

RYGA NUMBER 9, SUMMER 2016

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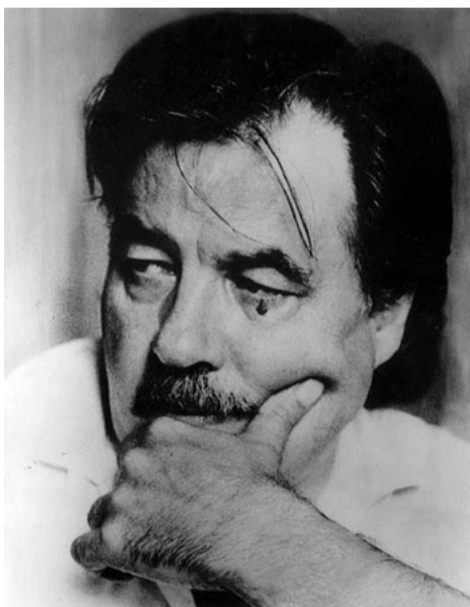
Editors: Sean Johnston and
Corinna Chong

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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.



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five screenplays, two long-playing albums, three novels, and a book of poetry, as well as a considerable body of unpublished and unproduced work.

KATE KENNEDY

WOODLORE

When the ground is still wet, you can
make your fire on a rock, they were taught,
thirty twelve-year-olds raw damp
the last day of a rain-soaked outweek
in the mountains behind their town.

The meadow studded with glacial
erratics, cured with pale lichens
that made each boulder its own imaginary
map. Spread across the alpine
in chattering clusters of three or four,
around their first successful flames,
water in their little metal pots convinced
at last, from the dusting of hopeful bubbles
into full rolling riot. Then a calm hum
spread from rock to rock. Later they'd descend
back into the sopping trees, sad chaos
of tents and gear, but for that hour...

If you meet them later in their lives and wonder
where they go sometimes, it's just above the treeline,
on that advice, for a dry rock for their fires.
If it seems they're not with you, they've only got
their water on to boil in the meadow, sometimes
in the company of other old twelve-year-olds
on imaginary respite from the sodden topography
every place else. Cooking lunch and
drying out their socks.

PENINSULA

Dewlap is the word
for the bit that hangs
from a moose's chin,
I found out later,
but that evening waiting
in the warm and vaguely
watery light of the hotel
restaurant in Matapedia,
I didn't know it yet,
only liked the goofy,
musing nudge it offered
from its place on the wall,
as I leaned in to study
the fishing supplies
displayed in the case below.

We had dinner in the in-between,
so civilized, we kept saying,
who had been driving all week,
our roadside picnics, so
in their element along the lakes
of the Shield, since gone stale.

Should have stayed, we would
keep telling ourselves later,
at midnight, muddling through Grand-Anse,
Maisonette, Caraquet—
Acadie in the fog and all its open signs
unplugged for the night, or
the whole fall and winter.
Almost stayed, tucked in
the crook of two provinces,
with all that near-expedition
hanging in the lobby:

Gentlemen, I'll see you on the Restigouche!
(Roosevelt or Albert Paine, before disappearing
into the fling of the Gaspé.)
We'll go over our kit.
(Fill up on vol-au-vent, crêpes de la mer.)
Set out at dawn.
(What we almost, should have done.)

TUCSON, OR, THE INFINITIVE

To attend a party at a train station is
to invite all possibility in to swarm. At once
here and gone, your outline flickering
on and off above the platform,
the air still dry and hot, but without
the weight of sun a static clip of circadian.

In between the city—
the parking garage with its lineup of leftovers
from the masquerade ball downtown—
and the open rails, the desert night, our continent
humming whole, neither unchosen nor unavailable yet.

To stay or go, to dance with the one that brought you
when the mariachi band begins or then again
to find your purse and buy a ticket west
before the heat goes off the day and the cold
finds you still pacing the hardening ground of
to be or not.

“SEKHMET, WHO SMITES”

The Egyptian collection is most popular.
Standing room only for the mummies, six deep
around the Rosetta Stone, sweaty schools
of uniformed children—damp kilts,
gangly ties—this rainy afternoon, pulsing
statue to statue, shriek and reprimand, until a break
as one company of shocking neon sweaters
flickers off at a right angle, leaving
a quiet gap, and I get a sudden quartet
of granite women to myself.

Not women. Lionesses. Breasted.
Two seated, two standing, tall, contented.
Each bearing behind her head her own round sun,
and, according to their panel, statues of Sekhmet,
“aggressive aspect of Mut.” I like this: aspect.
That it might present as the head of a separate beast
completely and so calmly. Smooth jowls,
ordered whiskers, clear-eyed loom.

“Sekhmet, who smites”—an old translation
into a verb we stumble now to march
through its paces: she smote, and then
the bandied, cutesified smitten.
Tell it to my lion head,
as we steady our suns, relax our chops,
breathe through the cheekbones, ready
to tear a swath.

THE LIFE RAFT

It's sort of a speakeasy, you said. Down the one-block side street and around the back, up the narrow stairs to the candle-lit attic. We're among the first as our hosts repair from the couch to their bar, an old door laden with the night's offerings: half-pints of porter, dark and stormies. Keeley mixes and pours, Adam motions to pickled eggs and other home-canned bites from the shelf above. More arrive, the couch suddenly full, others on the floor, an ancient bulldog at the feet of her librarian mistress. The window propped open. Now a cyclist has bumped his steed up and over the bannister and parked it in the bathtub, shedding layers and putting in his order. Winter has us talking summer—seed stores, the nearest lakes—but come August I know I'll want back this March night, the square of door holding my drink and candle, the fug of wet wool, conversations collapsing in on one another, a sweaty cheekbone turned at intervals to the cold. The desperation we harp on and then miss the moment it's not there at our throats.

Kate Kennedy is from Lillooet, BC. After many years in the Maritimes, she now lives in Victoria. Her poetry has been published in numerous journals, including *The Fiddlehead*, *The Malahat Review*, *The Antigonish Review*, *Ryga*, and *PRISM*, and has twice been selected for the annual Best Canadian Poetry in English. Her thoughts on reading, writing and editing can be found at katekennedyeditor.com

Title page photo © Dariusz Rompa

from

Eric Ollila

Prologue: Part One

A BAREFOOT WOMAN WEARING a short white dress sits on the edge of a plush couch's corner cushion. If a couch could be considered voluptuous, this would be the couch. The fabric of the couch is blue velvet: a thick, luscious, delicious, wonderful, blue velvet—not the blue velvet of some other time or place: not the empty, laughable, lean-but-fat-Elvis blue velvet, the unreal blue velvet, the harmonious blue velvet of shared experience, the blue velvet of utopian ideals, the fucking joke blue velvet—no, this couch's blue velvet is the blue velvet of the today, of the here and the now—the kind of blue velvet that sucks your fingers into it as you run your hand across it—the kind of blue velvet that caresses you as you caress it—the kind of blue velvet that sends the toucher, the viewer, the receiver, the receptacle, the consumer, images of bodies, and heat, and sex, and heat, and bodies, and sex—the kind of blue velvet one wants to get primeval on—the kind of blue velvet couch a barefoot girl wearing a short, white dress shouldn't be sitting on. The blue velvet couch is the beginning, and the girl has now become.

The woman's legs are extended before her, allowing her toes to rest on the edge of a glass coffee table. Her legs are thin; her knees are comically knobby. Her toenails are painted pink—painted flawless, glittering pink. The skin of her toes edges against the pink of the nails; her skin, her flesh, is light-pink—a natural pink. But her nails are the pink of a neon light-stick snapped with a quick crack and wrapped around the wrist of a fluorescent-eyed rave-queen who dances, who krumps, who thrusts and slams her hips and chest back and forth with a machine-gun staccato under a pair of glow-in-the-dark giant green lips that have been hung from a steel girder in an abandoned slaughter house.

On the woman's knees rests a pink plastic platter. The platter is topped with a pink plastic tea pot and two small pink plastic saucers with matching tea cups. A handcrafted, ornate, antique, oversized silver spoon has been placed in the center of the modern plastic piece—this leads to a question: would the antique spoon's seventeenth-century craftsman have considered its placement on the pink plastic platter to be blasphemy, or would he have considered it art? The answer to this query can only be: Who cares what the spoon's craftsman would think—he's dead.

An upside-down reflection of the woman can be seen on the spoon—her mouth rests above her eyes, so she can't help but look unnatural. However, to the spoon, both the woman and the man are unnatural; the platter, however, is perfect and natural—even anatomical. The spoon, then, offers a true reflection of the platter: the spoon

shows life from the inside-out and reality from the downside-up. The woman fidgets with the tea kettle and saucers, adjusting them only after a few moments of careful study.

She leans over to see her handiwork, and her hair, a platinum blonde bob, tickles the cheap, plastic earrings she wears in both ears. Her fingers hover over the platter, over the edges of the saucers. Her fingers are bent inward, like talons. She looks like an owl poised to strike at a field mouse. She is gliding in, peering at her prey, her fingers, the talons, are lifting, separating, preparing to slash. Her eyes narrow as she focuses. She pushes out her chest. She has the mouse in her sights, but what will she distract it with? She draws her fingers in, all except for her index fingers, those long, tapered index fingers—she holds her index fingers like twin pistols: bang, you're dead. Without lifting her head, not at all naturally, not at all like a woman, more like an owl, she turns and smiles at the man who sits at the far end of the couch. "Would you like some tea?" she asks. Her eyes widen as she waits.

The man, wearing a crisp, grey business suit, sits stiffly, his hands swallowing his knees. He doesn't feel at all comfortable in that suit. The stiff collar of his white shirt rubs against his skin; the shirt picks at his skin—pick, pick, pick, pick, pick, pick: it's pulling against everything. His raven-black hair, straight as a scorched prairie horizon, is cut short. His hair rebels against the cut: the ends rise from their bed—like each shard is shot through with electricity, each piece levitates—each piece tries to escape. He glances quickly at the coffee table: the woman's toes, the sparkling nails seeming to wink at him, wiggle at its edge. Without looking at her face, he says, "No... no. Thanks, though. I'm okay."

What a wonderful nose he has—strong, firm, bold. He looks at the platter, at the saucers, at the spoon, at the upside-down woman with her mouth above her eyes. He licks his lips and tastes sweat. *Saltpeter*, he thinks, and he smiles thinly, bitterly: Bang, you're dead. He remembers Emily laughing. *Oh, Emily*, he thinks.

The woman turns back to the platter. She frowns, and the upside-down woman in the spoon smiles. "There's not really any tea, you know," she says. She tosses her head to the side, and her earrings jiggle against her cheek. The earrings rub against the small, translucent hairs that form a soft, invisible, downy thatch on her cheeks. The plastic earrings, green and orange dolphins caught in mid-leap, ride gently across the undulating, rhythmic, tender hairs. There are chips in the earrings, or maybe they're in the girl, that make the dolphins flash when they move. The lilac-colored flash starts at the noses of the dolphins, and then it ripples through their clear bodies, ending at their tails. "It's just make-believe," the woman says. The lilac dolphins frolic.

The man chuckles grimly and looks at the woman. *She will be a holy terror*, he thinks. *She will be a beauty*, he thinks. *She will be a savior*, he thinks. *She will be a goddess*, he thinks. *She will rip your heart out*, he thinks. He admires her skin, her soft lashes, her high cheekbones. He lowers his eyes and turns them back to his knees; he draws small, invisible circles in the hollows on the inside of his knees with his thumbs. He draws the circles, then jabs his thumbnails into the center of them. A Tiffany-style lamp resting on the glass coffee table throws shadows on the thumb-impaled invisible circles. The man smiles when he notices that the three o'clock on his right knee is a nine o'clock on the other. *She will get whatever she wants*, he thinks. *Whether it is three o'clock or nine o'clock, whether it is real or make-believe, she will get what she wants. Where's Belle?*

The woman continues to fiddle with the tea set. Her talons dig into the sides of the teapot. She skewers the teapot—her big owl-eyes are unblinking. She turns the teapot a smidge, making its spout point perfectly straight down the middle of the tea cups and saucers. The teapot has become sexualized. The tea cups and the saucers are innocent. The teapot is victimizing the tea cups and the saucers. The woman nods with satisfaction. The upside-down face in the antique spoon laughs.

“Lots of times, me and my sister walk to Saversmart to get pop,” the woman says. “It’s just twenty-five cents from the machines outside the store. It’s really cold, too. It’s probably the coldest pop I’ve ever had.” She turns to him. The lamp throws daggers of light into her eyes. The daggers of light become spears. The spears leap from her eyes to his. He winces as the spears pierce him. The spears penetrate his mind. He feels the flesh laid open, the tender spot bared, the button exposed—will she touch it?

“If you’re thirsty,” the woman says, “you could just walk down there. It’s just down the street.” She makes a popping sound with her lips—pop-pop. Her red tongue flicks out from between her pink lips; the button is now depressed. She wets her lips with the saliva on her tongue. Her face is long. Her tongue is narrow.

His eyes darting to the door that lies across the room, the man softly clears his throat; it’s a low rumble—like a long, low, slow Southern California temblor. “No, I’m okay,” he says. “Not thirsty, at all. Really.” His tongue is dry. His lips are chapped. He’s dying for a drink. His thirst pulses and rages. Before him, the cherry-coloured hardwood floor gleams. *God, could I drink*, he thinks. A shadow cuts through the thin slice of light that shows under the door, and the man twitches. He drops his head, and the unruly ends of his thatched hair teeter. *Let me drink*, he thinks. The tips of his hair catch the daggers of light thrown by the Tiffany-style lamp—they burn bright, like a sienna sunset reflected in a placid lake, or like vengeance, or like a burning, gasoline-soaked tire placed around the shoulders of a peasant.

“You sure look thirsty,” says the woman. The spears fly from her eyes.

The man steels himself; his shoulders become rigid. He feels tired. He curls his upper lip as he grimaces. One can see bridgework there. His teeth look strong. The bridgework is like a grey fence running along the outer edges of his teeth. His teeth are like cottonwood trees—tall and worn and dull—and the bridgework makes them seem vulnerable, childlike, abused, forgotten, neglected, pitiful. His teeth have weathered. Cut them in half and, while the man screams, one could count the rings. The woman eyes his bridgework carefully.

The shadow under the door disappears and, just slightly, the man’s shoulders slump. His grimace fades into resignation, and the bridgework disappears behind his thick brown lips. His brown eyes drop to his hands. Those hands are scarred, but not too much. He’s always been proud of his hands. He has thick, strong fingernails. His fingers are also thick and strong. His palms are square and well-centered. His wrists are wide and sturdy. The stiff grey suit looks like crêpe paper next to his strong hands. He squeezes his knees with those strong hands until pain bursts from his kneecaps. The veins on the backs of his hands fill with blood; he can see his own pulse. He turns and looks from the woman to the teapot and back to the woman again. He raises his right eyebrow—it tents. After a few moments, he jerks his head toward the pot. “What’s on the kettle?” he asks.

The woman lifts up the teapot. “It’s a teddy bear,” she says. Extending her arm toward the man, she holds the teapot before him. “See? He’s smiling.”

The bear is indeed smiling. The bear is pink, as is the teapot.

The man squints and moves his head forward and back. “Oh, yeah. I see. It’s a teddy bear, a pink teddy bear. It’s hard to make out because it’s the same color as the pot. My sister had one like that when we were kids.” The man is lying when he says this.

The man’s eyes betray hesitation—they jump from the bear to the woman to his knees to the floor to the lamp to the daggers. What is he to do? His thick lips pull back and bare his wooden teeth.

“What?” asks the woman.

“A teapot, um, like that. My, uh, sister had a teapot like that. I, uh, think, uh, it was... just... like... that.”

The woman smiles—her teeth are white and sharp. Oh, how they cause flesh to bleed; how they cause the button to flutter. “Hmm. Do you want a cup of tea now?”

The man pokes a finger under the collar of his shirt and pulls on it. The fabric of the shirt pulls at the man’s skin—the shirt doesn’t want to let go. The man pulls hard on the shirt, and the shirt lets loose its hold. His finger still tucked under the collar of

the shirt, still holding the shirt away from his skin, the man exhales deeply. He looks back at the daggers of light flashing out from under the door and shrugs. “Okay,” he says. “I’ll take a cup.”

The woman smiles and turns to the platter. With her long, tapered fingers, she gingerly picks up a saucer and cup and begins to lean the teapot over the edge of the cup.

The man notices the woman’s fingernails; unlike her unnatural toenails, the toenails that are adorned with the glittering pink polish, her fingernails are bare and unadorned. Like her fingers, the woman’s fingernails are long and tapered. He smiles when he thinks that he’d imagined her fingers to be talons, like an owl’s. Instead, the girl’s fingers are beautiful. Seeing the woman’s fingernails reminds the man of his mother’s fingernails.

A tear forms in the man’s left eye. The tear is held there in his eye by his lower eyelid. The tear glistens, and the woman sees. He remembers those long, tapered fingernails from a commercial for a dish detergent—*Palmolive*, he thinks. He remembers watching the commercial and wondering if that was what his mother’s fingers looked like. He remembers wishing his mother’s fingers were as long and tapered and beautiful as those in the Palmolive commercial. The man blinks and the tear that rested in his eye is wiped away.

The woman sees this, her eyes widen, and she stops pouring. She turns to the man. “Oh, I’m sorry. I forgot to make any tea. There’s nothing in here.” She turns the teapot upside down—a thin film of dancing dust tumbles from the spout. The dust is caught by the light from the Tiffany-style lamp and begins to glitter. “It’s empty.” The woman smiles and her sharp teeth flash.

The man’s lips twist into a crooked, puzzled smile. “Um, okay.” The bridgework, caught in the light, the daggers and spears of the Tiffany-style lamp and the door and the girl’s glances, glows like charcoal-black fire. The shadow is sickening. The man’s teeth look like sick, rotting pines. The bridgework looks like a rusty chain. The man wants away from the woman. *Belle*, he thinks as he turns his eyes back to the light under the door. *Where are you? Belle, I’m thirsty. Take this woman away: She torments me with her spears and her sharp teeth. She’s not natural. She’s not like my mother. She’s not like my father. Or can she bleed?*

The woman places the teapot, saucer, and cup back onto the platter, then, carefully, sets the whole works beside her onto the couch’s middle cushion. Her fingers brush the blue velvet of the couch as she lays the platter on the cushion. Her fingers are sucked, swaddled, suckled, and sheltered by the fabric. A thousand buttons become stimulated. The woman’s skin has become gooseflesh. The man has become, like his mouth, like his teeth—agape and wooden.

The woman folds her hands into her lap, taps her toes on the edge of the table, and turns to the man. “Do you have any kids?” she asks. The spears fly and the sharp teeth slice. Come closer. What high cheekbones she has. What long tapered fingers she has. What straight hair she has. What dark eyes she has. What strong teeth she has. Come closer, still.

Looking back to the light under the door, the man shakes his head from side to side. “No,” he says. His wooden teeth clench tight and he opens his lips just a bit as he sucks in damp air. *Pity the poor children*, he thinks. *They know not what they do. Belle, I’m so thirsty.*

“Why not?” the woman asks. “Why don’t you have any children? Do you hate kids?”

The man pinches his lips together and straightens his back. He takes in a deep breath through his nose; it is a strong, well-formed, well-defined nose. A shadow again cuts through the light under the door. The man’s jaw slackens as he watches the shadow.

“Do you not have any kids because you don’t like them?” The woman waits. “Or is there something else?”

The man twists his head toward the woman his eyes still turned to the bottom side of the door. “What?” he asks. “What did you say?”

The woman leans back into the couch, her head touching the back cushion. “My mom hated kids. My mom hates me and my sister.”

The man turns his eyes toward the girl. “Who’s your sister?”

“Belle,” says the girl.

The man’s pulse quickens, the girl can see his veins throb.

“Belle?” he asks.

“Mmm.”

The man looks at the Tiffany-style lamp and closes his eyes.

“What’s your name?” The man licks his lips and tastes sweat.

“Kelly.”

The man opens his eyes and shakes his head from side to side. He looks past the Tiffany-style lamp. He looks past the daggers under the door.

Epilogue: Part Two

THE MAN LOOKS AT his lap. He does not know this girl—this Kelly, this girl with the white dress, with the painted toenails, with the sharp teeth, with the spears. He raises his fingers off his knees and drops them down one by one—tap, tap, tap, tap. He looks back at the door. *Where is Belle?* he thinks.

Kelly moves her toes; they rise and falls like tides, like empires, like machines, like children saying the “Pledge of Allegiance” before beginning their studies of what it is to be: mindless, thoughtless, hopeless. “It shouldn’t be too long, now,” she says. “You definitely don’t have time to go to Saversmart and get a pop—no matter how thirsty you are.”

“I’m not thirsty,” says the man. He turns to Kelly, and the spears penetrate—the button becomes a blur. What a wonderful aquiline nose. What beautiful hands and fingers. What strong teeth. What languid eyes.

Kelly sees. She snatches hold of the teapot and holds it up: the pink teddy bear surveys the man and the room. Kelly turns her head sideways and looks at the man. She yells, “You were thirsty just a little bit ago! Remember!?! Do you remember!?! Do you remember!?!”

She shakes the teapot then drops it unceremoniously. The teapot smacks into the platter, landing on the handcrafted, ornate, antique, oversized silver spoon and knocking the cups off the saucers.

The man leans away from the girl, his eyes narrowing. Is it the girl that worries him, or is it the teapot teddy bear? Is it the natural girl, or the unnatural, teapot teddy bear that worries him? Perhaps it’s both. The man thinks, *Is it the girl that is unnatural, with her painted toenails, and her sharp teeth, and her spears? And is it the teddy bear that is natural, with its halo, and its defined eyes, and its laughing smile? Am I in the teddy bear’s home—do I truly know this teapot? Or am I in the girl’s home—this house, which I do know, with the Tiffany-style lamp and the voluptuous, sexualized couch?*

The man slowly shakes his head from side-to-side. “Where’s Belle?” he asks with anguish. He takes a great, shuddering breath.

The girl, now calm, smiles and rises from the couch. She turns to the man and places her hands on her hips. She leans on one leg and turns the opposing foot out; her pink toenails shine in the light from the Tiffany-style lamp. “If you weren’t thirsty,” she says, “then why did you make me pour you some tea?” She swings her hand toward the upset teapot. She inhales deeply, holds her breath a moment, her ribcage pushing against the confines of the white dress, and screams, “See the mess you’ve made now! See what you’ve done!” She snatches up the teapot and throws it

across the room—it slams into a bureau and falls to the floor.

The man, his eyes wide and terrified, looks at her. *What has she become?* he wonders. His breathing is heavy, and his heart hammers in his chest like a gunned chainsaw. He remembers a hamster he had when he was a child. The hamster was afraid of him, and when he would clean its cage he would have to reach in and grab it. With his hand he would chase the hamster around the cage until it was cornered. The hamster would flash its sharp teeth and try to bite him as his hand closed in on it. One day, he had picked up the hamster and the hamster had bit him. He felt the hamster's heart beating rapidly as its teeth sunk into the flesh of his finger. He was surprised not at the pain of the bite, or of the blood that spilled from the wound, or of the way the blood ran up the hamster's teeth and into its mouth, but of the hamster's rapidly beating heart: it seemingly beat four or five times per second. But then, he remembered, there was nothing; the hamster died in his hands, its teeth sunk into his skin, his blood in the hamster's mouth. He had taken the hamster in the backyard and buried it under a large, flat stone.

The girl stomps out of the room, her short, white dress trailing like smoke, her bare feet slapping the hardwood floor.

The man watches the girl disappear around the corner. Once she has gone, his heart slows, and he turns his eyes to the teapot as it rolls on the floor from side to side. Coming into view as the teapot rolls one way, then fading as it rolls the other, the smiling teddy bear seems to enjoying a particularly hearty laugh. The man turns his eyes back to the dagger of light under the door. A cloak of shadow overtakes the light, and he sees the door's silver doorknob turning.

The door opens and a young woman wearing a rose camisole leans out; she doesn't yet see the man. The camisole is cinched tight, and the top of the young woman's breasts spill from it. "What the hell was that?" asks the young woman to the room.

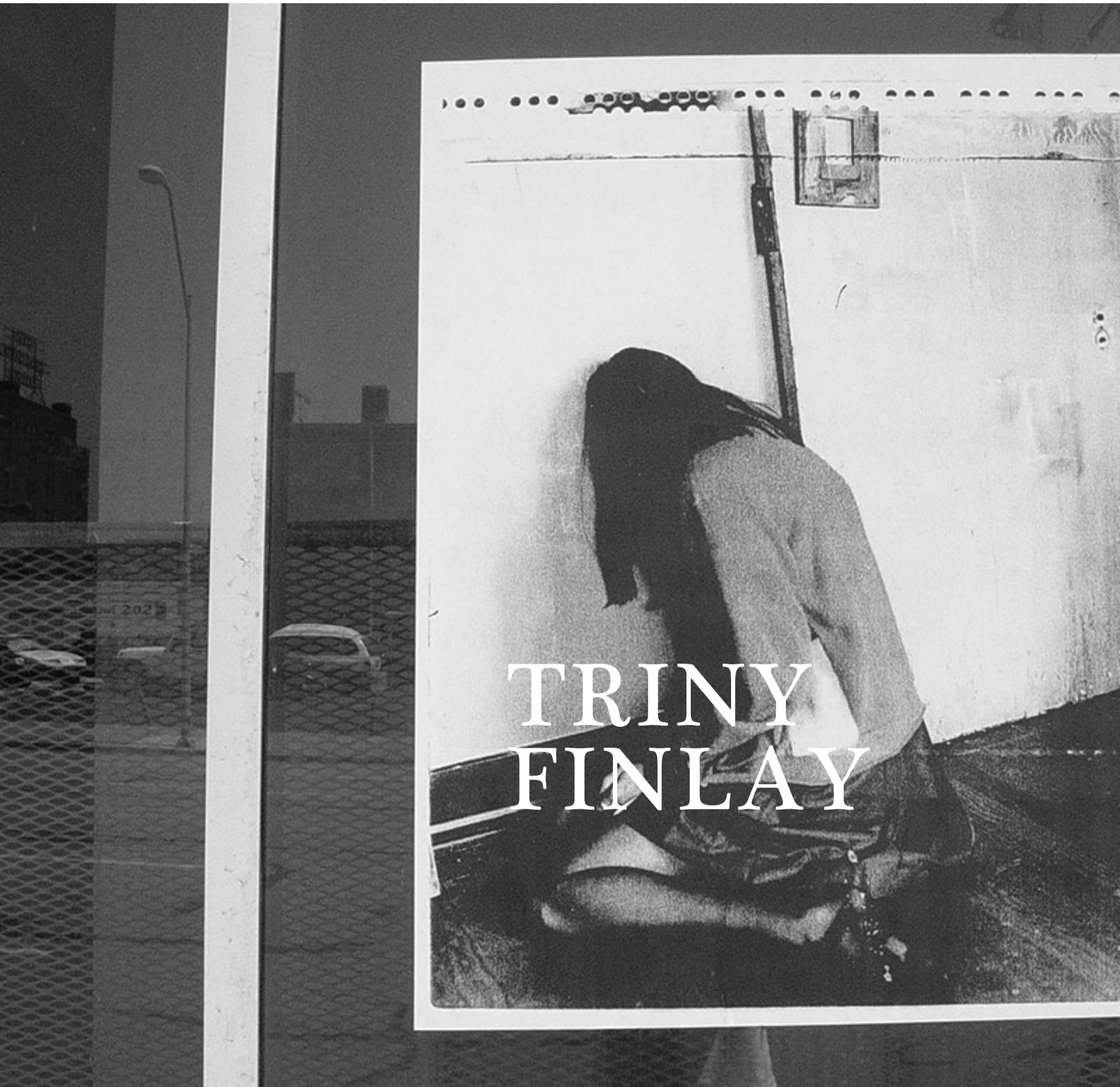
"The little girl, Kelly," says the man. "She threw her teapot against the wall."

The young woman turns her eyes to the man. Her pink-painted lips crease into a smile—her sharp teeth shimmer like wet pearls. "Greg," she says, "I've been expecting you." She steps through the door and walks to him—her bare legs and feet shine like glitter. She stands before him and holds her hands out. "Come," she says, "Come and drink. I have a secret to tell you."

He places his hands in hers and stands, and he licks his lips and tastes sweat.

Eric Ollila formerly worked in newspaper journalism and as a university publisher and editor. He is currently the executive director of several non-profit labor and professional organizations in South Dakota. He earned his MA in English in 2007 from the University of South Dakota.

Title page photo © Marta Rostek



TRINY
FINLAY

*

I don't want anyone walking
on eggshells around me.

This body a thumb drive, waiting to be
plugged in. Don't rush me.

Because you were born in Austria, I want to go
all Freud on you.

The sun tries to burn me.

There was something important
I was meant to do today.

Dare me to pop the sparkling wine.

*

Separate head from body, like so.

Re-read *Great Expectations* with a pencil
in hand. Pine for Pip.

What we are cannot be undone.
Death has been trying to find us.
You don't want what I've got.

The pale dog at the misty window,
rump against the pane, who will, like my grandmother,
pass away slowly after a terrible fall.

Time for us to go back to our cave.

*

In a stupor for months, Clonazepam
that winter. Spring came—I could do this.

A journal, close to midnight. Lost
at that time. My awkward work
to decode maps, catch the right bus.

Spent, cold, exchanged like money.
Some details float away. Meaning
in the creek of words.

That much I did understand.

They call it a spiral, but it does not resemble
a spiral. They call it the black dog, but it's no
tame animal.

It's the print of St. Agnes I gave my sister for her 40th birthday.
It's my St. Jude bracelet, circling and circling my helpless wrist.

It could all be so easy.

*

In the air, in a Dash-8, leaving sleep eat
up-down up-down downtown work.

Below me, a storage yard for loaders,
haulers, dump trucks, and bulldozers.
Orange, mighty, alien. Use value.

The horseshoe of lake-end,
cross-hatchings, settlements.

Something I should understand beyond
square within square abuts square within square abuts square

veering off at a positive angle.

And sometimes blue oval.
And sometimes blue kidney.
And why do people dig for an answer, settle—

*

First, a few blocks, a heritage house,

pastries on silver trays. That good
look: enjoy the afternoon.

Water ran through it, the neighbourhood's
past, nuances of the edge;

tastebuds are bold classicists.

Chinatown for Singapore Slings,
an intimate room dedicated

to joy, to apothecary concoctions.

*

It's almost always what it looks like.

We stay inside.

He wants to bathe

in the dark together, swig ice

water once we're done. I'll go

along with anything—pierced

tongue tracing my tattoos.

A boy watches his dad

fall through the ice, flip

around like a seal. A line of men

on their winter bellies, reaching.

Another rescue, another witness,

and he is that boy, inside me,

letting it be, a groundswell,

forever seeking atonement.

I call him Adonis to my friends.

He is a salve but not salvation.

Into my canal as oak leaves

fall... skip the blazon
this time, I just want the fire.
Pinch me: it's almost always
what it looks like.
He thinks the cat is a girl. With
anyone else this wouldn't work:
the purple lamp-lit glow of
the kitchen, nip at that spot
near the hip where all goes
hollow. Back and back
he comes, I come, glassy, why
we never step out together.

*

Wicked like a six-year-old. Moving
in while my parents were away,
sucking at my shirt
with plush, chapped lips. *You want
this*, she said, like a rapist, then bit
my left nipple. *You want this*, she said,
lifting my supple shift. I lay there—
a pin in a hat—first contact with
a girl, tit for that swirl of her tongue,
lace-edged bra. White on white, the
afternoon set to the tunes of Crosby,
Stills, and Nash: *teach your children
well.*

*

Walking to the other end of town
through the rain, ear to Marianne Faithfull,
straight to Martha's broken home, the dangling shingles.

Straight through the back door without
a knock—we have a knack for finding
each other without warning. Martha makes
me come, makes me squirm without
touching me where it always counts.

But not for the pounce, not for the leopard-like
post-coital peace, nor for the promise
of sleeping over, of release, not for the sheen
of her sienna skin when we begin again, not
for her slim feet trailing beyond the futon;
for this: a song we both knew before
we met, and sing along to in bed without
planning it.

*

Max with limp-penis fingers,
the poor circulation.

Max with the Hasselblad,
the suburbs, the jizzing
in scrunched-up boxers.

Max from the Island,
the anal fixation, the same
situation as before: a boy who
builds toys they call
genius, gets grants.

The novelty dance.

Max with the earrings,
the first of many
in that town,
near the hill.

Max with his will,
the wire-brush toes,
the throes
of defeat.

Max with the hammer,
the half-thumb, the beat.

*

Gone to Bermuda—

his mother's words through

the phone. Who stood me up

at the Pride parade.

Wonder what Bermuda

could mean for Thom with an "h."

The pale dog off-leash and leaping

at the snow, my buzzing sorrow.

Someone else leaving.

*

Whiskey-sour.

A late-night ring

you're in town

off to the bar for last call.

On the down-stairs to the bathrooms, lime-locked lips,

a slip in a stall

(tsk

And catch me again on the way back up

What that night (fill it yourself

(fill it

yours

Back at the seething table, the old crew stock-piling

green bottles of beer

and one old-fashioned—

*

We scuffed. We welded
a dream of imperfect seams.
He smelled of metal and pussy,
I pussyfooted around him
while the whole town knew
just whose he'd been chewing.
The screwing around, loosening
like nut and bolt, like lid
and Mason jar—I was a kid
in love without a seal,
without a signed deal.

*

You know her—looks harsh,
but fresh to the world.
A newborn hyena.

Eats arrowroots for breakfast.
Dips them in black coffee.

She waits for you, and you know it.
Count back the years.

Math is the same in every country.

*

Groundwork. Bending. Clear.
Not writing a standard biography.

Poems, pictures, a complicated
amalgam. Loose chronology.

The complexity of wild
boars and outrageous behavior:
snorting with consorts, snorting
with consorts, and sorting.

Appalling. Dedicated. Surrounded
by people who use people.

No sign of light. Some latitude,
contradictions, and the attempted

erasure of constant denigration.

Wounds, wounds not going away anytime soon.

Abused, resolving exploitation, internal
reality. Careful how the stories suffer.

The dog ate the rat poison laid out
by the landlord. This is the instant
of insurrection.

Creating may be another matter.

All the colours of the day compressed
into a single moment. Fertile.

Triny Finlay is the author of *Splitting Off*, *Histories Haunt Us*, and the chapbook *Phobic*. Her writing has also appeared in a variety of journals and anthologies. She lives in Fredericton, NB, where she teaches English and Creative Writing at the University of New Brunswick.

Title page photo © Ket Quang



JUDITH POND

I

I'D KILL FOR A latte. So I fucking would.

Except now I can't say fuck anymore, can I.

For look what I did.

And where it's landed me, nothing but canola as far as the eye can see, and all these brown little gopher-whatsits everywhere, what is it they call them out here? Prairie dogs, prairie hogs.

Prairie spies. Sitting up looking, with their hairy cheeks and their thumbtack eyes, and those little pious paws folded under like they just saw the most amusing thing in their little brown lives.

Which they did. For behold the two of us, in our tits-up Tercel coughing by, Mr. Not-So-Sure-Minister and his equally unsure wife, heading off to start a new life with nothing to show for it but a not-sold house in Kingston, ON, two late bloomers' student loans growing interest like moss on a stone, and one seriously pissed-off cat howling Armageddon to match its name in the back seat. Ah, shit.

Never have I known such thirst. And Calgary two more days to the west.

If only it were Calgary we were headed for. The postcard the church secretary sent, of Stella, Alberta, besides bragging that it's "just eighty minutes from the city!", showed an aerial view of a landing-strip crossed by four or five white roads, and a cartoon-style caption: *Stella: Gateway to Calgary*.

In other words: life as we know it ends here.

And "here" is what happens to first-time ministers. And the wives of them. Please, why did they even bother to ask us where we wanted to be stationed for his first job? And what did they hear in, "Anywhere east," that gave them the idea to send us straight the other way? Is there something I'm missing? A Newfie joke, there must be, somewhere in this.

It's hotter than the hubs of Hell. It's hot enough to make you return things you never stole. And the radio's turned up on bust about mad cow disease and the Japanese with their new DVDs, and the global warming getting worse, and Charles and Diana's dimwitted divorce, until I'm half-drove; add to that the depressed gusts coming out of my husband, the Very Reverend, and at this moment: Right Wretched Nick, I wish I could just go to bed out of it. Except there is no bed and there won't be one for a couple days yet, and I don't even want to think about where our actual fucking mattress is going to present itself, much less what we'll do on it.

Or won't.

Because let me tell you, there's nothing like "trying" to take the fun out of shagging.

“Could you—could we... could we just—?” (Putting on my Mainland voice to optimize conditions—though I cringe to hear myself, and so does Nick, hunched great in bitterness at the wheel.)

Armageddon letting out a howl.

“Well, what, then.” Spitting his gum out the window. “Could we just what.”

“I mean, take a break. From the news and that.”

“Stuff is happening, Grace, out there. Osama bin Laden just got booted out of the Sudan.” Gives me a big significant look over his sunglasses. “They’ve bombed the Paris subway, right? Israel’s pounding Beirut. Don’t you want to know about what’s going on in the world?”

“They forgot to say about you and me being sent on a suicide mission.”

He’s dying to laugh but he won’t. “Is that what you think.”

Anybody else said it, he’d be killing himself. “I’m not hearing a load of rejoicing from your end.”

Nick slows down, squints at infinity, heaves another tremendous sigh. “Well, do you need to stop, then. Why didn’t you say something back at the gas pump, the last one? Back in the last place, Nimrod, or whatever it was.”

Nimrod. Ohmygod. A desperate chuckle flutters in me, like when you were a kid and your brother let one in church. That helpless feeling between the ribs with him looking out the corner of his eye at you after, and your mother on the other side of him in her white gloves, praying. Her little felt hat with the beads up the side of it.

“I don’t need to stop, I just wouldn’t mind some music for a while, that’s all, so we could talk, maybe? A little jazz, a little blues, I don’t care, a little country? What about that new CD we picked up the other day at the Walmart in Thunder Bay, I love that one on it, ‘The Boy with the Arab Strap.’” The dried horizon whizzing by.

He drives.

I hum a bar or two from the song, about how this endless wandering gets you down.

Silence. Nick’s response to all opposition, real or perceived, white-knuckled hands crimped to the wheel, sweat beading up on his forehead, lips pressed thin as communion wafers, the inimitable sorrowful, outraged seethe.

His unselfmedicated self, essentially.

“Nevermind,” I go, admiring the horizontal view out the dusty window.

But by now the only sounds in the car are the engine’s roar and the intermittent warnings of Armageddon, hunched in a scandalized ball under Nick’s seat. Dear God, why there? Why not under me, which, if not friendly, would at least be neutral territory? Why do they always go just where they’re most hated? Cats. The world reduced to her calamity and the unforgiving heat.

I'll drown in sweat. I will. The slick way my knees slide, propped against each other, the way wet films my neck and trickles between my breasts. Can teeth sweat? My teeth can sweat.

Armageddon lets out a cloud of Meow Mix and feline distress as a field of cows flies by. The smell's enough to make a barn swoon, as Mum would say.

And I know what else she'd say: *You're a daredevil, you always were and you know it's true.*

She's right, and I won't deny it. Who besides me would fall for a guy that'd take a vow of poverty.

Right, Mum. Nobody. Though who can resist a man in a dress? I couldn't help it. As soon as I found out he was going to be a minister I started fantasizing something terrible.

Nick's face goes green. "Oh f—"

"What—"

"Oh *man*, I have to get out. Your cat —"

Oh, right. *My* cat. It's always *my* cat, isn't it, when it's bad, and at this moment there is no denying that the bloody cat is bad.

"What—here?"

"No, awfully sorry, hang on," he goes in a *Fawlty Towers* accent, "I'll just pull up at that quaint little café around the corner."

I see he still has his sense of humor.

*

WE PULL OVER, NOT at a quaint café, but in front of the Piapot Saloon. Because Piapot, Saskatchewan, population 55, it says on the blistering road sign, is where we have come, so far, on this desperate afternoon. The billboard on the saloon says, *Welcome to the Piapot Saloon and Guesthouse. Open daily 3 p.m. until 8 p.m. Later if we feel like it.*

The car door creaks open like the junkyard wreck it's becoming, and my skin leaves long, sad, evaporating ovals on the seat. More howling. Further stink. Nick dazed and confused, in the driver's seat.

I crane in at him. "You're not getting out?"

"_____"

Fine, stay there. See if I__

But then he does get out. I guess staring at the desert beats breathing cat farts, and he leans against the car, lights a cigarette, grimly exhales at the town's few peeling

buildings and the yawn of rolling brown, beyond. At his feet, dusty wild roses nodding in the hot wind.

Somebody's got to lighten the mood. "Pee Pot," I muse, "Now there's a handle for a town."

He doesn't want to laugh, but he can't help himself. Out comes a snort, and then, "They need someone to head up the UCW. They're hoping you'll do it."

"They?"

"The church," he sighs, "you know, 'the ladies.'"

Jesus. Church ladies is where I'm headed. I'm an idiot. "I'm not a lady."

Stellar answer, Grace. (That's me. What I am is a fake and a coward with a music degree and library experience. What can you do with those credentials?)

(Get married. At least that's what you do back home in Confusion Bay, and that's what I did. That's what cowards do, especially if they're not young as they used to be, and living Upalong alone in some mainland city. But I couldn't marry some normal accountant or teacher or construction worker, where you could just live your life and no one would be the wiser, oh no, *I* had to marry a minister. And now look. I'm about to be First Lady of Gimcrack, AB.)

"Well you're the minister's wife. The minister's wife usually does that stuff. Right?"

The 'right' thing. I hate it when he does that. One of the prairie things zooms over my feet. My heart shrinks. Nick flicks ash from his cigarette and the hot wind flings it back in his face. "You're creative," he goes, "you could, you know—be creative. Make, I don't know, improvements." His stubbled chin pitched at the desolate light. He's soaked in sweat.

I want to put my hand on his arm, murmur some gentle encouragement. Instead because I'm a harridan, I pluck the cigarette out of his hand, take a drag while a transport full of cows hurls by in a storm of gravel and straw. "I guess if I'm going to be making improvements you'll have to make a couple yourself," I holler over the noise.

"Like what? Just what's that s'posed to mean?" Jangling the change in his pockets, rubbing the dirt out of his eyes, looking back down the highway like if he looks hard enough he might be able to see something that makes sense.

I stick up the cigarette Why? I've never made much of his smoking before. "This, for one. Since when does the Good Shepard smoke? And what about the other?" My gritty hair whipping everywhere.

"They're not going to know about the other," he yells over the noise, "and as for 'this,'" grabbing it back, "it's the United Church, Grace, people smoke," he takes a drag, "and then some."

“Okay, “I say, “That’s good.”

“Is it.”

“Yeah. Because somebody back home in the choir told me that—”

“Someone, is it.” He raises a forensic eyebrow. “Might that someone be a married old poet—” he drops his cigarette and twists out the butt in the hot dirt, “—who thinks he’s Brad Pitt, and who’s forever writing you his lame-assed sonnets?”

“What the hell do you know about sonnets!”

“I know I know enough. Enough to make me—”

“Oh please!” I am hungry enough to eat one of the cows in that transport that just went past, and it’s making me some mad.

“Ah, shag it,” I go back, “shag it to hell!”

“Ya—shag *you*. And I mean it!”

We stand, dumbfounded at our daring, breathing like backhoes.

Armageddon letting out debased howls.

“And I’ve about had it with that cat!”

A commotion of tears in my chest. “It’s not her fault she’s been hoiked from her home and stuck in a microwave of a car in the middle of fucking *nowhere!*”

He shoves a hand through his hair, like he’s annoyed to find it still there.

“I’m taking a hike out of it!”

Ah, the tried and true male solution to all things. Too bad women don’t have a chance at it.

What I say: “I think that might be a good idea.”

What I wickedly think: *Fill your boots.*

What he says, “I won’t be long.”

And he’s gone.

What’s to be done, but check out the saloon? After all, it’s 3:05 p.m., and how many times am I going to be able to anonymously tie one on in Pee Pot, Saskatchewan?

Am I going to tie one on?

I watch Nick’s affronted, sweat-soaked back until it disappears around the side of a sunboiled feed store, and in my head I see that postcard again. The *Stella* one. That landing strip of a street with nothing but a gas station and a trucking company, probably. And a false-fronted grocery store and a feed store just like this one, and don’t forget: a church.

And a shitload of horizon.

Oh yes, I am going to tie one on.

/

IN THE BEGINNING WAS the weed. And the weed was with God, and the weed was God. And God saw that it was good, and Nick does, too.

He hoofs it until the town's few buildings lie behind him, finds a lilac-treed cowshed to lean against, explores his left shorts' pocket for the last of last night's, pats his right for a light and discovers one.

Pretty soon he's going to be out of that good thing, weed. Then what? What would he tell the flock in a time of need? God will provide, He parted the Red Sea for the Israelites, didn't He? Sure, He sent down manna from Heaven, what's a bit of weed to God, who made all things bright and beautiful, weed included. (Did he make Himself, though, that is the question soon, if temporarily, to be decided.)

God, he's stupid. He is so stupid. And so scared. What's he gotten himself into? Never mind him, what's he got *her* into? At least, thank God, she grew up with drunks and barnacles, so she's got a bit of nowhere in her blood, but he's a city boy, born and bred. He likes the coffee shops, the subway, the live music in the bar. He likes a movie now and then, and he likes good food, Indian, Mexican, Poutine, who cares, as long as you're with friends somewhere noisy. What's he going to get to eat in Stella, Alberta? Old lady casserole with peas and stuff in it. Ham dinner. Church supper. Should've gone with the Anglicans, at least they know how to party.

And there's the small problem of God. He eases himself to the ground, closes his eyes, watches the gentle shimmer of the heat behind his lids. How's he supposed to do God stone sober, in front of a bunch of farmers every Sunday morning? Fine back at school when you still had your own life on the side, when you could leave town Sunday night and find your friends and your brains and your freakin' jeans. How's he going to manage when there is no life on the side? When he's supposed to be the Shepherd all day 'til the end of the world, plus live right in the barn with the flock?

He could have been anything. Restaurateur, book publisher, swashbuckling sailor. He could've lived an ordinary life, but *he* had to pursue meaning, oh yes, he had to find the source, approach the throne, glimpse the yawning gawp of the Eternal. He, Nick Flynn, wasn't happy 'til he set himself the job of hunting down the Holy One of Israel.

Fucksakes.

And who or what is that, and is it anything at all? *There's* the terminal nag at the bottom of the soul. Plus, how did he get through four years of seminary without figuring it out? And how could they let a person do that?! Give him his tuition back!

Damn shorts are damp from the sweat of the car, this could be bad. He flicks the lighter once, twice, at last the butane flame wavers and stands, and he holds it up

to the sorriest-looking joint on the planet, draws, prays for action, draws again. Still good, praise God, still got a bit of the old kick, the old Nick. Ah. The breath before the buzz. He holds it there, feels it fill, and settle in the bowl of his mouth, then takes it in and rides the impulse to cough, rides it until his eyes water. Waits. Nothing yet, just that sweet little heat in the throat, the sound of wind, and the promise of what's to come, this is almost the best part, when he's still completely normal but he knows it's coming, that moment when everything gets more *there*, when the world feels somehow both closer and farther back, more interesting, more thick. He wishes he had something, even some peanuts, for when the inevitable hits. He'll want anything then, anything from Almond Joys to straight mustard. Should've stopped at that saloon or whatever it is back there, grabbed a few pretzels.

Well, too late now.

He leans against the shed, tips his head back against the old wood, feels the years in it, the heat on it, the drum of the sun on his forehead.

The leaves rustle and there's the first small dazzle, somewhere in the circuitry of his brain, God is good, as they say. But God Almighty, that horizon's without mercy. A person could get the bivers, looking at that for too long. The flat vastness of it, the pale miles of sky, the land without end, and dry as a criminal's eye.

And nowhere to hide. Always before, there was somewhere to hide. He had his weed and his ways, his theology friends and the other ones, and his harmless hidden rabbit runs. Now look: he's a married man and God's salesman. And all his rabbit runs shut down.

Fuck.

A shift in the world, a tilt in all things, a rogue breeze lifting the sudden leaves. He gazes and gazes at the leaves, falls into the green of them, follows the veins of light in them.

Such wind, such yearning in the sun, and in him. He takes a leaf into his palm, touches it to his lips, cups its green abundance as though it were communion. The leaf is alive, all chlorophyll, all one.

Somewhere once he read that the words 'all one,' morphing through time, became the word 'alone.' *Al one=wholly one=nobody else around=Godforsaken.*

=him.

The wind blows. His limbs hum. He closes his eyes and reaches out a sunblind hand:

I will

not let

thee go except

thou bless

me.

Judith Pond's fiction and poetry have been featured on CBC Radio and in a range of Canadian literary magazines, including *The Malahat Review*, *Grain*, *Prairie Fire*, *PRISM international*, *Combats*, *Ryga: A Journal of Provocations*, and *Event*. With Oberon Press, Ottawa, she has published fiction (*Coming Attractions* series) and four collections of poetry: *An Early Day*, *Dance of Death*, *Lovers and Other Monsters*, and *A Shape of Breath*. She holds an MFA in creative writing from the University of British Columbia, and teaches writing in Calgary. She is currently working on a novel.

Title page photo © Matthew Bowden

ELLEN
KOMBIYIL



avalanche
tunnel

NINE INSTRUCTIONS NOW IMAGES

A knife glints in kitchen light.

Laundered clothes flap in the sun & wick themselves dry while
in my room, curtains drawn, I listen to the drone of bees & push back
strands of loose hair, the top of my head, as Emily D. would say, taken off.

The quilt on my bed is pulled back as if I could step in & lie down
like a sick child.

A suitcase lurks in the wardrobe ready to be filled. My fingers
ache, my stomach growls & I am hungry so hungry.

It's my heart that keeps the suitcase a secret,
stuffed for my great & lonely journey.

I sheathe the knife in a wooden block. The scissors, too,
are closed and tamped with a safety strip, not able to snip.

I try to keep my counters clean. Milk spills when I pour it from pot
to my daughter's tiny cup. Tomato seeds glisten by the sink.
Eggs drip while I crack them for an omelet, the counter dries
& this life is messy.

Only the knife keeps its promise, waiting for truth
or a great failing.

LOVE AS METRO STATION

(a Golden Shovel feat. Ezra Pound)

A series of rooms interconnect or the tunnels lead to tunnels, an apparition of tunnels that crisscross platforms on or of a mighty grid: stairs dotted with foot grips, these railings (painted yellow (now) peeling), faces announcing a staggered climb & descent in pointillist swaths. Emerging from dimness, the mind manufactures an elaborate crowd of anything (people, flowers (their petals plucked like prize tabs (will he love me))) from or on a string of lucky hitches. I will marry but a) will he love me, b) I said that already & c) wet ephemera from rainclouds tinges black sky nuzzling a scar on yon lovestruck bough.

MIRROR IMAGE OF A STOCK MARKET CRASH

I can't see what they make, little hands
folding shapes: a crane, a duck, a long-necked

goose, harbouring secrets in feathers
preened straight, skin in as-yet-undimpled rows,

the mathematics of what will come—what might,
what might not. In the light of trying

a coin gets varnished, the bell curve
of failed attempts, a sweet spot held

in down-cupped palms. I'll name this one *graph*
of the stock market crash, and that one *flat*

line, for the blip that isn't there yet.
Somewhere a second hand exists, ticking

the heart into focus. Even though
it might slip into oblivion

muscle remembers moving in
unison like a snake darting through

sun-flecked grass or dream of that.

ODE TO MY BREASTS

You are the held-up thing, a green sea glass.
The last hour of dusk, an avalanche
tunnel. The too blue I can't look at.
That patch of grass instead. A whole
idea I've had, the building up of that.
You are spilled fountain pennies, *a time,*
a time, ago. Pretending to be
something I'm not. Latchkey skinning
my wrist. Sense of emptiness.

You are the house when I was young.
A framed window looking out, not in.
Rectangular constriction of breath marking
an unplanned protest. Light with no texture
emerges from electric sun. Cold kitchen
tiles and TV too dim. Midnight falsetto,
let me in, let me in. There is no
reflection without someone holding it up.
There are no rules of conduct.

You rattle the shirt rustle, a stuck
sequin shimmy shake, shivering in place.
The threat of suffocation is the same:
Lampshade halo aftereffect. Smoothed
out screw threads. Muffled tread of oriental
rugs. I pretend not to adorn you,
place for placing clocks. The cold river opens
its mouth, a mollusk widens in bliss.
You are everything and not this.

HOW-TO AS A LIST OF VALUABLES FOR INSURANCE

It was the year I was avoiding my mother. It's true I was full of sadness, but I knew that the blueness trapped like Lake Michigan would eventually end.

I followed paved paths to prescribed destinations. I struggled into & out of heavy winter boots & clomped down sidewalks, attempting to leave an imprint.

I'm leaping all over. It was both Chicago in winter & Syracuse in August. My mother wanted to shake the sadness out of me like loose petals from an almond tree so she could claim me once again tall & gleaming.

I drove to the beach with my friends, the water line with a little strip of sand that they truck in every summer because *that's what people expect*, not some lake in the middle of a city for God's sakes & small kids like to bring their buckets & scoop & mix it & let it course through their fingers.

We were laughing at something, I can't remember, but sadness ruptured into laughter that day & laughter was rapture, rippling across the terraced grounds.

It was like stepping into a green-jeweled gown, high heels pitching pock marks on the newly seeded lawn, time alight with clover—no, asleep with dew's mirrors at dawn—my shiny face repeated amid the humid razzle dazzle.

TRANSLATION

I'm never not in motion seasons move
towards next season I speak a little French
for example *les saisons* and *pardon*
Pardon my hemistich lines the pause
is implied & forgive my missed
prettiness I'm gregarious inside
with the face of a peony you with
your splintered hands so steady on the oft
painted sill was nailed shut no it wasn't
brute force may be required chip it with
chisels rock it back & forth like hips could
ease melody into place *la mélodie*
tra la la-ing when you shake/shook your head

MELODY FOR THE SINNERS

“Horizontal swaying hips/hypnotic unremembered”
—from *The Lost Pages of Anne Sexton*¹

1.

That person with no
name. That person with

no face, with a face
of silk, rippling

that hologram face,
that one with the sawed

off nose, that sawed off
stone, that boulder one

who shifts in wind, that
one.

¹The book cited, *The Lost Pages of Anne Sexton*, is fictional, wished into existence, as are the lines quoted.

2.

Crunch of gravel: another time. Now that
car's scrap metal. Time for one more ice cream

cone eaten in near winter. Cold within,
dragon smoke. The spoke of the chokehold

difficult to grabble. Breathe like that car
trailing its muffler. Owens Funeral Home:

"Where Beauty Softens Your Grief." Gossip scraped
over stone is spoken in undertones:

*She moves like
fin strokes*

*in front of
uncurtained windows.*

3.

Once, we were all fish.
Even birds were fish

and ate ancestors
of themselves. Lit from

within she gyrates
in soundless techni-

colour: red halter
top peep hole, casket

gazing as peepshow,
isn't she, aren't we,

that seamless water
asleep & flashing?

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