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## Rascality

### THE ACERBIC EYE

The Federal Parti Rhincéros Party of Canada was founded in Montreal in 1963 by a doctor and writer named Jacques Ferron. Although the Rhinos never elected a member, over the years several candidates finished second or third in their respective constituencies.

The Rhinos claim to be the spiritual descendants of Cacareco, a Brazilian rhinoceros who was “elected” as a member of São Paulo’s city council in 1958. Furthermore, the PRP lists Cornelius the First, a rhinoceros from the Granby Zoo east of Montreal, as its leader. It declared that the rhinoceros was an appropriate symbol for a political party since politicians, by nature, are: “thick-skinned, slow-moving, dim-witted, can move fast as hell when in danger, and have large, hairy horns growing out of the middle of their faces.”

Over the years, the Rhinos have promised that, if elected, they would not keep any of their promises. They have also promised to allow advertising in the Senate and the House of Commons, to promote carpooling by making sure that the brake pedal is now installed on the passenger side of all vehicles, to make “Sorry” the new official motto of Canada, to nationalize bacon, and to increase the safety of Canadian children: Newborns’ first names must be at least 12 letters, including a capital letter, a number, and a special character.

In the 2021 Federal election, only 27 Rhino candidates ran, garnering a total of 6,085 votes nationally (all of whom deserve The Order of Canada). All other potential candidates who declined expressed a fear that they might end up in some WOKE prison on some university campus dedicated to the humourless.

—Terry Mosher a.k.a. Aislin

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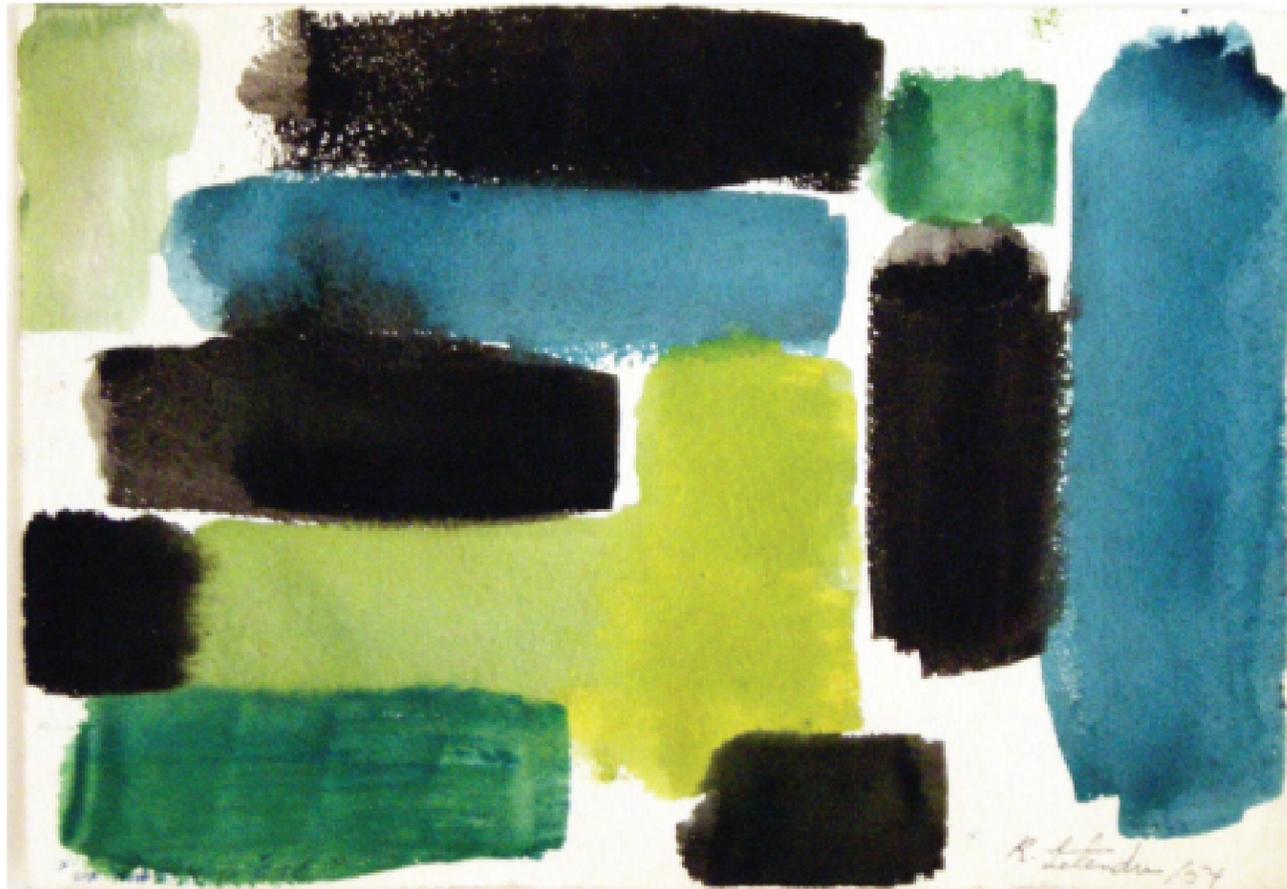
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## RESTORING RITA LETENDRE

by RAY ELLENWOOD



*Un matin d'été*, 1954, casein on paper, 17.5 x 20 cm (above)

Born the first child of a large Indigenous family in Drummondville, Quebec, in 1928, Rita Letendre had few amenities in her early life but made the best of everything she had, including quick intelligence along with physical and mental toughness. The story of her background has been told often, and in many places. One of the most detailed accounts of her life can be found in *Rita Letendre, Aux couleurs du jour*, the catalogue of a retrospective exhibition given at the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec in 2004; a more recent source is the filmed interview with Adam Lauder [scan QR code on page 6 for the YouTube video] made for the exhibition *Rita Letendre: Toronto Public Art*, curated by Lauder for YYZ gallery in 2018, showing an aged but certainly vigorous Rita commenting on her background and her interests.

Very briefly, Letendre's family eventually made its way to Montreal where, against long odds, with the help of an acquaintance, Rita was admitted to the École des beaux-arts. This was in 1948, the year of *Refus global*, the Automatist manifesto published by the painter Paul-Émile Borduas and a group of young artists of several disciplines – a broadly anti-establishment publication that provoked strong reactions at the time. Rita soon met people from that group, including the painter Jean-Paul Mousseau, and her work was shown in two of the last exhibitions organized by the Automatists. Beginning her studies as a figurative painter, she passed very quickly through various stages leading to gestural abstraction, quickly absorbing the process established by her new friends, getting favourable attention in the press from progressive critics, being shown in important galleries. For a while, in 1955 and 1956, she adopted the less turbulent, more geometrical style of the emerging post-Automatist group called the Plasticiens. Although these small works on paper are not the favourites of collectors, I have always liked them [see opposite *Un matin d'été* as an example]. But these calm moments were soon blown away by a return to strong, almost violent gestural works made with bright colours, often contrasted with black, using thickly applied pigment [see following page *Partage de midi*, and *L'élan* on page 13, as examples]. It is especially these works that caught the attention of galleries and critics, leading to invitations for important group shows including *Painters from Montreal*, held at Dorothy Cameron's Here and Now Gallery in Toronto, in 1960. Cameron also gave Letendre a solo exhibition in the spring of 1962, extending her first major welcome to the city.

In Quebec, her star had been rising quickly. In 1962 she received a Canada Council grant to study in Europe, and this allowed her not only to participate in, but actually attend, the first truly extensive and important showing of French-Canadian painting in Europe: the 5th *Festival Dei Due Mondi* held in Spoleto, Italy, in the summer of 1962, with an ambitious catalogue entitled *La Peinture canadienne moderne: 25 années de peinture au Canada-français*. Here, Letendre was included with all the Automatist painters, as well as artists such as Alfred Pellin, Guido Molinari, Lise Gervais, and Claude Tousignant. In his note on Letendre, Charles Delloye, the organizer of the exhibition, suggested she had learned the best practices of Riopelle and other Automatist painters, and then found her own way. A few months later, Guy Viau (painter, writer, and fellow traveller with the Borduas group, who would become a leading civil servant of the arts in Quebec and France), wrote my favourite description of Rita:

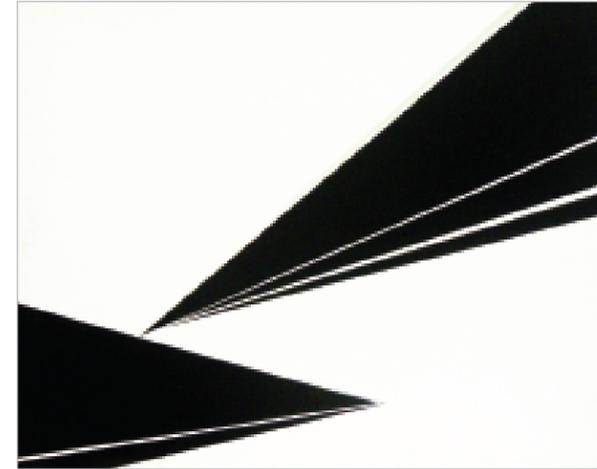


For Rita Letendre...painting is the perfect depiction of liberty. No doubt this ferocious taste for liberty comes from her Indian roots. The anguish she feels while working, the anguish any artist feels, may also depend on the fact that in her childhood, on her way home from school, her fellow students called her a “sauvagessé” and threw stones at her.

Rita Letendre’s painting is fiery, but it’s just as carefully thought out as it is passionate; her hand is as quick as her thinking is deliberate. She laughs when she says that her most important artistic tool is the chair she sits on, endlessly interrogating her paintings. These paintings have the freshness of things just beginning, of the morning, suggesting natural disasters and the fusion of planets. Entirely a woman, Rita Letendre incarnates power.

[*La Peinture moderne au Canada français*, Québec: Ministère des Affaires culturelles, 1964]

Spoletto was also a crucial moment of personal change for the artist. It was there she met Kosso Eloul, her future husband, with whom she would go to California in 1965 and begin the second



important phase of her career. He was invited to California State College in Long Beach for a symposium on sculpture. A visit of a few months stretched into five years, during which Rita was able to explore completely new directions for her work, including a large mural, “Sunforce,” commissioned by the College, that required a new approach and new materials to express the cosmic energy of her earlier paintings, but in flat colours. This, in turn, led to experimentation with acrylic paint on canvas and with silk-screen printing. Soon, what would become her signature motif emerged: the multi-coloured arrow-like

shaft of light flashing across the surface [see above *Rencontre*, and *Blues* on page 14 as examples]. The works she produced during this period were in such high demand that, by 1967, she and Kosso were itinerant artists moving between Los Angeles, Montreal, New York, and Toronto, where they settled (more or less) in 1968. When Barry Callaghan interviewed her for CBC television in 1969 [scan QR code below/page 9 for the YouTube video] she was becoming a celebrity. Her Indigenous family roots and difficulties with prejudice at school were an important part of that interview, handled with humour. She explained that, for her, drawing was like an arm (a weapon) against taunts. And when Callaghan asked, “I wonder if you ever felt the inclination to paint in the folk tradition, draw upon your Indian roots,” she answered, “That would be crazy. I mean I wouldn’t be a painter would I? I’d be a kind of funny craftsman.” Those might not be words she would say today, but they are entirely in keeping with the feisty tone of a solo exhibition she had in March 1970, at the Roberts Gallery, where one of the paintings was too large for the gallery space and had to be seen at the artist’s studio. A photo by the late, well-known Toronto photographer, John Reeves, shows Rita standing barefoot, hands on hips, in front of the painting *Lodestar*, beautifully capturing the defiant optimism of the moment.

*Rencontre*, 1966, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 75 cm (above/top)

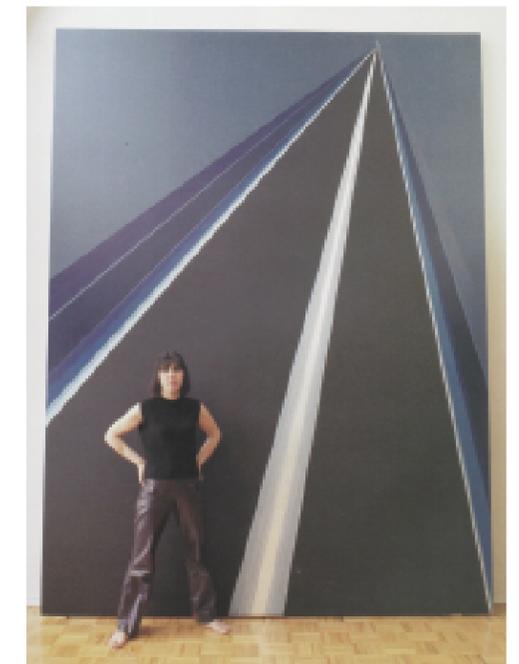
*Partage de midi*, 1962, oil on canvas, 62.5 x 72.5 cm (page 8)

Scan the QR for Barry Callaghan’s interview with Rita, for CBC television in 1969, or go to:

<https://tinyurl.com/Callaghan-Letendre>



Rita Letendre in front of *Lodestar*, 1970 (right)



In the early 1970s, Rita and Kosso were on a roll, and it would be hard not to agree that, between them, artistically, they'd taken Toronto. In 1974, they began renovation of a house and studio on Sherbourne Street that would be the centre of their activities for years. That space, and their lives in it, can be seen on YouTube in a film by Rohn Eloul entitled *Kosso and Rita at Home in 288 Sherbourne Street, Toronto* [scan QR code below for the YouTube video]. More and more of their art was to be seen in public spaces throughout the city. Among Rita's many contributions were a seven-storey mural entitled *Sunrise* [opposite] painted on the west wall of the Neill-Wycik building on Gerrard Street; *Upward Dream* (1980), a narrow, high mural later painted for the east wall of the same building; *Irowakan* (1977), a mural three metres high and 16 metres wide, painted in acrylic on canvas for the Royal Bank Plaza on Bay and Front; and *Joy* (1978), a painted glass skylight, six metres wide and 55 metres long, made for the ceiling of the Glencairn subway station [see page 12].

Gradually, the hard-edge quality of the arrow motif was softened with the use of spray paint, and the effect became more atmospheric. Eventually, in early 90s she stopped using spray paint altogether, returning to oil colours applied by spatula or brush or even the hands. [*Hurl Into Space*, upper page 11]. No matter how the pigment was applied, these paintings continued to show the controlled energy that Guy Viau had described in 1964, a feeling of cosmic forces, speed, flashing and sometimes clashing energy. Around 2009, abstract forms began to appear against a varied but essentially flat background [*Bach's Cantata*, lower page 11]. For some time after the death of Kosso in 1995, she painted very little, and there was an obvious decline in exhibitions of her work from then until well into the new millennium. The Simon Blais Gallery in Montreal and the Phillip Gevik Gallery of Toronto continued to show her work at quite regular intervals, but they were almost alone. The



Scan the QR for the film by Rohn Eloul entitled *Kosso and Rita at Home in 288 Sherbourne Street* in Toronto, or go to:  
<https://tinyurl.com/KossoRitaHome>



large retrospective in Quebec City, already mentioned, was the beginning of a resurgence of interest in her work, and smaller public galleries followed suit with interesting shows, such as the small but very attractive retrospective at the gallery of the University of Sherbrooke in the fall of 2017.

When the Art Gallery of Ontario finally got around to celebrating Rita Letendre through the summer of 2017, an important section of their catalogue was "Letendre in Toronto," in which Georgiana Uhlyarik described the history and location of some of Rita's most important public art



*Hurl into Space*, 1998, oil on canvas, 91.4 x 137.2 cm (top)

*Bach's Cantata*, 2009, oil on canvas, 60 x 201 cm (bottom)



works in the city. And from May to July of 2018, YYZ gallery presented the exhibition “Rita Letendre: Toronto Public Art,” organized by Adam Lauder. Those exhibitions documented not only the wonderful public artwork that Letendre had done for the city, but also the shameful loss of too much of it between 1980 and 2015. *Sunrise* was totally obscured by a building constructed within inches of it; *Upward Dream*, another mural done in response to public outrage over the loss of *Sunrise*, was later removed because of material problems; *Irowakan* was dismantled and moved, ending up in Quebec; *Joy* was lost for years, due to deterioration, but as of September, 2020 [*mirabile dictu*] has been restored by the TTC [opposite page]. In another gesture of restoration, Evergreen at Brickworks has commissioned a reproduction of *Sunrise*, approximately 3 x 4 metres, that may be seen now on their grounds. It can't replace the beloved and monumental original, which was visible for kilometres across the city, but it will at least jog some memories and be a shot of colour in an otherwise quite dark space [see page 15 for the image, and a video link to the unveiling of this major commission].

Wanda Nanibush in her text for the AGO catalogue, *Rita Letendre: Fire and Light*, makes what I consider a well-balanced argument to arrive at one of the conclusions of her essay: “Letendre is an



*Joy*, 1978. Skylight mural for the Glencairn subway station in Toronto; approximately 55 x 6 m – restored in 2020 (opposite)

*L'élan*, 1962, casein on paper; 45 x 60 cm (above)

*Ed. note* – there is a wonderful similarity in colours and composition between *L'élan* and the realized subway station, *Joy*.



extremely rare modernist: an Indigenous woman working in what is often considered to be a white male field.” That seems a constructive way of viewing Rita and the Abenaki/Mohawk roots that were, from the earliest years of her success, part of her story and, indeed, her public image. And that’s what pleases me about remarks by Tannis Nielsen, the artist commissioned by Evergreen Brickworks to paint a smaller-scale reproduction of *Sunrise* along with a painted “response” by herself. In a video made to publicize the project (not yet made public and recently unavailable) Nielsen speaks of having learned, late, about Rita, and of being inspired by her. But when she goes on to suggest that Letendre was almost a prisoner of her early artistic context and had to “break through” a “white Eurocentric environment,” I think the argument has become overstated at the risk of contradicting Rita’s own comments over the years, as seen in such documents as the 1969 interview with Barry Callaghan. It is absolutely no denial of the importance of Rita’s Mohawk/Abenaki/Québécois heritage to remember that she was a thoroughly modern and modernist woman, a sophisticated internationalist and proud of it.

Rita Letendre died in November of 2021.  
This article was written prior to her death.

*Blues*, 1972, acrylic on canvas,  
150 x 125 cm (opposite)

*The author and editors thank the Gallery Gevik  
for providing images appearing in this article.*



Scan the QR for the unveiling of this major commission,  
or go to:  
<https://tinyurl.com/EvergreenRita>



On September 15, 2021, Evergreen Brickworks in Toronto unveiled a major new commission in their public art program – a reproduction of Rita Letendre’s iconic mural *Sunrise* from 1971. The reproduction is painted by artist Tannis Nielsen, and is accompanied by *Ishkode*, a mural of Nielsen’s own, developed in response to Letendre’s work and her influence on Canadian art history, public art and Indigenous muralism.

# THE ONE WHO BLED FOR HER

KATHERINE  
ALEXANDRA  
HARVEY

An incessant itch on my left hand. I scratched. The itch was gone. I closed my eyes. Hadn't seen him since that night. He was scared of me. I was scared of me, too.

I didn't want to think about him. The itch returned. I scratched harder, pressing my nails deep into my flesh. Up, down, up, pressing too hard, breaking the skin. Blood. New life. Vinyl sheen.

Swung my feet to the floor, lifting them up, back down.

Feet fixed to the floor as I picked up the bottle of disinfectant. Before each step I sprayed the floor, sprayed the light switch, flicked it up, down, up-down, up.

His eyes were so deeply brown. I'd seen my reflection in them. Those eyes. He would stare me into submission. Maybe that's why I let him see that side of me. He's gone now. He saw and was gone. Breathe. One two three four five six seven. I looked at my left hand. Clotted blood, a scab had formed. An infant scab. Not yet hardened.

I walked to the kitchen, spraying, reached the oven, turned the burner on, turned the burner off, standing still, turned the burner on, keeping still, burner off, burner on.



Monoprint by Claire Wilks

Held the kettle below the faucet, water whooshed. One two three four five six seven.

Returned to the burner. Set the kettle down, lifted the kettle up.

*I love you, I do.*

*How much?*

*More than anybody else could.*

*Would you do...anything for me?*

*Yes.*

*Kill for me?*

*Yes.*

*Die for me?*

*Yes.*

*Prove it.*

The kettle whistled. I lifted it from the burner. Placed it back down. It screamed.

*What are you doing with that?*

I held a blade out to him.

*I'm not doing anything.*

He looked at me.

I looked back.

*Take it.*

I opened the cupboard, closed the cupboard, bang, bang, bang, opened the cupboard.

*I want you to cut yourself.*

*Why?*

*Because you said you'd do anything for me.*

He looked at me.

I looked back.

He took the blade.

*Where?*

*Your arm.*

He looked at me.

I looked back.

He took the blade.

*Where?*

*Your arm.*

He pressed the blade into his flesh and inched it to the right.

Looking at me.

I looked back.

*Again.*  
 He pressed the blade...  
 Brown eyes moistened.  
 ...the thin blade into his flesh, inching to the right.  
 Looking at me.  
 I looked back.  
 His brown eyes.  
 Into his flesh...to the right.  
 The blade. His flesh.  
 He cut to the right.  
 Brown eyes. Hollowed and terrored.  
 I took his arm and ran my tongue along the fresh wounds. A metallic sweetness. I could see me in those eyes.  
 Knock. Knock. Knock. The door.  
 I flinched, rapped my knuckles on the counter. Knock. Knock. Knock. Making my way to the door, spraying as I went.  
 I opened the door, an inch. Outside noise crept in. I closed it.  
 Silence.  
 I opened the door enough to see. *Hello?* Closed. Silence.  
 Opened. Enough to see. *Ma'am?* Closed. Silence.  
 Opened, more than enough.  
*I have a package for you.*  
*Okay.*  
*I need you to sign here, please.*  
 He looked at my arm. I looked too, seven cuts.  
 I signed. I sprayed the floor in front of me, sprayed the floor.  
*Put it down there.*  
 He was acting strange.  
 I shut the door, opened the door. The mailman turned around. I looked at him.  
 I shut the door. I opened the door. The mailman didn't turn around. He was gone.  
 I sprayed the package and the floor. I cut through the tape and opened the cardboard flap. Inside was a note:  
*follow*  
*slowly*  
*slowly*  
*in your own*  
*footsteps*

*from the collection*

## PANDEMIC POEMS: FIRST WAVE

OLIVE SENIOR

### **F** for Flattening (the curve)

We have beaten nature down  
 Exalted straightness.

But somewhere, are things we can never control:  
 Wildness always trying to break in.

When and where, unnoticed for how long  
 did this bump in the road emerge  
 this curve  
 that so urgently  
 needs flattening now?

## W for Waiting

On March 22, the government pulled the Covid-19 emergency cord in India: 13,500 daily passenger trains a day and 25 million passengers came to a full stop.

At Varanasi Junction, an ancient city on the Ganges, some got off but never got on another train again; departure signboards blank as total lockdown began.

Fifty disparate souls en route to far-flung destinations are still stuck there, confined to the waiting room, forbidden to leave the station, desperate.

*Is this life?* asks Laxmi, 700 miles from home and children.

From destinations even further: parents with children, construction worker, manager, pilgrims, students, lawyer and a marketing pro

Waiting.

Enter Anand Mohan the station manager who organizes them. Child's play when the station is used to handling 100,000 passengers a day. Washrooms, medical checks, three meals a day, hot tea and yoga classes thrown in.

He tells them to avoid the news. Too depressing. For uplift he arranges daily showings of the multi-part serial

Hindu epics: the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, which demonstrate, Mohan says, *Evil dies . . . good prevails . . . if you do the right thing.*

His charges sleep on benches, thin rugs on the floor. In the cavernous waiting room they bond . . . *complete strangers . . . we talk. We share our pain.*

Three weeks on; departure boards stay blank.  
No one knows when passenger trains will roll again.  
The nationwide lockdown has been extended.

★ ★ ★

We, far away, can read Varanasi Junction as a play, a novel, a film we've already seen.

Or simply as a metaphor for all of us who are now

*(Is this life?)*

Locked in and  
Waiting.

The original story appeared in *The Washington Post*, April 2020, reporters Joanna Slater and Tana Dutta.

## C for Corona

*Corona* from the Greek meaning “anything curved”  
elevated long ago to mean a circle of light around  
a luminous body, like the moon; a halo for the  
solar deity

from there to symbolic associations of the circle with  
perfection: the ring-shaped crown for both royals  
and the divine

then sliding a little lower as the seal of victory or  
achievement: the laurel wreath, the leafy crown,  
for heroes, generals, or sporting stars

to floral garlands for beauty and pleasure at transitional  
times: wreaths for May queens or June brides.

How then this collapse of the halo,  
the crown, onto  
the heads of incompetent  
but powerful clowns whose lasting achievement  
will be presiding over the distribution  
of funeral wreaths in the service of a  
greater dictator  
named Corona.

## C for Contact Tracing

When I see “contact tracing” it makes me want to write a  
letter to someone I lost long ago, who left no forwarding  
address, vanished without a trace. Feel sorry now that I  
did not hire a private detective or some such cliché.

But nostalgia counts for nothing when everything is  
driven by exigence: contact tracing a kind of policing  
to tag everyone who had contact with someone testing  
positive in the hope of stopping a viral spread.

Contact can never be considered again as simply touch  
and go. Someone will find out you were close once.  
Yes, the whole world is communicable. And yet with  
71 million displaced, so many can still vanish without a trace.

## C for Concert

This is not something I can keep mum about.

The Barcelona Liceu Opera House will reopen on Monday with a string quartet playing Puccini's *Chrysanthemums* to a packed audience consisting of 2,292 potted plants.

The artistic director said he felt it appropriate to stage this concert for the Biocene, with nature filling spaces left empty by isolating humans. To whom the concert will be livestreamed.

Although the plants might find the concert hall a bit small after the great outdoors, I'm sure they will conduct themselves with decorum; just the discreet nod, wave, or palms put together, like any audience.

Nature is used to moving to its own rhythm anyway and flowers are probably bored with serenades from bumblebees and other suitors. They should find this a welcome diversion.

It might start a trend. Soon, plants will be ordering up their own jazz band from New Orleans, or reggae recordings, or rappelling the four best soloists from the Heavenly Choir.

## G for Gamble

The hazard now is how to balance  
risk versus necessity.

Do we dare or

Do we dare or

Do we dare to go out there

and throw the dice

play the game

Or do we sit at home alone playing

Solitaire

from the novel

## DYING TIMES

DARLENE MADOTT

*Blessed are they that mourn;  
For they shall be comforted.*  
—Mathew 5:4

*Blessed are they that hunger  
And thirst after justice, for they  
Shall have their fill.*  
—Mathew 5:6

My mother is dying. My senior law partner, Jack, is dying. Our richest client, Bernie Spurling, is dying – each taking their own sweet time, defying predictions. They say my mother has maybe three weeks to live. She is not dying fast enough for Jack. He says he needs me to interview witnesses and wants Bernie’s trial fast-tracked to happen before the first day of spring. He says this is because he’s got maybe six months to live. Bernie, our quadriplegic client confined to a wheelchair, wants his case done and gone before his wife can get her hands on his money. “Not one fucking cent.”

I am taking their deaths into me. There’s no way out of any of this. I am the goldfish in the bowl in my childhood home; the fish flashed over glittering blue crystals we didn’t know were lethal. My mother had bought these crystals at the dollar store, thinking they would liven up the goldfish’s confined universe. The fish flailed about. I thought it was all play until I understood it to be fish language for dying. Dying had been the fight of its life.

### Liar

Talk with the palliative care doctor has gone off the rails.

The palliative care doctor had said, “Your mother is getting enough morphine to tank an elephant.” Yet, when



Painting by Francesca Tropp (detail, in greyscale)

he asked her if it hurt *here*, and then *here*, she said “yes” to everything. Even the soft tissue. Everything hurt – but with a smile. Mom’s smile: her warm, forgiving, beatific smile, which of course, he didn’t recognize or comprehend.

“The pain, it must be psychological,” the doctor said, trying for thoughtfulness.

“I’ll tell you where the pain comes from,” I said, pointing at my angry older sister. “Our mother’s fervent wish when she moved in here, was to finally be free from her eldest daughter and her son-in-law.”

“Get out of my face, get out,” Elizabeth sputtered. Louie, her husband, pointed at me, crying, “You need to know, she’s an aggressive litigator, a liar.” Instinctively, the doctor took hold of my mother’s hand, as if he might protect her from her children.

“Whatever the unfortunate history of your family,” the doctor said, “you all need to let your mother die in peace.”

My mother had told me the pain was like “dogs gnawing at my bones,” or “something taking hold of a leg or finger bone, and slowly twisting it around and around under the skin.” On top of being driven to tears by the excruciating pain of bone marrow cancer, Mom now asked me if she was going nuts, if this was all in her head? “Not even the doctor believes me.”

“I believe you, Mom.”

“I feel horrible. You have no idea how horrible this feels. I hope to God you never know.”

### Senior Partner’s *Shtetel* Wisdom

“Too smart is half a fool.”

Bernie Spurling was describing his wife. “She gets herself a little bit of knowledge, and thinks she’s an expert. Pretty soon she’ll even believe in her own lies. She makes herself into a very convincing liar.”

Jack assured Bernie: “Bernie, over 50 years, I’ve made a living out of liars. Your soon-to-be-former

wife hates me now. Wait till I cross-examine her. She’ll like me even less.” Jack was pleased with himself. His face had gone from chemo ashen to sunburnt pink at the prospect of cross-examining Bernie’s wife.

Jack had told me that Bernie’s divorce was a “career file.” He meant the kind of big-buck case that comes once in a lifetime and either makes or breaks a lawyer’s career.

Of the client Jack said: “His condition is awful: Mine is just that I’m dying.”

### The Family Law Act, 1985

More than three decades earlier, I had been in the first years of my practice. Jack had taken me under his wing. I had gotten into an argument with one of the firm’s partners; a blue suit, stuffed shirt who’d decided to cross-examine me because I’d asked for a second filing cabinet. I needed more room for my own burgeoning practice. The partner didn’t believe I had that many active files. So I hauled open each drawer of my single cabinet. “Active file, active, active, active,” slamming each drawer shut, opening the next.

When I told my father about the firm’s abusive male lawyers (I was the only female among 10 angry men) my father said: “You face your dragons where you find them. Change firms, and it will just be the same dragon but with a different face.” My father had been an artist, a painter, who supported us through his lettering business: United Signs and Outdoor Advertising. He’d been a good painter in oils on canvas and a surprisingly good businessman for an artist. About the cabinets, Jack said to me: “Why didn’t you come to me?”

“Because you’re not my father. I have to slay my own dragons.” Jack liked what he called the fire in my belly, my creativity, my independence.

From that point on, I had a history with Jack. Our professional intimacy began, I guess, with a couple called the Divots.

Mr. and Mrs. Divot were odd ducks. Their case was one of the first under the new *Family Law Act* and my first case working alongside Jack. The act had shifted the focus from family assets and non-family assets to marriage as a partnership. The new law equalized the growth in properties as between the husband and wife from the value assessed on the date of the marriage to the date of separation. In the Divot case, oddly, there was no equalization payment owing from one to the other. Neither Jack nor I could figure how it was possible to organize a marriage this way, with equal piles of nickels and dimes on both sides of the ledger.

Mrs. Divot had chosen to leave Mr. Divot for one simple reason. She realized that after his mother's death they were not going to inherit anything close to the millions she'd expected. Mrs. Divot – to make it clear that she was angry and done with the family – took a Sunday carving knife and slashed an ancestral Divot portrait. I had to rush to court the next morning to slap a lien against the matrimonial home, title to which had only just been conveyed to Mrs. Divot's name.

As we approached trial, Jack – who was actually disgusted by the players in the case, hating their pettiness, their vindictiveness – tried to wiggle out of the retainer. (Jack himself totalled three wives over the course of his life, but he left everything he owned at the time of separation to each in succession. “*Things*,” he said, “*never defined me*.” I thought his generosity toward his wives was what made him work to the grave. But dying while in harness was also a badge of honour. “*You see this desk*,” Jack proclaimed proudly. “*This desk converts into a coffin*.”

When husband Divot came up with the \$50,000 retainer on the eve of trial, Jack and I were stuck with the Divots.

Eager junior-lawyer-me went to work. I placed the trial binder in Jack's hands: opening statement, scripted examination-in-chief, cross-examination of Mrs. Divot, summaries of the discovery transcripts, law section as to the evidentiary

and substantive issues, closing argument. Jack looked up from his wingback chair. He was chewing relentlessly on his toothbrush. He asked what the firm paid me and raised me 10, like he was playing poker.

At the courthouse the next morning, I straightened Jack's white tabs, which were lopsided and unruly at the neck of his black silk robe.

Because of that, I ran into a new kind of hostility, much more wounding than macho bruising over filing cabinets. Our opposing female counsel, a declared feminist, scolded me at the break. “You behave like an abused woman.” She was talking about how I had handled Jack's tabs. Tabs!

I told her flat out – how brilliant Jack was, what a privilege it was to work with him, how much I learned from him.

“I rest my case,” said the female counsel. “Abused people always defend their abusers and find reasons to forgive and forget. What about his tabs? Can't he adjust those for himself in a mirror?”

Is sanctimony – righteous sanctimony – preferable to an over-weaning sense of macho-self, just because it is in stiletto heels? Accessorized by a strategic slit in the skirt? I'll say it straight, we were in a winners' game, and Jack and I played to win. Anything less was, and would be, a disservice to our clients. Mrs. Divot's counsel, mouthing superior all the way, was about to lose. Which meant Mrs. Divot – not counsel – would pay for the loss.

So, of course, Jack was hard-nosed. He'd take you for lunch and have you for lunch. From time to time, I tried to call Jack on this kind of behaviour. I even tried as we worked our way through the Bernie case.

“Jack, we have to talk.”

“We don't have to talk.”

“Jack, I have opinions. A mind of my own. I can't go back to being the junior lawyer and hand-maiden I once was. I can't just follow obediently.”

“Whatever I do, I do to protect you. You're on a need-to-know basis. You don't have to understand the whole of it.”

That was it.

He had a hard mouth. Direct, demanding, all too often, utterly insensitive. He abused men and women alike. Me, included. But damn it, he was good, sometimes great at what he did. He knew what he knew. He knew a lot. Sometimes he didn't know what he didn't know. And that would cause a hitch in what we were doing. But he was no fool. A hitch isn't a halt. Best of all, he was never fooled by fools. By sentimentality, never. By sanctimony, never.

They used to say about such men: He's tough. He's a straight shooter. Well, Jack was a tough lawyer who was dying; he was a dead man walking. I couldn't say to him: “*Dying is no license to abuse. You can't just beat on people like you do so you can get your way. You've no idea what it does to those who love you, who'll survive you*.”

I consoled myself by saying that to myself. Not to a dying man from whom I'd learned almost everything about life and law. Now, I'm learning about dying.

At the end of the Divot case, just as with every case we fought together over the years, Jack gave me some of his *shtetel* wisdom: “Humans can get used to anything – even Auschwitz.”

One case became another. Different faces. Different facts. Different lies. Same betrayals. Same greed. Same hate. In the end, they all blended together, like dust. *Will we make it to the end of the Bernie case*, I wondered. *Will we fight this last one together?*

Jack gave me his *shtetel* wisdom. I wanted to give Jack something:

“I told my mother about you. She says she would gladly give you what's left of her days.”

Jack was shocked. Speechless. And I'd thought nothing could surprise him.

## Whatever Has a Beginning Must Have an End

About the big bang theory. It wasn't known about back when I was born. In Sunday school, we were told that God is infinite and that infinity means *no beginning and no end*. At the age of six, trying to contemplate what *no beginning* was, had brought on night terrors. I could somehow cope with the idea of no end, but that something could have no beginning...? What about me? My mother and father? What did my beginning mean if we had no beginning? During the night terrors, I'd sleep run, not sleepwalk, around our apartment above my father's sign shop until Dad would catch me up in his arms and make me drink a glass of water.

This was the dream that had me running barefoot in my seersucker pyjamas:

I am in some kind of very constricted, snake-like tunnel, crawling slowly toward its end, toward the light. Just as I get there, someone plugs up that end of the tunnel and I am trapped in darkness forever.

I am told that, in fact, the umbilical cord had been roped around my neck at birth. It was a miracle I survived. I have been told that I am one of the lucky ones: delivered from my own darkness alive.

## Swimming

Water is my element, born under the sign of Pisces. I have never been afraid of water. I remember floating as a child in maybe a foot of water close to the shore of Ossossane Beach so my mother could see me floating free and easy, my mother seated on her beach towel, flipping through celebrity magazines. Along with my baby sister and older sister, they all feared water. Eventually, my mother would have to force me out of the lake, out of the water, at around noon so she could comb and braid my hair. My lips would be blue from hours of swimming.

Since it was obvious that I was at ease in the water and as I grew, it was important to my mother

that I take serious swimming and diving lessons. I readily passed through all the aquatic levels, achieving a bronze certification. My only difficulty was with the 10-foot dive to the bottom of a pool, to retrieve a puck. A puck! (There's always something crazy and elusive about life. In diving, it was the puck.) But staying on the surface was no problem. I could tread water, endlessly, and each summer I'd swim across the bay and back to where Dad had built a cottage for us on Clear Lake in Haliburton. As time passed, Mom wanted to learn how to swim, too, so as a teenager, I got it into my head to teach my mother how to swim. But I had to *overcome her fear*. Her fear of going under.

I suited us up with life jackets – flinging myself from a raft so she'd see that it is impossible to sink in a life jacket. Then, we went into the lake together, she in her life jacket, me holding her by the hand, until she got, gradually, the sensation of floating.

But in a sudden welling of panic, she realized that she'd lost any feel for the bottom. Mom grabbed me, pressing me under the water, smothering me with her life jacket. I'd been told what to do when a drowning person clings to you, drowning you, too. I kicked her in the gut. Freed, I flipped her onto her back, face away from me, and with one hand under her back, lifted her toward the sky. In her red jacket, she looked like an overturned ladybug, drifting on the current. I had strong, long legs. I kicked us back to shore.

### “She called me an Effing Cripple”

Bernie Spurling's penthouse condo was all rainbows, swimming in light through the cut crystals of the antique collection he'd managed to rescue from the matrimonial mansion.

“She thought I'd be afraid, called me an effing cripple, in front of my children. She thought I'd never have the guts to leave her, the effing bottom-feeding bitch. I've never been so happy. The legal fees. Every bit of it. All worth it – to escape.”

*On the other side of fear lies freedom. It's about overcoming the fear. That, or having no other choice.*

### More *Shtetel* Wisdom

*You don't shit where you eat.”*

Back at the beginning of my legal career, trial preparation had always started with Jack cooking a meal. For the Divot case, Jack made me chopped liver sandwiches served up with bacon and onions on toasted rye and topped by deli ketchup. I have never tasted a more delicious breakfast.

By the time of the Bernie Spurling case, Jack's meals had become more sophisticated. Preparing for Bernie was poached salmon and leeks.

We worked all day, side-by-side. But one evening, in his condo, Jack went missing. I found him dead to the world, sprawled on his bed in his silk housecoat, sleeping.

Was he really sleeping, or was the open door some kind of test?

At 10 o'clock that night, I tiptoed out of Jack's condo, having arranged and packed all our briefs for the next day, leaving the door unlocked behind me.

The next morning, Jack said nothing about my departure, nothing about the unlocked door.

Jack is not an ordinary man. He cannot be judged by everyday standards. I have always thought, if there is a God, then God must be something like Jack – an engaged enough sinner to understand, a profound enough saint to forgive. It has been, and still is a privilege to serve such a man, even if it involves adjusting his tabs or *schlepping* his law briefs.

There is another reason I cannot abandon this dying man.

### Fear

“Mom, why did you write down that you refuse everything, in advance – feeding tubes, intravenous,

oxygen – while at the same time you said ‘yes’ to transfusions...‘for now’...after all the doctor told you that the transfusions were extending your life, but also extending your pain? I don't get it.”

We're in the hospital transfusion room. The Voyageur transportation paramedics are waiting in another room. Mom's hematologist, Doctor Arlene Shaw, is waiting for an answer. My older sister Elizabeth, and her doting dumb-mouthed husband Louie, are waiting, too. For Mom to change her mind, to refuse the blood. Period. I show the doctor the paper Mom had signed, with me as witness, where she had gone so far as to say she no longer wanted the blood transfusions, adding, *for now*.

“I can override this,” Doctor Shaw says.

“It's okay, Mom, you take all the time you need,” I say. Doctor Shaw is waiting to see if Mom's refusal is tentative or not. She is impatient.

Elizabeth, as if there were no confusion, asks if she should take Mom for her scheduled blood test.

“What would be the point,” Doctor Shaw offers, “to inflict unnecessary pain?”

To Elizabeth's fury (any frustration or change in plans brings on her fury), Mom reiterates that she is refusing any transfusion, *for now*. I say, “Okay, then I will see her back to her room in the retirement home.”

The November day is spectacular, full of brilliant sunshine. On the ride back from the hospital to Mountain Vista Village with the Voyageur transport paramedics, the bare black branches flash shadows as we pass. In Mom's room, I again ask why?

“Why *for now*, and then you're going to change your mind?”

“I'm afraid,” Mom says, flatly.

I consider the decision she has made this day, how huge it was, how huge it must be to refuse all further treatment, even tentatively, tantalizingly holding onto or out for hope.

“You are the most courageous woman I know.”

“I don't know about that,” Mom says, with a wan smile. “No, I don't.”

**You should not cry  
when you are on your last journey.**

—Jewish Resistance Song,  
1943 in the Vilna Ghetto

Jack, my senior partner, has told me these words. Later, he adjusts the words:

*“Never say that you are on your last journey.”*

### Pumpkins on the Ridge

A year ago, visiting Mom at her Martin Grove condo: Believing that she's had enough of her four walls, I take her out, not appreciating – no matter her eagerness – how hard it is for her to get ready, then having to wait in her coat near the door. I think I have found the perfect formula for a perfect day – to spend most of it just driving around, as I'd once had to drive my sleepless infant son, Marco.

Getting her down to the parked car, the hazards flashing at the condo door, the seat warmers pre-heating the leather, lattes in the holders, I ease her into the front, fasten the seat belts and head north up highway 427. We stop at an all-day breakfast place, eat, and then drive on. Though we've just eaten, I suggest we stop somewhere for ice cream. She expresses her surprise, since she knows I don't particularly like ice cream, not since I was a kid. She doesn't know my dislike comes not because of taste, but from a determined resistance to my sister, Elizabeth, who had called me “fatso” after I'd eaten almost a bucketful of ice cream as a kid.

Staring out the car window together at the passing farms prompts stories of her childhood, when she ran with her arms outstretched through the wheat on the family's rented farmland outside the city, her father throwing his Sicilian peasant hat up into the air at the spring rain: “Goodbye *cappuccia*,” joyous in his expectation of the growing cabbages to come. And memories, too, of her own mother, coming from the city on weekends, after a working week at Cook's Clothing down on Front Street,

Toronto, to make rabbit *cacciatore* on an outdoor stove.

In my car, Mom sleeps a blessed hour, a rest she can never achieve in the lonely condo hours of “staring at the four walls” she hates, that she had acceded to within a year of Dad’s death, under Elizabeth’s influence, having agreed to move from her big house on Veneto Drive to the isolation of the Martin Grove condo. Her life, after Dad’s death, had become an excruciating exercise, waiting in bewildering pain, swirling through thoughts of obedience, disobedience, anger. “Why won’t God take me?” This before any of us knew about the acute bone marrow cancer. Later, she’d question the pain, and ultimately, she questioned God. “I don’t think I was a bad person. I don’t think I ever hurt anyone.” In truth, she had travelled through life as an unassuming woman, trailing little or no harm. Tempted in the condo by suicide, thinking she might pull a chair close to the balcony and throw herself over – this she also denied herself, lest she hurt *anyone else* by falling on them.

The journey north in the car is a Halloween Sunday. I stop at a display of pumpkins. I buy three. The figure quoted by the boy who is selling them is \$7 apiece. I ask him if he will give me three for \$20, and he tells me that a man asked him that very same question, only this morning. I learn from his proud mother that he has just started Grade Five and that the boy had struck a bargain with his mother and father – they’d let him have his own pumpkin plot if he would tend to the seedlings, grow them, and sell them, and keep the money made for his education fund. The boy proudly carries the pumpkins to my car. My mother watches from the open window. The boy’s little sister has been neglected in our conversation. Mom has always had an eye for the meek. She beckons the little girl to the car window and finds something to praise about her, while I negotiate for three additional gourds, for three dollars and not five. I toot the horn as we pull onto the road and continue north, and through my rear-view mirror I see the family on the wagon, waving to us.

For half an hour I am speechless.

For weeks I’ve had the feeling that I’m on a whirligig of death and dying...except whirligigs usually give pleasure, they make people laugh, and I am not laughing, or, maybe I am supposed to laugh at laughter – the crazy contagion of it, happening at the most inappropriate moments – maybe that’s the only way to deal with dying.

I am in a rush to get back home, to carve my pumpkins, to set my house up for Halloween. I am frantic because of my own physical confinement – in the car, too long, seated, too long.

“It’s getting late.”

When we turn to head south, in a field to our west, the setting sun catches a ridge of pumpkins on a hill and sets them ablaze.

“Pumpkins! Oh, look,” as if I have never seen a pumpkin before – but not like these, lined up like flaming candles.

*My father had seen them – four years ago. “Is there a garden outside?” He had asked, from his hospital room, “Are those pumpkins on the ridge?” He had died in August. I want to believe the pumpkins he had seen were these, waiting for us in our future, the future we had then, in a time when he would not be.*

“If Dad were here, I would stop to take a photograph of these pumpkins for him to paint,” I say to my mother, as we head back to the city.

She is in no rush to get back. She is disturbed about something. I don’t want to know, don’t want to start a new conversation, after what I feel was a perfect day. Crazily, I suggested another ice cream. She never says no to anything. I come out of the store with two cones. We eat in the car.

“When you get to where you’re going,” I say, “promise me you’ll find a way to get a message back. I want to know if you’re seeing my father again.”

“I don’t think anyone is waiting for me. Anyway, at the rate I’m going, I could never catch up to him, I’ll never find him.” I risk a glance. Calmly, angrily, she is licking ice cream, taking all the afternoon time I have to give. It is never enough; it will never be enough.

## A CANADIAN RE(PER)SPECTIVE RESURRECTION LOST *by* Barry Callaghan THE PRIME MINISTERS *by* William Ronald with commentary on the paintings by the artist



William Ronald Mural in a Painted Chapel. — as appeared on the 1965 cover of Canadian Art magazine; photograph by John Reeves.

## RESURRECTION LOST by Barry Callaghan

William Ronald was raised in Fergus, a small town in southwest Ontario. “Stone homes, cold hearts, and a movie house,” he once told me, born with a movie of himself in his own mind, deciding early on that he was going to be a painter, and so he got out of town as fast as he could and went to art school in Toronto where, exploring the new expressionism in abstraction, he was dismissed by teachers who had an enthusiasm for pine trees and ice floes. Except for one painter on staff, Jock Macdonald, whose good word led to a substantial prize from the New York Guggenheim Foundation.

It was the early '60s. He was brash, he had brilliance, he painted with urgency, with bravery, and went to New York where he had several shows in sudden succession at the innovative Kootz Gallery. He sold to the Roosevelts, MOMA, Chicago, the Albright-Knox Gallery, collectors across the continent, collectors in France, until his nerves frayed and he moved to Princeton where a doctor put him on uppers and downers. Pills left him tightrope walking in his mind for the rest of his life.

He came home, worn out, foolish and wise in one swoop, a wounded, voluble, abrasive innocent, still certain of his own destiny, street-smart enough to be paranoid. The hometown mean-minded and mealy-mouthed took his arrival in retreat as an admission of failure. Some, as is the wont of the town, relished his return, hoping to find a tail between his legs.

He did not settle in the city but on Ward's Island in Toronto Bay. He had a friend on the island, an Anglican parish priest, Father Hopkins. He rented a cottage, close to the small island church, St. Andrew-by-the-Lake and rested for a while, contemplating the calming waters, finding comfort and conversation with the priest, and then he was invited to go on national television as host of a new arts program, first called *Show on Shows*, and later, *The Umbrella*.

As host, growing heavier-set with a mane of black hair and wearing Cuban heels and capes lined with satin, he became a flamboyant presence in the tartan staidness of Sunday afternoons in Toronto. On camera, he was so intently serious he could indulge in slapstick, so guilelessly involved with himself he could wear his heart on his sleeve...or, as he told me at the time, “Warhol makes pop art: I am pop art.” He was a natural-born dandy, a natural-born Dadaist. Farce and bombast, inadvertent or calculated, were never beneath him.

At the CBC, mandarins and managers looked at him askance, as if he'd come from the backside of the moon: what he thought was performance as art, they thought was an embarrassment of moonings...an exuberant conversation about mobiles with a gruff and cagey Alexander Calder in France, laughter about urinals with Marcel Duchamp, pie throwing with “clear the track” Eddie Shack, the hockey player, a kitchen confab with young underground, sexually neurotic filmmakers, the New York Kuchar brothers and loopy clowning around with English comics like the Goons; I brought him John Updike bouncing a pink plastic basketball and Le Roi Jones in his collegiate desert boots promising the apocalypse. At one point *The Umbrella* ratings outgrew CFL Sunday football – one of the nation's supposed “spiritually binding sports” – but the broadcast managers knee-capped his act, killed the show, scuttled the “studio set” that he had painted himself, and scuttled cultural television for decades, easing toward the presence of Adrienne Clarkson. If, like Esau, Ronald was an hairy man, Clarkson was an smooth woman.

These were turbulent times for Ronald, but on the island he had found calm, and a comfort in his friendship with Father Hopkins. When not tied up in television and in his own studio, he – calling on local island children to help him – painted in oils the rectory of St. Andrew-by-the-Lake, three walls and

the ceiling... and also the fixtures, the radiator, the mouldings, the fireplace, an altar. It was an extravagant, undulating, joyous gesture in pure – directly-from-the-tube – prime colours...over 100 feet of bravado that had the feel of utter innocence, and – through the liturgical symbols of St. Andrew's Cross and the Maltese Cross – the feel of rebirth and resurrection in a landscape of water and sand and sky seen through the windows, the chapel becoming a place of prayer rare in the country...a place free from any hint of the chosen doomed of a dark God's Calvinism, free from the clichés of maudlin piety and sectarian sniping: it was a place of light and openness, of gaiety and grace, a painterly testament to refuge, meditation and friendship.

Then Father Hopkins died. Ronald tried to protect the chapel. But the Hogtown managers of the Anglican Church pulled up their gaiters and showed no will to keep the work. The chapel had been leased by the Church from the Metro Parks Department – for one dollar and the Church let the lease expire. The Parks Department let the chapel fall into disrepair, using it as a summer sleepover hostel for outpatients from the Queen Street Mental Health Centre.

In the winter, pipes froze and burst, a 4 x 8 foot hole was cut into a wall by plumbers. What was left of the mural was painted over by a new priest, a flat empty white. Ronald told the press that the destruction of the mural was a desecration. He offered to restore the mural at no cost to the city. The Metro Parks Commissioner, Tommy Thompson, said Ronald had had no right to paint the chapel. “If Ronald had painted a mural on an outhouse,” Thompson said, “there wouldn't be all this hullabaloo. I'm fed up with this Ronald guy's attempts to get publicity mileage out of a so-called masterpiece that probably wouldn't draw customers at Eaton's Art Department. Ronald had no business painting his mural there in the first place. As landlords we didn't want it.” The mural – a rare moment in the country's religious art – was lost to us. Ronald moved inland, into the city core, leaving the island barrens to the Parks Department.

True to the temper of the town – true to a reluctance to dream outside the grid-work of its oblong blocks of two-storey dream streets (our current rash of condos along the lakeshore are simply those same oblongs standing on end – jammed full of one and two-roomed shacks) – the know-nothing, know-it-all Tommy Thompson, ended up revered, while Ronald (his standing public work is a three-storey mural in the Ottawa corridors of the National Gallery) still has no parklet or green in his name in his hometown, not even a plaque. The local Pressers of the Flesh, our politicians, got into one of their self-serving huddles and, having found the northern half of a spit that reaches out into the waters of the bay, named it Tommy Thompson Park.

Some 20 years after this debacle, Pierre Elliott Trudeau arrived at the opening reception for an exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario, abstract expressionist “portraits” of the 16 Prime Ministers since Confederation, by William Ronald. When Trudeau stood in the gallery courtyard to speak, he said it was the sense of wonder in the paintings that fascinated him, the astonishment at life itself.

“There is a difference,” he said, resting on a podium, “between the craftsman on his trapeze and the artist who expresses life as he sees it. An artist must always be wary of trying to please, and in that he is like some politicians, he must never seek to please.” The crowd laughed and clapped. “The bad politician,” he said, “like the bad artist, seeks to please.

“The artist who sees for himself,” Trudeau went on, “opens up the treasure of innerness, the pleasures of wonderment, and such a man is basically a loner, but although he is a loner, he has genius, he creates something universal...”

The crowd applauded. Security men cleared a path into the gallery.

The Prime Ministers  
WILLIAM RONALD



I am a painter. I was born in a small Ontario town. I've always had a certain advantage. I've looked at the large world with a small town wonder, the large world of men on stage, taking hold of their own destinies by the scruff of the neck. I love men and women who take hold of their destinies. So, a few years ago, I decided to paint the portraits of 16 such men, the Prime Ministers, the men who had ministered to this country. The idea filled me with a sense of wonder. Who were they? What had they done? How had they shaped me, and how would I shape them? I began to read and read. I wanted to read through their worlds and come out the other end, to the nub of their character and how I saw them. As each began to inhabit me, I painted their portraits. They live in me. I in them. I also wrote about the painting of each portrait, what I think I see when I see how live I saw them – five of these follow.

Pearson was difficult, a challenge. I couldn't pin him down in my mind. I tried this painting three times. He was a bright and accomplished man, but he was never accused of flamboyance. His powers were hidden to the casual observer. When I was in New York, the place was packed every time Pearson spoke at the United Nations General Assembly. He was, at that time, the only Canadian politician I can remember reading about in the *New York Times*.

I thought of basing the painting on the flag, for which he will certainly be remembered, but that was too simple. He was a complex man, thought of as amiable and affable, a "nice guy," but he was no weakling. He could be hard-nosed when he had to be.

The first version was too meditative, all washes, a diptych. The next was bombastic, black, white and red, a fragmented flag. The painting I ended up with is totally different in feeling, yellow ochre and brown from the lighter end of the colour scale. This horizon has little soft explosions in it. The twin streams of blue and green are like the currents which directed the flow of Pearson's life: academia and diplomacy. The diagonal strokes in a left-handed direction are the sinister, tough threads of his character. They are not bombastic or vivid, and seemed to me the colour essence of Pearson. The flag could not be ignored. When you see it flying away from home, it matters. There is a blue flag which I put in at the end. This painting could not be flat. Pearson was too full of energy and intelligence, his political life too tumultuous, but as a whole, the painting has gentleness.

*Lester B. Pearson. 150 x 195 cm. Oil and spray paints on canvas*





I have a vivid impression associated with John Diefenbaker. It is the cancellation of the plane, the Avro Arrow. As a young man, I worked at Avro and my father was one of thousands who lost their livelihood that day. The impression is personal and powerful. The Canadian aircraft industry was destroyed when the prototypes were broken up. Canada's current pride in the Manipulator Arm for the space shuttle, and arguments that Canada must develop its high-technology industries, are bitterly ironic and heighten my impression of the man. In a sense, he defeated me (with a sucker punch) and got to me at an obvious level.

The red arrow is the Avro Arrow, squandered: it is also his tenure, his squandered opportunity. Diefenbaker was a one-man band who veered into highly personalized style. Everything was centred on him, his vision. He rides or falls, therefore, on the depth of his vision. His vision was a huge bubble blown from a prairie populist's pipe. It popped. The word "Chief," partially obscured in the painting, is appropriate: he ended up as Chief of his own tribe, with no warriors, wearing his old headdress to any powwow that could have him.

*John C. Diefenbaker. 195 x 150 cm. Oil and spray paints on canvas.*

I made three attempts at Laurier. I had an image of elegance and eloquence. With red, black, white and middle-grey in my mind, I did sketches of long, narrow canvases, different paintings stacked against a wall. Laurier's elegance and order overpowered this too-fragmented effect: the painting needed to be more organized, unified, reflecting his sense of purpose. That gave way to a circle and Maltese cross, a static cross, too stilted in effect. Then, the final inspiration came from a 16th-century Japanese screen called *Early Spring*.

That portrait is monumental, a portrait of birth – a planet of organic substance – lush with green and gold. It began as a busier painting, but I kept simplifying to give it strength and unity. There is only a little hot pink, made with crimson and white – rouge, if you will – left from those early experiments. The Maltese cross, large in the earlier versions, is still important but it has been diminished, as Laurier diminished the power of the Bishops. The green, a colour I have not used much in my palette, spreads across the canvases, giving breadth and scope, a larger sense.

There is a square within the centre panel, a formalization, a touch of propriety, like a table setting. I saw Laurier as a dapper Victorian gentleman, who had a known mistress. He was a good-looking man.



The centre circular motion is tumultuous and has to do with the formation of the country. In my mind, it was like the formation of a planet; massive undercurrents merging together with great forces. There is darkness, too, marking the struggles of his final years.

I intended the frame to be an integral part of the painting, like architecture, as Laurier was a national figure in the fullest sense, a unifier and builder.

*Sir Wilfrid Laurier* 240 x 360 cm. Oil and spray paints on canvas.



As a child, it seemed that Mackenzie King had been Prime Minister forever. I recall images of him in sepia tones creeping through the rotogravure sections of the *Toronto Star Weekly*. A strange fellow who walked around the garden a lot. I would have liked to listen in on his conversations with his dead mother. Back in those days, King was a real presence. He seemed controversial, dominant, and unloved.

He used to be seen as dull and gray, withdrawn into himself. This spiritual man must also have been a spirited man. His political brilliance and skill at manoeuvre show a concern with larger conceptions and a real zest for challenge. For a long time those rotogravure sepia tones represented King, but I found that underneath there was a personality with real depth and a quiet vibrancy. King will never be easy to grasp. There are so many aspects to the man that I could do 10 paintings of him. The actual work is suggestive, symbolic and expressionistic, and the palette, which is unusual for me, bears some relationship to camouflage, his secret life, I suppose. It has a slightly veiled, eerie quality, unintentional but there: his eeriness lies in the difference one finds between a white witch and a black witch: there was no profound evil in the man. The skull is generalized to King, his spiritualism, but also in the grave issues he had to face. There is a stiffness in the vertical stripes, forming a barrier. King, in a sense, was a prisoner of himself and his role.

Women were an important, difficult part of his life. The two-headed dog is a duality. It seemed to me there were many dualities in King: his public and private lives; his desire to reform, the practicalities of keeping political power; Britain and the United States; the English and French in Canada. The words “King-Byng Wing Ding” appear across the triptych. This dramatic manoeuvre summed up King’s desire for power, his sense of Canadian independence, and his political skill. What came out of that was of great importance to the country and the Commonwealth. I have done a small painting called *King-Byng Wing Ding*.

The rendering of the painting is loose, considering its scale. I wanted to present diversity within a whole. It bears some similarity to doodles, the unconscious coming through. The painting has an edge, not a border, and the images float. I was going to carry the painting further, but when the sun hit it I stood back and realized that if I went further I would be superimposing another painting. When I finished, I had a feeling King would like it, secretly. I could see it candle-lit in Laurier House with King sitting in front of it in a captain’s chair, his dog by his side.

*Mackenzie Lyon Mackenzie King, 150 x 345 cm. Oil and spray paints on canvas.*

Pierre Trudeau, a shy man but a natural performer, a man with incredible personal style, engaging and abrasive, subdued and ebullient, accessible and cold and remote, and warm.

I tried painting Trudeau three times. The first was almost all white, with canvases stacked on top of each other. For some reason, I tried “stacking” Laurier as well, but that Trudeau was too papal. The second attempt was his early years, the flashy glory days. Well, glory days are glory days, gone, and so is that version of a man I admire. Internationally, he gave us a stature we’ve never had.

I decided on the 10 x 6 foot proportion to underscore Trudeau’s presence, 10 feet high. The image is marginally related to my 1958 painting, *The Visitor*. It also had an enigmatic quality, a slightly threatening air. The Maltese Cross is obviously a form I like. It is used here because of Trudeau’s religion. His Jesuit education had a strong bearing on his life. The intellectual discipline from Jean de Brébeuf College is in his bones, but the halo-like cross is slipping a bit.

The painting has two sections; the division runs from upper right to bottom left. The right side is softer. Trudeau’s gentle side, seen with his children.

The other side is hard, rigid, disciplined, but not entirely so. Trudeau has too much heart to be totally hard-edged. He can be explosive. His life seems dominated by logic, but emotion bursts through. I have often used borders in my paintings, but here, for the first time, there’s only half a border. It contains a blue reminiscent of the Québec flag and gives that side of the painting, as an integral part of the whole, a more structured and firmer sense. The division is, in part, a device to make the painting work.

The stripes are entirely hard-edged and bold, like Trudeau’s discipline, strength and authority. A huge head-shape floats above the field of stripes. Everything about Trudeau centred on his mind. The head dominates. The things that look like cogs are actually part of a construction drawing of the female form. The head-shape has its back turned to a three-quarters profile. It is commanding, remote and removed. The black and gray – severe, powerful and even ominous colours – emphasize dominance and distance, while remaining enigmatic. The awkwardness is deliberate. I did not try to pretty it up. Trudeau’s incredible eyes, brilliant and sharp like a fox’s! Able to look through you. The eyes in the painting are like him, always seeing. The second set are akin to the mind’s eye, the eye that imagines what is beyond the seen.

*Pierre Elliott Trudeau. 300 x 180 cm. Oil and spray paints on canvas*



## A GIRL LIKE THAT

LAUREN B. DAVIS

What happened is awful, of course it is, but it's a damn upset to everyone. I'm not ashamed to say it, Addie; I'm glad we've seen the back of Heather Styler. Or should I say, *Mrs.* Heather Styler?

A girl like that. At her age. What did she expect? But I said to you right from the get-go that she was trouble. Didn't I say that? 'Course I did. I said, Addie, get a load of that. Prancing up Queen Street like she's in some damn costume parade. Oh, she wanted everyone to look at her. Drawing attention to herself, looking like what my cousin Dex calls Rampant Bimbosity. Isn't he a card? With her hair in those long ratty things. What do you call 'em? Sure. Deadlocks. Breadlocks. Whatever. Looks stupid enough on *them*, but on a white girl? Good grief. No wonder her parents...well, there's a question for you. Those parents. I think that'll always be some mystery to me. I'd love to be a fly on the wall in that family, wouldn't you? I mean, are they just as bad? Wouldn't they have to have given permission or something? If they really were married. I mean, her age! Or are they mortified? I'd be mortified myself. I heard she didn't run away, not exactly. Thrown out? Maybe.

No common sense, that much was clear. I don't care that she was always lugging around them books. *French*, of all things. French writers. Like American writers weren't good enough for her. How the hell did she think that was going to help her learn farming? Farming. What do young fools like that know about farming? Eco-farming, for God's sake, whatever that is. Romance and stupidity. At least he went to the agricultural college. Still doubt he'll make it.

The only thing I can say is she must have had a miscarriage and that's why there's no baby. What other reason would she have had to get married at 16? Sixteen, now! Why, my own Wendy's is nothing but sixteen and the idea of her getting married is some laugh – she can't even clean up her own room, for heaven's sake. No. I say *Mrs.* Heather Styler was surely in the family way. You know, I heard she graduated high school one day and got married the next. Don't you have to have your parents sign for something like that? Even in the city, I'm thinking

she had to have her parents' permission. So, they must have given it, which tells you a lot, doesn't it? I mean how they were probably right glad to see the back of her.

Well, you got a point. She's not the first girl got caught, I guess. And I suppose maybe there never was a baby. She swore to Wendy there wasn't, but why else would a girl want to get out of the house she was raised in so bad she'd marry that scrawny little gnome, and him what? Ten years older at least.

Have some more coffee cake. It's still warm. Never mind your diet today, Addie. I'm surprised you lasted this long.

Well, you have to admit you were none too pleased about Greg driving her around. Maybe they were just friends. I didn't say different, did I? But I don't care how heavy those grocery bags were, if it was my son, I'd have told him to let her carry them her own self. I don't care what you say, Addie, that girl was looking around for husband number two and what with your Greg at the Agricultural College

and the farm coming his way, it would make sense. You must see that.

I don't think I'm being uncharitable at all. Wasn't it me who hired her on to clean those cabins after Canada Day? I even had her out cleaning Janet Briscoombe's place after Janet went into the home. What a job that was. You know Janet was incontinent, for *months*, I'd say from the smell of the place. No. I tried to help that girl out. And as for Thanksgiving, well, you didn't want Greg inviting her around either, you told me so your very self. And Wendy took it on herself to invite her to come to us without checking with me first and there just wasn't room at the table. I don't even think that girl's Christian, and if she is, she's Catholic, so it's not like she could have come to church with us or anything. But I'm the one who sent her over a roast chicken and a slice of pumpkin pie and she never even gave me back the Tupperware. Which says a lot, I'm telling you.

Listen, I know Mr. and Mrs. Carlson pretty well and they tell me stories of what went on in that apartment. You know those old Victorian houses – air vents everywhere and you can hear a mouse fart. That girl had Blacks up there and even one of the boys from out on the reserve. Probably more. Mr. Carlson said something to her about it, and said she looked at him like he was speaking some foreign language. Had the nerve to be all hurt and proud as anything. And, he said there was crying. Quite a bit of crying.

You're right there, she sure was poor. Not even a telephone, you know. Borrowed the Carlson's phone to call her folks around Christmas. Collect, of course. Really? Well, I didn't know that. I wonder why? I suppose maybe there weren't any tickets that close to the 25th, but I bet they didn't want her home. I know that's what I'd say to my Wendy. You've made your bed, now lie in it.

Idiot city kids thinking they can move out to the country and farm and it'll all be sweet as apples. They didn't stand a chance. She would have been better off staying with that gnome she married.

What did she expect? That people were going to welcome her into their homes, when she threw out her husband for no good reason? Less than a year that marriage lasted and I hear he was real broken up about it. Todd Daniels had him in the tank more than once sleeping it off. Wandering up and down Main blubbering and making a hell of a racket.

Scared? Oh no, I don't think she was scared of him. So what? Just 'cause he sat in a booth all day, don't mean anything. It's a restaurant. Long as he orders a coffee and a slice of pie from her, he's got the right to sit wherever he wants is the way I figure it. Anyway, he isn't anything but a little bitty fellow. I think he just loved her. Men can be awful silly that way.

The boys called her all sorts of names. You must've heard from Greg. Well, he's well raised, so maybe he didn't say anything in front of you. But I heard the words. Lean in, girl, I don't want Wendy to hear this, I heard they all called her a "ball breaker." Something like that gets the boys' blood up, you know what I mean? Behaviour such as that is nothing but a direct challenge. A girl draws attention to herself by being all stuck up like that. And you can't tell me she's not doing it on purpose. You can't tell me. Not after she made friends with them Indian boys, with those Blacks. Not too stuck up for *them*, now, was she?

I guess. But what was Todd supposed to do? Arrest Jimmy Rucket? One of the Ruckets? Just be her word against the word of every Rucket within fifty miles. Everybody knows the Ruckets are no good. Everyone knows to stay away from them. All that mess of them living up there in them camps together like a bunch of rabbits. You stay away from them. First thing any mother tells her daughter. You gonna tell me your mother didn't tell you to stay away from them? Sure. There you go. You make friends with any of them, you are asking for trouble. You are advertising yourself for trouble. You are begging for it. Shouldn't be surprised when you get it.

You crazy, Addie? Sure he did it. Course he did it. And given the chance I don't doubt for one he'll do it again. Which is why Wendy wouldn't be stupid enough to let him in this house. Not ever. Sure as hell wouldn't get in a car. I brought that girl up right. But that girl? She had Blacks up to her apartment! That says it all, surely?

I don't know where the sense of shame has gone, Addie. I don't. There was a time, when you and I were girls, when if something like that happened, you'd keep it to yourself. You'd never tell. Never. You'd die before you brought the shame upon you. You'd just wash yourself up and hide the bruises and pray there weren't no evidence a few months down the line, you know? Who would you tell? After how stupid you'd been? You had nobody but yourself to blame. You'd go to bed every night with a pillow case wrapped around your fist and your fist stuck in your mouth just so you wouldn't cry out in your sleep, that's what you'd do.

What? What? For heaven's sake, Addie! I just mean we wouldn't wash our laundry out on the public line, wouldn't hang the bloody sheets from the window like I hear the Italians do. That's all I mean.

You know what I heard? Well, listen to this, as if that girl couldn't get anyone wrapped around her

little finger. Sybil told me. Her husband Dave works for the CNCP, you know. So, Dave gets a call to go pick up a shipment going to Toronto from 37 Main last week. Now he gets there and here she is, her face still a mess with bruises and red marks, with all these boxes, like from the Safeway – grocery boxes, full of her junk and tied together with string and cello-tape. He says he can't take it like that, and she bursts into tears. Dave told Sybil there was blood on her teeth, she must have split open the cut again. Anyway, Dave, the big softy, says he'll get a packing crate and help her and ends up packing everything for her and getting it down to the station and she's just crying, he said. Said he took her with him in the cab, although I guess it didn't make him half nervous, wondering what people would think with her up there. Sitting there, all crunched over next to the window, far away from him as she could get, like, and crying. She got on the train crying. Just thanked him and never said another word.

Truth is, he said it damn near broke his heart, she looked so little and so beat up and so alone. Oh. I don't know. Gimme a tissue, Addie. It's silly. Just the damn hormones. It's nothing. It's not like she's my daughter. Not like she's our daughter. Just a stupid girl.

## LITTLE ONE

LEANNE MILECH

My mother's name was Fancy. She wore cherry-red lipstick and smelled like summer all year round, like coconuts and ocean waves. She told me we were both angels who'd had our wings cut off and arms sewn on in an alternate universe called Starseed. That's where we were really from. We'd come from Starseed to planet Earth so we could heal all the sad, lonely people. My mom said that even though our wings had been cut off, we still had some of their magic.

"Where does the magic live, Mom? Now that our wings are gone?" I asked one day in line at Miracle Mart. Miracle Mart was our favourite grocery store because its name had the word *miracle* in it. Also, the store sold dented cans of tuna for half price. Bruised produce was so cheap it was almost free. Old packages of pasta laced with dust were under a dollar. I once saw a cockroach scuttle across the cereal aisle. Cap'n Crunch saluted me from his colourful cereal box, so I wasn't afraid.

Fancy cut me a look.

"I mean, where does the magic live, Fancy?" She hated when I called her *Mom*. I understood. My name was Diana, but I preferred her nickname for me.

"The magic lives in our hearts, Little One," she answered. She tapped the left side of my chest with her pleather-clad hand. "Right here." She thumped her own heart.

"But how come we don't remember Starseed?"

Her green eyes darkened. "It was a long time ago, before we were in these human forms." She pointed at my shoulders, torso, and legs. I examined her glove, studded with sequins, which seemed so glamorous to me. The glove of a famous movie star. Then she waved her hand around in front of her body, her sparkly blue sweater; her fake leopard coat; her jeans, ripped at the knee. "We've been designed to forget our true selves," Fancy said. She shrugged.

I wasn't satisfied with her answer, but I got distracted by hunger, suddenly aware of the BBQ

chicken wrapped in its foil bag, sliding away from me and down the conveyer belt to the checkout lady. The chicken smelled like heaven. *Maybe that's what Starseed smells like*, I thought.

The thought made me giggle. I put my hands over my mouth, but I couldn't stop laughing. Sometimes Fancy got upset when I made too much noise in public places. She didn't like people looking at us too hard. I could never tell when her mood might turn, her eyes flashing from green to a brown so dark it was almost black.

The chicken made it to the finish line. The cashier's name tag said *Chastity*. I was already ten years old, so I could read big words like that. Chastity scanned the chicken. Her cash register beeped.

"7.99," she said.

Fancy smiled at Chastity. "Oh shit, hon. You know, I left my wallet in the car. But I can write you a cheque. I have one right here in my pocket."

We didn't have a car.

I looked up at Fancy, at the three beautiful lines that sprawled out from the corners of her eyes when she smiled. Three tiny rays of sun. Those rays calmed my heart, which had been beating so loudly in my chest I could hear it in my ears. I didn't feel very magical.

Chastity ran her stubby fingers through her bleached blonde hair. "I'm not supposed to do that. We don't take cheques anymore." She paused. "It's a new policy," she apologized, pointing to a notice taped to her register. I stood on my tiptoes. The sign said *NO CHEQUES*. I could read that strange-looking word, too.

"Aw, come on...Chastity," Fancy said, reading the cashier's name tag. "It's a blizzard out there, and you want me to go all the way to the other side of the parking lot, all the way over to Bagel Plus, get my wallet, and come alllll the way back in here, dragging Little One? She might get sick!"

Chastity smoothed the front of her apron. She glanced around.

"It's just one chicken," Fancy said.

The man in line behind us cleared his throat and drummed his fingers on the conveyer belt. He was carrying a black briefcase. I considered trying to crawl inside, where I could hide until this was all over. Tears collected in my eyes. Fancy wouldn't like it if I cried. I focused on my sweatshirt instead, looking down at the cartoon of a proud penguin shaking maracas with a speech bubble over its head: "Don't worry, just dance." I swayed around a little, listening to the maracas.

Chastity pointed to the sign on the front of her register again. It still said *NO CHEQUES*.

Fancy said, "Right. We'll just go all the way outside to the car and come back." She knelt down and looked into my eyes. "If you catch a cold, you can blame this lady right here." She jerked her head towards Chastity. She stood back up. "Poor kid's had a cough for the last week," Fancy lied, shaking her head.

I felt that red, hot feeling crawl up my arms. It came around whenever I thought we were trying to

get away with something. I could feel the weight of Chastity's eyes on my face even though I was looking down at the speckled linoleum floor, trying to find a pattern in all those random dots. I felt the man behind me drilling his eyes into my back.

Chastity sighed. She looked at the long line behind us: the man with the briefcase; our neighbours from across the hall, the mother with the giant beauty mark on her chin and the black hair sprouting from it, the father with the red-rimmed eyes who always looked like he was about to cry; a short lady with thick legs and a wailing, pug-nosed toddler holding her hand.

"Alright," Chastity said. "But this is the last time."

I felt the red, hot feeling cool to blue. I smiled my most winning smile at Chastity.

Fancy shook Chastity's hand, pulled out the cheque and a pen from her pocket, and quickly scribbled. She glowed under the fluorescent lights. For a second, I thought I saw a halo hanging over her head. Fancy passed the cheque to Chastity, and all of a sudden, we were free.



I carried the chicken the whole way home, holding it close to my chest. It was warm like a baby. I felt so grown-up and responsible during the seven-minute walk to our tall, brown building with the black balconies and dead grass out front. We laughed the whole way, about how Fancy didn't have any money in her bank account, about how the chicken was ours for nothing and the world was our oyster.



We ate it on the sofa bed, with our hands. The meat fell from the bones and into our mouths; it felt as if the chicken had always belonged in my mouth. After, I fell asleep with my head in Fancy's lap, my hands greasy, my stomach gurgling. She watched our favourite show, *Dallas*, as I slept. She tickled my scalp with her long, hot pink nails. When I woke up, I kept my eyes closed so she would tickle me longer.

I heard J.R. tell Bobby to screw himself; Fancy laughed. J.R. was her favourite.

I could hear the TV on in the apartment next door, too, a game show with loud clanging noises and lots of applause and whistling. I opened my eyes and sat up, snuggling into Fancy, gazing at our carpet instead of watching the stupid commercials with the perfect moms mopping the floor, smiling with their shiny teeth. Our carpet was brown, stained with drops of red and pink nail polish and spilled tea. Near the balcony door, our white walls had fingerprints all over them. The walls had been like that when we'd moved in the month before. The fingerprints were tiny; it was as if little children had read too much bad news in the paper one day and then clawed at the walls, trying to jump out of their skins, utterly depressed.

But I wasn't like those kids.

It was 1989. I was safe and cozy and with my mother. She had the coolest name. I was her Little One; I wanted to be her Little One forever. It was snowing outside, and we were full and warm and dry. Nothing could go wrong.



Later that night, I was out on the balcony, bundled up in one of Fancy's sweaters. It was black with silver stars dangling from it and a bit itchy, but I liked the way the stars glinted in the moonlight. I always begged to wear that sweater whenever I could. I was spinning around in circles, extending my arms out like wings, remembering my former life as an angel. My wings felt fluffy and light. My feathers were pure white, just like fresh snow falling from the sky.

Fancy still looked like an angel. She had short, curly blonde hair and those amazing green eyes that changed colour. She had a wide smile and dimples in her cheeks. She was tall and thin and got looked at wherever we went. Even though she pretended not to like the attention, I knew she did. In the summer, she liked to wear white cowboy boots with fringes down the sides and mint-green shorts the colour of ice cream with tight, flowered tops. She

said she wanted to marry a man who owned a ranch so she could buy me ponies one day. She was so fun like that. She sometimes drank beer for breakfast, looking like the models in the Budweiser commercials; she knew the names of all the Care Bears; she showed me the chocolate factory episode of *I Love Lucy*, and we laughed until we cried. She played reggae music to wake me up in the morning and Grateful Dead to put me to sleep at night, using the record player the super at our last apartment at Bathurst and Finch had given us.

Now that we had gotten a little farther south to Bathurst and Sheppard, Fancy said we were moving up in the world: we were getting closer to downtown, where all the money was. She knew everything. She even knew my father was a spiritual sorcerer from Starseed. He had a great big belly and a white beard, like God. She said his name was Jerry and that he was the one who'd sent us to Earth. She said he had little bears who helped him rule Starseed. They weren't ordinary bears, she said. They were red and blue and green and yellow, and they wore collars like jesters. She said when I got scared and lonely, I should picture the Jerry bears cuddling me. They would keep me safe.

I was feeling a bit lonely out on the balcony, so I imagined that a red Jerry bear was in my lap and that a yellow one was playing with my hair. Fancy was inside in the living room with our new super, Anton. Anton had a big face, round and flat like a cookie. Instead of chocolate chips, he had tiny red scars in all different shapes; some were rugged circles, some were squiggles. It smelled like fish outside. Our neighbours were cooking with their balcony door open again. Fancy was playing Bob Marley really loud. She told me not to come back inside; she'd come to get me. When the music eventually stopped, I could hear our sofa bed banging against the wall in the living room. I thought they were playing "No more monkeys jumping in the bed," a game I'd loved when I was little, and I wished they'd invite me in to jump around, too.

Suddenly, the yellow Jerry bear stopped playing with my hair and jumped onto the balcony railing. He danced around and did cartwheels – magically, he didn't fall off and go splat on the ground. The red bear in my lap whistled like the game show audience I'd heard earlier. I clapped with glee.

We were all having a great time until the wind picked up and whipped the bears' collars around. My hair kept blowing into my face. All three of us began shivering. I wrapped my angel wings around myself.

The yellow bear told me to go inside. He said it was safe because the music had stopped. I shook my head. "Fancy said no," I said, setting my jaw. If I disobeyed my mother, she might get mad at me; she might not call me her Little One anymore.

I sank deeper into my lawn chair. I rubbed my hands together furiously. After a few minutes, the red bear put his paws on my shoulders. He levelled with me.

"It's time to go inside. You're freezing," he said.

I shook my head *no* again, but then noticed that the tips of my fingers were turning white; I worried I was getting frostbite. The bears said they would stay outside and play a little longer, even though they were chilly. I whispered to them to be good.

The blinds were covering the glass balcony door, so I couldn't see inside, but I could sort of make out my reflection. I looked a bit faint, like a ghost, but I could see my angel hair: short, blonde, and curly like Fancy's. I had her dimples and big mouth. I smiled at my reflection, satisfied. I was pretty, just like her.

I opened the balcony door just a tiny little bit. The blinds clicked together. I parted them with my hands. I peeked through. The living room was dark. I walked through the blinds. First I saw Anton. He was sitting on the edge of our bed. His eyes were closed and his wool cap was tipped back on his head. His mouth was wide open. I could see bits of saliva in the corners of his mouth.

Then I looked down.

Fancy was naked and on her knees with her back to me. Her head was underneath the blanket on

Anton's lap, her head was going up and down up and down super fast, as if she was trying to lick an ice cream cone before it melted. I didn't understand what she was doing under there.

They hadn't seen or heard me.

I turned around quietly, walked back through the blinds and the still-open balcony door. The wind greeted me, kissing my cheeks. The bears were somersaulting around the balcony. I crawled back into the lawn chair I'd been sitting in. The bears saw me and immediately hopped into my lap. I rubbed their arms and patted their bellies to make them nice and toasty. I told myself I hadn't seen anything weird at all. I hated lying to myself like that. It made me feel so stupid. I didn't cry because Fancy wouldn't like that. Instead, the bears and I played Stella Ella Ola, and I wished my mom would come outside to get me.



Two weeks later, I was sitting in computer class playing this game where you had to bring a settler family from the 1800s safely across the Canadian prairie landscape. Everything was black-and-white; the settler world was colourless. You had to make sure Ma and Pa and the kids had enough food and water to last the trip. If their horse got hurt along the way, you had to take it to the vet, but you needed money to pay for that. Money was always short in real life, so I loved playing that game and making as much money as I could. You'd make money by getting the family to sell the vegetables they'd harvested on their farm before leaving for their journey. They'd stand by the side of the road and wave down passersby. I always tried to upsell my customers, making two-for-one deals on potatoes and squash, saying you could get corn for half-price if you bought a basket of apples.

I was deep into a negotiation with another player over how many gold coins he'd give me for some freshly picked corn when skinny Chris Hughes came over to my chair and stood there

looking at me. Chris lived one floor below us. His mom was always hitting our floor with her broomstick to get us to turn the TV down. Chris' dad had a big tattoo on his neck with Chris' name on it. I thought that meant Chris was really loved. Also, everyone in our class had a crush on Chris because he had big blue eyes and thick, dark brown hair like my favourite New Kid on the Block, Joey. Chris and I barely even knew each other. I wondered why he'd come over to me. *Maybe he likes you*, a small voice inside said.

"Hey. My mom says your mom's a whore. She says she gives blow jobs to the super so she doesn't have to pay the rent."

"No, she doesn't." That red, hot feeling started to burn my feet. I paused my computer game.

"Besides, there's no such thing as a blow job," I said haughtily.

"Come to the soccer baseball field at recess, and I'll show you," Chris said.

"Whatever," I said, playing it cool. I turned back to my game and hit "play."

Inside, I felt that balcony wind from two weeks ago blow through my whole body. I'd successfully pushed that night out of my mind until now. I didn't want to know what a blow job was. I thought Chris' mom was a liar. I swallowed, trying to stop the wave of nausea swelling in my stomach.

I knew I had to meet Chris. If I didn't show, he'd tell everyone in my grade. He'd tell everyone that I was a baby, that I was too chicken to face the truth. But if I went, I could prove Chris wrong. I could convince him that Fancy was innocent.



"Get on your knees." Chris pointed to the ground.

I peered into the distance at the playground and the red slide and the yellow monkey bars and thought of my Jerry bears. What would they do? I decided I'd be brave.

I dropped to my knees.

The grass was covered in snow. My knees were wet and cold. I worried about ruining my only pair

of jeans. "This is stupid," I said. "You're not going to prove anything. My mom is NOT a whore."

"Look down."

I rolled my eyes.

"Look down."

I did, just so I could get it over with. I'd been so dumb to come all the way out here, so far from the playground and teachers. I smelled gasoline fumes from the street and felt really sick to my stomach.

I heard Chris unzip his pants.

"Look up."

All of a sudden, his thing was in front of me. It looked disgusting, like a gross pink pickle.

"Now open your mouth, and I'll show you what a blow job is."

I didn't want to, but I did. Fancy had done it, and I was her Little One. What else could I do?

It tasted too salty. I didn't like it.

After a nanosecond, I got up and pushed Chris away. "You're so gross," I said, wiping my mouth.

"You know what? I was going to be your boyfriend and make you popular, but now I won't."

He pulled his underwear up and backed away from me. "Freak," he said, zipping up his jeans.



I walked home from school that afternoon trying to pretend I was a real angel. I flew along the sidewalk, but it was no use. I didn't have any wings. I didn't see snow white feathers. I saw only my arms, my purple ski jacket sleeves. "You are a Starseed angel," I repeated to myself over and over again. I must have looked like the guy with the shaved head and nose hairs who lived in the bus shelter at Bathurst and Sheppard. *You're just a girl*, a mean voice in my head piped up. "I'm an angel," I whispered back. But my words felt hollow. They blew away with the wind as if I'd never even said them at all.



When I got home, Anton was just leaving. My apartment door shut behind him. We stood in the hallway, sizing each other up.

“Hello, Little One,” he said, patting my hair.  
 “My name is Diana,” I said. I smiled fakely at his cookie face.

He chuckled. “Okay, then.”

He walked away, whistling.

“Freak,” I said under my breath.



Inside, Fancy was pulling on her white cowboy boots. She never wore them in the winter unless she was in a super good mood. “Let’s go to Miracle Mart,” she said. “I feel like chicken. Uncle Anton gave us some money.”

“He’s not my uncle. He doesn’t even know my name.” My jeans were still a bit wet at the knee, irritating me. “I don’t want BBQ chicken,” I shouted, surprising myself. Fancy’s cherry lips formed an *O*. I ran to the bathroom and slammed the door.

I heard our apartment door open. I heard it close. I heard Fancy’s white boots clicking away down the hallway.

I sat on the sink and looked into the mirror. My hair was all tangled and my face was red from the cold walk home. I started doing this thing I did sometimes when I got nervous: I scratched my head really hard until all these white flakes appeared. Then I shook my head furiously, messing my hair around with my hands until all the white flakes fell into the sink and covered it in a thin layer of snow, like the grass had looked at recess. This ritual both calmed me and shamed me. I was dirty, I knew. I wasn’t an angel. Only dirty Earth girls did things like that.

“You suck,” I said to my reflection in the mirror.

I blinked my eyes a few times, willing my Jerry bears to appear. They didn’t.

I thought of Chris’ pink pickle and Anton’s closed eyes and then scratched my hair harder and harder until my scalp stung.



A half-hour later, I was still locked in the bathroom, staring absently into the sink drain. The apartment door creaked open and banged shut. I heard Fancy click the lock into place and slide the chain across the door. I heard her walk over to the bed in the living room. She sat down; the bedsprings moaned. I heard Fancy slide the chicken out of its foil bag.

I smelled the chicken.

My mouth watered.

I imagined tasting the meat.

I jumped down from the sink and slowly opened the bathroom door.

Fancy was on the bed, biting into a chicken wing. Her lips shone with grease. They looked beautiful like that. I noticed that her nails were chipped. One of her boots stood, forlorn and alone, near the bed. Its toe was scuffed black. Her hair was tangled like mine. Hunched over and eating, she looked small, smaller than me. Her legs were crossed beneath her.

I sat down on the edge of the bed.

I reached for the chicken and ripped off a bit of white meat. I chewed and swallowed.

Fancy put her chicken wing down and wiped her hands on the outside of the foil bag.

“I’m sorry,” she said. She looked as if she might cry.

I shook my head. “It’s okay.”

“Do you want to watch *Dallas*?” she asked.

I nodded.

“I’ll get the remote, Little One,” she said.

*My name is Diana*, I thought.

## WATA TIKA DAN BLOOD

LUE PALMER

“Him come to sin on Sunday. Him wait on Kitty and him wait on Peggy. He talking sound like sweet honey in her ear. And he pretty face look like a sweet sticky trail before he snatch them. Just like that. Wicked!” say the first, Hyacinthe.

“Eeeee. Me see done like that before. Is wicked,” say the second, Winsome.

Winsome squat up on a rock with her bare leg ankle-deep in water. Them bare toes pressed under the water that tickle their calf when it splash, wet skirt hoist up in their laps. Them reaching into the water and pulling out of it.

At the soul river, down in the water, where spirit float looking like pools of wet cloth; weaving, bloated and swaying in the water. They floating full like jellyfish around each other. Them colour red. Them colour blue, black, brown, green, purple. They fold in on themselves, floating up like they ready for the Judgement Day.

“Well *Iiii* say he not long for the world see. Long since pass we decide what to do with him now,” say the third, Merle. She was not amused; always concern with comings and goings, rights and wrongs.

“No one can say,” say Hyacinthe. “Wickedness, it come and it go. No saying when or why.”

Them reach into the water, pull out the soul cloths. Them spread the cloths each out and lay them flat. Using them hands to smell the surface. Their wrinkles run across it feeling the fibres hungry, it like the lacing of skin and tissue. They listening, listening for song and greeting. The threads of each cloth chatting out the tune of a lifetime.

Hyacinthe reach into the water and pull out a soul cloth. It small, the thread run short, the weaving cut off before the bottom sew up. She spread it

out and look it over, Winsome and Merle leaning to look at the pickney soul, laying with the water soak up. Hyacinthe look at he life, hanging in the short thread. She read he story sad. She breathe heavy and put he back in the water. “We pray next time he fate be kinder,” Winsome say. They put he soul cloth in the water, and send he gently down the river bend.

Many them put back in the water, bless them, and push them down the river. But other they ring them quick like a snap neck, like pulling the colour from the cloth deh throat. They feed them to the water, sink them down where the river bed swallow them whole. And the river bottom hungry today.

Some soul them fuss and fight on. “This woman never have a kind word for no one,” say Hyacinthe. “The only time she talk to she neighbours when she have gossip!”

“If gossip be a sin then we ought to throw you down the river bottom with her!” say Merle. They fussing and fighting. Winsome snatch the cloth up and push it rough down the river. She grab a stick and jook it round the bend.

Merle sit down pon the rock. She drag up a cloth from the water. It light blue. She sweep it up

## SIX POEMS

BRIAN BRETT

and naked it come. She look it real close. She poke her tongue out and she taste it. She press it to her face the same way she tilt a cheek to the sweet sun. She hold it close to her chest and rock it from side to side.

Hyacinthe and Winsome crane their necks. “Merle, who that you got there?”

Merle press her lips tight. “Nobody!”

“There’s no one so important as a nobody,” Hyacinthe call back. Winsome reach over and drag up the blue cloth and lay him out across the stone. The thread criss and cross. Some part shine in the sun, some part rip and ragged. She spread him out end to end, stretched flat and full. And he lay still, quivering in the water cool breeze.

The three look down upon him. Merle hand twist in her lap as they look – her baby boy come to meet he judgement time. “Get on with it,” they say. Merle begin slow, reading the soul threads, for the story of her son spread out naked across the rock.

“*Huncle he was a sweet boy,*” she begin. “*He like sorrel juice, and Christmas dinner, cool breeze, and riding he bike in the summertime.*” She stop, and Winsome continue.

“*An he grew to be a sweetman, dey says. Someone who can hear the coo of a young woman sigh, and know just where to touch her waist, know just how to wring her wrist, and just how to eye her thigh and fatness to make her walk quick – make her head lower and speak hush.*”

“*He knew a lot about cover curtain and roll-down car window and swimming pool corner. He knew what kinda sweet juice look tasty in the summer and how to spend a dime on a girl and get back a dollar’s worth.*”

“*Huncle lived in three places; number 36 apartment with the clean lawn, sat up by the grand ceme-*

*tery on the pothole road; on the street corner by the Second Drink, the bar with everybody outside yelling and swaying out the loud night time; and in the soft part up a woman legback, in the round wet pupils with dark holes, the hollow parts of her chest that beat quick at the look of snakes coming through the grass.*

“*Huncle was a diplomat, a quick pool player, a gardner and a Sunday school teacher; a Saturday’s child, the sixth of seven children, an uncle to 10 pickney, a lover to three women; a clean-hand man with no dirt under his nails, so he say.*”

Merle run a shaking finger down the thread, where it catch and rip, a ragged hole in the fabric. And Winsome go on reading it:

“*Come Christmas dinner a likkle pickney, dash herself behind window curtain, with belly full of pudding and cakes, sticky fruit fingers running down lace, eyes thick with up-past-bed-time. Behind the window curtain. And this is where she get caught. Huncle, clean-hand man, who like nothing better than a fully belly girl.*”

Merle stagger back, her leg splash in the water, and her body gone stiff. She fall on her heels and them catch her. Her eye roll back and she wail and cry. She wail out to the sky. Shaking her back from head to hip.

What she do to deserve such a son? Such a man as this. Her baby boy come to meet he judgement time.

Merle hand a shake and she reach out to he. Naked soul spread out across the rock. She hold the twisted thread in her hand, fresh and wet like the first day he born. Her mouth gone dry and she look to him.

“Wickedness. It come and it go. No saying when or why,” she say slow.

And then she ring him quick like a snap neck.

## To Your Scattered Bodies Go

*At the round earth’s imagin’d corners, blow  
Your trumpets, angels, and arise, arise  
From death, you numberless infinities  
Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go.*

—John Donne, *Holy Sonnets*

And I awoke in the thunder of those trumpets,  
the bright lights and the sirens of the ass-slappers,  
and I was but one of many awakenings, stars  
numberless and bright beyond the galaxies,  
human and insect, striving and writhing,  
as we came tumbling over the walls  
where we returned, tumbling again, full of arrows  
and bulbuls and radiation, all of us loving  
and dying in our gentled beds, hands held  
by many fingers and the gaze of love, tumbling  
into light and rivers, dodging crocodiles and not  
dodging crocodiles; to your scattered bodies go  
and then shrug them off in the Magellanic cloud  
and the Mindanao deep, life going way back  
to the big bang, and the bang we don’t hear,  
the one that strikes the heart and the lung and perforates  
our spine as we crazy dance into the trenches of lovers  
and weeping children, playing children, lost children,  
the scattered bodies of seasons and life, like pearls  
in the night sky, appearing and disappearing in the fog.

### The Season of the Thrush

The birds, they sing me sweet  
songs of home in their season,  
and tell me where I belong,  
though the years have taken this body  
to strange lands and strange loves.  
I've been wrong and wronged.  
I wouldn't deny any of it,  
the way I can't deny the Swainson's thrush  
investing me with memories –  
those soft, narcotic hallucinations of travel  
and danger and community and conversation.  
I've been a smoker, a snorter, an injector –  
a hard drifter come to the highways –  
hunter of berries and bears  
and a street-tough urchin.  
A dumpster diver  
living by my wits – and theft.  
I was the street strutting  
    fire stealer,  
lighting my fires  
on solitary mountains,  
looking toward some kind of decency,  
    honest at last,  
honest and always wanting  
the sap of a good life;  
until knowing my final place  
in the season of the thrush.

### The Winning

The days belong to us, and the nights,  
and the burnished light in between.  
It's a glory – the fields of molten corpses,  
the morning meadow aflame with poppies.

Monkeys and seahorses and thistledown.  
Sad dogs and lilies and gneiss rocks.  
The foam on the pint of dark dark beer.  
The organic earth of life.  
The urban deserts called parking lots.  
The flash of your eyes,  
blue in the blue blue blue night.

Everything's born. Everything erodes.  
The amoeba slithers across the glass.  
The children cough and die, or laugh and cry.  
All these lives are the prize, the one  
called existence without qualifiers.  
Every death rattle a battle hymn,  
every breath a victory.

### Mutant Child's Story

It used to be that when mutant children  
like me were born deformed, they were left  
out in the rain to die.

Now I walk in the world,  
with the hard cinder of my sorrow  
burnt into my chest.

And though I walk in the lustre  
of the world, I understand why  
they used to leave my kind to die –  
because every day has some rain  
and the suffering is without end.

### We Are the Comet

We are the comet  
that killed the dinosaur.

I look out the window,  
and it's May and the thrush  
has yet to return  
as I turn away from the window  
and look upon my luxury,  
this kitchen of plenty:

coffee from scary cooperatives,  
sugar from brutalized labourers,  
milk from tortured cows,  
salt from the mines,  
bread from GMO grain.

It's a new world, magic  
with plenty and temptation.

Though outside the window  
thousands of songbirds are dying  
in poisoned fields and suburbs  
that were once good marsh.

Our farm's wild orchids have disappeared  
in the twenty years since we inhabited this landscape,  
devoured before they could seed  
by the maws of the invading deer.  
Splendid creatures converted into a pest  
by colonization's rewriting of the landscape.  
But blame is only a variation on stupidity.

I know I am the extinction.

## I Who

I who once was brave.  
 I who once was beautiful.  
 I who strode into the ranks  
 of the ugly and the mean and the twisted,  
 and heaved their biting teeth backwards.

I who once wore my hair down to my hips,  
 and washed and brushed it before battle.  
 I who was knocked into the dust.  
 I who rose again and was knocked down again.  
 I who took the stiletto from my lover, between the first  
 and the second rib, when I was washing my hair,  
 while blinded by my vanity and my crazy purpose.

I who was a fool for love without end.  
 I who was a fool who wanted to save the city  
 that never wanted to be saved.  
 I who once fought the gods  
 while my army sold itself to the corporations  
 and I turned to witness only emptiness behind me.  
 I who was a fool with my marvellous hair  
 tangled in the mud and shit and blood.  
 I who chewed on the crap of my dying.

I who fell for you and would fall again  
 over and over again, falling. I who could  
 only fall into the ecstasy of falling,  
 ravished by my own pathetic death.

*from the novel*  
**GARCIA'S LAUGHTER**

JOANNE ROCHETTE  
*translated from the French by*  
 KATHRYN GABINET-KROO

## CHAPTER 1



Guerillas De Eliseo Velásquez by Fernando Botero

My mother always said that I exaggerate. A lot. I often think about that, now that I'm living in Colombia, because this is a country that exaggerates. When it laughs, it laughs at everything; when it parties, it goes on until morning. The poetry emerges from its earthy depths, lifts you up to the pinnacle of the human soul and turns up even in nursery schools. And the novels by Gabriel García Márquez who invented 10 wars to write about one and dared to draw a parallel between love and cholera elevated exaggeration to a superb form of art. The whole place is like that. A plant isn't happy just being a plant: it grows extraordinary flowers, multitudes of succulent leaves and viny stems that twist around everything and climb and develop and wrap and envelop, and the country couldn't get any greener, so exuberant is its natural environment. Colombia can't just be happy to have the beginning of the Andes, the longest mountain range in the world. Three, it has to have three this country has *three* mountain ranges! Plus it has the ocean on either side, and all the birds and flowers of the world. Resting on a plateau, at an altitude of 2,640 metres, its capital captures my heart: Bogotá. With its bookstores and universities.

### September 2014

When I wake up, I hear one lone tenacious bird, right near my apartment. Bogotá is quiet. You'd think that its eight million inhabitants had fled the city. No delivery trucks, no garbage trucks, no car alarms going off, and what happened to the dogs that bark incessantly? No salsa playing in the background, no *cumbia* or *reggaeton*, no raucous announcements from a radio station. A holiday Monday, so maybe everyone in my neighbourhood is still asleep. From the apartment next door, big bougainvilleas grow over the little patio's low stone wall and spill hundreds of pink corollas onto my side and over a terracotta pot sitting on the ground, on which blooms a single white flower with an intoxicating scent. I stay there for a moment, my nose in its petals. A windless morning. Today Bogotá, so often rainy and cold, is sweltering and an occasional ray of sun pierces the clouds and penetrates my skin. We're so close to the Earth's midline, the place where the two hemispheres meet. The direct sunlight seeps into my bones.

I love the fact that I can be alone to enjoy the tiny terrace on the third floor of my building. I let myself to be carried away by the space and distance. I see before me the ridge of mountains that borders the city; blanketed in forest, the high ramparts in the east loom like a protective barrier. They remind the pitiless concrete city of the soil. Nestled on one of the peaks, the sanctuary of Monserrate watches over us. As I sat on the bus earlier this week, I saw its ancient but unappealing battlements, the stone blackened with grime, and sheet-metal shelters on vacant lots where scrawny dogs roam. But looking to the left from my little terrace, I see ultra-modern buildings rise into the sky and affluent neighbourhoods ascend the mountain. Then the Candelaria, Bogotá's historic neighbourhood where the Spaniards first settled, stretches out around my building – rich colours, bars of turned wood protecting the windows, orange tiles on the roofs, ornate balconies. Colonial architecture frames my daily life as it does the cafés, libraries and museums.

I live in a bright little two-room apartment overlooking the Universidad La Salle, which clings to the mountainside. I can see its large paned windows and through them, the classroom tables and chairs. I love to walk along the streets nearby, with the vibrant paintings that have only recently begun to decorate the city's walls to speak its history, its literature and its people. All kinds of birds can be heard and it suddenly reminds me of the melancholy sound of the flocks of Canada geese that inhabit our fall season, which is now turning the trees red. Here, in the street, there is fruit. Loads of fruit. Always fruit. A country of abundance, earth blessed by the gods, lush forest to nourish and heal, exuberant nature, *desorden*, as a friend's father once said, his eyes serious, almost angry. "Haven't had to get organized like you Northern folk, to guarantee our survival. It's all too easy here with the fruit, the laughter and the flowers. So we do everything any which way, everything upside down, we haven't had to take care of each other." What I say is this: the forest is the jungle, the mountains are the Andes, gold abounds underground, the girls are incredibly beautiful, there are wasps the size of my hand and spiders as big as my head, and finally, the ubiquitous Spanish baroque style loads the ancient monuments with thick spiral ornaments.

### Heart

It seems obvious to me that Fernando Botero, the painter and sculptor who created all those juicy, round shapes, couldn't be anything but Colombian; his enormous men and women, even his cats and birds, represent abundance – overabundance. His subjects always look serious although the artist himself laughs a lot. In a family portrait, the woman relaxes with a fruit in hand while the man holds a crying baby and another one at his feet whines and tugs at him. In the painting *Guérilleros*, cigarette butts lay strewn on the ground, a number of combatants sleep, although one of them, with a scowl on his face and his rifle raised, looks to the left, ready to fight, while to his right, a mischievous snake

drops down from a branch and moves toward him. There's also *Presidente durmiendo*, the portrait of a man who's fallen asleep in his formal attire and ceremonial sash, and another one of a woman – nude, buxom and beautiful – entitled *Colombiana*. There's even a sculpture of a father with his child in his arms, standing triumphant...on the back of his wife as she lies facedown on the ground.

I stayed in a little gallery for quite some time, immobile in front of the work by a young painter, suddenly understanding America in a different way. I was stunned by our ignorance of all that is created and thought south of the Florida peninsula. Two years. I have just moved here for two years and already I am utterly intoxicated by the place. I'm already touching the surface of what I'm looking for and feel that hundreds, no, thousands of layers of meaning are waiting for me, offering themselves up for my consumption.

Here, a daily life filled with kindness and smiles completely enchants me, as it did today when I got lost on the vast university campus and a man walked with me for 15 minutes just to show me the right way to go. He gallantly sheltered me with his umbrella and said, "Come, I'll take you there." This all took place in silence, or almost; I mentioned only that I had recently arrived from Canada and that everything was still new to me. He smiled, saying he was sorry for the lack of signs to help find one's way around.

### Sandra

I'm trying to make connections, to get to know people. During the second week of the term, I meet Sandra in a Comparative History seminar. She is starting her doctorate at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, where she did all her undergraduate work, and dreams of doing postdoctorate work in the United States. I like her sensitivity and gentle ways. She has found me at a time when I am discovering my need for other people. Everyone I talk to says, "Iris, be careful with this, don't do that, don't trust that kind of behaviour." But I like living on

adrenaline; it enables me to function in an environment where I have to constantly observe and think in a different way. Then I can blissfully go home where I can be alone to assimilate everything that's new and do what I came here to do: study.

### At the university

I do not like my thesis advisor. He's arrogant. *Señor* is always in a hurry, he looks down on me, and makes me feel like I'm disturbing him. Today, he tells me that I have to do my research in a way that doesn't work for me. He put me in one of his offices, a welcoming little room with a stained-wood ceiling and two walls of white brick. As I sit at the desk in front of a wide window, tall trees and stretches of greenery fill my field of vision. At my sides are six boxes of documents that he wants me to scrutinize, the minutes of coffee workers' union meetings from the beginning of the 20th century.

Last week, the methodology seminar threw me into cold epistemological discussions and I had to endure the humiliation of being unable to demonstrate nuanced thinking or add subtleties. I had to suffer the other students' perplexed faces when they couldn't figure out what I was trying to say. *Shit!* I must have made a mistake with one of my conjugations, or maybe it was just my occasionally lamentable pronunciation that screwed everything up, or maybe it was two or three words that the others didn't recognize, even though they were very simple terms, but I have the very bad habit of putting accents in the wrong places and that wrecks everything in Spanish. No one understands anything at all when the stress isn't on the right letter. So I sought refuge in my favourite library, Luis Ángel Arango, which welcomed me with its light, its pale wood, its exhibition of historical photographs printed on immense fabric panels, and all its tantalizing lectures. Located right near my apartment, at the bottom of my street, it presides over a space that warms my soul.

For a few days, I've been busy devising a file so that I can start examining the minutes of coffee

workers' union meetings. So many documents from which to glean something significant. I decided to use content analysis to draw meaning from the words, extract the facts, and bring out the emotional aspect. After a quick reading of the texts, I began considering the logical categories. Tomorrow, I will dive head first into the thick of it, going page by page, evaluating, separating the words according to category.

"My parents also come from gold-mining country," I casually said to *Señor* Thesis Advisor, one day when a little work discussion managed to make its way into his busy schedule. "I'm talking about northwestern Quebec. My great-grandparents cut down the trees to open up that frigid, snow-covered land, and those colonizers of the interior could count only on their imagination for survival because they had less than nothing. Among the pioneers, sensitive souls and fragile bodies couldn't withstand the harsh life and hard work. Only the sturdiest stayed – and those who laughed the most. My ancestors were giants. At the goldmine, my grandfather came into contact with the Englishman and was denied a promotion because he didn't speak the proprietor's language. Then he was injured, his arm eaten by a machine he was trying to de-ice, mercilessly gnawed away, the machine making so much noise that no one heard his cries. So he decided to take his meagre sick leave and go find something better. Today, you'd say he was resilient. His body broken by capitalism, he decided to head for the city. When I learned this part of my own history, I wanted to study History with a capital H."

"I see," replied my thesis advisor.

### *Joyful crowd*

Today I decided to take a walk on the Séptima, the long artery reserved for pedestrians on Sunday afternoons. The city's residents stroll amidst the many enterprising types who have come to earn some money. On the sidewalk, these self-starters set up a square piece of fabric, and that's their business, their market stall. One sells hats, another sells old books,

yet another sells socks. A few have a wooden display case mounted on wheels and equipped with two handles so that it can be pulled. This one here offers a mountain of mangoes and *lulos*. That one there has hundreds of perfectly cut wedges of melon laid out on a pile of coconuts; a third prepares the coconuts with the ends open to show their crisp white flesh. The more fortunate come with their juicers to press fresh juice on site, or a coffee machine to serve you a *tinto*.

The weather is sunny and mild, and Bogotá is relaxing today. A Michael Jackson song and a Pink Floyd instrumental take turns with *vallenato* and *cumbia* music as I move along past the mimes, dancers, artists, cut-fruit stalls and a group of chess-players seated around a table. The endless comings and goings of the people on both sides of the street and the full-throated cries promoting some product quickly make my head spin. But all of a sudden, a lively rhythm grabs my full attention. I look for its source, caught up in its perfect beats. Dazzled, I approach and in the middle of the crowd, I soon see the musician at work. His features are so hardened that they wipe away his beauty. His entire face works to clench his teeth. His rage, completely under control, produces a magnificent rhythm. I am struck by the despair lurking behind the young man's jaw. In front of him sit five plastic buckets turned upside down, and to his right are four metal pot covers. His hands hold real drumsticks; he is an extraordinary percussionist. When I put money into his bowl, his eyes seem even sadder, even darker, and I watch him for a moment: he should be handsome. He's tall and thin...no, I see that under his T-shirt he is skinny and he is swimming in his dirty jeans. His calloused hands fly over his make-shift drum kit and it seems that no one hears what a great drummer he is. Concentrated, zealous, he handles his drumsticks with so much skill; he twirls them in the air without losing a beat, even adding a few surprises to keep us on our toes. I am shocked that such a giant is on the street playing on saucepans.

### *Seen from above or below?*

The 5 o'clock sun strikes the mountains behind Bogotá, bathing them in warm colours. The dark clouds, which give the sky a dramatic cast, are somewhat packed together, creating a background that amplifies the gold of the sunbeams that have just emerged before nightfall, which comes quite suddenly around 6 p.m. Sandra and I walk to the supermarket to buy vegetables, pasta, meat and toilet paper. The shopping cart looks like a suitcase on wheels, but even when I pull the handle out as far as it will go, it's too short for my body.

The young girl at the cash isn't smiling. She says what she has to say – hello, do you have our points card, thank you, goodbye. Back outside on the street, it's already dark and the rain falls heavily, but the young musicians continue to play.

I want to help my friend prepare the meal, but she won't let me. I begin reading her an article that the professor mentioned today and ask her what she thinks. In a few words, she demolishes the position of the journalist, who has denounced various urban development projects.

"Why do you want to do your research on the workers?" she asks.

As usual, she is looking up at me. Sandra often has her head down. And when she looks at people, she raises only her eyes, her luminous and gentle doe-eyes. Her short hair is thick and heavy, and when she runs her two hands through it, her bangs briefly stand straight up in the air. Her wide mouth stretches into a point on either side, as if she always has a little smile on her face. Her flared nostrils sit at the base of a sharp nose. She continues watching me without saying a word.

"It started a long time ago," I say.

"What started?"

"I was studying new schools of thought about the Renaissance. Then I just decided I'd had enough. I can't quite put my finger on it, but I just felt I had to get away from European history and the history of the elite."

"Oh...well, I love to go sit in the Santa Clara or the San Francisco," says Sandra of Bogotá's beautiful 17th-century churches. "It's peaceful and they're so majestic. Art history used to be my passion and I wanted to dedicate my life to the Latin American baroque."

"Bogotá is majestic."

"It's awful."

"It's a masterpiece."

"A masterpiece," Sandra says, echoing me.

"Sitting on a plateau. And the setting, with its backdrop an immense mountain range like stage scenery. Kind of strange to build a capital city at such a high altitude and not by the ocean or a river!"

"Iris, you think like a European. Bogotá, the plain, the *sabana*...the Muiscas had chosen it long before the Spaniards arrived. And the heart of the city is just a bit higher up on the mountain so that the whole savannah can be watched and controlled. This place was the most logical for the Indigenous populations: we're right in the middle of their territory, their economy, and their riches."

"Okay."

Then there was the Spanish Catholic foundation: Santa Fe de Bogotá. I wonder why Sandra abandoned her specialization in Latin American baroque. When I ask her, she doesn't answer. "It's okay, you don't have to tell me."

"No, I'll tell you."

I wait patiently. Sandra finishes cutting up the vegetables. She's thinking as she looks at the meat to be cooked. "You're sure you don't want me to help?"

"I'm sure," she says, still concentrating.

I realize that I should have bought some beer. I get up, pour us each a glass of water and watch as two cats slowly walk across the tile roofs just below the window of Sandra's little studio. I open the window for some air as Sandra puts the meat on to cook in the sizzling oil. "I was blown away by the baroque cathedrals' magnificence. I go often. The sculptures and paintings are so rich. The ornamentation is almost too much but it's incredible refined. The baroque is all about the emotion. I wondered if

these temples to God were built to make us feel small or to inspire us to greatness.”

“So how did they make *you* feel?”

Sandra moves her hands forward. When she has something to say, her hands always do the talking. I’m struck by how slender her fingers are. Her whole body is delicate and her long fingers give proof. Each time she wants to emphasize an idea, she stretches her hands out, palms and fingers pressed flat against each other, and used sides of her hand to clearly punctuate her assertion. “Saturated in beauty. And flooded with humility.”

“That’s the mark of a masterpiece,” I say softly. “That’s what they make us feel.”

Sandra turns back to stir the meat. I think about nature, the spectacular landscapes that bowl us over inside and then move us outward, giving us the impetus to come out of our shell and thrive. Sandra looks back at me, opening her hands as if in offering. “What else could I have done?”

“I don’t get it,” I say.

“I was too subjective with respect to my topic. I have faith but I’m angry at the Church. And the baroque is too intimately tied to the Church. So I realized that studying Women’s History was a better fit.”

Someone rings the doorbell. Sandra goes to open the door, has a quick discussion with her neighbour, and they laugh. Then she invites him to join us. She introduces us: Juan Paulo, Iris. With a big smile, he says a few words to me in French. Then he goes back to his apartment to get some fruit and returns to make fresh juice to drink with our meal. He took a degree in communication to become a theatre critic and is now completing a *maestría* in translation. Sandra tells me that Juan Paulo also writes a column for a big newspaper in Bogotá. I have a hard time keeping up because he speaks so quickly. My ears are better at catching the Spanish syllables now, but I still get mixed up when the conjugations flow one after the other, when I miss one or two of the sentence’s most important words or when I’m unfamiliar with a sentence structure. If I’m

tired, the whole thing becomes a buzzing jumble of sounds and I can’t make out what’s being said. Strangely though, it becomes a kind of music. I feel the rhythm and hear the tonalities, but I take the meaning from whatever my fantasy of the moment suggests. Juan Paulo doesn’t gesticulate. I realize that I understand better when people speak with their body. And when he puts his hand in front of his mouth, when he takes a bite but wants to go on with his thought, I don’t understand at all. I wasn’t aware that I was reading lips.

“What do you think of Colombians?” he asks me.

“We always ask that question,” says Sandra. “Why does that always come up?”

“Because we’re obsessed with the label that binds us together. You know, Iris – the violence, the drugs, and all that.”

“Why make such a big deal about what people think of us? It’s a sign of weakness,” says Sandra.

Juan Paulo’s hair isn’t long but a single curl falls sensually over his cheek. His high cheekbones accentuate his dark eyes. His full lips move rapidly, his body radiates comfort and his strong hands rest flat on the table. He takes another bite. I tell them how calm and gentle I find Colombians.

“Because you’re a foreigner,” he tells me. “We’re not like that with each other. How come you came here to do your PhD.?”

“I wanted to experience America in a different way.”

Silence fills the room. Juan Paulo stares at me.

“That’s what you came to find in a country torn apart by civil war?”

“It’s not a civil war,” says Sandra.

Juan Paulo insists that you have to call a spade a spade. Sandra talks about the quest for democracy. She leans toward me. “Montreal is rich, modern, open to the world – why would you think you could find something better here?” she asks.

“Because you’ve known for a long time that there are a number of different peoples in America.”

“And you didn’t?” asks Juan Paulo.

“It’s like there were only two categories: North and South.”

“Oh, I get it!” he exclaims as he takes another bite.

“The South is seen as one solid, completely uniform bloc...not like us Quebeckers.”

“Yes, I understand perfectly. That’s the perception of developed countries. But even so, why Colombia?”

“I knew that the Université Nationale was an excellent school.”

“The best! But there’s also Mexico, Chile...” replies Juan Paulo.

I try to explain to them. Quebec, its French-speaking population surrounded by the Anglo-Saxon ocean of North America...I find it hard to sum it all up and feel disheartened. I lower my eyes.

“That seems a bit philosophical,” Sandra says.

“I’ll bet it’s because you fell in love with a Colombian,” says Juan Paulo.

I smile, not saying a word.

“That is *so* macho,” replies Sandra. “As if she couldn’t have plans of her own.”

“No, I didn’t fall in love with a Colombian.”

I hesitate for a second and stare at my hands. They want to know.

So I tell them. I was stuck up to my neck in my doctorate on the history of workers in Quebec. At university, I had developed a passion for a period when things were happening, when the struggle against the political and social conservatism suffocating Quebec was just getting off the ground, when men were coming out of the mines and beginning to demand their dignity, when artists were chipping away cultural narrow-mindedness, when leaders were starting to think big and to dream of claiming more than just their little loaf of bread. But after three years of patiently pouring through archives and analyzing battles that were perpetually ignored, I was stagnating.

I met Francisco during an evening spent with friends in Montreal. A new Colombian friend had invited me to watch videos of demonstrations at

which the people’s anger exploded in Bogotá. I’d told him that we hate violence. Nothing extreme ever happens in our part of the world. Our most recent rebellion was even called the *Quiet* Revolution. Before coming to Canada, Francisco had been beaten up for having dared to publish a highly critical text. I was so afraid. But I told myself over and over that my job involved shedding light on the roots, the principles of both evil and beauty. I told myself over and over that my research was not concerned with the armed conflict that was tearing Colombia apart. No. My focus was on the period before *La Violencia*. 1948: the fatal year when riots broke out in Bogotá. 1948, the *Refus global* in Montreal.

I was going back and forth in my mind between the differences in our histories when I had a stroke of genius as I was riding my bike along a deserted Saint Laurent Boulevard after a boozy evening. Pedalling under the stars, I had a lightning-swift vision. I became aware the diversity of peoples living in the southern part of the continent. My brain was suddenly making connections: the indigenous peoples conquered, like us, yes, the same European colonization, with Christianity convinced of its superiority, natural resources in abundance, like us, cheap labour exploited, export economies, then the giant United States setting the tone and making the rest of the world dance to its tune when it wasn’t firing warning shots or firing a cannon. Suddenly, yes, my idea took shape: the thought that I had to go see this twin America for myself, to discover different ways of being human. A necessary verticality.

So my thesis turned into an analysis comparing Quebec and Colombia. I would go to the Université Nationale in Bogotá to study workers during the 1920s, ’30s and ’40s.

“If you ask me, I’d say there were also some fluids exchanged,” said Juan Paulo with a wink.

“Well, if you ask *me*, I’d say she needed Bogotá,” Sandra retorted.

Yes, I *am* scared. Colombia’s kidnappings, assassinations and fighting, and yes, I know, its drug

cartels...these clichés haunt me, despite my best efforts, despite the stability that the country is slowly gaining, the safety of most of its departments, and the tourists that flock to it. Not to mention Colombia's literature, its intellectual vitality. Francisco had explained all its rhythms and its musical instruments, which vary according to region; he gave me all the words for its art and the colours that inspire it. When I got back home in the wee hours of the morning, in the milky light foreshadowing a blazing hot day in Montreal, the face of a man appeared to me. A very old man who said not a word but who laughed, exhaling his tender mirth in my direction.

The telephone is ringing. While Sandra goes to answer, Juan Paulo questions me about my research.

Sandra hangs up and glances over at me. "What's he telling you now?"

"Quebec history is really exciting," says Juan Paulo, with a casual smile.

"We don't have much in common with the baroque, do we!?" I say.

"Why the baroque?" he asks.

"That's what I was planning to study," Sandra replies.

"And why didn't you?"

"Too many curves and arches."

"Too many clever protuberances?"

I look at Sandra and continue. "I guess it could make your head spin."

"That's it exactly," she says, moving her hands in front of her as if preparing to add something.

We wait eagerly for what she'll say next. She begins to wiggle her fingers, drawing gentle waves. "Basically," she says, "the baroque is associated with religion, but it's a voluptuous, carnal religion."

"Ha, then I'm shocked that you didn't go ahead with it," says Juan Paulo with another wink.

"Right, right," Sandra replies.

Juan Paulo doesn't comment but stares at her intensely. And I pay close attention to Juan Paulo. Sandra has lowered her eyes. She runs her hands through her hair so that we can see her slender neck. I'm sure that she is the object of his desire. He raises

an eyebrow as he catches me watching. He knows that I understand what's going on. Sandra raises her eyes to look at me. I return her gaze. Our silence catches us all off guard but no one puts an end to it.

I can't stop staring at the shiny black ringlet hanging on Juan Paulo's cheek. Slowly he says, "It's true, the baroque style is very sensual."

### *Camille*

After a few weeks here, I feel the urge to talk to my sister. She tells me several times how happy she is to hear from me. I tell her of all my discoveries and the connections that jump out at me, now that my perspective has changed and my mind has settled into a different world. Our parents come from gold country, I tell her. Beneath their feet, the veins in the rock nourished the souls of greedy men: gold. Gold from Abitibi, Camille. You decided to go back, to leave Montreal, as if a piece of your life was still attached to our ancestors. Unwittingly, or maybe driven by my subconscious, I also chose a gold country. You ask me why I left, dear sister. You often accuse me of running away. You insist that I won't work things out by leaving my homeland.



### *Heat*

"I love the feeling of being drunk," Alina tells me in a soft voice. Her honesty is disconcerting. Eduardo has been nestled up against her since the evening began. I'm sure they've already become lovers. They arrived a little earlier with my friend; they are drinking and they ply me with drinks. Alina's mother is babysitting her two children since Alina loves to go out and their father is always working. Eduardo laughs happily. He is passing through Colombia and will be returning to Bolivia tomorrow. Mario, who has known Eduardo for close to ten years, keeps trying to get his friend to talk because he's so funny. During our discussion of topics both serious and light, Mario puts in his two cents, his comments growing wittier the more he drinks.

Eduardo is gentle and strong; Alina, short and round, with chubby hands that move sensually. She enjoys moving slowly and speaks with a drawl. Protected from the cold, damp mountain air, I float in the *Galería's* heat, thinking little and listening a lot. Clara comes to check on us, tells us how much she likes us, and asks if we're okay or if we need anything, all while caressing my back and Mario's as the two of us sit side by side.

At the other table, Sylvio is speaking loudly, making jokes, and explaining his thoughts on the government with a generous sprinkling of big words. Then he drinks some more and says, "Iris, you've come to a country full of crazy people! Why would you do that? We love you, you know. But you're crazy to come to a country full of crazies. Bring her a beer, do you have a beer, Iris?" I already have one... "Not a problem, bring her another one anyway!" Mario holds my hands and plants a little kiss on my cheek.

### *Under ground*

I go into the building and suddenly feel intimidated. We hardly know each other. Santiago invited me over and I quickly accepted, for some unknown reason. But when I think it over carefully, as the elevator rises up to the 19th floor, I realize that instinct drove me to say yes. I had to hurry to get here, I'm overheated because I walked a great distance at a quick pace, and when I entered the building's luxurious foyer, the security guard gave me a look of suspicion and authority. I had to give him my name, telephone number and an ID number. I had only my Quebec driver's licence with me, which seemed to be sufficient, and he wrote down the number in his big ledger although I don't know if he understood any of it. I had to specify which apartment I was visiting and he made a call. He gave my name and then hung up, telling me that no, no one was expecting any Iris Martin. I stared wide-eyed and stunned, but now I wonder if it wasn't just a manipulation of some sort and had he really called? So I repeated the apartment number and restated my

host's name, told the guard again that I had been invited. He called again and this time indicated that everything was fine, *señora*, the elevator is to the left, have a good evening.

Upstairs, the door opens. I'm in a sweat. He welcomes me, adding "Make yourself at home," and I quickly take off my coat. As he ushers me in, I immediately see his apartment's elegant main room, and at the back, an amazing view of the city lights. He opens the big sliding glass doors and leads me onto the concrete balcony where a hammock hangs in a corner and numerous flowers and green plants enhance the space. He turns to go back inside to finish preparing our meal, telling me to take my time. I stay outside, leaning into the Bogotá night. The breeze is refreshing and I let myself drift in the sparkling city's magic. When I go back in, I go to the counter and he invites me to sit on one of the red stools. From behind the island in his state-of-the-art kitchen, Santiago smiles at me. He is extremely good-looking. I notice his perfectly bright-white teeth and the dark olive skin of a mixed-race Colombian. So much kindness in his intelligent eyes! "So how's it going for you in Bogotá?" he asks. I try to muster my best Spanish but immediately find in his words a generous familiarity, an emotional comfort that puts me at ease. I relax. He asks me a lot of questions but he talks easily, too, about his world and his life.

His movements are careful and supple. Each food becomes precious in his hands. He gracefully opens the avocado, removes the pit, separates the flesh from the peel, and cuts it into quarters that he delicately places on a plate. He has already prepared the greens and sliced thin strips of cheese. To complete the dish, he carefully washes an apple, which he puts in front of me, asking me to cut it into little cubes. On a wooden cutting board, he calmly lays two *lulos*, a kiwi and a well-washed mango, and then takes out the blender to reduce the fruit to a purée. He adds water and a pinch of sugar. With consummate skill, Santiago crushes slices of plantain and fries them up into thin discs. The meat has been

simmering for quite some time. Political questions fly back and forth between us. We discuss shady administrations, the quality of education, and the practical difficulties encountered by universities.

“At home,” I say, “the government throws open the doors to the great North so that mining companies can come exploit the subsoil without offering the people any real advantages.”

Santiago smiles. “Wait a sec,” he says. He takes time to prepare our plates, put everything in order and turn off the kitchen light. We sit at the glass table in the middle of the room, near a large canvas, a red and gray abstract painting.

“Do you have any idea what’s going on in this country?” Santiago asks me calmly as he takes a first bite.

“Well...yes, Colombia has gold, oil, copper, and nickel too, I think...”

“Plenty of cases have come to light over the past few years. It’s not always a pretty story.”

“I’m listening...”

“This is deadly serious. Destruction of the land and ecosystems, depletion of the labour force, clashes with different communities, threats...”

“Oh...”

“And in some cases, Canadian mining companies are at the root of the problem.”

I freeze. Santiago goes on.

“See, the previous government was willing to do whatever it took to attract foreign investment. No one wanted to come to Colombia, because of the danger. So the State offered miners incredible advantages and made far fewer demands than did, say, Chile, Brazil, or Argentina.”

I remember a few articles that appeared in Montreal’s newspapers.

He hesitates, keeps looking at his plate; I see the tension in his jaw. Then he leans forward to rest on his elbows and stares into my eyes. “I have a friend who studied geology, like me. After a few years of working for mining companies, he gave it all up. He was disgusted and decided to provide evidence.”

I meet his gaze, although I feel uncomfortable.

“I know you’re going to ask why I of all people would still work for a foreign company.”

“You have to earn a living.”

“And as you can see, I’m doing that quite well.”

“That’s for sure.”

“My education changed my whole life. I can travel, live, explore all kinds of things.”

“Yes, and?”

“Direct confrontation is not my thing and neither is being threatened or becoming a martyr. I prefer to work from the inside, helping to change minds. But as you can see, my friend is going through something pretty intense.”

“I don’t doubt it.”

“No. You really have no clue. He’s the only one who can explain it to you. If you care to listen.”

Worried, I look at him.

“After the publication of a few articles where he exposes the abuses, some people broke into his place and trashed his computer. He kept at it, writing a series of articles for a big newspaper, *El Espectador*. Everyone was shocked when they learned about the problem. Then two months ago, as he was leaving home, two men rode by on a motorcycle shot him in the leg.”

I feel a rush of fear in the pit of my stomach.



## *The Sunflower in the City of Roses*

*Poems by Alex-Andrei (Alexei) Ungurenasu*

When you get to know Alex-Andrei (Alexei) Ungurenasu, you quickly realize you are in the company of a poet through and through. Conversationally, his words are slow and precise, affording you that pensive, measured, and careful tone. You might even wonder if you’re not speaking with a philosopher instead of poet, but soon realize: both.

This 22-year-old fourth-year University of Windsor student is someone with a message. He is someone who has something to say. And he backs up those words with action. Alexei works with the Vanguard Youth Arts Collective in the City of Windsor, and also volunteers at the Art Gallery of Windsor and other arts groups in the city. Most recently, he was named Windsor’s Youth Poet Laureate.

Born in Romania, Alexei landed in Toronto at the age of 12, and four years ago moved to study at the University of Windsor. In an interview with *The Windsor Star*, he described himself as “an outsider-become-insider.” By that, he means that as a writer, his curiosity about the historic and cultural significance of a city situated, as Windsor is, on the border, this has led him on a journey to root out what the story is in this part of Canada. It has meant listening and paying attention – something he was forced to do in learning a new language when he left Eastern Europe. Now his attention is upon the subtleties of culture, geography, history, and attitudes. It’s finding out what defines a population that has one foot in the Canadian way of life, and one foot in the American way of life. Alexei has set out to unlock that in his poetry. In the poem “South of Detroit” he addresses that dichotomy, telling us that he is “blessed by coincidences, connections (and) contradictions ...” and that from where he stands – someone whose life is rooted in another country – he is the “sunflower/in the city of roses.” True, indeed.

Alexei’s poetry on the surface appears simple, straightforward, declarative. The lyrical falls somewhere in between the words and the message, but this is no dreamy-eyed poet or philosopher. Alexei draws upon mythology, philosophy, intellectual curiosity, witty exchanges, and finds ways to root his poems in cultural obsessions ever present in the 21st century – rap music, film, technology, social justice, contemporary zines. There are moments, too, when the poet is wise beyond his years:

*The bear and the hunter  
Walk in unison, tracing each other’s  
Histories – one with grace, one with  
Power; one in stillness, one indiscreetly.*

When you read this, you need to pause, look up from the page, and take in the language, see it the way he does, the way he leads your eye and your ear beyond the complicated nuances of language.

—MARTY GERVAIS

## Callisto

Marching, the ignorant boot stomps  
Life away from the earth, while the  
Conscious foot steps tenderly,  
Fine blades between her toes  
Splashing dew, sweat droplets,  
Breath of renewal in her soles.

If sleep ponders a reflection in the  
Dirt, then lucidity is quick  
Sand. Predators know it well: you are  
What you try to conceal, a series of  
Efforts erasing the evidence that  
You ate your heart out.

Inevitably, every morning poses  
An awakening; every passing  
Leaves its mark. The bear and the hunter  
Walk in unison, tracing each other's  
Histories – one with grace, one with  
Power; one in stillness, one indiscreetly.

The same force in the powder,  
In the paw: the earth welcomes  
Dust and bone, pressure and whisper,  
Shots and shrieks, yet never buries  
Either for the sake of forgetting;  
And every graveless child cues another misstep.

## South of Detroit

I'm blessed by coincidences  
connections, contradictions

Everything that happens  
between two red neon signs

I'll show you  
what it's like

To be a sunflower  
in the city of roses

### Mixed Feelings

My singers shine acoustic  
Over the silky pile of garments  
That we built

My lovers paint with glamour  
In a dusty sea-foam closet  
Where we hid

My rappers clout with swagger  
Every chance to digress  
That I missed

My garden whispers flowers  
From Bucharest to Berlin  
Where I slipped

### The German Rock

In a torpid train car I catch a glimpse  
Of blonde and blue returning dreams  
Covertly sipping the last drops of mead  
I ponder if Carpathian evergreens ever breed  
Cynicism in Communism-tired homes  
Overlooking German-owned stores  
Where teens buy bottles of vodka and wine  
Dog leashes, frozen pizza, and good times  
To spill and share on suburban-cabin oak  
With old neighbours in lax balcony smoke.

morning song

I met a summer's day  
in February

Watched it burn me  
to the ground

You should've seen the light  
that evening

All the shadows  
it had sprung.

I've held an autumn boy  
since February

Watched him kiss  
your velvet dress

Rain keeps my dreams  
still like January

When I hadn't  
met him yet.

# DIAMOND NIGHTS

## BETH MOON

*lines from*

WHEN LILACS LAST IN THE DOORYARD BLOOM'D

*by Walt Whitman*

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,  
And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night...

O powerful western fallen star!  
O shades of night — O moody, tearful night!

In the swamp in secluded recesses,  
A shy and hidden bird is warbling a song.

Solitary the thrush,  
The hermit withdrawn to himself, avoiding the settlements,  
Sings by himself a song,  
Song of the bleeding throat...

As I walk'd in silence the transparent shadowy night,

As I saw you had something to tell as you bent to me night after night,  
As you droop'd from the sky low down as if to my side, (while the other stars all look'd on.)  
As we wander'd together the solemn night, (for something I know not what kept me from sleep.)  
As the night advanced, and I saw on the rim of the west how full you were of woe,  
As I stood on the rising ground in the breeze in the cool transparent night,  
As I watch'd where you pass'd and was lost in the netherward black of the night...

Sing on, sing on you gray-brown bird,  
Sing from the swamps, the recesses, pour your chant from the bushes  
Victorious song, death's outlet song, yet varying ever-altering song,  
As low and wailing, yet clear the notes, rising and falling, flooding the night,  
Sadly sinking and fainting, as warning and warning, and yet again bursting with joy,  
Covering the earth and filling the spread of the heaven,  
As that powerful psalm in the night I heard from recesses,  
Passing, I leave thee lilac with heart-shaped leaves,  
I leave thee there in the door-yard, blooming, returning with spring...













*Branches reach for the light. On the opposite side of the sky, Earth's shadow is rising. There is a middle zone where splendour comes into being, where two different realities mingle and blur. If magic exists anywhere, it is here.*

Our relationship to the wild has always played an important role in my work. This series was inspired by two fascinating, scientific studies that connect tree growth with celestial movement and astral cycles.

Researchers from the University of Edinburgh have shown that trees grow faster when high levels of cosmic radiation reach the earth's surface, concluding that cosmic radiation impacts tree growth even more than annual temperature or rainfall. Secondly, renowned researcher, Lawrence Edwards, found that tree buds changed shape and size rhythmically, in regular cycles all through winter, directly correlating to the moon and planets.

David Milarch, founder of the Archangel Ancient Tree Archive, has said, "Trees are solar collectors. I believe energies inside the earth are transmuted and transmitted into the cosmos by the trees, so the trees are like antennas, senders, and receivers of earth energies and stellar energies."

This work marked the transition not only from film to digital capture but also from black-and-white to colour. Up until this point the majority of my work was done with a medium format film camera, but the long exposure time needed to photograph at night was not possible with film. Evolving digital technology has produced cameras with features that accommodate these conditions such as lower noise option levels and higher ISO settings.

I used a wide-angle lens and an ISO of 3200 to 6400. Exposures up to 30 seconds allowed enough light to enter the lens without noticeable star movement – and it is a wonderful result how time exposures blend the boundaries between the visible and the invisible. And a challenging part of this photographic experience was that each location required considerable experimentation and different lighting techniques.

*– Beth Moon*

# Contributors

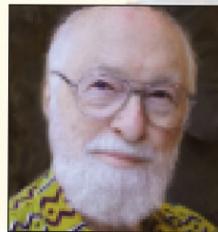
## RESTORING RITA LETENDRE

RITA LETENDRE was born in Drummondville, Quebec, in 1928. In the late '40s/early '50s she quickly became an important figure in the new generation of abstract painters that succeeded the Automatist movement, and by the '60s she was participating in exhibitions of Canadian painting abroad. In 1969, with sculptor Kosso Eloul, she settled in Toronto, and contributed enormously to the artistic life of the city. Rita Letendre's public art was once ubiquitous throughout Toronto, and there is a recent movement to recognize and restore it. *photo courtesy Gallery Gevik*

## FEATURES



RAY ELLENWOOD of Toronto has appeared many times over four decades in *EXILE Quarterly*, and has translated books for Exile Editions by Claude Gauvreau, Jacques Ferron, Marie-Claire Blais, and Gilles Hénault, as well as the complete *Refus global* manifesto; Exile Editions also published his seminal *Egrogore: A History of the Montreal Automatist Movement* (translated in 2014 into French by Jean Antonin Billard). He continues to publish articles and translations, mostly concerning Automatism and related subjects. *photo by Gabriela Campos*



## DIAMOND NIGHTS



BETH MOON of the San Francisco Bay Area is an American-born photographer who has gained international recognition for her large-scale, richly toned platinum prints – but in this issue of *EXILE*, we present a unique series produced in colour. Moon's work has appeared in more than 80 solo and group shows in nine countries, and her works are in numerous public and private international collections, and presented in five books: *Between Earth and Sky*,

*Ancient Trees: Portraits of Time*, *Ancient Trees: Ancient Skies*, *Baobab*, and *La Lange Verte*  
bethmoon.com    instagram.com/bethmoonphotography

## ENCOUNTERS

### A CANADIAN RE(PER)SPECTIVE: RESURRECTION LOST. THE PRIME MINISTERS.

BARRY CALLAGHAN is the well-known novelist, poet, and person of letters who has been included in every major Canadian anthology, and his fiction and poetry have been translated into seven languages. His 13 books include *The Hogg Poems and Drawings*, *The Black Queen Stories*, *The Way the Angel Spreads Her Wings*, *When Things Get Worst*, *A Kiss Is Still a Kiss*, *Barrelhouse Kings*, *Between Trains*, and *Beside Still Waters*. *photo by Mark Tearle*



WILLIAM (BILL) RONALD (1926-1998) had a unique style and personality, and in 1957 he held his first solo show at the Kootz Gallery, in New York, and was immediately collected by the major American art institutions. In Toronto, he was a founding member of the group Painters Eleven. He also became a television personality, as presenter on the program *The Umbrella*, and then with his own conversation show. He painted and sold successfully until the day he died. *photo by John Reeves*



## ENCOUNTERS

### THE ACERBIC EYE: RASCALITY

TERRY MOSHER (a.k.a. Aislin) of Montreal is often called Canada's nastiest political cartoonist. Over the course of his career he has frequently appeared as a commentator on many of Canada's major television and radio programs, and is also a regular speaker on the topics of humour, history, and the importance of cartooning as a communications tool. [www.aislin.com](http://www.aislin.com) *photo by Terry Mosher*



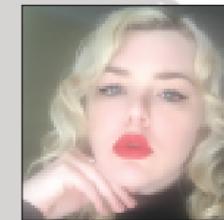
### LAUREATE'S PICK: THE SUNFLOWER IN THE CITY OF ROSES

ALEX-ANDREI (ALEXEI) UNGURENASU is a Romanian-Canadian artist living in Windsor, Ontario, and they are currently the city's Youth Poet Laureate for 2021-23. They are a member of the Vanguard Youth Arts Collective, and they often run events with the Art Gallery of Windsor and the University of Windsor's Humanities Research Group. *photo by Alexei Ungurenasu*



MARTY GERVAIS is a writer, photographer, and first Poet Laureate of Windsor, Ontario, where he also lives. He is the recipient of numerous awards including the Harbourfront Festival Prize and the Queen's Jubilee Medal. His most successful book is the Canadian bestseller *The Rumrunners*. *photo by Dax Melmer, Windsor Star*

## PROSE & POETRY



KATHERINE ALEXANDRA HARVEY is a writer and poet from St. John's, Newfoundland. She is the Executive Director of ReLit, and the Founder and Editor of *ReLit Magazine*. She has been nominated for the Carter V. Cooper Award, The Writer's Alliance's Fresh Fish Award and the Governor General's History Award. Harvey's first novel, *Quiet Time*, will be released in 2022.

OLIVE SENIOR is the Poet Laureate of Jamaica, 2021-2024. In her latest book, *Pandemic Poems: First Wave*, she exploits the language of Covid-19 to interrogate the global experience of 2020; she continues to write and post on social media "Pandemic Poems: Second Wave," as she did with the first. Olive is the prize-winning author of 19 books of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and children's literature. She lives in Toronto and Jamaica.



DARLENE MADOTT is the author of seven books, including *Stations of the Heart* and *Making Olives and Other Family Secrets*. She has twice-won the Bressani Literary Award, and has been shortlisted for the \$15,000 Carter V. Cooper Short Fiction Award three times, among others. Her stories have also been widely anthologized. A lawyer who practiced for over three decades, *Dying Times* will be her eighth book – a fictional novel exploring the last journey, and inspired by aspects of her legal background. She lives in Toronto. [DyingTimes.com](http://DyingTimes.com) *photo by Vincenzo Pietropaolo*

## PROSE & POETRY



**LAUREN B. DAVIS** was born in Montreal, and now divides her time between Princeton, New Jersey, and a log cabin on a creek in the mountains of Pennsylvania. Her works include seven novels and two collections of short stories. She has been longlisted for the Scotiabank Giller Prize and ReLit Award, and shortlistings for the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize and the CBC Short Fiction Prize.

LaurenBDavis.com *photo by Helen Tansey*

**LEANNE MILECH** is a writer and former lawyer living in Toronto. Her short fiction has appeared in *O*, *The Oprah Magazine*, *The New York Times*, and *The Globe and Mail*, among others. In 2018, she won Exile's Carter V. Cooper \$10,000 Short Fiction Award in the Emerging Writer category. Leanne holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Guelph and is now an English professor at Humber College, where she serves as Essays Editor of *The Humber Literary Review*.



*photo by Tyler Bowditch*



**LUE PALMER** is a writer of literary fiction, non-fiction and poetry, and is a recipient of the Octavia E. Butler Memorial Scholarship, and an alumni of Clarion West 2021. Published in North America and the Caribbean, they are completing their first novel, *The Hungry River*. luepalmerwriter.com

*photo by @RoyadelSol*

**BRIAN BRETT** of Salt Spring Island, British Columbia, was born an outsider because of a rare genetic disorder, one that led to an androgynous childhood of health concerns, sexual assault, bullying, and a callous doctor's prediction that he'd suffer a short life (which decades later, he did not). His forthcoming collection of poems, *To Your Scattered Bodies Go*, is the culmination of a 50-year-long award-winning poetry adventure – poetry that speaks with a child's open directness to the fierce ironies of loves won and lost, of logic conjoining with absurdity; poems that are the singular hallelujahs of a man of rare spirit with a unique musical voice, a man born standing on the lip of the grave.



brianbrett.ca



**JOANNE ROCHETTE** of Montreal has published two novels, *Vents salés* and *Quartz*, and numerous short stories have been published in both French and English. Her third novel – excerpted in this issue – is *García's Laughter* (*Le Rire de García, L'instant même*), released in 2020, and it has been translated into Spanish. instantmeme.com/auteurs/joanne-rochette



**KATHRYN GABINET-KROO** is an American-born translator with a Certificate in Translation from McGill University and a Master's in Translation Studies from Concordia University. Working out of her Montreal studio (she is a successful professional artist) Kathryn translates contemporary French fiction by Quebecois and First Nations authors. Her translations include, among others: *Poacher's Faith*, *Hollywood*, and *A Fine Line* by Marc Séguin; *Paths of Desire* by Emmanuel Kattan; *Flame Out* by Michael Delisle; and *Amun*, a collection of short stories by Indigenous writers, published under the direction of Michel Jean.