

W49



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Vincent Chorabik
Yukiko Takahashi-Lai
Simon Lam
Christopher Nazaire
Jessica Poon
Jan Tang
Wyatt Connelly
Jeremy Chu
Duncan Parizeau
Lucas Walkowicz

2017 **WRITING CONTEST WINNERS** **W49**

Design by Karolina Filippova

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the 19th (nervous breakdown) edition of Langara College's W49, a magazine of award-winning poetry, fiction, and creative non-fiction written by current and former Langara students. In what appears to be becoming an unwelcome tradition, the current issue has gone through numerous setbacks and delays to publication, and for this reason I would like to express my gratitude to all the authors of the winning selections for their patience and understanding. As always, W49's judges had difficult decisions to make in selecting the winning entries—proof again of the quality of literary talent that exists at Langara College!

Much appreciation to all who have assisted in the creation of this year's edition, including Darren Bernaerdt of Langara's Department of Publishing for helping locate and promote graphic designers, Langara librarian Allison Sullivan for placing W49 in the institutional repository, Susan Smith for advertising assistance, Jonathan Howard in Print Services, and Langara English department's esteemed panel of judges: Deborah Blacklock, Caroline Harvey, Heather Jessup, Trevor Newland, Kathleen Oliver, Thor Polukoshko, Daniel Poirier, Erin Robb, Roger Semmens, and Jacqueline Weal. Thanks also to Duncan Parizeau for his very kind offer of assistance in the promotion of W49. A special thanks to Karolina Filippova for her dedication and excellent work in the design and layout of this year's edition.

Warm thanks to the authors of the published selections and to all contestants—we hope that you will continue to write and submit in the future. And thanks, finally, to all readers and supporters of W49!

Guy Wilkinson
Editor

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I STOLE YOUR ARM

Meighan Donaldson

It started with the bad bitch of a heartbreak. It ended in last night's sweaty dress. An unexplained prosthetic arm curled around my waist. Death takes you from one strange place to the next.

My skin was hot in all the wrong places, under my arms, between my legs, and an uncertain cold crept up my back causing goose bumps to appear on my sweaty confused skin. Was it the cocaine or the Valium causing this psychotropic mix up?

The sun shone down cruelly, the way it does when you're still covered in last night. All you want is a glass of cold tap water and clean sheets but instead you're closer to a 7/11 dumpster than you ever hoped to be.

Last night began floating back in bits and pieces, crashing and churning, although that could also be my stomach. I wanted the sun to go away.

"This city is lonely, so, so lonely."

The gum I'd been chewing for days started to taste like poison. I grabbed The Arm and started walking fast; last night started to make sense, but only a little.

I stumbled into a dark house. It must have been after midnight. I was supposed to be meeting my best friend Noah but his phone was going straight to voicemail. The house was foggy and filled with cobwebs. It was Halloween and this place gave me the creeps. The party was the pits but I

scanned the room anyway. My space heater was broken and my cat had run away.

I settled my gaze on the back of a black leather jacket. Glassy eyes met mine. A slur, a smile, a nod. Pale fingers grabbed my boney wrist and dragged me into the bathroom, past girls in fishnets and boys in spandex.

The bathroom reeked like piss; the tub was being used as a urinal. House keys and plastic bags - nostrils and gums—frozen mouths and soft tongues...

BANG-BANG.

Someone was trying to kick the door in.

"Whoa, where are you going?" said the Tongue.

"Home," I replied. I did not want to wake up here, of all places, sober and shaky.

I was planning to walk straight out the door and down the paint-peeling steps, but I bumped into a boy. His name was Lyle. Lyle was tall, with blonde scruffy hair, and holding his right arm like he'd hurt it.

"What's wrong with your arm?" I half-yelled, my pupils the size of dinner plates.

He pretended not to hear me and asked my name.

"Judy." That is not my name. In fact, it's a horrible name. I have no idea why it rolled off my tongue so easy, but it did.

He smiled politely and disappeared through the crowd. I followed. At a safe distance, even though I'm sure The Arm had spotted me. I waited until I saw him place it gently down. It was my chance.

I thought it was an odd thing to do, remove your arm at a party. But then again these were strange times. Something possessed me; I swear I'm not in the habit of stalking amputees and stealing their prosthetics. I imagined all sorts of heroic ways he may have lost that thing, but it was probably just a lawn mower. It's always a lawn mower.

I slid down next to it and gently covered it with my jacket. It just seemed so lonely, sitting on the scratchy stained sofa.

I held onto Lyle's little plastic arm through the fabric of my coat and ran into the wet streets.

It was the early hours on the first of November and already it was freezing, but The Arm was giving off a strange amount of heat. I put it around my waist. It hung there pretty comfortably.

I started walking a little faster, past needles, crack heads and old coffee cups, boarded up Chinese buffets. I peeked into a hair salon that was displaying a bottle of shampoo from 1982.

"I use to get my haircut at a place like that when I was a little kid," I said to The Arm. "I'd go with my Grandmother. I always got a mushroom cut."

"I think a mushroom cut would suit you," said The Arm.

It should have struck me as odd that an arm had just answered me, but like I just said before, these were strange times.

"I need coffee. I think there's a place just around the corner that's open all night."

"Okay but can you hold me a little higher please? These streets are covered in vomit. I know I'm only an arm so I don't have a nose, but I feel the smells and it's making me ill."

"I'm sorry." Lifting him a little higher, I wiped a smear of something unrecognizable off his elbow with my sweater. I quickly swore to myself I would take better care of him. After all, he didn't belong to me.

The Arm and I ducked into a dingy neon diner. The lights were dim and a couple of old flies drifted toward the faint fluorescent glow. The woman behind the counter barely looked up but pointed a nicotine-stained finger in the direction of an empty booth. She then placed the same yellowed finger back into her mouth to gnaw on a chipped pink nail.

The booth was plastic and sticky. The backs of my legs stuck to the material in the worst way. The Arm propped himself up across from me in such a way that I could only see his hand. The palm had faint lines etched into it, as if it were real.

"Who was that greaser I saw you stumble into the bathroom with, anyway?" he asked.

"Ya drink?" The yellow nails were far away enough for the dry, painted lips to speak.

"Coffee please."

The Arm was silent but I got him a cup anyway.

We sipped and sniffed; I poured half the contents of the sugar bowl into my chipped mug. "I'm not satisfied until the spoon stands straight up."

"Ever kiss someone and hope that by the time you opened your eyes they'd have turned into someone else?" I asked him. I noticed an ashtray on the table and quickly lit up. I think smoking is always a good idea if you don't know what else to do. I inhaled down to my toes and downed the contents of my mug.

I can't remember the then before the now. It was last night, it was last winter, it was the dreams, and it was this morning. It's time, I have so much time.

I reached for the pill bottle in my jacket. My hands were shaking from the caffeine and the cocaine. We all have drug-seeking behavior, don't we?

The dark, star-studded sky suddenly cracked open real wide and I was drenched in minutes. We should have run, found a doorway, something, but we just stood there. It wasn't like a scene in one of those stupid T.V. shows, where the characters are completely ecstatic on being stuck in a downpour; they have an epiphany, start laughing even. I however was fully aware of how uncomfortable the rest of our walk would be. We found a decrepit awning but I was already soaked, my rain-spattered skin already rippling into ridges of goose bumps.

"Do you ever pray?" I asked The Arm, half yelling over the downpour.

"I think I have, a few times. I mean the inner dialogue can

always be with 'God.'" His index and middle finger moved with the mention.

"I've really only prayed once or twice. The real gut-wrenchers, you know? When I'm coming down off something strong, I have a bladder infection and there is always too much air conditioning."

The last time I really prayed? I pressed the palms of my hands into my eyes hard while I thought hard. It was the time I had to tell a mother her kid was dead. And I'm sorry, I wasn't there, there was nothing I could do. He was supposed to meet me, I was two blocks away and my phone was dead... and I'm sorry, I'm so sorry.

I thought I had boarded that wound up good, but it turns out you can't heal a bleeding sore with wood and nails, it just gets infected.

"This city man, this place did something to me," I finally said out loud. "Everyone did too many drugs then, and only now are we realizing we all aren't going to make it out alive. Not with the way we chose to live."

It all started here, this is where I met them. Them meaning the friends I'll never replace, even when they decided they didn't want to live anymore. Love and suicide makes everything unfair.

Before people started dying and parts of me started breaking. Before you started seeing people you love in cheap wooden boxes; so small and cold.

We had wild nights that turned into strung out mornings, but things never got too serious, until last summer when the world got so black and felt so empty. The drugs were supposed to make us feel better, weren't they?

They ruined everything, but they were everything. Salvation in little plastic bags.

There were even piles of it at Alex's wake.

"That was his name," I paused and caught my breath.

It's funny, I never used his real name until he died, but

from the moment we found out, our childhood fell from us with a bang. Our safe world of nicknames and games was behind us. We were grown-ups now and we were terrified.

I lit another cigarette.

"It's still that overwhelming sharp pain in my chest that I can't get rid of. It's still the reason I don't sleep. Alex laying in that coffin is always the first thing I see when I close my eyes."

I was sitting in the soaked doorway, my arms wrapped around my shaking legs.

"This is the shit that breaks your heart."

I couldn't tell if I was crying or my face was just soaked by the rain but my throat started to get real tight.

"I'm not mad at him you know. I'm really not. In a weird way, I understand why he did it. I get what it's like to not want to live anymore. I get it, I do."

I tried to re-light my cigarette but the rain wouldn't let me.

"I feel like everyone learned to live with it but me."

"Living is uncertain and exhausting," said The Arm.
"Sometimes it's just not worth the effort."

I leaned my back against the graffiti-covered door. My ears were ringing and my eyes were burning. It had been days since I'd slept. I felt myself drift off, as damp and uncomfortable as I was.

When I woke up his words were throbbing in my head, although he lay motionless beside me. The sun was bright and burning and I felt like I was going to be sick. I wanted the light to go away; it was making me feel guilty. I got up and started to walk fast. Today it wasn't worth it and that dumpster really stinks.

DYSPHORIA

Vincent Chorabik

When your hands break apart like that

You fuck like a lesbian, you know? Did you know? You fuck like a lesbian. I pull at the bathtub's faucet. Waiting for the tub to fill, I hesitantly gaze into the mirror. Applying a warm, damp cloth to my face, I remove a layer of my whorish disguise. I can feel, with each passing day, the metamorphosis of this mask soaking deeper into my pores, filling me with its plastic desires. (A man and a woman sit side-by-side on a mattress.)

I like to be submissive and let you call me whore or bitch, maybe slap or bite me if you wish. But that night, you pushed it too far. Bruises form on my calves in dark patterns like grapes being squished into skin by pudgy fingertips. They form bumps and discolouration all over my feminine frame. (A man and a woman at 10:49pm.)

Mirror

Upon discarding the toilet paper that enhances the size of my breasts, I take off my clothes. Naked, I scrutinize my enemy. Wide eyed, she stares back. Quiet. Weak. Fearful. Her ribs jutting out, exposing her concave stomach. Her face is painted with pain. She is anything but beautiful. I hate her. She disgusts me. Rejecting this fraud, this doppelganger, I sink into the depths of the scalding hot water.

Drip

Drop

Time stops, you know. When you're alone.

Sometimes I wish I could run away and leave you behind without ever hearing from you or my family or the church or anyone else see ever again and just live a new life as the person I should have been all along.

Time stops, you know. When you're alone.

Drip

Drop

A man and a woman sit side-by-side on a mattress. A man and a woman at 10:49pm. The man moves on top of his wife, caressing her, hands moving mechanically, tracing ancient paths. Never stepping off to explore uncharted territories.

"Do you love me?" the woman asks; her head tilted to the left steering clear of his gaze.

"Is that even a question?!" he snaps back angrily, jolting his body away from hers like a magnet of the same polarity, "Are you not my wife?"

"Yes."

The woman is meek, her body still sore from last night's episode. Another syllable is incapable of escaping her tightly sealed lips. A protective zipper captures words and sounds that may cause her harm. She knows she cannot withstand another round of abuse and her questions are only exacerbating the situation. Trained, she knows to lay still and allow him his pleasures.

The couple engages in intercourse.

The man is asleep and satisfied, a smug smile smudged across his gritty skin. He is a serpent that slithers between her legs, taking only what he desires. Oh sure, he gives her a place to stay, pays her to buy pretty things, allows her the honour of carrying his name. But he doesn't love her. She knows that very well.

She wouldn't mind so much either, if it weren't for the beatings, because she'd only married him to please the Lord. She didn't love him. And she couldn't love any man, not in the way that counted. There was a passage she read once in the bible, it etched itself into her skull with a type of brail that only she could read, tattooed with an invisible pigment that she would never share with another soul. It wasn't directly about homosexuality or affairs or anything of that sort. It was a passage that claimed that thoughts were just as potent as actions.

She was a sinner. And only God knew it.

The woman's husband was right to say she was a lesbian in bed. She'd been his for 981 days now, and he was still unable to make her quiver in ecstasy. He didn't even come close. She tried to blame it on his technique, the way his tongue got stiff or his hands made her bleed. But she always knew that wasn't the case.

A sleeping man occupies a bed. His spouse occupies a restroom.

This time, as the woman sees her reflection, it stands tall. The body is coloured black and blue and in some places yellow and red, but it keeps its chin up and its eyes gleam in the dull bathroom light. It begins to tear at its long, shiny, perfectly groomed hair with freshly polished nails. In awe, the woman watches as it rummages through her husband's drawer searching for a tool unfamiliar to her hands. Clutching the scissors with eager paws, the being cuts away the golden locks with vigour forming small haystacks on the hard tile floor.

Unimaginable euphoria grabs hold and possesses the

woman's actions. She watches as her twin applies a cold kitchen knife to its face peeling away the hard chrysalis of femininity. It bleeds. It feels the heaviness of blood clogging up atop its eyelids like saturated eaves in early autumn. It smiles. He smiles. A boy. Short haired, make-up finally removed from within the skin. A baby boy covered in his mother's blood. The blood freshly secreted from a mother's womb to protect her child from the outside world.

He has shed his past. His life. Yet, God has not said a word.

CORNU CUTANEUM

Yukiko Takahashi-Lai

The prince's forehead buds like a cherry and the kingdom rejoices. Some say a good fairy kissed his forehead into a twirling horn. Others blame his pale-faced mother for stealing into the woods with berry-stained lips and lying with the unicorn that haunts the blue groves, beastly as it may be. In any case, nobles travel from past the oasis for a glimpse of the boy, and slip coins to the wet nurse for a chance to brush the milky point.

It grows with every passing year, straight as a switch of willow, clustered with seed pearls and stolen rubies. Festering at the base of the shaft, gems swarm each ivory twist like beetles, consuming every growing inch until a gaudy sceptre sprouts from the prince's forehead. Chin raised heavenward, merry little feet prance through the halls until he is told that such movement is unseemly-- until the weight pulls at his neck and the wretched growth taps the floor before him like a cane for the blind. His sour face and sour tongue become petulant, and the enchantment begins to run out. No longer do the people come to receive his blessing, the pilgrimages from over the mountains cease to a trickle. Tributary rivers dry up, and the whispers start again.

Humanity disappoints him, shattering the illusion of enchanting trickery over expectations of gold from straw. Exchanges are made. They prop him up in front of an audience, the godly piece of a human design. Choirs in

the shadows echo his every word, thundering wide sheets of metal with batons. They hide alchemists and charlatans behind his throne in a haze of woodsmoke, melting garnets into wine. A court of tricksters orchestrate music that rises into a crescendo, flashing lightning past the windows and launching doves out of alcoves. The prince develops a cough from all the ash.

By the time of the coronation, favours flow to the delta at his feet, and the whispers have turned into gospel, humming through the palace in symphonies of praise. A price is paid, not for his head, but for what lies on top of it. Mischief incarnate is formed from sleight of hand, and he falls from virtue into an unsavoury avarice that is uniquely human. Too young, too young. A spear for a crown should have been a warning.

The royal family is decimated by unknown causes, and a phantom gores the servants with a lance. New faces appear to fill in the gaps, and the new monarch's slumber has never been deeper, his cheeks never rosier. If the fae would ever show themselves, the time is long gone. Bloody hysteria rushes the streets, and an army of conjurers cork plagues to lob over the walls of old friends. *Bless he who walks the line of fae and man with no fear of either, may he be a diviner of justice for the people who follow him.*

The king grips a fire-heated sword, hissing in pain. He raises red palms to the cheering crowd rallying behind a man who pretends that iron burns him. Ever the thespian, a jay blooms from his breast, beating its wings to the strike of his frantic heart. He swings the blade with the clumsy grace of man, through the throat of the old physician who had dared to hide in the blue groves outside the palace.

You hold no magic, she whispers from the stump of her neck.
Your mother should have let me cut it off.

CONTAMINATOR

Simon Lam

The moon was winking. The sun started shaking. A most abundant tree, heavy with fruit, was unburdening itself as life crawled upon its welcoming bark. We started upon its busy trunk. Tireless ants, thrifting some fallen fruit, welcomed us.

“From your commotion,” one started.

“In your locomotion,” another continued.

“You’ll be wanting to fly soon,” a third finished.

This is true. Our life began when gravity stopped us. We crawled against gravity. Naturally, flying is the next step against defying gravity. This is what our predecessors passed down to us. Flying will be our gift to our children, to our future homes.

The ants dug into the roots of the tree, which they called their humble home.

“You’re not as green as the ones that came before”

“But being yellow stopped no one from flying”

“Go on then. This tree needs you”

Innumerable branches were below as we raced to the top. Our host, the most fruiting tree, held its jewels in suspension among its branches. They looked in fearful awe of us, but our feast was complete a while back. Now is the time for our flight. A spider, steeped in gluttony, stopped us.

“Another caterpillar,” he puckered. “Always find them freshest before they fly”.

It menaced closer to us. We should be scared, but spiders

have no wings. What a pity. The spider weaved innumerable webs, curtaining the treasures of the tree. It called its vain patterns its home.

"I don't need eight eyes to see that yellow caterpillars don't taste as fresh. Go and make your home."

The sun was winking. The moon erupted. Our humble home was made at the tallest branch and we hung next to some treasures of the tree. Not even gravity could find us. Instead, a nest, carved onto a branch, rested underneath us. In that bleeding nest, a single chick was resting. Its hungry eyes watched us as we dangled, helpless and out of reach.

"You'll be a butterfly soon and I will be a bird soon," she said. "This tree separates us but gravity will bind us together."

This is not true. She will have wings that fly, most certainly. The tree does separate us, most definitely. This chick will fly with fruitful feathers.

"It is the way of things"

But gravity will not join us.

The moon's eye closed and the sun's eye opened. We burst open with clear wings and our first feast was the fruitful chick. She did not have wings for gravity, but we do.

After our fill, the next thief could not withstand our yellow stings. From the fat spider emerged a skinny husk. It tasted the same as our brothers, sisters and mothers.

Finally, the queen of the ants entreated with us.

"You, who contaminate us, cannot claim that we did not welcome you to our host, our home."

There is truth in her fiction—that her truth is a fiction. Our host was our home. They came to their host in search of a home. But to them, it was only a host.

The tree stood tall for the first time. Its treasures flew to the ground, free from curtains. Most important of all, the bird-throne disbanded. The tree was now unburdened.

After the last ant perished, we flew away in search of green caterpillars.

THE DAY OF THE DOGS

Christopher Nazaire

The morning I was left home alone for the very first time, I woke up to Sophie who was barking at one of the neighbourhood cats that frequented our lot for the food that mother gave. I called her out and she, panting slightly so that it made her muzzle form a smile, looked at me, wagged her tail and hopped her way back into the house. I kept her inside the house because I knew what she would do—she would chase that cat around the front yard and sometimes she would follow that cat through that little gap underneath our iron gate, so she could go out into the unpaved street and get lost in the neighbourhood, just like what had happened before. Sophie was bought from a puppy peddler we met on a beach on my sixth birthday. Since then, Sophie and I were inseparable, and as we grew a year older, she had been my constant companion in a family where everyone—my mother, sister, and two brothers—was at least ten years older than me. She would wake me up early for school, play Godzilla in my Matchbox city, watch TV with me, guard the house as she would bark at any trespassers, including those cats, and guard me during bedtime as she would wake me up from my nightmares. She was always there for me, and that morning, I had never wanted to be there for her more.

It only took a loud, sharp cry to know that something was going on. It was a strange excitement, a ruckus coming from outside. I ran out of the house and climbed up our tuba-tuba

tree, where I saw, over our high concrete fence, a stream of people gushing down the street. Men shirtless, some gaunt, breathing with their cigarettes, some with bulbous guts hanging out, playing card games at the sari-sari store, a convenience store attached to someone's house where some lay drunk in the high March sun. Some women in their hair rollers, with their spatulas, some winnowing a basket of rice, handwashing their clothes, some women holding a toddler on one hand and breastfeeding a baby on another. It was a confederacy of neighbours whose ordinary day, given to a shared life of poverty, idleness, unemployment, vice, and gossiping, was only shaken by a dog. Our street turned into an arena where everyone was up for a big spectacle, and I, high on the tree where I was hugging one of its bare summer branches, saw an entire neighbourhood descend into madness.

"Buang na iro!" shouted a kid who was following the crowd. The dog was a mongrel. They called it askal in the Philippines, a portmanteau of "asong kalye" which means "a dog of the street." It was a white, smooth-coated breed, with a several deep-brown spots on its body, particularly that big one that shadowed its left eye extending to its ear, and resembled a pit bull, only smaller in build, emaciated, and on many parts wrinkly and scabby. Many called it yagit for its squalid look. It had been the stray on our street for as long as I could remember, but some said it used to belong to a family from a nearby neighbourhood who moved to the mountains to join the revolutionist New People's Army. After being abandoned, it found its way to our neighbourhood because the people at the eatery on our street would give it leftovers, and it stationed itself around the place day and night like it had found a new home.

The night when several prisoners broke out of the jail from a block away, the dog awakened the entire neighbourhood with persistent barking. Through my room's window, I had seen many of the shanties outside lighting up one by

one and men moving swiftly on the street with the police officers searching for the fugitives. My room had lit up too and mama, who wore a frightened look on her face, came into my room, holding dad's old golf club, and locked us in. Sophie, who was a new pup that time, climbed up my bed and onto mama's lap, jumping with excitement. The next day, a story went around that three of those fugitives were re-captured. They said the dog helped in the search, when its incessant barking directed the men and officers to where they were hiding. Yagit was that night's hero, but now many had already forgotten that. It was still the mad dog of our street, the dog whom many liked to shoo away from their doorsteps, from their children, from their own dogs, the dog who stole unattended food, that piece of bread from a little girl's hand, the food from trash—it was the dog whose blood opened my eyes for the first time.

I saw it with lurid clarity, from the tuba-tuba tree, our small village, where my eyes darted through its rusty tin roofs, steaming in the heat, topped with used tires for added weight, and lines of pallid clothes hung to dry, and bayed by the blue mountains a little farther in the east. I saw five men, one armed with a crowbar, another with an improvised catch pole made out of a split bamboo stem and iron wire wound up on one end, and others with pieces of wood, hunting through the riffraff of decrepit shacks searching for the dog. They rummaged on all fours through piles of plywood, debris, sacks, and cartons that made up the bits and pieces of those houses, as well as the stilts which leveled them above the wetland beneath. The mongrel, which was already limping from trying to elude those men, hid under one of those stilt houses which were still plastered heavily with the faces of last year's political candidates. "Naa ra! Naa ra!" shouted one of the men who spotted the dog under one of the houses. The crowd immediately gravitated to where the dog was found and crouched on the ground, bobbing their heads to get a

better glimpse of the dog. The man with the catch pole took his tool and stuck it into the dark and wet recesses of the neighbourhood. Everyone watched intently as they waited for his catch. The man reached for the dog, in a careful and calculated manner as if assailing a sleeping enemy. All of a sudden—he jerked and waggled. A thundering noise came out from underneath as the man played tug with the dog. He had a difficult catch. The dog struggled to pull itself out of the wire that was wound up on its head but the man pulled harder, much harder after every breath, as if gathering his strength. He pulled the dog until its head showed, with teeth bared as it growled and tried to shake itself back in; he pulled the dog until he rendered it feeble, until he could move back one step after another, and drag it into the middle of the street. When the crowd saw the dog pulled out of its hiding, drenched in black mud and dirt, they bellowed profusely, producing a strange cry. Like a howl.

When the dog was caught by the head, one of the men had seized the chance to give it a quick blow on its back. It shrieked and cowered, lowered its rump and tucked its tail between its thighs, hobbling inch by inch, on its crouched legs, struggling to escape. There was no way out. Each time it shook and pulled its head out, the wire tightened on its neck and it met more beatings from the crowd. Chaos festered in that part of the street. It was frightening. I saw the dog bow its head and twist its body into the ground almost ready to succumb to the dust that billowed with the raging feet. But, its eyes, although wide and unsettled, wary of another blow, looked up again as if searching for the light of day that was already dimmed by the maddening crowd. In its eyes, I had never seen so much fear.

The men pressed together towards the dog, creeping in like a cult about to make a sacrifice, their faces crumpled and wet in sweat, their yellow teeth accentuated in their brown faces, gnawing, eager for blood. "I'm grabbing it by the head

and you hit it hard,” the man told the other with the crowbar, who responded with a slight nod, so that he thrashed the mongrel with the hooked end of his tool centering on its head. He thrashed the dog again and again, looking more and more satisfied each time. The dog took every single beating. Every bat, every whip, every kick mangled its face blow after blow after blow so that it could now barely open its eyes, narrowed by swelling and by the blood leaking out of its temple. It weakened and tottered with every thrust placed upon it, it tottered on the weight that it could no longer carry—and kissed the ground. At the sight of the piece of meat lying before them, the crowd fell silent. The man with the crowbar drew himself closer to the mongrel and inspected it.

“Is it still alive?” a woman asked.

“It is still breathing,” one of the men answered.

The man rested his crowbar to the ground like a cane, so that his arms flexed and showed his tattoo of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. He turned his head to the men around him, who also looked at him earnestly in return. Quickly, he made one step back, raised the crowbar over his head, and with a soft grunt hurled the crowbar into the mongrel’s head. Much later, I learned that the dog was killed because it had bitten that man’s daughter.

From the house, I could hear my dog barking. She knew something was wrong. I climbed down from the tree, pulled out some its branches, collected several handful of rocks, and piled them all up to cover the little gap underneath our gate. I ran back to the house where my dog, who was also a mongrel, wagged her tail as she saw me and let off a couple of barks in between. “Sssssshhhh Sophie,” I muttered as I cupped her cheeks like she always wanted, “please don’t ever go out to the street.”

NOT A HETEROSEXUAL MATING THEORY

Jessica Poon

He has my brother's name. My brother's name is Michael, so whatever ounce of remarkability that could possibly have is a moot point.¹ Every twentieth boy in the world is named Michael. Most of them will grow up to be atheists; none of them will be archangels.

So, this guy I work with who I would definitely acknowledge if I ever saw him out of context—only happened once, when he ventured to Walmart to buy sheets—he is not my friend, but our conduct is friendly; that is, when it's not seething with the sort of profanities, often sodomy-related, that Queen Eric relishes in calling sexual tension in a mock whisper.

He shares my brother's name, but not my DNA. It is genetically sound for us to fuck, if we wanted. Whether we want to, is another thing entirely. Or whether only one party does. Or maybe it's another thing, but not another thing entirely. A different, possibly related thing. We're both done toiling, and I find myself saying (as if possessed by a socially fluent ventriloquist) "Don't we live in the same neighborhood? We can walk together." Sex is not entirely in absentia. But then, maybe it never is. Then, realizing what this would mean if he took me up on the offer, I create an easy exit: "But you never just go straight home. You're doing

the pseudo-Casanova thing.” In vocalizing my assumption, correct as it likely is, of his casual promiscuity—nonchalant promiscuity—I implicate myself to be utterly outside of that faction. In other words, if I’m referencing you having sex, then there is no possible way I want to have sex with you. Which normalizes everything—totally. Fucking psychology.

He is a man of many tattoos; really, it’s the first thing you notice. There isn’t the slightest symptom of regret. Still, you don’t have to look very hard to realize that with or without ‘em, this is a man of mostly conventional attractiveness. One girl, a hostess who unfortunately confirms the occupational stereotype of cerebral vacancy, practically squealed at the first look at him, like she’d seen somebody from television: “I just saw all the tattoos!” (Translation: I am turned on by outward emblems of rebellion). I didn’t squeal at him. The expo practically scolded me for not saying hi to him (I was in that phase—still in the phase—of expecting people to introduce themselves to me, and not the other way around, regardless of the actual hierarchy.)

“Not recently,” he says. I realize we are condemned to walk together tonight, for a few minutes at that, alone. A few possible interpretations: 1. Chasing women is no longer interesting. Chasing a woman has become interesting. I am not that woman and therefore safe, or in the depths of unrequited sexual attraction, 2. Chasing women is no longer interesting. The Internet/hanging out with the guys talking about chasing women has become [more] interesting., 3. He spends most of his time alone, reading books, just like me. This last option is the least likely, and therefore the most appealing.

I remember once, at what I want to say was a softball game, I sat beside him for a good deal of time, drunkenly (but eloquently, I thought) complaining about the regrettable state of life, and people, and pretty much everything, and he kept saying “I used to be just like you, but I’m a little older,

and now . . . [some bullshit about going with the flow and being happy, largely incomprehensible to me, at least empirically]." I doubted we were ever alike, and yet I wanted it to be true. And at one point, he said "I like you, you like me, we should get a coffee sometime." Something to that effect. But I could also tell that remark was genuinely nonchalant; that is, he would've said it to any girl. Anyone. And that he wouldn't remember saying it later. And that I would never bring it up, because what drunk person remembers things almost verbatim? In remembrance of partial sobriety; it may as well be in search of lost time; it's the worst.

"We look too much alike," he says, in reference to our apparel, and not our actual physiognomies. I am inclined to point out my clothing is far more expensive, but he has already pointed this out, with what I like to think was affectionate snideness. We are dressed to kill, and I only mean that slightly figuratively, for our outfits are designed to weather the wind, to be practical in light of homicide, or espionage. "Leather buddies," he adds, a phrase that sounds more sexual than platonic. "Mistress of Poon." I sigh. The guys at work are convinced that I'm "into" some kind of dominatrix thing, which in its demented way, is kind of flattering. I think the truth would disappoint them, though I don't know what the truth is; who does? I sometimes wonder if I should, as a non sequitur perhaps, say something like "But I'm actually quite fond of missionary," to see how their jaws would descend at the revelatory dullness. (Whether that's true is irrelevant. Any utterance is almost entirely about the reaction you are trying to garner. Who cares about intentions when there are reactions to contend with? Does a comedian try to dazzle you with their philosophy? No! They might, incidentally, but they just want you to fucking laugh.)

He asks who I live with, and I admit that "I live with the people that made me." This has become my de facto way of confessing that I cannot afford a penthouse in Yaletown, or a penthouse anywhere, my way of saying I am not a real adult;

my parents are still alive, and yes, I live with them. It is also my way of sparing people from hearing me refer to my parents as the “Mominator and the Sperminator”; for some reason, people find that revolting.

“You mean, Mommy and Daddy? Well, this explains the Burberry money.”

“I pay for my own tuition,” I say, somewhat lamely. It’s true, but comparatively marginal. But even if I’m some entitled brat with boundless entitlement, I’m not a rich entitled brat. I mean, I wear a hairnet in my current job; I can’t be.

At some point, the inevitable inquiry comes when two people who see each other all the time, but don’t really know much about each other outside of context, arises in some permutation or bastardization, that all comes down to what I want to be doing, not for a pay cheque, but for some non-religious, spiritual purpose that still nevertheless collates with pay cheques, only in the form of a salary, and not wages: what are you going to do with your future degree that you still don’t have, once you have it? Not necessarily in those words.

At which point, inevitably somebody needs to talk about how superfluous, or at least, not monetarily useful a degree is. People with degrees engage in this sort of dialogue all the time; it’s practically mandatory. He called his fifth-grade teacher a bitch and dropped out of high school. None of this is surprising. I mean, the man can grill steaks and seduce women and clearly, withstand agony for the sake of art.

“I mean, what are you going to do with your degree in lesbian dance theory? Be the best barista at Starbucks?” he says. I can’t help but feel he’s said it before.

Generalized ‘you.’ Still, I feel the need to defend this person with a degree in lesbian dance theory, which sounds so ludicrous that I know it must be real. “That was an uncreative joke, and you know it,” I say.

He laughs. I interpret this as: he knows I am right, at least about that.

Does anyone care about personal enlightenment anymore? Do I, for that matter? I guess what I mean by personal enlightenment, removed from its commodified context (if that's even possible), is learning because you're genuinely interested in whatever it is you're learning about. Not because you anticipate that being an architect will make you rich, but because you fucking love cement, and the sheer possibilities (or whatever).

What are you going to do? It sounds like I'm in a predicament when people ask that. What am I going to do? Sometimes, people will be so charitable as to add a preposition before a pronoun: What are you going to do with that? The 'that', being an amorphous entity of uselessness, nevertheless snacking from your fridge at all hours, and asking challenging questions of no apparently definitive answer, let alone non-philosophical use.

"So what, are you going to write the great American novel?" he asks, after I tell him the damnable, secular truth: I want to be paid to write things.

"Yes," I say, with discernibly false certainty.

"And what's it about?" I can't help but feel like this is like expecting somebody's hobbies to tell you everything about who they are. If I say a story is about love, I have simultaneously broadened and specified it into an abyss of everything and nothing. To say a story is about love is akin to saying nothing at all. I might as well say it's about people. "Complicated relationships about people," I eventually muster. Already, I imagine how repulsed I would be were someone to crudely describe their quasi great American novel as such. Then again, seldom am I a person I would admire, if I weren't me, but a stranger. And how successfully can one imagine themselves as a stranger, anyway?

I segue that school is a way to delay adulthood. Later, I will say that nobody is an adult until both their parents die (id est, orphans have a head start), which is something I

really do believe, or have said enough to so many different people that I have convinced myself, which amounts to the same thing. I blame Michel Houellebecq. In any case, it's the easiest way to dismiss the legally constitutive adulthood of most ostensible adults.

"That's pretty dark," he says. His smile makes me wish it were sold in drugstores; something I could buy and therefore control, to possess at will; that doesn't sound right, and maybe it shouldn't. In other, fewer words, it's nice to make someone smile. Especially if they're attractive. I shrug, because I'm disinclined to either agree (to agree would mean that I am not dark, like not trusting a person who says "Trust me") or disagree (she doth protest too much).

We have to part, and it feels like the conversation isn't over. Were we to start it again, it would have to be in medias res. But probably, this conversation will have to end in the middle. It won't be continued. At work, he'll be rude and dismissive of me in a way that indicates that he does like me, albeit not like that, and I will be just as rude back, somebody will say "Ooh" because a woman who swears is always sassy or feisty. I can't remember the last time he called me by my first name; surely, it must've happened once or twice. More importantly, we won't have sex. But the possibility that we might, simply because we could, is always there. Lingers.

I do that thing to his knee where you spread your fingers out in a way that is meant to tickle, or stimulate. "It's like one eighth of an orgasm," people liked to say in elementary school, long before they should know what orgasms even were. I doubt it's an eighth of an orgasm, but it's suggestive, or a suggestion: let's do this again sometime.

THE LITTLE MONSTER

Jan Tang

It went like this. I was fourteen years old in June 2006, enduring the remaining days of the school year. I've always been a notorious list-maker and was scribbling a list of summer to-dos in my journal—hobbies to try, books to read, goals to achieve. It was then my mom came into the room and announced, "We're going to Hong Kong for the whole summer!"

Now, I'm also a dedicated editor of lists but going to Hong Kong was a complete revision, an act I was unaccustomed to and unprepared for. While I could appreciate the dynamic blend of glamour and grit that makes Hong Kong unique, summer in the Far East was not for me, the faint-hearted Vancouverite.

For those reasons, I listed my discontent in visiting the city. "But your grandma," began my mom. "It's been awhile since she's seen you."

That night, I called the woman herself.

"Sweat," I said. "Sweat everywhere. That one July I was in Hong Kong, I was ten or something. The moment I stepped outside—boom, fountain. You gotta talk mom out of this."

There was a gentle laugh across the line. "Wouldn't it be nice to go on vacation though?" she asked. "You get to try all sorts of food in Hong Kong. What did you eat for dinner by the way?"

"Spaghetti and meatballs." I continued my debate.

Another gentle laugh. "Don't worry, my little monster. Once you get your first job and save up, you can go wherever

you like. Do you remember how you got that nickname by the way—the little monster?”

“Yeah, I do. I used to make Drew cry a lot when he was a toddler by making monster noises and roaring like a weirdo.”

“That’s right. You loved making your brother cry. You found it funny, an interesting child you were. Now, tell me how your day went. What did you eat for dinner?”

“Spaghetti and meatballs,” I said, not thinking much about it at the time.

In the summer of 2016, after three months of backpacking throughout the Asia-Pacific region, my journey was finalized in Hong Kong. I was down to the stringiest of my shoe-string budget and was free-loading off my aunt (in exchange for chores). As I lathered myself with sunscreen, my aunt dropped off a bag of lunch in front of me.

“Make sure the congee isn’t too hot when you feed her,” she said. “Maybe test it out by sipping it. You might also frighten her at first because she thinks you’re a stranger. Well, she thinks everyone’s a stranger at this point. Talk to her slowly and calmly.”

Scrambling for my transit pass and wallet, I asked, “What else do I need to know?”

My aunt sighed and stroked my hair. “That your grandma may not be herself anymore but she once loved you. Very much. She’d be so proud to know how hard you worked to save up. She would’ve loved to hear all about it.” She sighed again. “She really would.”

I decided to do the forty minute walk to To Kwa Wan, the neighbourhood where the nursing home was located. The heat was intense, but I found ways to tolerate it. I liked cities, for one thing. I suppose after time spent majoring in Geography, I was bound to see streets as veins that contributed to the circulation of an urban body. The fragrance of street

food, the sounds of creative Cantonese swearing. Sights of such civic life were effective distractions.

Another reason to walk was delaying time to collect my thoughts before arriving in To Kwa Wan.

Should there be any curiosity as to whether or not I ended up going to Hong Kong back in 2006, I did. The first signs of my grandma's dementia had shown up. It started off subtle, the same questions asked every two hours or so. What did you do today? Have you eaten dinner yet? Are you dating anyone? I tried my best to remain in character, answering each question with enthusiasm as if it were the first time. Just walked around and explored the city. Yes, I tried that café you recommended. Not dating anyone yet, maybe one day.

Inevitably, one gets sloppy. Each conversation gave something away—answering questions too quickly, the bored facial expressions. She'd beam at whatever bullshit you spewed as long as your bullshit was undetectable. But when she does pick up the bread crumbs, she'd look so sad after realizing how repetitive she's become. I think that's what hurts me the most in return, seeing an old woman sad. Her especially. Not just because she was my grandma but also because she reminded me of a child. Every time I caught the elderly woman gazing out the window, there was a wide-eyed innocence to her like she was looking for some adventure out there. Maybe that's why she loved listening to people's stories.

I always wondered if those window gazes ever led her to think what she'd succumb to. As time went on, new questions piled on top of old ones with bizarre greetings. "Have you eaten dinner yet? And what was your name again?" she once asked.

"I'm your granddaughter," I informed. To which she paused for a moment before giving a friendly smile and said, "I see. Please, feel free to drop by my place anytime!"

Once I arrived at the nursing home, I was taken to her room. The lack of space in Hong Kong called for rooms being the size of closets, the beds fitting at exact dimensions.

There were a few items from her home, like family portraits and clothes. I placed the lunch bag on the shelf.

"Hi Grandma," I said. "Long time no see. I brought congee for you."

She'd lost so much weight. The lines of her ribs were visible under her shirt, her cheekbones sunk into her face. She stared at me.

I open the canister. "Smell that? Auntie made it for you."

She began whimpering, looking at me with frightened eyes. I stood there, awkwardly patting her. I haven't been around enough crying old people to know what the protocol was.

A nurse walked by and offered to help feed her. I left the two women in the room and headed to the lounge, studying the different elderly folks going on with their day. Several were chatting at a table, two were competing at checkers, one was reading the newspaper. I took out my travel journal to document my observations, from the walk to To Kwa Wan to my presence at the nursing home. But I began re-reading my entries instead, along with my list of crossed out and newly added itineraries.

It was absurd, laughable even. Here I was, trying to preserve a bunch of youth chronicles for 'when I'm old and grey,' and there's a disease out there who's also a traveler. Going back and forth through time. Crossing out its own itinerary of memories and creating an alternate universe. Because if there were such things as alternate universes, it was here. In my grandma's demented mind. Old people often get asked to think back on their biggest regrets in life. My question is, as I sat in a room with a population inching closer to mortality, where do you wanna go?

"She's fed now," said the nurse, coming out to the lounge. "She usually takes a nap around this time though, but you can go in and catch up."

I thanked her and entered the room. She was looking blankly at the ceiling. I didn't say much, just tidied up her

space as I waited for her to fall asleep. Dusting off some of the family portraits, I came across a picture of my brother and I as kids.

"Look," I said, waving the picture in front her. "You remember these little rascals?"

She said nothing, continuing to look up.

I held her hand but barely, mindful of her fragile fingers.

"Hey Grandma," I said. "It's me, the little monster."

There was a small squeeze of my hand. She closed her eyes and smiled.

CHATTERBOX

Yukiko Takahashi-Lai

At birth, I filled my lungs and began to scream. I haven't been silent since. Despite the best efforts of the people around me, I've only succeeded in turning my stream of consciousness into an anxiety disorder. It makes sense though, that forcefully jamming words into my vocabulary would cause some of them to vomit out at inopportune moments. Being chatty has its benefits. I have never needed to practice for class presentations, and I very easily make friends with shy people who are too nervous to fill the silence or too stunned to make a break for it. All I need is a single prompt, a tilt of the head to feign attention and my lips run free as they try to keep up with my tongue. As I grew older, it became apparent that this kind of ability was something that could be used for good [read: accolade]. Both hands gripping the steering wheel, I tore through paragraphs at public speaking events, screaming as my vehicle launched into the craggy ravine of first place. From the wreckage I raised my fists victorious, beleaguered with a charming pageantry that always seems to work. Because I have so much to say with such little preparation, people have told me that I seem ridiculously confident, and far too intimidating to interrupt. However, like a pig smacking face-first into a glass door, I smacked into a glass door (of anxiety).

Little things pile up, little moments in your life where someone said just the wrong thing. It isn't until you look back

at the steaming pile of garbage that your mental health has become that you care to say hey maybe that's why I act like this. I began to notice that people were laughing when I spoke, not because they were interested in my stories but because I had become funny to watch—like a clown beating his teeth out with a hammer. My incessant stream of consciousness had made people leave classrooms in frustration, had made teachers slam their doors shut as I walked down the halls. I don't blame them, it can be very difficult to work with high levels of noise, and they had no loyalties to my feelings. I understood what was happening, and though my ego was bruised, I surged forward. It didn't start to hurt until my friends said, maybe you should be a little quieter. It wasn't until the person I loved started to cut me off mid-sentence to say I get the point, I'm not stupid.

I never said you were stupid, love.

Tackling my words was like trying to catch a thunderstorm in a pillowcase so you could drown it underwater and leave its corpse in the river. Bubbling adjectives and expletives frothing into apologies were too much to bear, and as I sat on the riverbank with Chatterbox, it was me who apologized. Talking makes me so happy, and I spent years apologizing for speaking, hating myself at night as I remembered moments where I'd spoken too much. It's a heavy burden to be told that your words aren't important. To me, my voice became a car alarm going off in the suburbs, a bitter opera singer trying to prove herself. I was an annoyance, something to be avoided at all costs, lest you fall into a trap of hey did I ever tell you about the time I—I came to regret every breath that made a noise, and felt deathly guilty when I talked to my friends. I still spoke the same amount, unfortunately. Speaking aloud was so much a part of my personality that I would have had to lop off an arm in comparison. (Have you ever felt guilty for having arms?)

I learned tricks. I read a lot, thinking that if I could just push fancier words into my sentences I would sound smarter, and therefore my words would matter. I learned to speak with a lower register, pulling my words into my chest and rolling each phrase across my tongue to taste the serif before I spat it out. It worked. When I want to, I can play at charming, delightfully insightful, deliciously philosophical. People who first meet me think I'm extremely intelligent, that I'm Socrates reborn except less white and less Greek. I learned to manipulate my conversations, but not well enough. The moment I got comfortable my tone would rise, and chickadees chattered in the back of my throat, flying out into a swarm. This wasn't so bad. If I was comfortable, it meant that I trusted people to accept that aspect of my personality. By letting my guard down, it was clear that I felt safe talking to them.

My best friend says I can be too trusting.

My speech is a staccato rhythm. Bright, loud, quick, for a moment. Then I fall into a corpselike quiet that causes people to stand aghast in confusion. The words return, filling the void of conversation with hopes that people will like me. With those I love, I can alternate between excited soliloquy and a loving hush, but with new people the meter is thrown off and I'm left to stutter through the minutes with no idea how to time my sentences. I became a marvelous conversationalist, not to be social, but out of fear of rejection. Sometimes I'll sit in a group, not talking but not listening either. I stare into space and someone asks me where are you right now?

What are you thinking?

I escape into my head when I need to be heard. My skull brims with thoughts that run in circles until they collapse from exhaustion. I have so much to say, and when I write, my words flee like it's prison break, sprinting through the tall grass with no grace whatsoever. I pursue them with Seuss-esque humour, slapping butterfly nets over them and yanking

them into place. I shake with anticipation for in-class essays, for take-home exams, because when given the space to be heard, I slobber over every second like the greedy child I am. Writing is like sleeping. It comes so naturally to me that I fall into writing as I fall into slumber: like a brick being shot through a window. Though there is no real substitution for speaking aloud, the margarine of conversation is found on paper. An outlet that will always listen, the steadfast neutrality of a computer screen has slowly become a comfort. When I write, it's a bare-knuckle brawl, and when the dust settles it reveals a stack of bombast-ridden Word Docs and my shit-eating grin. I've unironically used the word "ameliorate" enough times to be embarrassing, and I adore every second of it.

I'm growing. I'm sure of that. I've cut down on the ornamentation in my daily speech, and I'm finding a medium where I say what I need and think critically about my dictation. My setbacks are plenty but they always are in times like these. I'm thankful for my friends. I'm thankful for the people who love me. My memories are filled with bright points, walking down the street at night, talking so fast I'm losing breath, panting, heaving, stopping to fill my lungs again as I burst into laughter. I don't hurt anyone by talking, I know that now. All the people who silence me or make me feel like I don't deserve to speak are dealing with their own problems. I can't be angry at them, but I can tell myself that they're wrong. I am clearing the remnants of my poor self-esteem. I talk about my feelings to those who ask. I go to sleep humming to myself because the silence doesn't scare me anymore, it fascinates me.

I am fascinating.

I am Chatterbox. It is very nice to meet you.

THE DIGGER AND HIS GOD

Wyatt Connelly

The Digger stood at the end of all things
 And refused to let go.
 Small ankles buried in ash, a grey snowfall stretching into forever
 The sky had gone, there was no light even from stars, but the Digger made do
 With an old battery-powered lantern hanging from a snapped steel pole.
 The only sound was the shovel's metallic crunch-hoist-slide
 And his soft voice, humming half-remembered songs.
 He was young, and the digging tired him
 But he could do little else.

Mounds like small hills surrounded the Digger, along with treasures
 A partly-deflated car tire, for sitting
 A box-cutter, cruelly shortened by use
 A framed photo of an unknown girl in a park, with the glass fractured
 (Though this he did not look at often, it hurt his chest)
 And a refrigerator door; its smoothness comforting.
 He ate cold canned food, torn messily open and
 Drank dusty bottles of Dasani and Aquafina, and once, Fiji, artist-made
 But all tasted the same
 Much to his disappointment.

He froze
 The shovel had struck something.
 It was not the usual clang, crackle, or thunk
 Whatever he struck had just yelped.
 With care, he scooped away the surrounding residue
 To reveal
 An eye.
 Bright green, it winked.
 The Digger did not know whether to run, or keep digging
 But without his identity
 He would be nothing
 So, he dug.

First he released the figure's arms and torso
From their premature burial
The head was left for last
He did not want a head talking to him as he worked.
Soon the figure could free herself, ash streaming
Hissing as if ordering silence
She looked like someone hung baggy clothes
On a nuclear shadow
Coughing, wiping dust and blood from face and hair
Guilty, the Digger offered water, in recompense
Plastic cracked, tore, its top half soaring away
The silence broken by crinkling and desperate swallows.

"Thanks, kid," she said, her voice like a radio with a bad signal
She tried to rise, stumbled, fell, a newborn deer but
Older, angrier. Giving up for now, she sighed
"Well, this is some mess."
The Digger nodded.
"I was a god, you know."
The Digger nodded. He knew.
"I was once many, now I'm only one."
The Digger shrugged, pointed to himself.
The god's laughter was coarse as the ash that had covered her
But the Digger did not often hear laughter, so it was welcome still.

The god again tried to stand
And this time the Digger was there to offer a shoulder and a bandage.
She flashed jagged teeth, fixed the gift to her head
"So. Want to help fix it?"
The Digger was already gathering his things
Placing his shovel on his shoulder like an old miner
Offering the god his slapdash lamppost
She raised it, as insignificant as a candle in the deep of space
And cried "LET THERE BE LIGHT!"
But all she did was make the Digger smile.
"Guess it's not that easy, huh?"
Oh well. The hard path makes better stories"
The Digger shrugged, and started to walk.
In his digging, he lived off the past
The future was only the next old can of sick-sweet peaches
But the god had taken him by the hair, pulled him out of the dirt
Showed him how it stretched out before him in vast multitudes
And for that, she had his faith.

RAISING THE NEW WORLD

Jeremy Chu

He walks past the night's flotsam
of ragged yellow men, a far cry from three months
decay below the damp musculature
of a sailing vessel and farther still
from the milk skin of his wife,

where he may only feel her
in light breaks through the walls of ships,
the moon and its great weeping face
burned away the dark wax sky
until it too,
understood loss.

This ghetto night will crowd the senses
until the moon is forgotten.
Opium bakes the air, abuses the silence
where crickets fear to sing.
Failing men bandage loose meat hanging
from their fingers under bonfire light.

In the morning, he'll sift for
his soul's worth of gold.
In the morning, he'll lay
a way back home.

VANCOUVER SPECIAL

Duncan Parizeau

I had to get physical with him
because he was so good with his mouth—
like a Vancouver Special.
I felt like I was hallucinating.
It's the kinda thing my mom would find sexy.

PAPER

Lucas Walkowicz

A low hanging tree—
Its bark torn apart
By men

Tossing in my
wings, showing
breath in a
pump
I hang for the
of the Florida
I close my eyes
cross myself,
and imagine from

Golden clouds
swaying in the
air—the thumping
slows to a muffled
beat. Visions of the
former, leading to the
tawny beauty, under
soul and strength.

I take a deep breath, pulling from
wind over the Rockies
into my lungs and
for one humble moment
my prayer is answered
and my worries cease

OVER THE ROCKIES

Duncan Parizeau

One hundred and
forty-three kilometres north
of Saskatoon, exists a place
where the horizon
is an open book.

The locals claim that
this is where God
began to plane the Prairies
flat, with colossal macro-crystalline
graders, until the earth was
compact and fertile.

The only obstructions
that rise above the peaks
of grain shocks, are silos.
Each, a small town's personal
Tower of Babel, where spring
wheat, barley, and canola
mingle, forming the common currency
of rural, Western Canada.

Sixteen hours and
two provinces west, the people
don't appreciate their
geological gifts.
Quartz behemoths
with rain-capped summits—
man-made
monuments to hubris—
obscure the snowy peaks

and verdant trails I was
promised when I set
out for the coast.

I can't see
the mountains
from where I live.
Each day, a new structure

rises, restricting my view
to the latticework
of concrete & glass
that will one day be my tomb;
my heart takes
refuge in my throat.

Thumping in my
windpipe, slowing each
breath to a
gasp.
I long for the dry, open air
of the Plains.
I close my eyes,
cross myself,
and imagine Prairie wheat.

Golden shocks
swaying in the cool, autumn
air—the thumping
slows to a measured
beat. Visions of the resolute
farmer, tending to his precious,
tawny bounty, comforts my
soul and strengthens my resolve.

I take a deep, concentrated
breath, pulling Prairie
wind over the Rockies,
into my lungs and
for one humble moment,
my prayer is answered
and my worries cease.

RATTENKÖNIG

Yukiko Takahashi-Lai

A tangle of tails
Little feet
Scrabbling in different directions
Raking their nails along the insides of my heart
Trying so desperately to get free
That they don't notice
How my chest is seizing.

I wish
They would stop for just

A moment.

They pull
Sealing their fate with
Tighter knots
Blood constricted
Hearts giving out
Perfect corpses wrapped in their own bows.

How can I keep carrying this heartache
Cradling rats
Too foolish to untangle themselves
Too foolish to choose someone with enough energy to pull apart their bodies.

