

FIREWEED



shortstuff 2000 ISSUE 68 \$7

short stories

prose

meditations

stream of consciousness

diary entries

humour

recollection

68

shortstuff

special short fiction issue

FIREWEED

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Shannon is responsibly studying
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dreaming she could paint for a living.



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n : a hardy perennial so called because it is the first growth to reappear in fire-scarred areas; a troublesome weed which spreads like wildfire invading clearings, bombsites, waste land and other disturbed areas.

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(416) 504-1339 fireweed@web.net

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ISA 3 TIMES

Linda Lok, whose photographic work "Red (my)story" appeared on the cover of Issue 66, would like to express her belated gratitude to Pak Tam for his contribution as a photographer and for his expertise and assistance with computer graphics, and to Johanna Bohbot for her work as makeup artist and stylist.

Editorial

Each year *Fireweed* participates in literary events and fairs such as Word On The Street. We load up our table with subscription forms, copies of our most recent issues, and a selection of back issues. We wait to see what happens and each year, sure enough, we are amazed as the more current, glossier and — we thought — more cutting-edge issues are overlooked in favour of Issue 21, *Fireweed's* first and until now, only short story collection. What is it about this narrative form that compels us to return to it time and time again? What do we seek that perhaps we cannot find in poetry, novels, or even within our own lives? Perhaps for today's reader an even more interesting and appropriate question would be, "what defines a short story in the year 2000?"

The editorial team of "shortstuff" was impressed by the variety of submissions we received, both in terms of print materials and visual art. We selected the best and the most innovative work from across North America and are certain you'll find much that inspires, subverts, challenges and, in the process, explodes your notions about what a short story can do. The cover art, "Firepit," painted by local artist Shannon Olliffe, introduces you to the collection with the exact sense of whimsy and boldness you are meant to expect, while Francesca L'Orfano adds texture to the fictional pieces with her mixed media and collage work in "Caterina, La cognata di zia Esterina" and "Isa 3 times."

Some of the contributors, such as Barbara J. Sibbald in "Normal," Kathleen Olmstead in "Within Arms Reach," and Gena

Smith in "Spirit," use a relatively traditional narrative format to deal with painful or unspoken sentiments, while others take stylistic risks, sometimes combining poetry or academic research in their pursuit to create new forms we might call "prosetry" or even artful telling practices. Camilla Gibb's use of the diary form is one such refreshing example. Roewan Crowe consciously constructs her tale "An Old Story" employing mixed genres while Leah Piepzna-Samarasinha's "*ammachi* stories" take us across several generations in the span of a single page. Percy Lezard's "The Dark Land of the Silent" successfully blurs the distinction between storytelling and recollection while asserting the importance of both.

Regardless of the structure, the pieces within "shortstuff" are filled with humour and poignancy. Margarita Miniovich's "The Cooks, The Dykes, Their Wives and Their mother" and Chocolate Waters' "Dumped in Denver" provide two excellent examples. Elizabeth Ruth's "A Map and A Tree," Jerri Jerreat's "Blue," and Sandra Rabadziewski's "These Slippy Days" slide most notably into unrestrained memory or stream of consciousness, and yet leave us with a sense of transformation or promise of change. Finally, this collection is unified by recurring themes of betrayal, alienation, and relationship—themes which, not surprisingly, pervade many of our lives. We are certain that there is something for everyone within "shortstuff."

Joan Didion wrote, "we tell ourselves stories in order to live," and while we know, of course, that this statement is technically inaccurate — we eat, sleep, and work in order to live — it would be fair to claim that we also need our stories in order to survive. Perhaps we as readers keep coming back to the short story as we have hectic lives that won't allow us time for more lengthy pieces, perhaps because we enjoy them for their immediate sense of completion. But perhaps, as "shortstuff" asserts, we look to the short story form because we all need to see the graceful and the traumatic, the mundane and the surreal, expressed concisely outside of ourselves. As proof, maybe, that as women and artists, we share a connection, however small, with each other and with the world at large.

Comings and Goings

Fireweed is proud to announce the arrival of two healthy, bouncing new editors, Elizabeth Ruth and Cassandra Lord. Elizabeth is a writer and organizer of the monthly literary series, Clit Lit, and Cassandra is a visual artist. Elizabeth and Cassandra will help fill the void left by Lisa Rundle, Lisa Mesbur, Shauna Lancit and Louise Bak, editors and board members extraordinaire, who have recently moved on to other projects.

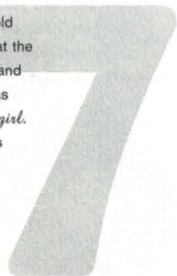
Note To Contributors

Fireweed is now accepting E-mail contributions at fireweed@web.net. All submissions should be sent as a Word attachment in Macintosh format or, if you use a PC, in Word for Windows, saved as RTF (Rich Text Format). What the heck is rich text format, you ask? We don't really know, but it seems to be the only PC format we can read on our ancient Macs. For those of you who have no idea how to go about doing this, here is a quick primer: (1) write document, (2) go into "save as" (as opposed to just "save"), (3) click onto "save file as type." A menu should pop up, with Rich Text Format (RTF) as one of the options. (4) Click RTF. Easy, and you just saved us a giant headache. Please note that if you do not use one of the above formats, your submission may be returned.

action/reaction



Tamara Rae is a twenty-three year old student of photography and printmaking at the University of Manitoba. She is the artist and publisher of nEUROTIC girl comix and has collaborated on a zine called *fight like a girl*. Tamara also plays bass guitar and adores cooking and crafting.



Blue Plate Special

I can't talk about anything but her. I can think of a thousand different things. But I only speak about her. I should have never eaten that dinner. It was weird, I thought it was weird even for her. She was out there, a true corn flake. Don't let that fool you. Made you think she was off in Disneyland but she had a razor blade brain. A real killer. You would just be dying to please her. Blood-thirsty bitch, couldn't be satisfied. She loved to set traps for people. She thrived on that. I loved her for it. I still do.

She had all the goods, not beautiful at all really. Yet, every guy I knew wanted to fuck her, lots of girls too. It's something impossible to define. Fucked like the devil, slowly pulled you apart and then slapped you back together. Only you were never together after that. You had her on the brain, deep in your guts.

That night she met me at her door. She had on a plastic silver raincoat with a black silk slip on underneath. I slid my hand up her thigh and met that naked hairy cunt. I remember thinking *what was in store for me?* She slid out of her coat and did a little shimmy dance for me. Robyn Hitchcock was playing on the boom box. She hadn't said a word yet. I was rock hard the minute I stepped through the door. As she twirled around I grabbed at her but she smiled and danced off into the kitchen.

She returned with a single plate. A deep cobalt blue plate. On it was a green lettuce bed holding a tongue. It looked broiled or something. I must have had beef tongue sometime in my life. Maybe once with my roommate's Jewish parents. I

didn't know what they should look like really. But I thought this was a rather puny one for a cow. Did people eat pig tongues? Well this must be it.

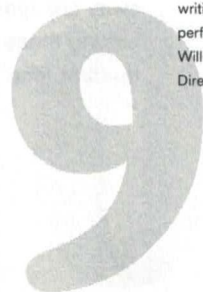
As she put the dish down on the table she pushed me into a chair. She sat down on my lap and I tried to kiss her. I didn't want to eat. I wanted to fuck. I rubbed her bare ass with one hand and massaged her sweet tit with the other. She broke off a piece of that tongue and I let her feed me. Bite after bite until it was gone. I don't remember what it tasted like. My head was buzzing. I slid down one strap of her slip as she turned to face me settling down spread-eagled on my legs. Her cunt opened. I could smell it. I wanted it.

She looked into me. She looked that way sometimes. Her eyes didn't seem real with all those mixed up colours — yellow, brown, green. She leaned into me and lightly kissed my lips, I wasted no time jamming my tongue through her lips and into her mouth. And then I touched on the unthinkable. There was nothing there. I mean there was no tongue. I sprang up and she landed on the table, crashing with it onto the floor. She opened her mouth and nothing came out. I mean no noise, no sound but you could see that she was laughing, her body shook like crazy and that gruesome tongueless mouth was wide open now. A silent howl.

Once I had told her that her tongue was too big. Her clit was huge, her nipples too. I wasn't ever going to complain about those. But she had shoved that gruesome long fucking tongue of hers down into my throat again and I told her. I forgot about it as soon as I said it. She took care with her tongue after that. Never forcing it too far anymore. Anyway what the fuck was I complaining about. She gave great head. I had loved her tongue really.

Mine, my tongue, now has a mind of its own. It's hers. I'm gonna blow my brains out because ever since I ate her tongue I can only talk about her. Look I can't even write about anything else. First I'm going to cut out this cursed tongue of mine and then I'm gonna blow my head to bits. What else can I do?

Janean Williams lives in Orlando, FL, where in addition to writing fiction, she creates and performs Barbie™ Opera. Ms. Williams is Public Relations Director for the Orlando Opera.



These Slippy Days

It's like sliding a piece of honey comb all over your tongue, the way it sort of slips and slides all across the taste buds and underneath too, in between the folds and creases, and you'd expect it to be slippy, but really it's quite sticky if you get it on the tip of your finger first. That's how all of it is, life i mean, especially now with it ending and everything. i like that idea, that life is like honey, because honey is my favourite thing in the whole wide world, and isn't it just perfect how, somewhat like life itself, it comes out of the bums of bees.

It looks as though it may actually be true, what they've been saying, those brooding scientists and card-reading glittering ladies, about how the end is coming sooner than soon, sooner than supersoon, and how now we've got so little time and let's all live these last three years trying to actually live the way life was meant to be lived. But with the end on its way, the world has gotten a little out of hand, what with all of this crying and screaming and such. That all should stop. It isn't good for the children anyhow.

i'm not sure if i should spit or swallow, not a question i come to face too often, so i have to make sure i do the right thing, especially these days. i'm sitting at the bowl of a toilet, on the floor, and i'm wondering how, amid this mass chaos, they still manage to clean the dirt and grime from around the rim, sparkling, as if the thought of total annihilation was dirty enough and they couldn't bear any more of it. Around and around goes the brush, swishing away any reminder of the shit that is about to hit the fan, and i'm betting those miserable janitors are happy to be who they are for the first time in their lives because now it's true they're helping

the world forget their problems. This is what i'm thinking, as the vomit is raking its way up my throat like a scorned woman's nails on his flesh, and my head suddenly has bloated in that helium balloon bobbing kind of way, and my hands are reaching for the toilet paper, but all i've done is made the roll go round and round, unravelling, and life is unravelling as the world continues to go round and round.

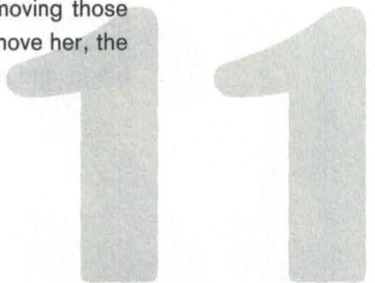
It's madness the way one's floor can quickly become one's ceiling.

i retch up the last bit my stomach has to offer and as i'm trying to strip some from the locks of my hair, i look up to the stall walls that surround me, bullet-holed with words like cunt and mother-fucker. A drawing of what would have been a standard stick man, except for an enlarged and quite detailed penis, which hung regretfully flaccid between two lines for legs, did nothing to tap any emotion. What did surprise me though, enough to forget the cottage cheese gob smeared all over my cheeks, was so slight, so tiny, nothing more than a child's mouth, that given another time, a bit more energy, the eyes to jump a little faster, would have been missed.

A tiny butterfly.

Oh no ... oh no, that's it.

i'm running through a field. It's summer with a warm sun and the sky tightly blue, no stretch of cloud, and it's so long ago that it might have not even happened. i'm feeling how new i am and tomorrow in time when i'm going to be sitting wasted in bathroom stalls it doesn't even occur to me. It's so good to be me and there and i'm laughing all over, even in the small spaces of my insides, and my legs don't hurt if i run. i'm rolling like a pin over soft, cushiony dough down a green grassy hill, and when i come to a stop there's a rip in the earth like a peephole into another dimension. With curiosity i look and see insects, all bustling about doing and going about their own business all serious and such, and i'm wondering if they take breaks, having not noticed the cut that is in my skin like a peep hole into another dimension. Big huge ants that look like three mercury beads stuck together; miniscule red mites that, when i squish one, leave a tiny red streak on my fingertip. Then i see her, she's gliding, not even moving those crepe-paper wings as she's gliding, letting the wind move her, the sun warm her, the eyes adore her.



A butterfly, i think; that's the kind of insect i would want to be if i was ever asked.

There's a glow to the room that isn't coming from the lights and when i walk through it i think of how much i miss the glow of snow. My fingers are on the back of my neck, and a woman is singing up on stage, and her voice is like them, like long fingers that easily squeeze, and it reaches out from the stage, wrapping itself around me like the velvet ribbons i used to put in my hair, and this place is like all those things i remember and long gone, with outside in its chaos. She's singing and i'm thinking how lovely she is at the same time i hate her too because she's making me ache in ways i thought i'd shut off. Her face is barely there, like the moon on most nights, and she's looking up over our heads and she's clutching the microphone like it's all she's got, and suddenly she has become a warm watery current that has surrounded me, twirling and enveloping, pulling me in, and for a moment, just one, i feel like i've been cupped in her hands and in them i can sleep so long.

i've spilled some of my drink over the candle that's begun to flicker and sway, like the singer on stage, and i'm sure it's going to snuff out and it does just as the fingers around my neck ease with the last notes from her trembling mouth.

A chair scrapes over a well-scraped floor, and across the room a man is slowly moving his hand up a lover's thigh and i think how much like the fog rolling over a morning field that is and suddenly i remember there are only three months left and how time just sort of slides. Outside the neon flickers in red Morse code and the air is so heavy it sits on the grooves of my collarbones and once again i have to marvel at the stars and wonder if i held one, would the skin of my hands look the way an eyelid does closed while facing up to the sun? i'm shaking again and i'm not sure if it's because it's cold. There is so much i'm not sure about these days.

It isn't until my foot has dug into it that i realize i'm missing a shoe, and so at my feet is blood and a piece of broken blue glass that i have to tug on to get out. Somewhere i hear a car horn and for a second i think it's the alarm and i should find a place to hide, but that only lasts a second and that's when i realize i've dug its sharp edge into my palm and at my hand is blood and a piece of broken blue glass. i would have once

laughed at the thought that maybe i had just been crucified, but i didn't now because i was sure of it.

i used to have a lover. i once had my own home. My cat's name was Elliot. Some days there was even enough time to bake fresh bread.

Daisies look especially nice in the blue vase on the window-sill, but sometimes i'd put them in the yellow one, and they'd never wilt, not even sitting in the path of steam coming from the boiling pots below. i made him laugh with his mouth full and i could see the tomatoes mixed with the white grains of rice and his little pink tongue, and it's wonderful the way the colour of his eyes change when he moves from in and out of the sunlight, and when the salt spills he pinches some over his left shoulder. i dance for him, and there are birds far off somewhere, and i'm nice and warm and swinging my hips, and when he tells me i'm his cello whose strings he loves to rub i remember to remember this moment when things are dark and vacant. Only that's when Elliot jumped up and the blue vase with the white daisies came down smashing at our feet.

In my nose a smell slips and i think of the slop i used to watch my uncle's pigs eat, and i'm awake again when the hookers are dressed like wet saran wrap on beef asking who's been spreading your jelly and my stomach sounds like it's trying to imitate Louis Armstrong. There's nothing quite like the feeling of running fingers through your own greasy hair, and the texture of it reminds me of my mother's pudding, and as i'm walking at stride to the rise of the sun i was thinking how in three days i might feel her kiss at the crook of my neck again. My arms are so thin that when i stretch i lose them in the branches of the bare trees and this place used to be full of people and noise and ideas, but now you can feel the expansiveness of vacancy. i'm wondering where she is now, the singer, and if her tongue still twirls in her mouth or has it been replaced with the dirt of six feet under. i wonder if we'll all be six feet under in three days or just become tiny mounds here and there like goose-bump flesh after a quick, cool breeze. It's so hard to be positive when even the dawning sky seems to wane in mourning.

If time had elastic hands i could save us is what i'm thinking as i go about picking at an old scar on my knee that has opened up again. i'd stretch and pull and wrap them around until it was a quarter to and not half passed the countdown to the end,

because that was when we didn't know the end was coming and to be ignorant again would feel so good. Except i don't remember how long ago it was that life wasn't how it is now and i'm trying to find the moment that things shifted and all of a sudden life fell out of the mouth of living and splattered all over us. That's when i realized that it was my own face that was reflecting back at me and not some dirty hag, and the water felt cool on my neck as little droplets of dirt dripped down to make slinky dark rivers on the sand that reminded me of the blue veins all up the underside of my arm where it's still smooth. i'm in and suddenly it sounds like the inside of a seashell when you bring it up to your ear and when i look up through the surface of the water the world looks wavy and sly, like a belly dancer wooing and twinkling with all her jewels and i want to gather it up in my arms and pull it under with me into this numbing liquid haze and save it from that moment when everything will just stop.

Tick tick. How easy it is to slip even when you're careful to notice.

Lapping at my feet came the water like wet lips making them glisten and shine and i was twinkling in the headlights as if my skin dripped in stars and i could see the moon reflected in his eyes. My hair was loose and swaying like the tide, and i was letting him watch my body swing through the sheerness of my dress and Billie is singing about her man that she loves so, and the music made me feel alive and if only this moment would just last forever here, with him, at the edge of the world. Only that's when the music stopped and the voice from the radio said we only had three years until it would all end.

How quickly the morning came that day.

It usually takes me three days to finish a good book. Today, if the world was a novel i wouldn't have time to turn to the last chapter because there are only three minutes left and I've barely begun.

Oh no ... oh no, that's it.

Despite graduating from Ryerson University's esteemed film program, *Sandra* has, in fact, managed to find a devotion to gauze-mache sculpture, design and art direction. Still, freelancing in these positions has not yet diminished her love of the written word, and she enjoys picking up a pen every now and then. She lives, currently, in Mississauga, where her soul may or may not soar free, depending on the transit situation, air-quality-index, and weather.

14

The Dark Land of the Silent

I remember he was different as a boy, my beloved brother, Sunshine. We would run and play, only he wouldn't hear the honking car as it passed. Strange, I thought, as I ran faster ahead without thinking to stand beside him.

My brother, so sweet and so kind ...

I could never lose a fight with him. I'd always win and never get in trouble 'cause I could tell my truth (at the time) faster than his hands could cry. And when I was crying he would get in trouble, but I knew I was lying. In the end, he would always hold and comfort me, wipe my tears away, tears that were silent and flowing and a river, a river he could never hear. But still he held me.

My brother so sweet and so kind ...

He never played ring-around-the-rosie or tag or hide-and-go-seek, because I was the only one who could talk to him in his foreign language. And after a while, I would get tired of telling him so he stopped playing. And our other brothers and sisters stopped picking him. Always the most well-behaved kid on our block, he would be the first at the table all washed up and tidied for dinner, the first to place his plate at the sink without being told. Never had to be yelled at like us other kids when we didn't make our beds, clean out rooms, or do our homework.

My brother so sweet and so kind ...

Skins. We were skins but he never had to hear the little white boys and girls make fun of our skin, the colour, the shades, we were ... brown. Never had to hear the adults passing by say we were savages, never had to hear the blatant racism spat into

our face by the tongues of the miners and the skiers as they sped by in their vehicles as we protested their claim to our roads. Roads that went through the heart of our nations...

My brother so sweet and so kind...

I didn't know that in the night when silence is the loudest, a little boy was touched and molested and hurt. I never knew he was in his second home, a home he was forced to go to because it was best for him, being the little boy he was. Or that he was hit for being "slow," kicked for taking his time, ridiculed for the words he tried to utter, and harmed and humiliated by his beloved caretakers. Caregivers whom my family religiously shipped him to each long weekend and holiday and break...

My brother so sweet and so kind...

When I was in school, a white man's school, I was not able to appreciate the education I was receiving. I did not know my brother was passed through grade after grade, that his teachers pushed all the students through. Countless numbers, child after faceless child, no one caring if they could read or write. I was never told of the times he was cold inside, so cold he wanted to douse the flames of shame and hurt he's lived with. Alcohol and drug abuse.

My brother so sweet and so kind...

I remember one afternoon when I held his hand in the emergency room. We were no longer little boy and little girl. He was withdrawing from drugs and alcohol. I remember the shame I felt because I could not help or support him through hurts that haunted him. That day he looked like a little boy, a boy I remember lost with no one to talk to. He was learning how to be stepped on, hurt, and slowly die inside.

My brother so sweet and so kind...

Never did they realize that my brother is the sunshine, a ray of light to bring him and the other former students out of the darkness. Sunshine is a man. A man whose little boy has been hurt and damaged, now picking up the pieces of his broken life and bringing the pieces into the sun. As a ray, my beloved brother, Sunshine. No longer facing the darkness, the shadows of day, my beloved brother, Sunshine.

Percy Lezard is
an Okanogan 2spirited
woman from the west.

16

Within Arm's Reach

Celia didn't hear herself fall. It seemed to happen in an instant. Wasn't it just yesterday that everything was all right, felt perfectly normal? She looked up one morning and couldn't see the top. So she floated. An inch above ground. A perfect glide around people and objects, keeping her distance, resigning herself to a world removed. *These are moments, not mine, just moments that hang in the air. No one owns them.*

She saw the details of that morning in movie stills. Her path from living room to bedroom to bathroom; her precise movements, the red lines that followed the slice of the blade, the chair pulled up close to the sink. It was so quiet. The water made no sound. No noise came from the street below the open window. She was in a silent movie.

Celia sat by the sink and waited. She waited for a sound. Something to tell her that everything was over—or that it was just beginning. It was an outcome that was needed and any one would do. *I remember my mother in the hospital. How thin and pale she was. The machines that surrounded her, that kept her alive. I could sleep only when she did, laying my head at the foot of her bed. Or curling into one of the hospital chairs. I could only sleep when surrounded by the sound of the machines that kept my mother alive and always within reach. Have I slept that well since?* Her first clear memory, complete with all the senses, motion returning to her body and the world around her, came as she walked into the Emergency Room. She arrived with her wrists wrapped in dish-towels, holding them out towards the nurse on duty. "I've changed my mind."

*

She stood at the pay phone near the nurse's station while her father slept. His bed was in an older wing of the building. The dimly lit hallway, the sickly green walls, resembled a submarine, or a cheap science fiction movie version of a submarine, rather than a hospital. For a week, every day that she had visited her father, she felt herself under the deep water.

Celia's sister was living in Vancouver, a student at UBC, so she didn't have to worry about hospital patrol. She phoned her regularly to leave reports on her answering machine. Apparently Adele didn't spend much time in her room. When she did answer, she sounded irritated about the disruption. "It's a standard operation these days. They know what they're doing."

"He's sixty-nine years old. This is his third major operation in less than five years. Doesn't that scare you?"

"It's not good but it doesn't scare me. Doug explained the whole thing to me. As long as Dad's organs are working fine, they can replace everything around them." Adele mentioned Doug often. *New boyfriend. Or someone that she's hoping will be her new boyfriend.* His hip was disintegrating; bones slowly deteriorating, eating themselves. His doctor wanted him carefully monitored before the operation. He also claimed there was nothing to worry about — he just liked to make sure everything was covered.

"He's had two heart attacks, has high blood pressure and borderline diabetes. Do you want me to fax you his medical chart? The man is falling apart." Let Adele's little pre-med or pre-law, or whatever his monthly ambition is, buddy swallow that one.

"What are you trying to do? Make me feel guilty? I'm living thousands of miles away. Exams start next week, school is eating up my life. Do you want me to drop everything to come out there while Dad has an operation? I wouldn't be coming for Dad, only you, and that's not a priority for me right now. Sorry." Apologies replace goodbyes.

*

Adele was ten when their mother died. She had very few memories of the time before sickness took over their lives. She only saw a woman who tired too quickly and wore elaborate scarves to cover her bald head. Scarves Adele hated. Other kids called her mother a gypsy. She would have preferred that her

mom expose her bald pate—a punk rock mom was much more acceptable than a gypsy mom. She visited the hospital only a few times. Everyone felt that she was too young. No one wanted to upset her. Their mother needed her rest. None of this seemed to really bother Adele. It felt more like a distant relative whose loss she was supposed to mourn than the women who cared for her when she was young. Celia took care of her, was the one who she depended upon for the day's needs.

Celia tried to talk with her about the "inevitable." "It'll be hard. You can talk to me any time you want. It's okay to cry." None of these words were Celia's. All of them had been handed to her from nurses, teachers, neighbours and now she was passing them on to Adele. Maybe she would make better use of them. Adele kept her silence, though. The look on her face suggested annoyance at her older sister's intrusion. She just wanted to get home, phone her friends, eat something, maybe watch TV. All this talking—it made everything last longer. It was going to happen no matter how many sentences of condolence and sympathy were crammed into a day. Just let it happen. Let's get it over with. Their family seemed to be in a perpetual state of transition. Waiting for something drastic to occur—for death or a reprieve—but it was a constant linger. By the time the end came, they had spent so much time in preparation that the event seemed to pass by without their full attention.

Celia, who was fifteen, rushed between school, hospital and home, trying to fill in all the gaps. It was already an old role for her by the time her mother died. Most duties fell to her, and she picked up the rest, as soon as the diagnosis arrived. All hours of the day were rigidly controlled. There was always some place that she was supposed to be, something else that she was supposed to be doing.

She started smoking—said that it calmed her nerves—didn't mind the contradiction that her mother was dying of cancer. It was the only outlet she had. It was a pleasure she could work around her schedule and it allowed for solitude. The only other time she felt calm was in her mother's hospital room—listening to her breathe amidst all of the machines at work.

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"That's the third time today that they've taken my temperature. I think they've lost my charts. Or, they've doubled up all my

rounds and there are three different nurses performing the same duty." He struggled with the pillows, trying to prop himself higher in the bed. Celia took over, making him comfortable.

"They're monitoring you, Dad. That's why you're in the hospital. To be watched and cared for."

"I still think it's suspicious. Keep your eye on them, Ceely."

"I will."

He fidgets too much. He has never been an active man, preferring the solitude of a book and a warm armchair to any kind of physical activity. "Exercise of the mind," he called it. His father was an electrician's assistant and his mother cleaned houses. Celia knew very little about her grandfather except that he drank and her father wanted nothing to do with him. To put himself through school, Celia's father struggled, worked a variety of jobs: construction, waitering, summers on boats and logging camps. He vowed that his children would never have to work that hard. His calluses have long since disappeared. Other than gardening and cutting the lawn, he was never seen performing any activity that might produce a sweat. He was not a thin man. Flesh piled on flesh. His sedentary state provided a Buddha-like continence without the beatific smile. In his hospital bed he struggles. The IV drip, the steel bars along one side, the embarrassingly short gown held him in place. For the first time since he was a young man, he needed to move.

When the sickness was over, empty space took its place. Celia's hands searched for something to occupy them. She smoked more, considered taking up knitting or bowling. There was time to do all of the things that duty kept her from before. She could join clubs at school: the yearbook staff, decorating committee for dances, basketball and track. But these were just activities to take up time. She was filling in the available space with whatever was closest at hand. Celia's life had meaning when everyone required something of her. There was purpose in action. There was satisfaction in results.

High school parties became a necessity. Loud music, crowds of people, drugs and strange concoctions stolen from parents' liquor cabinets provided her escape. She felt comfortably lost in that environment. An overload of stimuli without having to focus on one particular thing. She surrounded herself with

friends that she thought would last a lifetime but lost track of shortly after starting university. It seemed that the only thing they had in common was geography.

With no one around who knew her during her responsible days, she could shed that persona entirely. Suddenly, she was only what she let people see. She was a person who existed only as she stood before them; nothing before and nothing after. As soon as she realized that she could survive without boundaries, she could see no other way of being. Not a shadow, something more like a breeze.

*

She took the book from her father's hand. "Read me some of this, could you?" She flipped through the worn out copy of *Moby Dick*. The novel was his second skin, his constant companion. A copy sat beside his bed, always within arm's reach. There were many times when her father, amidst the clutter of family or work, through her mother's long illness, through her own troubles, maintained a calm, reassured state. He always looked to be in mid-prayer but Celia suspected he was reciting passages from Melville to himself.

It was difficult to know where to start. The familiarity of the pages, the cadence of Melville's words, felt uncomfortable in her hands. Her father had read the same book to her when she was young, kindly skipping the long passages concerning types of whales and whaling ships. There was distance in this intimacy. Her father's voice beside her bed, waiting for her to fall asleep. Her eyes always closed; the world, her bedroom, her father, cut from view. Ony words, her father's near whisper, could touch her as she lay with sheets pulled to her chin.

"Doesn't matter which part. You can start anywhere."

The pages flipped carefully in her hands.

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During university, she had a part-time job at a gift store on Bloor Street. Mark was dating one of her co-workers, and he often came along for drinks after they closed the store. They drank more than the rest of their friends, didn't feel the need to sleep like the others, and never worried about the next day's activities. The next day was never a part of the equation. At first they just flirted in the way that drunken people who are attracted to each other but like to pretend that they're not and

are only being friendly, flirt. Then their knees touched beneath the table or they caught each other's hand while passing to the bar. They moved to the next level when one followed the other into a storeroom near the washrooms.

Everyone else pretended that it wasn't happening. She skipped her classes and called in sick for shifts assigned with Mark's girlfriend. Work became a hostile environment without anyone mentioning the real reason. Celia didn't mind though. She could finally admit that she never liked them any way. She quit her job without much fanfare—rather than call in sick again, she simply stopped going in. (About a month later when she desperately needed money, she showed up at the store demanding her final cheque. There was a shouting match with the owners when many things that she would regret years later were said. She left the store with cheque in hand, though). Mark's girlfriend eventually grew tired of the game and threw all of his things on to the front lawn. He moved in with Celia temporarily, staying for two years. He tried everyone on for size; she was the closest fit.

We lost our television in a fight—or rather it was disposed of by being thrown from a window—so we had to invent our own form of passive entertainment. Our apartment had a fire escape that looked over a men's hostel. In the summer, they propped the bathroom's frosted window open. We sat on the wrought-iron stairs listening to their conversations, watching the midriffs of the residents walk from stall to sink and giving play-by-play commentary on all the action. (The remains of the old Zenith could also be seen from our fire escape perch and might still be there today).

These were quiet moments, when we caught our breath and listened. We made elaborate promises—that we would never buy stocks, go to Las Vegas or quit smoking. We never made promises of love. (I guess that seemed too far fetched). We never promised that there would be another time on the fire escape, smoking and watching. Each moment was consumed like a last meal—each soft word, every silent pause.

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Her parents rarely touched. They never kissed or hugged or sat closely together on the living room couch. They were comfortably apart. Once during the long and final hospital stay, Celia

walked into the room a little too quickly and saw her father's hand quietly covering her mother's. His head was down, reading from a magazine in his lap. When he saw Celia his first reaction was to smile and nod his silent hello. A moment later he remembered his compromising position and slid his hand along the bed and back to the magazine. Celia looked away.

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A nurse was checking her tubes and IV. Not the same one from the night before (if it was the night before) but a newer, younger version with a sweet, beatific smile. She let her little light shine down on Celia in her bed. Celia stared back, a hard solid glare to combat this gentle good nature. She didn't want the IV but was careful not to make too big a fuss. It was the drugs, the sedatives that frightened her. "You'll feel better. You need to relax." *I used to agree with you. Not anymore.* The nurse moved in a soft, fluid motion, injecting the syringe into the solution that dripped from the bag. Celia wanted to remind her little guardian that she had checked herself in. A custodian or pizza delivery boy didn't find her in a heap. She realized her mistake, or perhaps miscalculation was more accurate, and came to the professionals to have it fixed. She would only take her car to a qualified mechanic. If the nurse had heard anything Celia said, if anything was in fact spoken aloud, it was ignored.

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Her father's house became a retreat. She breezed in every few months, bags in hand, ready to change her life. Her stay might last a week, a couple of days, or maybe a month. By the time Adele was in her last year of high school she was tired of her older sister's disruptions. Old roles did not apply and Adele resented Celia's insistence on caring for her. She was doing just fine without her help and it was quite obviously Celia who was in need of assistance. Her plan for escape was in place. Hard work would lead to a good school far away. Some place where she could avoid her sister's desperate antics and her father's quiet acceptance of everything before him.

Each time Celia returned home, or lived on a friend's couch, she thought that a final break was made at last. She talked about going back to school, maybe taking an art or yoga class, making steps and moving on. Daytime talk show vocabulary became her vernacular. She was on the road to recovery. And then the phone calls

would begin. They didn't feel the need to talk during the day, only after midnight when sufficient quantities were consumed, somewhere between two and six in the morning. The phone would ring and shake Celia's family out of their slumber. Conversations usually lasted several hours (including the time it took to slam the phone down and then call back) and always ended in loud arguments. Anger wasn't usually the impetus to call, though. Mark generally had two emotions: repentant and horny. He called to say he was sorry for everything that he did and/or didn't do or because he wanted her to take a cab to see him because she was so beautiful and he needed her so much. Celia, too, often phoned out of suspicion, hoping to catch him in an illicit act, hoping that he wouldn't be home and that she could continue to call at 15-minute intervals until she found him. Exploding with anger and frustration, she cried, screamed, broke things around the house. Her father never asked her what was wrong or told her to leave. Adele kept her distance. Eventually, Celia packed her bags and headed back in the other direction, moving silently through the door.

*

"I spoke with Adele. She sends her love."

"Good. Good." He reached for the water pitcher beside his bed.

"She's studying for exams so she hasn't had much time to call."

"She'll do well—she's a smart girl. Focused." She took the pitcher from his hand and poured the water. "Thank you." His hand quivered as he took the glass. "She's happy being a student."

"Being happy is what it's all about, right?"

"Ah, sarcasm. It's not a dying art, is it?"

"I think we're both keeping it alive."

"Genetic trait." The glass quickly became an obstacle for him. He couldn't turn his body enough to place it back on the table without threatening its contents. His frustration showed on his face but he kept his silence. Celia stepped in. Second nature taking over as she removed the glass from his hand. He closed his eyes.

"Nap time?"

"Hmmm."

She opened his book to Chapter 37. "*I leave the cabin a white and turbid wake; pale waters, paler cheeks wher'er I sail. The envious billows sideways to whelm my track: but first I pass.*"

Kathleen Elmstead is a Toronto writer who has been published in *Saddle Creek* and *Vice*. She admits to enjoying the long passages about whales in *Moby Dick*.

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Margarita Miniovich

The Cooks, The Dykes, Their Wives and Their Mother

So, OK, maybe it wasn't such a good idea after all. To have my mother come to visit for two weeks from Virginia. With my grandmother, my mother's mother, who is 94 but swears she is not a day over 89. Both of whom had come from Moscow 20 years ago with my sister and me in tow, in order to give us a life of freedom and opportunities. Which, in my mother's view, we have perverted and abused by taking up the worst in the Western society, namely lesbianism. The word my mother can't say. She loves my sister Ella and me passionately and boundlessly like the good Russian Jewish mother that she is, and just like one, she never lets us forget that our lifestyle, as she calls it, is what will take her to her grave early and painfully, and what will make her turn in it over and over.

My mother and grandmother come from Russian Jewish intelligentsia, are Scorpio and Leo respectively, and thus cannot be in the same room together without both of their heart medications on the table, just in case. Perhaps it wasn't such a good idea to have them come in the middle of a Vancouver winter. The coldest one in 70 years. To stay with me and my, also Russian, lover, in our small apartment in the West End. And maybe it wasn't such a good idea to have my sister, who lives a 20-minute drive from my mom in Virginia, come to visit at the same time, with her own Russian lover. As well as our good friend Ann, from Toronto, who happens to be my ex, in search of a good time, and the only one in the house not to speak Russian.

We only have one real bed, which we give to my mom and grandma to sleep on, while my lover and I use what feels like

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a fist-filled futon mattress in the living room, with a huge dip in the middle—the mattress not the living room, although after two days, I wish the living room floor had not only a dip but a hole that I could fall through to wander in the dark, quiet corridors in the underbelly of the earth. We also have to share the mattress with our two dogs who eat “giant breed” dog food, not accidentally, whose bed this really is, and who regard this as a hostile take over, fighting every step of the way with their tails in our face. We also have to lock our cat, Caviar, out of the bedroom at night where my mom and grandma sleep because Cav has a tendency to jump on the pillow and take a good swipe at your nose with her claw. This is her way of asking to be let under the covers but could certainly be misunderstood in the middle of the night by my 94- or 89-year-old grandmother. So she stands in the hallway all night long scratching at the door, and making threatening noises. The cat, not my grandmother.

This keeps me awake every night for two weeks and I become a little jumpy and irritable to say the least. Which does not bode well with my boss, Santa Claus, over at the Park Royal Mall, where to pay our rent, I work as an Elf for 8 bucks an hour, this being Christmas and me being Jewish. I whizz around this heterosexual Christian zoo, with a crooked scowl on my face, eight hours a day, yanking screaming kids by their sweaty little hands and escorting them to sit on Santa's lap for a picture, which will eventually stand framed on a mantelpiece in some West Vancouver house as an eternal reminder of my complicity in the crime of helping perpetuate this quintessential display of Family Values. I am decked out in a little green velvet dress that keeps riding up my thick black nylons, and a hat adorned with bells. One day I try to smile sweetly and seductively, as I see it, at a cute tall butch walking by. She looks at me with disgust, and I swear I can hear her say, “Listen, Elfie, I'd rather sit on Santa's face than be seen with you!”

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, my mother is cheerfully and energetically trying to ignore the fact that she is stuck in a house with 5 dykes and her own mother. Outside the snow is up to the waist and nobody can leave the house. And so she and my grandmother, who thinks the absence of men in this house is just a temporary misfortune, cook and cook and cook

without stopping for two weeks. Our fridge is filled with perogies, porridge, cakes, cutlets, borsch, blintzes, home-made cottage cheese, stuffed fish, gulash, cabbage rolls etc. We have to ask our friends down the street if we could use their fridge for storage as ours doesn't close properly anymore. We are forced to steal a Safeway cart and load it up with pots and dishes and bottles of stuff. It takes all five of us, me, my lover, Ella, her lover and Ann to manoeuvre, heave and wheel it to our friends' place, without anything falling or spilling into a snow bank on the way.

My mom and grandma leave the kitchen only to go to the bathroom and while there, yell orders at each other, like "Don't lift the lid on the pot! How many times do I have to tell you the dough won't rise!" My grandmother yells back "Oy veyzmir, I've been making kulebyaka for 70 years, don't you tell me how to make dough!" while raising the lid. My mother runs back to the kitchen, forgetting to flush the toilet, screaming, "I knew it! You've ruined it! Do it yourself then! Don't ask me for anything!" "I didn't ask you to help!" yells my grandma, "Meshugeneh, you always stick your nose into everything!" "Ella," she calls for my sister, "Come and help!" "Oh yeah!" screams my mom, and slams the door to the bedroom, where above the bed in which they sleep hangs a poster we forgot to take down of two naked, sweaty, post-coital women. My mother catapults herself from the room two seconds later, runs back into the kitchen, grabs a cutting board and slices beets with so much force that you just know she wishes the red juice running down the spine of the knife was my grandmother's blood from where my mom had plunged the blade in, with intent and precision. They both eye their bottles of pills on the table but do not reach for them. They will not be moved.

Mealtimes are often and deadly. We all sit around a small table in our kitchen touching knees. "Isn't it nice," my grandmother says, "All girls at this table. And all so pretty. Don't you worry, you'll get some nice boys soon. I too, was not married until I was almost 27. Was waiting for my special one. And found him too. So there's no harm in waiting. But not too long." She winks at my sister, Ella. Who squeezes my hand underneath the table, hard. Our grandfather was a rare asshole. But more to the point, our grandma thinks that a Russian gay

friend of my sister's is her boyfriend. She calls him her "son-in-law" and we cannot break her heart by telling her that it would be far more appropriate to call him her "sperm-in-law" as Ella is considering using him as a donor in the near future. "Alright, mother," my mom says, with a note of hysteria in her voice, "You talk too much. Eat what's on your plate." "I won't talk very soon at all. When I'm dead," says my grandma, "Then you'll be happy."

Ann is the only one who is stuffing her face. Her plate is full of pickles, herring and boiled potatoes. I translate the gist of the conversation to her, but it doesn't spoil her appetite. Nothing does, as far as I can recall from our days together. "Umhu," she says, loudly and slowly, in English, addressing my grandma, "Pretty girls, all of them!" My grandma smiles and nods. My mother grabs dishes from under our noses and drops them in the sink with a bang. My lover and Ella's retreat hastily out onto the fire escape to smoke. Ann, who doesn't smoke, decides she needs some fresh, 10-below air. Ella stands behind our mother and massages her shoulders as mom washes the dishes in the steaming water. I put my arms around grandma and we sit together, rocking gently. "Tell them to come in and get some jackets," my mother mutters under her breath, "It's too cold to be outside like that." "It's okay, mama," I say, "They're big girls." "You're all big, shmig," she says, "Until you get sick, and then you wish you'd listened to your mother." I have no idea what she means. Is she referring to AIDS, being a lesbian, or being genuinely concerned about our lovers' health? My sister and I exchange one of our "How can we slip some PFLAG pamphlets into her luggage" looks. I think of how my mother told me when I came out never ever to tell my grandmother that I was a lesbian, as it will kill her. I wonder who it's going to kill first. It could just as soon be me.

The rest of the time with our guests goes like this: we go to the only lesbian establishment in the city, in search of sanity on a Friday night. It's closed. We assume it's due to it being Christmas Eve although there is no sign saying when they'll reopen. Ann is getting frustrated and picks up a drunken woman cop, in her civvies, outside the closed gate of the bar. They go to the cop's house for the night. Ella, me and the loves of our lives dread going home, where mom and grandma

are watching a Russian war movie. We hang out on Commercial which is frozen and empty, except for a smokey pool hall, where we are the only women and where we spend the money my grandma has given us on beer and cigarettes. We speak in Russian about everything but have no words in our own language for dyke or butch or femme or Pride.

On Saturday night, we try the Lotus again. It's closed. It's Christmas Day. Sunday we go to the Lotus for our last and final time. It's closed. We rent more Russian movies, Ann spends her time at the cop's house, my grandmother cooks, my mother looks through our family pictures, where Ella and I are children and suddenly exclaims that there is absolutely nothing abnormal in either her own or my father's family's backgrounds that would point to a degenerative trait of our lifestyle. Ella and her lover sneak into the bathroom at night to make love, leaving the water run as loudly as possible. My mother knocks on the door insisting she has to pee immediately. My lover and I abandon the futon to our dogs, our backs are killing us anyway, and we move onto the floor to sleep beside my sister and her lover. In the morning Ann arrives with a bunch of warm bagels and a great blue hickie on her chin, which from a distance looks like a goatie. My mom helps my grandma to take a bath, and through the closed door we can hear my grandmother say she'd rather drown than ask my mother to help next time and my mother says, "Yes, mama, just hold on to my neck for now, but not so tight."

We all sit at the kitchen table, eating breakfast, and Ann entertains us with stories of murders and car crashes that she'd heard from the cop. I am thrilled about this liaison because I plan to get this sister-in-uniform to erase all my parking tickets from their computer. Ella and I put our arms around our mom and grandma as Ella's lover takes pictures, that my lover will develop in our bathroom that night. In the morning we will look at them, my sister and I, and notice, for the first time, how scared our mother's face looks. Looking at the pictures, my grandma will say, "Mamela," addressing my mom, "You should be so proud to have such a mishpuha, such an old and wise mother, and such daughters, so young, so beautiful, so full of life." My mother will smile, maybe, take a deep breath, and let her shoulders drop ever so slightly.

Margarita Miniovich

was born in Russia, and currently lives and writes in Vancouver. She has worked (among other places) in a shelter for homeless women, as managing editor of *The Capilano Review*, and yes, as one of Santa's little helpers. Margarita has read at numerous literary events in both Toronto and Vancouver and is a recent contributor to an anthology of Jewish lesbian erotica entitled *Friday the Rabbi Wore Lace*. She is currently working on a collection of related short stories and, in addition to the Russian wolfhound, black shepherd and Persian cat she and her partner share, Margarita would like to add three more animals and still continue to travel light.

A Map and A Tree

My lover's body is a road map and mine, a tree.

Each layer of my fat is like the ring inside the trunk of an old maple. Run the tips of your fingers along the puckers of my belly and you will feel my power, where I've come from, who I'm not. Measure my circumference and you measure the distance between you and me. A pound gained for every childhood nightmare, five added with each adult memory—an additional ten when I bumped up against my most recent birthday and realized I hadn't become the impenetrable woman I promised myself I would, at the age of five. Every year is marked on me somehow. Long healed spiraling slashes where I tried to be creative about hate. Because women vote with their flesh. And scars count as public acts of civil disobedience just as lovers carve their initials into the sides of trees to mark eternal sentiments. My body, my oak-birch-sycamore body carries the name, the dates, the addresses and occupations of those who have climbed on top, of the rotting one who tried to bore a hole through my core—and failed. My lover and I don't need to talk about this; she reads my Braille skin with her fingertips. My lover's body is a blueprint leading me back to myself when it's hardest to be me. When I can't get out of bed for a week, she becomes tall and stiff. Like an arrow, she points and I follow. Sometimes I find what I lost, sometimes there is nothing. But when I turn back again I find her waiting—patiently. She stops me repeating other people's lies. She says, "violence is indiscriminate." And I believe her because she can see in the dark. Her steady strength holds me down,

An earlier edition of this story was published online in the CWR.

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pins me down, guides me where I need to be in order to let go. She navigates gripping my hand, breast, cunt, holding me on the mattress by the scruff of my neck like a mother cat carrying her kitten. As she flexes her muscles the veins in her arms become swollen, dark red, bluish-black by candlelight. They remind me of the thousands of unexplored valleys, rivers, country roads shooting off of a main highway.

My lover reads my body like a road map; she's a blind woman trying to drive with her hands.

She scans me from head to toe and sees my past through an eye in the centre of her palm. One wrong turn, a touch too close to home, and she risks everything. Frustrated, she clenches her fist and follows my directions. Follows my lead. Tries hard to forget that she knows exactly what she's really doing: She's kissing away the accidents that have taken place right there. A tear in the lining of the soul is something which can't actually be replaced but still, she continues trying to soothe, suck, squeeze away, erase that invisible presence, that third party who interferes. She commits murder every time I come. "It won't stay this way forever," she reassures after four months when hot breath reminds me, my own orgasms remind me. Even she reminds me. Then, she winds her arms around my shoulder, knots me in to her protectively as I whisper, "I thought you were somebody else." Although she's learned to read in metaphor and translate facts to flesh, in these times I know she feels most illiterate. She summons wisdom handed down through generations, uses it to pretend she is unlike me—for a minute, an hour, two weeks. She becomes what she is not so that I can be myself. We have to take turns being fully human. She resolves that tomorrow, when she's alone, she will destroy something heavy. She sways gently, rocks me to sleep, my naked body strangling hers as though clinging to the trunk of a redwood during a flash flood. Looking at me, I hope she is reminded that she can hurt without peeling inside out. Her long gray hair dangles over me and I decide that for now she is a powerful willow, shading me when I wake nauseous, night sweats soaking our sheets, when the raping-mating noise of cats at dawn makes me rush to the window. "They sound like babies screaming," I say. "Make them stop." Mutating, we watch our skin grow thin with age. Some moments it feels as

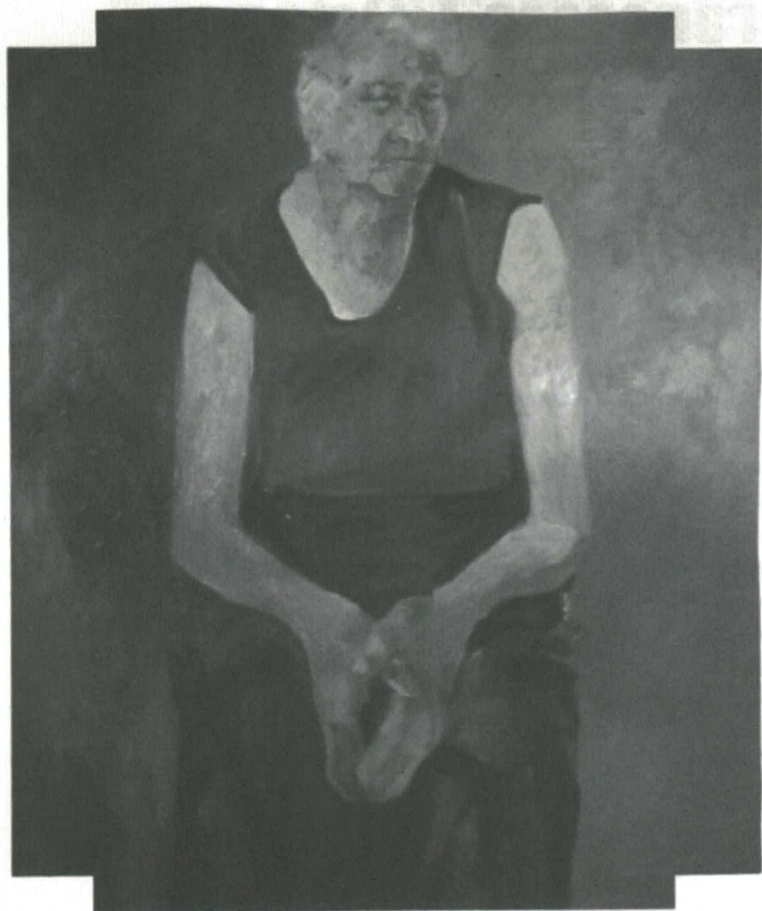
though our own bodies crawl away from us. Everything changes eventually and when it does there is laughter, there are new erogenous zones carved onto paper bodies. Then we crave sensation like we crave oxygen—and the future. I open my hand and see it clearly: She will climb me, swing from my branches, pick fruit, hang unselfconsciously upside down from bended knees. I will not fall.

My lover is a road map and I a tree. I offer her roots. She shows me direction.

Elizabeth Ruth is a Toronto-based writer whose recent fiction has been published by *Contemporary Verse 2*, *Room of One's Own*, *The Church-Wellesley Review*, *Intangible: counter realist journal* and *She's Gonna Be*. Elizabeth promotes a monthly literary series called *Clit Lit*, is a member of the *Fireweed* editorial team and is on the verge of completing her first novel.

Francesca L'Orfano

As an Italian Canadian artist (and teacher) living in Canada, I am continually confronted by the absence of place that I feel. I am the fourth female child of immigrants from Calabria, in southern Italy. My artwork is culturally based and challenges the aesthetic trends that deny its importance. Through cultural images and memory, artworks are created that explore both the tension and celebration of living between two worlds. Through the years my pieces have included Italian cultural, historical, sculptural, and landscape references: Catholic icons, casts of female body parts, excerpts /texts/words from poems by an Italian friend (Nino Palamà), recycled, collected and found objects, new and old photographs, and video shot in both Canada and Italy. This complexity, layering and fragmentation attempts to somehow connect being an Italian, a woman, an artist and a teacher in Canada.



*Caterina, La cognata di zia
Esterina (Due donne di Palizzi)/
Caterina, Aunt Esterina's sister-
in-law (Two women of Palizzi)*
Acrylic paint, paper collage on
masonite and wood base.

An Old Story

"Now what?" I toss words up into the air, wondering if they'll reach the ceiling I'm decidedly fixed upon.

Everything falls back on me.

Vowels, consonants, question marks, tumble onto the duvet tucked tightly under my chin. My body is crossed, arms firmly at my chest, ankles twisted securely. I'm lying still, corpse-like, waiting for something to happen and hexing its arrival at the same time.

Something to pull my thoughts from Martin.

Martin Kruze was the first of many to disclose he had been sexually abused as a teenaged boy at Maple Leaf Gardens,¹ home to the Toronto Maple Leafs hockey team. At 13 years of age, he was lured into a sexual power play by Gordon Stuckless, a long-term employee of the Gardens. Martin told his story to the press, to the courts, across the country. People believed him, and his story, although some contested whether or not what he came to call sexual abuse, in fact was abuse.²

I know there are complications to unravel here, entanglements of homophobia, sexual abuse and the sacred Canadian sport of hockey. But Martin told his story and he died. "Killed himself" seems too simple an explanation. Absolving responsibility of everyone involved. He threw himself from Toronto's Bloor Street Viaduct. A bridge now famous for launching the lost ones into death. Telling didn't heal Martin. It also didn't ward off suicide for Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. Both of these poets told of sexual abuse. Sylvia Plath with her poem "Daddy." Anne Sexton with her poem "Briar Rose."³ Neither one of them survived and

1 See "Grim tales from the Gardens" (Fennell 1997) and "Scandal and Suicide" (Came 1997).

2 In the article entitled, "The making of monsters: What some call 'abuse,' I call my first blowjob," Michael Kealy (1997) recounts his own first sexual experiences. At the age of 14, Michael Kealy had his first sexual encounter with the postmaster, in this small town. He argues that sex between adults and teenagers isn't always abusive.

3 In the brilliant article, "What prison is this? Literary critics cover incest in Anne Sexton's 'Briar Rose,'" Dawn Skorczewski writes of the responses to the poem "Briar Rose," noting that, "Some of the responses suggest to me that Briar Rose's memories of sexual violence do not release her into a new life because her disclosure has been ignored, dismissed, or used as evidence of her mental illness" (1996: 311). Additionally, she writes, "the personal voice of the survivor of sexual violence speaks from and within a larger culture that still controls how much violence might be articulated and heard" (320). This article reveals a literary community that has, with some exceptions, assumed the role of expert, participating in a culture of silence to sanction the sexual abuse of daughters by their fathers.

both hold the reputation of poets struck by madness. Still, I cling stubbornly to the simple notion that telling a story will bring healing. I want this to be true. Need it to be true. Tell your story and you'll be healed. Simple. Not so simple for Martin. He told his story and then jumped to his death.

Now, I'm haunted by Martin. I suffered his death as if he had been a close friend.

His last public words chase me, "... I am thankful to be alive and hope and pray that I don't die from this, as many of my brothers/sisters survivors of sexual abuse have."⁴

My strength wobbles. My beliefs are challenged to the core by seductive thoughts of leaving all of my past behind. Just jump. Now that seems simple. Frighteningly so. In moments of clarity though, I know life is far more complicated, and confusing. It's hard to keep putting one foot in front of the other day in and day out, to choose to live. And it's hard to follow a foot's final fatal step off a bridge.

And telling?

It isn't a clear path. Who is the story for anyway? Who will be healed in its telling? Anyone? What of the witnesses?

A sleepy sigh is released from the short-haired Chihuahua snuggled beside me. My fierce protector during the night. I slide my hand over Tiny's slick, black head, smoothing back huge ears. Dog at my side I can slip into sleep, knowing these keen ears will keep close guard. Ever loyal, her warm body comforts me.

I've been lying here all morning, my body clamped horizontal. It must be after ten o'clock, the playground across the street is abuzz, giggling and shrieking children released from desks and chalkboards.

"Urggh, let me go!" I plead as if something outside of me has bound me to the bed, confined me for the duration of the morning.

I wonder about my commitment to exploring artful telling practices. I don't know if I have what it takes to sustain a relationship with these stories. I don't know if I want to. How did I develop such a fierce commitment to the expression of the forbidden?

Not a huge mystery. I've been reluctantly gathering my past, in readiness for this "event," this telling, for the last seven years. More like my past has been finding me. Hunting me down even,

⁴ See "Garden sex scandal victim jumps to his death" (Brazao 1997).

tracking me to my most reliable and sophisticated hiding places. What will come of my stories? My own history of abuse? How will I tell? And why tell at all? Telling didn't release Martin from his burden.

I don't trust telling.

I reflect on my own story, the safe parts. I know I'm completely estranged from my extended family. No relatives knock on my door, send words through the mail, or call with family news. I fight to connect with my immediate blood kin. A most difficult task. We're afraid of each other, what the other knows.

this story is telling

*Two or three things I know for sure and one of them is
that telling the story all the way through is an act of love.*

—Dorothy Allison

the story of my family is not telling
words buried deep into the ground
pounded into fence posts and rusty old nails
swallowed with rum or rye whiskey

shoved from memory to shovel to tractor wheel
from fragment to hammer to steel and wood
sleight of hand to bottle to leather liver
crying heart to terror back to terrorized heart

stories hidden in leaning stalls
dusty old barns and scattered feed
binding time in bales and bodies

i carry these hammers and shovels
a telling story
with no fields to plant
no fences to build

Most of my story's been hidden and buried. Although fragments return each day. I marvel at their arrival, muse at their origin. A few stories of my childhood, fewer yet of my own family, and

slight traces of my grandparents. I'm just figuring out what it means to have grown up white and working class, under a big sky, to have been raised within a family full of secrets and shame.

Unspoken stories leave their traces everywhere.

I have too many questions. Know it might take a lifetime for my story to unfold. And it might take as long for me to tell. Maybe I'll never tell, keep my mouth shut. Never speak of the deadness inside me. The parts of myself I've clutched to, the parts of myself I've disowned. Don't talk of my small, child-body recklessly ravaged by adult sexual desires. My body used for the sexual pleasures of men and women tragically misdirected in their passions. Was it pleasure? My small body stolen for pleasure?

An angry, brutal face stares at me through the past.

I resist this story, push against it. I don't want to be a victim to my past.⁵ I can barely acknowledge I was once a vulnerable and unprotected child living in a small town among dangerous people. Insistently, a misplaced and disowned story raps on the door. Knuckles to wood, Story asserts in a calm voice, "I'm not leaving until you let me in." Story waits, tapping a toe until it puts its shoulder to the door and barges in with the power of history.

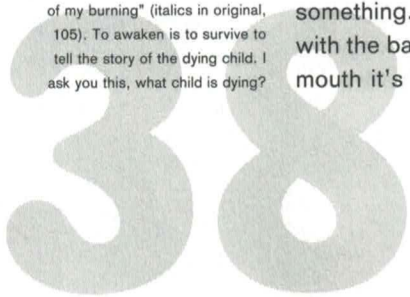
(You must know I hesitate to speak this story, I want to protect you. Or is it that I need to protect myself?)

I'm a wee child, barely walking yet. My mom and I are in the diner she runs in a prairie town hotel. I'm curled up in the corner booth, chewing on crayons, watching my mom's every move. She's wiping the counter, cutting a piece of homemade pie for a miner with a hankering for apple, sliding the cheque with it, hoping she can take a few minutes to rest her feet. A ring-jingle-ring of the bells swinging from the door means someone else has arrived. He's a regular. He sits up at the long countertop, places something on his lap, motions to my mom. She knows what he wants. Brings it to him without him having to ask. He clutches at the cold glass she's holding. Downs ice cold beer and then places the glass down, with a measured thud. My mom's still standing there, waiting for something. His big hand moves toward my mom's face, and with the back of it he smears off her red lipstick. All around her mouth it's red like the crayons I've mashed into my teeth. He

5 And what do you think a victim is? How does a person tell a story of being a child victim without being labelled a victim in the telling? How did we arrive at this point in history, where telling about a personal experience of violence has come to mean that you are occupying a victim stance, supported by, what some have come to call victim feminism. How is it that I am asking this question, after years of politics and consciousness raising?

6 See Cathy Caruth's article, "Freud, Lacan and the Ethic of Memory" in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996).

In it she examines a dream of a man who lost his child in a fire, as it was explored by Freud, and later reinterpreted by Lacan: a father dreams about his lost child, the night after the child died. A part of the dream that stays with me is the child returning to the father to ask him, "Father don't you see I'm burning" (93). What stays with me is this, "it is precisely the dead child, the child in its irreducible inaccessibility and otherness, who says to the father: wake up, leave me, survive; survive to tell the story of my burning" (italics in original, 105). To awaken is to survive to tell the story of the dying child. I ask you this, what child is dying?



reaches under the counter pulls out a twenty-two rifle, touches the barrel to the center of her forehead. Like he's giving her a kiss goodnight.

"Take off that blond wig, you look too much like my wife," he bellows, booze on his breath. "She's crazy that one, got herself locked up in the nut house."

My mother stands before me stripped of her wig, red smeared round her mouth. A gun touching up against her head.

Story's pushing hard on my chest, lungs seizing tight, sleep barging in, promising refuge from terror. I don't want to stay awake, something in my reality makes me want to sleep.⁶

"I have to get up." These words barely escape from my tightly held body. Each cell slammed shut. I roll over, reach for a book of poetry lying next to my bed. I prop my head on my elbow, force my eyes wide and start to read from *The Bat Had Blue Eyes*. Betsy Warland (1993: 12) writes:

if i tell this old story
in some new way
will it let me go?

"It's the poets I turn to in moments like these," I think, stroking the small dog now curled into my stomach. Words move me from paralysis to a whispered hope.

"Will this story let me go?"

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Roewan Crowe is crazy about words, books and art. And of course, Jarvis. She lives in Toronto and has just completed doctoral studies at OISE. She's been published under various names in *She's Gonna Be: Stories, Poems, Life* edited by Ann Dexter and *Contemporary Verse 2*. She is also a columnist for *Siren Magazine*.

How I Almost Became an Anthropologist

FEBRUARY 20, 1971

Dear Diary,

My name is Penny Hill. Today is my birthday. I am in Grade One. Mrs. Luscious is my teacher and she is very pretty. I have a cat named Bart and a twin brother called Joey. He likes to eat blue plasticine and sometimes his poo is blue.

FEBRUARY 20, 1972

Dear Diary,

Joey stuck a spoon down Bart's throat. He laughed but it made me cry. I wish I didn't have to go to school because Colleen threw up on my desk yesterday. I hate Joey.

FEBRUARY 20, 1973

Dear Diary,

I saw Dad naked!

FEBRUARY 20, 1974

Dear Diary,

I think I should go on a diet.

FEBRUARY 20, 1975

Dear Diary,

Mum and Dad are getting a divorce. Rebecca says that means twice as much allowance. Score!

FEBRUARY 20, 1976

Dear Diary,

Today I turned eleven. I'm sorry I **only write in you once a year**. Joey thinks I'm illiterate but I think he is a dough brain.

FEBRUARY 20, 1977

Dear Diary,

Only one more year and I'm a teenager. Nobody seems to be looking forward to it—especially not me.

FEBRUARY 20, 1978

Dear Diary,

This is the third time this week that somebody has called me a FREAK. What is wrong with people? I hate being thirteen but I love MR. SAMPSON!!!!

FEBRUARY 20, 1979

Dear Diary,

Why was I born? And especially—why was I born in February? And one more thing—why the hell do Mr. and Mrs. Hill have to be my parents?

FEBRUARY 20, 1980

Dear Diary,

Maybe I should kill myself. But not until I finish the remains of my birthday cake. Oh. And I don't have any clean socks. And I'm supposed to finally get my braces off next week. There are clearly reasons to live.

FEBRUARY 20, 1981

Dear Diary,

So what if I don't have my period? I don't see what the big deal is anyway. Joey says maybe I'm a hermaphrodite. I'm not entirely sure what that means but I don't think I like the sound of it.

FEBRUARY 20, 1982

Dear Diary,

I refuse to believe my only option is PLANET EARTH. I mean, who made up such a stupid rule? God? Oh merciful and beneficent one? I don't think so. I bought myself some new

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red shoes and clacked the heels together in an appeal to the Good Witch. I paced around the house screaming "beam me up, Scotty." I even called up NASA and offered myself up for space exploration. I thought I was doing well—they took my name and number and asked me how old I was. But then they got to the question about mental illness in my family. Hmm.

FEBRUARY 20, 1983

Dear Diary,

I think Mr. Fletcher might leave his wife for me. I mean, if I think about it hard enough maybe he will.

FEBRUARY 20, 1984

Dear Diary,

I'm thinking about annihilating my ego. The only problem is I can't seem to locate it.

FEBRUARY 20, 1985

Dear Diary,

Today Peter Pickineater (the sexiest professor EVER), told the class that the concept of a person is a peculiarly Western concept. Hmm. This could be promising. Maybe if I become an anthropologist I could find another world where I won't have to worry about who I am. Maybe I could just move to Paris.

FEBRUARY 20, 1986

Dear Diary,

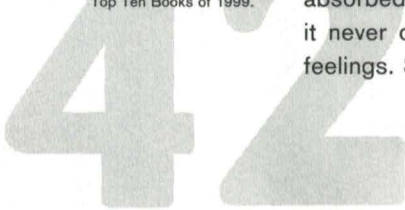
Apparently I have manic depression! How cool is that? All the geniuses on the planet have it! I'm in great company. I'm not a hermaphrodite! I'm just insane! I won't have to leave PLANET EARTH after all. There are plenty of people like me living here, people just like me—which I guess, makes me a person. Who would have thought! Fine then. But could someone tell me this? If I'm such a special person why the hell do I still get zits at age twenty one?

FEBRUARY 20, 1987

Dear Diary,

I'm sorry I've never asked before, but having been a self-absorbed and narcissistic teenager until just about yesterday it never occurred to me until now that you might also have feelings. So how are you, anyway?

Camilla Gibb is a writer in Toronto. Her first novel, *Mouthing the Words*, was selected as one of the Best Books of 1999 by *The Globe and Mail*, and appeared on *Now Magazine's* Alt Best Seller List and their list of Top Ten Books of 1999.



Blue

excerpt from the novel in progress, *Faces in the Water*

My first bedroom was powder blue they tell me, clouds sweeping across walls. I don't remember that. Nor the Levi overalls at age four, with the floppy cornflowered hat in the photos.

I do remember sapphire bursts of pain.

I remember lakes across my cheeks, a chain of lapis lazuli circles, always five, around my arms. There was thick Tennessee blue grass in the park where I ran to when they were fighting. And a flashing blue light when the police came again.

I devoured candy-blue popsicles from the corner store, stealing the money for them from his pocket or her purse. And the summer I drowned, (I was six), it was a turquoise wetness, sudden and cold, terror, then sleepiness. The eyes of the woman's face I saw under water were bright brown, but what shade were the paramedic's who stared me awake?

Later, I rode in midnight cars, painted my nails and eyelids indigo, drank curacao in a backseat, barfed blue. This all changed, the day I hit bottom. Isn't it always the way?

I'm repainted now. I wear jeans with snow-white tops. I fly a silver city bus to a new school, my crimson wings a backpack with books I truly read. I jettisoned the smokes and make-up. And I will break a new green path, I swear, even if I still live with one of them. No one dares touch me and there's a lock on my room.

I might be a fancy lawyer someday, or maybe an actress. I'd like to travel, the farther the better.

They tell me my eyes are sky blue but that's absurd. I've never seen a blue sky yet. But I will.

Terri Terreat writes in Kingston, Ontario. Her fiction has appeared in *Canadian Storyteller Magazine*, and her non-fiction in *Canadian Living*, *Today's Parent* and *Health & Living*. She teaches creative writing and literature at St. Lawrence College and Queen's University, and drama to children.

ammachi stories

excerpt from *the lost boat*, **biomythography in progress**

5 years I think after she died & I barely noticed, my grandmother starts talking to me from just under the bedroom ceiling. Things I don't even want to hear about the father I don't talk to.

1943, KUALA LUMPUR

It was almost too late when we got to the Singapore boat. *Buddhu amme*, the bombs coming down, one time two time everywhere all around the house, Ayah Nancy screaming, Jeremy God-rest-his-soul screaming, and all I can think about is Christabel and G and Renee. How they didn't move away. They didn't move to Malaya because of any damn engineer job or to start the labour revolution someplace that wouldn't kill them. Wild Alvis girls settled down quite nicely, thank you.

I'm seven months heavy with Christian, the belly sticks out of my skinny body. I feel every bomb hitting like a fist pounding my womb, & I think, *stupid, superstition, is that what the nuns taught you*. Maybe this is the Almighty's punishment. For how I made this baby, even though Ellis still pat my belly and smiles, clueless. Maybe I'll lose it & it'll be all for the good. All that pregnancy, ay-o, I'm in dread. Who know what colour the baby will come out? I pray every night for him to be light, anyway, even if not blonde like Frederick. Then while I'm trying to sleep I think no, damn them all, no! Let him be as dark as his father, dark and bitter as tamarind pulp, with great black eyes like Roshan's. Then Ellis will leave me, all the aunties will cluck in trembling disgust and smack their lips over me. I don't care!

All this going through my head as—boom—the window glass crashing out of the frame—boom—the almyrah tips over—boom—Ellis is going red and brown, in and out, like a puffed up balloon and then like a hollow man. There's no rickshaw, no nothing. The servants have fled or are hiding under the house with the kingsnakes. I grab the two photograph albums before Ellis grabs my arm hard and I grab Jeremy and we are running through the streets. There we see a few rickshaw but even for a rich Burgher family with a 7-month gone wife and Ellis waving a fist of money and screaming and a little screaming blond boy, maybe especially for us, they don't stop.

The last boat comes when we have been standing for hours. I'm shaking all over, flying glass has cut my scalp & we are all plastered to the knees with red brown mud. I grip the albums under my armpit, and as we get onto the last boat out, going back to the family I spent all of me fleeing from, they are the only thing I take back. I clutch them to my mud-streaked breasts, the home I've spent all my life running away from.

1970, LONDON

My lips are pressed tight and thin into each other the whole 18-hour flight over. A twist of grief, bucking rage down into my tight blue teeth. Ellis sits next to me like a little boy, staring out the window exclaiming over everything, y'know. Occasionally he glances at me, then he fingers his tie and looks away. 6 gin & tonics makes him have to piss, every time exclaiming over the water closet in the plane like it's the greatest engineering invention imaginable. I stare straight ahead until the seatback dissolves into a blue blur.

16 hours later after flying over all those Soviet deserts and Paris where we were so happy, after we circle Heathrow for an hour and a half and we finally walk down those metal steps, she is there with him. Before I even get a chance to glare at him for long hair, old dungarees, some old jacket thing, to let him know how he has ruined all our lives by being so useless, she is there. A little white dough something like dumpling, the color of raw *appam* batter. Grinning her big wide face at me and sticking her hand out like a salute. Good lord, Bennie Ebert was bad enough—that's all we need, bringing *Chinese* into the family! And if he went out and found some nice British

girl—blonde hair, milk rose cheeks, a house in the country, china tea cups and saucers—that would have been alright. Quite nice. But instead is this old girl, running the world, stupid American woman in London studying Africa of all things! If she'd gone to Uganda like she was supposed to Amin would have eaten her, and my son could have been left alone to sow his oats, get a job in the civil service and marry a nice Burgher girl! Or a real white girl, not some tasteless American from God knows where.

So as she sticks her head out, her eyes wide and nervous, her mouth chattering how glad she is to meet me finally, I look at her little mousy *angrezi* self and at my son's eager, shy, ashamed, sullen cocoa hand in hers. I look at the skin browner than mine and hair blacker that I've never been able to accept, let alone love, and the first thing I say to my son after ten years is, "We had another son you know. He had blonde hair and blue eyes."

DUPONT AND LANDSDOWNE, TORONTO, 1997

I never saw any woman who even looked like her 'til I moved here and could walk up to the Tamil co-op right next to the subway. Buy a can of mango juice in the patty shop and watch women with her coarse gray coconut fiber hair twisted into that tight bun, skin tight over cheekbones, eyes like a diamond drill that could cut you in half.

I was born creamy-olive skinned and blue-eyed and faded to sandy dark gold and mestiza hazel by 1st grade. Born with hair my mama swore was red but in all baby photos is mouse brown and slightly curly. As soon as I insisted that I let it grow (2nd grade, 1982, when I wanted to look like Laurie Partridge), actually only as soon as they moved me to the all-white private school on scholarship a year later, it went from slightly wavy and medium brown to thick, kinky, coarse, frizzy, comb-breaking, wild black hair full of snarls, kinks, naps. Only then did my skin turn sallow, "so dark," ugly. Brown.

My grandmother was far away and never saw me, except in the school photos mailed in those thin blue aerogram packages. Maybe that's why she never visited, why she wasn't too disappointed when there was only enough money for my father to go visit her once. Melbourne. Their silver anniversary.

Leah Piepza-Samarasinha is the daughter of a Burgher/Tamil long lost Lankan and a Ukrainian/Irish Massachusetts milltown girl. She was raised in Worcester, Mass., came of age in New York in the early '90s, and currently lives in Toronto. Her work has been published in *Femme*, *Blood/Lust: mixed-race queers speak*, and *A Girl's Guide to Taking Over the World*.

Cancer

Because she had a fur coat on, which they peeled from long animals to get for her, the word around the schoolyard was that she was spoiled. But she just sat in a furry little heap, while everyone around her froze and stared at her and the winter whipped their insides right out of them. This was the cancer-child's first day back at school, but everyone around her still called her Nadine.

I remember when Nadine came back to school that day, because I was sitting on the other side of her furs. She left in the fall and came back in it. She left after trying to jump rope with us, before it snaked around her legs and caught her falling down. Nadine tried to get up again but she couldn't. She said she had no legs anymore so they took her to the office where her mom came and got her in the afternoon. Nadine didn't return by the end of the day. Nadine left with her legs in a knot and all leaning over and came back sitting up straight, but quieter than before. Except for that coat; those dead animals screamed. Who ever thought to put an eight-year-old in furs? And the buzz all around her hissed *spoiled*.

Nadine had two friends to defend her. They were both a little younger than she was, but they were both bigger than she was too, and anytime they heard one of us talking about Nadine and her coat, they marched right on over and bellowed *cancer*. We shut up, after that, although at that age nobody really knew what *cancer* meant, least of all the defenders of Nadine. Cancer at that age was like the name of one of the horses we pretended to be during recess, but when Nadine came back we knew it was real.

One year later, in the next class up, Nadine had outgrown the coat made from furs, but now she had a robot that she brought into school. The robot went up to our knees. It came into the room when Nadine was outside with the controls, and it stopped in the middle of the classroom where its eyes flashed madly and its head shook. Then, it yanked its right arm forward, all flashing and shaking, so that it was pointing to us. We all stared in silence while the right arm twitched down again, until someone in the crowd muttered *spoiled*.

That was also the year that Nadine's parents bought her clown invitations and wrote all of our names on the envelopes. And, one day after school in January, they packed us into our snowsuits and we all tromped down the street in a convulsing string of children to the restaurant where the party was held. They said that we rushed because we were eager to get to the restaurant-party, but mostly we were curious to see just how spoiled Nadine really was.

Inside the restaurant, we were hardly disappointed as we plunked ourselves down in the seats that were too big for our bums, acting like it was everyday that we could be found in restaurants like these. But when we looked up from our damp mitts and our broken zippers, we were amazed. On the table, past the plates framed by the knives and the forks and the red-checked table-cloths that hung over like wings, was the most beautiful centerpiece we had ever seen, though we didn't know what to call it at the time. There, in the centre of every group of greasy children, exploding out from an eruption of silver flakes and ballooney, was an enormous iridescent white porcelain swan. The swan was sitting back on its haunches in the most elegant of poses, its long neck pointed skyward and its head held high, three long white feathers streaming out from its iridescent white bum.

Nobody moved. The swan threatened to take off any second. The whole thing was incredibly life-like. Except for the iridescence. And the eyelashes that had been added on later in permanent marker, surrounding each perfect snake-eye in gold.

Suddenly, twenty-four plates of spaghetti were whipped out of the kitchen at the exact same moment that twenty-four small children realized that eating spaghetti in a restaurant was much more fun than finishing what was left on your plate with

your parents at home. Someone whipped a meatball at my leg that afternoon, while others transformed spaghetti into hair. I remember Nadine's parents dashing between tables, dodging flying cutlery while Nadine's little brother screamed loudly from his high chair. Nadine's father kept retreating into the kitchen and the restaurateur kept racing out, while Nadine's mother stuffed our mouths with candy to keep the noise down. Only Nadine was unheard. Only Nadine sat quietly at her table, columned by the bodies of her two larger friends, face-to-face with the howls of her brother from where he was strapped in the chair. Nobody was throwing anything at her table yet.

When the spaghetti was done we stood on our chairs, mashing the crumbs into the seat-covers with our socks, until a flaming rectangular cake burst out of the kitchen and landed bumpily in the cleared-off area of the red-checked table-cloth in front of Nadine. We jumped from our seats as Nadine took a desperate breath in to blow the flames out while her parents bridged the air over their daughter, fanning children away from the cake. Nadine sat in her seat and she concentrated on her breathing: in through her mouth and her nose and her ears and through the holes in her eyes, all at the same time. Nadine closed her eyes while her parents flapped their arms and her brother wailed and the all other kids eyed all the other kids all eyeing the cake and then there was a slip and a crash and the concussion of a pure white porcelain swan spreading all over the red-balled restaurant carpet.

Many years later, when she was newly an adult, Nadine's hand would graze across something furry at the back of the closet, hanging like hair, and she would remember that she was the first one among them to become sexually-active.

Kristi-Ly Green
enjoys a good loot bag.

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Dumped in Denver

GAILY FORWARD

When I picked up the message on my voice mail from the editor at Aly's-sons-and-daughters-and-all-the-rest-of-those-wacko's Publishing, I thought I must have saran wrap in my ears. He was talking enthusiastically about a story I'd written that had just been submitted for their new anthology, *My Mother-Your Mother-All Our Damn Mothers*. He went on to say how *very, very, very, very* much he admired the story and would I consider doing a novel. I was so impressed with counting all the *verys* and listening to his voice telling me how much he liked my voice, that I almost missed that part about the novel. I played the tape back several times to make sure I had counted the *verys* correctly and that he really had added that bit about writing a book.

It took me five days to return the call. When I finally did call back, I lied that I had been out of town. Actually, where I had been was hiding under the covers. Write a novel? Write a novel? What did I know about writing a fucking novel? I, Vanilla Land, am a poet for Christ's sakes—poets don't write novels!!! When I finally got my head out from under my covers, the first thing I did was run down to the All Our Lights Are Not the Same Bookstore. Well, if someone thought I should write a book, I decided I should probably read one.

I bought three. The first one was something called *Amnesty* by Louise Blah Blah. My best friend, Silvana, had suggested the possibility of starting a novel with my father's death. Unfortunately, Louise's dad had just died too. OK, OK, the father of the character in Louise's book had just died. I don't

know Louise or her father or even if she had a father. The point is who wants two books that start out with dead dads?

The next book was a collection of short stories by Nisa Donnelly. It was so good I wanted to throw up. All that description and detail and plot and character and excellent understated angst. This woman was a writer—a writer's writer, not a poseur, like moi.

The first book I actually read all the way through was called *Chicken* by Paula Martinac. It was the story of this aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaging 40-year-old dyke who was breaking up with her lover of 3,000 years and kept aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaging as she romped in and out of bed with 20-something women who were not aaaaaaaging. The 20-somethings had names like Lexy—"rhymes with sexy" said the book jacket just to make sure we got it. The 40-ish character had a couple of faggot friends. One was dying of (surprise!) AIDS and another was (surprise!) a drag queen. I was surprised there were no transgendered characters, but I don't think they aaaaaaaage, so that's probably why.

Anyway, *Bok Bok Bok* was a good fast read. There were some funny lines about Swiss Army knives and the story had a beginning, middle and end—just like a real novel should.

Unfortunately, by the time I finished reading it I wanted to kill myself. Girl gets girl. Girl loses girl. Girl gets another girl. Girl gets the girl the other girl used to get. Girl loses all the girls and ends up with E-mail. If this was lesbian life as it yawned toward the millennium, kill me now.

Who am I kidding? This is the story of lesbian life. Except for that part about ending up with the E-mail. That part is new.

In these past three weeks I've watered plants I don't have, descended the fire escape to retrieve a window screen I dropped out there five years ago, fed the cat, fed the neighbour's cat and bought a new cat so I could take up more time feeding the cat.

When I wasn't making up new ways to avoid writing, I was staring at the reflection of my face in the computer screen. Those of you who have computers know that this is impossible. Computer screens can not reflect your face. They can barely reflect your thoughts. Well, if you have the right program, they are supposed to be able to reflect your thoughts, but only if you have some thoughts to reflect.

Additionally, I have called everyone I know to tell them I am writing a book. Make that everyone I know, used to know or expect to know in the future. This has provided weeks of hilarity both for me and for all those prospective book buyers who used to be strangers.

The story I want to tell is when it was all new. The story I want to tell is set in the days before Ellen Degenerate could come out in front of God and everybody on international TV and have Looney Tunes foot the bill. Those days when people would see someone who looked like k.d. lang singing and whisper quietly to themselves, "Wow, she's a big ole' dyke!" Those days when you didn't have to dress up your lover's pussy with something that never should have left the dentist's office. Those days when you could find your friends on the Most Wanted posters at the post office. You know, the good old days—when the men were men and so were the women—and Rita Mae Brown was King.

CHAPTERETTE ONE

I have been trying to figure out the best way to tell you this story about the raging '70s and my part in it. To tell you that story, however, I must first tell you a little about where I am now. I mean that both literally and metaphorically. Let's concentrate on the literally part and forget the metaphorically part; you can figure that part out for yourself.

I live in what is called a railroad apartment in the Big Apple Pit and I will explain why it's called a railroad apartment, but I will not explain why I call New York City the Big Apple Pit. If you ever come here, the answer to that question will become immediately apparent, and if it doesn't become immediately apparent, then you should probably move here. That way I can move back to Pennsylvania and take up my rightful calling as a wood whittler.

Anyway, it's called a railroad apartment because a train ran through the apartment once and crushed everything in its path. No I'm not going to tell you her name. The point is that the place is laid out in a straight line and you can walk from one end where the water closet is to the other end where the fire escape is in exactly three seconds—or about one second per room. This is helpful when you have to pee badly in the middle of the night.

And yes I said water closet. Although this sounds like a little closet where you might store water during emergencies when terrorists have shut down the city, it isn't. It's just the room where the toilet is located. There's no water there at all, except in the toilet, and very little there either because it's one of those conservation devices called a water saver which will be so helpful to all of us when the world comes to an end next year.

In 1971 the world was not coming to an end. At least not for all us Booming Babies. The world was full of sex, drugs and rock-and-rolling possibility. There was more to do on a Saturday night than stay home happily watching *Dr. Quinn Medicine Woman* and *Xena Warrior Princess*.

The United States was bombing the hell out of North Vietnam but the Pentagon Papers had just been published and Lieutenant Calley (we used to call him Killey) had been convicted of murdering the 22 villagers at My Lai. Charles Manson was locked away forever and there were no tee shirts proclaiming how "awesome" he was. You could buy a movie ticket for a measly buck-and-a-half, but 25 years from now someone will write that you could buy a movie ticket now for a measly eight dollars.

I had recently graduated from college and was looking for an adventure. I found one—with an old college boyfriend named Willie. He was kind of cute for a guy, but his most exciting characteristic was making wild, wet slapping noises with his armpits while crowing like a rooster. He stood over 5'10, was slender and muscular without being annoyingly skinny and could clean up nicely when it was necessary to show him off to the girls. He had tight little buns, which also made him attractive to boys, but he was pretty good with his tongue, which made him attractive to me.

We had decided to go on the road together. Head for Colorado and raise hell. What was I doing with a boyfriend, you wonder? The same thing everyone else was doing with a boyfriend in 1971—pretending to be a bisexual with a guy who was pretending to be a man.

I keep coming back to a photograph of me and Willie standing in front of a majestic red Maple tree in Mount Joy, Pennsylvania. The leaves are falling and blowing and if my mom were the type to cry, she would have been crying. My

mom is not the type to cry. She's the type to hide her feelings so far inside they could never come up for air. It wasn't until years later she would tell me she knew she was going to miss me. I was surprised by the admission because she never did like me very much.

I had been a troublesome kid, refused to be a girl—at least not the kind of girl who would grow up to be Donna Reed contentedly vacuuming her floors all dressed up in pearls and high-heels. It wasn't that I was a bad kid; I just refused to “go along with the program,” as mom used to say. About the worst thing I ever did was burn down a barn when I was eight, smoking unfiltered Camel cigarettes that I stole from my uncle. No one ever found that out and I am not admitting it now.

So I had no thought of missing my mom, or of missing anyone. My only thoughts were about how incredibly excited I was to be leaving. Escaping is closer to the truth.

CHAPTERETTE TWO

Willie and I made our getaway in a 1970 TR-6, a little green pearl of a sports car that had six major breakdowns on the way to Denver. The TR is short for Triumph, a misnomer if I ever heard one. I had \$110 and he had 90 bucks, a meager amount on which to attempt a 1,500-mile cross-country trip, even in those days. In these days I wouldn't even attempt a trip across the street with that amount of money.

The first thing to conk out was the heater, not an auspicious omen for a chilly end of October. Needless to say, there was no money for hotels or motels or anything with an “els” ending. Sometimes we tried to snuggle up at roadside rests in towns that had dumb-sounding names like Geneseo, Illinois and Avoca, Iowa. Sometimes we slept on floors in the bathrooms of garages. At least there was heat and hot running water there, although it wasn't much fun looking up from the sleeping bag and seeing a toilet bowl looming over your head.

The non-functional heater, however, soon turned out to be merely a minor annoyance. As we were leaving oh-so-cozy Avoca, we heard the Big Noise from the Rear End, the rear end of the car I mean. Something called the “bearing” blew up or collapsed or whatever the hell it did. To this day I do not know what a bearing is, and I don't want to know.

Our travelling days became a blur of endless stops for oil, riding on the shoulder of Interstate 80 at 10 miles per hour, so we could limp into the next gas station in the next town. The money we had quickly disappeared into the pockets of nameless mechanics, who didn't know anything more about finicky foreign cars than we did because the hateful thing continued to fall apart all the way to Denver—just like our relationship.

Relationships. They suck. I haven't found one yet that doesn't. In fact, I haven't found one yet. My time with Leona, however, was not a relationship. She was a one-night stand that I picked up at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln.

It was our fifth major breakdown and Willie and I were stuck in the heart of Cornhusker territory for a week, waiting for Triumph innards to be shipped in from Chicago. Although everywhere we turned we were mercilessly subjected to a barrage of signs and posters proclaiming "Go Big Red," Lincoln turned out to be a happening place.

For those of you who don't know, the Cornhuskers are a football team and their nickname is "Big Red." I have never been into football, baseball, basketball or any other kinds of balls. Willie doesn't count.

We set up our command centre at a friendly enclave called the United Ministries of Higher Education. We didn't know what ministries they ministered to and didn't care. The important thing was that we were allowed to sleep on the floor in the basement free of charge and it was warm.

It didn't matter that all the other guests were raving lunatics. My favourite was the guy who was in the process of writing down every thought he ever had, starting from the moment he emerged from the womb. To facilitate the memory process, he was ingesting massive doses of methamphetamines gulped down with Coca-Cola. He had already filled a dozen spiral notebooks with his recollections and was just beginning the thirteenth when we met him.

"Why are you doing this?" I asked.

"Why are you not doing it?" he countered.

Meth Man did manage to give us some useful information. At least I found the information useful. He told us that UMHE was also the headquarters for another campus organization: the Lincoln Gay Action Alliance and they would be sponsoring a

dance at the student union that night.

I knew there were organizations that existed to promote the rights of gay people, but I had never actually seen one—an organization I mean. I certainly didn't expect to find one right under my nose here at the University of Nebraska so I was openly delighted. Willie was less pleased.

"So," he said to our new friend, the Meth Man, "You're not only a loony, you're a fag." Willie had never been known for diplomacy.

I tried to apologize for his bad manners as I dug into a suitcase looking for that hot black leather vest I was going to wear to the dance.

"That's all right," Meth Man reassured me, continuing to scribble in a notebook. "He's obviously never had a thought in his life."

"I just have no interest in being associated with those kinds of people," proclaimed Willie as I strolled out the door in search of the student union.

"You've got to change your evil ways, Baby," he hummed after me—more loudly than I thought necessary.

CHAPTERETTE THREE

I never thought I'd end up sleeping with Leona. "Sleeping with"—what a stupid euphemism for fucking someone's brains out. I don't look at someone and go, "Oh wow would I love to bury my head in her dreams." I'm not saying I'm never attracted based on looks. That would be a lie, but it has never meant one thing in connection with actually loving someone—or fucking them either.

There are a million studies about why we are attracted to the people we're attracted to and still no one knows the first damn thing about it. Why are women into men? Or men into women? Or women into women. And that's only the first of it. Why are women into women who are mannish or femininish. I have always been totally confused by all the categories and the variations of the categories. I've been drawn to very masculine women, to very feminine women, to feminine men, to very masculine men. A veritable potpourri of attraction, and I still don't have the first clue about any of it.

It's been said that it's the feminine in a man that is attractive and the masculine in a woman. I only knew that there was

something about Leona that was appealing. At first I thought she was a guy. She was nearly six-foot-tall and had great shoulders, and I was too young to know the difference between what was butch and what was femme and what I was supposed to like or not and if not why not.

I knew I could like her.

"You got a cigarette?" I ventured.

I'd like to say she said, "Honey I got all the cigarettes in the world for you."

What she actually said was, "No," and turned her shoulders in a completely different direction.

I was not to be deterred.

INTERLUDE

Speaking of being deterred—I was—in connection with writing "the novel" I mean. Just as I thought I was going full steam, I made the mistake of trying to contact my editor. Well, he had asked me to write this book, hadn't he, and we were in the middle of thrashing around ideas, weren't we, and I thought we might even be getting close to discussing some actual dough. Hahahahahaah.

Sooooooooo, I pick up the phone, dialed the publishing house number and ask for Mr. Whatizname. A pleasant voice at reception says pleasantly, "Mr. Whatizname WHO?"

"You know, Mr. Whatizname-Whatizname."

"Oh him. He's no longer with us."

All the broccoli sprouts I was chomping on got spit out into the receiver.

"Huh?" I choked. "Is he dead, or what?"

"Not dead," intoned the pleasant voice unpleasantly. "He's just not working for us anymore."

"Oh," I said, not at all relieved by the news that he wasn't dead. "Can you tell me where he is working then?"

"No."

"Can you tell me how I might reach him at home?"

"No."

"OK, can you tell me how I might reach him at all?"

"No."

"Are you sure he's not dead?"

I hung up, not wanting to hear that he really was alive

somewhere. Consequently, in the ensuing year I didn't write another word on "the novel." I quit. If I had no editor then I had no impetus. What was the sense of sitting at home pounding on the keys into a vacuum for nothing? I returned to playing Bingo on the Internet. After all, I might eventually win \$25, which would at least translate into about half a cent per hour—almost as lucrative as writing.

Who wants to hear these stories anyhow? I asked myself. Sure, the '70s are in now, but by the time I get around to writing about them they'll be out—just the nature of our quick sound-byte-five-second-attention-span society. Just the nature of my dysfunctional thinking, actually. So who cares if I sit here writing this in a vacuum—it's my vacuum and it's warm, so I'm going to sit here and be warm while my girlfriend labours at a full-time job (in the rain, I might add) so I can write—and in between writing I can, uh, vacuum?

During the "second wave of feminism," *Chocolate Waters* was one of the first openly lesbian poets to be published. A pioneer in women's publishing and in the art of performance poetry, she has toured throughout the United States, but makes her home in Manhattan. Her three collections: *To the man reporter from the Denver Post*, *Take Me Like a Photograph* and *Charting New Waters* were produced by Eggplant Press during 1975-80 and sold 10,000 copies. A new collection, *Illusion Junkie Downtown*, will be released by Cedar Hill Publishing sometime in 2000.

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Francesca L'Orfano

Isa 3 times



Mixed media on paper.

See bio page 33.

Peashooters

He called me a bad girl and I hated it. I hated him for it. No matter who told me different, I would prepare myself for the arrival of the garbage trucks. Where do all the garbage trucks go when they die?

I went with them, that's why I am so angry. Angry is not the only thing that I am. I am mad, bitten by the snarl of the dog who guards the entrance to those memories marked as forgotten.

My father the drunk. Oh sure, he paid for our meals but that was to keep us tied to the fridge.

"Eat," he would call from the kitchen, for he loved to bake bread.

"Eat," and we would crawl down the steps, carefully, so as to not upset the rising of the other loaves of bread.

"Eat."

"I'm not angry, I mean hungry," I would respond, for I was loud and obnoxious he told me and I made a point of being so. I could not learn to be still as a statue but quibbled with the bread and made little round pellets, the size that would fit into a peashooter.

"It's better than a shooter, really Daddy." Don't you know comfort can't be swallowed? It must be absorbed through the pores. It must be understood.

The next few hours I would spend tearfully, hearing his pacing, back and forth from the liquor cabinet, until the bottle was finished, only to begin another and then another.

And I wondered, how many others were there?

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Then I sat in between the curves of the seat of the truck and counted the empty liquor bottles being crushed into other matter.

When I became older, the size of peashooters became the size of penises. And I thought, is it possible to exorcise ghosts so easily?

Was there enjoyment in holding discarded objects, tossed carelessly along the sides of the road?

I picked up everything those days, even that which lay inside the crevices of wounds untouched.

So I made it a vow to be the one who did the touching, not that it mattered to me in the least. But it did.

Eventually I put to rest the peashooters and the penises because I could no longer distinguish my shadow from theirs.

They say you can get used to being alone. I could not. I asked to be saved from being caught by the snarl of the dog.

And I found myself within the shrine of what was once a convent, resting my head on the lap of Mother Mary, embraced by her wisdom. In time she became Sophia, the double-edged goddess-turned-witch when her father decided he had had enough of her storms and thunder.

Naturally, he replaced Sophia to become the God of Thunder, and Sophia ran away to sit in between the moon and the sun: the place of shadows, terror and sadness.

I had no idea at the time, what this place might be. To me it seemed I had reached the end of the world. I could not remain here forever though.

I needed to give back all the pain I had subjected to those little peashooters. So, I gave back my pain to the place in between time. I gave it away and wore the white gown of the nun's habit.

After climbing over rocks and silence and digging my hands into the earth, where I had planned to bury my memories, my white dress became torn and soiled.

Not sure of what to do, I began to wash my gown and let it dry in the sun.

I lay naked beside my habit, waiting beneath the sun. I could hear my heart and blood breathing warmly through my pores and into my nervous system.

I believe now that it was love that I felt, but I was unsure of its meaning. Something of this world, the sky, the sea, the barren hills, began to expand inside of me, dissolving the broken bottles back into sand.

Although I was afraid to move, I sensed it was important to recognize my fear and that fear tended to hang around those who dreaded it most.

I made an effort to put on my white gown, even if it was still wet, and ran quickly into the sun. I knew the wetness would protect me from its fire.

Turkey Baster

Eventually I guess I'll have to tell Margie. For the time being, though, it's between Caitlin and me. I just need to make sure to destroy all the evidence right away, every day. Because Caitlin is like clockwork. Every morning, six o'clock, as reliable as lousy front page news.

Today she's late. When I walk into the room at five after six she is just getting started. "You're slipping," I tell her. "Usually you're done by now."

It's a procedure. She lies on her back, reaches a tiny hand into the diaper and brings up the first wad. Smoothes it all over her forehead. Then it's back for the next load. She's a systematic eleven-month-old. Before long she's got babyshit all over her face and hands, and a fair smattering on the sheet.

If I start cleanup right away it's possible to get through it without hating her. When I was ten, my grandmother taught me how to clean a bathtub. Get out the sponge and cleanser right after the tub's been used, she said, that way the dirt is still fresh. I have learned that the same thing happens to babyshit. The one time I waited a few minutes before getting at it, my feelings toward Caitlin were not those of a loving aunt.

By the time Margie does her morning shuffle into the baby's room at seven o'clock, I've bathed, shampooed and fed Caitlin, and I've dressed her in one of her many adorable outfits. One thing I'll say for my sister Margie, nobody can beat her taste in clothes. Today Caitlin is a sailor in navy and white. There are fresh linens on her crib. The soiled sheets have already gone through two hot water washes with lots of bleach. They're in the drier now.

Margie picks Caitlin up and hugs her and does her highpitched motormouth mommyblab. *Hi-there-dolly-oach-don't-we-look-cute-in-our-sailorsuit-are-you-mommy's-girl-yes-oh-yes-oh-yes-you-ARE.*

That's all she's got time for. Margie is always in a rush before work. She has trouble waking up; she's never been a morning person. And now she has a day job that starts at eight fifteen. She doesn't like the work. It's tedious, she says, how can a person enjoy data processing? But she needs the money. Plus, she's managed to stay in the job for six months already, which is unprecedented for her. Usually she's done with a job within days or at most weeks. Bosses call her a troublemaker. She'll stand up to a boss for maltreating an employee, whether it's herself or a workmate. She'll force a showdown on principle. She'll refuse to follow a boss's instructions to screen out his wife's calls. She's competent but bosses don't like having her around. She's been set up more times than a bowling pin. If she doesn't get sacked she walks. That's how it's always gone with Margie for jobs. Until this job. I guess she's not so fast to play Norma Rae now that she's got a baby to consider.

After Margie leaves, Caitlin and I have our morning play session. She still prefers to take the stairs sitting on her bum but once we get down to the living room, she's up on her feet working on those early walking skills. She's proud of her new achievement, like a fledgling bird. She goes four, five, even seven steps, like a wind-up doll, straight ahead in whatever direction she happens to be pointing. Then she falls back on her bum and we both laugh. We have a long session of peek-a-boo, which cracks her up; it's her favourite game.

About ten o'clock we head into the kitchen for morning snack. I am mashing up a banana for Caitlin when Ron wanders into the room in an undershirt and shorts. I hate it when he walks around half-naked. He's hard enough to tolerate fully dressed. Caitlin is sitting in her high chair playing with her plastic keys while she waits for her refreshments. Ron goes up to her and kisses her on the forehead. Then he shuffles over to the coffee maker.

It bugs me how that man drags his ass around. What a con artist. Half a dozen medical specialists refused to buy his nonsense. Finally he found a green young family doctor who

fell for his line. So now he's got the chronic fatigue diagnosis he was looking for, and he's achieved his goal—to collect long term disability. In a way you've got to hand it to him. He plays systems well.

Ron pours himself a coffee. He goes up to Caitlin again, runs his fingers through her curls, then heads out of the room. He knows I don't like having him around, and that's fine with me.

Half an hour later Caitlin is down for her morning nap. We'll go for a long walk after lunch. She likes wheeling along in her stroller. She babbles to the passersby who fuss over her. She points out pansies, her favourite flowers. Meeting a new dog is a big deal. She is a person who appreciates the newness of each day.

For me, the walks are a pleasure too. Vancouver is a happening town. Still I miss my home in Calgary—the dryness of the air, the chinooks, my friends, my job, my little inner-city house. But how could I not respond when Margie called me six months ago, half-hysterical. And there wasn't just her to consider. There was Caitlin, who was not doing well either. "The pediatrician says it's called Failure To Thrive," she said. "I don't know what to do. I've got to work, I can't stay home with her. Ron's not the Mister Mom type so that's out of the question. I brought in a sitter but she didn't do anything, just filled the house with cigarette smoke. Caitlin wound up with one ear infection after another, plus she's losing weight... She's too little for day care, she'll get lost in the crowd. PLEASE. You're my sister, for God's sake. And then there's the obvious thing—."

"Don't say it," I said.

I took another leave of absence from work, my second unpaid leave in less than two years. Thank God for my inheritance from Auntie Hilda. And thank God I have an understanding employer. There is something to be said for holding on to a job for almost fifteen years. You sort of become part of a company family. Mel said he would just bring in a sub on contract like he did when I took the first leave. My job will be waiting for me when I'm ready to go back. Mel says I'm irreplaceable as his office manager.

I had a lot of doubts about doing this. Just like with the other thing more than a year and a half ago. But my sister Margie is

nothing if not persuasive. And there were more reasons than the obvious one why she approached me rather than someone else. Every family has its bailer-outer. Way back, I cared for Auntie Hilda for over a year. She had pancreatic cancer and a terminal prognosis and she preferred to stay in her home. Sure, she could have hired nurses, but we knew that what she really wanted was a live-in caregiver from within the family. Nobody else came forward, so I did. Auntie Hilda supported me during that period. She wanted to pay me a salary on top of that but I didn't feel it would be right to take it. I had been working as an office temp for a placement agency; I had no dependents; taking the time to be with Auntie Hilda was not a problem. I stayed with her to the end, and she appreciated it. Still, when the lawyer called and told me about the bequest, I was surprised and a little defensive. It wasn't my intention; it wasn't why I cared for her. But the money was mine now, and I needed to act responsibly. I got advice from a financial consultant, who invested the money for me. I've been sitting on that nest egg for seventeen years. The interest is what's let me be here for Margie now. It's what let me be there for her the last time too.

I couldn't believe that call two years ago.

"Liz," she says, "You are the only person in the world who can help."

Talk about pushing the right buttons.

"Ron and I have been trying for a baby," she says, "but I couldn't conceive. Something to do with the shape of my uterus. We looked into artificial insemination. It was out of reach—they wanted thousands of dollars just to give us a shot at it. Adoption is ... well, let's face it, genetically, you don't know what you're getting."

Then my sister pitches her surreal proposal to me.

For the next three months, I take my temperature every morning. When we talk again I tell Margie exactly what day to book Ron's flight to Calgary for.

Ron calls me from the airport. I think he expects me to jump into my car and go pick him up. Forget it. I'm doing it to help my sister out, not because I have any use for Ron. Forty minutes later, he shows up in a cab. He hasn't been at my place ten minutes before he makes a surreal proposal of his own—to try it the old-fashioned way.

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Right. In his dreams.

"Okay," he says, "Whatever." He reaches into the sports bag he has brought with him and pulls out a bunch of porn magazines.

I made my sister Margie a promise. I need to hold my nose and get the thing done. I hand him an empty glass. "I want the door of that room closed once you're in," I tell him. He goes upstairs to the spare room with the magazines under his right arm and the glass in his left hand.

I spend the next hour in the café down the block, dreading the next step. When I get home I hesitate to unlock the door. How long does this kind of project take? I peer through the window and I can see Ron in the living room watching TV. Good, he's done then. I go in and immediately invite him to leave. He would like to stay with me a bit, he says, he's come all the way from Vancouver. I remind him his return flight leaves later this afternoon. He asks for a ride to the airport. I say no. He calls a cab, which thankfully arrives within five minutes. End of visit.

I wait a bit after he's gone to make sure he doesn't try something stupid, like coming back. Once I'm confident he's gone for good, I go up to the spare room and collect the glass, which has now got a teaspoon or two of semen in it. I carry it carefully to my room. The turkey baster is waiting on my end table. I put the baster in the cup, fill it up, insert it in my vagina. I give the orange rubber dropper of the baster a good squeeze. I am doing this to help my sister Margie. I am doing this to help my sister Margie. I am doing this to help my sister Margie.

I stick my legs up on the wall and lie like that for a half hour, so the sperm can make it all the way up. I promised Margie I would do this, and I am doing it.

Eight weeks later, it's me calling Margie. Unbelievably, the connection has been made. Pregnancy is confirmed.

I refuse to attach myself to this condition. Why ask to get hurt? To stop the questions before they start, I've got to get out of town before I show. This is also the only way to safeguard Margie's plan. So at four months, I arrange an indefinite leave without pay. Stress leave, I'll say.

The next five months are like something out of a Victorian novel, with the pregnant single woman sequestered in a little

cottage in the Caribbean. I fly Margie out too, because she needs to be invisible for about the same period of time. However, I draw the line at Ron. He can stay put in Vancouver. He'd better.

I work like hell to keep this business all business. At seven months I get everything settled with my doctor and the hospital for the birth. First off, I have a bad hip and don't want to get into trouble with labour. I request a planned caesarean. I don't want to be awake for the birth; I request a general anaesthetic. No wetnursing in the cards for me, either. I request pills to stop me from lactating. Yes, of course. They'll give me whatever I want. She who pays gets her way.

Thirty-nine weeks. It's time. Everything goes according to plan until they wheel me back from the recovery room. Margie is waiting for me, with Caitlin in her arms. She asks if she can leave the baby with me so that she can go shopping.

This is my niece, I tell myself, I am allowed to have some feelings for my niece.

I need to get out of that place fast before the bonding goes out of control.

A few days after the surgery, I fly Margie and the baby back to Vancouver and I return to Calgary.

Normal life resumes. Back to work. I work to put this bizarre mission of mercy behind me.

Until Margie's call six months ago. Three words bring me to Vancouver: Failure To Thrive.

Now my job is to stay detached enough to keep my sanity and attached enough to give Caitlin what she needs. That's the current project. It's not hard to play the role of Caitlin's aunt. What's hard is watching those two play at being parents.

Today I can see Caitlin has branched out. Not only are her face and hands covered, this time she's done her legs and feet too. She is kicking her poopy legs up in the air. "Raising a stink, are you?" I say, impressed at my own cleverness. Then I forget how clever I am and how stinky she is. I look at that baby and begin cleaning her up but I work clumsily because I am crying and then she starts crying too and it's tears and babyshit all over both of us.

Rona G. Altrous'

short fiction has been published in *Prairie Fire*, *Contemporary Verse 2*, *Dandelion and blue buffalo*.

Her story "The World To Come" will appear in an upcoming issue of *The Malahat Review*, and her story "Briefing Notes" will be broadcast on CBC Radio One in March. Rona is the mother of two amazing daughters. She believes it makes no difference how children are conceived, as long as they are loved.

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Spirit

Maybe it's fitting that the first contact I had with her was a dodgeball to the tits. But when I was lying flat on the gym floor, woozy and sore with the whole class hanging over me, it was she who leaned over and extended a smooth white arm. "I'm Ellen," she said.

We were blood-thirsty, twenty against one. The game was "Nail the New Girl"—no prisoners taken. There were as many balls as we could get our hands on, all of them blown to full capacity. True to sport, Ellen was attempting to dodge, first gracefully, then with increasing distress as our shots grew harder and faster. She began to lose it, her face flushed deep red while her dark curls plastered themselves to her forehead. Her movements got wilder and wilder and you could tell she was about to give up. But she didn't give up. She did something never before seen at Miss Unger and Miss Grant's School for girls: she calmly drew back her leg and kicked the ball full force at the first available target.

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"Have you ever passed out?" Ellen asked me later in her dorm room, "That's such a trip. I used to do it with my neighbours at the cottage. It was all we did that summer." No, I said. The room was freezing. She had the window wide open even though it was November. I hugged my knees to my chest for warmth. She says it's the old radiator that boils her blood. She needs to breathe. The way she's dressed in a sleeveless cotton nightie she could be an alien, her skin is almost glowing. The mixture of hot and cold air makes me suspicious. "In Finland,"

she says by way of explanation, "They have these sweat lodges where you steam in a sauna for a while and then dive naked into a lake." She tells me to lie down on the bed. "Take some really fast breaths and keep going until I get to ten. Then sit up." I hyperventilate until my head feels like a balloon. When I sit up there are a million fish in my brain. Ellen leans me against the wall and wraps her hand around my neck. "Anno Domini, Carpe Diem, Vitae Lampada Tradens," she chants, tightening her grip. Her hand feels cool and strong. Then I am circling through mucky dreams wanting desperately to surface, yet hopelessly stuck. When I do wake up, her face hangs over me like a moon. She looks blue, all backlit and ethereal. "Boy, you were gone alright."

When I think back on it, I get secret twitches in my stomach. I try to ignore them but they are stealthy and sneak up on me when I least expect it—during math, at lunchtime or when I'm shampooing my hair. I wake up and I'm not sure of anything. The world looks murky and grey. I want to stay under the covers with the blanket snuggled in close to my ears, where I can pretend to be safe. When Ellen wants something she just takes it. I heave myself out of bed and somnambulate to the bathroom. All around me girls in flannel dunk their toothbrushes under rusty taps. I rub a circle in the foggy mirror and examine my puffy face. Another glorious day in which to excel.

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"House Shout," I explain, is a mandatory contest of spirit held once a year. This year Robson House is performing the "Teddy Bears' Picnic." House, Vice and Games Captains act out a little skit involving picnic baskets and a big red blanket. They cavort, ad nauseum. Games Captain extends her hand, feeling the imaginary raindrops. "What is a bear to do?" she sighs. All members storm the field waving the House Banner. We cheer, we form a giant "R" for Robson, cheer some more.

"What a crock," says Ellen. She has no spirit. She is one of the lucky ones who can get away with it. Instead of her house pin she wears a button that says, "I'm bisexual and I'm not attracted to you." For the first time, I ditch House Shout. We hang out in the small school chapel, and while everyone else cheers their brains out we have a discussion about God. Ellen was raised Catholic. She is in love with the pagan aspects of the church, the votives for instance. Her favourite Saint is Guadeloupe

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whom she calls "the Virgin Slut." Guadeloupe gives her something to aspire to. She also believes in ghosts. Not the Casper kind, obviously. We sit on the carpeted altar and listen to the wind outside. Ellen locates the holy water and daubs some on my forehead, "In the name of the Father, the Son and the UGS Ghost." I laugh as she lights up a cigarette and takes a deep drag. "Want a massage?" she asks.

The twitches come back like blips of radar. I watch her finish off her smoke, hoping she'll swallow it. Instead, I let her rub my back with both hands. My mind goes, "Stop, stop, stop," but she's like a mosquito I can't swat. I shiver and lean into her warmth. It's been so long since anyone has touched me. Her arms encircle me, hugging me to her chest. The catch in my throat threatens tears. I go all stiff and she tells me to relax because there's nothing sexual about this, that sexual and sensual are different and that I should keep them straight in my brain if I want to be best friends.

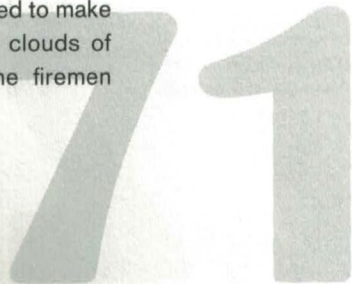
Best friends. I bounce the words around like a pinball machine.

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The ravine is an old foot plunked down between the Great Meadow and the Lower Quad. It smells like an old foot, all rank and gamey. This place is awful but it's mine, I think. I look down at the remains of a condom and mounds of cigarette butts. "Irony is the ability to look at yourself and still get the joke," someone said. Ha, ha.

I come here to think, because I need a quiet place to be alone. The maple keys have all dried up into brown shells of their former helicopter selves. When I look up I see a squirrel's nest in the crook of two white branches that jut like bones into the shock of blue sky. I sit on the fat, dead tree that lays on its side as if to say, Why me? and wait for a revelation that can't possibly arrive because it's noisy as hell.

There's a soccer game on the Lower Quad and you can hear them yelling and screaming. There's also an entire fleet of bulldozers up the hill; they are building condos where the abandoned mental hospital used to be. It was called High Point Psychiatric and it burned down mysteriously one night near the beginning of school. The mood was very festive. Someone offered to make popcorn. There were huge cheers when the thick clouds of smoke descended and aggravated boos when the firemen



arrived. We liked a good show at UGS and this fire lasted forever. It was still smouldering in the morning when we had to get up for class.

People used to make pilgrimages there before it burnt. They would come down with weird artifacts—a patient's art therapy for instance. It was a simple oil painting with a smiley sun on one side and an black cloud on the other. "Definite Schitzo," they'd say. One girl came down with an entire roll of stickers belonging to the Director. The game quickly turned into sticking them on other people's backs, lockers and notebooks. The jig was up once the principal read the sign above her door, "Property of Dr. Alexander Shuter, Dir. High Point Hospital."

We knew there had been a long-term adolescent unit up there, people had witnessed the restraint beds and the rooms with tiny windows and padded walls.

Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of marbles.

Jack fell down and broke his crown and Jill still couldn't find hers.

There were two theories about the fire: one, arson, and two, the ghosts of the teens who had offed themselves. Ellen, of course, subscribed to the latter. She also believed that during a full moon, these tormented souls would descend and enter the sleeping bodies of UGS girls. She especially liked the word *incubus*, defined by the dictionary as:

- 1 an evil spirit believed to violate sleeping women and
- 2 an oppressive nightmare

I feel like I'm losing my mind already, like they should chain me up and throw away the key. I am fifteen and I want to kiss my best friend. On the lips. I pick up a twig and poke at the condom. I lift it to eye level and wriggle it like a worm on a hook.

Ellen's not afraid of anything; not the crazy semaphore of this school, with its tunics and kilts and who's cool enough to pull up their socks and how nobody can hear you take a shit. What's wrong with me? I have blue eyes that go grey when I cry. The tears boil over and spit through my open hands; my nose is a mess of strings. Do I love her? I mean, do I love her?

She has a perfect body. Her ass is like a pear in a still-life painting. I want to see her face again, maybe she's not human. The ghosts from the hill. But when I close my eyes it's not her face but her cool fingers that put me out like a light. Maybe if

her fingers were inside me I'd be safe, because then I'd know she was real. But I know better. I know how that would feel, the heat spreading through me, burning me down.

*

The steam green jungle feels far away now, the mosaic tiles cool my feet. I dance for myself after dinner—no tyranny of eyeballs. I am my own maharajah in white silk, strange and wonderful as seven moons.

She drops from the sky like a beetle with gold-green iridescent kimono wings. She plops down on lush cushions. "I caught you," she says. With her lacquered face, she brings the air heavy around us. She peels off the kimono and pulls me toward her mouth which is sharp but yields like a plum.

"I can't. I'm too fucked up. You know, inside."

"Sure." She leans back and brings her hand between her open legs. She rises to meet her fingers, moaning softly and looks at me with steady eyes. I can hear how wet she is. I can't help watching as she takes herself, wanting it to be me. Her cunt is swollen and pink. I go to her and she cackles and smiles. I suck at her, slide around inside her. I get lost.

"What about your girlfriends?" the thought snaps out of me.

"They won't mind."

But her two skinny, painted minions sniff their way to us. They seethe and glare.

Later someone brings wildflowers. She must have ripped them from the side of the road. I don't want them but I put them in water anyway.

*

I take the first steps, the feet padding down the hall are not my feet. They are the feet of a feral creature with branches knotted in her hair. I pause at Ellen's bedside. I have come here out of sleep, out of sawtooth dreams, out of my hiding. It takes her a second to recognize me. She smiles a secret knowledge. Is she making fun of me? I can feel that dodgeball hit me square in the chest, knocking the wind out. Ellen just shrugs, the moonlight outlines the roundness of her shoulders and the swell of breasts under her nightie. I hate you. She takes me in her arms like a little child. I press my face into her. She smells like oranges and wet earth. Dangerous, too, like metal under the surface. How deep her arms are, and quiet. How deep her arms are.

Gena Smith lives in Toronto where she hates being on the subway without a pen. Her poems have been published in the *Claremont Review*.

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Normal

I've come to this party hoping to find a lover. I turn my head, try to unravel the roar of talk and music, eavesdropping. I catch enigmatic fragments:

"Stress-induced..."

"Step-aerobics..."

"Yes, and as Nietzsche says..."

I'm an anomaly, an infiltrator. Everyone here is younger than me, in second- or third-year university. Everyone, except Tim.

He's in charge of music and plays the '70s hit parade songs we both grew up with. They bring back memories of dimly-lit, slightly pungent gymnasiums. Sweaty palms. Hopping hormones. He brings this back too.

He reminds me of a boy I went around with. A boy I was in love with. That was a long time ago but I still recall his smile.

I've come to this party in the city to find a lover. The hostess was in my English literature class last year at the university. Julia's fifteen years younger than me but we've become friends. We talk a lot on the phone. She tells me about the men she meets, her quiet little adventures and her lust for something noisier. Julia agrees that I need a lover. She knows it's not my first.

*

Julia is the only normal friend I have left. Everyone else is in-crisis. Two are incest survivors, another is a recovering alcoholic (relatively tame stuff these days), one is a recovering bulimic, three are recently divorced. Their bedside tables spill over with self-help books: *Healing the Child Within*, *Eat and Be Happy*, *Single and Satisfied*, et cetera, et cetera. They hit

their mid-thirties and say they are *sorting things out*. They look to their past for the answer and talk to me endlessly about themselves. I. I. I. Roman numeral one. On the phone. In public washrooms. Sitting on my lumpy sofa. I've heard all the stories now: excessive laxative-taking, the fondling step-father, the self-induced puking, the compulsive shoplifting. Their stories don't shock me anymore, they make me wonder what's normal.

Some of them say I'm their only normal friend. They're wrong, I just don't talk about it. I hit my mid-thirties and felt my skin sagging, synapses flagging. My gums bleed when I brush my teeth. My husband John hit forty like a freight train. Now he talks about his sore hip, his aching back, his tired feet. The truth is I have lovers. But I don't talk about it. It has to be a secret. If John found out he'd never forgive me. I know this so I lie, make up appointments, back them up, hide the phone numbers.

(Safe sex. It used to mean not getting pregnant. Now it means being discreet.)

I remember, long ago, shortly after I started my first affair with Reed the tennis pro, I was sitting with my husband and son in a little roadside restaurant, a rather good one actually, with excellent pepper steaks. We were on a trip to Quebec City and everyone was unhappy for different reasons. I was unhappy because I hadn't had any sex for a week. My husband was unhappy because we couldn't afford to be eating at the restaurant. Charlie was unhappy because he was bored. I gave Charlie my note pad where I write grocery lists and he started to draw a picture. I looked out the window at the half-eaten snowbanks lining the highway.

"R.N.," Charlie said. I looked up, he was reading from the back of the book where I'd encoded my lover's phone number. My heart pounded and for a moment I was speechless.

"2376851h230..." he said.

"Draw me a picture of a cat catching a fish," I said.

*

Tim and I are sharing a cigarette and a beer, taking sips and drags. He is wearing a flamboyant Hawaiian shirt—I have one just like it that I found at the New-to-You shop, but I can't quite bring myself to wear it. He feeds me stories. His timing is flawless. He's a bit taller than me, and has a stocky build. (I've always found John too insubstantial). His freckled forearms

bulge out from under the sleeves of his garish shirt. He doesn't have a girlfriend. He manages a small record store in the city and plays bass guitar in a rock band.

He will do nicely.

I realize I'm not normal but I haven't made my affairs into a way of life. I don't go on obsessively about it. I get on with living. I go through lovers, abandoning them when I become bored or they become too interested.

After the first few times I wondered why I couldn't fall hopelessly in love, high-pitched, squealing love, careening madly. I daydreamed of finding someone new, exciting. Then, after a while, I realized that it wouldn't really matter, eventually it would end up being the same: double ryes and cokes while watching sitcoms. Endless discussions about mundane house-hold details—what to have for dinner, where to buy a new stove. I cannot mesh these details with passion, with wanton desire. With my needs. So now I just look for new lovers and new positions. It's comforting to know that I'm not the only one.

*

A few years ago I asked my doctor about AIDS.

"Use condoms," he said. "Though it's not one hundred per cent."

He paused, peered at me through smudged glasses. He was unshaven, had been up all night delivering a baby. He delivered my baby too. By Caesarean section.

I wanted to tell, to shock him. It was delicious news to me. Passionate news. My first extra-marital love.

"I'm going to have an affair and I want to be safe."

He blinked.

"I know you and John have been having problems," he said. "Are you thinking about leaving him?"

I laughed. "Oh no," I said, shaking my head emphatically. "I don't want to leave, I just need a lover."

"Oh," he said. "That's great!"

I could tell he was sincere and felt perplexed. He is a conservative, small town doctor, a decade or so older than me. He is a leading member of his church, in charge of the committee to find a new minister. His wife is meekly beautiful; she never says anything in public, just nods her head at what he says.

Now I understand that he is tired of monogamy too.

(Safe sex. It used to mean not getting pregnant. Now it means not dying.)

*

At home I play the game, the prevarication, the distortion—there are a thousand euphemisms for it, this lie, this game of marriage. I know the rules, so I play it well, or well enough to get away with it. I work at *The Madawan Post*, I buy condoms, I cook dinner and scrub the kitchen floor. I am manager, mother, wife—lover. My friends Anita and Wanda don't know how to play so they are continually disappointed. They are still looking for something definitive in one person. This is impossible—at least I've never seen it. I'm lucky with John. We don't argue, we get on with living. I'm satisfied with him except he's nearly lost his libido. But, I figure, you can't have it all in one person.

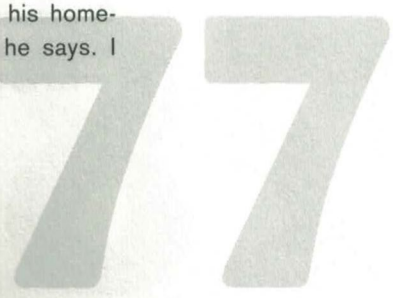
There's this scene in Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* where Big Mamma wants Maggie to admit that she has a loveless marriage. Big Mamma slaps the bed and says something like, "This is the foundation of a good marriage."

I have always known this is true so I play that lie too. I lie in bed and my husband comes inside me. It doesn't happen often these days. He lost his passion years ago, now there is just necessity every few weeks or so. It keeps him happy. I have to find my happiness elsewhere. It's a trade-off. We give our social self, our time and a slender sliver of our sexuality. We get stability. Sometimes it works. Some times better than others.

My mother's cousins have been married fifty-three years. Now that they are geriatrics he's asked her for a divorce. He says he's tired of her always putting him down. In today's crisis language he is saying she has been verbally abusive for the past twenty years. I wondered why he stayed this long, what finally made him leave. Last week I found out he's living with a thirty-one-year-old woman. He's seventy-three. My husband thinks there must be something wrong with her. I'm not so sure. You have to take happiness where you find it.

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Tim says he'll drive me to my sister-in-law's where I'm spending the night. We walk to his car, smoking a joint of his home-grown. That's all the pot you can get nowadays he says. I haven't smoked in years.



"Look," he says, stopping at a huge boat of a car, the cars of my youth. "If you press here the light goes on inside."

He presses something near the key hole. The car is illuminated. It's like a living room with deep couches in front and back.

"I love screwing in big cars," I say peering in, too stoned to be embarrassed.

He opens the door. I fall in, sinking into the plush cushions.

We stop on a dimly-lit street to roll and smoke another joint. I figure it's time to make The Pass. I reach over and touch his hand. Clasp it tightly, massaging his thumb. He leans over to kiss me, wetly, smoothly. But his beard is too heavy, it scratches and irritates. I pull away, putting my hand to my cheek.

"I'm sorry," he whispers. "Next time I'll shave."

Next time.

"I'm married," I say. I need to reaffirm this fact. I don't want any misunderstandings.

"I know," he says. "That's okay."

"It's a lot different," I say. "Everything has to be secret. I can't afford to take any chances."

"I know," he says. "I'm not a kid."

No, I think. Neither one of us is a kid.

*

He answers the door wearing cut-offs and a torn Grateful Dead T-shirt. I'm over-dressed in a short black skirt and expensive cotton sweater. I was wrong, in some ways he is a kid. He still lives like a student. Empty beer bottles are scattered everywhere from a party two weeks ago. Aluminum ashtrays overflow on arborite surfaces. Tacked-up posters half-conceal long cracks in the plaster. The bedroom walls are bare, white and clinical.

But he looks into my eyes when we make love. I've come to favour musicians; guitar players especially have wonderful fingers. He makes me hum. He kneels between my legs, stroking my thighs apart. He massages my breasts, I strain toward him. Our bodies tighten, harden.

He knows what to do while I'm still at a loss sometimes, the awkward times when clothes are coming off and my body's imperfections are exposed: the belly, the dimpled thighs, the Cesarean-section scar bordering my pubic hair.

"You blew me away," he says. "It was wonderful."

"I'm so happy."

He goes to a short business appointment in the middle of the day, our day. I'm glad. It gives me a chance to check out his closets.

*

Later, on the phone, he says, "You need lots of reassurance."

I understand this to be a statement, not a complaint.

"I'm vulnerable," I reply. "Everyone is, but most people just keep it to themselves."

"Yes, I guess you're right," he says.

The phone line buzzes softly, separating us.

*

I understand marriage. I try to explain to Tim that for most people it's crowded with the everyday—kids, pets, jobs, food, work, relationships in-laws. It's also comfortable. Stable. And the sex? Predictable. No one is to blame, it's inevitable. After seven years. Fourteen years. Fifty-three years.

We change.

We want to love others who will welcome our love.

I understand marriage, but not monogamy. What we need is an understanding that marriage can survive without monogamy, without monotony. This would make things so simple. But it will never happen because we want exclusivity—that feeling that something is uniquely our own. Even John, who is no longer jealous, still wants this exclusivity. He assumes loyalty because he is loyal himself.

(Safe sex. It used to mean not getting pregnant. Now it means passion without turmoil.)

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"Do you expect me to be monogamous?" Tim asks.

"No."

I pause to consider.

"But I'd rather not hear about it," I say.

*

He tests me at a New Year's Eve party. My husband is recovering from the flu, so I'm free to spend the evening with Julia. We smoke too much pot and arrive at the party at 2:30 a.m. to find Tim with his arms around a beautiful drunk young woman. He says he didn't think I was going to show up. He hesitates then admits he's persuaded this other woman to spend the night with him. She stumbles against the wall.

"You're jealous aren't you?"

He asks me this three times. He wants me to be jealous but I'm not. This is not part of us. It has nothing to do with me. I arrange to meet him the next day.

*

I know I'm not normal, but I don't phone my friend at two in the morning. I'm quietly in-crisis. I don't feel guilty about what I'm doing—I think it's my nature, it's probably everyone's true nature. No, I'm in-crisis because I have to lie all the time. Because this is a secret. Sometimes I wake up in the cold night, my heart hammering my ribs, sweat soaking my flannel nightgown, thinking that John has found out, knowing he will leave. It isn't difficult to lie anymore, what's difficult is remembering all the lies, keeping the fiction and reality separate, remembering which is which.

My mother was in-crisis too, so was my father. She wanted him to love her more, the most. He wanted to find someone to love him. The great tragedy is that they never really found what they were looking for. She was too busy finding new recipes and redecorating the house. He was too busy finding new cars and flirting with his secretary.

Everyone is in-crisis. I know one couple my age who seem to have a wonderful marriage: loving, close friends, cooperative, equal. But who really knows? They're probably dissatisfied or disenchanted. They probably have affairs too. They probably aren't normal either.

Julia and her friends are lonely and insecure. Many of them think a man will solve their problems, not just a man, but the big "R," *the* relationship, leading inevitably to marriage. I laugh at this notion. I try to tell them the truth, but they don't listen.

Barbara J. Sibbald, who lives a normal life in Ottawa with her family and 36-year-old red-eared turtle, makes her living as a medical and health journalist, but lives to write fiction. So far, eight of her short stories have been published in small literary magazines and two others are due out this year. Currently, Barbara is working on something novelesque in nature.

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Interview with Sarah Murphy, Lynnette D'anna & Camilla Gibb

JANUARY 25, 2000, TORONTO

New works by Calgary author Sarah Murphy (*Lilac in Leather: A tale of forsythia, bedbugs, faded cotton & time*, Pedlar Press, 1999) and Winnipeg author Lynnette D'anna (*foal's bells*, Insomniac Press, 1999) were launched at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre in January. Joining Lynnette and Sarah on stage the night of the launch was Toronto author Camilla Gibb (*Mouthing The Words*, Pedlar Press, 1999). The next day, these three writers met in interview with their editor, Beth Follett (also publisher of Pedlar Press), to discuss writing and living as writers. What follows is a partially-edited transcription of that interview.

BF Most of your characters, through the course of your novels, endure trauma and loss, endure the world, survive. But one hundred years ago, women writers often found no recourse other than death for their women characters who struggled with questions of identity and independence. Can each of you tell me why you have chosen strong characters? survivors?

LD Baby does survive [in *foal's bells*], in her own way she does survive. She is at least able to take control and take responsibility for her life within its confines. And I've always thought about her as a survivor. She makes deliberate choices, and in fact choosing to end her own life is her own choice. I see a great deal of strength in that... In dealing with the constructs and the criticisms, that some female characters have to die, particularly if they're gay... they must be punished... All around me in this world I see women surviving,

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surviving incredible hardship and pain and dominance and oppression...and surviving. Some of us go, some of us have the right to make that choice under stress because it is the only choice for that woman or that individual. To make the choice of suicide.

SM I talk that way about Miranda in *The Measure for Miranda*. That last line, that she said in recognition, "not his name but her own." In that sense you recognize the choice. One may have made a bad decision overall, but the decision has been made because you believe it is the only thing that you can do. It is your decision. So I suppose my feeling is, overall, about what I do is exactly that. I don't think I even think about whether someone survives or not, although survival is very important, and I remember once in a kind of crazy conversation when the person who Lilac [in *Lilac in Leather*] is modeled on cracked up and I was told that she was back in the hospital. And I said, Back when she and I were very young, who would have known that survival was already a triumph? There was a sense of revelation. So what I think I'm dealing with is the whole question of making decisions, and having my characters take back into themselves that whole decision-making power. Yes, mostly I deal with people who in the end are able to make positive decisions, but not always. Lilac, in a sense, is trying to get something out that has not been said before, and in the end can't figure out how to do it. And the contradictions come down on her. Nonetheless, she is very much a survivor because she has stated herself into the world somewhere, and that has been important. So that's what I would say I'm doing: It's that ability to decide, and to see those decisions clearly.

CG I agree. It's about a particular consciousness which is of the world...you've been using the word survivor, which I wouldn't in Thelma's case necessarily [in *Mouthing The Words*]... *Mouthing The Words* is so interior, it is so in her head, and to me that recognition of surviving doesn't seem appropriate for Thelma. The whole idea of mouthing the words, of trying to articulate what you can't say, which she begins to do toward the end of the novel... I'd like to think that people like Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton tried everything they could, they tried to say it, they put it down on paper... In this case, Thelma hasn't even gotten to the point of trying to articulate it.

BF I am interested in making links between women writing one hundred years ago and all of us who have grown up through a feminist movement. Why do we think that women don't have to walk into the sea? Do we think there is more potential in the world? Do we think this is a different world for women? Is there something within each of you that instigates the telling of these kinds of stories to the world? Is there some connection you are trying to make between your hopefulness as women in the world and the audience you hope you find?

LD The question of, Is this a different world for women than it was one hundred years ago, at least for North American women, seems answered by the fact that each of our works, being what they are, has been published and is available for people to read. This in itself says, Yes this is a different kind of world. We can express circumstances wherein women do not have to end with the ultimate sacrifice of their lives.

SM Getting, very briefly, somewhat semi-theoretical [about] the whole question of narrativity and metanarrativity...assign yourself a mission, change the metanarrative. Or the master narrative. Or however you want to speak about that. I think that for me the extreme importance is to say that always there is another story. In fact women have always survived, yet this was not a tellable story in the master narrative of one hundred years ago. Yes, there has been a change which allows other narratives to surface, and part of that is not only, say, between me and my community, which it might have been one hundred years ago, but is also between a greater community that will publish us, that will look at these issues, that won't say, O that story is impossible. Or, I don't want to hear from that. Although we know that happens. We read reviews...There is in that sense a real change. That change in the possible narrative...I mean, there is just a lot of stuff going on for women. If you want to look at it as narratives of class as well, there is a lot of change in what can be said in terms of who is stereotyped as coming from where, and what happens to people depending on their positions in society, and what happens to women in particular. And the same thing with the metanarrative around race. You look back one hundred years ago, it is not simply what happened to women writers. If you look at male writers

writing women, and Tolstoy always comes to mind for me but there are millions out there, you know, there is on the one hand the peasant woman who is all-giving...and she's still around... there is the black woman who is all-giving...and women as well who are still writing that narrative...and then there is any woman who thinks, who is generally the aristocrat (because we don't allow peasant women to think although they are always thinking), and she is evil. So you get really interesting things in being able to rewrite that one. And acknowledging both the thoughtfulness of other kinds of lives, and also addressing the idea that thinking women are evil.

CG It really has to do with how the story is told, not only about the content. I wasn't very much alive in the early 1970s, but I was thinking that we don't have much tolerance now for the confessional narrative. That's what is dismissed when the subject gets raised. That is the criticism that gets levelled against us. But there is a way of telling, we have a way of telling that is still palatable. There is an artistry to that. It was one of the earlier things that you said to me, Beth, that I will never forget: That really there are only five stories on the planet, and much is in the way of telling. This material has existed in different forms, repressed or otherwise. I think that we are actually in an era where we don't have as much license to speak these stories as plainly as we might have in the mid-'70s. I do think that the context for these stories is wider, we're talking about marginalized voices, immigrant literature, especially in Canada. We can almost place [this discussion] in a wider context of marginalized voices, looking into the world as we know it and trying to deconstruct it.

LD I could not have had my work, as it stands now, published in the '70s, precisely because of where the women's movement was then. Even in the '90s my work has been censored, in fact by women in the feminist movement. There are still particular taboos about what one can and cannot give voice to. I certainly have had that experience. For example, woman violence against women in lesbian relationships. I certainly have had difficulty expressing that truth.

SM I talked about that, in terms of maternal violence and sexual abuse. I addressed that in *Connie Many Stories*, and to some

extent was welcomed but to some extent was... whoops. But again, got to the question that you raised, Camilla, there's still something really interesting that happens in terms of the so-called confessional narrative. One is that the confessional narrative is actually big out there in certain kinds of literary circles. I see those circles as actually being a fair constant; in other words, they've been there throughout this particular period, always saying this slightly differently, but the confessional narrative was probably sat on just as much in the criticism of the '70s as it is now. What bothers me is that abuse histories... it is what I call the 2% solution, and it applies to a lot of things. It means that you get 2% of the space. There are certain kinds of coming-of-age narratives that can happen again and again and again, most of them male. Certain other kinds of coming-of-age narratives, that involve abuse, get sidelined. And often there is an accusation that these stories are unmediated, the sort of sense that abuse narratives just happen. No language just happens. Anything that you put on paper is thought out and changed. In your work in particular, *Lynnette*, it is magnificent, the ratio of the said to the unsaid, and how the unsaid enters the said, and I could talk about that at length. There is texture and change within these narratives. I think [the response to] *Lynnette's* work is an incredible example of this attempt to sideline work, work that is obviously so well crafted, as somehow being confessional and therefore unmediated. As if it just kind of happens onto the page. It's ridiculous. It's one of the things that really bothers me.

CG I was just thinking that these narratives are so ubiquitous. We find them everywhere. I would rather not see *Mouthing The Words* named a story of abuse. I would rather it be seen as a girl's story.

SM Exactly. That's what I'm saying. These are part of the coming-of-age stories. This is coming of age for any number of people. This other kind of coming-of-age narrative is a coming of age for another group of people. But it's a way of legitimizing one story and naming the other an abuse narrative. I don't think that works.

LD The statistics would suggest that this is the coming-of-age story for one in four children, one in three children perhaps. The voice is ghettoized. But I like to think of it as Voice.

SM Both of our works deal with female sexuality ... Daphne Marlatt has received criticism that she's "just into this cunt thing." And I sat there thinking, You can't have enough cocks and balls, but one too many cunts. We just have too many cunts! Well excuse me. So sexuality, in that sense, is dealt with in the same way.

BF My next question is about whether you are conscious of writing from a feminist politic, and do you think of audience when you write? When I hear these kinds of stories about male critical response, I wonder are any of you writing for male critical response? Do you think about these kinds of things when you are writing?

CG I can speak as someone who has just written a first novel, my first major piece of work. I did not think about an audience, period. It only occurred to me when I realized you were going to publish the sucker [Much laughter]. It wasn't only going to be women who would read it...my family would read it, ex-boyfriends, teachers who taught me in high school, everybody, the world, men. And it was such a shock. It's disconcerting, because of course people assume it is autobiographical, and I skate around that. It's curious. Many men who approach me feel they have a particular insight into my character. And I don't like that, that kind of assumption of intimacy somehow. But other men have taken something from the book, have said to me, This helps me read my niece, this helps me read my god daughter who I care about deeply. This makes me think about my wife. This makes me think about my daughter. That's been a wonderful surprise...But no I don't think I write consciously as a feminist, I don't write consciously as a lesbian.

SM I suppose for me in all my work there is a political layer. I enjoy politics and theory in some kind of way. Many other people recognize more theory in my work than I do. I think about sections in *Lilac*, like the stuff around, I won't be the Pied Piper of Pomo Soho and invite another young woman into this, and the stuff around the woman who has to deny her voice in order to be the muse. So I am constantly dealing with those art world issues that I faced twenty years ago in art school. O god, thirty years ago. O shit! Anyway. And that I know from speaking to young women,

they still face. In a funny way I want to say it politically, and I want to say it out loud. In some ways the reception of the work gets quite peculiar because of that. I will articulate a politic which I feel very strongly about. I've been politically active around issues of race, class and feminism from the first feminist meeting ever held in the Students for a Democratic Society, in 1965. For me that's there. But it isn't what dominates the work. I never think, I'm going to come to a position on this issue. In the descriptive versus prescriptive debate, I'm on the descriptive side. I want to say it like it is, and I want to say what I think about it. And after that, I hope it finds its audience. But the other thing is that I also want to say it in the voice that I most love. When I look at the reception of my work, part of what I get is, Thou shalt not sully thy work with politics. But then there are the political people who say, Thou shalt not sully thy politics with art. So people will get angry at me for various reasons within that. My own feeling is, I want a consciousness on the page that is both thinking about the issues and just being in the world in a way that intervenes and mediates the world, that is beautiful. There certainly is no specific audience. I just say to myself, If I'm here there must be somebody in the world who feels with me on this stuff. Which is why when you, Beth, had your response to the work, it was so wonderful...

BF How are your own lives structured to allow you the time and means to create? What I'm hearing you say is that sometimes the impetus to tell the story breaks through, so you begin to structure your lives in order to tell it. Tell me about that. In terms of choosing to take the time to write, knowing what some of the changes in your resources might be.

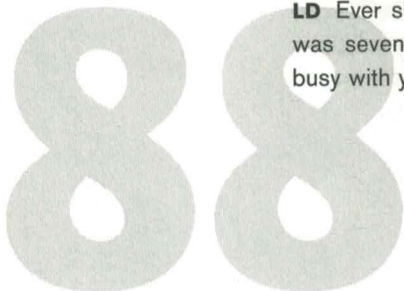
LD All my adult life has been a struggle economically. I have made a lot of choices in my adult life which have involved doing things that interest me. Doing things that I feel ethically obliged to be involved with. I chose to be a single parent. That was an active choice on my part. An ongoing struggle, given what my other choices are. I have always done contract work. I have done contract work with AIDS organizations. In the '80s most of my contract work was with social service type organizations. I worked with Planned Parenthood to develop a sexual resource library. That kind of fringe work that you certainly don't get a lot of economic recompense

for. But I figure if I'm pushing papers and filing, I want it to be something that has value...I worked with single parents who were attempting to achieve post-secondary education. In the '90s, most of my contract work has been in the arts...

When I chose to write, that was another one of those choices. It's knowing where potential resources are. Trying to access them in order to accommodate what I want to do in my life. I'm certainly not, in the traditional terms, successful. It's a matter of juggling contract jobs with what grants I can get. I consistently apply for grants. I approach my writing like any other job I am paid to do, so I work from 9 o'clock on. Much of my editing work involves deconstruction, taking things out. It's extremely demanding and it takes a lot of time, so that when I am in that phase of my writing, I will work for long periods of time, first of all to justify the grant money. It's a matter of making choices and juggling... Anybody who is involved with creation will understand what "having to write" means. Writing fulfills a certain need. I've always written. Since I could first hold a pen. And most of my things were secret. It's something that I do and that I will continue to do.

CG It's absolute compulsion. I would say "burn." It burns. You don't have that choice. As a person who is just deciding now that I will be a writer, I'm going to have to make those kind of choices that you are talking about. That summer in the trailer park where *Mouthing The Words* was hatched is just a manic blur. It was 8 in the morning until 8 in the morning. I had just finished a Ph.D. I'd had ten years in which I felt I couldn't even read fiction, let alone write it. I felt guilty. When I began to write something that was liberating, not constrained by academic discourse, which is partly why I have a reluctance at this stage to think of my work in theoretical terms... That place where I was writing the novel, I'd finished my Ph.D., I'm unemployed, I don't have a home, I had nothing to lose. I've consciously decided to live alone... I'm being really pig-headed about space... it kind of worries me that I'm going to end up being an old cat lady in a one bedroom apartment... but if I still burn, I burn!

LD Ever since we got the computer in 1992, and my daughter was seven-years-old, she has said when I'm writing, O you're busy with your other child.



SM I didn't choose writing, writing chose me... For years I hated writing... But as I was walking around in Calgary I would have voices in my head beginning stories... The anxiety during the transition from visual artist to writer was tremendous, because I knew I was throwing away a career that was started. In the sense that you don't go anywhere in the visual arts if you are not consistently producing... There was a real thing for me of having been betrayed by language and then having to come back to it, through it. There were years when I never wrote anything. I'm not a consistent writer... I do it because I'm in love with the process... What I do to make money, except when I've got grants, is teach English as a Second Language. And I now teach Spanish as well... There was one point when I was writing *Lilac* and all hell had broken loose in my life, and somebody said, Well how do you keep doing this when all hell has broken loose? And I said, I think it's because it's the only part of my life that I can control.

CG Yeah.

LD Yeah.

SM Those jugglings are extremely important. And the places where you give yourself release are extremely important... What I do think I echo with both of you is, if I didn't produce art, I would go crazy.

LD In every single one of my works, the characters find their release through the act of creation. That is very much where my personal politic comes into my work.

BF Marguerite Duras says, Woman is closer to madness because she is closer to all transgressions. Each of you take your characters to the mind's shadowy edges, to dangerous extremes in some cases. Why are you interested in these regions, and the dangerous absence of pleasure or purpose there?

LD I think each of us would have trouble with the terms "mad" and "sane," so I'll change it to "unacceptable." I certainly have done my share of treading on the unsacred ground of "insanity." This is probably why I write about the exploration of the self. In my work I question social definitions of madness and sanity.

SM I suspect I make the journey because I have already made the journey. That's going to sound peculiar. I mean in some ways, if I look at my own history, I made a kind of adjustment with a mad world... Once I had done that, I wanted to talk about safety, about what happens when you push things too far, about where those edges are... I don't hate safety. I think we all need safety. But not a safety that simply shuts down the dangerous issues... For women in the West, speech is already a transgression. So the naming of the self into the world is a transgression already... If you're trying to name what it means to be a woman, you're going to be walking the edges from time to time... I wrote *Lilac* to resolve an issue I couldn't resolve... Part of that was watching a friend descend into what we would call irrevocable madness. I don't know what's on the other side of the barrier... Writing is a way of recovering the world. I do feel a difference between when I can feel the table and when I can't feel the table... Most of my adventures with madness have literally been "shrinking" until I felt I was a self this big inside my body. I thought I would never touch my fingertips again... I think desire for the world brings me back.

CG Madness for me is in not being able to relate to this world, in finding it just too unbearable. The feeling of finding it unbearable is not the madness that others might romanticize as being cathartic and creative. It shuts down! You are beyond language when you are beyond the world. To be able to look at Thelma in a psychiatric hospital, to be able to see it... I think personal consciousness isn't necessarily there in that realm... It may be virtually impossible to convey madness if it is in fact beyond language, even if we want to write it as writers.

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Beth Follett is publisher and
in-house editor of Pedlar Press.

Calls for Submissions

FIREweed

Guidelines for submissions

- Always make sure that each submission is carefully labelled with your name, address and telephone number.
- Include a stamped, self-addressed envelope (SASE) for our reply or return of your submission. (If you live outside of Canada, attach an International Reply Coupon with sufficient postage. Do not send American postage!)
- Send material typewritten or computer-generated on 8½" x 11" paper, single-spaced for poetry, double-spaced for prose. Maximum accepted is five poems or 5,000 words of prose.
- Your covering letter should include a brief biographical note, including previous publication credits, if any.
- Visual Artists are encouraged to send whatever material you feel would reproduce well in our format. Send slides or photographs — no originals through the mail please.

Fireweed accepts E-mail submissions at fireweed@web.net. All submissions should be sent as a Word attachment in Macintosh format or, if you use PC, in Word for Windows, saved as RTF (Rich Text Format). Submissions not sent in one of these two formats cannot be opened by our computers and will be returned

Fireweed: a Feminist Quarterly of Writing, Politics, Art and Culture, is an ongoing forum for the writings of women rooted in diverse cultural, sexual, and regional communities and which challenge literary and aesthetic genres. We publish visual and written material in all forms. We do not publish material that the editorial collective finds racist, classist, sexist or homo/lesbophobic.

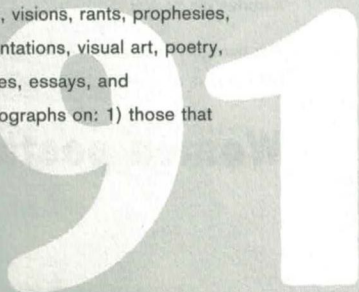
Call for Submissions

Women at the Millennium

Women have been at the forefront of social, political and economic change over the last millennium. They have participated in revolutions, fought for their own and others' rights, secured the vote, entered the labour force, entered the political arena, and secured greater control over their bodies and their destinies.

Despite these victories, in many countries, women continue to be denied their political rights, subjected to violence and mired in poverty.

To commemorate women's achievements over the last millennium, and record their dreams and aspirations for the next one, *Fireweed* invites you to submit your odes, celebrations, visions, rants, prophesies, lamentations, visual art, poetry, stories, essays, and photographs on: 1) those that



went before: role models/
inspiration/achievements; and
2) goals/visions/dreams/
predictions for the future.
Young as well as old women of
all backgrounds are encouraged
to apply.

Women's Paths to Economic Self-Sufficiency

For women fleeing abusive
situations, living in poverty, and
marginally housed or homeless,
the path to economic self-
sufficiency is an arduous one.
Fireweed invites women who
have made this transition, or
are in the process of doing so,
to submit the stories, essays,

photos and poems that describe
your path to economic self-
sufficiency and the tools you
used to get there.

Transgender Issues

Some of us are fighting the
battles associated with being
lesbian women or gay men in a
heterosexual world. But others
are attempting to make the
transition from one gender and
sex to the other, or to live in the
space in-between, where they
identify with both genders, or
neither. *Fireweed* invites people
who are both making transitions
from one sex and gender to the
other, or attempting to carve out

their own, sometimes fluid
space on the continuum in
between, to submit your
stories, poems, photos, visual
art and essays. We want to
hear what challenges you face
and what it means to defy
categorization in a world that
turns on it. March 31.

Women in Prison

What does it mean to be a
woman who is, or has been,
incarcerated? *Fireweed* invites
women to express their
experience of being
incarcerated through short
stories, essays, visual art,
photography, and poetry.

Fireweed is having a Poetry Contest

As *Fireweed's* **Poetry is Political** issue attests, women of all persuasions are putting their concerns about life, love, and oppression to verse. To celebrate women's poetic impulse and achievement *Fireweed* is holding a poetry contest!

To enter, please submit your political rants, lamentations, spoken word/dub, whispered love songs, sisterly calls to arms, and other poetic musings with a stamped, self-addressed envelope and entry fee of \$10.00 per entry (five poems maximum) to *Fireweed*, P.O. Box 279 Station B, Toronto, M5T 2W2.

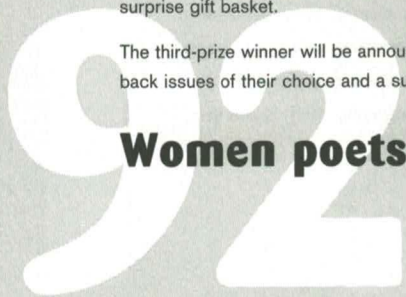
ALL ENTRANTS WILL RECEIVE A ONE-YEAR SUBSCRIPTION TO *Fireweed* — A \$22 VALUE!
Deadline for entries is May 31, 2000.

The first-prize winner will be announced and published in an upcoming issue of *Fireweed*, and will receive a \$100 cash prize, a two-year subscription to *Fireweed*, four back issues of their choice, invitation to read/rant/recite at an upcoming *Fireweed* function and a special, surprise gift basket!

The second-prize winner will be announced and published in an upcoming issue of *Fireweed*, and will receive a \$50 cash prize, a one-year subscription to *Fireweed*, two back issues of their choice and a special, surprise gift basket.

The third-prize winner will be announced and published in an upcoming issue of *Fireweed* and receive two back issues of their choice and a surprise gift.

Women poets unite | recite | take flight!



Back Issues



54 (\$5)

Technologies
Digital artist
and cyber-
feminist Nancy
Paterson

charts the emergence of cyber-feminism, plus a Fredrica Mintz ad-spoof—bringing you friendly products for a hostile world. Latin American women and the politics of race, immigration and feminism in Toronto: a personal/critical article by R. Magaly San Martin. Poems and stories by Nadine Boughton, Beth Goobie, Angela Hryniuk, Kerry Langan, Lisa Mesbur, Elana Moscovitch, J. Pitter, Jenny Potts and Rita Sommers-Flanagan. Reviews of *Lesbiot: Israeli Lesbians Talk about Sexuality, Feminism, Judaism and their Lives* and *Plural Desires: Writing Bisexual Women's Realities*.

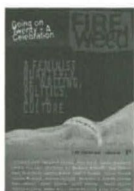


55 (\$5)

Heather
Cameron on
the Cross-
Canada
Women's

March Against Poverty, plus notes from "Rolling Feminist Library" organizer Anthea Whittaker; Ratna Kapur on how censorship rewrote *The Bandit Queen* in India; Brenda

Cossmann reviews *Whore Carnival* by Shannon Bell; Ling Chiu's film/reflection on the Montreal Massacre; new work from ijose chow, Shai Dhali, Neesha Dosanjh, Crystall Carmen and others.



56 Going On Twenty (\$5)

Fireweed
celebrates
unruly

adolescence and fiery womanhood: Marge Piercy slices fear; Margaret Atwood examines the female body; Lillian Allen frigs stereotypes; Susan Swan flirts with a saint; Makeda Silvera argues with a village; Janice Gould on Easter Sunday; Claire Harris and Lesléa Newman on grief and memory; Mary di Michele on Lesbos; Erin Mouré, Nicole Brossard, Betsy Warland and Mona Oikawa on love, sex and the whole damn thing; plus, plus, plus.



57 Exploring & Questioning Collectives & Activism (\$5)

Ethel LaValley on the grass-roots of coalition building; the ex-workers of *The Concordia*

Women's Centre have their say; Fauzia Rafiq sends us with Saheban on a satirical trip through a collective dystopia; Jacquie Buncel dishes the dirt on seven bosses from hell; Shira Spector's cartoons poke fun at activism and collective organizing. Plus Sapna Patel, Aviva Rubin, T.J. Bryan, Ann Dexter and others.



58 (\$5)

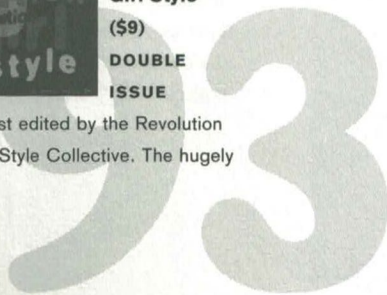
Gloria Kim in
conversation
with Judy
Fong Bates;
Kristy Green

gives us the unlikely revenge of a bride scorned; Beth Goobie's "Nothing But The Hurt"; We see things thru Anagel Saunder's eyes; Rhonda Mack gets Plum Rotten; Patria Rivera journeys back to Cold War, 1957; with artwork by Marie-Denise Douyon, Madonna Hamel and others; plus Kam Sein Yee, Amuna Baraka, Lea Littlewolfe, Marilyn Elain Carmen and many more!



59/60 Revolution Girl Style (\$9) DOUBLE ISSUE

Guest edited by the Revolution Girl Style Collective. The hugely



successful, much talked-about special issue all about young women. A springboard/ call to action for other girls to do the same. With works by Karen Kawawada, Blood Sisters, Jaime Kirzner-Roberts, Lorraine Hewitt, Rita Fatila, Ivana Shein, Emmy Pantin and many more.



61 (\$7)

Includes poetry by Deborah Schnitzer, Joan

Latchford, Sonia MacPherson, Joelle Hann, Khadija Black, Rachel Zolf, Shauna Richler-Lancit and Carrie L. MacDonald; fiction by Kim Anderson, Beth Stinson, Christy Ann Conlin, Nora Solanoy Lusterio and Beth Brant; artwork by Shannon Greene, Julia Powditch and Reena Katz; and a review by sherece taffe.



62 (\$9)

Includes fiction by April Selley, J. Maureen Hull, Jillian Maloney

and Anne Duke Judd. Poetry by Deborah Stiles, Jennifer Moss, Susan Holbrook, Shae Irving, Karen Forster and Heather Hermant. Art by Parvenah Radmard, Christina Francisco, Sue Goldstein and Shira Spector.



63 Pop Culture

A tribute to all things pop. Includes poetry by Crystal

Hurdle, Malca Litovitz, Zöe Whittal, Adrienne Weiss, Jennifer Inslee and Star Hong Nga Rush, essays by Kerry Daniels, Lisa Bryn Rundle, Cathy Katrib, Lily Slain, Catherine O'Sullivan, Lara Karaian, Andrea Gin and Mariko Tamaki. Featuring visuals by Shelly Niro, Wendy Coburn and more!



64

Poetry by A. Mary Murphy, Molshree and Julie Schroeder;

fiction by Mary Jo Pollack and Rachel Li Wai Suen; art, reviews.



65

The Sex Work Issue Guest-edited by sex workers — strippers,

prostitutes, call girls, exotic dancers, and sex activists — who have worked, or are working, in the sex industry. Features a roundtable on sex work by women at Stella; poetry by Michelle Lampart, Tenacity Numen and Cathleen Withs; prose and discussion by Lily Fine, Raven DelMonico,

Debby Toupin Clarke, Marie Wilson, A.J., Stripper Girl, Tamara Faith Berger, Raven Rowenchild, and much more.



66

Poetry is Political

Poetry for the people! Women strut their stuff

in this issue, with writing by: Cathy Stonehouse, Christina Springer, brenda simmers, Kathleen Hankinson, Bridget Wayland, Crystal Hurdle, Carrienne Leung, Elisabeth de Mariaffi, Rachel Sohn and much more!



67

Fat FIREweed

Guest edited by the fabulous Fat Collective. A wide load of

contributions including art work, fiction, and poetry by Chubbalicious, Pretty Porky and Pissed Off, The Fat Avengers, and many others. Check out some of North America's biggest writers as they challenge prevalent attitudes towards large women and reclaim the space they desire.

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upcoming issues

Women at the Millennium

**Women's Paths to
Economic Self-Sufficiency**

**Transvisions:
Transgender is the Issue**

Women in Prison Speak Out



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9 Bread and Roses [\$3]

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16 Women of Colour [\$10]

17 Writing [\$3]

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19 Theory I [\$3]

20 Theory 2 [\$3]

21 Short Stories [\$3]

24 Writing [\$3]

27 Writing and Humour [\$3]

29 Writing [\$3]

31 Weird Writing [\$3]

32 Writing [\$3]

33 Loosely About the Body [\$3]

34 Writing [\$3]

39/40 From the Mouth to
the Page [\$5]

41 Shifting Identities/
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