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SCARBOROUGH  
FAIR

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SCARBOROUGH FAIR

2018

50th Edition

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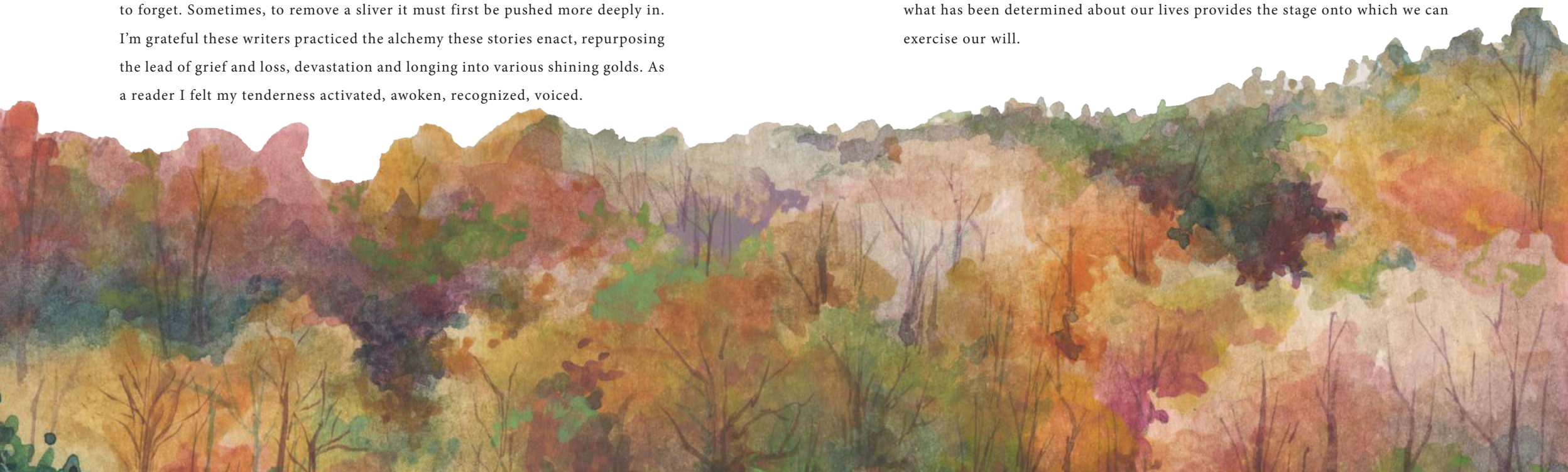
# Foreword

Aisha Sasha John

There is certainly something sage connecting the works of this 50th issue of Scarborough Fair—their makers seem to recognize that the bogeyman is scariest in his element: the shadows. Whatever air, whatever modest light we let meet what feels unsayable to us shrinks it—and grows us. My response to reading the writing you'll shortly enjoy is that I am dumbfounded, I am inspired, and I am sad, too. There's another word nudging itself whole out of the haze of my impressions, but I hesitate to describe the writers herein in terms of courage because I don't want to make assumptions about their relationships to their material. For many of us the only way to high-five the light of day is to make sense—narrative, rhythmic—out of what has long been lodged in our throats. It might not be courage that fuels these writers—it might be psychic survival. Regardless, I want to applaud them for what they've allowed me to bear witness to. To create is to express a freedom to create. We makers undertake great difficulty, often or inevitably, in the service of this freedom. It might require a slow and sustained voyage into terrain we would and have avoided if not for the fact of being unable to forget. Sometimes, to remove a sliver it must first be pushed more deeply in. I'm grateful these writers practiced the alchemy these stories enact, repurposing the lead of grief and loss, devastation and longing into various shining golds. As a reader I felt my tenderness activated, awoken, recognized, voiced.

Circumstances can demand action of us. Those actions can feel impossible, if certain. The circumstance speaks to us: you continue grieving, or you speak a truth you've buried, or you leave what is known but negates you, or you offer mercy in the interest of your own continuance, or you know your not-knowing is perfect and just, or you move in terrifying faith. You go ahead and do what no one else has in your family, your friend group, your community—you do what no living person has as far as you know. You obey the call your dreams offer, that easy-to-deny call, the call you've stuffed your ears against, for years, so that one morning you can be new, not able to picture, even, what that newness constitutes.

So yes, many of these works speak to redemption, and suggest that doing what one can in the face of situations that are devastating is something—something enormous: it is the exercise of freedom. The work in this journal speaks to that possibly divine place where personhood is articulated—those moments where what has been determined about our lives provides the stage onto which we can exercise our will.







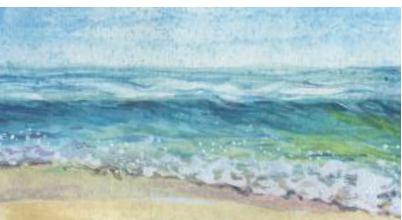


## Retrograde

Ryenne Kap



## F I C T I O N



They demolished the street where I grew up.

It was named after a president, and it had twenty-seven matching houses.

Nobody told me. I was driving by the neighbourhood after work, like I sometimes did when the old songs were on the radio and I wanted to feel young again, but when I went to turn onto my street there was only concrete ruin.

I parked close by and walked up to the stop sign across from it. I looked out at twenty-seven skeletons of houses, some half-buried in mounds of dirt. Some businessman had bought the street, ravaged it, and forgotten its existence.

I got back in my car and drove to the ice cream place where I used to bike with my friend after school. It was still there, derelict as ever, probably guilty of a million health code violations. I got a double-scoop of Rocky Road and left my car in the corner of the lot. I walked back to the stop sign and sat on the grass.

My friend's name was Lucy, I think. Or Betty. Some blonde 1950s cartoon character. She always got a scoop of bubble-gum in a waffle cone, which I thought was stupid because bubble-gum is sticky and chewy and entirely inappropriate for ice cream.

She lived at the end of the street. She hung out with me mostly, but in fifth grade she realized I didn't love her back so she migrated to the group of girls who lived a few doors down from me. I'd drag my lawn chair out of the garage and sit on the freshly-mown grass and watch them. I could never tell anyone apart in the huddle of high ponytails and short skirts.

My brother was nice to me because my parents told him to be. He offered to take me skateboarding with him and the older kids, the ones with nose rings and aviators, but I liked sitting on the lawn better. It stained the soles of my feet green. I would trail grass clippings inside and my mother would come after me, brandishing a mop and swearing at me in the secret language she usually saved for phone calls with her sister.

It was worth it. From the lawn you could watch all the small happenings

on the street. The lady in the first house let her kids draw on the stop sign with magic marker. In the yard of the fourth house, the dog with the shock collar yelped every time it tried to chase the cat next door.

The ninth house was constantly being teepeed by my brother's friends. They'd heard that a homo lived there. I thought they meant a hobo. I imagined an old man in patchwork clothes who peed all over the place like an untrained dog. I thought they were trying to help by giving him lots of toilet paper.

People avoided the thirteenth house, especially on Halloween, but that was mostly because of the woman with long, knotted black hair who lived there. She probably wasn't a witch, but nobody wanted to risk it. My brother dared me to egg her house once, but my aim was awful so I had to creep up close to hit her door. I think she must've been watching from the window because as soon as the egg broke apart, she opened the door and stared down at me. Her mouth was slightly open, so I could see the cracked and yellowed teeth. There was a map of blue veins under her skin. She looked ancient. My father told me later that she was only thirty-four.

I liked the twenty-fourth house the best because it looked a little newer than the others. A man and his wife lived there. He looked like my father, but shorter and more serious. His wife had swollen fingers and was perpetually pregnant. But it was never children crying in their house.

I asked my brother about it once.

"Shut up, junior," he said. He'd taken to calling me "junior" because someone had told him it was cool.

"I cry a lot too," I said. That was true.

"It doesn't matter as long as you don't tell anyone," he said.

We were upstairs but we could hear our parents fighting in the basement.

Their voices flew up through the floorboards. For the record, my father never hit my mother. He tolerated her, which I grew up to believe was worse.

Shortly after he started listening to people's advice about being cool, my brother got a girlfriend. He made a big show of introducing her to our parents, as if she were a dog he'd taught to do magic tricks, but all she did was sit quietly by his side at the dinner table and nod and smile a lot. She got up to help my mother with the dishes, and I could hear them speaking the same secret language. They traded words like kids with baseball cards. It sounded like music, or a river.

My brother sat me down to make sure I wouldn't fall in love with his girlfriend.

"You aren't gonna get obsessed, right?" he asked. "You won't watch her like you watch the other girls, right?"

"No. She's not even that pretty," I said. That was less true.

She had hair like a waterfall and her smile was infectious. But my brother had gotten to her first. For most of his senior year, the two of them lived out of his bedroom. I wondered if anyone else on the street could hear what they did at night.

When she broke up with him, I could hear him crying through the walls for weeks.

He was still heartbroken on our big trip to Florida in the summer. We went to see the oranges and marveled at how they grew on trees. He kicked the fallen oranges around and snarled at my mother when she told him to lighten up. She swore at him in her secret language. In that moment we were all thinking of my brother's ex-girlfriend. My father put his hand on my brother's shoulder.

I don't remember much else about that trip, except lots of golf and arguments in the hotel room because we only had three towels.

When we came back to our street, it looked older and uglier. We could see the places where it was falling apart. I thought maybe planting orange trees would make it pretty again, but apparently that wasn't feasible since we weren't anywhere close to Florida.

My brother started driving around with the nose ring kids after that. He came home later, showered less frequently. We all suffered.

I caught him alone once, staring at the dog trapped in the fourth yard. He flinched every time it yelped.

He didn't fight my questions anymore. When I asked him if he was still heartbroken, he sat me down and explained that she was just a phase.

"But I thought she was a person," I said.

"Sometimes people are less than what they seem," he said.

He became what my father called "philosophical" after that. He fought with my parents, but he never yelled like they did. He got very quiet, like his ex-girlfriend, and he smiled a lot, also like his ex-girlfriend. But his smiles were a sickness. He got a nose ring and started wearing aviators, even though they were too big for his face and slipped down his nose more often than not.

He told me all kinds of stories. Like how the woman in the thirteenth house was a drug addict, and that the lady in the first house was going to lose her kids to a social worker. He told me that girls with high ponytails and short skirts were asking for it, but he wouldn't tell me what "it" was.

I guess that during all this time, I must've been growing up and making

stories of my own. But they don't come back as clearly to me.

My mother would know my stories better. She kept scrapbooks of all our best moments. Mine were mostly participation ribbons, but she must've thought they were gold medals. I don't know what she did with my brother's.

I went over to her apartment once to ask if I could see his photos. She shook her head as if I'd given her a bad answer. She said that it was all in the past, and it was important to focus on the present.

She didn't understand. The only things I care about are the ones that have already happened.

Like the time my brother sat on the lawn with me. It was one of the last good days, which I guess I couldn't have known then. He put his lawn chair right next to mine, and he took off his socks and shoes and let the grass make his feet green.

He let me tell my stories of the twenty-seven houses, all the lives crammed into them. He laughed when I described seeing the thirty-four-year-old witch up close. We imagined little bits of eggshells still stuck to her door.

I asked him what it was like to fall in love. I'd never tried it before.

"It's the best and worst thing that will ever happen to you," he said.

I wondered out loud if I was the best and worst thing that had happened to the girl at the end of the street. Lucy. Her name was Lucy.

"People don't happen to you," he said. "People are what make things happen. But they aren't the things themselves."

"Right. People are phases," I said. I checked to see if I'd answered right.

He looked at me for a long time. Without the aviators on, I could see his sadness.

"Not really, junior," he said. "You can't ever grow out of them."

He was gone three days later. We looked for a note, but his room looked like it'd been hit by a hurricane. I fought the urge to put on gloves as I sifted through Pink Floyd records, empty bottles, all the other detritus.

In his absence, we learned new tricks. My mother figured out how to sleep sitting up in the chair by the telephone. My father mowed the grass until there was no green left. I watched over all my brother's things, categorizing them by degrees of wear and tear.

But when years went by and it was time to move out, we didn't have the room for them. We gave them away, all the remnants of my brother, to the tenants of the twenty-seven houses. We thought they'd be safe there.

I guess we couldn't have known then what would happen to our street.

My ice cream was a puddle at my feet by the time I balled up all my

memories and tucked them in the back of my mind. They would be safe to return to later.

For now, I imagined my brother somewhere in Florida, kicking the fallen oranges, the soles of his feet bright green.

I drove in silence all the way home.





## We All Come Home

Simaran Hubbell

Maya Henley lay in the back of the clown car, wondering how long it would be until this ride was over. It had been nine years since her father had adopted her; she was fifteen now, just one day shy of turning sixteen. She was so excited for her birthday. Sixteen years old meant that one was old enough to become a full-fledged clown. Finally, she would fit in perfectly with the rest of her family.

Maya closed her eyes, hoping for sleep. Car rides made her sick and she would rather not feel the bumpy road and jerky motions if she didn't have to. As she drifted off, she could swear a woman was calling out her name...

*She stood, hand in hand with her mother. Maya looked around. They were standing in a park and it was a beautiful summer day. The mood was calm, the air was crisp and she felt a slight buzz of excitement in the air as an ice cream truck pulled up into the park.*

"Mummy," Maya started, looking up at her mother, "why're we here today?"

"It's a beautiful day outside," Maya's mother replied. "I thought we could enjoy it."

"Why couldn't daddy come too?" Maya asked. She had noticed that her daddy hadn't been coming with them anywhere. It made her sad inside.

"Daddy has work, sweetie," Maya's mother replied. "I told you that already."

"Yeah, but it wasn't a nice answer."

Maya's mother led her over to a park bench.

"Do you want to feed the birds?" she asked.

For whatever reason, Maya felt irritated at this whole situation. Her daddy wasn't around to spend the day with them and her mummy had taken her out when she didn't really want to go out.

"No," Maya replied stubbornly, "I want ice cream." She crossed her little arms across her chest and looked up at her mother, defiance in her eyes. "I'm not gonna get up till I get some!"

"You just had ice cream yesterday - "

But Maya didn't let her mother finish: "Daddy would let me get it."

The words clearly stung her mother but Maya didn't really care. In that moment,

*the cold ice cream was all she could think of. Her mother looked over at the ice cream truck and then back at Maya. The truck was very close to where they were, only a few steps away.*

"Okay. But then no more dessert today, okay? Come on, let's get in line."

*Maya nodded enthusiastically. She was getting ice cream! Maya followed her mum into the line. As she was waiting as patiently as she could, she looked around the park, watching as people walked by. She knew all about strangers and how bad they could be. Her mummy had told her that they could take away any kid, and Maya knew she didn't want to be a taken away kid. For this reason, Maya stepped a little closer to her mother.*

*Her eyes were still scanning the park when she saw him: the clown. He wasn't too far away and he was making some pretty balloon animals. Maya looked up at her mother and then to where they were in line. They were next! Maya looked back at the clown but saw that he was leaving. She knew what she had to do.*

"Sorry mummy," she whispered quietly. If she apologized in advance, maybe her mum would forgive her in advance. She ran towards the clown and called out, "hey Mister Clown!"

*Only a few steps forward and the world as far as Maya could see plunged into chaos. Screams erupted all around her and people running frantically. As Maya turned to one source of the noise, she saw them: a dozen or so clowns riding in on horseback. These clowns weren't normal happy clowns though; they wore strange face paint, striped and scary, threatening and angry-looking. The clowns came rushing down the hill only to be followed by another cohort.*

"Mummy! Mummy where are you?!" Maya called out. She was scared. Tears blurred her vision. All she wanted was to be back on the bench, eating her ice cream with her mummy by her side. Maya knew she had been a bad girl. She didn't do like she was told.

"Sweetie, are you okay?"

*Maya looked up to see the clown she had approached approaching her, pinching his squeaky red nose in a fashion that made him funny. He was tall but he looked friendly. He wasn't scary like the other clowns. He looked like a normal, ordinary, nice clown.*

"No," she said. "I'm not. I'm scared. I don't know where mummy is."

"Come with me. I'll help you find her," he said as he took her hand in his. He led her over to a clown car - red and white and shaped like a shoe - which was parked at the nearest parking spot.

"Mummy says I shouldn't go with people I don't know," she said.



*“But you don’t know where she is. I’m going to help you find her. But it’s totally chaotic out here – we’ll never find her by walking around. You might get hurt too.” The clown noticed Maya’s scared expression and knelt to her level. “Don’t worry. We’ll find her real quick.”*

*“Okay,” Maya said, giving in. Her mum had warned her not to get into cars with strangers, but this wasn’t a real car. It was a shoe car. And her mum had never said not to go in a shoe car. Actually, the whole thing seemed silly. Maybe this wouldn’t be so bad after all.*

*After hesitating for a moment, she dove into the backseat of the car. The clown slammed the door behind her and headed around to the driver’s side. Now, Maya wasn’t so sure she had made the right choice. Something didn’t feel quite right about the whole situation. She reached for her seatbelt but was met face to face with a boy who was around her age. Next to him was a teenage girl clown. Something was wrong.*

*“Why’s there another boy here?” Maya asked the clown who had brought her here.*

*“Because,” the clown said, smiling as he looked at her, “you’ve both asked for my help to find your parents. I’m going to help you both. Don’t worry.”*

*As if on cue, the teenage girl clown put masks on Maya and the boy’s faces. Maya tried to fight back, tried to push the teenage clown off her, but she was too strong for Maya. The world started to get fuzzy, and soon, Maya was asleep.*

*Maya woke as the car stopped moving. She hated that dream. It came to her every time there was an adoption day in her clown community. It made her uncomfortable, but the feeling never lasted too long. She knew that what they were doing was for the best; they were rescuing kids from the boring world and bringing them into a world of fun, laughter, love and happiness.*

*It had taken her a little while at first to get over her own adoption but, as she now understood, being adopted was the best thing that could have happened to her. She was loved unconditionally by her adoptive father and by her large extended family. Her birth mother probably didn’t even miss her; after all, she had made no attempt to reach out to Maya after she was adopted. Maya had come to learn that family isn’t the ones who create you, but the ones who raise you.*

“Wake up, sweetie,” Maya’s father said.

Her father was the very same clown who had promised to help her find her mother all those years ago. He technically hadn’t broken that promise; while he did not bring her to her birth mother, he had brought her to her mother who had taken her in and loved her like her own.

“We’re here,” he said. “Today, you’re going to get new cousins. Your

uncle is so excited. Be ready to sit with them in the back seat. Are the masks ready?”

“Dad, really, I’m only one day away from being sixteen! If this were happening tomorrow instead of today, I would be part of the horseback group. Can’t I just do that? Does one day really make such a difference? Can’t someone else sit in back because I really, really don’t want to,” said Maya. She crossed her arms and gave him a stubborn look. The backseat job was a kid’s job and she was no longer a kid.

He looked at her and his gaze softened. “Alright,” he said. “But only because your birthday is tomorrow. Don’t expect exceptions all the time, I don’t want you getting spoiled or entitled. Deal?”

“Deal.”

He smiled at her and helped her get her makeup on. It didn’t take him too long to put it on her, as he had done the multicolour face paint many times. Afterwards, she rushed out to the horseback crew, ready to bring in a new member to her family. She mounted on a horse alongside the other clowns and looked at her dad. “Thanks!”

“You look beautiful,” was his simple reply.

Then, the group was off. Every year, there was an adoption. A child was taken in and given to a family that qualified. The children would then be raised in the clown customs and the cycle would eventually repeat. To keep their society safe from the evil people who were trying to destroy happiness and keep boring-ness in the world, they would travel around the world to different parks to always be one step ahead.

As Maya rode through the park, she saw an eerily familiar woman with a young boy. The woman’s face was contorted into a look of utter horror, more so than the other park-goers. The woman stared on as the clown-chaos reigned. The little boy, presumably her son, tugged on her hand, obviously scared and seeking comfort. The woman didn’t respond though; she was too frozen with fear. That’s when Maya noticed her clown uncle tapping on the little boy’s shoulder, beckoning him to follow. The boy noticed and looked at the clown but gripped his mother’s hand tighter. Maya thought back to the day of her own adoption; she remembered how the clown – now known to her as her father – had attracted her attention from afar while clown-chaos swirled around her. He had been like a beacon of light in the darkness for her. Now, the same thing was happening to this boy. He, much differently than herself, was less interested in going with the clown than she had been; he was beginning to look almost as afraid as his mother. Maya knew she shouldn’t care, but she did. Not for the boy



so much, as she knew he would be safe and that he would grow up in a loving adoptive family like she did, but for his mother; the woman looked as though she was about to be sick from her fear.

That's when it hit her. The woman seemed so afraid because she must've been afraid of losing her child. Maya thought about what it would be like for her to lose her adoptive father or one of her many adopted cousins; it would be almost unbearable. Maya wondered then if they were doing the right thing, separating the kids from their birth parents. She knew that they always researched the family and that the child was from a less than ideal situation; Maya herself had come from a family that was in the midst of falling apart when she was adopted into her new family. She just figured that it was best for the kids to be removed from these bad situations.

This little boy, however, looked as though he didn't want to go. The mother looked as though she truly loved her child too, like she didn't want to part with him, even if it would eventually benefit him. In that moment, Maya knew she could not let the child be taken away from his birth mother. Even if his current situation was bad, the mother might be able to get them through it. Maya knew she didn't have much time. She began heading towards them.

"Hold your little boy close!" she yelled, calling out to the mother.

Multiple sirens cut through the air and gunshots began to sound in the crowd.

*Good, she thought, the police are here.*

She felt it then, a searing pain in her back. Perhaps she had ridden too fast over some rocks and had endured some shock. After all, she was new to the distraction crew. She slowed down a little but instead of getting better, the pain only got worse. She reached her arm around and touched the sore spot. Instead of cloth, however, she felt liquid. Hot, sticky liquid. She retracted her hand to examine it. Blood. She'd been shot. A few more shots rang out and other clowns fell around her, blood apparent through their bright clothing. Maya, disoriented, fell from her horse and hit the pavement.

Everything hurt. She could feel the blood coming out of her back, rushing out as if it were a river. At least the clowns were receding. That was the last thing she wanted to see, those painted faces that had taken her away from her birth mother and potentially normal life. They were the ones who had brought her to this moment, to this terrible situation. They had succeeded in infecting her mind and now, more than ever, she wished she could go back to the moment where she saw her adoptive father for the first time, but instead decided to stay with her birth mother, her real mother.

The woman stood steps away from her with her little boy, clutching him closely. "Mommy," she heard the little boy said in an eerily calm voice, "mommy, she's dying."

Maya was quiet. The pain was starting to fade a little, making her tired. She closed her eyes as the warmth spread across her body, sucking the pain away as it went.

"Sorry mummy," she whispered, nearly inaudible. Maybe apologizing to her mother now would allow her mother to forgive her now, before she was gone.

Sirens echoed all around as police cars and ambulances pulled up.

A moment later, Maya Henley was no more.





## Beyond The Trees

Ivy Hon

The rain darkened the wood of the birdhouse hanging from her father's cabin. She cursed herself for forgetting her key, and then counted to three before she closed her eyes, and stuck her fingers into the opening. She fished out the spare key, and prayed that a set of eight legs wouldn't be there when she opened her eyes. Inside, Nina slipped out of her yellow rain boots, and in wool clad feet made her way to the bookcase across the dark room. Her limbs felt like lead as she pulled her grandmother's notebook from her jacket and stuck it into the only empty space on the bottom corner. She walked back to the front door not daring to look back. Outside, She placed the spare key back in the birdhouse before she headed back into the forest.

Each footstep she took was punctuated by the crunching of half decayed leaves scattered about the forest floor. Nina wrapped the length of thick hemp rope around her neck before she jumped to grab a hold of the branch closes to her. The bark bit into the flesh of her pink palms. Up, and up, and up she climbed, until she reached at least nine feet off of the ground. For someone her weight, the drop had to be at least eight feet and four inches off the ground. She just wanted to be on the safe side. Her legs straddled the branch of the tree, and secured one end of the rope around its circumference.

Her fingers, numbed by the cold, fumbled as it tied the knot to form a noose. Nina had just placed it around her neck, making sure to secure the knot below her jaw, when the muffled sound of Queen's Bohemian Rhapsody drifted from her back pocket. The special ringtone she set for her father. It had been weeks since they'd spoken, and part of her wanted to hear his voice before it all ended.

"Hey dad," she said with the phone to her ear.

She heard heavy breathing, and then: "Nina, I'm dying."

### *Three weeks later*



"Mom, you should go get some fresh air," Nina placed a hand on her mother's shoulder. "Or something to eat? I'll stay with him."

Her mom reluctantly let go of her father's hand and slipped out the door. Her silence made Nina uneasy. She'd been this way ever since he fell unconscious a few days prior.

Nina fidgeted with her car keys as her father's ragged breathing ceased. She pressed the wooden N of the keychain into the palm of her hand. It left an indent when she lifted it off.

The door clicked open and she expected her mom. When she looked behind her she felt the blood rush from her face.

"Hey Nina, long time no see."

Abel leaned against the wall with a coffee in his hand.

"Hey," was all she could squeak out.

The chattering of the news on the television suddenly felt loud as the silence between the two stretched.

"It's been, what? Twelve years since we saw each other? Can you believe that?"

The wooden N bit back into her skin.

"No. I can't."

"Remember when we use to play hide and seek with your dad?"

"Yeah."

"We were such a pain in the ass," he snorted. "The both of us always sneaking off into the forest even though it was off bounds."

She shifted in her chair keeping her eyes slightly above Abel's head.

"Did Tommy come with you?"

Abel's lips fell into a hardline. "No. I haven't seen my dad since my mom and him divorced a few years back."

Nina knew this. Her father had said how disappointed he was in Tommy for cheating on Deb, Abel's mom. But She just needed to be sure.

It was unsettling the way the light hit Abel's face, how much he looked like his father.

"I gotta go to the washroom," she said suddenly.

She shuffled past room after room; past sullen face after sullen face; past the kitchen volunteer who hummed merrily as she chopped vegetables; past the chattering at the nurse's station and the baby being bounced on some stranger's knee.

She locked the bathroom door with a click, drowning out the noise of the hospice. Still, she found no relief, everything spun around her. Her breaths came in short successions. The pain will end soon, she thought, she just needed to endure a bit more just until after the funeral.

By the time Nina got back to her father's room all that remained of Abel was his coffee cup, turned over on the floor; a puddle of brown liquid pooled around it. She left to get some napkins and on the way back shoulder checking a

large man.

“Sorry,” she said automatically not even looking at his face as she walked passed.

“Nina?”

Her eyes grew large at the sound of that voice. She heard his footsteps grow closer and closer and as much as her mind screamed to run all she could do was stay still.

“It is you!”

Tommy wore the same big smile.

“Oh come on, no hug for you Uncle Tommy?”

As soon as he went to embrace her she bolted like a deer. She didn’t stop running until she was out the hospice doors, passed the rows of houses, onto the streets of cafés and pizzerias. She probably would have just kept walking aimlessly if she had not seen the side of Abel’s face through the window of a grimy bar.

The door opened with a ring. Abel had both hands around a short cup with something strong in it. She could tell because it looked like something her father would have on a particularly hard day. She sat on the stool next to him and ordered a coke.

“You didn’t have to come find me you should be with your dad.”

Nina sipped her Coke and wondered if she should tell him that she wasn’t here because of that.

“Your dad doesn’t actually know the actual reason they got divorced,” he let out a laugh. “Well, I guess I didn’t either until last year.”

Abel shut his eyes.

“My mom and I got into this huge argument because I wanted to find my dad and she told me to let things be and shit like that. I said some messed up things to her that night. She got really quiet and then told me that she left him because she had walked in on him groping the neighbour’s daughter. Annie. She use to come play with us all the time.”

Nina gripped the edge of the bar.

“Anyways. When I heard about your dad I emailed my dad not really expecting anything. You know, I didn’t believe my mom really. Then I saw him today and I still don’t know.

The contorted expression on Abel’s face made Nina bite her tongue.

“What do you want to do?”

Abel wiped away his tears with the sleeve of his shirt before looking at her.

“I don’t know. I shouldn’t want to see him. I know that but part of me wonders if he’s changed. That maybe that was a one time thing?”

Nina put her hands in her jacket pocket and clutched her keys, letting the rivets dig into her skin.

“Maybe.”

Nina left Abel at the bar to nurse his pain. She walked back to the hospice, taking the slowest steps possible and lingered outside the front door until the anger sunk in. Why was she the one hiding? Shouldn’t it be Tommy? If she had told her family earlier maybe that little girl wouldn’t have been groped.

She saw Tommy in the stairwell as she walked up to the second floor of the hospice.

“Hey there you are. I was starting to get worried.”

He leaned against the hand railing.

She stared at him for a minute before she asked, “are you really going to talk to me like nothing happened?”

Tommy’s eyebrows pinched together.

“W-w-what? You think I wouldn’t remember?”

Nina’s whole body shook. Half of her wanted to run away and the other wanted to slap that confused look on his face.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

She hated him so much in that moment, not because he denied it but because she second-guessed her self. What if it never happened and she had made it all up in her head?

The tears threatened to come and the last thing she wanted was to cry in front of Tommy so she left without a word.

Nina spent the next few days in a stupor. She spent less and less time at the hospice with her father and more and more time at home staring at her bedroom ceiling. She thought of all the things she still wanted to say. They boiled up inside her until she had to roll over and scream into her pillow.

Abel had left a voice message asking her where she’s been and if she was okay two days ago. Her mother must have given her number to him. She lay on her bed with her cell phone on speaker. Another voice message played: “I don’t know why I’m telling you this and I’m sorry if this is weird because I know we haven’t really been close since we were kids but I guess I needed to tell someone, my dad and me are having lunch tomorrow.”

She threw her phone against the wall. “Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.” She grabbed



the razor that sat on her night table. Dry blood still clung to it but Nina didn't care to clean it before she added a line to her inner thigh. She was dabbing the blood with a piece of toilet paper when her phone rang from the ground. She inched her face over the bed and saw her mother's face pop up on the cracked screen. She picked it up.

"Yeah, mom?"

"Hurry. Your dad, he's awake."



He was finishing his second bowl of strawberry yogurt when she arrived. Tommy and Abel were both sitting by his bedside with her mom.

"Daddy!" She hugged him almost knocking over the bowl still in his hand.

"Sweetheart. I love you but my back hurts."

"Sorry," she said through blurry eyes.

"I was just telling Tommy," her dad took her hand into his, "to look after you and your mom when I'm gone."

"Don't say that dad," Nina dug her nails in to her palm.

"I know it's hard for you to hear but I want to know you'll be safe."

Tommy put an arm around Nina and she felt herself physically cringe.

"Don't worry, I've got her."

Her father smiled. His eyes glowed. She couldn't take this moment away from him.



In the spring when the earth had finally thawed her father's coffin was lowered into the grave. Black clad bodies huddled around the rectangular hole. Nina held her mother's hand in hers; the wrinkles of her skin rough but warm. Abel had showed up alone with alcohol on his breath. Later when everyone had left they both sat on a bench overlooking the grave. Nina's hands were folded over her grandma's notebook. Abel fiddled with the buttons on his jacket.

"So?" She asked.

"So, what?" Abel continued to fidget.

"Where's Tommy?"

"Dunno."

They both sat in silence. In the distance she could hear the muffled sound of traffic.

"I asked him about Angie and he told me he couldn't believe that I

would be stupid enough to listen to the shit my mother would say about him. Said he didn't need a son that would question his character."

Nina asked if she could read something.

"It might upset you though."

"It take a lot to make me feel worst than I do now. Go ahead."

She didn't really know if she was doing this for him or for her but the book burned in her hands.

She flipped it open.

"There was a time when the lines of trees made her heart sing. Back when father, and daughter played card games by the fireless fireplace in the summer, and ate chocolate chip pancakes for dinner. Then, he came to stay one night. Uncle Tommy, who wasn't really her uncle." Tears gathered in the corner of Nina's eyes, and a knot formed at the back of her throat.

"Uncle Tommy, her father's friend since college, and had a boisterous laugh. He'd always tickle her until she screamed, and slipped her extra chocolate when he came to visit.

"Her father told uncle Tommy he had to run to the store. Tonight was chocolate chip pancake night, and there needed to be chocolate chips. When her father disappeared into the tree line Uncle Tommy patted his denim clad knee. He wanted to read her a story."

The page between her thumb and index finger tore as her hand shook. The words all blurred together.

"Uncle Tommy put his lips to the girl's ear. The dried chap skin tickled her as he told her that if she were a good girl he wouldn't hurt her daddy. That night she slept in the pair of long pants her mother pestered her to bring along in case it got cold. Sweat clung to it as she sat curled up in her bed upstairs. The reddened skin on her thigh and calve started to purple."

Tears collected the crevices near her nose and dripped down to her chin and on to the journal.

Abel eyes stared at a fixed point somewhere in the evening sky. The wetness of his cheeks glistened under the lamplight. Nina closed the journal and put her hands on his.



Nina's boots left imprints on the forest floor. The rows of trees once naked now had branches peppered with tiny green leaves. The branches still called out to her like hanging exit signs but today she barely noticed them as she made her way to the cabin with the faded pink door.





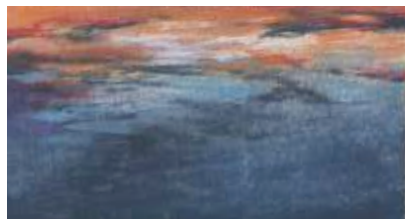





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# P O E T R Y

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## How to Prepare for Hurricane Season

Grayson Chong

Hurricane season came early this year.  
 Luckily, my grandparents have taught  
 me how to prepare for the storm.

1. Hoard up di Hardo bread an bokkle wata.  
 You give me all your reasons for staying.  
 My mind hungers to devour your words,  
 but my ears have caved in on themselves  
 when my intuition hears, I'm leaving.

2. Secure di roof wid tarpaulin an raft dem.  
 I struggle a smile, offer you a laugh,  
 a hug – anything to hide the roaring  
 winds trying to blow my composure away.

3. Tun on all a di light dem.  
 I've never understood this one.  
 Apparently they do this to keep the ghosts  
 away. Light – a signal to show  
 Death that Life still lives here.

4. Guh inna yuh yaad during di eye a di storm.

I run outside to survey  
the wreckage around me:  
ten splintered hopes,  
five buckets of tears,  
two broken hearts,  
one missing woman.

Maybe that's why I'm supposed  
to keep the lights on –  
to beckon the missing souls home.  
I've been through enough mourning  
seasons to know you won't come back.  
But I still leave the lights on for you  
in case your spirit loses its way.

Hurricane season came early this year.  
And I was unprepared.



## Mothers

Noha Kandeel

I wish I could've known  
the woman  
who birthed the heaven  
beneath your hard worn heels.

I hear she used to cradle  
a wombful of stories  
to repay the Nile for its  
visits to her dreams.

You say her breath  
was a hymn to  
love. I inhale  
every sorrow-struck sigh  
you devote to her reflection.

I close my eyes and sail  
on a fragmented  
river, to bind my soul  
with the chord of her song.



22+1

**A Trans-Feminist Manifesto**

- A Tribute to Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?" -

Leon Tsai

Ain't I a woman enough,  
That when my mother denies me,  
I give birth to myself.

Ain't I a woman enough,  
That when men come after me with  
pitchforks,  
I stand tall and proud with my heels,  
And I blow them kisses with my lips.

Ain't I a woman enough,  
Carrying the weight of my sisters.  
The 22 trans women murdered in 2017,  
I might as well be next.

So go ahead,  
Tie me up on the cross and burn me  
like a witch.  
For I have sinned, calling men trash  
Yet I will not stop being angry, and  
I will not stop fighting.  
How can I, you ask, a woman,  
Dare to put men beneath myself?  
Watch Me.



Birthered from Adam's ribs,  
I shall rip them out one by one,  
To build my mighty armour. Climbing  
out of his grave,  
Every man's nightmare I shall become.

Ain't I a woman enough?  
No, I am so much more.  
I am a woman of magic.  
I am a woman of power.  
I am a woman of resilience.

I am Woman,  
Hear Me Roar.







## Don't Say That, Don't Shoot That

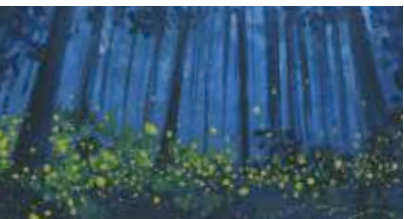
Trevon Smith




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# CREATIVE NONFICTION

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*It was early morning, just after eleven, when he walked in. I say it like that was all there was to it, but he actually wrestled with the knob about ten minutes before he entered. A small inconvenience, one you'd probably look past. But shitty wifi, shitty food, shitty service. The kinds of things that add up and make you pack your bags. It was only a short visit, just to spend Christmas with my Dad. Why not tough it out?*

*The tropical breeze followed him in.*

*"You awake?" he asked. Then he saw my tired eyes, my grouchy face, and puzzled the answer out himself.*

*"C'mere, I want to show you this." He placed something metal on the dresser.*

*I rubbed my eyes, then sat on the edge of the air mattress. My brother was passed out on the real mattress. Whatever Dad wanted to show me was for me and me alone.*

*"What is it?"*

*He slid the cold metal from its leather holster.*

*"My gun."*



They have it wrong. The movies, the TV shows, even the comics and videogames. Guns don't go bang, or pow, or even krakow. It's more of a pop sound, like kernels in a frying pan.

*Pop, pop, pop.*

At least that's what we heard, my Dad and I, as we rounded the corner to the front entrance. We opened the door into a dimly lit vestibule, its windows covered by notices and warnings and regulations, maybe even a recipe for homemade sugar cookies. Or, maybe not.

In the glass space between the papers, a man eyed us from behind his counter, then unlocked the door. I wanted to say something funny as we walked in, like "no pat down fellas?" or "your metal detectors are broken."

Both were stupid, and made us sound suspicious. So I didn't.

"How can I help you guys?" Zach, the man behind the counter, arms laid flat with a tattoo on his right forearm of what I think was fire and some

skulls. Or maybe they were ferns and blooming flowers.

“We’d like to use the range please.” I said, though the “please” came out fractured. I imagine I sounded younger than I was. My freshly shaved face probably didn’t help, either.

“Alright,” he pointed to a counter in the back. “Just fill out the waivers over there and we’ll get you into a class ASAP.”

As we walked over I noticed the mannequins, decked out in combat vests, helmets, and goggles. Camouflage cargo pants, tactical gloves, multiple pistol holsters without pistols. Most were armed with shotguns and rifles, but one had a bow strung to its back. I like to think about the mannequins going to war, most armed to the teeth (or where there teeth should be) and there’s this one leading the charge into enemy territory, family in its heart and bow in its hand. I like to think that it survives. I know it won’t.



*It was years ago, back when I lived in Jamaica. My mom was picking up her niece from school. I wasn’t there with them when it happened. I heard the story after. My mom was in the car waiting for my cousin to come out. There were usually kids playing outside and on the street. That day? No one.*

*My mom waited twenty minutes before thinking she should go and get my cousin herself. Then they came out. Not the kids. Two masked men, guns in hand. My mom froze in her seat, hands still on the seatbelt she was about to unbuckle. One pointed his handgun directly at her. I like to think he may have held it there a while, for dramatic effect maybe. But guns are heavy, you don’t wait. He fired two or three shots, the bullets missed. Maybe he was out of ammo or heard the sirens closing in, and ran off into the foliage.*

*Sometime later, she told me she prayed the whole time to herself, and to the gunman, “Don’t shoot.”*



We were only halfway done the waivers when Zach called us.

“You guys can tag along with this group and hand in your forms after.” He pointed to a group of people filing into a smaller room at the end of the hall. We nodded, attached ourselves to our new classmates, then took a seat at the back.

Our instructor, Chris, started with a handgun. Rather, a pink plastic

replica that was standing in for the real thing. Holding the barrel with his left hand, he explained, “You take your right hand and place your thumb and index finger right under the groove.”

Chris continued. “Then take your other fingers and wrap them around the grip. Make sure your index finger isn’t on the trigger until you’re ready to shoot.” He took his left hand off the barrel. “Then you take your left hand and wrap four fingers around the grip, over your right fingers. Then bring your left thumb up, and lock that under your right thumb, nice and tight.”

To simplify, it’s like playful choking. Wrap your fingers around the neck, hold it tight so it doesn’t slip, and for the love of god don’t jerk it suddenly, or someone ends up dead.

Chris moved on to the what-not-to-dos, most being how not to hold the gun. I wanted to ask if holding it sideways like the gangsters do in the movies was ok, but that would be stupid. So I didn’t.

Next was the rifle and shotgun lesson, which could be summed up with “don’t hold ‘em like Rambo.” Then we were done.

We handed in our forms to Zach, who gave us a list of their shooting selection. They had a range of handgun ammo; from .22’s which are mainly used on rats and in tickle fights, to .50 cal’s which are used on bigger rats and tickle fights where you want to tickle your enemy to death.

“We also have a nice selection of AR-15’s and a few pump action shotguns.” He motioned to the rifles hanging behind him.

“Uh, no thanks. I think we’ll stick with handguns today.”

It wasn’t the size of the gun that swayed me from trying them. Rather, it was the size of my wallet. Bigger guns use bigger bullets, and bigger bullets cost more.

I chose a CZ 9mm and a Remington 1911. The first looked cool. The second I had heard of before. It was featured on some of the covers of the Hit-man video games; the games about, you guessed it, being a professional assassin and killing people.

My Dad chose a Glock 17 and Glock 21. It makes sense, he owns a Glock 17. I remember how much contempt he had for guns when I was a kid, a sentiment probably born out of his childhood in Jamaica. But times and minds change, especially when you’re downstairs having a drink and see some un-savoury characters hanging outside your front gate. You might think to yourself “What’s stopping them from hopping the fence? How would I protect my family?” Or maybe your opinion would change when your business is broken into



and the police take more than an hour to respond, the intruders already in the wind.

My mom isn't a fan of him owning a gun, but why should she? One almost took her life.

"Alright guys, I'll pack these up and meet you over there," he pointed to the door beside the waiver counter. "Grab some ear and eye protection, and I'll see you in a couple minutes."

Beside the door is a stack of paper targets, all featuring an armless, legless person with a bullseye drawn squarely on his stomach. I pull one from the stack, nudge my dad.

"Hey, his name's Bill. He's ok, but his personality is a bit flat."

He laughs. I laugh. Bill doesn't.

"Ready to go guys?" Zach, muffled through his specialized face mask, a carbon black mask that covered his nose and mouth. Range officers spend most their days around live ammunition, so they need special masks to protect from the lead and gunpowder in the bullet casings when they're fired. It also makes them look cool.

He carried a large case on his back, one you'd mistake for a guitar case if we were any other place. But this is a shooting range, and there were definitely guns and bullets in there.

"Your glasses and ear protection fit ok? Good, follow me in and close the door behind you."



*I don't know the whole story, but this is what I was told. I'm told he was a good kid, my cousin Jory. I'm told he had a good heart, and cared deeply about his friends and family. I'm told he was the ring-bearer at my parents' wedding. I'm told he lived with my mom and grandma for a while. I'm told he had problems.*

*I'm told he smoked too much, and drank even more. I'm told he was probably depressed. I'm told he would sometimes lay in bed for days. I'm told he sometimes didn't brush his teeth or shower. I'm told his dad was imprisoned, and his mother moved to America.*

*These are all things I'm told, but this is what I know. I know he had two daughters, and a loving girlfriend.*

*I know he was twenty seven when he died. I know it was early in the morning when it happened. I know it was at the bar. I know he was intoxicated.*

*Maybe weed, maybe alcohol, maybe both. That I don't know.*

*I know it was a cop that did it. I know it was a friend that did it. I know it was both. I know there was an argument. I know Jory said something he shouldn't have. I know the cop, the friend, shot him in the stomach two or three times.*

*I know Jory died a few hours later. My mother's crying told me that much.*



The first thing you feel on the range is the shock of each pop. Every bullet fired imprints itself in your chest. It would jolt you at first, but like elevator music, it becomes white noise.

Zach set the case on the ground, clipped Bill and his brother Will to the target post, then sent them on their way down range.

"Who's first?"

I pointed to my dad.

"Alright, step up here."

Zach handed him the Glock 17, then my dad assumed a stance I couldn't help but laugh at. In class, we were shown two stances to take while shooting. The first has your dominant leg, in my case the right leg, set behind for support. The other leg is forward, your right hand is slightly bent but pointed straight ahead, and your left hand is bent for support. I called it the cool stance.

The other stance, the one my dad took, has you stand with your feet spread shoulder length apart and both your arms pointing straight ahead like arrows. You lean into the gun a little, make sure your back is slightly bent to absorb the kick. I called this the nerd stance.

My dad took aim. I expected him to start as soon as the gun was in his hand, but he took as much time as he needed. Eternity is a long time. Waiting for a shot to go off is longer.

Days later, it was my turn.

Zach showed me how to load the gun, how to hold it, and where to aim.

It was heavier than I thought it would be, and it was finicky to hold the way we were taught.

I pointed it down range at Bill. No point shooting his brother any more.

At first it was shaky. The sights weren't quite lining up the way Chris said they would. You're working against the weight of the gun and your own breathing. Maybe you're working against the loud bang that you think you're going to hear. Maybe you're working against your own history with guns and

violence. Maybe all the crazy stuff on the news shook you, or that scene from the original *Robocop* got to you. Then again, maybe not.

I ignored the sights and looked straight down at Bill. I ignored Bill and looked straight at the red oval on his stomach. I ignored everything else. That red oval was all I saw.

Then I squeezed.

*Pop.*

The gun was lighter, I was lighter, weightless even. It's a release. Years of rhetoric about guns build up like phlegm in your throat, choking you. A school shooting one day, gang violence the next. Black youth gunned down by police or armed civilians, riots the week after. I squeezed again.

*Pop.*

And again, and again.

*Pop, pop.*

And again, and again, and again until the gun clicked and Zach tapped my shoulder.

"Nice shooting, set it down right there."

He brought the targets back. Bill had holes all over him, not a single one missed.

"You ever shoot before?" Zach asked.

I wanted to say two decades of video games, violent movies, and violent TV might've taught me a few things, but that'd be stupid. So I settled on something else.

"Nope, never."



We were on the way home, my dad and I. We were talking about the range, about shooting.

Rather, he was talking and I was listening, though not really listening. I was practicing my grip. Right hand on the handle under the groove, left hand over the right. I was aiming out the window at the car next to us on the highway, and at the evening sun hanging in the distance. I was aiming at all the masked men of the world and the mothers they shoot at, or at all the burglars and hooded figures that stand at our gates in the night. I like to think that I don't shoot, that I don't pull the trigger. Then again, I like to think that I do.

*Pop.*





## No One Has to Know

Erin Miller

Throwing up for the third time in this month makes my head ache. It's not healthy, but it just lurches from my mouth without pause or warning, I think it's my body trying to purge itself of any reminder of him. It mostly occurs late at night, when the moon shines in through my window and I am lying in bed unable to sleep. Time doesn't heal over what happened and the waves of nausea keep pulling me under.

I keep thinking about him.

His hair was red, not in a unnaturally dyed way, it was more like copper colour with brown hues fused into it. His eyes were the colour of the mid-summer sky, a bright and welcoming blue. His freckles stood out when he got embarrassed, like the time he got picked for honour roll or when he had to go up to receive his first place prize for his robotics entry. His smile was large with straight, white teeth. It was so friendly that it became predatory. What stood out most was his laugh that echoed through my bones when someone told a joke, or when I said no.

What happened didn't begin when we first became friends. Trauma like this doesn't jump out and yell that it's trauma. It usually starts out normal, the lure of security before the trap comes down.

A group of friends spending almost every day together, we hung out in three places; the Scarborough Town Centre, the Beaches, the run down McDonalds, but our second home was the Thursday youth group. This was friendship in its purest form, perfect for a lonely teenager. It was fun. He was fun.

He invited me over after about three months of friendship with the promise of video games and hot pizza. It was November; the skies were grey, threatening late autumn snowfall, the frost was beginning to form around windows as the chill of winter's arrival sung through the South Scarborough air.

The ride took much longer than normal as I went in the opposite direction from where he lived, closer to Rouge Hill Go Train Station rather than Scarborough General Hospital. When I texted him my concern, he laughed about it, even called

me with the sole purpose of laughing about it, I nervously laughed as well even though anxiety about being lost was eating me up from the inside.

That should have been a sign to just go back home.

I persisted regardless; I made my way through the winding neighbourhood streets that connected to his. Long stretches of cracked road all lined with cookie-cutter post war homes. Each of the houses was made from red brick, with striped awnings over large windows and small steps leading to the door. There were subtle differences in colours of the awnings or what curtains they used for the windows, but it all felt the same as I continued to walk. The only information about the house was the number, thirty-six.

I approached the house with minimal trouble once I made it through the maze of side streets. He let me in and took my coat, hanging it over the edge of the couch. He said he would be a moment and went into the kitchen.

The living room was furnished with a white carpet, dark wood coffee table, cabinet, and side table complimenting the cream coloured couch and love seat. It looked like something ripped out the recent Ikea catalogue with the walls the colour of Fragrant Lilac from Valspar.

I sat uncomfortably in the living room; I was quickly accompanied by one of his cats. She was a thick grey furred Maine Coon with bright yellow eyes, she less friendly, more curious about me. Regardless, didn't help with the uncomfortable feeling in my deep my stomach.

This was a time before my chest binder, my protective cotton polyester second skin. There were whispers of my gender identity, nothing concrete to tell like a new name, change in pronouns or even a binder. Instead I was still wearing feminine clothing and undergarments, even with my short haircut. I had this nagging feeling of exposure, it was a feeling that was so constant when I went out, that I didn't think it was anything else.

He called out from where he was, "Hey, can you come in for a second?"

"Yeah sure." I met him in the kitchen, and not even for a second after I step onto the cold-tiled floor, he was kissing me.

It was brief, but it was sloppy, messy and made me freeze up as if his cold, thin fingers were keeping me in place. He tried to be sexy by biting on my bottom lip, but it made me more shocked. As he pulled away, he wiped his mouth before giving me a smile, “Erin, I had to do that. You’ve been giving me looks for months now, I didn’t really have a choice.”

I believed him.

I believed him so much that I let him do it again. Except on the couch, I remained rigid as he kissed me, using tongue and keeping his hands on my shoulders, his grip was so tight that I would later think that he was trying to trap me.

How could he not help himself? I was wearing a beige shirt with a scoop neck and quarter length sleeves and black skinny jeans, every curve exposed. How could he just sit there like a normal person and not take advantage of me?

He took my shirt off, and things only got worse. He bit me, marked me as his own. A purple mark ringed with red right under my collarbone. He bit down, and pulled back on the skin as one does when devouring the skin off of a piece of meat. He was in a way trying to devour who I was, and leave behind someone who he could shape.

He left indents on my skin; at that moment I didn’t feel it, I felt nothing. The mark almost bled, blood bubbled up just below the skin. An act of possession, a demonstration of control over someone that trusted him, that thought of him as a friend.

As he felt up my breasts and I laid on the cream couch, staring up at the ceiling. He whispered something to me, “Why do you want to be a man with tits like these?” and there my bra went and there went any remaining memory I had of the event. I don’t remember what happened, my body wasn’t my own and still isn’t my own.

When I got on the bus, my head was still in a daze, I didn’t even remember if I paid to get on the bus. He sent me a text while I tucked myself away in the back corner of the bus.

**“No one has to know.”**

This wouldn’t be a one-time deal.

He held it over me; he established control over me every chance he got. He would occasionally whisper in moments of privacy, “Even if you told them, and they would just kick you out of the group. I’ve known them much longer. Who would they believe?” Then go back to our little group, acting as if nothing happened. His laughter echoed in my head as it was the same laugh he used when I tried to push him away earlier in the evening.

He got perfects on tests, wrote university level papers with ease, did amazing in any sort of robotics competition and everyone loved him. He was a good guy, which by definition left me the villain. It didn’t matter how many times I cried on the bus or flinched when people came near me, it was my fault.

He would bring it up when tearing off my winter coat and trying to feel me up through my baggy sweater, “You like this don’t you?”

Did I? If I did then I was at fault too? The nightmares were just blown out of proportions, even though they began to grab me. His hands coming out from the shadows and grabbing hold of me in all the places he took control of. Curling around my thighs, nails digging into my wrists, gripping onto my breasts, clamped tightly over my mouth and dragging me down until I suffocated.

My silence was his consent. My guilt allowed him to violate me.

I know deep down that I should have taken off, never looked back and tried all over again, but I couldn’t. The unbearable weight of loneliness kept me coming back, a looming threat that it would happen again, that the suffocating feeling of a silent phone and the worrying voice that no one would ever love me, kept me from leaving.

With my silence opening up the gates to my body, he continued to back me up into the corners of stairwells. His bites began to multiply, bruises that felt like they would one day take over my entire body, I had to buy concealer to make an honest attempt to cover them, but mostly resorted to the stinging pain of melting ice cubes against the damaged skin.

No matter how much melted ice dripped between my fingers, his mark still lingered.



On March 4th it ended. Just like that. Despite the evening prior he took hold of me and kissed me in the middle of the McDonalds and told me to call him, but the following afternoon it ended.

He found someone else.

A girl in the group, Jade. A friend of mine who comforted me when I choked out some details about what he did to me. Instead of cutting him out, he brought him closer.

Sloppily making out in front of me at a table in the food court of Scarborough Town Centre. What I only saw was the way he touched her. He didn't put his hands on her the way he did on me; a collar of bruises and dried spit with thinly veiled threats and complete control.

It was PG. It was almost cute.

She didn't do much better to me, she used her words to drive home that it was my fault. Planting the seeds of doubt as deep as she could.

"You shouldn't have gone over and put yourself in that situation."

"He's a guy, it's what they do."

"You're over exaggerating."

I cut them both out soon after, it felt like using a butter knife to cut off a limb. I continue to bleed out, no amount of therapy or counselling was able to fix it. When I picture his face, a shiver crawls down my spine. When people mention him in passing I feel a slight tremor in my hands, as if just mentioning him will bring him back.

I hate not having full control over my body and not being able to talk. Even though he has been removed and blocked from my life, the people associated with him are gone, and the bruises are finally healed, he still lingers. It isn't like a ghost of days long gone, his presence still has weight, like the hard bites against my skin.

That's where I remain, curling into myself on the floor of the bathroom, head in my hands as all my thoughts swirl around, as if my brain is just a slush splashing against the inside of my skull.

I still ask myself, "Why did I go to his house" and "Why did I get close" as the memory of him traces along my body with thin, cold fingers sneaking up my t-shirt.

*"Why would you want to be a man, with tits like these?"*

His violence has made me disgusted with my body.

*"You like this, don't you?"*

I'm afraid it's going to happen again.

*"I had to do that. You've been giving me looks for months now, I didn't really have a choice."*

I wonder if for the rest of my life my body will purge itself to get him out.

*"No one has to know."*

I'm terrified.



## Employee Confidentiality

Dustin Macandog

I've never seen my dad cry. Not when I graduated high-school with honors, nor when his wife passed from ovarian cancer. I did, however, see a tear drop form when Philippines won the Miss Universe Pageant. It must have been the first time I've seen him cry. Although, looking at his drawn face this morning, I imagine last night was the second.

My father was once a disciplinarian. I used to look at him like he were a stone golem, a beast made completely out of rock, with unwanted vegetation growing on his head and shoulders. He walked through the house like a brute, knowing that everything we had was owned by him. In return, he deserved the utmost respect. He was king.

Now he's a withered old man who's lost control of the kingdom.

"Just ignore him," he says, "Your brother."

"Ignoring it won't help our situation."

"I know how good you are at ignoring things, Dustin."

Just like him. I can imagine what he's going to do instead of pacifying the family: Pray.  
Go to damn church and ask a floating monkey in the sky to save his family.  
What a waste.

*I know how good you are at ignoring things. What did he mean by that?*

If Hell existed, and Satan designed a nightmare-landscape based on each individual person's absolute fears, mine would be working the Tim Hortons drive-through. It's a gathering place for all the caffeine-addicted grumps who hate waiting in line. A nifty little spot for them to unleash their road rage and complain about how late for work they are. So, as I work the window this morning at six A.M., each passing customer adds to the migraine.

"That'll be \$6.50" I say to a man in his car.

"Why does it cost so much?"

I raise an eyebrow at him. The big man can afford to drive his Hummer, but breaks the bank for a sandwich and a coffee. I can't help but feel he's compensating for something.

"Well sir, the sandwich and coffee costs six, plus tax."

Now he raises both eyebrows at me and says something I'm unable to respond to:

"I pay taxes?" I understand that English is one of the hardest languages to learn. It contains unreliable patterns and random anomalies, but I don't think the Tim's menu is very hard to comprehend. Our signature drink is the Ice Cap, I'm certain you cannot be legally Canadian without drinking one of these.

The man at the intercom has an ambiguous accent. It sounds like Australian mixed with Middle Eastern mixed with river troll.

"Can I take your order?"

"I get an *Ass Crap?*"

"Uh, what?"

*"Ass crap! Ass crap!"*

Something our customers don't seem to know is that we can hear everything that's being said in their cars. Even if we haven't started taking their order, as soon as the car hits the sensor, we can hear them. We're hit with a line of customers who don't seem to know we're listening.

"...So many good-looking daddies come into my work."

Our ears perk up and we raise the volume on our headsets. The voices of two young women.

"The toy store?"

"Yeah, and they never take me home."

"I can use a sugar daddy too. Like, why couldn't I be their child?"

"Oh my God, same! I wish I could have been shot out of that urethra."

After what feels like a thousand years in the desert, I'm finally able to leave the drive-through. The store gets quieter around noon, the line cutting down to only four or five people.

I can't help but stare out the window for Maggie to arrive. She's scheduled to start in five minutes, and I'm hoping to catch a few words with her—professionally, of course. It's never a good idea to be romantically entangled with someone you work with. But maybe she's wearing that raspberry perfume.

She walks into the store, not looking like herself. Black bags hang under her eyes, and once golden-tanned skin seems to have faded into a blotchy pale. Her dark hair is shorter on one side—has she been cutting it? Her figure is hidden by a sweater that folds down her to her knees like a dress, and I'm pretty



sure both her shoelaces are untied.

“Hey, Monkey,” I say.

She mumbles something incomprehensible and walks passed me.

Maggie’s been disrespecting the guests today. She’s usually the type of girl to call the customers “Honey,” and “Dear,” and then possibly wipe their nose or tie a loose shoe. I watch her help a man with a pineapple-shaped head, his hair like sharp leaves.

“Scuse me, Miss. Where can I pick up my sandwich?”

Her scowl is sharp enough to cut through the man, and she grits her teeth as she speaks.

“Have you tried looking at the giant, glowing ‘Pick Up Here’ sign?”

I spend my thirty minute break playing *Animal Crossing* on a hand-held gaming system. It’s a fantasy world-simulator, filled with perpetually happy animals to socialize with. You can decorate a house, pay the mortgage by collecting apples, go fishing or bug-hunting, and you even play online with other people who have the game. Mom used to play with me. She didn’t enjoy the game, only did it to humor me. She was especially fond of the mail system. I’d come to my virtual home and find a letter from her, asking if I’ve finished my homework. And then, subsequently, a letter telling me to drop the game. Now Daniel occasionally plays with me, again, to unnecessarily humor me. He’s the middle brother, but is rarely found at home. I’m not sure where he goes, but he’s gone for weeks at a time. I send my little, pixelated character to the mailbox, discovering a letter from him. There’s a sea shell attached to it.

*This shell looks dumber than your face.*

I delete the message, but keep the shell. This will make a large dent in my pretend-mortgage.

I put the game down when Maggie comes to the back and plops her head down on the table. She covers her face with her arms, long hair covering any gaps. I’m tempted to poke her, but I think I’d like to keep all my fingers.

“You know,” I say, “You’re the one that always says it’s bad to keep things bottled up.”

“I wish you were bottled up right now. No air holes, either.”

Loud and clear. I open my hand-held and forget she’s there. I’d like to be offended, but her come-back makes me laugh a little. I could probably think

of something better. Her phone is surprisingly quiet, it’s usually irritating me with constant messages from the boyfriend. Never met the guy, but I’m sure he’s a pathetic shell of a man with no direction in life and only won Maggie’s heart through witchcraft. After a couple minutes, she lifts her head off the table.

“Do you want to grab some sushi after?”

The restaurants empty, all that can be heard is the chopping of dead fish. Maggie hasn’t touched her salmon rolls since we sat down, just rolls them around in soy sauce.

“So,” I say, “Wanna tell me what’s eating you?”

“I said I was fine.”

“You can cut the act, Monkey. It’s me. It’s not good to ignore things.”

“Look who’s talking.”

Why do people keep saying that? I’d like to think of myself as a mindful person. I get out

of my seat on the bus for a senior citizen, I’m basically a saint. Am I forgetting a holiday? Is it her birthday? No, it’s the middle of August.

“What do you mean?” I ask.

“What day is it today, Monkey? August the eleventh.”

It suddenly hits me. The anniversary. How could I forget what happened five years ago?

This is what dad must have been referring to. It’s not my fault, I don’t have a lot of memories of mom, I was so young. One that stands out, and I can’t explain why, is her talent with a wooden spoon. That woman could discipline a war lord with a wooden spoon. She had such precision with it that she could nail a fleeing child square in the back of the head. But she was as loving as she was tough.

So what if I don’t remember the anniversary? She passed away precisely five years ago, today. Do I have to rip open a new scar every year?

“Can’t believe you remembered that,” I say.

I take a sip of water, but I can feel her eyes fixed on me, waiting for a grand metaphor to describe my inner turmoil. Something like a babbling brook that can’t flow properly with fallen debris blocking its flow. Except less cringe-worthy and cliché. I’m tired of people looking at me like I’m broken, like my childhood has transformed me into an abstract artist. All I want in life is a hot-dog vendor in my room.

“Are you going to visit the cemetery?” She says.

“Not likely.”

“Wow. And why not?”

Just like her, turning the tables. Snooping into my life in order to avoid answering to her own emotions. Fine, if she wants to play that way, I can serve some wicked sass too.

“I don’t need a stupid rock in the ground to pretend I’m closer with her. So, just drop it.”

The rest of the meal is spent in silence, awkwardly trying to think of a conversation topic.

We find ourselves sitting on a dry rock, overlooking the fading sun’s reflected rays on the lake. Nothing can be heard except for washing waves and screaming seagulls. It would be a romantic scene, but this is Lake Ontario, a cesspool with the occasional dead body floating up. A sewer tunnel lingers nearby, releasing a moist stench that smells like the aftermath of a Taco Bell Party Pack.

She looks at her phone, then aggressively throws it in her bag, releasing a long sigh. Our eyes meet, and she knows I’m questioning the act.

“After four years,” she says.

I’m not sure how to react. My infatuation with her tells me to throw a parade. Maggie is on the market and I just got paid. I can’t help but enjoy hearing those words. But logic questions our compatibility. We can’t seem to get through a meal without arguing. I turn to her, a blank face. Not a single tear drop. Now’s not the time to be thinking of future entanglements.

“He, uh, ended things?”

She nods. What do I do in this situation? It can become messy at any second. This is what I wanted, but now I feel like I’m not prepared to handle a hysterical woman. How do I make her feel better? Maybe I should put my arm around her and tell her that everything is going to be okay. Or maybe I can turn the situation into a joke. That seems like the optimal solution to me.

“He must be struggling with his sexuality,” I say.

Her lip quivers, I can tell she’s trying to hold back a smile. I release an awkward chuckle, and she joins me in the laughter after slapping my shoulder.

“Seriously!” She says, “I haven’t even gotten to the worst part!”

“What’s the worst part?”

“He’s been going home a lot. To the Philippines, told me it was to see his family. A lie, of course. He has a girl there, and they’re already engaged.”

I’m caught off-guard. Getting dumped is one thing, but to know your

partner has made a commitment to someone that he or she refused to make with you. It must sting. I’ve always questioned how a man can physically cheat on a woman, in terms of sexually viability. Laying with your mistress, staring into her eyes and only seeing the pain of your partner, leaving you only with a deflated balloon for reproductive purposes. I’m getting off-track.

Maggie maintains a blank face. I attempt to subtly nudge closer to her, but a chunk of rock breaks off. We watch the fallen debris slide down the edge, creating a loud splash when it hits the water, and suddenly the space between us becomes more obvious than ever. I freeze in place, quickly thinking of something to say.

“I won’t sugar-coat it. That really sucks.”

To my surprise, a slight smile seems to be forming on her face, until she starts laughing. Starting with a quiet giggle that escalates into an all-out echo through the valley. I stare at her, wide-eyed. Why is she laughing? Has crippling loneliness already started to deteriorate her mind?

“Uh, you okay?” I ask.

“It’s just so stupid that I didn’t see this coming. The signs were there. And it feels good to let it all out. You should try it sometime, Monkey.”

There it is again. I don’t feel the compelling urge to laugh into the wind. I don’t feel like bursting into tears or throwing a tantrum, so why create emotions that aren’t there?

It’s almost midnight and I finally arrive home. My body feels like a punching-bag and my mind is too exhausted to express its fatigue with a simile. I collapse onto the mattress, too tired to remove my clothes, but miraculously possess the energy to play some Animal Crossing. I figured I’d check my mailbox to see if Daniel sent another letter. Nothing. His messages are beginning to clutter this thing. I send my character to scroll through the messages, deleting all the old ones. I can’t believe this thing stretches back to 2011.

Daniel sending a pear with an insulting message.

A stick with an insult.

A rock with an insult.

Delete, delete, delete.

When I arrive to 2011, however, I’m petrified to find a letter not sent by Daniel. He’s the only person I’ve played this game with for the past five years, but I remember he’s not the firstperson I played with. The letters addressed from mom, dated a month before she died. I forgot this was here, I don’t remem-



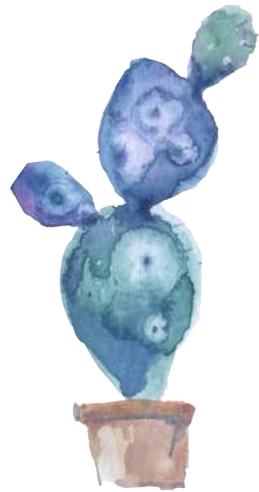
ber what it said. It can't include anything worthwhile, mom wasn't really interested in the game. I should just delete it. I hover over the button but can't seem to press it. Whatever's in there can't be important. This is just a dumb game for children. But, despite the format, a letter is a letter. I open it.

*Dear Dustin,*

*There's a squirrel in my town that wants me to deliver a package for him. Why can't he do it himself? If you're reading this, it means you're not doing your homework! You know I will get the spoon and come up there! Get to bed soon, my puppilo, and don't forget to say your prayers.*

*Think of me while you do, okay? I love you.*

I was right. The message didn't contain anything worthwhile, but I can't help but think of all the feelings I've been ignoring. Was a part of me aware of the anniversary? I lay motionless, staring at the ceiling. And cry.



## Featured Artist

Carol Cheong is a Chinese Toronto-born emerging interdisciplinary artist who uses an experimental, process based method. Her most recent work takes on the idea of one's being as a participant in the world; the spaces we occupy in nature and intimacies in growth.

With this exploration of relationships, the beauty of the everyday is mediated through time in specific places – time-stamped and archived in all progress work. From initial sketches to material handling, the physical act of creating is an essential component in Cheong's creative process.

@cyacheong









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