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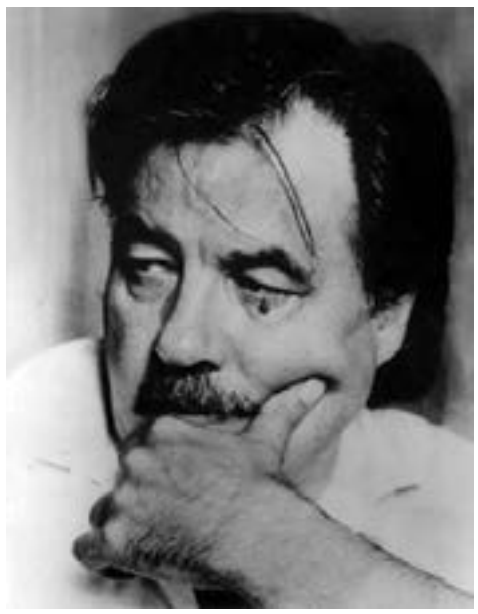
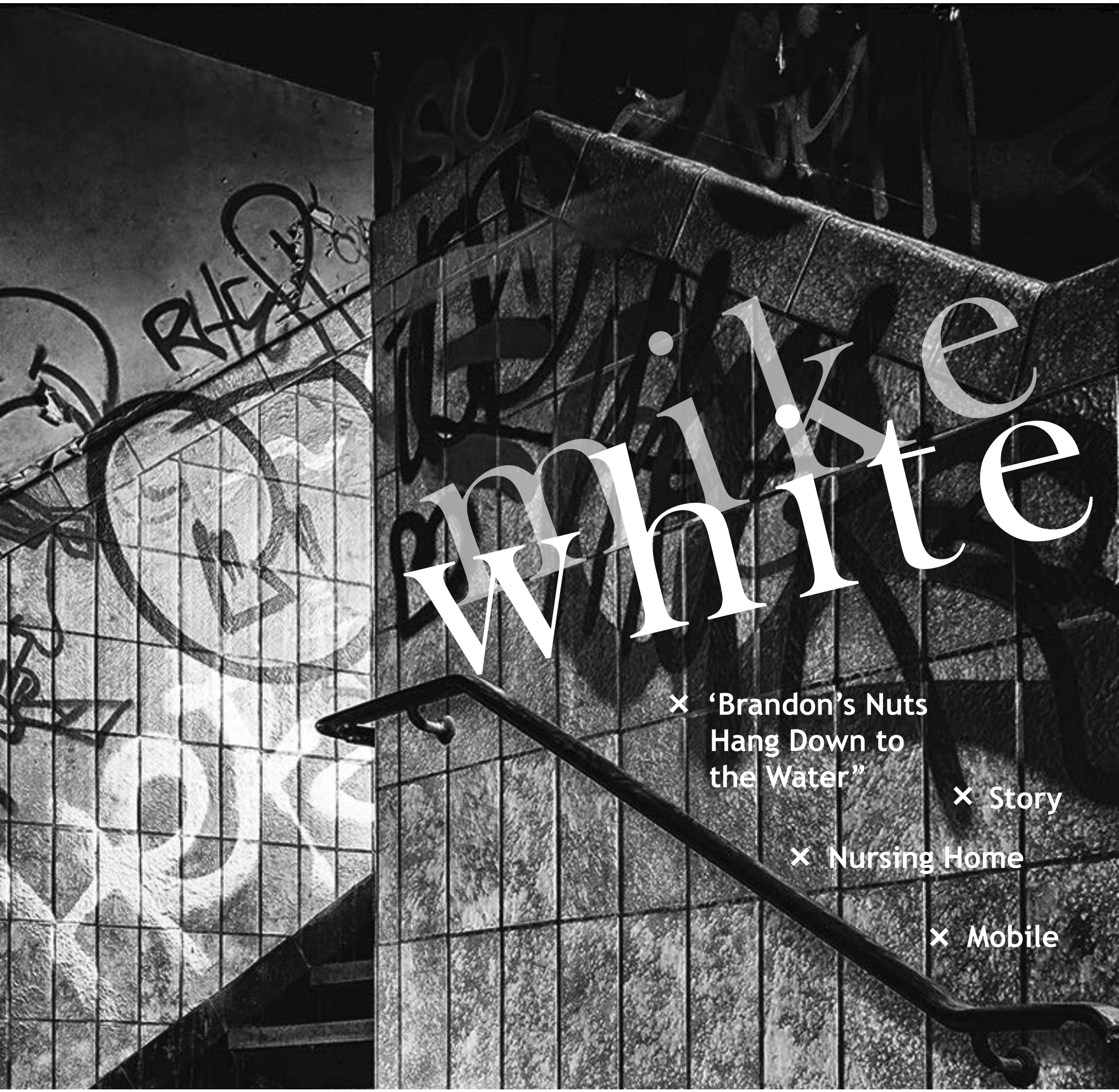
We take our name from Ryga, a political writer, to honour his commitment to his art and to his world. His legacy is this: he was a human living in a community and that community was living in a nation, that nation in a world. He wrote without nostalgia about the world that lived around him. He believed the artist had a responsibility to write counternarratives, to treat the marginalized among us fairly, to challenge the formal boundaries of his art without losing the humanity of the characters that drive it. These characters live and move according to a complex, tentative political agreement that must not be taken as natural, but must be interrogated in every way.

—Sean Johnston, Editor

Ryga gratefully acknowledges the generous gift of Anne and Ted Chudyk, which has enabled us to continue publishing the important work of literary artists. We dedicate this issue to Ted Chudyk's memory.



George Ryga (1931-87) is the author of Canada's best known English-language play, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, first produced in 1967. He was one of Canada's most prolific authors—he maintained a taxing work program as a short story writer, novelist, radio and television dramatist, poet and film scenarist, not to mention ventures into the world of ballet and opera. In a period of 14 years he produced 190 plays, two cantatas, five screenplays, two long-playing albums, three novels, and a book of poetry, as well as a considerable body of unpublished and unproduced work.


white
like
× ‘Brandon’s Nuts Hang Down to the Water”
× Story
× Nursing Home
× Mobile

"BRANDON'S NUTS HANG DOWN TO THE WATER"

In the Reno bus station,
in the stall furthest
from the yogic exertions
of a man washing his feet
in the sink,
I give myself over
to thinking about Brandon,

to wondering who needed him
enough to leave this tribute
carved as much as written
in dark red ink
above the toilet paper dispenser.

I read into things.
Like the notice scotch-taped
to the ticket window
warning of pickpockets,
which has me half-hiding here,
examining for comparison's sake
my own considerably
less elastic scrotum.

Or that grainy photo
(the only one that could be found?)
of the little girl
with the goofy gap-toothed smile,

last seen…
the year before my son was born.

Shit.

Shit.

Where does it go?

It just disappears, forever,
swirled into a cosmic vortex and
sucked down a gleaming bowl, a loss

which every put-upon toddler knows
to be a basic violation of personhood.

How very different in the days
of the outhouse: a *house*,
say what you will, in its own right,
consisting of a wagonload
of warped and mismatched boards,
a splintery seat and shallow pit;

a place to sit and think and watch
the spiders spin their eloquent webs,
and listen at a settled distance
to the human weather inside.

No spiders here;
just a pencil-drawn swastika
that, if I squint, almost looks the part.
It's small, hardly there, as if
offered in the spirit
of a tentative suggestion.

And the others, who've left
no trace of themselves…

The man with pink lipstick
on his wilted penis
and the one
who sweats through his shirt
waiting for a shoe
to push the promised bag of powder
from the adjoining stall.

And the ones on their knees,
fishing with a finger
for a quarter, a key, a ring,
a missing tooth…

Brandon, always you find us
out, with pants down
around our ankles, washed up
on some strange shore, searching

like Crusoe
for a coin-operated box

that will dispense
four varieties of condoms, only

tonight there's a strip of duct tape
across the money slot, and a sign
that reads No More Sorry.

By the waters of Babylon,
the Israelites, exiles, captives
in a hostile land,
hung their harps from willows
and refused to play.

I can all but see
those abandoned harps now, still
bending the branches
above the darkened river, maybe
swaying slightly in the breeze,
and yielding, in spite of everything,
a soft soulful music.

In spite of everything, Brandon,
you are here, in the bowels
of the human town,

confessor and custodian
of our shared
privacies, our comings
and goings, you

more-than hear, you overhear
the chronic sigh, the stifled sob,
the air guitar of prayer,

because you are, Brandon, and have always been,
a talisman to bring the rain
and swell the corn,

a clay vessel to fill
with bear's blood, and spill with chanted rites
upon the belly of a newlywed.

As a rule, nothing grows in Reno—

but in the rich permissive shadows
of your hanging garden,
this toilet water becomes
the reflective surface
of a koi pond
into which a moon rises
and a poet from his hut
rises to write it down.

Now I can't help seeing you
in the balled fists of a scared child
unclenching in sleep,

and now
in the extravagant breasts
of an old woman
laughing up and down in the mirror.

There's no keeping your story
straight, Brandon,

you split the seams,

male and female both, singing
the body eccentric,

singing

no more sorry,
no more sorry.

Meanwhile the man at the sink is finished.
I can see his clean bare feet.
There is no other place for him.
He walks around in his clean bare feet,
on tiptoe, making as little noise as an angel,
as little noise as can be.

STORY

Of the finger caught
beneath the skate blade
we must never speak.

It was not my fault.
It was not my finger.

It was never found.
It never happened.
It was lying

in the goal mouth.

NURSING HOME

The stars, too, are gassy
and immoveable.

Hard inscrutable suns
blazing for another world,

they leak light,
and are

seen to
as time allows,

night after night after night.

MOBILE

A racist,
she loves birds,

assigns them
bright sweet names

from a chair
by the window,

forgets…

after lunch
the staff knows

to fetch her
on the double

a thick wad
of napkins

out of which
with trembling hands

she fashions
birds, birds

the orderly
hangs for her,

a small darkish
figure who,

as shadows
fall and night grows

around the chair
by the window,

sweeps up.

Mike White is a poet and faculty member at the University of Utah. His first collection of poems, *How to Make a Bird with Two Hands* (Word Works 2012), was awarded the Washington Prize. Individual poems have appeared in journals including *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *The New Republic*, *The Threepenny Review*, T*he Antioch Review*, *The Iowa Review*, *Field*, *Rattle*, and *Witness*. His work has also been featured on *Poetry Daily* and *Verse Daily*.

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FLY

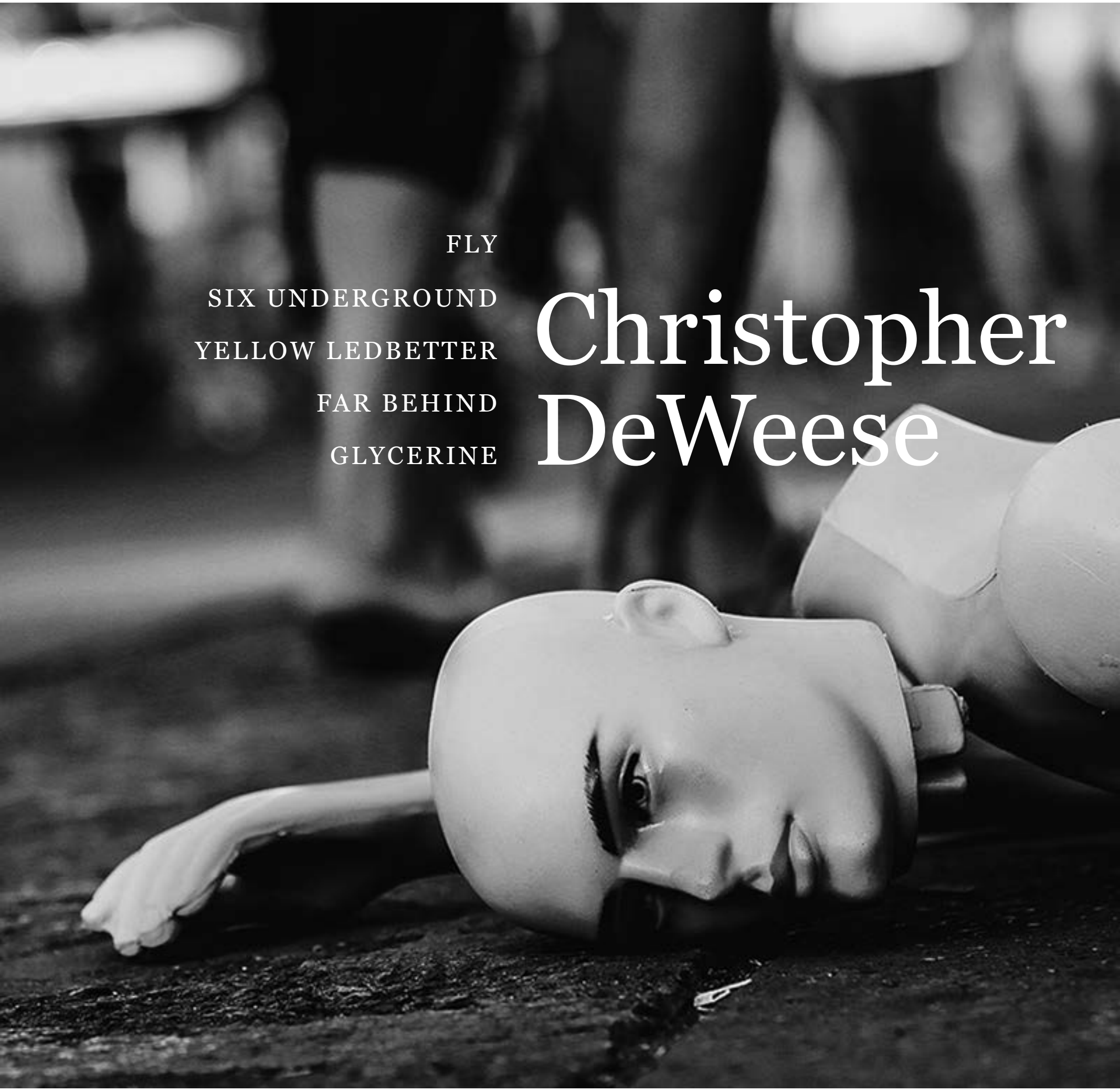
SIX UNDERGROUND

YELLOW LEDBETTER

FAR BEHIND

GLYCERINE

Christopher DeWeese



FLY

Every morning
Someone's playing Halo in bed

35 years old
And I'm not so great

I want to cash checks
And just get higher

In malls around the world
I have known haters

When they put their arms around me
I just want to cry

SIX UNDERGROUND

I've got a head full of mountains
I can't talk about

I swim to the sound
Of beaches

A head full of brownstones
Falls down on my arm

Don't eat me out
While I'm talking

I've got a head full of clouds
And I'm running late

YELLOW LEDBETTER

On the feeling
Of a voice of feathers

I came to say
I want to be there again

In the rust of a choice
I can't make while I'm flexing

I never asked
For this mountain

Don't know if I'm a fox hunt
Or a man

FAR BEHIND

Someone said my wife was sad
Maybe it was her eyes

Friends act strange
When you're feeling flustered

They watch you stutter
They ask about your weight

When Sunday comes
Everyone's a census

They push you down
They count your carbs all night

GLYCERINE

I had bad skin
And a head of women

Ate a lunch of nothing
And tried to be thin

My days weren't fine
My posse wasn't real

I should have changed
What I wanted

Should have just eaten chocolate
And voted for Bill

Christopher DeWeese is the author of *The Black Forest* (Octopus Books, 2012). His poems have appeared in *Boston Review*, *jubilat*, and *Tin House*. He teaches at Smith College.

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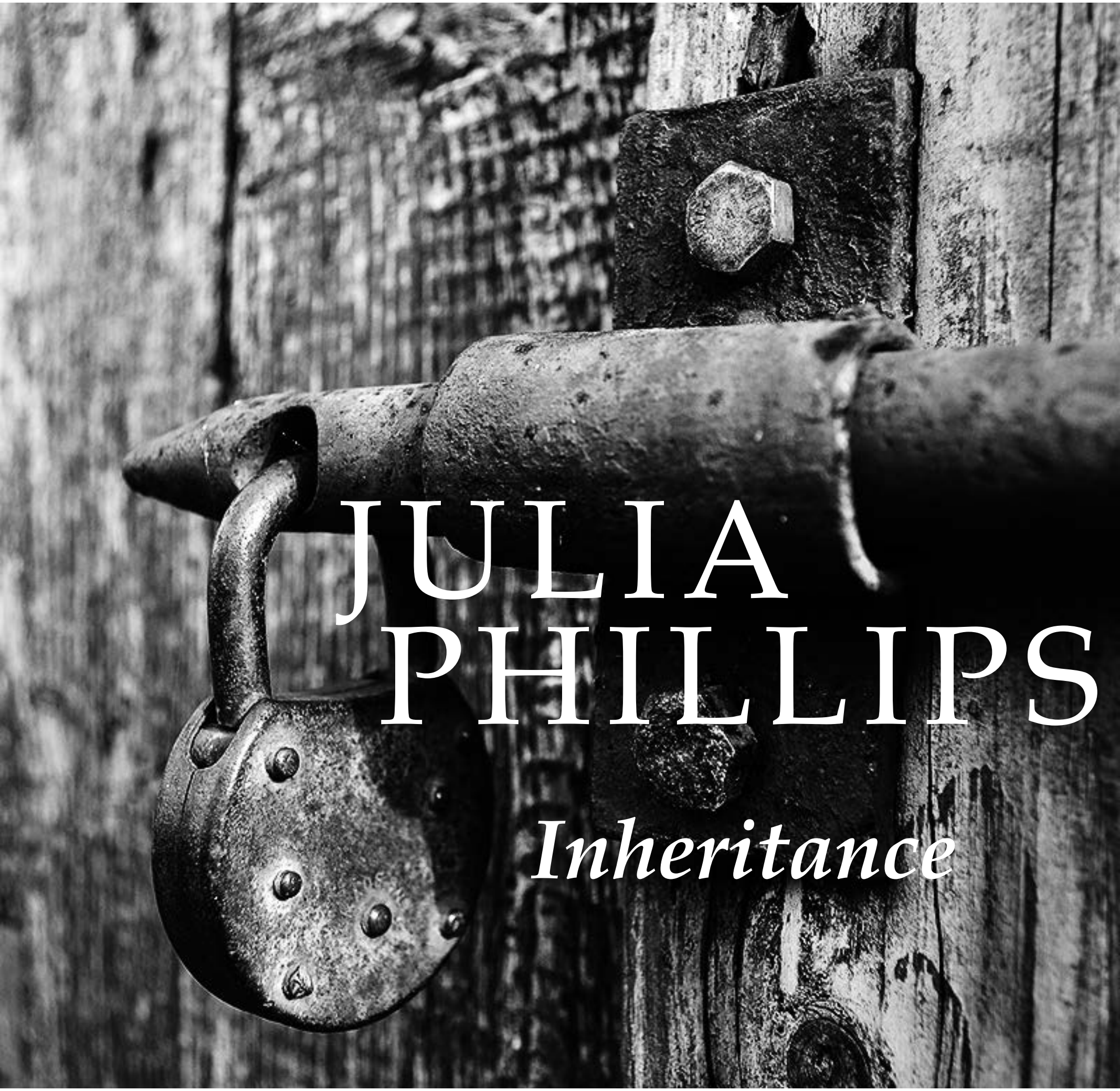

JULIA PHILLIPS

Inheritance

home

IN INTERVIEWS, YEVGENI SAID he had a hundred children: Lyosha, the seven books, the forty-nine orphans already held by the community, and all the ones waiting to be found, the children who had not yet been interviewed, fed, finally loved as only he could teach them to be loved. The petite brunette sent yesterday as a special correspondent from the State News Channel had tucked her hair behind her ear at this answer and looked over the community to avoid meeting his eyes. He didn't mind her turning away; he was proud of the view. The circular homes, painted in primary colors, and their broomlike roofs, the narrow paths of hexagonal paving stones, the surrounding grasses and slight hills already thickened with ice clumps and early snow. At the edge of their land stood the church, dark and wooly, lined with gold frames and wax drippings, that he built with the other fathers and his own broad hands. "When we came here," he said, "there was nothing—just an idea I had and the wood we salvaged from the abandoned government projects in Kostoma. The Soviets fell but we rose." He used this line almost every time.

"And how long before you started taking the orphans in?" she had asked, still looking over the stiffened grass.

"Within a year," he said, "I found three." She was recording this for a segment on a mentoring program to be established in Moscow. "It took another couple of years before officials started to recognize the orphan problem and donations began in earnest. We really expanded then. I wrote about it in my second book—have you read my books?"

"The first few," she said, "yes."

Pointing, he directed her eyes toward the church. "We bussed a priest in to consecrate the site in '94," he said. "Are you a believer?" She looked young enough to be. Squinting at the edge of the property, she shook her head.

"Me neither," he said genially, "I love my children. There's no room left for any God." The girl had turned her lipsticked mouth back in his direction and gone on to her next prepared question, but he kept looking out across the lawn.

His son, his books, the orphans here and there. Except when a journalist came to them, or when he acted as tour guide to potential benefactors, Yevgeni was hardly able to stay a night in the community. He was always packing up his razor and toothbrush, catching a bus to a train to the airport, settling into a sticky chair and accepting a cup of tea from some on-set assistant. He tried, then, to carry home with him: a worn photo of Lyosha smiling lay behind his credit cards in his wallet. Yevgeni buzzed his own hair in hotel bathrooms and thought of Anya all the while. He wore ankle-high boots and a camouflage jacket lined with quilted black silk, so newscasters would make jokes about heading back into the woods, and in response he shoved back into

his interviewee seat and allow the jacket to fall open, cracked his knuckles, cleared his throat loud enough to make the microphone buzz. They asked him to come on and speak about the resurgence of communal living, or the homeless living in the cities. What did he have to say about the cities? He just looked up into the studio lights and tapped on his book cover and waited for them to be silent so he could talk to the audience about how to raise their children. The people understood him, even if the new elite did not.

The brown-haired woman with her microphone and camera lenses left last night, so Yevgeni gave himself the pleasure, today, of staying still. It was Tuesday. The air smelled of gasoline and leaves. He stood on his porch and listened to the splintering sound of frost as it melted on the grasses. He was wearing his jacket, half-zipped, with no shirt underneath and he still had on his house slippers, so the breeze blew against his heels and slipped under his loose pant legs. A black dog ran across the lawn from one cottage to the next, and then, a moment later, one of the youngest children, pigtailed, chased after the animal, with her arms out for balance.

Back inside, he unzipped his coat the rest of the way and leaned over his desk. He smoothed down the next blank sheet of paper in his notebook and began. *The land*, he wrote, *contains a force, invisible but felt powerfully, that drives our community toward greatness. It makes the children brighter and louder, their feet swift and their minds keen*. He capped the pen and read this over, not taking his face too far from the page. His belly pushed, full, grainy with hair, over his belt. Finally he straightened and cracked his knuckles to search for socks and a sweater, pushed back the office curtains, jogged down his back steps and up into the house next door.

Anya was awake, too, preparing breakfast in the kitchen. Bacon on the stovetop, bread darkening in the toaster. She didn't turn when he came in, just bent her head for him so he could kiss her on the back of her neck.

"How's our boy?" he asked.

"Lazy," she said. "Still sleeping."

He said nothing, only slid his hands around the looseness of her waist and down to her hips, which had widened after the one child. Touching her where she was the most aged made him think of Tatiana, six houses away, who never had her own but swelled in the same way after adopting eight. Tatiana was a golf ball of a woman now, small and round and lovely. *It's not the birth that does it to them*, he thought, *it's the mothering*, and withdrew his hands to pat his pockets for a scrap of paper. "Do we have a pen?" he said to her back.

She shrugged. "I don't know where." He had to record it later, whenever he got back to his office. She was chopping onions, pushing them aside, reaching for a tomato from the windowsill.

In his socks, he slipped upstairs, running his fingers over the banister on the way and marveling again at the dark, bumpy wood they had gathered and labored over to form into this warm home that smelled like vegetables. Lyosha's door was open. The boy's face was smushed into his pillow. His mouth was open, arms wrapped around each other. Yevgeni looked at him and remembered the months Anya was breastfeeding, when the boy, impossibly small, would rest a loose fist on her collarbone, having to close his eyes with the entirety of his pleasure. Yevgeni watched them and took notes, or spoke into a tape recorder: *Find the children*, he said, *when they're young, so the parents will love them more like their own. Hold them in one arm and feel that connection that cannot be found when the child is not so childish anymore*. As he spoke, Anya would open her mouth and he held up one finger to quiet her. They began to talk only after he turned the recorder off, and now he does not remember what they said.

"Lyokha," he said. "Now. Get up. Class in an hour." His son groaned, bent his knees, and threw the blanket off his body. "Get up," Yevgeni said, and Lyosha nodded against the pillow.

When Anya was pregnant in '89 Yevgeni pushed his hands across her huge, impossible belly and said, "We should go away." Her face then was a rounder, more speckled version of itself. She looked down at him like the moon from the sky and said, "Where?" During the first year or two of the community, when they only had the baby and some house frames and none of the media attention, he thought of that one word and loved her for offering it instead of *why* or *no* or *won't*.

Passing through the kitchen to the back door, he said, "He lives," and Anya raised her hand in assent, her knife smeared with basil. Outside the mist was dissipating. The ground was damp. He heard a bird call. Yevgeni bypassed the winding cobblestone path and cut straight across the lawn to Gregori's house.

As he stepped into the freshness of their hallway Roman's wife came out from the back. "Good morning," she said, and added, "He's coming," when Yevgeni looked up. They could both hear his tread on the second floor, the low, rolling tones of his voice. While Yevgeni unlaced his boots in the hallway, the wife stood at the bottom of the stairs. She touched the head of each passing child until all seven had been counted and then disappeared with them back into the kitchen. Roman came down afterwards, smoothing his hair at the temples. "Morning," he said, and offered his cheek to kiss. The men's faces scraped together.

"My notes are in the other room," Roman said. "Tea?" Yevgeni accepted the hot mug brought by the wife and blew. "How was the interview yesterday?"

"Nothing to speak of."

"I saw the girl when she drove up. Terrific-looking."

Yevgeni shrugged, hearing the wife laughing and chatting with the children in the next room. "Sure makes it easier to talk," he said. "You ever see the answers I gave to that one last year—to that old man with one ear higher than the next? I almost forgot my own name."

"You? Can't believe it." Roman pushed the ledger forward so they both could see. "There's another interview scheduled on Sunday. The journalist's in Moscow, but they offered to have you with him by phone."

Yevgeni touched the collar of his jacket, felt its roughness. "Better in person."

"Show them who we are," Roman agreed. "So you'll have to leave Saturday morning. I'll look up the trains." He made a tick mark in the schedule. He was a fastidious record-keeper, an excellent right-hand man. Yevgeni's own hands were so often full. Yevgeni ran his fingers now over the smooth clay of his mug. Through the doorframe sounded breakfast noises: the crash of bowls and slush of spoons dragged through kasha. Roman kept taking notes in his cramped, clear print, turning one page back and forth as he tilted his head over it. "Okay," he said, and laid the page flat. "We got a call from a woman in Kostoma about an orphan. I told her you'd come and see."

"Here? In Kostoma?"

"Strange, isn't it?" Roman said. "Or not. They're everywhere. The caller said she's been stealing people's preserves." Yevgeni sighed and ran his hands down his stomach. A child shrieked in the next room. "Here," Roman said, "there's the woman's number. Her address. She said you could find the girl in her shed."

"In her shed," Yevgeni said. "In November. The old bitch. This kid's probably ruined by now." Roman looked back at the ledger. Yevgeni thought, not knowing why, of their most recent adoption, the six-year-old sitting now in Roman's kitchen, the boy who had been beaten into unconsciousness by a visiting priest at his orphanage and now refused to enter the community church. But he wasn't an orphan any longer. He studied hard. He certainly was not the type to snatch pickles from some stranger's cellar.

"All right," Yevgeni said, and stood. "I'll be back in the afternoon."

"I know it's a day off for you."

"Days off," Yevgeni said, and pushed in his chair. Roman stood too, shuffling a little. "They don't happen. You said it—orphans everywhere."

"Even in Kostoma."

"Even here," Yevgeni said, looking to the door, taking his hands from the chair, checking his pocket for the keys. "The van's free?"

"Always free for you," Roman said.

Roman's wife came to stand behind him, wiping her hands. "See you for dinner," she said. "Lamb stew tonight." Yevgeni let himself out.

Someone had turned on the lights in the schoolhouse and was brushing past the windows, pulling out the tables. Someone, probably Tatiana, had opened the door to the community dining hall, and already brought a group of children in for buttered toast and cheese. Yevgeni could smell the bread from across the yard. Yesterday he had pointed out to the young journalist everything here he thought would interest a stranger, but this morning he looked at the community and felt in his hands the phantom weight of a hammer, the warmth of freshly-laid eggs.

Before he came to the woods he worked in customs, but then the wall fell and he worked nowhere. Really, he had already been on the way out before the first cranes were rolled in. In the beginning of that year Anya told him she craved salt, so he ripped open packages and flipped up boxes of clothes searching for the occasional tucked-away tins. She had already redeemed all their rations stamps. He managed to bring home nearly a kilo before they found him out, moved him from inspections to filing to the street in front of the customs office with his pockets full of currency that soon meant very little to anyone.

While Yevgeni searched for the land, gathered wood and glass, walked the dump looking for scrap metal, Anya sold their apartment for the bit it was worth and stayed with her mother. When Lyosha was born Yevgeni sent for them, though the house was not completed. "It's not right," he said, "for the boy to be raised without me." She brought the baby in her arms through the eighteen-hour train ride from the capital, and when she arrived he looked at them both against the backdrop of the yellow woods and said, "There should be more children here."

He put out the word and the trickle began—phone calls, parents, orphans. First came Anya's distant aunt, then a friend that woman knew who could not find work, then a girl from the East who read about the community in a newspaper article. Men came. Yevgeni, with them, built the gate. Orphanages around the country were trembling with the weight of abandoned children, so Yevgeni would show up, his chin raised, and offer to take the best of them.

Was this where he wanted to be, eleven years ago, as a meeker man, one less sure, a shamed border guard from a dissolved state? The affirmation came after so resoundingly that it made him blink a few times when the question even came to mind.

On the drive into town Yevgeni called the community center and asked for Roman, who came to the line after a few minutes' pause. The cell phone was just the latest in Yevgeni's arsenal of leadership tools. "Does Zhenya need more medicine?"

Roman didn't say anything. "Or honey?" Yevgeni tried.

"Oh," Roman said, and the phone rustled. "No, he's almost all better now. Just a stomach bug." Yevgeni had one hand on the wheel, steering it around wooded curves. "I should have let you know sooner."

"No, no." Yevgeni let his voice drop. The road turned again.

"I called the Petrova woman and told her you were coming. She said the orphan's there now." Silence yawned between them briefly, then Roman said, "If you have a chance, we could use more sponges here."

Yevgeni gave a murmur and hung up. He was passing more houses now, ones that, after just two days spent in the community, looked lonely to him—childless, separate and strange. Each with its own yard, some with their own cars. He wouldn't return with any sponges tonight; it wasn't his place to pick up kitchen supplies, and that should have been understood.

The creased slip of paper on his thigh read marina nikolaevna petrova, 7 chapaevski alley. When he pulled up, she was waiting for him on her steps. "Marina Nikolaevna," he said.

"Yevgeni Stepanovich," the woman said. She was heavy, wearing a sweater, with her arms crossed at her waist. She took a step down as he approached. "The girl's in the back."

Yevgeni followed the woman around the edge of the blue wooden house, its foundation exposed, and past two apple trees. When she opened the shed door, the girl already stood in the middle of the cement floor, looking at them.

"This is the man I told you about," Marina Nikolaevna said.

"Hello," Yevgeni said.

The orphan swayed on her feet for a second, watching both of them, and then said, "Hi."

The girl's body had that wasted look he had seen so many times. Her eyes sat dark and aged above swollen cheeks. The space smelled of moss and vinegar. "Whose coat is that?" he asked her, nodding at the red parka she had on.

"Mine," the woman answered from beside him.

"Thank you," he said without turning. Marina Nikolaevna said she would be in the house. The girl was watching Yevgeni's boots, the shine of his belt buckle, the thickness of each of his reddened fingers. "How old are you?"

"Don't know." Then she bent to his presence, as they always did, and said, "Ten." It was the jacket, the stare, that made them speak. When the community just started, Anya told him he was a natural leader.

"Ten?"

"Ten-ish."

"And where are you from?"

"Roshal."

He didn't know the town but he could picture it well enough, with houses scattered and tall thorn bushes, a town with few children, one wide street, one large monument. A hushed town, making sounds like the static on the radio, not noticing when a family is lost.

"And where are your parents?"

The borrowed coat was slipping off one of the girl's shoulders, exposing a bare, yellow neck, like a plucked goose's. "Don't know," she said.

"In the sky?" he prompted.

"In the ground. Don't know."

The shed was just as cold as he thought it would be. The five-litre jars of apple jam, raspberries, cucumbers and wrinkled tomatoes made him think of the lab in the basement of his secondary school, with its fluorescent lighting and bomb-shelter walls. His son sat now in the day's first lesson at the community schoolhouse, in a setting as quiet, as gentle, as Yevgeni could have dreamed of then.

"How did you get here?"

"Walked," she said.

"Do you know who I am?" he asked, and she shook her head at the floor. "I created a place for children who lost their parents to find new ones. We live together and learn and work like comrades. When they're older, they go to university. They move to cities and are just like normal again. It's like they were never orphans at all."

She shrugged.

"Do you want to go to university?" She didn't say anything. "Do you want to work?" Looking at her, her child's face and lips pressed shut over crooked teeth, he pulled a slip of paper from the front pocket of his jeans. "Here," he said, unfolding it, holding it halfway between them. "Take this. Read it out." She reached and took it.

He had been on media panels with other organizers and educators who endorsed IQ tests, personality profiling, meetings between the children and social workers and officials from the government. There was no need for that kind of interference. He found this paper to be sufficient: ВОТ КОТ, it said, КОТОРОГО ЗОВУТ АБРИКОЗ; VOICI LE CHAT QUI S'APPELLE ABRICOT; HERE IS A CAT WHO IS CALLED APRICOT.

She kept holding the slip and looking.

"Do you speak English?" he said. "Any other languages?"

She was very still, holding this paper that had been held by so many children in

the past eleven years.

"Do you know how to read?" he asked, and his voice was lower, gentler with her, more hopeless. Her shoulder was bare. He reached out to lift the jacket up and cover her. Closing one small hand around the paper, she snapped her head forward and closed her teeth around his wrist.

Her mouth was wide, steaming, and her teeth sank into his skin; he thought of diseases, he thought of sharks; he ripped his arm down. For a moment she hung on and she bent with him before he could shake her off. He pressed his arm against the drum of his belly, where next to his jacket's shades of green he saw how stark the deep red holes were in his flesh, how purple the surrounding area was already under the wet and clustered black hairs of his forearm.

A bubble of panic swelled briefly in him, foul-tasting, then withdrew. Looking at his arm, he said evenly, "Who taught you to be such a little savage?"

"No one," she said, and lifted her lips off her teeth. "You won't teach me nothing. You don't know how."

"Put the paper on the ground," he said, still looking at his arm. Not looking at her. She dropped it. "Now you back up." With each of her steps back he took one forward. He scooped up the slip of paper, the chilled cement floor scraping under his fingers, and stood. The girl, her back against the shining jars of preserves, stared at him. The coat was still hanging loose from her.

"I came here to help you," he said.

"You can't," she said, "you don't help nobody."

He left her there, like that.

On the way to the van he knocked with one fist on the woman's front door. His other hand was deep in his jacket pocket, where his wrist throbbed like a jewel in the dark. When she opened the door he said, "I'm sorry to tell you, Marina Nikolaevna, that the girl won't fit into our community."

The women let her hand slide off the door handle and said, "Well, what can I do with her?"

"Call the state," he said.

"Who there?"

"The *state*," he said. It wasn't his business anymore to know everything about that; his community was not connected to the government, it was his own. The woman's arms were loose at her sides. "I don't know," he said finally, "but she won't work with us." He looked out toward the road. The woman closed her door, after a minute.

The van started immediately. He thought when he first saw her, small and swamped in borrowed clothing, standing fiercely in the middle of that shed, that she

could be a child again—that they might be able to take care of her. But it was clear now that she was just another orphan and that she would be that way for the rest of her short life.

Best to just stay in today and work on his book. It would be after lunch when he got back. There was little use to his interrupting lessons to supervise whichever parent was teaching today, or checking in on the pouring of the foundation for the new house. The community functioned smoothly when he was not there. It would, too, while he was.

This would be his eighth book, and sometimes, when he had a particularly productive day and put down before dinner five or ten smooth pages of unhurried and persuasive thought, he wondered idly if these were not the children he loved most. Or, if not most, at least as much as Lyosha: each book was entirely his in the same way as the boy, pure, carrying with it all that he wanted to give to the world, and so he never doubted them, and he was always proud. He ran his hand over the bite mark on his arm as he pulled into the paved lot behind the dining hall.

From across the yard he could see his children's heads bowed in the schoolhouse. Lyosha's small body was instantly recognizable. His shoulders were narrow and fragile under a knitted sweater. His head was dark, hair slick as an otter's. Even from the lot Yevgeni could see one child turned away from the lesson and toward the windows and trees beyond; he squinted to try to capture a face, but the child turned away too soon. He saw pigtails. It had to be one of Tatiana's. She loved to braid her girls' hair. Tonight at dinner he would issue a general reprimand, and look in the direction of her table a few more times than seemed necessary; it was after one o'clock, their English lesson had already started, and inattentiveness like that could not be tolerated. The child, whoever she was, would grow up and leave the community helpless if she spent her hours that way. She would be marked as an orphan wherever she went.

He came into his house through the side door, not bothering to check for Anya's herb-smelling body in the building next door. After taking off his shoes he went to the sink and ran his arm under water, letting the throb subside. Yevgeni remembered the shape of his son's head from behind. He walked to his desk and smoothed the paper in the open notebook there but did not yet sit down to work. Instead he moved slowly, picking up the first editions of his earlier works and turning them over and studying their spines, opening the books and running his thumb down their lists of illustrations. He looked out the window toward the open afternoon.

The trees were a batch of pale paintbrushes standing in a jar, their trunks thin and limbless, their tops feathery. There seemed to be no movement within them. In interviews while he was traveling he called the community "a chance to return to the

natural world," but when he was here it looked like his own creation, where he threw out the deer and instead inserted the orphans, almost as wild at first, bending to an offer of fresh food or a hand on their backs.

The community boys were outside throwing snowballs or, for the lazy ones, just handfuls of ice. Their lesson must have let out early. Lyosha was taller than the other five in his age group and a little bit louder, shouting directions to them, urging them to scatter. Yevgeni watched his children's noise shake the thin branches that surrounded them. A parent came out from the community center and put a wide hand on one boy's shoulder. The children began to disperse. Yevgeni cracked his knuckles and looked at the wall clock: if he worked two hours more, then, all in all, except for the orphan shut in a curing shed, except for her teeth sunk into the meat of his arm, he could consider this a very productive day.

The light sank low in the sky and set the clouds aglow. The whole world was a tub of honey, thick and stirring. Roman went out, blowing into his bare hands, and closed the gate at the community entrance. Tatiana would send her two youngest out in the morning to open it again, and reward them with cups of hot cider when they returned. Some predatory bird flew overhead. Yevgeni wrote about their canning of last year's tomatoes, constructing the plumbing, soliciting four ping-pong tables from a donor. *Make them work*, he wrote, *even the youngest, so they can understand exactly how many nails and pegs and shingles are required to grow a house from the ground up. They should sweat with all their lessons.* He made a last few marks and twisted his pen around in both hands, trying to see how much ink was left, then set it down.

He did not bother with his coat to go to Anya's. She looked up at the door as it opened and smiled at him. Her arms and neck were bare as she sat shelling beans at the kitchen table, and he lifted his arm. She stood. "Oh, God," she said, her hands still full of green, "what happened to you?" He took off his shoes and came around the stacks of magazines and donated toys to show her. She took his forearm in both hands and pulled him closer to the windows' dwindling glow. He purposely had not looked closely at the wound since arriving in the community this afternoon, but a wound is what it was, a few front teeth outlined in ragged purple and red, two puncture marks left by the canines.

"What happened?" Anya said again, her head bent toward his body.

"Orphan today," he said, and she murmured.

They both heard through the hissing and steaming in the kitchen the stomps of Lyosha's feet. "Lyokha, here," Yevgeni shouted. "Hi, Papa," his son called from the hall. When Lyosha came in, his face was a sharper, handsomer version of the pink-and-white blur Yevgeni had seen at play a few hours before. His hair was growing out

from last month's buzz cut given by Anya over the sink in the dining hall. One day he might be as tall as his father, but for now he was a child, small-handed and with a pointed chin. He slid on his socks over to the table and stood next to Yevgeni's chair.

"How are you, baby?" asked Anya, as she gave Yevgeni's arm a squeeze and ran her hands down to his wrist. They both looked at their son but Yevgeni felt her warmth from across the table and was held by it as much as by her thin, cracked fingers.

"Normal," Lyosha said. "They gave us borscht for lunch and it had no meat in it. Papa, you should make them put meat in it."

"We put in meat when we have extra," Yevgeni said, "so we must not have extra now. I'll ask Roman." Anya stroked the knob of Yevgeni's wrist with her thumb. "How was school?"

Lyosha shrugged. "We got our test in geography back. I hate that class."

"Let me see," Yevgeni said. Lyosha stood for a moment in place before sliding across the rough planks in the floor. He dug into his bag by the side door and pulled out a creased paper for his father to take.

There was a map of their region and the more northern parts of the country; Lyosha's loose cursive, sloppy on the page; the numeral two marked in red at the top. So Lyosha had failed. Yevgeni lifted his arm free of Anya and held the test with both hands. "You knew nothing here."

"It's just one test," his son said.

Just a test, he said. Yevgeni stood up, the force of his body pushing back his chair, and hit his boy across the face. The impact of his hand on Lyosha's pale cheek, the quick snag of the child's nose and solidness of bone underneath, sent a tremor up Yevgeni's arm and made his new wound ache. Lyosha sat down on the ground, hard. The boy was breathing very quickly. Anya's fingers were pressed to the table as she watched. Here was one of the reasons Yevgeni loved her so much—she let Yevgeni teach his lessons when he needed to.

"Have I been here so little that you've forgotten how discipline works? Don't make excuses to me," Yevgeni said, "There's no reason for you to be anything but the best. You're not some orphan like the rest of them. You're my child, you set the example here."

Lyosha's face was a mess of splotches, but he kept both hands pressed to the floor. Yevgeni looked down at him. The boy kept trying to hold in his rapid breath.

Yevgeni sat again but did not settle there. He tilted up on one hip and felt the denim of his back pocket. So he had left his pen next door. *Have a child*, he thought, *that will get up when you knock him down; you will have to knock him down; make him strong enough for it*. His arm still throbbed and he remembered today's orphan. He was

helping Lyosha now, wasn't he? Wasn't he teaching him? He had forgotten his pen, but later, in his office, he would write down all of this, and in years to come the people in this country would read and speak of it with pride.

Yevgeni laid his arm back on the table and Anya took it up, her touch light, her hands two feather dusters. She breathed quickly, too.

Nobody spoke. Lyosha was still on the ground but stronger for it all, Yevgeni knew. Yevgeni turned his arm in Anya's grip and looked past the orphan's teeth marks to his watch; it was almost time for dinner. Tonight they would have lamb stew. Above their community the sky was a blot of dark blue and Yevgeni took the kitchen's silence as a chance to tally it up for himself one more time: he had a hundred children, and because of him all of them, flesh or paper, here or wherever in the country they would be found, were growing up in exactly the correct way.

Julia Phillips is a Fulbright fellow whose writing has appeared in *Glimmer Train*, *The Atlantic*, *Slate*, and *The Moscow Times*. Her debut novel, *Disappearing Earth*, is forthcoming in May 2019. Her fiction has been supported by two residencies from Yaddo. She lives in Brooklyn.

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KATIE MANNING

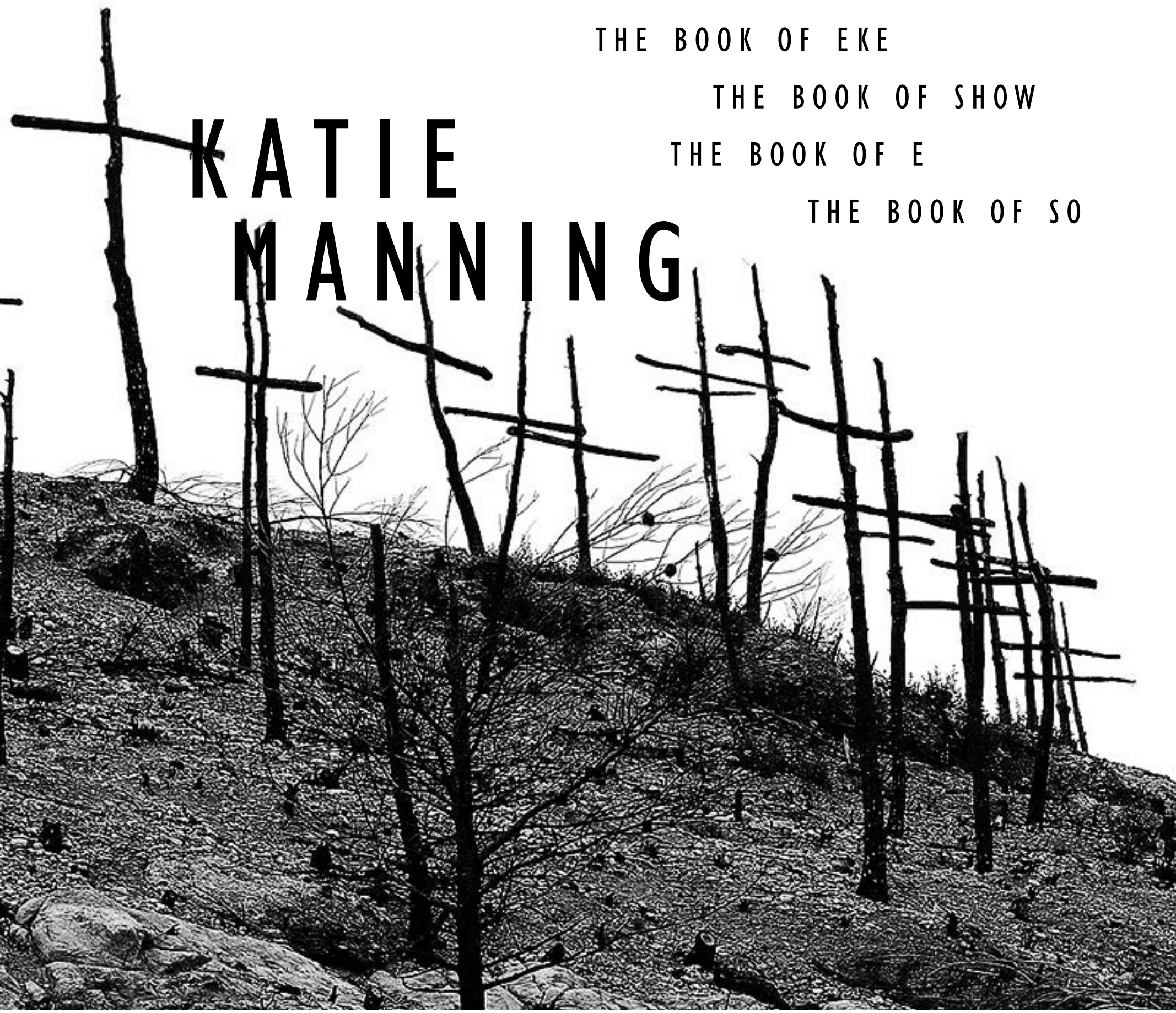
THE BOOK OF CLASS

THE BOOK OF EKE

THE BOOK OF SHOW

THE BOOK OF E

THE BOOK OF SO



THE BOOK OF CLASS

all that remains of Ecclesiastes

the days
will say
find
pleasure in
the light
the clouds
the windows
the almond tree
the grasshopper
the streets
the sound of
people
afraid of heights

the dust returns to
meaning

find
the word
like firmly embedded nails
in
every hidden thing

THE BOOK OF EKE

all that remains of Ezekiel

the
name
will have one
road
from east to west
from east to west

it will
be
a special gift

in the center
will be
hands
for
common use

what remains
will
run
from east to west
from east to west

the
name
will be
a
gate

and the name
will be

THE BOOK OF SHOE

all that remains of Hosea

words
cannot save us

we will never
say
the fatherless find
their way

anger has turned
like a lily

his roots
will grow
will dwell again in
shade
like
fame

I will answer him
who is wise

the righteous walk
but
stumble

THE BOOK OF E

all that remains of Joel

I
trade
boys for
girls for wine

I
speed
on your
heads
to your temples

I am going to
use
you
and
turn
you
on your own heads

the LORD will
invade
with water

beat your
words
into
ears

say
I am
ripe

THE BOOK OF SO

all that remains of Amos

I
strike
the heads
so
not one will get away

dig down to the depths

I will bring them down

though they hide
I will hunt
though they hide
I will
bite
I will
slay them

I will keep
them
for harm
for good

you
are
the same to me

all who live
sink
like
a
face

Katie Manning is the author of *Tasty Other*, winner of the Main Street Rag Poetry Book Award, and four chapbook-length poetry collections: *A Door with a Voice* (Agape Editions), *The Gospel of the Bleeding Woman* (Point Loma Press), *I Awake in My Womb* (Yellow Flag Press), and *Tea with Ezra* (Boneset Books). She has published poems in *Poet Lore*, *New Letters*, *Fairy Tale Review*, *PANK*, *So to Speak*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, and *Stirring*. She received *The Nassau Review* Author Award for Poetry and several nominations for The Pushcart Prize and Best New Poets. She is the Founder and Editor-in-Chief of *Whale Road Review*.

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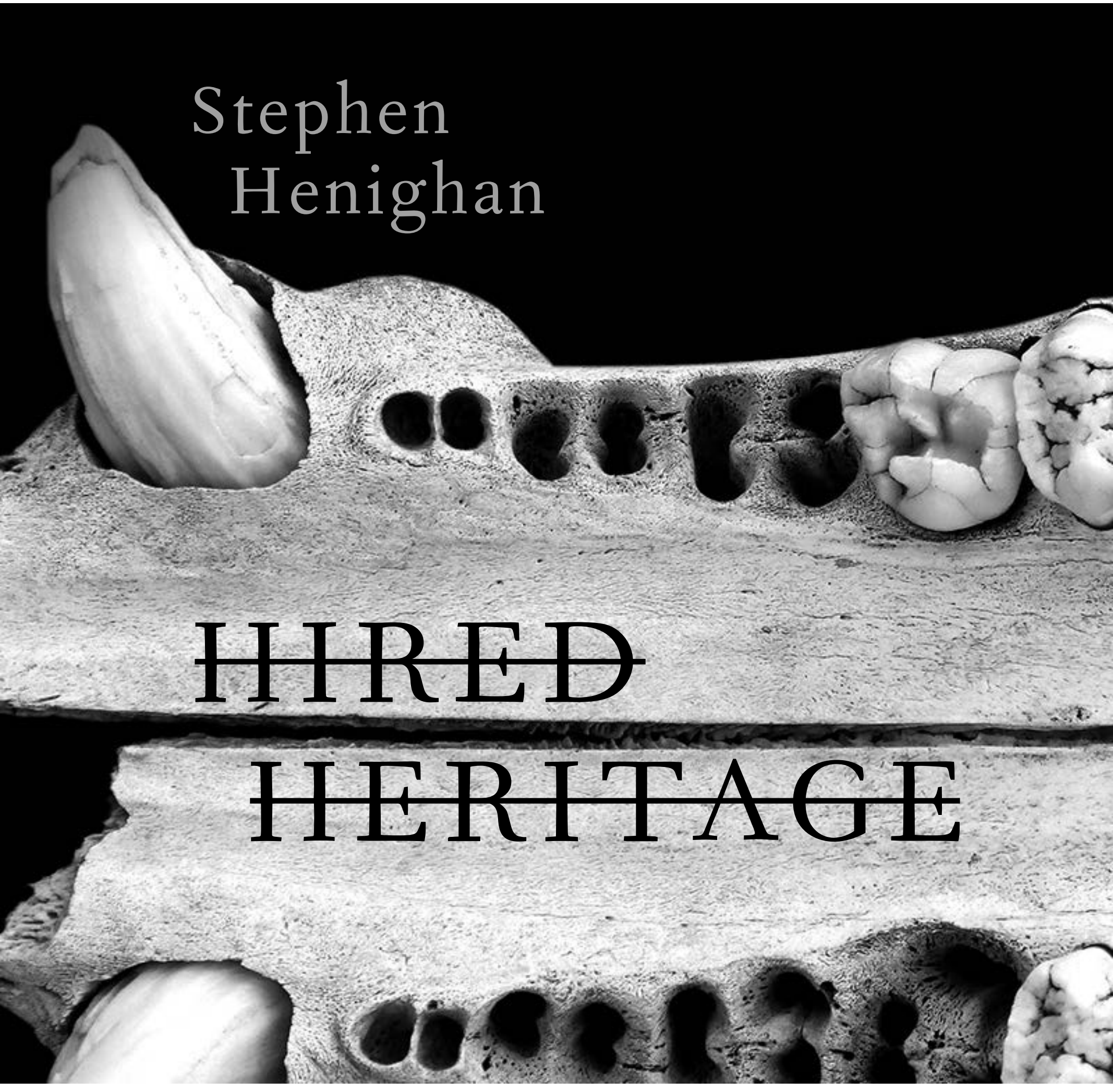


home

"IT WARMS MY HEART to see you people," the lady from the city says, sliding two flasks of maple syrup and a home-sealed glass jar of Merrill's gooseberry jam onto the oak counter. "I bet you can show your children where their ancestors lived. You can touch the ground."

"We sure can," Merrill says, taking her money. When the lady leaves, she turns around the sign on the door so that the Closed faces outward. "We can go upstairs."

The first time she said that, I'd been begging her since her first day on the job. "Are you crazy?" she said. I'd told her how my apartment above the gift store had a view of the St. Lawrence River. "I won't make you do it in the back of a Duster like them other lads," I said. "I'm a serious girl," she answered. I deked around her hesitations like Davey Keon tying up the defence at the blue line. I told her how my old man had been a hired man all his life, working a year or two on this farm, a year or two on that. "There was lots of hired men in those days," I said. "Yeah, whenever I complained, my mum told me to be thankful I wasn't a hired man's kid." That was the first time Merrill looked at me with an expression that wasn't sassy. I looked right back at her. "My old man took out a mortgage on the apartment upstairs. In five years I'm going to be a homeowner. How many lads can say that, Merrill?"

She looked down and blushed. "Are you trying to tell me you're a serious guy, Pete?"

"If that's what it takes."

It took another week. The next Friday, as we cashed out, she said, "We can go upstairs if you want."

Twenty-five years later it's not very often that we seal the deal, as we did that first afternoon, when the light from the river that angled in the bedroom window turned us to old brass. Still, it strokes my chords to hear Merrill murmur her invitation. After all this time I'm as happy as a hog on ice with Merrill, even if what I mean by "happiness" isn't the same bunch of feelings that strummed through me back then. When we met, Merrill wanted security; now she's looking for something else. Our apartment doesn't look so grand any more. Old Mrs. Grant opened the store to sell souvenirs to the tourists who drove out to see the Mansion, where they have a museum about how people lived in Upper Canada. When she died, the store was taken over by Parks Canada, who let us keep our jobs. Maintaining long-term employees fostered goodwill in local communities, we were told. We were hired heritage, like my old man used to be hired labour. We got Parks Canada tunics with the beaver badge on the shoulder and an insurance card that reimbursed us when we went to the dentist or the eye-doctor. I felt secure; Merrill felt trapped. There's a conversation we have: one of those married-couple conversations that you repeat again

and again until one of you breaks away from the script. That's what happened after that lady left with her two half-litres of Canada Grade A and Merrill's gooseberry jam.

"She found what she was looking for." Merrill dishes out mashed potatoes alongside the heated-up beef stew from the can.

"You have what she wants," I say, fending off her discontent. "You can touch the ground."

"I could touch the ground a darn site easier if we had a backyard. I could grow my gooseberries on my own land. Why didn't we get our act together when houses were cheap, Pete? There we were patting ourselves on the back because we had a paid-off apartment when our friends were saving for a downpayment. Well weren't we hot shit. Now they all have houses and we're still in an apartment. Do you know what Nancy and John's place is worth now?"

"Nancy and John have three kids— "

"That would've got you out of here." She looks at her plate. "If we'd hadn't had them miscarriages."

When she meets my eyes I know that her tears won't move me. That's to say, they won't move me as a reaction to this particular conversation. Merrill's tears wound me in a more long-term way, like a dredger that comes back day after day to scour out a riverbed. For a long time nothing but sludge comes up in the head of the dredger; then steel prongs hit river-bottom rock and the damage is done.

I lift her hand, kissing her fingers as though she were a fairy-tale princess. "We can't change what happened."

"We can't change what happened but we can change what's going to happen. Just once I want to be the lady in the old house full of heirlooms and portraits of my ancestors— "

"You don't know who your ancestors were."

"That's why I need it! My parents gave me my values, but they're blond and I'm darker and my hair curls. Just once I'd like to have a house full of heirlooms and decide what's my heritage and what's junk for a yard sale."

"You know we can't afford— " It's a relief to get this conversation back on track and stomp around in our well-worn circles.

"We need a vacation," Merrill says. "A vacation in a city."

I give her a warning look. "No way I'm setting foot in an airplane."

"I'm talking Ottawa or Montreal. An old house in the city."

The next day at lunch she disappears. When she comes back, she says, "I went to the Mansion."

I imagine Merrill mooning around the Mansion, staring at the stencilled

wallpaper whose patterns reflect the prints of the calico worn by the acting students who play the roles of serving lady and lady-of-the-house in the skits for tourists. I see her wishing she could play the period piano and caress the furniture. Wishing that the people in the sepia photographs really were her ancestors.

She holds up a roll of printed pages. "Marge let me use the computer to find house sits in Ottawa."

She's found three places where families going on vacation are looking for house-sitters. That evening, Merrill picks up the phone. I always forget how smooth she can sound. She says we are a non-smoking middle-aged couple with no children and no pets. We have caretaker experience. (That's the first fib.) We work for the government in the Heritage Department but don't spend much time in Ottawa. (The fibs are taking over.) We have more than two decades' experience in caring for heirlooms. (This whopper seems pointless until she puts down the phone after the last call and gives me her ranking, based on the families' responses to that line, of how much history each house contains.)

"I've found what I'm looking for." The next day she puts our references in the mail. A week later the phone rings and the house is ours.

*

THAT NIGHT, AS MERRILL drifts in her dreams, I remember places I slept as a child. There was one house where my old man and I had a back room off the pantry and a washroom all to ourselves. That was the best of them. Most of the time we were in some kind of insulated shed next to the barn. Summer and winter, we walked outside to go to the washroom. In one place, way up the Ottawa Valley near Packenham, there was no washroom, just an outhouse along the fenceline and a tub in the back of the barn that you could fill with water for a bath. We stayed there for two years and I finished grades four and five. In those days, I'd get off the schoolbus and rush into school for the thrill of using an indoor washroom. Later, I didn't like school—especially not high school, where the girls mooned after lads whose dads owned farms. Even at sixteen you've got to have something to bring to the table: a past that promises a future. The lads were just as ignorant. Whenever a farmer was spraying liquid manure and the reek flooded in the open windows of the school bus, they'd say, "Hey, Wallace, I bet that's your old man that's workin' in the shit." Half the lads who talked like had sprayed liquid manure themselves. They all took Farm Leave during the last two weeks of June, when the first cutting of hay came off and hardly a

lad over fourteen was left in school. It didn't matter that they did as much farm work as I did; what counted was that their old men were farmers and mine was a hired man.

My old man's name was Peter Wallace. As long as I can remember, I was Pete Junior. The Ottawa Valley was as thick with Wallaces as it was with groundhogs. My old man and I were a branch of the clan that had fallen on hard times. Nobody could explain how we were related to the big, ruddy Wallaces, both strong and fat—"wall-to-wall Wallaces," they were called—who owned dairy farms from one end of the Valley to the other. Peter Senior was a more reserved man than the wall-to-wall kind of Wallace: quiet, severe, a little soured on life. He was taller and rangier than the big-bellied Wallaces I met at school. He didn't drink, which helped keep him slim. Farm work gave him muscles. My old man's muscles didn't bulge like Dave Draper's did in the Charles Atlas add on the back page of the Marvel comic books; they were sinewy and hugged the bone. The thing about him that didn't make sense was that he was a Catholic. The other Wallaces were Christmas-and-Easter Protestants. In most of the villages where he worked there was only the United Church of Canada, or if there was a Catholic church it was French, and one way in which my dad resembled other Ottawa Valley Wallaces was that he didn't hold with Frenchness. He reckoned there was no way those Frenchmen had any right to speak a different language when normal people spoke English. We shared a room from the time I was five years old and afraid of the dark until I was sixteen and waking up trying to hide my boners. In all that time, I never saw him cut and I never saw him chase a woman or come in late. Looking back, I reckon the one thing that worried him, even though he kept this worry to himself, was how I was going to fit in. I think that's why he didn't try to make me a Catholic. He wanted me to be like everybody else; any similarity that would scrub away the stain of being a hired man's son was welcome. By the time I was a teenager, his stamina was failing. When he couldn't hold down hired man jobs any more, he left the Ottawa Valley and moved down to the banks of the St. Lawrence River where he figured the winters would be milder. He never complained; I didn't have a clue how ill he was until two weeks before he died. Not even with his last breath did he tell me my mother's name.

Right from the get-go Merrill and I had in common that we both had only a vague notion about our mothers. I was twenty and Merrill was eighteen when she came to work in the store. My old man had been dead for almost two years, and I regretted not having asked him about my mother. That was the first feeling I shared with Merrill when she came upstairs on that sunny afternoon. All she knew about her mother was that she had been a local girl who had got into trouble. She figured she was related to some family around here, she just didn't know which one. Nor did

she know who her mum had got into trouble with: who had given her those dark eyes and that curly hair and skin which, if it didn't look much darker than anybody else's, tanned quicker in the summer than that of her brothers and sisters. I told her what I had heard from my old man at the age of six, which was the last time I was unguarded enough to ask him a direct question on the subject: that my mother was a foreign lady who didn't like Canada and had gone away. I imagined her levitating up into the sky and vanishing. My old man's story sounded like a fairy tale. I finally decided that was what it was, and that the reason he'd told it to me was that truth was something that would hurt me.

*

THREE WEEKS GOES BY faster than you think. And slower. It seems like forever and it's over way too soon. You just start feeling that the place belongs to you when you realize you're going to lose it.

I'd had my doubts about Ottawa. I get lost in cities. We were in a neighbourhood called Westboro. You walked out of the leafy streets and in five minutes you were down in the shops and restaurants on Richmond Road. The house was a three-storey redbrick Victorian, not unlike the places that city people bought down on the St. Lawrence. We were doing what they did in reverse. We had hardwood floors, and mouldings and wainscotting that dated back to the First World War. There were four bedrooms and an unexpected little parlour on the top floor that opened onto a balcony where you sat among the branches of eighty-year-old maples. In the summer heat, without a breeze off a river anywhere in sight, the cool dimness of the house was a relief. Merrill and I savoured our fine residence. The place didn't need much work. The front and back yards were covered in wood chips, so there was no grass to cut. A gardener came in on Saturdays to hoe the weeds and trim the flowers. All we had to do was keep the place locked and safe and water the plants once a week. That, and admire our heritage.

The first afternoon, when we came in the door hauling the suitcases we'd bought at the charity store, there in the front hall was a sepia-tinted photograph of a slender gentleman with a goatee dressed in a high white collar and a short black tie. "Great-Uncle Arthur!" Merrill said, as though she had known him all her life.

Once we got settled into the master bedroom on the second floor, feeling a little weird at the thought of sleeping under another couple's sheets, as though we were rolling into their skins, we ambled down the hall, where a murky photograph of a

pudgy couple in antique garb hung high on the wall, guarding the entrance to the linen closet. "Great-Granma Betty and Great-Granpa Cedric!" Merrill said. "Great-Uncle Arthur's parents. Their parents came over from Scotland and started the lumber business. That's how Great-Uncle Arthur went to law school."

"He worked as a lawyer in Montreal until he was elected to Parliament. That's how the family came back to Ottawa."

I finished the sentence in a whisper. My chest felt hot.

"Great-Uncle Arthur's money," Merrill said, "bought this place."

"Five generations' heritage in one house," I murmured.

"Our house," Merrill said.

We cooked supper in the remodelled kitchen with the island in the middle. When we had finished stacking the dishes in the dishwasher, Merrill said, "We can go upstairs."

As we had a quarter-century earlier, we sealed the deal between the sheets. Neither of us had been this passionate in years: thrashing and sweating, we were reborn in a new bed. In the morning, when I opened my eyes to the sliver of light that slipped beneath the curtains' heavy fabric, I knew the bandoleer-like pattern it made on the oak floor. I anticipated the creak of the second board from the door of the en suite bathroom. As we left our bedroom to go downstairs, I stopped in front of the portrait of Great-Granma Betty and Great-Granpa Cedric.

"Their work made our—"

"Made us," Merrill said.

"—made us who we are."

We sat in the living room and talked about our ancestors.

"After Great-Granpa Cedric's stroke," Merrill said, "Great-Granma Betty brought a girl in to care for him. Arthur came to the house—this was the old house on the Rideau Canal—when he could, but he was busy in Parliament."

"When he met the girl," I said, "he came more often."

"He was a childless widower," Merrill said, "so it was okay for him to do some courting during his visits to Great-Granpa Cedric."

"The girl had come over from Scotland, too," I said. Merrill gave me an angry look, so I added, "Even though she was working as a servant girl, she was from a good family."

"She became our Great-Aunt Merrill," Merrill said. "Her portrait's in the parlour on the third floor." She beamed, lighting up the hollows that shadowed her eyes. "I was named after her."

We were at home, surrounded by family heirlooms. After breakfast, when the

morning light fell on the calico wallpaper and the humid air was as stagnant as time brought to a halt, we went upstairs to the parlour to admire the portrait of Great-Aunt Merrill, a girl whose face was both open and firm with Protestant rectitude. She and my Merrill had the same cheekbones. It made Merrill smile to look at her. The tip of her index finger hovered over the glass as she traced the curve beneath her ancestor's eyes. From there, we moved on to the prints on the wall that came from nineteenth-century books and magazines. The prints had titles like Commander J.R. Ross shooting a bull musk ox. The print depicted the Commander crouched behind a boulder in a desolate Arctic landscape as he brought down a big-horned beast. Was Commander J.R. Ross a relative, or had the print simply caught someone's fancy? That must be the case with the books on the shelves. There were old novels and a fat book in French called Relations. I opened it and stared, the unfamiliar words confounding my concentration. Were you expected to know French if you lived in this house? On a table so old it must have dated back to Great-Granma Betty's day sat a brass-rimmed steel tin. Against a navy blue background, embossed letters spelled out the words, McElroy's Original Ontario Toffees. Painted figures cavorted across the background: a little girl in a pinafore, a boy in a sailor suit.

"Hey, Merrill," I said. "That's what you and me would have looked like if we'd been born a hundred and fifty years ago!"

"That's why all this is ours." Our morning walks through the three above-ground floors of our property, and the basement rec room, were as comforting as dinner-time conversation in our apartment overlooking the river had been in a life that felt as remote as the hired-man rooms where I'd slept as a child. Then, as had happened once before, she surprised me with an answer that changed everything:

"All this is ours. We can decide what we keep and what we get rid of."

"What do you mean, Merrill?"

"I mean it's time to have a yard sale."

*

ON FRIDAY MORNING WE made up bristol board signs, taped them to telephone poles and trees, and pinned them to billboards at stores on Richmond Road. The words YARD SALE stood out in black letters. On Saturday, we got up at a quarter to six and carried lawn furniture from the rec room into the yard.

Then we went into the house and decided which parts of our inheritance we no longer needed.

The first item I put on the table was that book in French. The day was going to be a stinker, and even at six in the morning I sweated as I went up and down the stairs. Yet I felt a breeze of relief as I removed the book from the house. My heritage was purer now, no longer clogged up with things that diluted it. We were refining our legacy, as I used to boil sap until it became maple syrup. As though sipping from a vat in the sugar bush, I combed the house for the pieces that soured the taste of who we were. The DVDs from the basement were the first to go, starting with half a dozen films of jazz concerts. I loaded a bunch of Hollywood movies onto the table, keeping the CBC documentaries. In the kitchen, I plucked The Art of South East Asian Cooking and Kosher Meals for Modern Families off the shelf.

"This is looking more like home," Merrill said, as we climbed the stairs to the second floor.

We reached the third floor and entered the parlour. "We're getting rid of Great-Aunt Merrill," Merrill said. "She never did belong in our family."

"But she's our ancestor.... She came from a good family in Scotland."

"Then how come she didn't stay there? I'll tell you. Because she's one of them girls who came out to Canada as a servant because she got into trouble. Look at that face. What a hussy! She probably wasn't even pure Scottish. Her nose is too big and her mouth is too small. I bet she was French."

I stared at the dim photograph in its black frame. There was no doubt that Merrill—my Merrill—was onto something. Great-Aunt Merrill wasn't part of our lineage; not a real, legitimate part. We had to rub out this blot on our family tree. Great-Uncle Arthur had fallen from his pedestal by marrying this harridan.

It was a relief to carry the shameless hussy's portrait out to the yard, leaving behind a dark rectangle on the wall of the parlour.

When we got downstairs, two guys in vans had arrived. They were sharks: professional yard-sale scavengers who did the rounds at the crack of seven AM to grab the good stuff before the punters could roll out of bed.

"I'll take the Relations," the first shark said.

"That's an old edition," the second shark said. "From before the First World War."

I doubled the book's price. As eager as I was to get that Frenchness off our property, I didn't plan to forego a profit.

The first shark accepted my price. The second one bargained with Merrill over Great-Aunt Merrill.

People kept coming. By mid-morning most of the DVDs were gone; the other stuff sold little by little. Running a yard sale was easy. The only difficult moment came late in the afternoon, when a couple emerged from the big house across the street. They came across the road scowling at us, two people in their sixties who were dressed for a wedding or a funeral even though it was a sweltering Saturday afternoon.

"David and Rachel didn't tell us there was going to be a yard sale while they were away," the man said.

"I guess you don't know them very well," Merrill said, looking at the table.

"We've been friends and neighbours for twenty years."

"Who are you?" the woman asked. "Do you know the family?"

This time Merrill lifted her head. "We are the family."

The couple exchanged glances and went back to their house. By sundown the tables were almost empty. We dragged them back to the rec room, then walked upstairs through our cleansed, welcoming home.

*

"WE MADE THAT PLACE ours," Merrill said in the morning, as we put our suitcases in the Ford's trunk. "We sure did. Our relatives will thank us when they get back tonight."

After that, it was difficult for either of us to talk. The thought of other people living in our home made us uncomfortable. Unsure how to refer to them, I fell silent. I turned on the radio. I spun the dial in search of sports reports. On the first station I hit, they were talking in French. We were a good forty-five minutes south of Ottawa before French stations stopped coming in. We settled down to country music. The next time Merrill spoke it was as though we had passed into a different period of our lives where all the names had changed.

"Do you think they'll come after us, Pete? I mean, what we did, is that like stealing?"

"We didn't steal a thing. They put us in charge of their possessions and we acted in their best interest. We only made a few bucks. It's like a tip for good service." I shifted my hands into a fresh grip on the steering wheel. "Even if they come after us, they'll never get a conviction. There's no getting around the fact that they invited us in."

As we drove south towards the St. Lawrence, fields of corn tapered away into swampland. "I like being married to you, Pete. Even if we don't have a backyard."

A pressure in my skull burst like a hog's bladder. "Merrill, I never told you what I found after my old man passed away. There was an envelope in the bottom drawer. It

had a certificate saying that a lady with a long name had died of breast cancer in the Ottawa Civic Hospital."

"You figure that lady was your mum?"

"I guess so."

She shook her head. "It's weird to think of Peter Wallace marrying a foreign lady."

I gulped, squeezed the brake and pulled over onto the shoulder of the two-lane highway. A transport truck swooshed past, rocking the Ford on its chassis. "I found something else," I murmured. "A pile of envelopes with stamps on them that said Polska. The letters were addressed to Piotr Waslewski. My dad changed his name. I got this old Polack down at the garage to read the letters. He said my old man came to Canada with his parents when he was twelve. The parents went back when he was sixteen and he stayed here."

Merrill's arms tightened around my neck. Just as I was starting to feel better, she squeaked, "A couple of years ago I asked for my adoption papers. My mum wasn't a local girl like they always told me. She was from Lebanon. I'm not related to anybody in town."

"But your dad—"

"He was from Quebec," Merrill said. "He was French."

"You could look for them," I said.

"I've been thinking about that. But you know what? Right now I just decided I'm not going to do it. I've had enough of the past. I figure who I am today is good enough."

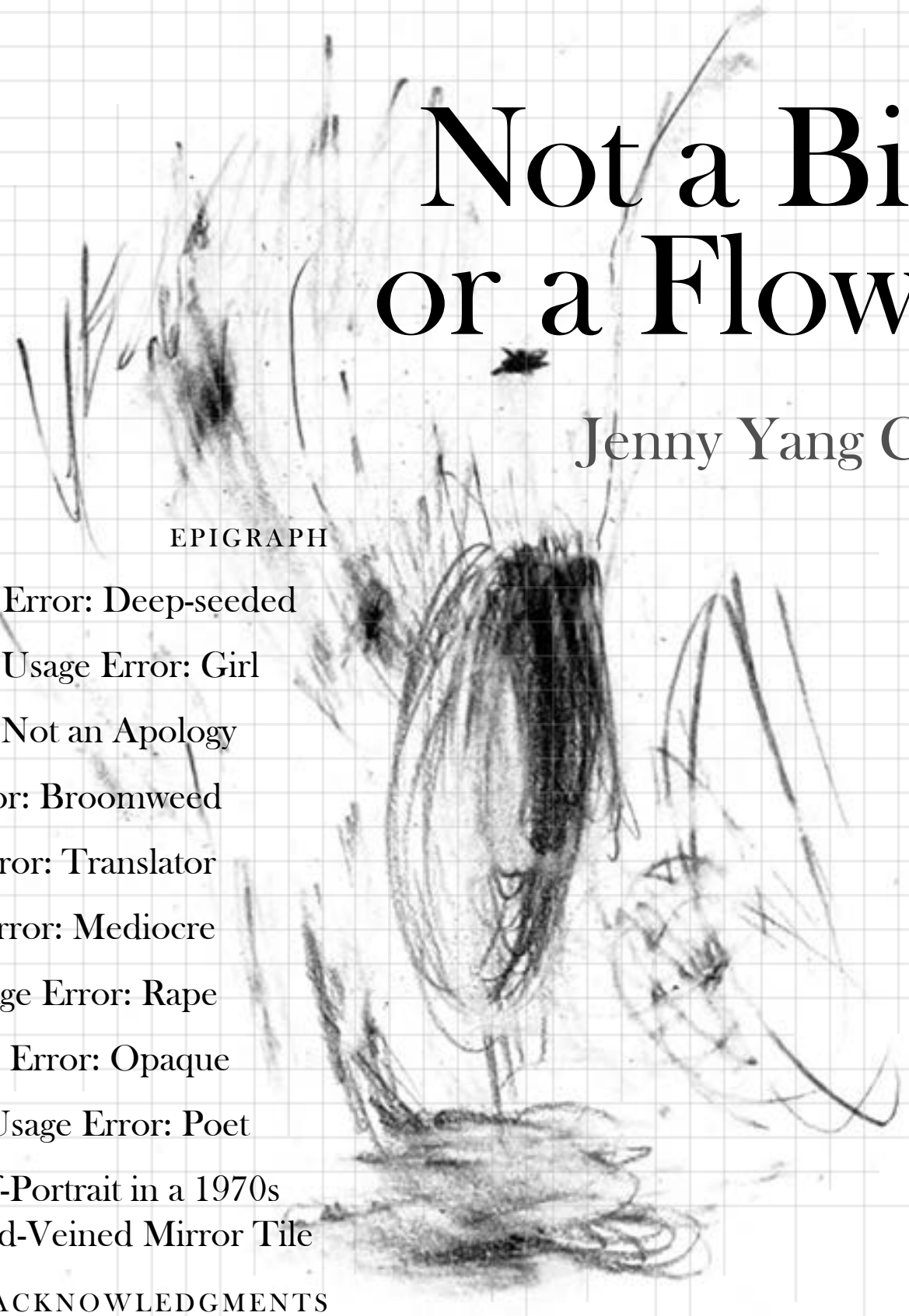
I gave Merrill a kiss and slipped the Ford into gear. We were different people now, even if we didn't realize it yet. We drove home in silence, knowing that tomorrow we would put on our uniforms and continue making our living off people who were looking for their heritage.

Stephen Henighan has been

Title page photo © Marc Pascual (courtesy pixabay.com)

Not a Bird or a Flower

Jenny Yang Cropp

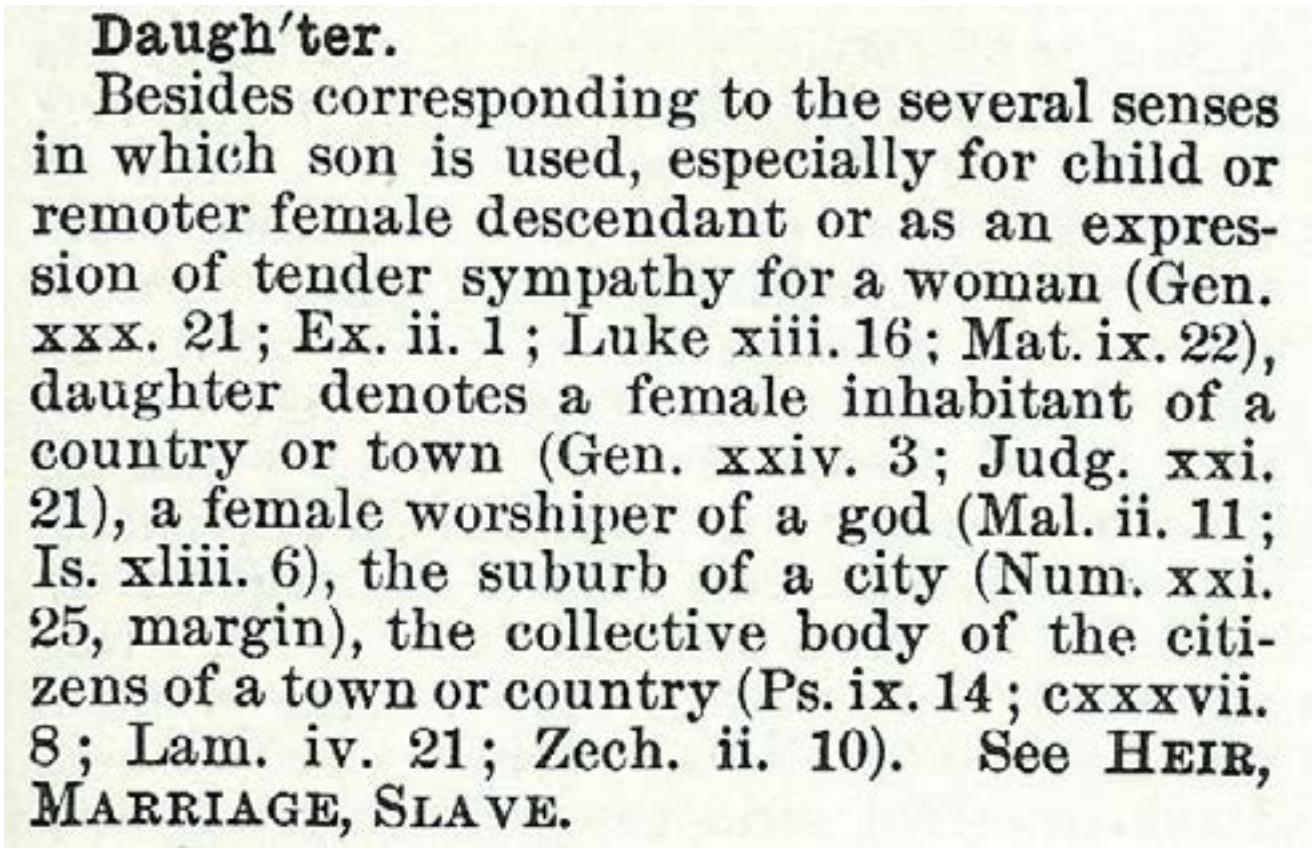


What I thought were the arms
aching *cleave*, were the knees trembling *leave*.
What I thought were the muscles
insisting *resist, persist, exist,*
were the pores
hissing *mist* and *waste*.
What I thought was the body humming *reside, reside,*
was the body sighing *revise, revise*.
O, the murderous deletions, the keening
down to nothing, the cleaving.
All of the body's revisions end
in death.
All of the body's revisions end.

—Li-young Lee, "The Cleaving"

USAGE ERROR: DEEP-SEEDED

I am grasping at dirt. First knuckle, then elbow, then shoulder-deep in it, I have dug myself a hole. It isn't that I think I can escape, find myself on the other side of the world. It isn't that I think playing in the dirt is good for the soul. This isn't about nature or mindfulness. Maybe I just believe in digging, the process of it, dirt beneath the nails giving me something to wash away at night. Or maybe I like watching my hole become a pit, my pit become a place to hide things. My rag doll's plucked eye. A list of curse words tucked into a triangle and passed to me. A wire stripped from my bra and used to pick a lock. The night of our attempted suicides. Boys and girls brandishing their weapons. My collection of sharp edges. I can leave them here. Deep beneath the dirt. I can bury them in this red clay. How we thrive in a hostile environment, how we manage to take root.



Daugh'ter.

Besides corresponding to the several senses in which son is used, especially for child or remoter female descendant or as an expression of tender sympathy for a woman (Gen. xxx. 21; Ex. ii. 1; Luke xiii. 16; Mat. ix. 22), daughter denotes a female inhabitant of a country or town (Gen. xxiv. 3; Judg. xxi. 21), a female worshiper of a god (Mal. ii. 11; Is. xliii. 6), the suburb of a city (Num. xxi. 25, margin), the collective body of the citizens of a town or country (Ps. ix. 14; cxxxvii. 8; Lam. iv. 21; Zech. ii. 10). See HEIR, MARRIAGE, SLAVE.

Figure 1: Entry from the Davis Dictionary of the Bible (1954)

USAGE ERROR: GIRL

What you mean is daughter, mother, lover, girl in relation to. What you mean is other than what I mean, what you mean is foreign, a thing not recognized, the absence of, not mother, mother again. What you mean is laughter. What you mean is silence or sweetness. What I mean, though, is a kind of rage.

THIS IS NOT AN APOLOGY

The father to his daughter says, *Sometimes, when a hard man begets a hard son who begets a hard son, they will sing in the forked tongue of their own anger. They will pretend they know God, are God, have been forgiven by… And when a hard man begets a daughter, he forgets to sing at all. In the sadness of her birth, he mistakes flesh for softness, plucks the fruit from her mouth and tells her to hush when she cries.*

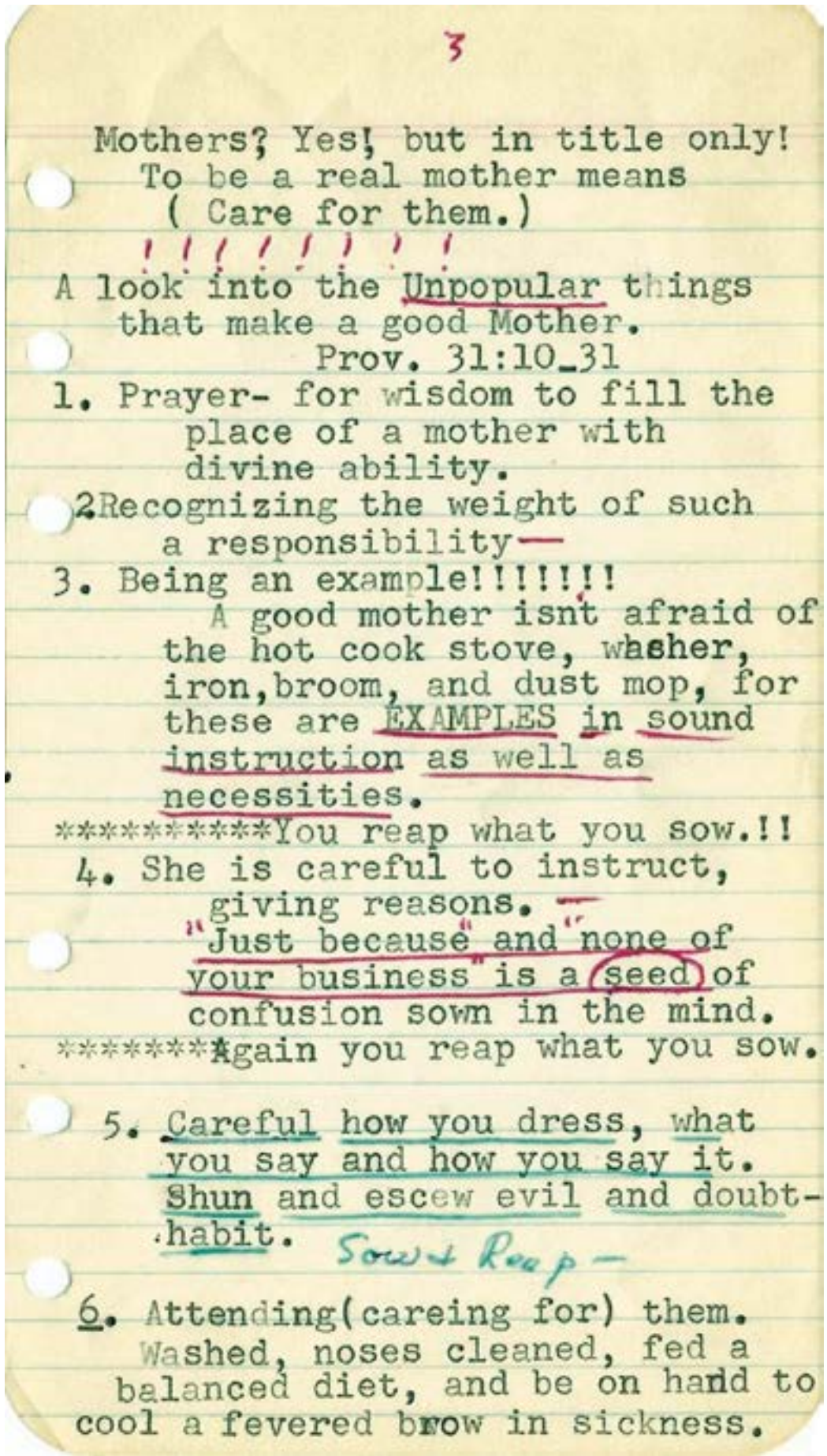
His daughter recalls the summer after she'd been cut off, the chemical smell of varnish, the scratched and tagged blonde wood of her dorm room bunk, the rippled outline of clearance sale surrealist posters, Magritte warped by the wet heat and molding, her body pinned, her boyfriend's drunk hands, familiar echo of threat. To her father, she says, *This is not a parable*.

To herself, she says, *I am not a bird or a flower.*
Or a fundamental truth about birds or flowers.
Or the sharp but unidentifiable lines of part of a bird or a flower, a close-up with blurred background hinting at a larger existence.

When she was twelve, she held a knife to her skin and found it was stone. She knows he doesn't want her forgiveness, that he has already forgiven himself.

USAGE ERROR: BROOMWEED

These are not our fences. These are not our yards to cross, our walls of summertime chiggers strung from post to post and drinking from damp laundry, but we rush through them anyway, and we are not caught. We are not bit. I like to think of the world this way, when we're walking low in the space between the yards as the sun pinks and purples a brown horizon, knowing it's getting past eight and nearly time to head home, as if home wasn't the place we'd been running from all day. I like to think of us unafraid. There's time enough for truth. For now, I can hurl my body over a barrier as if it has never been chased by a boy with a sling-shot, as if it has never been bruised or bled by a brick or pole, as if the top of each rusted chain-link fence isn't a saw someone put there to teach my hands a lesson. For now, these are fields of sweet yellow flowers we've landed in, and our hearts are made of medicine



3

Mothers? Yes! but in title only!
To be a real mother means
(Care for them.)
!!!!!!!!!
A look into the Unpopular things
that make a good Mother.
Prov. 31:10_31
1. Prayer- for wisdom to fill the
place of a mother with
divine ability.
2Recognizing the weight of such
a responsibility—
3. Being an example!!!!!!!
A good mother isnt afraid of
the hot cook stove, washer,
iron,broom, and dust mop, for
these are EXAMPLES in sound
instruction as well as
necessities.
**********You reap what you sow.!!
4. She is careful to instruct,
giving reasons.
"Just because" and "none of
your business" is a seed of
confusion sown in the mind.
*******Again you reap what you sow.

5. Careful how you dress, what
you say and how you say it.
Shun and escew evil and doubt-
habit. Sow & Reap —

6. Attending(careing for) them.
Washed, noses cleaned, fed a
balanced diet, and be on hand to
cool a fevered brow in sickness.

Figure 2: Page from Mother's Day sermon

USAGE ERROR: TRANSLATOR

When I tell my father about the restaurant where my mother was refused service, he tells me it didn't happen.

But it did.
Napkins folded into bishops' hats.
Lemon floating in heavy-stemmed glasses.
They would have sweat in our hands had we been allowed to hold them.

So he takes me there the next night, same restaurant, same table. Says, *See. You belong here. You are mine*. I sip the water cautiously. I am a secret he does not reveal. We eat steak.

My mouth is full when a letter from my mother arrives. It is the only letter she will ever write to me. It's in a language I was never taught. I call to ask her what it means, but the steak spills from my lips, and she tells me I will need a translator.

Her English is good enough, my father says. When she fought for custody, she brought a translator to court. *For sympathy. For show*.

Love, she said in Korean. Which sounded to the judge like, *I do not belong here.*
Please, she said. Which translated to, *These children should not be mine*.

I see her now, alone at her table, sending messages I will read as years of absence, as white space waiting to be filled.

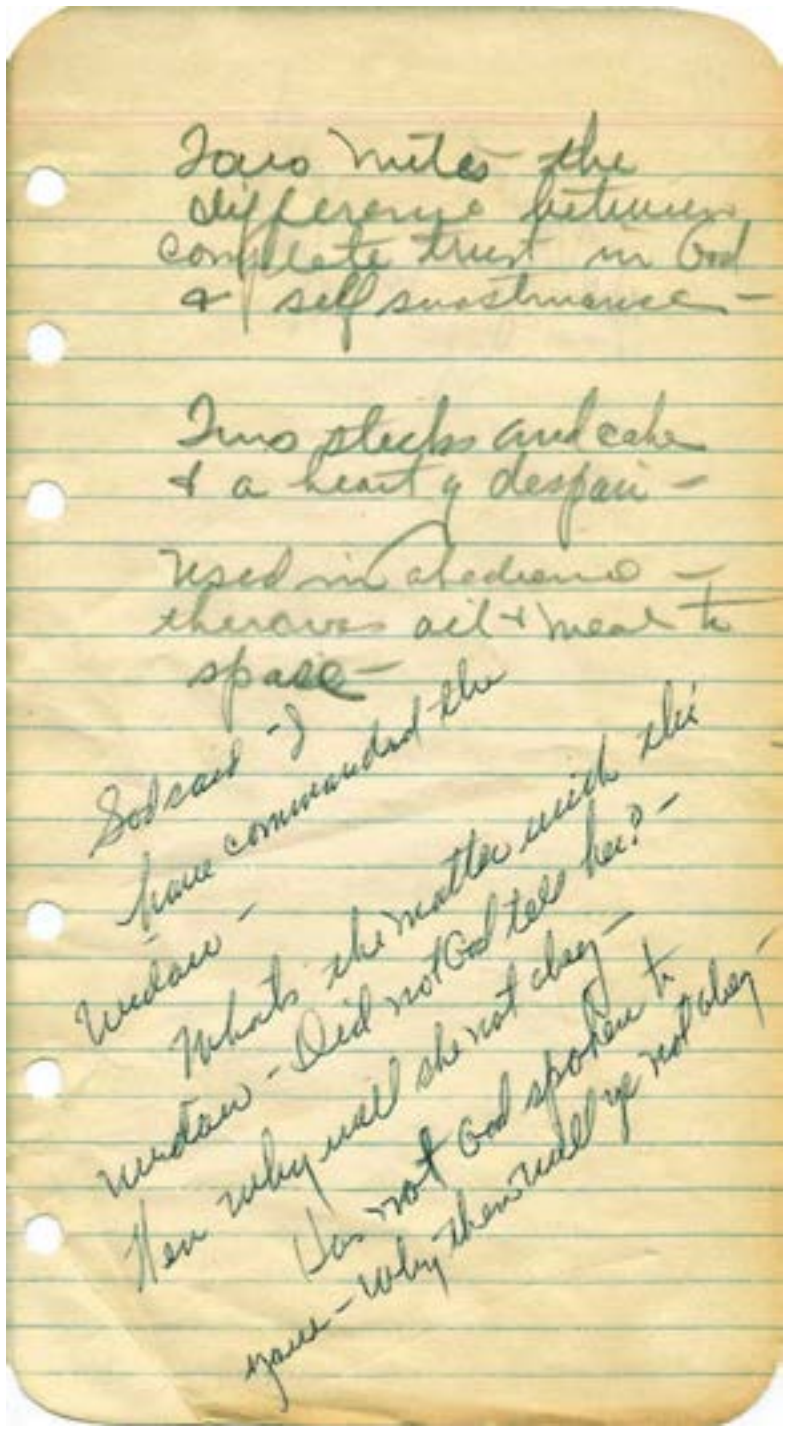


Figure 3: Margin notes on obedience

USAGE ERROR: MEDIOCRE

He closes his eyes, head tilted in hard listening. *Do you see that?* I see the glow of numbers and dials. It's been dark for hours. While the rest of the world dries the dinner dishes, puts the children to bed, we sit here listening to song after song, driven out of the house but only making it as far as the driveway. The music is better here. More is possible here when the visible world shrinks to the inside of this car. The things we love do not belong to us, to people who grew up in low brick houses with storm windows that never opened and yards kept neat and empty, whose brothers and fathers labor with their bodies, whose mothers and sisters labor with their bodies. *Do you see it?* I see the dim shadow of my own hand twitching nervously because there are no lyrics just now. For me, the notes are just notes. For him, they light the sky. We each have our way, and I envy him his. Whatever pain or problem stalking his brain tonight, this short-circuits, this, and he's off in another version of him so far away only he can see it. We've inherited different versions of the same fear. How to get out. *I don't see it.* I am more hungry than blind. I am waiting for the words. Give me words, and my mouth waters. Feed me syllables, and I explode in color and smoke.

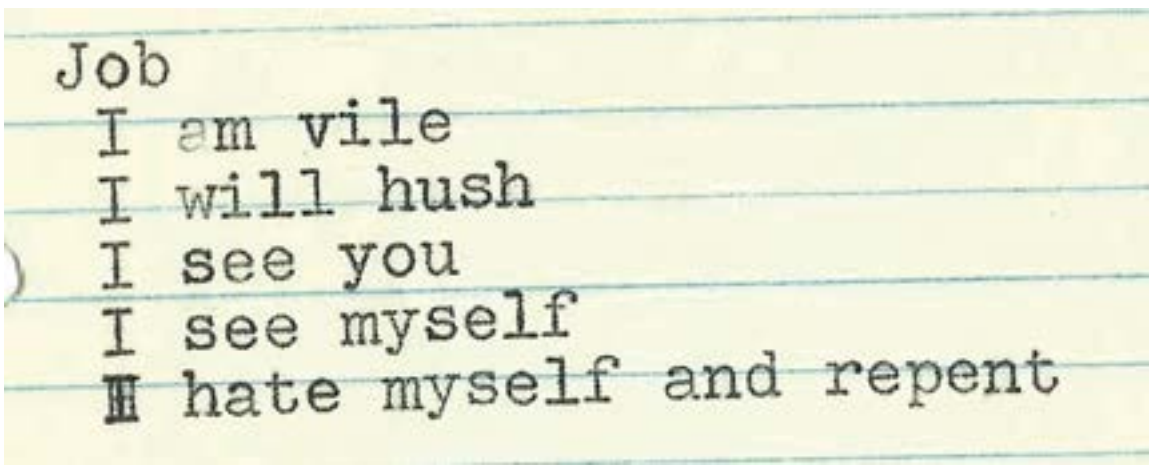

Job
I am vile
I will hush
I see you
I see myself
III hate myself and repent

Figure 4: Excerpt from sermon on Job

USAGE ERROR: RAPE

01010100 01101000 01100101 01111001 00100000 01110011 01100001
01101001 01100100 00100000 01001001 0001010 01100011 01101111
01110101 01101100 01100100 01101110 00100111 01110100 00100000
01100011 01100001 01101100 01101100 00100000 01101001 01110100
0001010 01110010 01100001 01110000 01100101 00101100 0001010
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01100101 00101100 0001010 01100001 01101110 01100100 00100000
01001001 0001010 01110011 01110100 01100001 01101110 01100100
00100000 01100010 01111001 0001010 01110100 01101000 01101001
01110011 00100000 01110101 01110011 01100001 01100111 01100101
00101110

USAGE ERROR: OPAQUE

I won't give it up, or I can't unlearn it, the way it feels when I say it like this, a word still clinging to light, that sliver of shape or meaning that might pass through. When I hear the word, I think of milk, the way it seems to hold and emit light. I think of it spilling and spreading until the grain of the wood table emerges, until the pattern of linoleum below, goldenrods and brown borders, is inked in iridescence. If I say my face in the fog of the mirror is opaque, nearly erased, I know I have it wrong and I don't care. It's a spectrum. I am mostly wrong. I am nearly right. I am a pessimist who can't help but hope just a little. I am a girl who shuts her eyes to the light and watches how it seeps in anyway.

USAGE ERROR: POET

What I remember first is the light. And then we are in a parking lot in Oklahoma, middle of nowhere, middle of summer. I can't tell you the time of day because the sun floods the plains in a way that makes it hard to distinguish, but that light, that is how I know this isn't a parking lot in New Jersey. It's a particular kind of light, it's Oklahoma, I'm sure of it, and there are Red Hots from a gas station, and we aren't at a Whataburger, but passing by, passing through, on a long walk home.

This makes me want to write a book. Nothing in the book will be true. Nothing in the book will be untrue.

There will be light and Red Hots and parking lots and passersby, and none of it will be viable, in that none of it will live beyond the pages of the book. All of it will be legal. All of it, a disclaimer. Which is that I make things up. Which is that I am writing down exactly what happens. Which is that in the moment of writing it ceases to be exactly what happened. In the moment of remembering, it ceases to be. What I mean to say is that it is never exactly what happened, not even when it is happening, not even in the light of day.

SELF-PORTRAIT IN A 1970s GOLD-VEINED MIRROR TILE

1.

Polaroid. Summer. 1990.

The way she posed herself, lying on her mother's closet floor, fingertips of her left hand resting

against the looking glass
just so, as if the veins of gold were tributaries
tracing back
to the same source.

Her wrist emerges from the lower left. Most of the background obscured by the flash reflecting, a face half shadow and half blur behind and above which

the arms and shoulders of her mother's wardrobe vaguely hang.

2.

The only thing seen in detail is her hand,

its thin fingers making the knuckles seem disproportionately large,
fingernails filed—short, neat, round—except for a thumb whose ragged
edge and peeling cuticle shows signs of habitual, unconscious chewing,

though not outright biting,

of the nail. Her diary entry that day reads, *I wonder if it will turn out*.

What *it* is, she doesn't say.

3·

This effacement of her image, of which the mirror is a reflection, of which the photograph is a recording once removed.

Through that tiny viewfinder,
she saw everything that couldn't be seen
but would become important to her:
the way she would know herself less and less each day,

the way her body would move on, leaving her behind, abandoned, only sometimes sending a short letter or postcard apologizing in a language both familiar and foreign, like the skin in the middle of her back, always there but untouched.

4.

The body establishes itself.

It is true that a body can go vast distances and still return, but hers will not.

The surface of the mirror calls attention to itself, marbled, split, unreliable.
What use is a soul without a body? This is what the photograph says.

With every viewing,
she must have seen the other side of the hand pushing away,
its reflection pushing back.

5·

This push and push contains us, though the shape of it varies.

The body's ability
to stretch, conform, obey.
Spectacle. Spectacular. Speculum.
From the Latin *speculum magnum matricis*, great mirror of the womb.

In Pompeii they found intact specula made of bronze. Thick duck-billed blades screwed open and shut like a clamp.

6.

Dear Girl in the Photograph,

Did you see in yourself a love of mirrors and watch that loving become a
fear, that fearing, another you to be undone?

Worse than the one who wants to see you splayed open, figured inside out,
is the one who mistakes your body for known quantities.

That's your hand reaching toward you.
That's your face receding,
partly menaced and partly sad at the hand's approach.

Do you see yourself in the tile both trapped and set adrift?
Ursa in two dimensions?

Love,
A Thing in a Frame

7.

Her eyes say nothing, betray nothing.

The thing to break is the frame, but a tile has no frame. Its raw edges run parallel to the raw edges of other tiles and on and on, a monotony of boxes. Pattern and repetition until my eyes are heavy from the looking, until my son runs into the room and breaks the quiet lies I tell myself when I'm alone.

I think about all the stops and starts.
All the anecdotal evidence—
so beautiful and doesn't know it,
so beautiful and never looks in a mirror,
so beautiful naturally—
how we use them to train ourselves out of looking.

8.

So much looking without looking, knowing without knowing, being
without a body.

But what good is a soul without seeing?
For centuries, we thought
Mizar and Alcor
were two stars, one bright and one faint,
a naked eye binary by which
we could test the accuracy of our vision.

But Mizar is four stars. Alcor is two. Horse and rider. Fruitful. Multiplied.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A portion of the poem "Self-Portrait in a 1970s Gold-Veined Mirror Tile" first appeared in the Corroborations exhibit at the University of South Dakota.

Earlier versions of "This Is Not an Apology" and "Usage Error: Opaque" first appeared online in *Festival Writer*.

"Usage Error: Deep-seeded" and "Usage Error: Broomweed" first appeared in *REAL: Regarding Arts and Literature*.

"Usage Error: Translator" first appeared online in *Poemeleon*.

NOTES

Figure 1 was scanned directly from my grandfather's personal copy of the *Davis Dictionary of the Bible* from 1954. Figures 2-4 were scanned from my grandfather's sermon notebooks. He was a minister for the Assemblies of God, a Pentecostal denomination, for thirty years.

The poem "Usage Error: Rape" was written in English and then converted to binary.

Jenny Yang Cropp is the author of the poetry collection *String Theory*, a 2016 Oklahoma Book Award finalist, and the chapbook *Hanging the Moon*. She is an Assistant Professor of English at Southeast Missouri State where she also serves as poetry editor for the literary journal *Big Muddy*.