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transverse

the creative writing issue





transverse

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a fight in the house
halimat sekula

Shouts abound
Hitting debt walls
To purge listening neighbors
From the grip
Of loud television

Another day
Another fight
The children hurdle
Hardening hearts
Lock the shame away
From
Synthetic sympathy.

A fight in the house
Purple onion
Derobed,
Peel after peel
Spring forth tears
We get to
The center
Tender
And the tangled hearts
Come gently apart.

the disgrace

She sneaks

Into gatherings

Soiling symphony

Of pairs

Smiles of brilliance

Return with reserve

Outsider

Wedged into

Closed tribe

Of one to one

One to two, three four

Wives

Girl, woman

We are ashamed

You unpaired

Impair

Our symphony

Of tribes.

travellers
kathryn mockler

He sits on the single bed in a small motel room. He is reading a letter he has just written. Beside him on the bed is a small handgun.

The letter:

It was after your mother and I separated. I met this model in Sault Ste Marie. It hailed that weekend. Hail stones the size of golf balls. Never saw anything like it. Went out, picked one up, brought it in the car, and let it melt in my hand. It was a strange thing to do. I don't know why I did it. It just felt good and cold. By the time it melted, my hand was numb. Felt three times the size.

It was the week I quit Stallard. I was about twenty-seven. You were pretty young then. We used to have Stallard stuff all over the house: napkins, lighters, bumper stickers. You name it. Don't know if you remember but we had these plastic Stallard glasses I used to drink beer out of. They were white and red and you liked them because they matched a dress Grandma made for you, and when they fell on the floor they wouldn't break. Sometimes when I was having a beer I'd let you take a sip. That is, when your mother wasn't looking. If I ever get up to that university of yours, I'll bring you one.

I quit. Couldn't stand it anymore. Hated that job. I just wasn't cut out for sales. Because your granddad was high up in the company, there was even more pressure. He watched over everything I did.

So instead of going back to London, I check into this hotel in Sault Ste Marie. It's a run down place that has a bar downstairs. Been there before. Know the owner. Even get a deal on the room because I tell him I don't have a job.

Anyway, I'm sitting at the hotel bar thinking about my future, what I'm suited for, what I wanna do. I'm pretty mixed up. Don't know if I'm coming or going. I had no work and that got me worrying.

So I'm having a beer and dipping into the pretzels. They have them in those wood salad bowls your mother used to have. You know when you see something that reminds you of another time in your life and even though it's years later it brings you right back to it. I don't even like pretzels but keep eating them until I get a canker on my tongue from the salt. I drink some beer and it goes away, and then, for some reason, I have more pretzels and it comes back worse. I keep doing this until I feel sick, and then I get mad at myself and push the bowl away. This real

attractive lady comes and sits down in front of the bowl but doesn't take any pretzels. She's so attractive, I think, This lady's gotta be a model. And sure enough.

We get to talking, Rudy and I. That's her name. Turns out she's this real interesting person. She tells me how she used to work for K-mart, modeling for flyers, and then one day she got a call and boom she was a model. Just like that. She travelled all over the States, even went to England. She doesn't brag though. She's actually kind of shy. She talks about it like it's just her life and not a big deal.

I think, I should buy her a drink. So I offer, but she says no because she's an alcoholic and in the AA. She takes a silver medallion out of her purse, and says that's what AA gives you when you've been sober a year. I ask her if it's hard being in a bar and not drinking. She says she used to it. I say it'd be hard for me, and I'm not an alcoholic. I just like the taste of beer. Rudy says she knows what I mean. I'm impressed. I think, This lady's really got it together.

You know when you meet someone and it's like you've known them, and you think, I could tell this person anything. That's what it was like. I tell Rudy all about your mother and getting married young. How we lived in a basement apartment in her parents' house in Peterborough and your grandmother coming down every single day. And how, when I wanted to apply to Teacher's College, your grandmother said I didn't have what it takes to make it as a teacher. So I never applied. I tell Rudy about moving back to London with you and your mother and working for Stallard. And how the pressure used to make me so mad, I'd throw things. I tell her about throwing that beer bottle through the living room window and later closing it up with wood boards. And how I brought your mother flowers because I felt so bad, and then I left for good.

Rudy has a real good sense of humour. She gets a kick out of my stories. Like the time your Uncle Chuck and I swatted at that beehive on St. George Street with our hockey sticks. And when we went to St. Thomas to drink and got caught and got our names in the paper and how your granddad was so mad because he had business there. And that summer job in Godrich. The crummy hotel and how we peed out the window. And the cop that said people were complaining but we didn't get a fine even though it was Saturday night.

When the bartender comes to take my empty glass, I order another. Before he leaves, Rudy stops him and orders a drink too: a beer. At first I think she's kidding. Putting me on as a way to liven things up. When she lets the bartender walk away, I start getting real upset. For a few minutes I can't say a thing. Eventually I ask her if she's sure she knows what she's doing. She says she does. I feel bad. Like if it weren't for me she wouldn't be drinking. She says it's her decision. After a while I think, Well, she's right. So she has her beer and the world doesn't fall apart and then she has two more and then she stops. So I think, Hell, she seems to be handling

it. And then she spends the night in my hotel room.

The next morning we have breakfast out. Rudy doesn't eat a thing, just has coffee. It's no wonder she's so thin. We decide to drive to the States. Do some shopping and hit a few pubs. Rudy wants to get a motel with a pool. Even says she'll pay the difference. I tell her, if she has the money that'd be great.

We take my car. As we head toward the highway we pass a liquor store. Rudy suggests we get some travellers for the road. I pull over, go in, and come out with a six-pack. Rudy looks at the six-pack and before I know it, she's out of the car and comes back with a two-four under her arm. She keeps the case between us in the front seat but covers it with a pink cashmere sweater she says is left over from her modeling days.

Rudy hands me a can then grabs one for herself. I open the glove compartment and take out two plastic sheets with fake Pepsi logos on them. We wrap the sheets around the cans as a disguise.

Rudy finishes one beer and then another and then another and then another and then she's drunk, and I'm still on my first. Her sweater's crumpled on the floor, and she's slurring her words so badly I can barely understand a thing she says. I suggest she slow down because she might not know her limits. But Rudy doesn't like me telling her what to do. And she shoves me—real hard. The car swerves into the other lane. She's lucky I'm such a good driver and that there's not many cars on the road. As quickly as she gets us into this I get us out, without a scratch.

I want Rudy to pass out and not wake up till she's sober. But she doesn't. And as we drive by a Relax Inn, she bursts into tears. I find out that's where her boyfriend dumped her. Once Rudy starts crying, she can't stop. She keeps drinking and crying and everything's a real mess. I look at the empty beer cans all over the car and think, If we get pulled over—I'm dead.

Rudy starts telling me all these things I don't want to know. Like how she hates herself and everyone else. And how she could have been a big star but now she works for Mary Kay. She tells me more personal stuff than that. Stuff about her father, about this boyfriend, stuff I don't want to think about or repeat. I give Rudy a hanky. She blows her nose and just when I think she's calming down, she starts crying all over again. Luckily, there's a rest stop up the road. I suggest we take a break, that Rudy wash her face, and get something to eat. Besides, I need to fill the tank.

I park near the gas station. Rudy grabs her purse and kind of stumbles out of the car. Her sweater is wrapped around her leg and drags behind her as she staggers to the ladies room.

The attendant at the full-serve looks at me like I'm rotten for not telling her. But he doesn't tell her either. I put my hands over my face and rub my eyes. I'm tired and don't know what the hell I'm going to do.

I pull up to the self-serve. At the pump, gas spills on my jeans, and I think, I'm gonna smell like this all day. I pay, take the car to the side near the restaurant, and light a cigar. The whole car fills with smoke. I like the way it smells. The cigar is wine-tipped. I chew the plastic end and the flavour burns my canker. It reminds me of the pretzels and that I don't have a job and what your granddad is going to say when I get home. I roll down the window. The air is cool compared to the air in the car. Drops of rain the size of pinheads land on the windshield. When I stick my hand out to feel them, it comes back dry.

Seems like a long time that I'm waiting for Rudy. Don't know what comes over me but I get out of the car and open the trunk. My bag is in there and Rudy's suitcase and a Stallard glass with a cracked rim. I pick up the suitcase. It's brown. The kind everyone used to have—hard on the outside and heavy. I open it. There's not much inside: a couple of packs of cigarettes, under things, a pair of shoes. I snap the suitcase shut and look around. I feel like a kid who's just shoved candy in his coat and is about to leave the store.

I set Rudy's suitcase on the ground, carefully, as if it's filled with glass. I look at the roof of the car and notice that the hail stones left dents. Craters all over the roof, and I think, I just bought this car not that long ago. I wonder about getting it fixed and how much money it'll cost, and then decide I won't bother because it'll probably happen again. I get into the car and drive and don't think about Rudy at all. Instead, I think about you and your mother and leaving. And realize for the first time in my life—I did the right thing.

The man thinks about the things he could do now that he has written the letter that has taken twenty years for him to write.

- 1) He can shoot himself with the gun because he regrets his life and the way he treated people he cared about.
- 2) He can shoot himself because he's depressed but thinks it's because he regrets his life. But it's really because he feels sorry for himself and doesn't really care about the people he hurt in his life.
- 3) He can go to sleep and dream that he is on a beach in Mexico fucking the woman he describes in the letter to his daughter.
- 4) He can call his daughter and apologize for being a shitty father. His daughter can hang up.

The man calls his daughter and she hangs up. He lifts up the gun and shoots himself with it. His last thought

is being on a beach in Mexico fucking the woman he describes in the letter. His daughter calls back because she realizes that the man on the phone was indeed her father who she hasn't heard from in twenty years and not her ex-boyfriend who has been stalking her for three years. When she calls the number that first called her, there is no answer.

sweet valeria
martha batiz

The last time I saw her she was wearing a blue turtleneck sweater and a black jacket. Her brown hair fell over her shoulders, and her thick lips, painted a radiant red, stood out like cherries stuck onto her face. She didn't have rosy cheeks or bright, flashy eyes: only those shiny lips amid the pallor adorned with black eyelashes like those of a doll. Valeria had a face like a rag doll. Huge eyes, white skin, curly locks. She was the daughter of a dead father whom I had dreamed of only once giving me his blessing and of a mother who could no longer bear to take one more breath of life and died of asthma. All alone, she came to me at the age of twenty, full of ideas, with so much old pain hiding under those thick eyelids of hers that at first I was afraid to look her in the eye.

I don't know exactly when it occurred to me. I do know that we ate together many afternoons, that we held hands hundreds of times, that I too was alone. Her long fingers offered me a pen for the first time. Those hands, where the location of each vein could be inferred with a cartographer's certainty, related stories to me that I had never thought possible. And I wanted to make them my own, make my own. To invent new faces and words also; to adopt the sound her fingers made as they struck the keys of the old typewriter. Each of her paragraphs sang of my uselessness, my ineptitude, because the characters in her life danced, while mine dragged their feet across the blank paper and died in a mass of crumpled papers tossed to the floor.

Her high-pitched voice burned like the sun. The afternoon when I felt she was about to raise blisters on my ears and when my fingers couldn't hold out any longer, I made my final decision.

The perfect night for it soon came. Amid an almost unending toast celebrating her first book, I made her sleep. I gave thanks to God for chemistry and medicine; thanks for my medicine chest, always fully stocked because the psychiatrist believed that the cure for depression came in pill form; thanks for the manuscript nestled on the desk; thanks because Valeria fell limp, and it wasn't hard to cut off her air.

I licked her nose to savor the perspiration, her mouth to taste her breath. As she slept, the softness of her teeth and tongue turned her into a veritable doll dressed in black and blue velvet. After she was nude, I explored her at length before breaking the skin. The first morsel tasted strangely sweet. Soft. Her legs and arms awaited my hunger patiently in the refrigerator. I used her hair to stuff a little cushion, which I sewed up carefully and kept in my purse as a kind of amulet. Red fabric to hold the curly locks. The long fingers I left for last. Those hands that had drawn with perfect words the worlds I was unable to imagine were now between my teeth. The bones, afterward, all of them, in the earth.

At last Valeria was mine, and I was she. She, her sinew, her ideas. To know that her fears and her yesterdays reposed in my stomach and that she would no longer be tormented made me happy, because happiness—as

I realized at that instant—is to bite away the pain of others, put it to sleep so it will age in the belly without speaking a word. Valeria and her characters entered me and I learned the flavor of their sex and their saliva and their sweat; beside the heat of the coals I devoured them for days. Then, only the pen shared my secret. All that which her eyes had seen—her eyes, those orbs which I relished with slow delectation—seeped in between my words, and when I captured her world in the first lines after the lengthy process of digestion, I knew that it was all worth the effort.

The last time I saw her she was wearing that blue turtleneck sweater and that black jacket, and she smiled when she looked at me before falling asleep. The last time I bit into her she was no more than a pliant, amorphous mass between my hands, and her ideas were the genesis of many books with my name in bold letters on the cover.

last kiss
kris brandhagen

Lips become the
folds of a bird's claw,
clinging
to a wind-blown branch.

My lips need his
like a lonely pet
craves an owner
-knowing nothing of
its own kind.

wonder woman: the series
kimberly alexander

Wonder Woman was
my favourite tv show
too young to watch
new episodes I
remember the
later series and
reruns

Wonder Woman was
my sister's bathing suit
got second hand from a
cousin because
I'd grown too fast
and it wasn't my size

Wonder Woman was
Linda Carter
size ten or more
taped to my wall
and posed in an
eight by ten glossy of
black and white

Wonder Woman was
my sister almost drowning
playing in the shore and
thinking she could swim

Wonder Woman was
my mother's voice
weekend mornings
high pitched and excited
"Kimmy, your show's on"

Wonder Woman was
my sister not drowning
but losing her voice and
flailing her arms
until somebody saw her
and it wasn't me

Wonder Woman Was
blue eyes and black hair
glossy lips and invisible
jets I used to ride
wearing yellow plastic
around my head and hips

Wonder Woman was
a girl past toddler
with green eyes
and blond hair
who slept with blankie
til she was seven
and sucked her thumb
til she was nine

Wonder Woman was
make believe
or so my mother told me
when I put two and two
together
and realized that no one
could type ninety words
a minute
change clothes with no one
seeing
and save the world
in less than a day

Wonder Woman was
sleeping
in the creaking bed beside me
fawned over by mother
and narrowly escaping death

Wonder Woman was
taken
in her eight by ten glossy
torn from her place
in my child's imagination
and crumpled in a ball
thrown in the trash

Wonder Woman's bathing suit was
too small for next summer
and hung on the clothesline
in the yard outside my window
drying from its ordeal
for all the world to see

Wonder Woman was
forgotten
after a period of
mourning
growing up into
something
but no one knew for sure

Wonder Woman was wonder
woman was wonder
woman was no longer
she was no longer me.

carmina and the painkillers

irene marques

I once met a girl who kept begging strangers for painkillers. She would get up every morning: early before the rise of the birds, and then would walk slowly outside, trying to discern the sound of her moving small feet. First, she would stop by the muddy puddle that never went dry: even when the sun was scorching and greedy. She would seat by its circle and look into the dark insides of the moist mud, where the frogs were still asleep and not ready to play. She would look and look as if immersed in the realms of ancient roman catacombs (although it was in Lusita that she lived). After a while, the silence seemed to pay off, and one by one, the small green frogs would emerge from the profound realms and open their tiny eyes, slowly and carefully, so that Carmina could learn from the wonder of the frog-awakening world. There were thousand and thousands of little frog creatures that were seemingly interested in showing Carmina a part of themselves and the world where they had come from. The girl would inhale these painkillers of the morning dawn with great pleasure. And then she would slowly get up from the circling circle and walk backwards: steadily and faster than before. Sometimes her backwards walk would suddenly be altered and she would start jumping in the air little a first-born black butterfly. It was a dance that scared the birds, which were by now starting to awake and trying their lazy and rusty wings: 'How is it possible that this black butterfly is flying before us? Where has she been already and who the hell is she anyway to disturb our peace and steal our skies?' they would moan. 'I am Carmina the Carminda' she would say, screaming as loud as she could from the bottom of her childish lungs, although it was improbable that the birds had heard her because no reply from them was ever discerned. 'I am Carmina, the Carminda of the mountains' she kept saying, seemingly to no avail. Anyway, but this was not the last stop of Carmina. Not a chance of that, for she seemed to be possessed by some unseen carnivorous energy that guided her to the most unpredictable places in search of the so sought after medication: the painkillers, as she kept calling them.

After that, and since it was still long before sunrise, and her parents had not yet gone to her bed to give her the good-morning chestnut, Carmina kept wandering backwards. 'The dawn is long and wondrous', she would think to her herself. 'And before mama and papa awake and come to greet me with their morning and tender chestnut, I still have several voyages to voyage, yes I do! But I must not get distracted, for I do not want to miss that double circle from my progenitors who speak to me without words in their morning greeting ceremony. Let's go, let's go Carmina, the Carminda. Walk down the path.' She would further babble to herself. And babble and babble, so that Babble, the Babbler would suite her very well for a name. And she would surely go and go and go.

Next, was the trip to the cowshed. Her father had twenty tree cow-mothers and six cow-daughters born infallibly every mid February: a sign of the health of the times, of cows who work very regularly and always produce living wonders during the process. 'Little cows with wide, staring and undying eyes.' Her father did

not own any bulls. In fact, the entire village only had one: big, mad and impossible to satisfy, reason why the twenty-three cows were regularly walking round and large bellies, which to me seemed more like immense yellowish balloons supported by four strong legs. Immense balloons, ready to burst at any minute if ticked off by impatient child-play. 'More like the earth globe, dancing gelidly in the crosscurrents of the sky, at times merely and dangerously suspended by the invisible forces of relativity', the exacerbated and confused fans of Einstein and his followers would claim. But in any case, there was surely no need to worry, for life would always continue, springing forward, because the village bull was indeed impossible to calm down without the right dose of turbulent cow-making, which some seemingly confused villagers, be they men or women, young or old, wise or fool, insisted on calling love-making. But not Carmina, who always held strong doubts about the propriety of such term and often went so far as engaging in rattling battles with those who claimed to be the right linguists.

In the cowshed, Carmina was sure that the painkillers would come to her abundantly. She was not called Carmina the Carminda for a simple reason. The first to feel her presence was the oldest of the cows, which Carmina's father had baptized as Castanha Castanheira a very long time ago. This is a name that only makes sense in the ancient language where it came from, and although I find it extremely difficult to translate its exact meaning, Carmina once told me that the best way to describe it is as follows: 'The Dark Chestnut of the Lands of Viriato.' I must confess that even though Carmina was not always to be trusted in matters of logical knowledge and coherent rationality, such name makes all the sense to me given the context. Yes, given the context. But you must not ask me why, for I would be unable to tell you: with or without words. Castanha Castanheira was a big, long and tall cow, with brown and translucent shades on her face and on her back, so brown and translucent in fact, it seemed that she had been applied the latest brand of make-up and was wearing the most natural gown (and I say 'latest' because, the colour seemed immensely real and I say 'most natural' for the same reason). At the first scent of Carmina, Castanha would get up slowly and without a drop of noise, which was nothing short of a miracle given the immensity of her cow body, especially when it was carrying another little one inside. The other ones (big and small) remained silent and dead: in the world of cow dreamland, one might speculate. The oldest cow would then come near the door of her shed, and she would expand her red tongue to greed Carmina's finger, which had entered through an incidental opening on the door, caused by the pointing horn of one of the other cows sometime ago (or perhaps, who knows, even by the village bull, who in his desperate search for painkillers to cure his major life wound had found a way to leave the incarceration where his owner was forcefully keeping him). And this was how they would adore and console each other: the cow became the Carmina and this one became Castanha. A sisterhood of unusual but possible proportions. Strange but delicious metamorphosis. Strange but true.

After several eternities of adoration, the door of the shed would naturally open and Castanha would exit the enclosure: only to carry Carmina on her wide and strong back. They would then walk (or trot) through the vast lands of the regions like two fools of the same order. 'I am Carmina, the Carminda' the girl would scream, mixing her voice with the crosscurrents. 'I am Carmina, the Carminda' she would go on and on. The oldest cow also spoke: the way cows do. And after eternities of this great cavalcade, the two would return to their

respective houses, where mom and dad, and cows and calves were still asleep. But not for long. Not for long. In a few eternities, mom and dad will come to Carmina's room with the special matinal greeting. Carmina will open her eyes, cunningly, pretending it is really the first time that night, and then throwing herself to the circle of her parents, she will say: 'I am Carmina the Carminda, Carmina the Carminda, Carmina Carminda.' In the cowshed, another scene takes place: the oldest of the cows gets up noisily and moans loudly--the way only cows know how to do. What she really meant was: the sun is up and so must we. But the sun should be kind, kind enough not to burn the tip of every dream one is patient enough to build, discover and nourish.

epileptic confessions
aamir aziz

Here I celebrate the loss
of my seventy third year of birth.
At the top of a stony cliff,
in the light of a half lit candle.
The knife of confessions will mark
strange cuts on my conscience.
Ironic clap session will ensue,
with suffocating chuckles and smiles.
Those reminiscent omissions of my past,
evoke a flood of painful sighs.
For my wistful heart
which once shared everybody's secrets
The youthful feelings took me
to the shrine of Heer.
Became a disciple of the hermit
but I was not worthy of it.

Turned to mystics
but my hollow passions dominated noble Ishq.
Man was my ideal, experience my guide
and happiness my destination.
Love became my religion;
still I was taken for an ignorant atheist
Every growing moment
brings wisdom in real sense of this world.
This never occurred to me,
I feel like an ignorant old bear
Which always surrendered before fate
and could not kill his bestial self.
Today I am a mature fool
who lived in the name of abstractions and words.
I feel convulsions in my heart;
wish me during these last humble breaths
Happy birthday to you.....happy birthday to you.....

january 15
rob mclennan

each of them and each of us hugs each
– *Roy Kiyooka*

a particular brand
sees / either

a photographic

fred wah speaks a w/right
write
ing

a talk down,
door

a doorway

introspection, this
in bells corners

where tourbin
a once-studio

before 1997
back

before
he was dead

when he was still
alive,
dying

& we knew already

we

would miss him,

but

we did not know

how much

two colours shadowing

the square

canvas

january 16

fourteen hundred and ninety-seven
giovanni sailed from the coast of devon
– *Earle Birney*

today is not the nothing it was supposed to
an empty word; a token ruin

& snow, sun-bright
reflective surfaces

wanda says these poems a lot of sadness
in them, & who can say; perhaps
i never

a photograph from a doorway daphne marlatt
by roy kiyooka, sometime
in 1980 vancouver

the end of the rhythm & the rhyme
the end of anything else but time

beautiful at the noisy end
of sentence

*

the first time you were here
a tree was not a cover

“this is a hard language to work out
the images keep interrupting the talking”

(fred wah)

may 1972 & i am barely aware of anything
my body under the chair i now keep
at writing desk

when we used to have three dogs
before the kitchen renovation
before anyone thought to invent
my sister

the year my other grandfather died
& the last summer at my grandmothers
cottage,

 sold
 after he died

memories i actually have:

 aunt pat washing her hair
w/ rain water & her hair turned green, i remember
her screaming

 cousins patti & kim, her daughters
& the raft on the lake, & the charlie brown
colouring book they gave me, colouring
 as i lay on the floor

all on nameless lake i remember
only as an opening out

all of this before i was two
& a half

how wonderful

*

my daughter, fourteen, at her
dance class

 doesn't remember
being there before

a class when she was six
in the same building

until she been through; until
we start to talk

a familiar enough trigger

; i remember the cold
being colder

when she was less portable

*

long on the radio i don't listen to,
in the back porch of parents house

never did; perhaps
as old as them

found in back shed attic, along
w/ chairs, an
old pair of skis

& what else

less a crawlspace

so much ruin
covered in dust
in forgotten attic; redoing room
& ceiling, my father

about to cover hole that just fits

& me, barely thirty, the only one
able to crawl through & willing

my daughter wants no part of

undress me
camillia matuk

One

I wrapped my body in shells, layered, petalled, in leaves to be peeled
as orange skins or acorn scales fallen in that red season shards of fire
breath of ice slicing the undulent hum of worry.

And you did it. You unravelled the strings I wove white cocoon
blown outward these rising mists of cotton candy spindrifts on the
King Kone rooftop whistling.

And I, plucked, unpetalled, scaled and scathed and standing sullen,
goose-skinned, pink, slapped by the raw light of your eyes, the shiver
of your gaze. Standing as rabbit's flesh meek to be devoured
Stubbornly mute as you savour. You saviour. Swallow.

Two

You drew my tongue like toffee throat-stretched insistent tugs,
turning to inspect every budded, trodden surface tracing treads along
a blind-winding highway, groping for the thing I buried in the
hollows shrinking its essence with words, shrinking thoughts to peas
they tumble from my ear, hail on concrete rumbling, rolling into his
palm like a gathering you offer them back to me, torn and mangled,
skinned, insides forked and fluffed, furious at being understood.

Three

You peeled me, shape-quivered, spotted, uncertain, scraped from
shell, silent squelch of sea I cling to you a siren (ice mute) because
there's nowhere else to hide. At my feet, water pebble-strewn in
memory, space-scattered as elation, heaving like the colour of rain
the scent of gravity licked I bring my half-formed words for you to
finish I bring my words to you half-formed I bring myself to you I
bring myself I bring I bring I bring myself to finish this.

morgenrot in toronto vasile v. poenaru

Alle Wege führen zu dir,
schüchterne Geliebte
im Morgenrock.

Ich will deine Augen sehen,
die Fußstapfen im Schnee,
die Hügel
mit Sinnen ersinnen,
mit Weh.

Nach Wörtern greifen,
in Tönen erklingen
und sehnlichste Wünsche
auf Ewigkeit schwingen:

Das wollen wir beide, und mehr.

Weil ich mit dir spielen kann,
wird jeder Schritt zum Einmaleins,
weil ich dich beim Wort fasse,
und beim Traum,
mit dir hinunter gehe, wenn dein Körper spricht,
und neue Wege finde unter liebem Gewicht.

Weil vier Augen mehr deuten als zwei und zwei,
ja weil die Dämmerung kein bloßes Bild mehr ist,
sondern ein Schrei
unserer balden Stunde
im tanzenden Morgenlicht.

Drei Stunden im Gras

Wir sahen uns die Flugzeuge an
und die Tannen und den Wind
am Ontariosee.

Weit ging der Blick über die ehemalige Wildnis
der Medizinmänner und Grizzlybären.
Das größte Hotel im britischen Imperium
stürzte aus dem CN-Turm hervor,
es blieb wenig Sinn mehr übrig
für den Rhythmus wahrhafter Zeiten.

Schiffe stachen in See.
Du wolltest nur drei Stunden bleiben,
drei Jahre
und
ein bißchen mehr.

Aus der kleinen Ewigkeit
des Fremdseins
wurde eine große Vorläufigkeit
ungefahren Seßhaftwerdens.

Ich hab auf dich gewartet,
rück näher, die Stunden im Gras
wissen um Geographie und Geschichte
und um das Alleinsein
und um Mehrwerden
und um den lauernden Wärmetod des Gefühls.

Brief an die Unendlichkeit

Ich hab ihn schon vorgestern angefangen,
meinen kurzen Brief an die Unendlichkeit,
bald ist er fertig.

Ob die Damen am Schalter den Umschlag stempeln,
weiß ich nicht, sie
sahen sehr streng aus.

Zeit. Raum. Erfahrung. Kategorien. Sie sind
alle drin. Mein Brief wiegt
sehr viel mehr
als Form und Inhalt,

sehr viel mehr
als Wesen und Werden.

Vielleicht werde ich ihn sogar selber
überbringen müssen,
meinen kurzen Brief an die Unendlichkeit.

Vielleicht werde ich ihn sogar selber
überbrücken müssen,
den
trauten Abgrund
zwischen Ich und Selbst,
zwischen Ton und Klang,
zwischen Tempo und Rhythmus.

Wenn ich Welten höre, die es nicht gibt,
glimmert die Idee.
Wenn ich den Tod ahne, wo Leben war,
sträubt sich die Leere.
Wenn ich Fragen sichte,
die als verschollen gelten,
beginne ich schon wieder
mit dem Nachsinnen
und Briefeschreiben
und Spurenlesen
und Zeitfangen
und Zeit Anfängen.
Mein Brief an die Unendlichkeit wird länger.

una tarde en el occidente
clelia rodríguez

Se derrama el latido helado de una
cerveza nacional. un toque de labios
que aumentan las cadenas de un
puente ardiente. la exigencia de oír
una canción famosa enloquece tu
imposibilidad de amarme ya.

jugamos el tiempo con la mirada
disimulada. mojada boca que lanza suspiros
terrenales. escucha la melodía sin cesar de un deseo.

interrupción de una pregunta sorpresiva
¿los anillos?

me refería a la culpabilidad intransigente
que la tarde rodea. cabalgando al hombre: se aleja
con la culpa llana del ayer.

bajo un framboyán amarillo: sitio exacto de estar.

causa y efecto

dilatando el humo
gris producida por el
deseo de un órgano llamado piel.
me encuentro desafiando
la memoria de Calcuta.
La historia olvidada de un
título se proyecta más no
se rebela.

Impotencia de recordar.
Culminación de sentir:
si tuve un éxtasis dado,
no lo creas, más bien
entiéndelo.

el camino de la moneda estrella
es firme – acéptala. Penetrará
el valor en tu bolsillo.
Un refresco de limón sufrirá
la ternura de un hielo masticado
elevando tu calor sudado a un fondo golpeado.

te invito a sufrir de fiebre. Jazmín falso y ardiente:
causa y efecto.

cicatriz

un uñero clavado en la epidermis
suenan a pérdida de cordura.
un saludo por la radio me
recuerda al ondeo
de un mar salpicado de
manzanas en diminutivo: manzanillo.

la paz enmielada de un
saxofón conserva el tiempo
marcado por una lejana
tempestad.

un quizás esperado queda
temblando en las lenguas que
agitan nuestro lecho en la
calle Eddy Suñol.

un servicio provisto
transmitido por la Radio
Bayamo traduce la
inmortalidad de un fulanita.

se dice "muerto" pero vimos,
seguimos. La hierba dada
conserva la Savia trasluciente
de una flor Narcisa.

vamos: venimos

aparición de una caída
sufrimiento frisado en la cicatriz.

in between
jenny sampirisi

the bus is familiar, bobbing like a beach ball too far out to reach and its hum tastes of the silence that fills spaces between rings of bells. the landscape folds itself up as it skims the window because it no longer exists beyond the frame. i wonder at sleep because the bus doesn't seem solid in my waking, the slow sway repeating the road and the sun rawing the squared sky. this in between notion, metallic and buzzing forward, i think of place simultaneously ripping my body home or away. the bus is nowhere like an elevator between floors or a diver between sand and ceiling. i've lost the referent. i don't name the seared tips of trees blending into dusk. i don't watch for the shine of green propped up along the edges of gravel. there is only the leaving, feeling out the bits of it, or there is the ache of arrival. this gestation in upholstered curves, in increments of asphalt.

crust

i am pulling my bodies from you. tin scales flaking. the coddled effort of your skin still on me. still flapping between fingers. patching joints and hollows. cracks elbows. webs us to evening. a sleeping hand occasionally between my shoulders. the vanishing. point. of my skin and your shadow body. between copper salted fingers. tell me

what if

i find a stone to rub against. slough you off. these water broken rocks. revised. by the rub rub of my limbs rawing. smoothing cool mineral. clip aloe for the ooze of it and paint over the missing skin. leave. you still sucking milk from limestone. ripped of sweated flesh. you are cut out. the tender incision of a key through a key hole. until

this lifting

thickens our heals. we are sideways walkers. among the shale of highways. pinching our skin to other bodies. knitted now. to other pores. leaking over suckled blemishes. scraping one from one. until the pumice snows our shavings to neat piles. water scented ash. you or me. forever flaying the layers. looking for the drop of blood that

unravels us

scrivere e sopravvivere: fernanda si racconta. anna maria chierici

E non posso gettarmi a vivere, non posso. Per vivere bisogna aver forza e capire, saper scegliere. Io non ho mai saputo far questo [...] Scribacchio, vomito poesie, per avere un terreno, un punto su cui fermarmi e dire “sono io”. Per provare a me stesso di non essere nulla. (C. Pavese, *Lettera ad Augusto Monti*, 23 agosto 1928)

Disincanto (bruma)

Classe 1923, un'espressione mesta e una gran voglia di raccontarsi: mia nonna Fernanda. Così mi appare in questo periodo di soggiorno a casa mia, in Toscana. Le piace stare qui perché le ricorda quando viveva a Santa Caterina, un piccolissimo paesino di campagna nella pianura padana dove ha trascorso gli anni più bella della sua vita. Infatti, fin dalla mia infanzia me ne ha sempre parlato con grande fervore; era un gesto di grande affetto il volere condividere con me le gioie di quel mondo rurale, popolato da “fantasmi” a lei molto cari. Contrariamente alle mie aspettative (pensavo di sapere già tutto riguardo al suo “paese delle meraviglie”), anche questa volta riesce a sorprendermi (sebbene non si tratti dello stesso stupore di allora). Esordisce, di sua iniziativa, parlandomi di una *new entry* nel novero delle figure leggendarie che riaffiorano dal ricordo di quel *locus amoenus*:

F: La mia amica, che le volevo molto bene, si chiamava Maria Sgarbanti Teresa. Noi non avevamo le possibilità di studiare perché abitavamo anche in campagna, poi a quei tempi non c'erano le scuole come adesso. Ehh... anche le superiori, micca superiori ... chi poteva andava in città e chi non poteva in campagna, però noi due ci eravamo fatte nella nostra testa di studiare, volevamo studiare e poi molto. Avevamo già scritto a Torino alla ... com'asciama ... elettra...

A: Scuola Radio Elettra

F: Scuola Radio Elettra a Torino che ci mandassero dei depliant, tutto, perché insomma la nostra volontà era di studiare. Mi voleva molto bene, la mia amica. Non è stata troppo fortunata, però era una ragazza intelligentissima, io forse meno di lei, però mi ingegnavo sempre anch'io a scrivere a macchina con un foglio che c'era la macchina da scrivere, perché avevo volontà. Avevo i miei quaderni nei cassettei del comò, volevo sempre scrivere....e la passione per scrivere mi è rimasta sempre.

Ci sono tutti gli ingredienti di un romanzo dell'Ottocento nel racconto di quello che, con Clifford Geertz, si può definire un "falsario sincero". Il racconto di mia nonna è molto circostanziato e nello stesso tempo talmente pregnante, che ha innescato in me un processo di totale empatia.

Mi pare impossibile di rinunciare alle aspirazioni ed ai desideri, fintanto che siamo veramente vivi. Ci sono cose che sentiamo essere belle e buone, e dobbiamo essere affamati. Come potremmo mai vivere soddisfatti senza di quelle, finché i nostri sentimenti non saranno estinti? [...] Questa è una pena per me, e lo sarà sempre, finché le mie facoltà avranno perduto il loro acume, come occhi invecchiati. E poi ci sono tante altre cose a cui anelo...
(George, Eliot, *Il Mulino sulla floss*, 1860)

Dal tenore della sua narrazione credo di riuscire a scorgere le "cicatrici della sua esperienza" (sto cercando di fare l'apprendistato per acquisire tutte le *expertise* del "cercatore di funghi", come suggerito da C. Ginzburg). La concitazione che traspare dalla sua voce è un tutt'uno con la furia del suo racconto, che scorre come un fiume in piena

F: Purtroppo la mia amica, la Sgarbanti Maria Teresa, si è sposata con un uomo ch'an era della adatto a lei e in tanti anni è diventata mezza pazza ed è morta. Una volta mi è venuta a trovare, che io poi mi ero sposata, mi ha detto (simulando, con un tono cantilenante, la voce dell'amica): "guarda, son sposata, non mi ricordi più sono la Sgarbanti Maria Teresa!" (Rispondendole) "No, ti ricordo, solo che le strade ci hanno diviso e ognuno è andata per la sua; io poi mi sono sposata, ho avuto i miei figli e... e tutto è finito lì.

Un universo al femminile si schiude al calore della nostra conversazione, che sta assumendo i contorni di un vero e proprio memoriale.

Vagano le fanciulle per le stanze,
ci chiudono in anelli con le loro
bianche mani, hanno da dire qualcosa.
Colgono una rosa, se l'appuntano
sul petto, odorano le mimose
- a strilli, saltano per raggiungerle-,
vedono pel cielo venire animosa l'ombra
e in petto loro ingombra quel cammino
umile della morte.
E solo quando lento intorno a loro
Andare s'accumula il futuro
E vuole da loro una voce,
allora c'implorano prigioniere.

(Pietro Bigongiari, *Vagano le fanciulle*, in *La figlia di Babilonia*, 1942)

Pulsioni grafomani (nembo).

Le parole di Pavese riportate come epigrafe forniscono la chiave interpretativa per decifrare lo strano rapporto che Fernanda intrattiene con la scrittura. Nel corso dell'intervista essa viene ad assumere un ruolo di primo piano, dal momento che, come ella sostiene, nel corso degli anni le ha sempre fatto da compagna.

F: Però la volontà di studiare non mi è mai mancata perché persino da vecchia MI PIACE SCRIVERE (sottolinea il proposito dando, con la scansione, particolare enfasi a queste ultime parole)!

A: Ecco, dimmi di questa...di questa passione. Quand'è che scrivi? Quand'è che...

F: Ho sempre scritto, anche dopo che è morto mio marito - che so può gnanc dov i' andati a finir... beh, va beh, - ...ho sempre scritto e sempre scritto, anche la minima cosa l' ho scritta, perché...insomma, mi piace scrivere.

A: Ci sono dei momenti particolari in cui scrivi?

F: Sì, ho scritto molto perché... anche per la morte di mio marito. Dopo mi ero sposata ... la morte di mio marito, ma c' ho scritto TANTO - che adesso non so neanche più dove le ho messe.... beh, va beh - e poi ho scritto molto perché mi' è morti i miei fratelli...ehh... in tutte le occasioni...

L' elemento della morte, accennato a proposito dell'amica, in questa fase diventa più marcato e si coniuga con l'impulso a scrivere. La reticenza manifestata a riguardo da mia nonna, pungolata dalla mia domanda, mi fa capire che la mia curiosità mi ha portato ad oltrepassare il limite entro cui avrei dovuto mantenermi in veste di intervistatrice (occorre ricordare, come suggerito da Pietro Clemente, che "il racconto biografico sta tra il dolore e il pudore"). Resto, tuttavia, convinta che siano indicativi i suoi riferimenti a lutti legati a persone, appartenute alla sua vita dopo il matrimonio (i fratelli e le sorelle non vivevano con lei); esso è pertanto lo spartiacque tra la realtà ovattata di Santa Caterina e la dimensione esistenziale di donna sposata.

Probabilmente
non sei più chi sei stata
ed è giusto che così sia.
Ha raschiato a dovere la carta a vetro

e su noi ogni linea si assottiglia.
Pure qualcosa fu scritto
sui fogli della nostra vita.
Metterli controluce è ingigantire quel segno,
formare un geroglifico più grande del diadema
che ti abbagliava.
(Eugenio Montale, *Gli uomini che si voltano*, in *Satura*)

Un marito premuroso, che, per la differenza d'età, l' ha sempre considerata una ragazza, le ha consentito di mantenere un forte legame con il mondo dell'infanzia e della prima giovinezza; esso giace in una nicchia riposta della sua memoria e torna a rianimarsi ogni qual volta ella ne faccia oggetto di narrazione. Di contro la scrittura viene principalmente riservata a coloro che, dopo averla accompagnata nella fase della cosiddetta maturità, l' hanno poi abbandonata, lasciandole un profondo senso di vuoto dentro di lei. L'impulso a scrivere nasce pertanto dal desiderio di muovere la sofferenza e il senso di vuoto che tale distacco ha prodotto in lei.

Sono i morti, e brancolano incerti, e tendono le labbra come per bere, chiedendo il loro lume [...] Di sotto la terra certo credevano di vedere ancora il giorno in quel lume, ed ora a tentoni lo cercano. Solo i vivi possono accenderlo e spegnerlo; così vuole Dio, nel mezzo, il silenzioso, che castiga i vivi e rinchiude nella terra i morti.
(Elsa Morante, *Il ladro dei lumi*, 1935)

“Zefiro torna e il bel tempo rimena...” (Petrarca)

Tuttavia, Fernanda appare, per altri aspetti, profondamente interessata alla realtà che la circonda, in gran parte filtrata dai suoi famigliari, di cui va fiera. Loda i figli e i nipoti, ma allo stesso tempo mi fa capire che desidera essere rassicurata (“Ecco, s’onia brava?”). Dalle sue affermazioni traspare un senso di inadeguatezza che la spinge a rifugiarsi nuovamente nell’universo spensierato di Santa Caterina.

Oramai ho capito come va la vita. Un tempo credevo di essere libero, indomabile, dominante e che il mondo fosse a mia disposizione per essere goduto e modellato da me, invece con il passare degli anni mi sono accorto che sono solo una specie di piastrella incastrata geometricamente con altre per formare un pavimento, sopra cui il flusso scorrente degli uomini, di altre piastrelle, viene a sovrapporsi nel crescere saliente di nuove generazioni. [...] Tutto avviene come nella formazione di un cristallo secondo uno schema preordinato. ...Sapendo che non posso influire sul succedersi degli accidenti della mia vita posso tuttavia invero assistere a questo spettacolo e consolarmi come fosse di un altro.
(Giovanni Comisso, *Un gatto attraversa la strada*, 1954)

A questo punto mia nonna mi “presenta” altri “fantasmi”, più precisamente le figure che hanno dato un notevole

impulso alla sua "volontà di studiare". A dir la verità le suore canossiane, da come me le dipinge, mi sembrano un po' sadiche, mentre le maestre hanno tutta la mia simpatia.

F: Non solo le suore, ma anche le mie maestre. Le mie maestre di Santa Caterina. Erano due maestre, che non so dire...Erano infermiere, la maestra Mantovani, era pittrice, non come le maestre...E la maestra Maria Nina, perché allora le maestre andavano fuori quando avevano finito di studiare, andavano nelle pi... nelle piccole frazioni, e lei mi raccontava che dormiva nelle scuole da sola, con dei temporali, con tutto, e non aveva mai paura! Per me quelle due maestre lì, oltre le suore canossiane, SONO STATE DI GRANDE INSEGNAMENTO!

Ora che mi trovo totalmente immersa nel racconto di nonna Fernanda, mi accorgo di essere tornata anch'io un po' bambina, allorché la stavo ad ascoltare con grande interesse.

Quando l'anima è stanca e troppo sola
E il cuor non basta a farle compagnia,
si tornerebbe discoli per via,
si tornerebbe scolaretti a scuola.

(Marino Moretti, *La Signora Lalla*, in *Poesie scritte col lapis*, 1910)

La sua capacità di sorprendermi sono infinite: quello che sembrava un discorso tutto improntato sull'educazione scolastica, ad un tratto tende a destare ilarità.

F: Ecco, mi ricordo ...no, non lo dico della maestra Mantovani quello che aveva fatto! Perché, la maestra, la più giovane, diciamo, la Maria Nina, aveva un braccio disgraziato, poverina...Ma quella che...tirava avanti il biroccio era la maestra Mantovani, che lei poi, a sua volta, aveva allevato cinque nipoti da un fratello ubriacone che...gli ha fatte diventare tutte maestre! È stata un grande maestra. E poi dopo aveva, perché quella lì non era più capace di camminare, la Maria Nina, allora aveva fatto un carrettino con due ruote, con il seggiolino sopra seduta, e portava in piazza la ma... - (ride divertita) - la maestra Maria Nina. Tanti ricordi...dovrei ricordare tante cose...guarda, la...la mia gioventù a Santa Caterina per me è stata tutto! Però, le torno a ripetere, che la più grande mia amica, con tante mie amiche che avevo, è stata la Sgarbanti Maria Teresa, una ragazza molto intelligente, che ha fatto una brutta fine. Ecco. E pò' senza cuntar la vita dal convento! Venivan i buratinai...

L'argomento dell'amica morta viene qui appena sfiorato per passare a quello gioioso dei burattini. Entrambi ricorrono, sempre accostati, anche nella narrazione successiva, creando un effetto chiaroscurale. Si apre così uno squarcio immaginifico, degno di un romanzo a metà fra il gotico e il picaresco, che serve a mitigare i toni cupi prodotti dal ricordo della sorte di Maria Teresa.

F: Questo luogo era un convento di una volta, ecco, poi i g'ivan che g'era i pozzi, quelli dove che i frati i butavan...

A: Ah c'erano delle leggende!

F: Delle leg...sì, sì, sì. Lì gh'era pasà al Lutero.

A: Ah, Lutero! Addirittura!

F: Sì, sì a Santa Caterina, poi è passato, andato a San Possidonio...Eh, eh...(pausa) È tutta una lun... una lunga storia, ma quand'gh'era i buraten, guarda ! Gh'era da murir! I gh'eran in tri frateil, do donni e...dormivano proprio là, perché questo convento aveva poi come tutti di garas e gh'andava a star anch'dla gent. E quando facevano gnivan i burattinai...e quando facevano i burattini li facevano sotto questo porticato sempre lì dal convento.

Riverbero

Con una perfetta circolarità, al termine del suo racconto Fernanda torna ad evocare l'immagine dell'amica, che diventa l'emblema del tempo memorabile trascorso a Santa Caterina :

F: Pensa, che la Maria Sgarbanti faceva persino il soprabito uguale al mio, in un'altra tinta, le scarpe come me, tutto uguale a me! Poi andavamo a cantare messa, andavamo nelle figlie di Maria, è stato un bel periodo!

A: Un bella amicizia.

F: No, tutto il periodo...e io penso che non ci sia più d'amicizia a'csi.

Sembra quasi che parli osservando la sua immagine di ragazza riflessa nello specchio: "Mi chiedo perché i fili di due rocchetti/ si sono tanto imbrogliati; e se non sia quel fantasma / l'autentico smarrito e il suo facsimile io" (Eugenio Montale, *Le revenant* in *Satura*).

Nel corso dell'intervista la mia disposizione d'animo è mutata, come per effetto di un *transfert*: mi sono ritrovata nella "postura del ricordante" (P. Clemente) e chiamata a svolgere un compito importante. Spero di esserne all'altezza.

Io li evòco allora i mièi amati ricordi, io li voglio; li voglio, uno per uno, contare come la nonna fa co' suoi nipotini. Ma essi, sulle prime, mi si tirano indietro: quatti quatti erano là sotto un bernoccolo della mia testa; io li annojo, li stuzzico; quindi han ragione se fanno capricci. Pure, a poco a poco, il gruppo si disfa; uno, il men timoroso, caccia fuori il musetto; un secondo lo imita:

essi cominciano ad uscire a sbalzi, a intervalli, come la gorgogliante acqua del borbottino [...] Oh, i miei amati ricordi, èccovi. Mentre di fuori, ai lunghi sospiri del vento, frèmono, piègansi le pelate cime degli alberi e batte i vetri la pioggia – qui vampeggia il più allegro fuoco del mondo, scoppietta, trémolo illuminando lieti visi dai colori freschissimi [...] Amici mièi, novelliamo.

(Carlo Dossi, *Introduzione a L'Altrieri*, 1881)

sindabad and the un-found/ed dream

nizar farouk hermes

"Mawlay,
Promise a dawn's breath,
A kingly truce
In your war against
My doomed race,
A night free from
The specter of your sworn death!

Mawlay
Promise a promising light
For, if this night's tale would not soften
Your sword,
Shehrazad will be ready for
Your word.

mawlay
Promise a day's sight
For, through his night's tale
You will travel
Further than *The Thousand and one Night*.

mawlay,
"Save my sight another night,
and your sight will be delighted
By the Arabian's journey to New York:
The queen of the coming night."

"WHAT?," thunders *Sharahayr*.
"Is there a night that you dare to compare to my night?
Is there a queen that you dare to compare to my queen?
Is there a *Baghdad* that you dare to compare to my Baghdad?"

mawlay
New York is the future Baghdad of the world,

A city you will love and admire,
And to it, millions of your sons and daughters will dream to fly,"

...*King Sharayar*

With a history of a thousand and one night

Of harem's sufferings, fears, and tears
Stretched his ear and opened his eye

The belt was not there,
But safety was secure.

For at that time

-Fortunately-

There were no accidents in the air!

Queen *Shehrazad* is ready to speak
Her tongue when speaks,
Speaks no lie.

The carpet is ready
Flight number one thousand and one
From Baghdad to New York
Has just started.

On board of the Oriental Magic Lines.

The adventurous *Sindabad*
Stares towards the Atlantic shore.
The American dream looms hard,
But tantalizing to pursue.

Notes

Mawlay: Arabic for master.

Shehrazad: the heroine of The Arabian Nights whose tales saved her life and tamed the bloody king

Shahrayar, who swore to kill every woman he sleeps with in revenge of his own wife's betrayal.

Sindabad: the Odysseus of The Arabian Nights

christopher mulrooney

the chorus of advisers 'gainst the wreck
brings forth the satire you can reckon
on the bulwarks 'gainst the stream
and Sea State Six
play and counterplay
wrack and cadge
at the back of the office

an anchor's wit
is by far the better part of it

the class of buildings

that class of buildings is us
unpitied down the years
untouched except to mar and maim
you know them by the happy hyacinths out front
and by the deep sun pervading all the cracks

they have stood with us from the beginning
there our mother's feet trod the lawn
and there we saw a few things for the first time

and some presided at our mind's birth
in a way

and now stand isolate
as we

farcical Pharisaical

I prefer to think not he said
as easier on my kugel
and then as the good Lord saith
which of you by taking thought
ever got to be a grownup?

not like always
kenneth pobo

A seizure at night.
His roommate found him.

18. His friends hunt for words
in the cold. We walk up
and down halls, enter buildings.

Like always.
Not like always.

a scissors says

I should be glad my life isn't
cutting. I don't understand her—

I cut in to conversations,
cut out of boring meetings,
cut up when I need to be grim,
make cutting remarks when
tact would be balm. The scissors

says she fears her blade
going bad. Wrapped bacon
won't fall to her slice.
She also fears

freak accidents. Ann
next door left her cousin
in the rain. She rusted dead,
had a dumpster burial.
I need my blade sharp,

I tell her, to cut hard and deep,
cut like my life depends on it—

to breathe I must cut a hole
in a box I've built around
myself—then, just maybe,

cut the hole wide enough
to escape.

polymer
nathan leslie

They're headed to Richmond on the midnight bus, a young couple, wary, thin-skinned. Rachel flips on her reading light, twists the airflow. Calvert watches the woman on the other side of the aisle play solitaire on her lap. The reflection of the reading light marks a hexagon against the black window. Calvert glances at his watch, and Rachel peers from her book to see. The bus seems to float through the night.

"It's stuffy in here," Rachel says.

"Yeah," Calvert says. "How's the book?"

"Okay. Good."

Calvert knows she won't elaborate. Their relationship has altered. Rachel, once talkative, once a socialite, is now tight-lipped. Now silence is more comfortable. Rachel wonders what Calvert is thinking. She knows he wouldn't say even if she asked. He *reacts*.

Calvert has much to say, actually. He'd love to tell her how disappointed he is in the arc of their closeness, how their marriage has become pinched to comfort, how his father rubbed off on him the wrong way, and for that he's sorry. Rachel has questions, about Calvert's father, about simple childhood stories, about their intimacy. She doesn't ask. They have become comfortable reading, watching others.

Calvert thinks about his father often, the master of polymers, the inventor of Teflon. His father used to recount the moment of discovery: how he cracked the valve to discover that no Freon whistled out, how the tetra fluoroethylene mix became a polymer unexpectedly. Then, his eyes would dart, as he remembered the Manhattan Project scientists who needed a gasket, and the New Jersey company who bought the powder, keeping it in two hundred and fifty pound kegs in a bank for collateral. Rachel has heard it all before.

"Do I bore you?" He asks suddenly.

"What?" She snaps her book closed, peers up from the ring of light.

"Am I boring?"

She shakes her head, squeezes his hand. At times Rachel wonders if he's depressed, yet she thinks, surely this is just the age in which we're living. If he's depressed, we're all depressed. And what's the difference anyway?

Calvert wasn't supposed to tell anybody about the bomb, the bomb was a secret between his father and the government. But now it's out. Calvert feels embarrassed. He betrayed his father blatantly, and now...He wouldn't be able to...

The woman on the other side of the aisle stacks her cards, flips her reading light off, and closes her eyes. Calvert turns towards his wife, pats her kneecap. Rachel places her hand on top of his. Her touch eases his failures. That is something, he thinks.

“This bus is quiet,” he says.

“Yes,” she says. “It’s dark and quiet.”

ZŁOWIESZCZA HISTORYJO

thomas jankowski

Zaiste, zawichrowiawszy w cieniu jesionów nieprzypadkowo zleżawszych podłóg odwiecznej tradycji, Grotolamiec, Grotciem wołany ponikąd i zewsząd, zamyślił się na moment.

Paskudne jesionowe drzewce zanikające dymnie w tle
zapochylonych wieżowców,
parsknąwszy śmiechem niezapomniane melodyjnym,
wyplakało swój obłęd żywicznie, organicznie.

Niewidzące binokle zapodzione na niepasującym nosie
w nieodpowiednio nadpochylej epoce
zrozumiawszy misję swoją podobnie organiczną
poczęło świat odbijać pryzmatniej, matowiej.

Nibyczłek półpochylej przeminał
zostawiając jedynie krzywy światłocień w szklach Grotcia.

Psinka przybrzeżna, przydrożna, przybłąkana
zapłakawszy nad losem niebohatera
- przejechana.

Cały nieznaczący nawet niewiele ludek przemykał
niezastanowiwszy się nad niczym niedługo, niechcący,
zignorowawszy przeraźliwiejący krzyk jesiona,
lekceważący nieme refleksyje prastarych patrzalek,
posuwa się niezaprzeszanie ku przeminięciu niechwalebny.

Nibyludzie lelum-polelum,
złowieszczco zabrzmiało
zakańczające zdanie.

emmanual
nathaniel g. moore

Fragile Items Packaging, Custom Box
Making, Crate Building, Gift Wrapping, and more.

The package. Knock. Buzz. Ring.
Karl delivers the package.
 Stapled to the front.
 The seal is broken.
 Red letters. Writing says 'Partes Loste'
I cannot plug it in. I can not turn it on.
 Parts lost. Are lost have been lost are being lost.
 He laughs.
 Smiles in English.

Este manual describe la instalación, operación y el servicio de
mantenimiento de su
nueva máquina modelo 716/721, así como también instrucciones fáciles
para el
mantenimiento. Train for successful shipments and a more profitable
year.
Las instrucciones adecuadas para el sellado térmico vienen en un
folleto
separado.

The manual is in Mexico.
 Shipping extra. Lost parts.
Mexico has Emanual. Postage Due. Call Karl for directions.
Instructions, January 3rd. Talked to Karl. Emanual is ok.
 I cannot plug it in turn him on the package.
The manual will come in three weeks. Talk to Karl.
 Emanual will talk to Karl. For three weeks.
Lost smiles in English laughs. Postage Due.
Can I speak to someone?
The package.
 Karl delivers the package.
 Red letters.

I can not turn it on.
Parts lost.

1. Quite la perilla
2. Quite los dos tornillos que fijan el control al tablero del frente.
3. Desconecte los alambres que van hacia el control.

Mexico has Emanuel. Postage Due. Call Karl for directions.

le tableau jody mason

After a while there is no arrival and
No departure possible any more
you are where you were always going
and the shape of home is under your fingernails
the borders of yourself grown into certainty...

Al Purdy, "Transient"

Only sixty or so kilometres inland from the Atlantic coast, Bordeaux is linked to ocean by the serpentine flow of the Garonne, a river that brings the salt chill of the coast into the city's ancient port. A port for slaves, Nicole had recently reminded a Martiniquan woman at a party; Nicole had been drunk on sweet, red vermouth at the time, drunk enough to narrow her eyes and the set of her mouth, just enough to suggest that this was *honteux*, that the French should feel *honte*. The woman had been polite enough to Nicole, but the aloofness of her expression said that the port of Bordeaux wasn't her problem, wasn't her history alone. The conversation had ended and the party carried on, but Nicole hadn't been able to stop looking at her from across the room where she stood—looking at her bare feet tucked neatly beneath her, at her eyes flashing with interest at friends. Disgusted with herself for not being able to do anything but stare, she left soon thereafter and stumbled home through streets she doesn't yet know, even though she's lived here for a year.

Cathédrale St. André, she now realizes, is not a good place to escape from the damp cold that seems to pervade the city, though refuge in the cathedral is meant to temper the monotony of the apartment's bone-pervading chill.

"A concert at the cathedral will mean, at the very least, space heaters," Alan had offered, tossing Nicole a suspiciously glossy brochure from the Mairie de Bordeaux. She'd immediately acquiesced, not because of any desire to see the stiff, septuagenarian choir, but because she'd wanted the distraction of warmth. Now, sitting in the cavernous, stone cathedral, she rues the choice as she's been regretting many of their recent choices. Nicole came to France to watch, to look, and all she feels is that she can't go on looking or she'll turn into a pillar of salt. When the moustached man at immigration had looked at her Canadian passport, he had assumed she was Québécoise because of her name, Cambrin. But she's not, or at least no one has ever told her so. So how can she stop looking? What else is there to do?

"This church dates from the eleventh century," Alan explains, as if correcting one of Nicole's thoughts, "not the twelfth, which is assumed by those who know about Eleanor d'Aquitaine's marriage here." She sits dumbly, too cold to resent the tone of his lesson, delivered without feeling to the back of the pew that faces them. Alan is

playing the tourist but really he's annoyed with all her gaping. He's from Singapore but has had about twelve different homes since; he's tired of pretending he's not part of something.

"I thought you were a scientist; now you're a historian as well?" Nicole tries to make a joke, but she knows she sounds testy, annoyed.

"*En fait,*" suggests a sure voice from somewhere on the other side of Alan, "*la cathédrale a été consacrée en 1096, à la fin d'onzième siècle. L'orgue devant nous est très neuf, mais l'orgue original a été construit en 1427.*" Nicole can't see the man's face, but she's sure that this voice belongs to the delicately crossed legs that turn ever so slightly towards her as the voice continues speaking. "*Je suis tout à fait disponible cet après-midi. Je pourrais vous montrer le cathédrale après le concert,*" offers voice, as if proffering them a cool and sharply beveled diamond. A veined yet cared for hand appears on the knee that she think belongs to voice; it rests there only a moment before a second hand hovers near it and begins to remove invisible, idle threads from the impeccable, woolen trousers.

Alan turns towards him and murmurs something inaudible just as the organ begins to play aggressively from the back of the church. Nicole's body is saturated with cold and she feels the notes like cold metal keys along her spine, but she's warmed by the prospect of intrigue the old man offers. He looks like a retired French civil servant, polished and neat in his case of woolen clothing. The concert is short; as the applause tapers off, she wonders if voice will persist in engaging *les étrangers*. She hopes so. Oh, she hopes not, considering steaming, pink cups of rosehip tea in the safety of her studio apartment. But she wants to see what he'll be like just as much as she wants to retreat.

"...And this is my partner Nicole," Alan nudges her sharply, urging her to turn towards him.

"*Partner? Elle est votre femme ou votre douce? Laquelle?*" As voice demands their choice, it merges slowly with the smooth, dignified face that appears from behind Alan's angular, leather-clad shoulder. The face is regular and insistent in its lines, easing ultimately into a cap of silver hair that reminds Nicole of brilliant fish scales, each hair imbricated neatly upon the other.

Following the surging crowd, they go outside and the man continues to tell them in French about the history of the cathedral. Nicole is distracted by the nagging of cold wind in her left ear but pulls her thin coat around herself and attempts to string a narrative out of his rapid French. He gestures to the east wall of the cathedral, motioning for them to follow him.

"*D'édifice romain, il ne reste que les murs intérieurs de la nef. Ce mur de l'est a été reconstruit plusieurs temps pendant les siècles. Le mur de l'est est malconstruit, mais on dirait que tout nos problemes viennent de l'est.*" He hesitates for a moment, perhaps waiting to see if they've understood him. Alan is looking at Nicole meaningfully, but she really wants to stay now, just to see what will happen, and so she doesn't return his look. "*Je n'ai pas encore me présenter. Pardonnez-moi. Je suis Claude Monpoint.*" His sharp eyes from beneath

their creased lids flick from Alan to Nicole and back again. He looks like he might dart out his clean tongue and deftly carry us into his waiting mouth, Nicole thinks. But that wouldn't be a terrible fate: I bet his mouth is cool as a peppermint.

“Je suis Nicole et il est Alan,” she says, pronouncing their names in her anglophone accent, which she couldn't get rid of if she tried. Her French is passable because it's Alan's mother's first language, but she's never felt part of the words. Even now, as they float out of her mouth and into the chill of the air, she can see them take on their own form outside of her body.

“Peut d'être, Nicole et Alain, vous voulez prendre un apéritif chez moi? C'est pas du tout loin, en face d'ici, en fait.” Claude motions to one of the stately, stone buildings that surround the square in which the cathedral sits.

Nicole nods enthusiastically, not wanting to risk the poor French. Almost immediately she wonders if she's done the right thing because Alan tightens beside her in resentment; she can feel it through the thickness of his leather coat. They're ushered across the square, through magnificent oak doors, and up the dark hallway into an apartment that is flooded with light and gilded edges. I'm in a treasure chest, Nicole thinks, giddily. I've walked into a sea littered with golden bones. She glides through the magnificent debris of the apartment, only half-aware of the firm pressure on her elbow—Claude is pushing her along while describing his objects in a voice that seems to her, somehow, oily, though she hadn't noticed this before. She can't follow what is being said about each item. As they pass each object, ticking it off the list of things seen, she feels more and more deeply submerged in a watery fishbowl world:

a Louis XIV chest with a gold lock,

a huge Moroccan tapestry,

a silk shawl from, she thinks he says,

l'Indochine,

a Delacroix painting of Arab women lounging on a carpet,

things made of bone, shell, turquoise, silver, diamond.

Claude is outside the bowl, but Nicole has the sudden feeling he could pluck her out of it at will and drop her, gasping, on the Persian rug. Claude turns sharply and the tour is over.

“Vous voulez un apéritif?” he asks and then is gone before they can reply. Nicole and Alan stand silently, awaiting his return. He comes back moments later with a tray, glasses, and a bottle. He sits in a large chair with carved arms and an upholstered seat and indicates that they should sit on the small couch opposite him. Nicole sits tentatively but realizes immediately that the couch is very low to the ground; in his chair, Claude is towering over them.

“Ça serait le meilleur porto de votre vie, chérie,” Claude says, looking down at Nicole with glossy eyes as he

pours the lush liquid into a cut crystal glass placed before her.

Her skin feels papery and thin as she peels off her coat and Claude's glance smoothly appraises her; she puts it back on quickly, despite the close heat of the room, embarrassed by the indecision of the movement. She lifts the glass that has been offered her and evaluates it by holding its contents in the light, though she doesn't know what qualities she's looking for. The ruby liquid slides down her throat and eases some of the tightness that has begun to form there, a tightness that is urging tears, though she doesn't know what on earth would make her cry at this moment. Almost immediately, her body feels suffused with the soft, golden light of the room; she feels beguiled by its shiny but indistinct edges, its opulence. Her body settles into the low couch; beside her, Alan's body remains stiff as dried glue.

“J'avais trois femmes dans cet appartement,” observes Claude, *“mais personne veut rester toute seule pendant que je travaillais. Je travaillais constamment, un pilote pour Air France, guidant les français autour du monde.”* In a practised way, Claude gestures to the tiny model of an Air France plane that sits incongruously among his treasures on a nearby table. He pauses for a moment, but doesn't seem to be looking for a reply. In fact, he isn't looking at them at all; his large eyes are focused on the rich tapestry that hangs behind them on the wall, the large tassels of which are tickling the nape of Nicole's neck. His eyes shift to Nicole, and her face colours as she realizes that she might be part of what he sees in the tapestry—a part its jewel-hued scene, a Moroccan slave with swollen breasts and chestnut hair.

“Les femmes manquent l'objectivité, vous savez—elles ne sont pas capable de voir nettement. Moi, je l'apprenais lentement. Mais, j'ai eu de la chance; je l'ai appris il y a des années. Pas tout les gens l'apprennent, vous savez.” He sighs and then continues rapidly in French, gesturing neatly with his glass of port for emphasis.

Nicole tries to follow but only manages to catch the words that seem to fly out of his thin lips and land on her waiting skin, imprinting themselves like dark bruises on her pale flesh—*elle, colère, déraisonnable*... Anger wells up in her rapidly but dissipates just as quickly; I'm tired, she thinks, and the alcohol is seeping into her blood like warm milk. We should get up, spit in this man's face, and go, she knows, but neither she nor Alan move. We are different from him, she tells herself lazily; there's nothing to worry about, no harm in looking. But she feels sewn into the brocade of the couch, as if her arms and legs are extensions of the intricate vined and flowered limbs that make up its pattern.

“C'est comme ça, Nicole?”

“Pardon?” she stammers, feeling like a wide-eyed fish caught on the end of Claude's line.

“C'est comme ça que vous avez tombé amoureux?”

Has Alan been following? What has he said? She hasn't heard. Shit. She struggles against the plump lines of the couch, trying to gain some rigidity in her posture though her brain feels like wet cotton.

“We met as students,” she offers, weakly.

“Ça fait un peu exotique, vous savez. Je vous ai vu aujourd’hui et je me suis dit que ça fait un vrai tableau.” Claude appraises her with a long, steady look and she’s absorbed by it like spilled wine by a sponge. His eyes flicker and, suddenly, she apprehends what he sees—a pale, blue-veined body pinned down by Alan’s mahogany flesh. Nicole turns quickly to look at Alan, feeling and so expecting to see him ready to smother her in order to ingratiate Claude. Alan looks back in a tired and unfocused way, a frustrated and fatigued anger forms a dull sheen in his eyes. Claude leans forward in his chair, casting his shadow like a stain over Alan’s body. Nicole rises quickly, pulling Alan with her. His body resists heavily but then springs quickly to life.

“Nous devons partir, Monsieur Monpoint. Thanks for the drink and the tour.” She feels like they are running towards the door, but somehow Claude reaches it first and opens it for them graciously, slowly. Her body is surging, and his tempo seems exaggerated, grossly slow and swollen like a white-bellied fish washed up by the night sea. He says nothing but hands them his visiting card, a thick, creamy square embossed with gold lettering. Perhaps we are expected to come again, Nicole thinks.

“Bonsoir, monsieur,” says Alan, weakly, though Nicole feels his pulse strong in her hand. She can hear Claude’s voice replying, but they’re already out the door.

They’re in the stairwell in a moment and then out on the dark street. She pauses for a moment, and Alan disentangles his hand and rests his forehead on the cool stone of Claude’s building. The day has disappeared into evening, leaving soft blackness for the metallic grey of the afternoon. I’m hungry, Nicole realizes. They begin to walk and then almost run through the streets, saying nothing. They reach their building and climb quickly up the winding stone staircase to the fifth floor. Nicole looks down, watching the evening recede behind her as she climbs. She’s short of breath when they enter their small apartment; the windows are closed and they’ve left the electric heater on.

“Fuck, Alan, the heat.” Nicole is irritated, thinking of the electricity bill. Alan is silent as he removes his shoes and then fusses about the small kitchen.

“What did you want from him?” he barks, suddenly.

“Want?”

“When will you get it? You want something here that has nothing to do with the way things are.” That’s too simple, she thinks.

“You don’t want anyone to see you, Nicole, but they will. You can’t just stare and stare like an idiot and expect no one to look back. How long have you been living here?” Nicole is silent and goes into the bathroom to avoid Alan’s words. She’s heard this before from him.

“I’m tired,” calls Alan from the other room, “Let’s go to bed.” She hears him pad to the refuge in the far corner of the room, a mattress strewn with clothes and twisted blankets, and imagines his small form as it crawls into the bed.

“I’ll turn out the light for you,” Nicole offers, sullenly, and does, though she doesn’t head for the bed.

She pulls a chair over to the kitchen sink and swings open the window above it despite the cold. A dish of cigarettes on the counter looks forlorn; she grabs one anyway and then quietly wedges herself into the window frame, a tiny space that opens onto a night sky, a sea of undulating terracotta rooftops, and the river just beyond them. Her shoulders are cramped by the warped, wooden frame so she fumbles trying to light the cigarette. The noxious fumes enter her and fill up her lungs with acrid harshness. She cringes, running cold fingertips across her transparent, night-chilled flesh, feeling for a border, for something grown into certainty. But it's not there, and she wonders how she lost this thing that has kept her warm in a cold climate.

broken limb
corey mesler

Another limb fell,
broken six years ago,
when the ice storm came through.

A reminder we didn't
need, yet, there was something
in its resting there, half on the fence,

half on the rusted swing set,
that set off in us an inner ticking.
A memory of how we persevered

without heat or cable. Were
we proud? We were not. It was
a long time ago, when we were

younger and more flexible,
when a nighttime torrent of ice,
could upset us, but not

change the way we felt about each other.
Those days came later.

Det døende Barn
hans christian andersen

Moder, jeg er træt, nu vil jeg sove,
Lad mig ved dit Hjerte slumre ind;
Græd dog ei det maa Du først mig love,
Thi Din Taare brænder paa min Kind.
Her er koldt og ude Stormen truer,
Men i Drømme, der er Alt saa smukt,
Og de søde Englebørn jeg skuer
Naar jeg har det trætte Øie lukket.

Moder, seer Du Englen ved min Side?
Hører Du den deilige Musik?
See, han har to Vinger smukke hvide,
Dem han sikkert af vor Herre fik;
Grønt og Guult og Rødt for Øiet svæver
Det er Blomster Engelen udstrøer!
Faaer jeg ogsaa Vinger mens jeg lever,
Eller, Moder, faaer jeg naar jeg dør?

Hvorfor trykker saa Du mine Hænder?
Hvorfor lægger Du din Kind til min?
Den er vaad, og dog som Ild den brænder,
Moder, jeg vil altid være din!
Men saa maa Du ikke længer sukke,
Græder Du, saa græder jeg med Dig,
O, jeg er saa træt! – maa Øiet lukke –
– Moder – see! nu kysser Englen mig!

the dying child
mette bach: a translation

Mother, I'm tired, I want to sleep now,
Let me nestle in close to your Heart;
Don't you cry, You must promise me,
That Your Tears won't burn my cheek.
It is cold here and afar a Storm beckons,
But Dreams are where All is ideal,
And the sweet Cherubs I envision
When my tired Eyes are sealed.

Mother, Do you see the Angel by my Side?
Do you Hear the lovely Melody?
Look, he has two Wings, handsome, white,
Likely given by our Lord Almighty;
Green and Yellow and Red for the Eye wanders
They are Flowers that the Angel will sow!
Will I have Wings in my lifetime, I ponder,
Or, Mother, after my death, will they grow?

Why so firmly to my Hands do You cling?
Why do You press your Cheek to mine?
Though wet, it is a Fire that stings,
Mother, I will always be Thine!
But You must no longer be morose,
If Thou cryest, I cry with Thee,
Oh, I am so tired! – must my Eyes close –
- Mother – look! Now the Angel kisses me!

OPEN ROAD / UNTERWEGS

a road diary, written on a trip through france

dorothee lang

OPEN ROAD

Route des Grandes Alpes

The Route des Grandes Alpes. Leading from grandes valleys to grandes viewpoints to grandes mountains. A long and winding road that curves the countryside of Rhone-Alpes gracefully in hundreds of turns. If roads were music, this one would be a symphony of whistling wind and humming trees, of birdwings and churchbells, of snowcovered horizons and flowerframed doorways. Even the names of the villages and mountains along the route sound like a song: Notre Dame de Bellecombe, Col des Saisies, Saint Jean de Sixt or Col de al Colombière.

Chasing Clouds

On the street again, on the Route des Grandes Alpes, on the way to somewhere else. Running with the road, chasing clouds, cruising through wide valleys, twisting the shades of the alley trees. Reaching a little village called Saint Michel, turning towards the mountains, moving up again, higher and higher, in wide curves, in narrow curves, in steep curves, in incredible curves. A curveway to heaven this is, to the mountain pass that is waiting at the horizon, hidden in clouds.

Reaching the top of Galibier, touching the sky with one thought, breathing in clouds, gazing at the world below for some moments. Curving down again on the other side, passing a little chapel on a stone hill above the road. Wondering if it is the chapel of this road, for this road is divine, created by the lord of curves, no doubt about that.

September Rain

Rainy day today. Strings of hazy mist drifting slowly through green valleys. Flocks of grey clouds circling around white peaks, showering the world below them carefully, as if the mountains hired them to wash away the summer from their slopes and to water their stone gardens.

The soft drizzle of the sparkling raindrops tiptapping on the windshield. A hushed atmosphere, a wild world, a place where we don't really belong, where we just pass through on paved streets which don't belong here either, on streets that are only open during summertime and close down in winter, surrendering to the snowflakes that will turn the world up here into a white refuge for the wild wind again, right here in the middle of Europe. How comforting a thought.

From Azur to Lavender

Setting off at the Cote d'Azur, a world of sunny skies, hypnotic harbours and pastel palaces. Flashing through Monaco, a colourful crazytown of super skyscrapers full of rich rooms with a view. Doing a u-turn in Monte Carlo, cruising along the crystal coast again, and then crawling through Nice, where the beach is barred by a six lane street. Feeling dizzy, longing for space, for wider views, for empty roads.

Leaving the coast, escaping to the vast wilderness of the lengthy land behind the ocean. Following the rough roads, breathing in the appealing air of the beautiful Provence, seeing lavish lavender fields, passing hushed houses. Expecting nothing, being overwhelmed by the serenity of sights that impress even though or especially because they don't try to impress at all.

Open Road

The unique fascination of the open road, miles and miles of open road, unfolding somewhere near the horizon, coming closer at rapid speed, just to slip through the wheels and drift away in the rear view mirror in a wink of a second, like the invisible white water of a pulsing stone river. Again you are nothing but another bubble in this flow, surfing with the stream until the final turn brings upon the last piece of road, the beginning and ending of this trip, the place that you call home.

UNTERWEGS

Route des Grandes Alpes

Die Route des Grandes Alpes. Sie führt von gewaltigen Tälern zu großartigen Aussichtspunkten zu grandiosen Bergketten. Eine lange, gewundene Straße, die sich in hunderten von Kurven durch die Region Rhone-Alpes zieht. Wenn Straßen Musik wären, dann wäre diese hier eine phantastische Symphony, gespielt von einem Orchester aus wehendem Wind und summenden Bäumen, aus Flügelschlägen und Kirchenglocken, aus schneebedeckten Gipfeln und blumentumrankten Haustüren. Sogar die Namen der Dörfer und Bergpässe entlang dieser Route klingen wie die Verse eines Gedichts: Notre Dame de Bellecombe, Col des Saisies, Saint Jean de Sixt oder Col de la Colombière.

Den Wolken Hinterherjagen

Zurück auf der Route des Grandes Alpes, zurück auf dem Weg nach anderswo. Der Straße folgen, den Wolken hinterherjagen, durch weite Täler surfen, die Schatten der Alleebäume hochwirbeln. Einen kleinen Ort namens Saint Michel erreichen, den Weg zu den Bergen einschlagen, höher steigen, immer höher, in langgezogenen Kurven, in engen Kurven, in steilen Kurven, in unglaublichen Kurven. Der Straße in den Himmel folgen, zu dem Bergpass der irgendwo dort oben wartet, jenseits des Horizonts, versteckt in den Wolken. Den höchsten

Punkt erreichen, den Himmel mit den Fingerspitzen berühren, die Wolken einatmen, für ein paar Momente auf die Welt hinunterschauen. Dann auf der anderen Seite wieder hinunterkurven, an einer kleinen Kapelle auf einem Hügel vorbeiziehen. Sich fragen ob sie dieser Straße gewidmet ist, denn diese Straße ist himmlisch, erschaffen vom Gott der Kurven, daran gibt es keinen Zweifel.

Septemberregen

Ein regnerischer Tag. Geprägt durch Nebelketten, die langsam durch grüne Täler driften. Durch Wolkengruppen, die gemächlich um weiße Gipfel kreisen und dabei die Welt unter sich sorgfältig duschen, fast so als ob die Berge sie damit beauftragt hätten, den Sommer von ihren Hängen zu waschen und ihre Steingärten zu wässern. Das leise Plätschern der Regentropfen auf der Windschutzscheibe, eine ruhige Stimmung. Eine wilde Welt, ein Ort an den wir nicht wirklich gehören, durch den wir nur hindurchfahren auf geteerten Straßen, die auch nicht wirklich hierher gehören, auf Straßen, die nur während des Sommers geöffnet sind und im Winter schliessen, sich den Schneeflocken ergeben, die dann diese Gegend hier oben wieder in das unzugängliche Zuhause des Winds verwandeln, hier mitten in Europa. Welch tröstlicher Gedanke.

Von Azur nach Lavendel

Start an der Cote d'Azur, die Küstenstraße entlang fahren, eine Welt voller sonniger Aussichten, yuppiger Yachten und pastellfarbener Paläste. Durch Monaco flitzen, dieser verrückten Stadt voller Hochhäuser mit repräsentativen Reihenluxusapartments. In Monte Carlo umdrehen, entlang der glitzernden Küste zurückkurven, durch Nizza schleichen, wo der Strand von einer sechsspurigen Straße begrenzt wird. Sich nach Raum sehnen, nach freieren Ausblicken, nach leereren Wegen. Die Küste verlassen, in die weite Wildnis des Hinterlands flüchten, die liebliche Luft der Provence einatmen, durch eine spektakuläre Schlucht schneiden, grenzenlose Lavendelfelder sehen, an verlassenem Häusern vorbeifahren. nichts erwarten, und von der ungezierten Schönheit von Orten überrascht werden, die vielleicht gerade deshalb so beeindruckend sind, weil sie nicht versuchen zu beeindrucken.

Unterwegs

Die unglaubliche Faszination endloser Straße, Kilometer um Kilometer endloser Straße, die am Horizont auftaucht und heranrauscht, die flimmernd unter den Reifen durchzieht um sich dann im Rückspiegel aufzulösen, wie eine unsichtbare Stromschnelle in einem pulsierenden Fluss aus Stein. Wieder bist du nichts weiter als eine Blase an der Oberfläche, die auf der Brandung mitsurft bis die letzte Kurve das letzte Stück Asphalt mit sich bringt, den Anfang und das Ende der Reise, den Platz den du Zuhause nennst.

hive lore abby whidden

1. Crib Notes

We couldn't watch in those days
so I didn't see your gran give birth
but I'd seen birthing
tiny black legs crawling out of
waxy wombs, ready to fly

But when I first saw your mom
she was a larva
shrunken and unfocussed
like we held the piano pedal too long
like her arms would drift
into her hands and her hands
into her fingers and her fingers
into the blanket

Nothing to keep her separate, defined
contained only by crib
I didn't want to touch her
to guide her
afraid to articulate her life

2. Summer Swarm

Our family flowed
before your mom left home
we were a hive full of bees
and honey streams
in a good summer:
just the right equation of
sun and rain and goldenrod

But that's when the bees swarm
so strong is the hive that

half the bees leave in a black cloud
to build a new home,
leaving the old one
weak and uncertain and dark

3. Dandelions

Most people see weeds, chicken pocks
scarring the lawn, contagious,
but each dandelion is a kitchen for my bees,
a feast to bring home to their queen
a respite in their six short summer weeks

Your gran and I had forty-five years,
me at the piano and she at my shoulder
turning the pages, harmonizing honey
Like a worker bee in a field of flowers,
she brought me all I ever needed

Now it's my turn to tend to her
and I search for the nectar in her stroke
but I can't even play anymore
now that your gran don't sing and
my hands are so swollen from stings

Our arthritic piano aches for fingers
humming over the keys,
so thank you for flying in
bringing your songs so like a bee dance
directing me to weeds

our weddings
sheniz janmohamed

Three days of elaborate festivities
Bright printed saris
With gold filigree borders
The occasional waft
Of Arabic perfume
Mixed in with laughs,
Conversations and kisses
Hands decorated with
Intricate mendhi designs
Traditional songs
Belted out
While the bride arrives
With her head demurely lowered
Canopied by the gaudy
Heirloom of fabric above
Her head.
And as she sits,
The women bless her
One by one
With money envelopes, jewellery, coloured rice
And sips of sherbet.

And while the women
Chatter and reminisce about their own weddings,
(And the young ones about their future weddings)
The men take the festivities
one
step
Further.

The groom
Is bombarded
With
Broken eggs,
Turmeric paste,

Flour,
Maple syrup,
And
Other
(Respective)
Condiments.
The purpose,
You see,
Is to allow
The groom to cleanse
Not only his body
But his soul
Before entering the sacred realm of
Marriage.
(Or as one whispers under his breath, ' The Realm of Hell')

And at the mosque
The tone is
Serious, sacred, beloved.
The bride and groom
Bathed in pure white
Enter the hall
Followed by a series of hushes and gasps.

They take their places
And
The Nikka is recited.
Flowing Arabic,
Foreign and familiar,
Reverberates throughout the walls
To ensure that everyone
Present
Bears witness to
The union of two souls
Bound by the threads of faith
And the ropes of love.
The rings are exchanged,
Tears wiped,
Smiles spread-

And in the midst of all this silence,
I catch your eyes
Speaking to me
Of love.

contributors

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