



Where are My Pants?

[Katherine Howard]



RoboMike

[Emma McKee]

See you Wednesday

There comes a moment of transcendence, at about 17:39 Eastern Standard Time on Wednesdays. It's best in late February, when the sun releases the strain to stay aloft at precisely five minutes prior, and its warmth pours in through the windows, desperate to push past every particle of dust in order to mix with the incense and song. The best position is at the front, at the pinnacle of the reverberating rhythms and the distillation of each person's concentration powers.

The outside world isn't there. Memories of frost and the chilly windowpanes, just right of the pipes, cannot penetrate the heat of breath and the rapidly working hearts. My brain is the warmest, broiling with concentrated blood vessels – though thoughts of the subthalamic structures cannot perturb me now. My wings are lifted with the deep voices behind my shoulders and my palate is ringing with tune.

Suddenly, a look passes between us all, ever so briefly, and we launch – with everlasting care and restraint – into the passages leading to the ultimate glorious notes. The swell of the pipes grows as if to rattle them soundly, urging us forward when we need no encouragement – only more focus, more breath! while inwards our breath is baited for the final crescendo. The race must be kept in check as we climb higher and higher and weave and meet and cross our parts, as if a sound fabric were cascading from our vantage point, behind us like threads and breadcrumbs, when we can never go back.

Chords seem to hover in almost painful essence at my ear before chiming throughout the echoing walls; I at once want to dissolve in the shimmering hum of sound waves and yet cannot forget for an instant: focus, focus, lower than you think, organ...rest - count, higher; focus! The punctuations keep my feet on the ground as my head leaves my body, even my throat, behind for labouring, while my cochlea trills ecstatically. With wild brimming clarity we ring loudly as carillons on an encompassing, wheat-sown, acoustical plain! And there! We sing the grandest chord, bearing our bodies forth for the sound to battle with our parietal bones, and with firm resolution we end the final cadence.

We eagerly wait the final word from the conductor, who makes a pleased sign, and we resume seats, at approximately 17:46. Perfection cannot be accomplished always – but the thrill of clashing chords and the physical buzz of tuning satiates me enough to wait another week.

The Rash

Her office wallpaper compresses its flowers,
pleatherchairscongeal and glisten,
Somethingis breaking out of her face:

–What is this?

She gawks in the mirror.
The lines in the corner of her lips and eyes
have climbed into a thorny vine
burgeoning with polyps like ripe berries.

–Is this a wreath I've earned working here for three years?
Are these the fruits I reap? Then who planted their seeds,
hoarded and stuffed them into my cheeks?

Is it the coworkers, who pass her each day on the stairs,
foreheads smooth as beige walls,
with arid, un-cultivable pupils.

She looks again closely, sees a web:
a network of hands interconnecting
into a complex lattice.

–When were they planted? Was it at night
they were hauled like stones imperceptibly?
Rolled over my face like a red carpet
of crude wool.

Or could it be a mould? The rain spiking
daily like tacks on an empty calendar.
These tiny yellow bubbles, spawns
nursing on this dank air, this stagnant yellow pond.

What could be inside? A parasite
that preys on the malleable.
Has it been dormant for three years? Are these its bites?

Or are they stars,
smoldering in the last of their oils.
Craters, each one in turn
itching and flickering.

Why haven't I felt it 'till now?
Each night, exiting out to candid streets,
the fall air snuffing out their flame
with a cold provisional hand.

The Day I Drowned

I open the jar and find
a rat bobbing with the pickles.
It has slick brown fur and a frozen smile
and smells like formaldehyde.
Some vinegar spills on my fingers and
I swear the rat winks at me,
so I run my hand through my hair,
which is what I do when I'm nervous.
My hair is brown and now slicked with vinegar, and I swear
I wink and smile as the rat spills vinegar on its fingers and
runs them through its hair, which is what it does when it's nervous
and somewhere in the commotion
it grabs a paper towel,
closes the jar,
and puts it back on the shelf.

Purple Stains

Over borscht and soggy cabbage rolls my grandmother tugged on my shirt and asked who I was.

'Andreiko,' I whispered. When she didn't respond, I added,

'Your grandson?'

'Yes. Yes of course.'

Baba was a spectral force, diminutive in her corner of the room. If it wasn't for the beet stains on her lips or the blotches of pink makeup my mother smeared on her cheeks in the washroom, she would have vanished entirely, dissolving in the maelstrom of interlinguistic conversation and wine the way salt melts in water. Last year, she remembered faces but not names and could manage a story or two if she concentrated. This year, everything was foreign. Sometimes I caught her staring at her spoon for extended periods of time, watching the juices dribbling across her concaved reflection.

Overhearing our conversation, my mother put a hand on my knee and squeezed firmly. I'd been briefed earlier: comments requiring more than yes or no in response were strictly forbidden. I smiled at my grandmother and passed her a roll.

Later, while the adults smoked cigars and caught up over a lazy game of rummy, the underaged gathered on the balcony for fresh air and some smoking of our own. Paulie produced a joint from his pocket.

After taking a hit, he said, 'My dad said she sometimes forgets to wipe her own ass.'

'Dude, brutal.'

'She tries to wash her underwear in the bathtub and forgets them there. My mother showers at the neighbors.'

'Fuck.'

Ever since her last visit to the hospital, when a doctor a third her age suggested that she was too enfeebled to be left alone, she'd been passed around from household to household, a kitschy family heirloom whose portent everyone acknowledged, but the presence of which was tolerated only out of filial obligation. Nobody was willing to put up the money for a nursing home, so we, the family, paid in other ways: ulcers and premature aging, shit-stained bedsheets and partaking in the same circular conversations over and over again.

Lukasz's family took her in first. His father was active in the Ukrainian Catholic Church and accepted her with open arms. His wife, a Polish woman and the longstanding locus of my grand mother's scorn, was so relieved that Baba didn't recognize her that she prepared an immaculate traditional Ukrainian dinner. Their zeal translated into a mere three and a half months. Next, my aunt Olga put her up in her apartment for a little over five weeks, complaining that she, an eligible bachelorette, couldn't find a husband if my grandmother was sulking around. And, she reminded everyone, wasn't her marriage something the Babooshka would have fought tooth and nail for?

'You are all married, have families. Why should I suffer?'

Eventually Aunt Olga would marry a Cuban. Whether she chose her mate out of true love, or simply to put the last nail on Babooshka's coffin, as my mother suggested, is anybody's guess.

And from Aunt Olga's tiny apartment, Baba was ferried to Uncle Tamas, where she stayed in my cousin Petro's room while he slept on the couch. After three months, it was Paulie's turn.

'Do you ever think that all of this is traumatizing us? Like, you know, one of us is going to go on a killing spree?' Paulie studied the joint. 'Watching her die is robbing us of our youths or something.'

'You're high,' said Lukasz. 'You better take it easy.'

Having nothing to add, I just shrugged.

Once the joint fizzled out, we shuffled back inside, stamping snow off our shoes. The game of rummy was winding down, butts piling in ashtrays next to piles of cards.

My mother announced the final phase of the evening, guiding family members around the tree, directing traffic into love seats and lawn chairs brought out of the closet for such an occasion. As was customary, we opened our gifts on Ukrainian Christmas, when the entire family could get together. Many of the faces around the room I hadn't seen since the Christmas before.

As usual, the gifts addressed to me were stuffed with chocolates and cologne bought at the Value Mart. These would join the other bottles at the bottom of my closet. My Uncle Tamas, in a gag he pulled every year since I turned thirteen, included a condom.

'What?' he protested when my mother slapped the back of his head. 'The boy's got a wang, doesn't he? It's best he learns to wrap it now, when he's young.'

I made my rounds, kissing the perfumed cheeks of my aunts and shaking hands with my uncles.

'Oh yes,' I said when I got to Tamas. 'This cologne, the good stuff.'

'They go nuts, Andreiko,' he confided. 'How you think I nabbed your aunt?'

Aunt Helen squealed as he slapped her ass.

The memories I have of Babooshka before her illness took hold are few but distinct. The time she stormed our house when she heard I'd found a girlfriend, and the twenty-dollar bill she folded into my hand when my girlfriend turned out to be Ukrainian. The Thanksgiving when she tried to swipe the nose-ring out of Paulie's left nostril. And, of course, appearing on my thirteenth birthday, carrying a bottle of applejuice with its label scratched off, claiming it was wine. How she beamed when I graduated junior high with honours, her puckered lips leaving a pair of pink half-moons outlined on my cheeks.

Others remembered her differently. Supplementing my fond memories of Babooshka were murky recollections supplied by mother: constricting corsettes binding the waist every Sunday at church; militant monitoring of my mother's menstrual cycles as she navigated puberty; cigarette burns on her arm after a pregnancy scare. Decades later, my mother could still roll up her sleeve and expose a series of white circles. That my grandmother, she of frail body, red kerchief, and soft blue eyes, could be capable of such cruelty seemed unreal.

Sometime during the night, before my uncles nursed liquor bottles of their own, my grandmother excused herself to the washroom. After twenty minutes my mother pulled me aside.

'Go make sure she's okay. And for God's sake,' she whispered, 'don't make a scene. Just because she's old doesn't mean she's lost all dignity.'

I found her in a bedroom, staring at my mother's print of Van Gogh's sunflower that hung on the wall.

'Do you need a hand, grandma?' I asked in Ukrainian. She turned around slowly.

'I don't understand. Sunflowers, they don't look like that.' She sighed.

'Where's the washroom in this place? It's like a maze.'

'Tell me about it. Listen,' I paused. There was a silence that wasn't awkward, but instead threatened to extend to eternity if something wasn't

done. I cleared my throat. 'Down the hall, to the right.'

They say the hands of elderly feel like sandpaper, like newsprint decades old. My grandmother's felt like the runny borscht my mother made - clammy and so hot they bordered on vaporous, slipping through my fingers so frequently that it became a chore to reclaim them. Before closing the bathroom door she rummaged through an antiquated handbag that never left her side and gave me a quarter.

'I usually tip more but I forgot my purse in the car.'

It seemed futile to remind her that she hadn't driven since coming to Canada. I reported back to my mother, who frowned. 'Worse and worse by the day, isn't she?'

In a few hours, we were all sufficiently drunk. The supply of alcohol my uncle brought far eclipsed last year's slim pickings. There was a desperation to the drinking, each shot taken resolutely, as if the entire family was being held at gunpoint. Amidst spilled booze and cigarettes extinguished on any and all inanimate objects, the mood eventually lightened. My mother seemed as baffled by my drunkenness as I was by hers. She shrieked and elbowed Uncle Roman in the ribs.

'Oy, getting my boy drunk? Just like when we were kids. Remember that time... you know, with Papa's wine? Boje, he whipped you like the dog you were.'

My uncle barked loudly and nearly fell off his chair.

By three in the morning, dozing bodies were draped over anything stable and the select few still standing began calling cabs. My mother had the foresight to collect all of the car keys earlier, knowing that drunkenness rarely deterred anyone from getting behind the wheel.

('Don't tell me I can't drive,' Luckasz's dad hollered. 'A few drinks of this watered down Canadian shit wouldn't even get my dog pissed.' But my mother, tipsy but resolute, refused to yield)

'Paulie,' Uncle Roman grumbled. 'Get Babooshka. Time to go home. The cab is on its way.'

'Yeah, yeah,' Paulie yawned, wandering down the hall. Though she hadn't been seen in hours, it was assumed that the drinking and general pissing around had tired her out, that she had helped herself to one of the spare bedrooms for some rest. When Paulie returned, he scratched the back of his neck.

'Uh, pop, I think she's...you know...'

'What? Spit it out?'

We all gathered in the washroom. There, on the toilet, her reading glasses on and a copy of *Elle Magazine* on the mat at her feet, my grandmother sat. Even with the ceiling fan, the smell was putrid.

'Christ Jesus,' my mother said, dropping to her knees. 'Can someone please get her a towel? A blanket? Anything to cover her up.'

Hand over her heart, Aunt Helen added, 'This is obscene.'

Lukasz appeared seconds later with a bedsheet that floated gently in the air like a layer of snow before settling on her outline.

Once it was determined that she was still breathing, everyone else shuffled out. One by one, they offered condolences and thanked my mother for dinner.

'I'd stay, you know, but the kids, they get antsy if they don't sleep in their own beds.'

'Ingrates we have for family,' my mother muttered, surveying the devastation while I knelt by Babooshka's side. Empty bottles, an overturned fern, cigarette ash coating the furniture. By the time the ambulance arrived, we were the only ones left.

Babooshka was kept overnight for observation. Once the doctors assured us that she would be fine, I let my mother use the quarter Babooshka gave me to call a cab home. As soon as we got through the door my mother pushed me out of the way, swung her purse onto the floor, and puked in the toilet.

Andreiko,' she said, her voice echoing off the insides of the porcelain bowl. 'Don't tell anyone about this. I mean it.'

And then, as if to make things right, my stomach seized and I took her place at the toilet, throwing up bile stained purple from beets while she hummed softly, rubbing my back.

Afternoon

In the rippling shade
where sunned limbs are sprawling,
gritty hot hearts beat
faintly beneath lazy skin.

Without me knowing

you've gone to raise water
from the well
its subterranean murmuring
against the pail's grooved collar
sounds distant and soothing.

Contact
sends shivers shrieking
outward from my elbows, into
knee-hollows and down
cascading shins before numbly, jerkily
I emerge

with miniature ponds
filling the spaces between squelching toes
and tributaries trailing
at my heels, in the surge of events

I'll grow mountainous,
miss the metaphor-hailed moment
in the chase to settle scores.

Anne Enright

You said
Why are men
better authors?

That night
together,
we heard
Anne Enright

And I squeezed
your thigh,
your eyebrows
piqued, and then
I whispered
under the
applause,
take it back

Dating

We can sit anywhere
you want, you say seizing
a chair and sitting down. I like
a man who takes
control who talks
while I listen and
listen. But jokes
aside you are almost
familiar, a blustering orb
of virile insolence that I tip
toe, tip
around, half-remembering, half
-charmed. Behind my face, rain-dimmed childhood:

A new umbrella buzzed,
taut under the sweep of my palm. Upside
down, it spun on clickety orange linoleum.
In the sudden steam of spring, on the first
welling day of itchy April, I ran
barefoot in the yard. Snow-mud-snow-mud.
In the snow, my feet left mud
prints. On my skin, warm rain. Numb, slappy toes.

I sit down. Your arm is bulging
itself across a nearby
chair, a tilting victim. Your words
collect in puddles. Can I blame you
on a Hallowe'en costume
with wings? On pink? Somehow
I got here. Your predatorial
ease, your stern chest. No
umbrella tonight, I walk
home alone in the careful splutter,
streetlamps feeling for earth. Past
a parked car I look
through windshield streamy dribble:
face becoming
a man sitting
in his car.

Nursed with Ice

Sosua, Dominican Republic

I have all the meat I could want, all the remedial drinks.
I met a man whose back caught fire
and a twenty-one year old girl from Belgium.
She weeps nightly for her ex, until three am,
by day plots ways to win him back.
Together we take pictures of each other in our bikinis,
speak to the Haitian illegals.

I went snorkeling on a sandbank called Paradise
but the deep sea was inaccessible to me:
-the cobalt flashes of fish, the scatters of brain coral.
Confined in shallow waters, I panicked
that the reef's appendages might touch me, that I might get burned.
A Dominican boatman took it to rescue me,
slid my stomach up his wooden board
and glided me back to shore.

I left ice storms and fall-out snow
machine cleared and stuffed into impasses.
But I stubbed my toe on coral
and nurse myself with ice.

I'll spend the remains of my time here making gastronomical choices
among a grade two reunion of men,
wading waist high in a natural or artificial pool,
floating off a peninsula
where the Canadian humpbacks come to breed.
Watching a leaping mother and calf,
sick on my side with oscillation
boggled between waves.

Then limp up a labyrinth
And lie on a king's bed
shedding my blistering breasts
as I dream of a whale in amniotic fluid
finding the precincts of its new form,

dreaming of you
back home, mid-blizzard, hunched in wool
circuitously ebbing back to the haunts we've just left
to seek a wife.

Robert

The yard is full of bushes and my own reflection on the window spooks me, scooting along like a bunch of ghostly rats. You're still asleep, extending the morning until two or three; now that it's November you get up when it's almost night again. I've started preparing for the party by myself, but I can't finish dicing cucumbers until I find sour cream, and I can't buy that until you wake up so I can ask if Karen is a lactard, as you call them. And the cat ate out of a shopping bag and there's cheesecake vomit in here somewhere still. And those bushes, those big blunted shedding things, those snarly backyard buffalos should be pulled right out.

I'm a pimple-popper, though; a plate clearer. I pick things, clean things, fold things. You've become an expert at hiding your dirt: compacting the contents of the laundry basket, leaving a banana peel in the potted poinsettia. You mentioned that it needed the vitamins, and I washed my hands three times after pulling the slimy thing out. I don't know why you do it. Does it perk up the sex? Does it turn you on to see me so mad?

The buzzer goes. Karen has come early, by herself, and I am secretly horrified: she's nice but she's one of your friends, not mine, and you're still sleeping, and the counter is covered in vegetable guts, and my hair is dirty. So I accept her tight hug (it is like our clothes are rustling like sandpaper, it seems so loud) and she sits herself down at a counter bar stool.

"I can tell I came too early because you look like crap," she says. My smile burns at the corners of my mouth and I look beyond her at the bushes. We have such a tiny yard anyway, if they weren't there it would just be a mud patch. She leans to follow what I'm looking at, and thinks it must be my reflection on the glass window. As if I was really hurt by what she said (I guess I was).

"You just look so beautiful all the time," she explains. "God, I just can't think before I talk. Need any help? Let me help."

She takes the knife out of my hand.

I slide the rest of the un-diced cucumber her way and slit open the pasta bag. "Are you allergic to lactose?" I ask after I pause.

"I'm on and off," she says. "It depends on what kind of lactose it is. Are you planning on serving milk, for example? I wouldn't trouble you to buy soy."

"I think we do have soy milk, actually," I say, and she goes to the fridge to look for it. "It's great as a snack," she says, shaking

the little gray container she finds, and I realize with dismay that I bought it about four months ago. You must have hidden it among the mustards, because I haven't seen it since.

"I think this stuff is rotten," she says, wrinkling up her freckled nose. She puts it back in the fridge. I remind myself to take it out later and scrub the shelf.

I glance into the bedroom. You roll over and then roll over again, violently this time. With a gigantic effort you haul yourself out of bed, and then lumber to the bathroom. You brush against me to get past and I am aware of Karen standing at the counter, making little thumping noises with the cutlery. I suddenly am glad for her presence. If it weren't for her you'd have tried to drag me into bed with you, or else whined for water.

You left marks on me the first time you got me entirely naked. You pushed in my stomach with both your hands and ground my bones together, and I was bruised there for days. You wouldn't let me go, you lay and growled, even when I had to pee. When washing my knees in the morning I found scratches there, and more on my neck. You said I was so pale, it was like I was a little bird skeleton. Especially the skull, with all those little caverns. I wish you were smarter. It's an awful thought to have as I pass the mustard jar to you, as the three of us wait for Rob. "He's about half an hour late," I say, and you look over at our bedroom door, which is closed. Karen has been speaking on her cell phone in our bedroom for the past fifteen minutes, and I am getting antsy. What if she smells the bed? Did I close the garbage?

She comes out and closes the door behind her. "Rob says go ahead, he'll probably show up later," she says. You don't argue with Karen, you bring the beans over and start as fast as you can. I don't say anything either, and carry the salad bowl.

We eat gigantic plates of pasta. It smells like bread and thyme and citrus and soap (the cutlery) and Karen eats slow and you eat quickly; and I keep pushing the salad on everyone, and think about dessert. What can I serve everyone, now that the cheesecake had fallen through?

Karen talks about Rob. "Oh he's doing good, you know. We don't really talk as much, but - I mean, I'll be in the kitchen and making food, or he'll do it, and we'll be quiet. And it'll be nice, like we'll watch movies, then we'll go to bed. I know how he's doing; I could name some of his coworkers."

"That's good," I say.

"Rob's always been a busy guy," you add, scratching your scruffy jaw in a weird direction. "My buddy Pete's in med school too, I don't think he sleeps anymore." You men, you dogs, you one-track wild rabbits you. You always smell dirty, like an unwashed onion, and it makes me wild; it makes the bed stink.

Karen has filled herself a glass of what looks like real milk. I watch her little teeth close on her fork and wonder how her body will react to all that lactose. How small she is. "Rob could tell you stories, you'd never sleep either."

"Like what? He leave his watch in a guy yet?" you ask. Karen looks at you, your big cheekbones, your teeth much bigger than hers. And then she laughs, she whacks her hand on the table, she grips my arm like it's all too much. "I don't think that really happens, Steve," she says.

I wonder how any of this ever seemed like a good idea.

After dinner I am washing and Karen is drying (I watch her hands; afraid she'll drop something. The wine has made me stern and resentful.) We haven't spoken in a few minutes; we'd been talking about boots and had fizzled out.

"Rob's losing his hair," she says softly.

My response comes so fast it was like I prepared it. "He needs to shave it all off."

"I hate bald heads. They're like eggs. Rob thinks so too."

"It'll be like a clean slate. It'll be sexy. Imagine how much operating table crap he must catch in his hair anyway."

"He cries about it," she says. "I saw him crying on the bed this morning and I asked him what was wrong and he denied it at first and then he said 'my hair, Kare. I'm sad about my hair.'"

"He denied it?"

"Well, imagine losing your hair. Imagine talking to someone about it." She touches my hair and pushes it back over my shoulders.

I dry a few glasses by myself and imagine what it would be like if you started losing your hair. You probably wouldn't notice; I'd be picking it off the mattress, the plates, the produce, the toilet for months. I didn't know men cared about their hair that much.

Karen takes our little white pail full of potato bits and orange peel and carries it out to the composter. If I were my mother I'd call after her to close the glass door, to put some shoes on, but I just watch her through the door and feel the clammy night come in, watching her yellow dress

hovering at the end of the yard. The cat winds between my ankles, a bit of sinewy silk, and then darts right out the door.

"Oscar! Baby! Shit!" I yell, and Karen calls back, "What?"

And then I'm running out in my stocking feet, and the wood of the patio is all slippery like an ancient ship deck, and I can't see in front of me except for Karen coming back to the house with a spotty but empty pail. "Oscar got out," I tell her, and she groans. "Close the door behind you," I say, and she nods, sleepy, and goes back into the house. I see you sit beside her on the couch, both lamps on either side of you blazing, making the room a bright orange marble, and I shiver a bit, scanning for cat. The cold is a test, I can handle it.

Oscar's under one of the buffalo shrubs; I see him looking up at me with his reflective eyes, his fluffy walnut skull. I scoop him up and he goes limp, and then I see the headlights on the fence behind the shrubs. Someone has pulled into the driveway.

I go and push open the fence door (clammy, ship-deck-like) and recognize the little red car: it's Rob, and I come closer and look in one of the windows. He is hanging his head slightly, the keys dangling in his long surgeon fingers. I tap on the glass, Oscar still in one hand, and he jerks up to look at me. He rolls down the window manually, and says hi. "Are you sad?" I ask.

"I'm sorry I missed everything," he says. "I'm so late, I don't even know why I'm here."

I wonder if someone died. I hear the pop of the car lock and, kind of reflexively, I pull the door open and slide in. I close the door, because it's cold.

"I don't know what Karen told you," he starts.

"Nothing," I say. "We all had a nice dinner, but we missed you."

"I was going to grab something but everywhere's closed," he said. "Wine's the only safe bet, and you know how early they close."

"Yeah. They'd do wildly good business if they stayed open all night. Imagine the two a.m. crowd. Do you want to talk about this?" I don't know Rob; he's your friend, not mine. I don't really know Karen and I don't know Rob, but I'm sitting in their McDonald's- and coffee-smelling car in the middle of the night, with the door shut and locked and our kitten in my hand.

William

I was playing at the house
of the half-native boy
who could shoot a line of saliva
from beneath his tongue
to a distance of one metre.

By the time Dad found me
you were blue and unmoving
in a dark hospital room
where they took turns
holding your body and crying.

But I didn't cry
and I didn't hold you
because you were already gone,

and you would never be more than three days old,
never gain language or listen to The Smiths
at the helm of a houseboat, bonfires
flickering on the far north shore,
never feel a thundering wall of ocean
crash over you on Ipanema Beach, sucking
your young neverbody under
and almost out
into that dark lonely blanket of wet salt.

Chimney Smoke

Of course, you wake up late, the afternoon
light working discretely,
look out the window and the willow
that once fell all over itself
is a stump.

A pile of empty glasses
in the kitchen sink.
A stranger celebrated his birthday
in your house last night.
Of course, there was a time
when your daughter watched you
washing the dishes
and you carried on
like no one was looking,
like you would never need
to do anything else.

Of course, there was also a time
when disease didn't have wings,
couldn't sneak in
through the rips in the screen.
But now your dog has arthritis
and can't climb the stairs
on damp afternoons like these –
he's an old boy, older than you.
And your neighbour has put on thirty pounds,
the new portion seeming portentous,
the past seeming less accurate
and the future leaning towards
a sagging, bloated chin.
This evolution stings.

It's a good thing you taught your wife
how to build a fire just so,
because Fall smells the same
each year, smells like the cold
is coming.



