

# HOME



05

FALL 2023

**ISSUE 05:**  
**HOME**

Straighten the paintings, sweep the porch, and welcome us HOME in Block Party's 5th issue. HOME is your first apartment with the broken locks, the friend who ties your laces, the songs you sing in the car. HOME is where you fit, where you can kick your shoes off and feel wrapped in warmth.

Above all else,  
HOME is Block Party's best issue yet.

*Welcome HOME.*



# CONTRIBUTORS

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## MEET ME IN TORONTO

Karen Sadler

That implausible intersection  
of September salmon runs and  
skyscrapers, glass condos  
sprouting like goldenrod over  
Garrison Creek.

That pavement palimpsest,  
a grit-filled grid gripping  
tightly to raccoon-filled ravines  
and basin-shaped parks  
scooped out of the clay.

That lake-fed locus of nestled  
neighbourhoods overlapping  
at the seams, a living,  
breathing quilt of a creature,  
warming the earth.

# HOMES THAT CARED FOR ME

Jesse June-Jack

I.

When I write about you, the soil weeps. Water,  
smudged with brown droplets of sand and  
discarded candy wrappings conjure a crying face.

Your house still stands. Faded pink,  
shade of dried livers and peeling Barbie dolls,  
chip off the bones of cement pillars.

The cacti still perk up when gusts of wind  
carry spice and sawdust from the nearby market,  
almost offended by the smell of crushed leaves

that garnish stockfish in the soup pot. I haven't been  
*home* in a while. It was never mine, but always open.  
It was yours and then my mother's and then my father's

who only had spare keys under the brown straw mat  
because he fell in love with a family of carers,  
who only knew greetings

in hugs, cheek kisses, swigs of cracked open beer cans,  
dried groundnuts, stacked book piles  
and dinner table communions. There were whispers

*(there are no houses without whispers.  
even the dead are busy bodies)* but every escaped breath  
grew larger because heart circulation

winds up even the palest gale into a tornado. Debris  
lays in the mid-morning phone yelling  
and stare-down confrontations, late celebration. Pieces

of wood lodged in the cacti plant, spikes  
embedded in everyone's chest. You, of course,  
always end up smoothing things over. The key

to the front door weighs heavy in my pockets  
and the ridges between brown bittings leave  
fillings on my thumb, earth from beneath

the palm trees in your backyard. If the house is to be mine  
then you must let me in when we next meet. I'll hug first  
so you'll remember what piece of me belongs to you.

II.

*after "Time" by Hans Zimmer.*

childhood laughter. midnight cookies.  
late-night PlayStation 'one-more-game' marathons.  
movie night, caramel popcorn stuffed into ceramic bowls.  
open pizza boxes and cans of energy drinks. birthday processions.  
family dinners. gift wrappings, plopped underneath strewn Christmas trees.  
phone call ringing, processing birthday messages with morning hair,  
sweat drenched armpits and red-eyed slumber. slammed doors, exclamations  
used to denote a truce from yelling to rest cracked larynxes. air conditioning  
warding off mosquitos chuckling by window frames and summer heat lashings.  
apartment ceilings, terraforming to match the pace of change  
and fatherly design choices. love, enough to satisfy time,  
the only roommate needed to make a house a home.

III.

my mother's arms was the first home I ever lived in. then  
her voice, which led butterflies through open windows,

moving streaks of rainbow colors flapping from their wings.  
my father's voice was the next home, booming but gentle

like a bongo drum or a bear hug,  
towering but not belittling. family, my first home

had a welcome mat that tickled with smooth brown coir  
and no closed doors. i waltzed into my father's hugs,

tripping over feet and furniture, clanging the remote  
to the floor. both of us, excited to get to Mom's fried rice

and a dinner table. and still, the home grows,  
uncles and aunties and cousins and family friends

knock on the door and dust their feet at the welcome mat.  
they knew not to pretend like our home wasn't theirs.

drinks were stocked upon arrival, chairs were pulled  
granting leverage for further conversations,

some spent hours, some planned days. and still, a piece of them  
remained when they pulled their shoes on,

dragging a goodbye into farce by showing  
that they loved us through the absolute refusal

to leave exactly when they said they would. i carry  
my aunts, their temperament and belief in grander designs,

i carry my uncles, their knowledge of the earth and how  
to best dress in emergency situations. i carry my cousins

but not for long, for they contain multitudes across different continents  
and no one can properly carry a kicking, restless eight-year-old that long.

and still, the house grew  
moving from apartment to apartment

still a family, but age breeds contempt for loneliness  
so I invited friends of my own. some of them broke plates

as soon as they could eat  
and some brought their own food to share. i carry them

in my chest pocket, where confessions of secret admirers,  
elaborate hair-pulling debates about fictional characters

and homework cheating synergy were first crafted. by now,  
i have an entire segment of a home to me, a division

of the tree of life that has now sprouted its large branches  
into a floorboard built to contain adolescence. but

as always, tree branches get cut  
when the world requires its bark for bite

and as always, mother nature throws flights of anger  
shanking the roots from the grime to the sky. Growing pains.

and still, the house grew  
as my family, my first home, transplanted leaves

from one world to another,  
in a city of multitudes, where different lives

reconcile in the shared understanding  
that everyone's got to pull out winter boots before December.

the cold was a new adornment, fluffy white  
creaking against the roof, melting into dim puddles

on the driveway. transplanting a leaf is bittersweet,  
given the chance to grow anew, it leaves its roots

in search of better fruit sprouting from its being,  
and being anew is another cruelty

knowing that your welcome mat isn't yours  
but the system that burns the coir of strange newcomers.

here,  
I welcomed new friends and distant relatives.

they all brought food, their words,  
wood for the fireplace and postcards for the dreams.

i did not know that i could carry this much  
but here, I learned words can carry the tiniest whimper

which is harder to contain than rage. so i found home  
not in another house, but in many arms

of different shapes and memories, all fitting  
the same space where my mother and father still hug me.

my first home is now a home that houses many  
as all homes should, to carry the words of love

closer to the chimneys where the earth can hear it.  
and still, the house grew,

but I do not know of its next form or shape.  
my first home reminds me that I did not know

the carvings before i felt the wood of my bedroom door. my new home  
reminds me that as long as there is laughter, there is a place to rest.

so, I let the house grow. hoping  
that it cares for those that need it most.

# MAMAN QUI JARDINE

Timothy Lam Yan Yu



# PORTRAIT OF THE FLOODED BASEMENT, REVISED

Michael Russell

i hunch over a silver shovel  
haul rain water into puddles

in the lily garden each toss  
orange petals splashed torn

flowers slung like crabs  
into muddy water last week

the landlord brought contractors  
to inspect the backyard the mud

gripping their work boots  
as we talked groundwater

rain water how water sits  
& slithers feasts

its way to a flood  
-ed basement

year after year i'm here  
drenched in June's hot rain

shoveling water into the lilies  
trying to outpace the downpour

the landlord promised  
this year would be different

my dogs paw the wet curtain  
behind me wrap burlap

around their noses lift  
their snouts to the drowned

air they smell it too  
the rancid stench of bullshit

## IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Stan Rogal

half the neighbourhood is drunk, the other half dead  
 where gentlemen prefer blondes but marry brunettes  
 the model wife unafraid to bare some tit  
*now&then* in proper company  
 the father who arrives home by mail once a month

facing the mirror in peek-a-boo bra  
 a roller skate bumps a lunch pail  
 the dog scratches to be let out  
 the awkwardness of the act

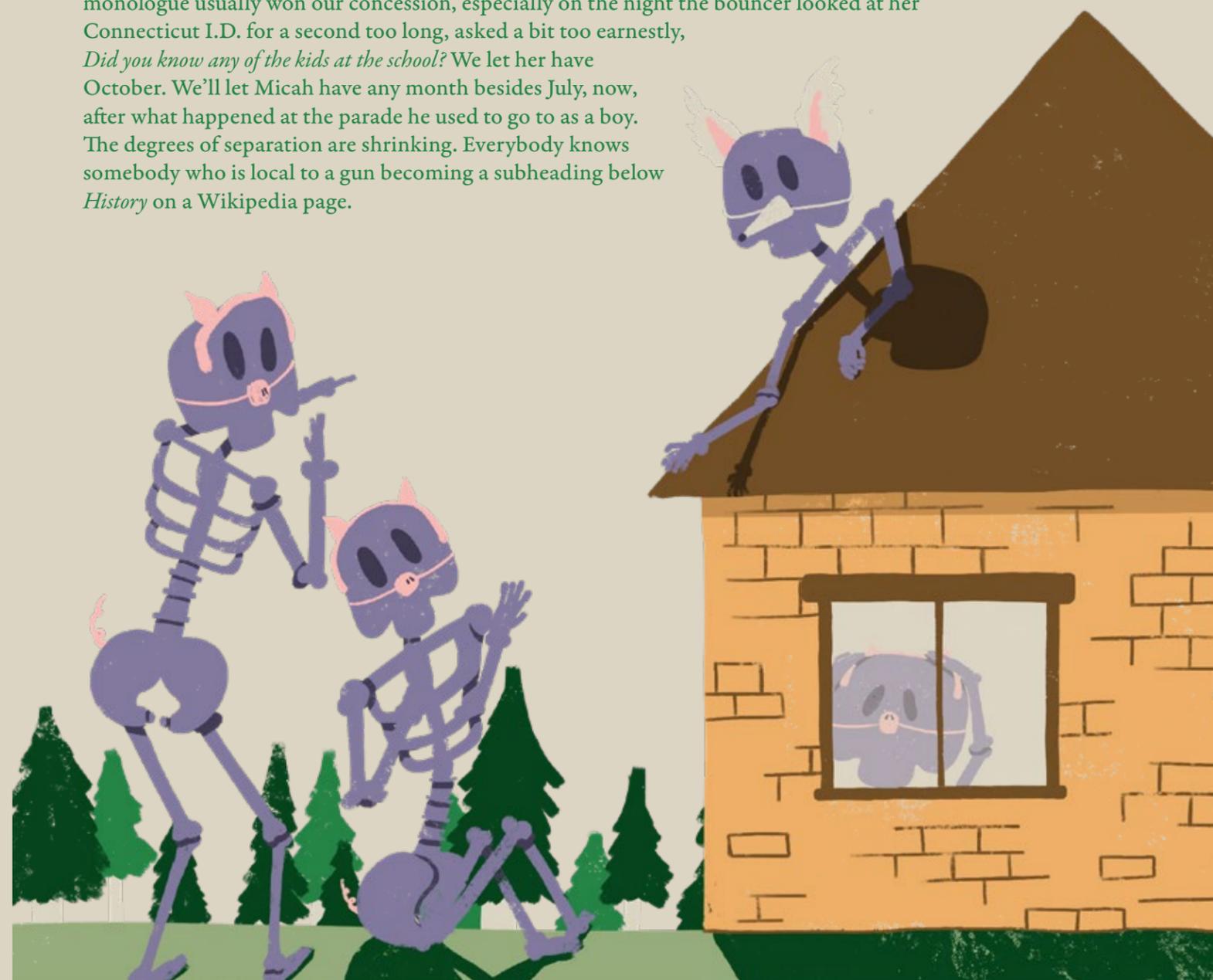
...don't care if it rains or freezes  
     long as I got my plastic jesus...  
 who never meant to tessellate a wasteland with human  
 skulls  
 begs a strange blend of calculating cats, bent nails  
 & linked sausages  
 in the mellow drama (dialogue a bust)  
     eat each other out to the feathers

## ALTERNATIVES TO 'WHERE ARE YOU FROM?', IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Em Dial

### *I. Where are you local to?*

For one year, the five of us were local to Jason's couch, where we would rip smoke from his bong and pretend we were immune to the homesickness that is unique to the year before graduation, one that extends in both directions, back towards Estes Park, Roseville, Highland Park, Alameda, or Newtown, forwards towards a city unlike the one we came from. We planned hometown tours on nights we would go to the bars, insistent that our favorite body of water would be best lit by the long angle of fall sun. Claire's apple cider doughnut monologue usually won our concession, especially on the night the bouncer looked at her Connecticut I.D. for a second too long, asked a bit too earnestly, *Did you know any of the kids at the school?* We let her have October. We'll let Micah have any month besides July, now, after what happened at the parade he used to go to as a boy. The degrees of separation are shrinking. Everybody knows somebody who is local to a gun becoming a subheading below *History* on a Wikipedia page.



## YOU GET HOME ANYWAY

Saffron Maeve

I read my friend Richard's *The Long and Short of It* when I need to gulp back hope—for myself, my body, romance, analogy. *Long and Short* is the editor's note of Spork Press issue 2.1, where my friend Richard writes on "human souls," an abstraction which twists into an address of loss and acceptance for his former lover. "You know how I am," he writes. "I push too hard. I get ahead of myself. I keep ruining everything I touch by turning it into gold. But I'm learning how to be gentle." Not everything can be gilded, I know it; some things are milky, like egg whites on hot asphalt or spit in the palm of my hand. Anyhow, the floorplan.

Richard would have made a good architect, I think. Stucco in his semicolons; mortar in his ellipses... good, strong pipes. It's fascinating how he shapes love: brutal, demanding, unremitting, holy. To him, love is putting pies on the windowsill; flying into the airport of someone else's listening; misplacing one's teeth in another's mouth. He's right, it only grows bigger with time. I collect every ping of affection I've ever felt—a bucketful in the supply closet, some more in the hamper, the clipped and abbreviated in the carpet fibres.

A quick Google search will tell you that my friend Richard was born on February 15th, 1967 in New York City; he wrote his debut poetry collection *Crush* after his boyfriend passed in 1991; he co-founded Spork Press, the quarterly literary magazine, crucially bound hardback; he calls Tucson home. Google will not tell you that we share a birthday, or that his work made me more patient and less resentful. It won't tell you that he made me less afraid of the routine of love, of those rituals which curl and peel at the edges.

My friend Richard and I are a lot alike, all cold pies and warm guns: I hang my heart up on the mantelpiece so I can keep an eye on it; I twist and push and loathe and chew; I carve gifts out of my memory and hand them to myself; I rip the stocking and pinch the flesh; I'm doubled over with love, it's warm in my head. Understanding each other was never the point, was it, Dick? We're meant to love until you can be seen through like glass. I dislike mirrors and wet tile. I avoid windows. Discretion is the taproot of sympathy; all this loving is straining my eyes. My friend Richard says "it's nice to put pictures inside people's heads, like frogs and ronin and Cleveland and Deloreses." I think so too, obviously, or I wouldn't pirate so many rowboats.

## SOUTH AFRICA

Daniel Maluka



# BLOCK TOBER FEST

**OCTOBER 6**

DOORS OPEN..... 6:30 PM

READINGS..... 7:00 PM

COST..... FREE

LOCATION.....THE SOCIETY

CLUBHOUSE

967 COLLEGE ST TORONTO



READINGS | MERCH | CHAPBOOKS | FUN!

#ad

## MEMORY MAP

Tanya Ng Cheong

I am a flâneuse in Port-Louis, waiting for the town to nudge itself in the soles of my sandals like a pebble.

My first time skating was at Nathan Phillips Square, where a stranger helped me tie my laces after my third fall.

We had shaved ice in the church yard in Sainte-Croix. It gave me brain freeze.

Ding Dong Pastries is objectively a funny name for a bakery, too bad it went out of business.

The last stop was at a food market in Kaohsiung, I ate strawberries drenched in chocolate and condensed milk.

“Having lunch anywhere along Yonge and Finch, you’d hardly think you’re in Canada,” I told my Asian friends. They all agreed.

The blueberry danish from Montmartre bakery was so rich I almost cried.

There was a snake on campus in Semenyih when I visited my brother. I used to think I’d study there too.

Peacocks roam around freely at Casela (which is where you can walk with lions). At the Toronto Zoo, it’s geese.

I never thought Lion Mountain looked quite like a lion, but maybe I just didn’t squint hard enough.

We had a bungalow in Tamarin. A scorpion came out of the shower drain once.

At the mountaintop hotel in the province of Shandong, I almost died.

Question I’d ask myself once in a while: why does Singapore have merlions?

My cynophobia started in a park in Vancouver when a dog ran after me to steal my sandwich.

The parks in Confucius’ hometown had something timeless about them, the stones we stepped on felt eternal.

Nestled between the ocean and the mountains, St. George is the graveyard where thieves stole the stairs of my family vault. Not even the dead get to rest.

The first time I saw Amish people was at Niagara Falls, I thought they were paid actors.

My first sleepless night was at a nightclub called Insomnia.

My aunt’s house in Montréal confused me: she played mini golf in the basement.

The bunk bed in our London hotel room looked older than me. I broke a step on my way to the top.

They got married on a Wednesday at the ruins of Balaclava. I didn’t know most of the guests.

“The snow evacuation system in Toronto is shit,” said the TA from Montréal. How would I know?

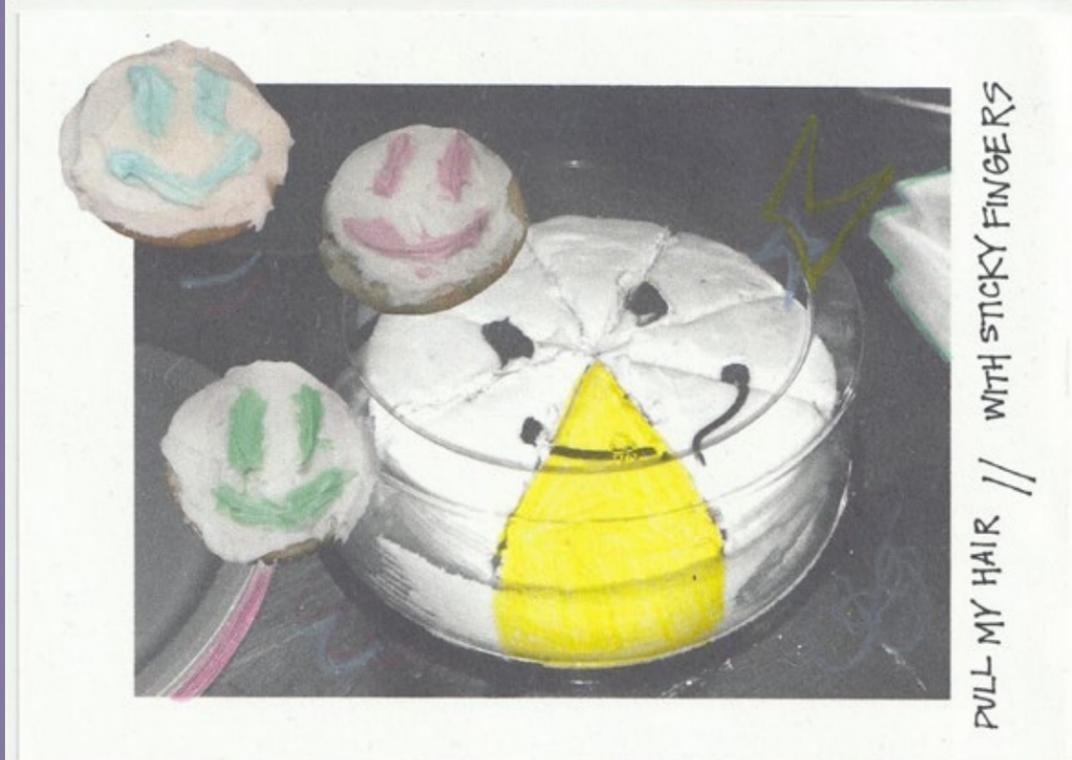
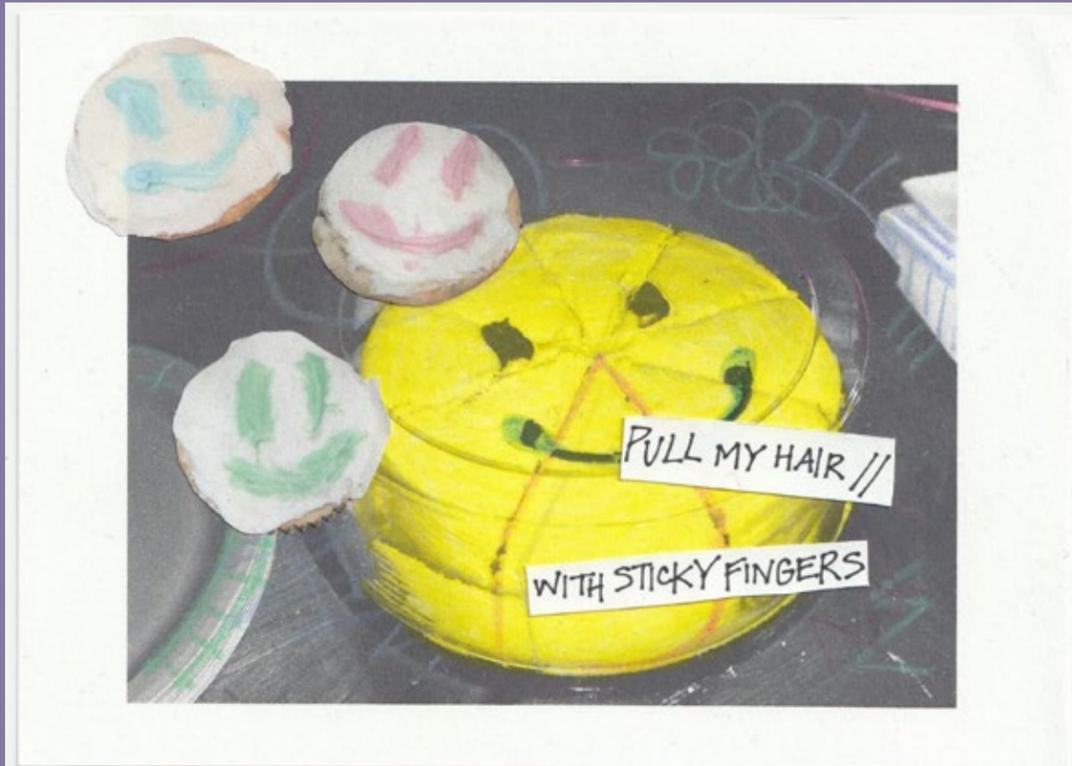
Cavetown’s concert at History made me lose my voice. I’d do it again.

I walk around Toronto, the city that sticks to the bottom of my shoe like a dirty piece of molten gum.



CAKE-TALK

Richie Evans



Pull my hair:  
 in braids  
 in bed  
 to remove the knots  
 through running water

this is not an invitation but a permission –  
 you do not ask before I am sat down at the kitchen table, but I still nod as if to confirm.

the walls will shift but the fingerprints will echo,  
 sticky ghosts,

frosting, mud, styling gel, summer sweat, thick medical shampoo;

I can smell your palms like roses in my ribcage.

I don't want to be touched  
 but here my body feels the same as yours

I am still learning how to give and not be taken,  
 I am still smoothing down my hair before I enter the room,  
 catching myself at the wrist

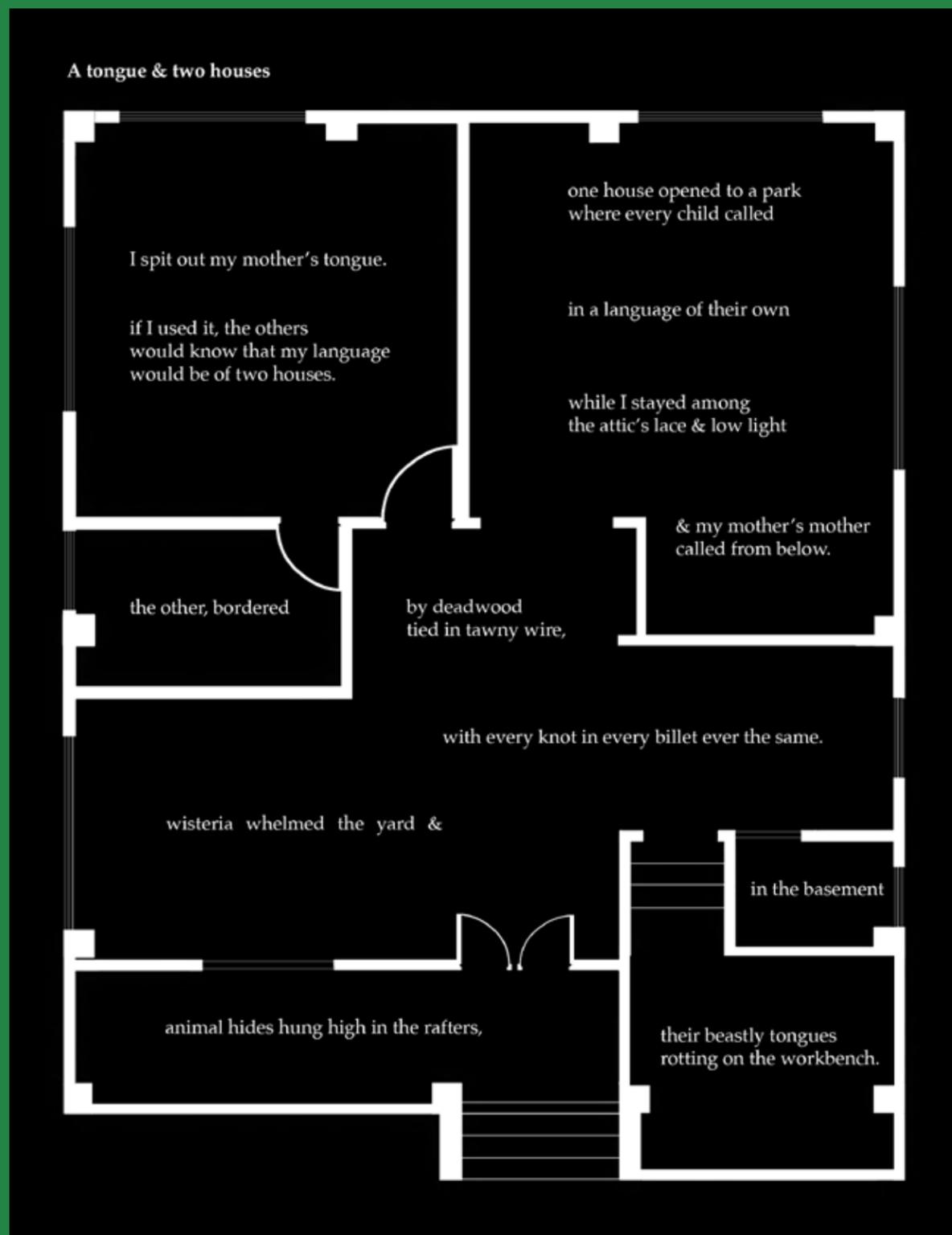
I have spent more time a child than a lover  
 and so I will stuff my cheeks, steal from cupboards,  
 hide away in dark corners, unsettle, screw up,  
 beg for attention,  
 refuse to take it

chase me with a cloth, a spoon, a knife, with mixed intentions

I'll still slide warm against the plastic, hair matted to my cheeks, begging for the next bite

## A TONGUE &amp; TWO HOUSES

Eric Schmaltz



## GIANT-SEERS

Eugénie Szwalek

I went to the cliff to sit with the Moon.

I had meant to go to the beach, but when I got to where, only the day before, the beach had been, I found instead a cliff face, jagged and severe, staring out over the churning Ocean as they crashed at its feet. I thought, maybe there is a reason the beach is a cliff today. I stood very near the edge.

The cliff did not like that.

“What are you doing?” it rumbled, voice like an earthquake dislodging rubble in my ears. “What business is it to you?” I grumbled in return. Sitting down, I swung my feet out over the ledge and watched my mismatched laces flutter in the wind like the tattered sails of a sinking ship. “Since when do cliffs talk, anyway?”

“I am not a cliff,” said the not-cliff. “I am a Giant.”

“Giants aren’t real.”

“Then you must be some wretched gull, to be suspended so high over the waves, sitting on nothing.” The earth beneath me shook with ancient laughter.

“If Giants are real,” I began, “--and I’m not saying they are-- what would one be doing all the way out here, on such a lonely shore?”

The maybe-Giant was silent for a time. When they spoke again, it was with the roiling rhythm of a mountain collapsing over centuries.

“I came to sit with the Moon,” they said. “And the Ocean. We are old friends, us three.”

I looked out over the curling black waves tipped in silver moonlight. The horizon rippled like a fine abyss silk, catching the silver between its delicate thread and reflecting it back up to the stars in gentle undulations. The Ocean breathed, deep and gentle, and the rhythm of their heart beat against the stone that was the Giant’s feet. The Moon’s light spread itself over all three of us, stitched itself into my skin like spider silk, held me together. I wondered if, perhaps, the Giant had sought out this place for the same reasons I had. I didn’t voice this wonderment aloud.

“Why this beach though?” I asked instead.

“Why not this beach?” said the Giant, and I couldn’t argue with that.

We sat in silence.

“Tell me, sad little gull, why have you come out seeking the comfort of the Moon this night?” asked the Giant.

“Who told you I was seeking anyone’s comfort?” I drew my knees up to my chest and glared at the Moon, not because they had offended me in any way, but because the Moon had a face I could glare at where as I wasn’t yet sure if a Giant did as well.

“You did,” the Giant said simply.

“I’ve said no such thing.”

“You did not need to.” The earth I sat upon shifted. It gave the impression of a mountain making itself comfortable. “I have been a great many lonely places --cracked deserts, jagged mountains, crumbling islands falling slowly into the sea-- and lonely places draw in hurting people,” said the Giant. “Tonight, I am a desolate cliff face, and you are the hurting person who has sought me out. So tell me, Little Gull, why are the Moon, calming yet distant, and the Ocean, soothing yet vast, the first ones you seek in comfort?”

I took a deep breath.

“I come out here to remind myself that I am real.”

It felt like admitting a terrible secret. The kind that can unmake a person.

“Hmm,” said the Giant like they knew exactly what I meant.

I felt a sudden need to clarify.

“The Moon may be distant,” I started, “but in that distance there is space to think, to breathe. In that distance there is acceptance. The Moon does not try to convince me I am something I’m not. We can just sit, and be.”

“I see,” said the Giant, and I got the sense that they really did.

“The Ocean may be vast, but in that vastness there is possibility,” I went on. “The Ocean has never demanded I become something it recognizes. They are life on a scale beyond my comprehension and I am no more than a mote of dust caught in their currents. We could never truly understand one another, but we don’t need to understand one another to respect each other.”

“The Ocean is very wise that way,” said the Giant.

I watched as in the distance something large broke up through the silver-edged waves. A shower of diamond sparks exploded across the black night sky, a cascade of droplets caught in the Moon’s light. I blinked, and it was gone. Like it had never been there at all.

“Here,” I said, staring hard at the horizon. “I do not doubt my own existence.”

“Such a doubt often proves itself a deadly poison,” the Giant said, and I knew their words were dredged from a deep and personal depth.

I considered my next words. I wasn’t sure I would speak them, until I did.

“I come from a place of fish and foxes,” I said, leaning back on my hands and letting the stars gaze upon me. “I have been a fish even though I longed to be a mermaid, when the other fish let me swim amongst them even though I could never get their dance quite right and all the foxes wanted to eat me and both told me that mermaids did not exist.”

“Mermaids exist,” said the Giant with such certainty that, for the first time, I did not doubt it to be true.

“How can you know that?” I asked anyway, hating how small I sounded.

“There is one sitting on my shoulder,” they answered simply.

I found myself unable to speak for a long while.

The Moon had moved across the sky. Their light now shone crookedly over the Ocean, the silver playing on the waves took on a smoother, deeper pattern, like the dips between dreams.

I sniffed and whipped at my eyes with the drooping sleeves of my sweater.

“What is it like to be a Giant?” I asked into the night.

“I imagine it is a lot like being a mermaid.”

This was not the answer I had been expecting.

“I was once a mountain,” said the Giant. “A great, mighty mountain, surrounded by other mountains. But none of those other mountains were Giants. It was rather lonely.”

“How did you know you were a Giant?” I couldn’t help but ask it.

“How do you know you are a mermaid?”

And they were right.

“I could only be a mountain for so long, though.”

The Giant sighed. I watched loose rubble dislodge itself from their cliff and plummet into the black water below.

“I was once a desert, vast and cracking,” the Giant went on. “I did not want to be a desert, but a desert is what I had become. A single drop of rain cannot feel a mountain, but thousands of millions of drops of rain over lifetimes can rewrite any topography, as I am sure you know. And so the weight of the rain had caused me to crumble, and I became a desert. People do not much like deserts, I found. But this is what their rain had made me, and I was too tired to make myself anything else. I was too tired to convince the world I was a Giant. I slept.” In the far, far distance, a lone creature called out to the Moon, and I wondered if they, too, would find their way here eventually, to us. “I was a desert for a very, very long time, Little Gull.”

“How did you stop being a desert?”

“I didn’t, not completely,” admitted the Giant. “Some days I am still a desert, but on those days, as back then, the Moon never leaves my side. We do not speak. They ask nothing of me, I want nothing of them. We simply exist near one another, in quiet acceptance of the way things are.” The lone creature’s call was joined by another. I could hear the great distance between them, but still they called out. “Eventually,” said the Giant, “the Ocean joined us. They washed over me, slowly, steadily. They brought colours back to me, one anemone at a time. That is how I became an island.”

“Is an island a better thing to be than a desert?” I asked even though I already knew the answer.

“Yes,” said the Giant. “No,” said the Giant.

“It is better to be neither,” said I.

“Hmm,” the Giant said. “Indeed. But that is quite a trick, is it not? That is quite a thing to accomplish.”

“Most days, it feels impossible.”

“I was once a hill upon which a graveyard was built,” said the Giant. “Like many graveyards, this one, too, attracted ghosts. And, like many graveyards, the presence of these ghosts created unease amidst the other townsfolk. Do you know what these ghosts did in their spare time?” asked the Giant.

I did not.

“Neither did the townsfolk,” they said, “for none of them ever asked.”

“What did the ghosts do in their spare time?”

“They read poetry to the flowers, to help them grow more beautiful.”

I couldn’t help but smile, even though I didn’t understand what they were getting at.

“How many people have asked you what you do in your spare time instead question the fact that you are a mermaid?”

I could not answer that.

“The first thing you told me when we met,” said the Giant, “was that I was not real.”

My own words rushed back to me. Giants aren’t real. Hot shame spiked up my spine.

“When you first met me, you believed in cliffs, but not in Giants.” The Giant shifted below. I felt foolish for ever doubting them. “Yet,” they continued, “not long after, you asked me what it was like to be a Giant.”

“I don’t understand.”

“There will always be people who choose only to see a cliff. Because it is easier, because a cliff is familiar and safe. Because a cliff does not require effort to be understood. But there will also always be people like you, Little Gull,” said the Giant. “Those who saw a cliff at first, but who put in the time and care to see the Giant instead.”

I gazed out at the night, unsure of how to respond. The Moon hung over us like a watchful parent, waiting to sooth the hurt in our bones with their pale light. If only every parent was as understanding as the Moon.

“Love is effort, Little Gull,” the Giant said. “This world is not lacking in those willing to put in that effort, but your life sounds like it is too full of cliff-seers.” The Giant sighed and I felt the world sigh with them, felt the sadness seep into the air, thick as the scent of spring blossoms. Winds rushed in from over the Ocean, washing the scent gently away, but still the memory remained. The memory would always remain. “These cliff-seers, they are very talented at convincing you that they love you despite who you are and that you should be thankful for that. Such a love as blind and inflexible as that is a tragic kind of love.”

My throat felt tight and my heart was a clenched fist. I wanted more than tragic love. Was I allowed to want more than tragic love?

“Little Gull, you deserve Giant-seers in your life,” said the Giant with such surety, such resolve. They said it the way someone says you deserve water, you deserve air. You deserve to be breathing. “They are out there, as surely as there are mermaids and ghosts who read poetry to flowers. Do not let the cliff-seers convince you otherwise. Do not let the cliff-seers convince you that you are alone or that their half-efforts could ever be enough.”

The Ocean whispered their agreement through the soft lapping of waves over stone. They glittered before me, vast, full of possibilities.

“How will I know?” I asked. I felt my heart breaking. No, not my heart. The thing I had grown around it. The brittle shards fell, down past my ship-flag laces, down down down until they were swallowed by the Ocean. The thing left behind in their wake felt exposed and vulnerable. It felt precious and indestructible. “How will I know when I’ve found the Giant-seers?”

I looked up at the Moon, the Moon who had always seen mermaids and Giants, the Moon who never doubted, never demanded, never questioned, and I understood.

The Giant said: “You will say I exist, and they will simply answer, I know.”

## THE ROOMS OF MY BODY

Reilly Knowles



# WINDOW SHOPPING

MJ Brown

I.

I can see you through the window, trembling hands clasped in a pseudo-prayer. I have never felt my own age so strongly pounded back into me as I stand here again on the driveway. Crow's feet frame your eyes; your shoulders have a cruel hunch in them. You have never looked more scared.

For the first time since I got in the car, I wonder if you'll have anything to say.

I've argued with you countless times in the shower. A loofah takes the place of your head, or maybe a crusty bar of soap. I run the water until it turns cold and stand there, shivering and screaming. I babble until my girlfriend wraps me in a towel and carries me to bed like a squirming child.

I don't think I'm ready for this. I don't think you are, either, but at least you have never pretended to be. Your lips move. It takes me a while to piece together what you are saying.

*Who are you?*

I motion to the door, but you don't move. My hand gestures don't faze your concave stare. This is a variable I did not account for. On the phone I should have said, *Mama, you might not recognize me at first.* But I didn't call; I just grabbed the keys and locked the door behind me. I couldn't afford to hear your voice before I saw your face.

I can feel your sorrow deepen with your frown.

II.

Every Sunday, the two of us would take the corroding Camaro and go to the movies. You and I would share the largest popcorn bucket we could get and slather it in every flavor of butter and seasoning. What we were seeing never mattered. Sometimes we would go to the same flick over and over until it left theaters. You would mouth the words, almost rehearsed, and hold my hand in the liminal darkness. We rarely touched except for in those spare moments.

What mattered, I suppose, was that we weren't home, held captive by the absence of my father, your husband, though he hadn't been either of those things in a long time. I was already wearing boxers under my jean shorts by then. It was an invisible defiance, but it filled me with the type of rightness I would not fully embody until I transitioned in college. At the time, though, it was delicious. It was enough.

You spent my teens worrying you had fucked me up. You fed me cereal for dinner sometimes, when the weight of the day was just too much, and you flinched every time I asked you a question. I could not have told you who I was. As you wound tighter and tighter, I found I could do nothing but leave.

III.

When you finally open the door, my legs will shake of their own accord. If there is one thing I cannot do, it is beg to come back home, but you will understand that. You will hesitate before asking if I would like to go inside.

The house will be just as I left it. My softball trophies still line the lavender walls. You never painted over my toddler scribbles in the guest bathroom. My graduation photos still hang on your fridge.

We'll talk over a pitcher of Minute Maid on the back porch and watch the weeds dance. You won't acknowledge my beard or the drop in my voice, but you will listen when I speak. That can be enough. I'll tell you about my girlfriend, who's at home with our labradoodle, probably worried sick. You'll tell me about the little cousins who've grown up since I last saw them.

We will trade memories until we bathe in the murky dregs of the sunset. I can believe that love endures,

despite it all. I could shave my beard. Maybe a minor concession is all you need. You won't ever call me your son, I know this, but I will melt into your arms anyway when you hug me goodbye.

There will be a lifetime of Christmases and birthday cards. A cheap vacation in Aruba just like we always talked about. You will meet my daughter on the day she is born, and though I can't ever be your son, you'll say I'm an excellent father. Whatever I was afraid of losing is meant for us, after all. It can be enough.

IV.

I watch your house from the car until the blinds draw shut and the lights go out. It's the middle of the afternoon. My Honda's air conditioner stuttered out a while ago. I will run out of gas if I stay here, waiting for you to unlatch the door.

I search for you through the humid window fog, and I search for you in the rearview mirror, and I search for you at every intersection until I am back and bleary-eyed in the parking garage.

You do not return my calls. I shave my beard anyway. That first night my girlfriend makes me grilled cheese in the frying pan and tells my boss I'm sick the next morning.

A friend brings over some potstickers and a bottle of cheap wine. He lets me pretend not to cry.

"My dad never came around, either," he says. "I had to block him on Facebook. I don't even fucking use Facebook."

The absurdity of that statement makes us both laugh until we shoot pinot noir out our noses. I hope that this will be enough. I think it can.

## NEW HOUSE

Sarah Hilton

*after Sanna Wani*

Today I lay naked on the beach, and I press my breasts into the sand.  
I turn my back on the sun. The convex of my body bringing my heart

the closest to the earth it has ever been. I breathe and keep sinking. I think,  
When has my heart ever not leapt for something so solid?

These days when I take a breath, I am  
reminded of a flock of birds. Scattered, swelling.

When I was eight, my dance teacher told us,  
*Breathe from the belly.* A memory. A flock overhead. *Inflate yourself.*

Or was the belly a drain for all this suffocating? *Let it go.*  
I am knee deep in the water and my chest stays bare to the wind.

Grounding is the body standing tall despite the earth giving way. Heart open.  
The water climbing my calves like careful hands erecting a house.

When is a house a home and not just some shape mimicking the sky?  
I believe home is a place where there is no such thing as closing.

I used to watch my mother keep herself alive every day when she made  
the backyard a feeding ground for the wild. A handful of bird seed

and they would all come running. Squirrels, rabbits, birds. Two summers ago,  
I folded over my legs while a baby raccoon ate from my cupped hands.

My pelvis grounded like a trunk; my hands rooted in softness.  
This happens at the new house, and I weep.

On Sunday, we sit cross-legged on the porch, and we feed orange peels  
to the animals that live in the shed. So still, there's no room for breathing.

We read each other's birth charts. We learn where our mothering comes from.  
Cancer moon. Gemini rising. An entire solar system cradled like something soft in our laps.

Is this what home feels like? Like laying on the planks of your new porch  
and feeling the solid earth of your mother?

Mom, I wish I could've brought you with me when I left.  
I wish you could feel what I felt the day I stood naked on the beach.

I did your birth chart, too. Did you know they're nearly identical?  
We are of the same universe, you and I. Virgo sun, Leo venus.

Our hearts belong to the sun. If only you could've been there in the water with me. I can only  
imagine, somewhere, you stood under the same skies and when you fed the animals, you felt it,  
too.

**KAREN SADLER**

Karen Sadler (she/her) is a geriatric millennial living as a settler in Toronto with her husband and two young kids. She writes about nature, parenthood, grief, and the occasional ghost.

Meet Me in Toronto is a little love poem to the city I live in. I wasn't born here, but it feels like home now.



**JESSE JUNE-JACK**

Jesse June-Jack is a 21-year-old Afro-Canadian written and spoken word poet based in Toronto, Canada. Currently attending University of Toronto Scarborough, he has performed with many organizations, such as Unity Charity, Word Is Bond, RISE, JAYU, Poetry Saved Our Lives, etc. Alongside eleven talented Black poets, Jesse is also part of an animated television project called DREAMS IN VANTABLACK, which can be found on YouTube/CBC Gem.

Homes That Cared For Me is a tribute to the people, places, and memories that truly define the love required to make something or someplace a home. To my family, friends, and loved ones I've met, thank you for being my home. This one's for you.



**TIMOTHY LAM YAN YU**

Timothy Lam Yan Yu is an artist based in Kitchener, Ontario. From Mauritius and with an interest in art since childhood, he is now pursuing a degree in graphic design (BDes) at Conestoga College. His work can be found at @tim.sketches on Instagram and at www.timothy-lam.com.

Home for me is seeing my mom gardening on the balcony from the living room doors. The sunlight streaming in never fails to bring me comfort, even when I'm away from family.



**MICHAEL RUSSELL**

Michael Russell (he/they) is coauthor of chapbook Split Jawed with Elena Bentley (forthcoming from Collusion Books) and mother monster to chapbook Grindr Opera (Frog Hollow Press). They are queer, mad, and overflowing with anxiety. Currently, he has a craving for chocolate chip pancakes with bananas and thinks you're fantabulous.

Insta: @michael.russell.poet



**STAN ROGAL**

Born in Vancouver, now living and writing in Toronto. Work has appeared in numerous magazines and anthologies in Canada, the US and Europe. The author of 27 books, including a dozen poetry plus several chapbooks. An autodidactic intellectual classicist [reformed]. Speaks semi-fluent English and controversial French.



**EM DIAL**

Em Dial is a queer, Black, Taiwanese, Japanese, and White, chronically ill poet, grower, and educator born and raised in the Bay Area of California, currently living in Toronto. They are a Kundiman Fellow and recipient of the 2020 PEN Canada New Voices Award and the 2019 Mary C. Mohr Poetry Award.



**SAFFRON MAEVE**

Saffron Maeve is a Tkarón:to-based critic, academic, and film programmer. She is a contributor to Film Comment, MUBI Notebook, Cinema Scope, Screen Slate, Le Cinéma Club, Little White Lies, and a former editorial intern at Paste Magazine. She is also a member of the Toronto Film Critics Association, FIPRESCI, and GALECA, the Society of LGBTQ Entertainment Critics. Presently, Saffron is pursuing an MA at the University of Toronto's Cinema Studies Institute.

YOU GET HOME ANYWAY is an opaque, warm homage to Richard Siken's "The Long and Short of It," an essay which encouraged me to think of myself and my affection as parts of building or haunted house. I'm sewn into its drapes, I've fractured the floorboards, and the foundation moves with me.



**DANIEL MALUKA**

Daniel Maluka is a Toronto-based artist and writer hailing from South Africa. His work takes an Afrocentric approach while incorporating surrealist elements to bring what lurks in the deep recesses of the mind into the forefront of his work.



**TANYA NG CHEONG**

Tanya Ng Cheong is a Mauritian writer and undergraduate student at the University of Toronto, Scarborough campus, where she studies English and Journalism. Her work can be found in Ricepaper Magazine.

As the title suggests, this is a memory map in poem form. Each line refers to a prominent event I associate with a place, as I was thinking a lot about what locations mean when we travel/are far from home. As I wrote the poem, seemingly unrelated places and events in my life seemed thematically connected.

**RICHIE EVANS**

Richie Evans (he/they) is an artist based in Tkaronto and currently attending OCADu. His practice revolves around creative writing and the visual arts, focusing on exploring themes of queerness, disability, and political resistance through poetry, printmaking, and various forms of multimedia experimentation.

My piece centres around this duality/division between home in childhood and home in adulthood, the cloying stickiness of both; the way your heart can still swell like age 6 at a brightly coloured cake when you're drunk at new years, or when a lover is washing the blood from your hair.

**ERIC SCHMALTZ**

Eric Schmaltz is a poet and intermedia artist. He is the author of *Borderblur Poetics: Intermedia and Avant-gardism in Canada, 1963-1988* (University of Calgary Press) and *Surfaces* (Invisible Publishing), editor of *Another Order: Selected Works of Judith Copithorne* (Talonbooks), and co-editor of *I Want to Tell You Love* by Bill Bissett and Milton Acorn. He lives and works in Tkaronto/Toronto.

**EUGÉNIE SZWALEK**

Eugénie Szwałek (they/them) is a trans, non-binary writer who has just completed Sheridan's Creative Writing & Publishing program. They enjoy writing across a wide variety of genres but always gravitate back to speculative fiction, to stories of people and places that blur the lines between memory and dream. With nineteen profile pieces published with Sheridan College's Everybody's Got a Story project and an upcoming short story in Issue 20 of *Fusion Fragment*, they continue to look for new opportunities to connect with people through storytelling.

**REILLY KNOWLES**

Reilly Knowles is an emerging artist and curator living and working in Treaty Six Township ("London, Ontario"). A 2020 graduate of Western University's Bachelor of Fine Arts Program, Knowles has held solo exhibitions at Forest City Gallery (London, ON), Queen Elizabeth Park Community & Cultural Centre (Oakville, ON) and Spencer Gallery (London, ON). He is a member of London-based artist collectives Good Sport and The Coves Collective, as well as a recipient of the Tony and Betsy Little Gold Medal in Visual Arts, the Canadian

Embroiderers' Guild Memorial Prize, and the Mackie Cryderman Award for Excellence in Visual Arts. "The Rooms of My Body" is part of a series of drawings, paintings and sculptures exploring the doll as a tool for creating girls – that is to say, socializing certain children into holding gendered ideas about their bodies and identities. This drawing depicts the body as a dollhouse – a home – in which the self resides, not as an immutable kernel, but as a collection of pieces in play.

**MJ BROWN**

MJ Brown is a queer, neurodivergent writer from Alabama. They are currently a student at Emory University, and you can find more of their work in *Door = Jar* and *Five on the Fifth*.

For me, the notion of home is complicated infinitely by transness. As a non-binary person, it is difficult to reconcile home with the place I grew up in, or even with some of the people who raised me. I wrote this piece for those who cannot return home and those who are still working on creating a new one.

**SARAH HILTON**

Sarah Hilton (she/they) is a lesbian librarian, or...a lesbrarian! Her work has been featured in several print and online journals including *Minola*, *Untethered*, and *Long Con*. She is the author of *Saltwater Lacuna* (Anstruther Press) and the digital chapbook *homecoming* (MODEL Press). They live in Toronto, where they work as a children's librarian.

