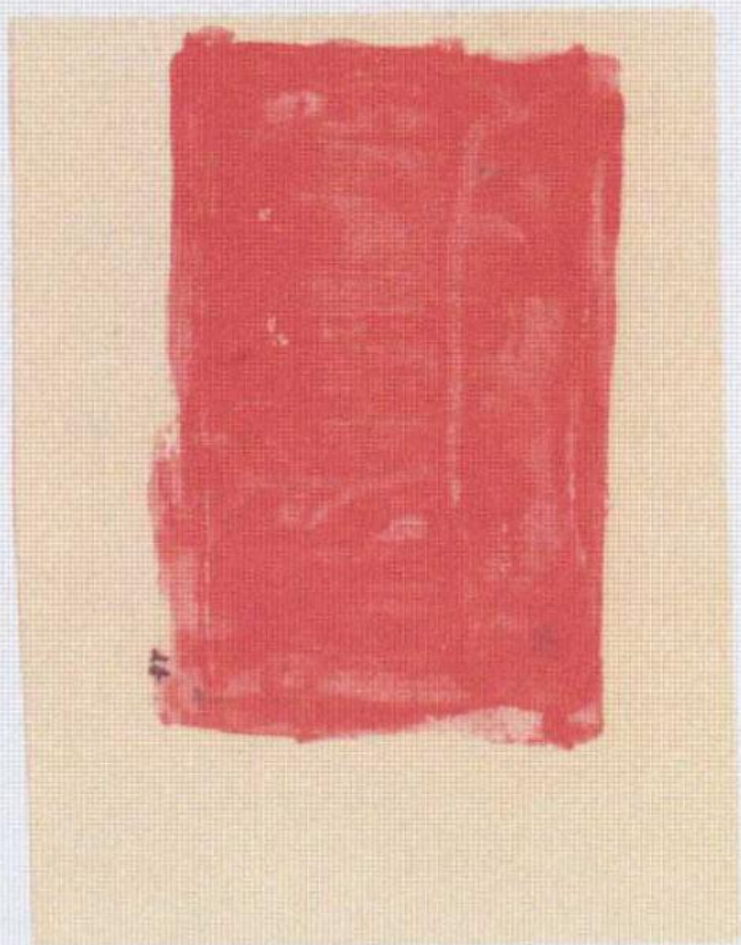


# ACTA VICTORIANA

Fall 2001





# Acta Victoriana

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*Acta Victoriana*

Fall 2001- Volume 126 No. 1  
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### *Editors' Preface*

Generations of young Canadian writers, artists and editors have shaped the Acta Victoriana. It is a process, an accomplishment and an evolving institution. It has showcased student writing longer than almost any other literary journal in Canada and so it is also a testament to this incredibly exciting time of life. This year's contributors and editors have done much to further Acta's success.

In a year when many Canadian publishers and presses are struggling to survive and to find home-grown audiences, we hope the Acta Victoriana will serve as an introduction to the raw and beautiful nature of Canadian writing.

Kerry Clare and Brad Miller  
Victoria College, Toronto  
Fall 2001

### *Untitled*

I heard the argument of  
water and stone

body against body

I palmed the scars of  
river cut rock

a body loved

My eyes I opened  
saw the dry riverbed  
leading to desert,  
laden with stones.

-Stephen Indrigo



*scales of a sidewalk*

twin symmetrical vessels  
carry me, but then defy me  
at the first discontinuity or irregularity,  
upraised bump or well-worn puddle  
they jump ship

the world's surface gone lunar  
inner ear askew, focusing on the nonlinear  
five simultaneous futures five minutes from now

seeing myself in the expressions  
of strangers  
until they sail by

-Lesley Trites

*Night Breathing*

*Bring the balloon of the mind  
That bellies and drags in the wind*  
-W.B. Yeats

Geographic, hieroglyphic  
Night pulled up its star-pierced blanket  
over our eyes losing perspective  
of the horizon's soft border.  
We heard a huge breathing,  
a monody only passing trucks would syncopate.

Night had turned into a giant stomach  
pulsing its obscure factory labor  
out of the Roamer naval plant.  
Alarmed by this rambling  
on the side of our planet  
someone called the cops,  
a citizen outraged at having an untamed beast  
panting in his backyard,  
something out of the ordinary,  
like in Amarcord a huge ox slowly heaves its lungs,  
snouts haze over a foggy field.

Following the sound,  
we walked to the top of the street,  
half-sagged on the ground  
an air balloon slowly uncrumpling.  
All motionless for a few seconds  
we looked at one another  
and at the church parking lot  
brimming with brilliant lights  
over the squared tarmac.

Soon the big sphere lifted up,  
its growing volume dangling  
like a limp Jurassic beast doddling its head  
bulging a membrane of warm air,  
the midget men in the gondola rearing up a blue flame  
into the balloon's opening.

-Jean-Mark Sens



### Sex in Terms of Solitude

You leave your window open when you bring someone home  
to fuck  
so I hear you moaning then coming then just breathing in deep  
heaving gasps  
and I want to thank you  
for lifting the crushing quiet of my night  
with the defiant joy of yours.

-Alan Reed



### Distortion

David Reibetanz



Looking up, the penitent knelt beside his bed as visions of new schemes enveloped the round of his head. He stretched his hands across the bed and hung his head down. His name was Abstone and he tried promises in imprecise words.

As kneeling was a semi-regular activity of Abstone's, a crouched over position of supplication became no special occasion. Indeed, he felt comfortable, repentant and learned. Around him the walls of the room blazed with the intensity of intensely put pictures. No Van Gogh or Dali claimed the walls, no, there were no images reproduced with sickening frequency; only the present tortured reality could apply for admission to these walls. These walls held the art of immediate reaction.

But decoration gets difficult, and only a certain mind can keep consistency. Abstone did not have that certain mind. On a wall, to the right side of Abstone's crouched figure, was a plastic fish. It was from a store that cares about giving the customer low prices, and when the fish had batteries it sang a song, sticking its head and tail out as its mouth mimed the music. Beside the fish a bottle of Shock Cider was duct taped to the wall and across from both, in between, on the facing wall, was an empty pack of Lucky Strike cigarettes stuck with double sided sticky tape. The walls were home to an agreement between present art and tacky shit whereby neither would become the other, but both would tolerate the other because they were both the whims of a misguided renter. This shrine to emotion-inducing relics Abstone largely avoided once hung.

"The loneliest live in this world assured of their own sure part. Belief in unity and completion declares most deterministically the part and the placement. But what then does it mean to act? What can I get free for?"

The philosopher was bombarded. The questions from his mind, about the condition of his convictions, hung in the air, and the Beast Doubt came with a cape to drape Abstone's belief in the effectiveness of Q and A (specifically the A part). The

penitent pushed away from the bed and fidgeted and jilted on the ground for a bit trying to unravel the cape. He soon got up, for he was sober, and had no business being so ridiculous.

The stainless steel tap, standing out against white cupboards holding dishes, dripped, ready to be turned on. Glasses are containers that keep things, and Abstone, in an effort at consistency, drank directly from the tap. He walked away and had nearly licked both lips when he noticed the TV had been turned on during his rolling about.

Abstone was faced with the late night image of Mickey Paulsome tolling the daily news. He smiled, because he thought Mickey Paulsome was pithy and ironic, and because he didn't know the difference between pithy and ironic. Abstone found the remote to untell the mute to both see and hear the Spanish dance classes being nettled, and Abstone was caught, and there was belly dancing, and Abstone was quiet, and began to slip away to picture ships and selling, adventure and greed, and planes, and faster, and slow, seeming so slow—and he laughed. Not in a showy, look how much fun I'm having on my own sort of way, but in a tickled pink by comedy and conditioned convictions and Ha Ha Ha at the commercials sort of way. Abstone glanced at the walls to try and calm himself with the unmoving, but he soon went back to the TV, to the images he saw flashing, heard groaning. He felt hungry and wanting, alone and believing.

Abstone found himself a captain on a ship in a movie. The crew was flying through space in time and the fate of the earth depended on the mission. They were out there to protect a way, and they were professionals, and they were cool, and they were going to be paid, and they were doing it. Abstone was part of a great conspiracy to greatness.

Captain, we are approaching the sun. Shall we head right or left?

We shall go neither way lieutenant. Turn the ship that way.

Yes Sir.



Abstone finished his dialogue and sat down on the captain's chair with the command buttons closely at his fingers. Then he sees the TV and the other captain, and the other actor, and brings himself back to smack against the bed.

He peed in the toilet, and thought to sit in the tub but the cat was already there and the desire left him when he noticed a screwed up blue bath towel.

There was a knock at the door. Abstone finished his pee, as his body began to quiver, washed his hands, as his body began to shake—on a helter skelter falling down, and should he answer the door? The knocking stopped. Abstone left the bathroom, shut off the light, and edged towards the door. It was the lady from across the hall. He knew that the moment he peaked in the peeper. She didn't see the eye peeping, and knocked again. This was the crazy lady. She got up early so she could scream at her walls and stayed up late for an encore. The TV flashed like a cop car in the background, car doors slammed outside, Abstone got scared and, before he realized, opened the door.

Compared to Abstone, who was in his twenties, she was older. Compared to Abstone, who was a white creation, she was a black one. He was taller, but she was more compact. Although she was crazy, she had a calm face when it wasn't speaking. Abstone had a troubled face, lined beyond its years, and the only time he looked calm was when he thought that he might be crazy.

Karen seemed almost innocent standing in the doorway, despite the fact that all she expected hadn't happened in her life, and she was constantly caged in angry unhappiness. She'd scream about a lot of things, but mostly about other people coming to take her things, wanting to return her to him, and how they could not, because she was a woman, she was not a victim, they were not going to take her away, not again, how she was never going back, how she was not a lesbian: I am not a lesbian! she'd cry, as if insulted and defending again—leave me alone, I am my own woman, I will not be coerced into your

schemes! Kill me no more!

"It is not my god I worship," she said to break the silence of staring.

"Hello," said Abstone.

In the background, one of the pictures fell off the wall. Karen noticed and leaned in, determined to peek at something in a pecking way. This accident could provide a sufficient condition for an attempt at a connection beyond the obvious one of being classed as homosapiens, existing in time and space, and having all that having a life and a death thing.

Abstone invited Karen in for some duty free, single malt scotch. She did not flinch at the impressive history of the liquor they were about to drink, but passed slowly in, looking about, and swaying from side to side. In a effort to be pithy or ironic, Abstone quipped, "Looks just like your apartment doesn't it?"

"One of your pictures fell off the wall. I saw from the hall."

"Yes, I heard something like that. On the ground. I would have seen it. Not my top priority, you know."

The room looked small and seemed to contain something quite unfamiliar and altogether different and suffocating. Abstone indicated a chair that Karen might like to sit in. Karen sat down pleasant faced, nodding her head in quick, continuous bounces. Abstone reached up over the stainless steel taps to the open cupboard to grasp the liquor while Karen left the present to focus and dissect a defined portion of a previous time. Karen returned to deride Stermon for whatever he built, when he built it, for she was beaten and slaved, and never cried out. She took the glass when Abstone passed it her but immediately went back again while he pulled faces, trying to decide what to say.

It was his apartment. It was their box. They sat across from each other at a wooden table bargained for, bargained for with a man who had a big family to feed. And a tricky will to do it. He said, "I make no money on this deal, but I will do it for you."

Abstone looked at Karen and Karen looked at Abstone,



but then she broke off to look around. So he had a look around too, and by avoiding specific concentration came up with a happy view of what was happening. This was going to be ok. Later, he could lie down alone and fall asleep before his flashing TV. He'd wake up in time for work and feel good. This was going to work. He turned to Karen and she smiled and said,

"There's nothing you can do, liar, defacer, you come to me now and want to spy on me. You want to look at me. You have brought me here to tape me, you want to view all that I am—fuck you pervert!—you are gone now and I will never go with you again, you go now, and away, you kill my life, you know that that's what you do, you suck my life, you fuck me, you take me—I will not go again! I am no longer your wife. I am a woman and you can not take that away from me! I am here and this is my property! You can't take that away from me! I am here, the government knows, my apartment is mine!"

Karen stopped, and looked around peacefully at the art and tacky shit till she found down and the floor and examined it with a smile on her face. Abstone lit a cigarette, she looked up and said, "They promised me your apartment."

"The difference is that I see more street and you see more building."

The conversion stopped and Abstone felt his desire to be a philosopher collapse. He no longer wanted to be involved because he had no idea, and the circumstances couldn't lead to a happy eventuality, and Karen knew the same, but neither knew the other knew. Each took a sip of scotch.

We are there captain.

Are we?

Yes, just before it.

So, its time for a decision. Press Go.

Space floated and time ran but Abstone and Karen were content to stare out within themselves, searching for why they became, revelling and despairing in the memories, trying to apply them to now, but only in a circumvent way, and mostly fading away from all but preparation for a drained glass. That

was and is and there's still a drop till speech, and what will the words say both minds wondered and feared, and made beautiful things that sort of looked like they'd been in the mind before—soon someone was going to have to ask about a drink—neither wants to ask about a drink—there was definitely something in the mind that was different and going on while there was silence.

Karen leaned over, put her head on the table, and sighed; Abstone sighed, leaned over, and fell over. Abstone had had a spasm and as he lay on the floor, he broke the silence to say, "I've been here before already this night, you know."

Karen smiled, "So have I."

"It's nice down here. Would you care to join me?"

Karen looked down on him with throbbing eyes and a more vigorous nodding of her head. She could do this, but it was crazy, and she couldn't be seen adding to more perversion, she should scream, calling this what it was, but she wouldn't. Not any more did the past moment mean to Karen, hers was live, and she surrendered in a way that lay on the ground near Abstone, staring up at the speckled ceiling. Together they were uncertain and down.



*The Cherry*

bleeds red

though not blood

Its veins

circle around its body

though inside there is

no source, no heart

no beat of pulse

for all the red it keeps contained

One can live,

can hold something

unearthed and dangling

from the weight of ground

-Souvankham Thammavongsa



*the spectrum, you see, is only a sliver of the total range of wavelengths*

each etched with its own set of sketches, each has  
the dark half of the moon blooming underneath  
twitching its betrayal, a knee hit with a doctor's hammer

drunk with the word-filter removed,  
absolute truths salivating on the tongue, quicker  
than a dotted line drawing itself  
between two pairs, flexing  
minuscule muscles of the pupil

dilate, despite the bright light, and rhyme  
like you've never rhymed before, woo with  
your iris and your freshly-penned metaphors Restrict  
yourself to a formal form, within the bleeding  
black boundaries and learn to love like  
a tradition.

*-Lesley Trites*

### *Medicine for Night Spots*

Noondays orbit blind planets from the corner of your eye.  
They push trajectories of meteorites,  
crash silently, off glass rims,  
in brightness of a façade,  
cornean blind spots  
loops of uncatchable flies  
sudden inversion of crossing black stars  
when staring at a ceiling.

Night offers remedy for night spots  
as the cantina closes  
the last lamp reverberates hushed voices  
and dozens of canine forks and spoons  
glimmer in the slammed drawer.

Night spots are finger tips  
dancing castanets yet seldom touching,  
except in the snap calling for a drink  
or the moist silence of closing hands.

Night spots never really heal  
Ointments of liquors,  
poultice of curacao, bourbon,  
glint of anise and comforting vermouth  
iced hue of sloe gin and vodka  
onomatopie B&B that collects a thin dew over a glass —  
sugars of moon's watermelons.

Night spots cure the obscure,  
a bandolean bellows deep below an empty street  
and cobbles glisten like cymbals  
the alarm clock ready to slide thousands of garbage lids  
tilting the sleeper's eyes out of dreams  
a bottle overspilling the horizon,  
an engine revs rippling rims of stacked high plates crashing.

Night spots a comet streaks in the brain  
blank taste of aspirin blackness of coffee can't erase  
— like insomniacs slip out to self-invented days  
night spots sneak out of the retina  
star's fading cynosure against a floating sea bottom.

*-Jean-Mark Sens*





*Crooked Tree*

Graham Taylor

*Poems from the Almost Famous Trailer Park Café*

1.

There is a small company of ragged  
winged angels  
who spend their time in a rat-hole bar  
heavy  
with cigar smoke,  
drinking endless margaritas and licking the salt from the  
glasses.

After making love, satiated,  
their halos-come-handcuffs flung over the bedposts,  
they sit half-drunk and naked  
legs crossed  
and whisper to me.

They say that God loves me (they  
stroke the breasts of the whore beside them  
and whisper that God loves her too  
and they'll show her just  
how  
much).

They say there is a heaven  
and o baby it feels something like  
o yeah,  
like that  
and that believing in Jesus  
Jesus that was good  
Will get me there after a while.

And then one of them reaches up grabs  
my hand,  
rearranges his wings as he  
makes room on the bed and tells me  
to give it all up to God.

-Rachel Bokhout



Night. Two young women stand on a bridge. One is tall with a tired face. In the dark it is impossible to tell the colour of her eyes, or to clearly see the shaping of her features. Her movements are slow and tense. Like a wild animal, there is no wasted motion. She wraps her fingers around the wooden railing of the bridge, and when she speaks, her grip tightens and her knuckles grow white, as if it were her hands that squeezed the low stumbling words from her throat. Sometimes, when she turns slightly to the right, and tilts her face up toward the moon, you can make out a long nose, and a wide, slightly lopsided mouth. In her eyes, at the back of her grey gaze, is a dark confusion. The other woman is stockier with blunt limbs and wide hips, and she envies her friend for her skinny legs and bird shoulders.

They are eating cherries, and when they have located the stone with their tongue and teeth, they lean out over the water (invisible in the black night, though they can hear it throwing itself over the turtle-backed rocks) and spit it as far as they can. It is late September, but it's warm, and they stretch their bare arms in front of them to feel the night's bristling hush. The air smells of the river, muddy and metallic and cool, and of leaves turning crisp gold. The 4 am train sounds in the valley, and at night, through childhood, the trains pockmarked dreams or measured sleeplessness.

The tall one, Fanny, is saddened by the train; it is the noise of the unsettled. Her father left on a train, brown coat flapping like the wings of a frantic sparrow as he ran to catch it. Tall and athletic, still young, he took loping, gangly steps. Fanny watched the motion and felt the echo of it in her own body. She had walked with him to the station; her mother had stayed home sick in bed. As he ran, dawn slanted down over them, darkly pink and still, not yet broken by the hardness of the August sun. The worn soles of his tennis shoes slapped as his feet hit the pavement; it was a sad, impoverished sound, a

sound at odds with the muscular sureness of his stride. He waved to her before he jumped aboard, but the wave was too jaunty for the occasion.

And then, last year, Fanny too had gone away on the train. She watched her mother wave from the platform in her lank, navy-blue dress, bought for a dollar at the Salvation Army and hemmed under the obtrusive, bald light of the kitchen. Her mother waved without emotion, and Fanny mistook the death in her face for exhaustion, or the flu.

The other, Marella, smiles into the dark.

In the silence left by the train, the two move closer together.

Spit. Spit.

"We could swim, you know. I bet it isn't cold." Fanny touches Marella with her elbow, feeling suddenly reckless. Marella snorts, as if to say, there isn't a chance. But wildness, it makes her laugh coldly and loudly.

"YOU are a scaredy cat!"

The sinking moon slides out from behind a low, gauzy cloud. The cloud is like a thought slipping away from the moon's dreaming gaze. In its light, their faces are clear. Fanny's cheek is stained with the last yellowing of a bruise. No one has mentioned it, though it sits like a sickly sunset on the smooth line of her cheekbone. Marella has deep, intelligent eyes and her father's nose. They glance at each other in this new light, and Fanny touched her friend again, gentler this time, with the same nudging of her elbow.

"Come on. I want to."

Spit.

"It'll be too cold. And the water's high, after all that rain."

"It won't kill you!" The hardness returns to Fanny's voice. She puts a cherry in her mouth and lets the juice drip warmly down the back of her throat. "You've always been a worrier, haven't you?"

Spit.

Marella's fingers are red with cherries. She licks them,



trying to ignore Fanny's critical, half-crazy gaze, though it burns painfully into her. She feels ugly standing there.

"I don't have anything to wear."

A strange, embarrassing cruelty fills Fanny. She envies her friend's happiness, but she can't tell her that. "Prude!" She laughs. "Why do we need to wear anything?"

"...We don't, I guess..." Marella says meekly. She likes standing up here on the bridge, feeling night move in swells around her. But she is not attracted to the black shock of the rushing and she doesn't want to upset the precarious sensation.

But Fanny has started back along the bridge. "I'll go alone then," she shouts, only a voice now. "And if I drown it'll be your fault!"

Marella stands alone, listening to Fanny's ungraceful descent to the river. She crashes through bushes. Twigs snap and small animals scuttle away from the rude invasion. Fanny's voice rises, cursing the undergrowth that snags at her like many-fingered hands. For balance, she grabs at young tree trunks, and the trees bow and rustle with her weight. She slips and stumbles over rocks and unexpected roots. At the bottom of the slope she can see the river moving. It catches the moonlight, and for a quick moment carries the brightness on its tumbling back.

Spit. The cherries are nearly gone. Below, in the black that is the river and the river's dusty bank, Fanny has begun to pull off her shoes. A wildness not unlike fury has spread up through her, like two reaching hands, one clenching each lung. Without thinking, she throws a shoe as far as she can, but doesn't hear it land.

On the bridge, Marella leans her face into the night. Her mouth is softly open, as if awaiting a kiss. She breathes in the darkness, the paleness of the cloud-skimmed moon, the noise of water replacing water. For a moment she forgets Fanny, stumbling on the shore below. She forgets that aching, ugly feeling, for a moment. She feels her body releasing itself into the night. The darkness of her veins, of her stomach, of the two expanding

cavities that are her lungs feeling suddenly enormous, they join with the darkness that moves around her. Her skin stands like an inconsequential film between the two bodies of blackness. Her teeth and lips, open to the night, suspended in her body of black, feel suddenly distant, remote like stars.

Marella is very still and peaceful, not frightened. She would like to stay here, in secret cahoots with the night, her mouth opened forever to this vast, real darkness.

But Fanny shrieks a high-pitched laugh. She is dancing on the shore, her skinny hips wiggling. Her heart is slamming in her chest, making strange, frantic rhythms reverberate up through her throat. It makes her breath thin and strangulated; it makes her voice tense and high. She is kicking up the dust on the river bank, laughing in that heartless way.

Marella's eyes flick open, her mouth closes abruptly. She calls to the shadow that is Fanny, "Wait! I'll come okay?" Now Marella is making her way down the hill toward the river. She worries that Fanny will do something foolish; she does do foolish things.

They undress on the shore. Both are wearing their black funeral dresses, and it feels good to step from the zippered, mournful constraints. They lay the dresses over a rock to keep them dry. The moon has slipped away again, leaving only the weak muttering of the stars. Marella sticks a foot in the river.

"It is cold!"

Fanny giggles, like a child who has tricked her baby-sitter into letting her do something her parents have forbidden. Then they stand quiet a moment before the rush and toss of the restless water. Marella tries again to relax into the darkness, but Fanny's taught, wild presence makes her own body tighten and her mind skip nervously, forgetfully.

Fanny says, "Isn't it ironic? My mother said *I* would die in this river. 'If you keep thinking you're a fish, Fanny, you're going to get yourself killed!' A bad omen." They stood still, Marella with her foot poised above the inky water, thinking of the dead woman. She was a tiny woman, as skinny as Franny,



though her bones seemed meeker.

"I could hold my breath longer than anyone, you remember?" Fanny laughs suddenly, the sound like a knife-stroke through the night. "Look!" She runs into the water, screaming with the chill, and dives beneath the surface.

Marella knows this game, they played it often growing up. You let the current carry you as far as you can without taking a breath. Usually, however, it was played in the daylight, when it was possible to keep an eye out for the rocks. She stands and waits, her foot growing numb in the water. She has folded an arm around her stomach, aware of her curving frame. She thinks of Fanny. She had looked lovely and strange standing at the river edge, angular and long-limbed, like a painter's model or a character from a film. Marella feels awful in comparison: stumpy, undesirable, suddenly apart from the sleek darkness that surrounds her. Her face is not bad, she knows, but... an owl cries questioningly from the woods.

Fanny can stay under for a minute. More, if she is feeling competitive. Marella waits patiently, wading a little further in, bumping against the small river-bottom rocks. They stir like sleeping things under her feet. An uneasy quiet has fallen in Fanny's absence. Goose pimples stand out sharply on her arms and legs. It has been a minute already, or a minute-and-a-half.

"Fanny?" Silence greets her. Silence but for the eternal movement of the water and the night rustlings in the woods. "Fanny!"

Marella waits. She tries to remember how it felt to stand up on the bridge, alone. There, the dark was not frightening or oppressive. She had leaned her whole weight against the night and her own darkness had stirred within her and recognized an ancient ancestor. Marella tries to remember herself into that place. She had not frightened. She wills herself to open again to the strange, wild night.

But where is Fanny? Marella tenses, apprehensive, angry that her friend could be stupid, crazy enough to plunge into fast, blind water.

The night bristles like an offended creature. Marella yells, "Fanny!" She shrieks the names. Visions fly through her, visions of Fanny lying, skinny and blue. Also visions of creatures emerging from the woods; human creatures come to rape and pillage, or wild beasts, eyes bright in the sparse moonlight. "FANNY, WHERE ARE YOU?!"

Marella begins to run along the shore. She does not know where she is going. It is uneven ground, and stony underfoot. She keeps calling that name "Fanny," and soon the word has lost its meaning; it is only a sound, an animal noise of fear. And the darkness, that unconscious body of night, is suddenly the enemy, murderous, hellish creatures, chasing her from all directions.

"FA-NEEEEEEE!" With each met silence, the images grew sharper; they cut through her, so that soon she understands them in reality. She can see Fanny, like a fish washed lifeless upon the shore, and she can see herself being dragged away by a man who will kill her. She can feel his foreign body pressed violently against her with the clarity of a terrible memory, she hears the sound of his breath, an ugly, human sound. He curses her and pushes a hand against her throat, so that as she blindly runs she feels her throat close and the tears squeeze from her eyes. He will break her neck, and the gesture will be quick and easy, and night will continue, remorseless and unchanged.

The owl questions again, but Marella does not hear.

She finds Fanny on a flat stone. Fanny's spine protrudes, articulated with a startling clarity by her skinny, white back. At one time, her back, with its many angles moved Marella. She longed to kiss the spine, as it progressed up the back, became the neck, the skull, the pale scented hair. She wanted to kiss her shoulders, sharp and angular like her back, from which the two long, caressing arms extended. But now she is taken aback—even repelled—by the woman's smallness. Marella is crying with the last dark sensation of a dream. Her heart moves violently inside her, she can feel her temples repeating its hard rhythm. She is



breathing jaggedly, but cannot remember why.

"Fanny?" She says, very quietly. The meaning of that word "Fanny" suddenly falls back into place. Fanny does not answer. She is weeping, a rushing sort of weeping, fluid like blood escaping its wound. Marella crouches for a time beside the skinny body. Both are shivering; both are pale and aware of the point where their goose-pimpled skin meets the still, skinless dark. Finally, Marella curls against the girl and they stay like this for a long time until their shivering subsides to a precarious warmth.

Fanny says, "My mother's dead," and she has just understood.

They find their clothes and dress, side by side, in black. Fanny hunts around for her shoe, but then remembers how she threw it away. Marella takes the stockings she had been wearing (she had felt, foolishly it seems now, that bare legs would be disrespectful to the dead) and ties them in a knot around her neck, like a strange scarf. Fanny walks with her one-shoed limp. Marcella puts an arm around her, around her slack, small body. Together, they move homewards in the half-light of morning.

### *The Other Side*

Children eagerly toe the sweeping tide  
their parents eye the scathing sun

Butterflies emerge from cloistered moments  
ignorant of the spider's steely weave

My pulse is awakened by the sound of your voice  
yet your kisses skim my cheek  
and your fingertips run shy of my thigh

-Margherita Ziraldo



\*

(what) passion lies  
in the translation to fingers

your thin-hipped beauty—  
a scandal in this postcard  
landscape

meet me in the smaller hours  
we can feel bigger again,  
near the porch light,  
a ceremony of moths  
gathering

(banging getting burned,  
like we do,  
against heat)

\*

i was talking about  
the glass of this window,  
how everything through it  
has the static quality of  
a photograph

you: standing in the field  
kicking dirt  
hands on your hips  
a fiction to be reckoned with

\*

i could fall in love  
with a woman  
who can't keep her  
balance

\*

windows i've broken stared  
into, out

seeing nothing  
seeing meadow, seared earth

have written the names of lakes  
rivers

on your thighs scripted  
scenes of battle across

your back

now drinking deep of those waters  
half-  
drunk sifting pure soft earth  
through my fingers

this  
the oasis where hunters gather

\*

"it happened in the light of day,  
and so is believed to be true"  
she says to me, the old woman  
early one north Ontario morning  
rumour of Italian in her voice

sulphur sky careens  
over me, her, the dead chicken  
in her hands, the feathered blood  
on the stoop where she sits, plucking

"never trace the  
path of the  
moon over your  
left shoulder"



i've been waiting all  
swimming night for  
your belly and thighs  
scolded by daylight, for  
that silvered moment  
when my nettled fingers  
trouble up your spine

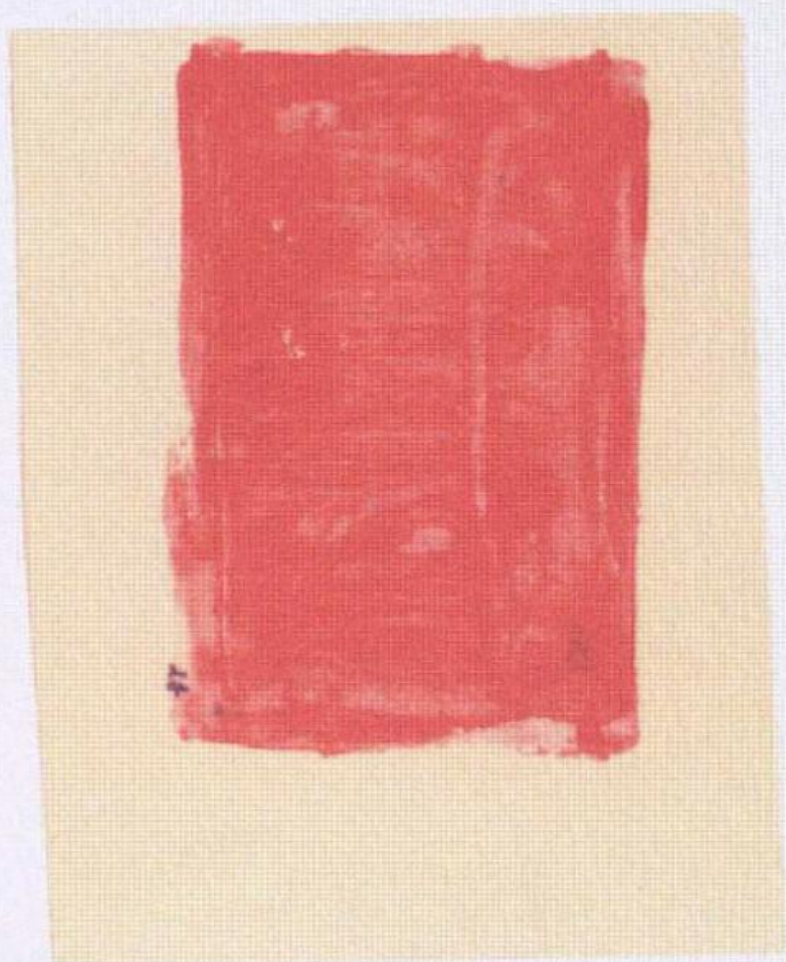
"and listen"

cornflowers,  
a cicada's scream,  
the dead bird, and me—a meek  
trestle for the sun

"never reach  
to covet her  
shouldered  
moon"

-Stephen Indrigo





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