Acta Victoriana CXL II

Acta Victoriana
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Acta Victoriana, est. 1878, is the literary journal of Victoria University in the University of Toronto

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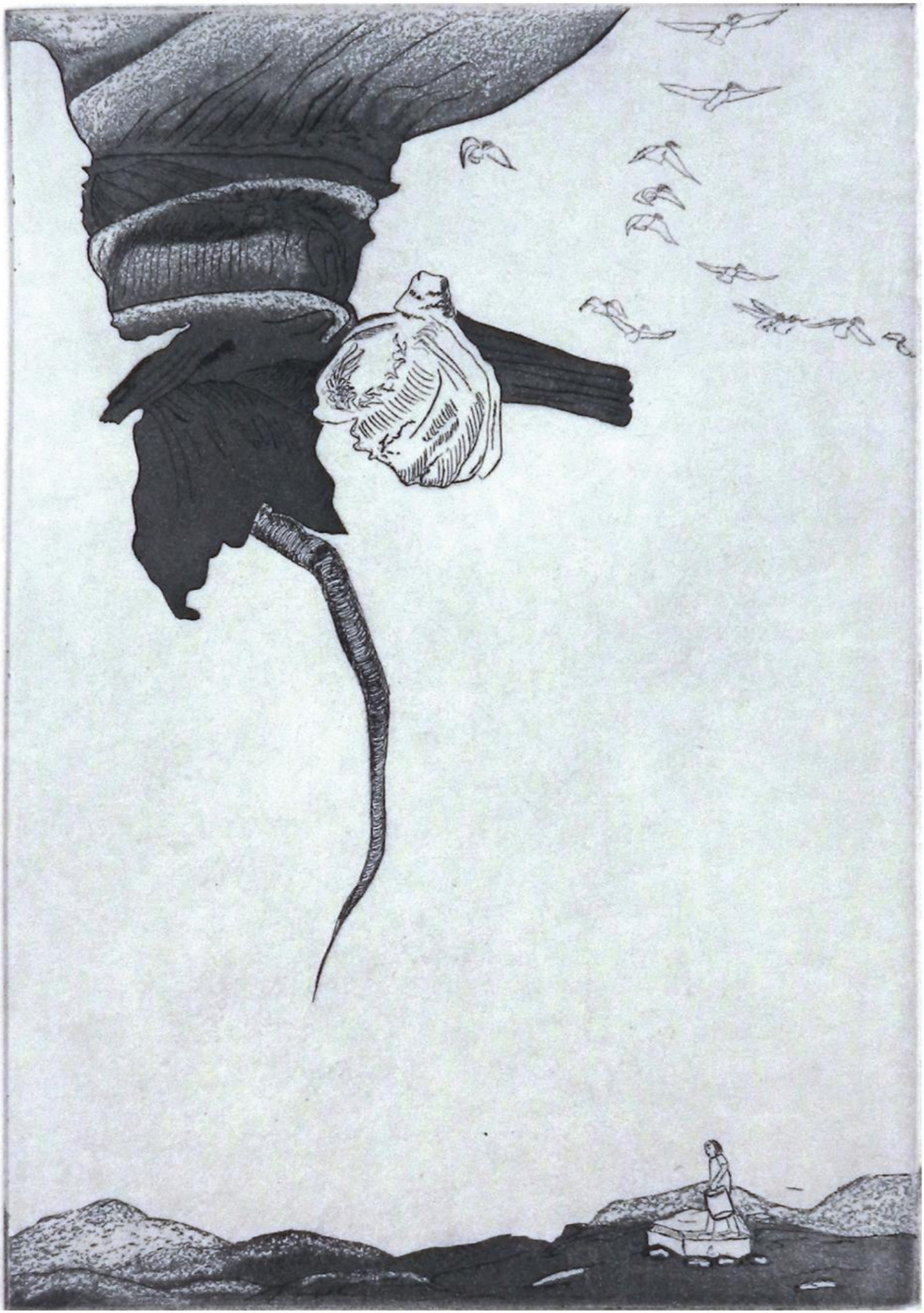
This journal is our garden, well-tended and cherished, and yet eternally subject to the graces, vices, and occasional malice of that obscure witch, Fortune, the reverser of all things. Today, we are her favoured fools, and beckon you to survey with us, and with abandon, the mighty lyrical vista she has allowed to grow before us. Our goddess has animated Acta Victoriana with a strange life this Spring, one that pulses and throbs so vividly we feel we might drown in it or devour it. We invite you to step into our Arcadian cemetery with confidence: feast on its fruits, snorkel in its vibrant pools, and surrender yourself to its mortifying physicality.

Ella Wilhelm

My mother once told me that hope springs eternal, or perhaps she said that hope was vernal. In this, I am reminded of the growth of new things. I am jealous of the flowers that are growing outside in the soil but I am comforted by the seeds we have sown on every page of this journal. As I leave Acta Victoriana behind and wander out into the [dubiously] real world, I hope whatever grows from these pages can be happily harvested by those who follow after.

Clark Thomson



Congestion

A.F. Moritz

Once you were young. Now soon
you will drown in your lungs. In your body
nothing anymore beats hard enough to abate
the rising of the waters you're made of. Does it matter?
Your world has gone, patch by patch. Go after it. Tear
the earliest piece out of ours.

Migration, Joanna Yetter

Backlands

Nika Gofshtein

In me: what I run from most
in a heavy, angled orbit to which I am
the centre. Someone said I fell
asleep with the sunset; someone else
took the moon by its jaw,
threw it out like a disc into space.

In me: the torn lungs of a sprinter
forced to marathon. Voices long
past midnight, continuing conversation
and destructive to rest:
darkness is quiet only for the eyes.

In me: the immortal fear of being unable
to outrun that which has no speed.
The moon a receding light
and the sea all around.

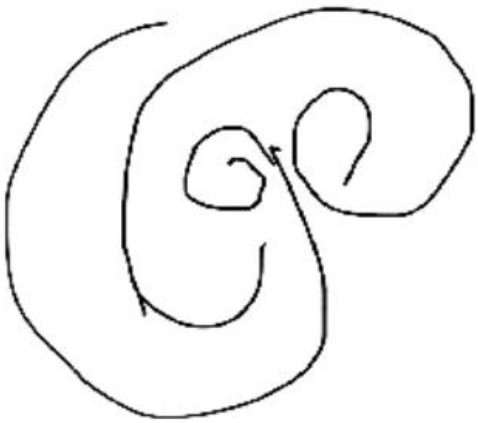
First Place, 2016 Victoria Poetry Contest

Crustacean

Miranda Alksnis

with u i feel not like a wound in the earth
where maybe some thing once grew, or else was salted from the start
but like a pool clear to the bottom where tiny craven mollusks swim,
flee currents in spirals, giddy, til they slow and expire
pick between giant rocks, nibbling on drifting weeds
or rest belly-up in sun-warmed hollows, curled between the lazy shapes of branches far above

dreaming cool creaturely dreams



Second Place, 2016 Victoria Poetry Contest

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Marinated Tofu

Cara Schacter

sara's ex roommate david
marinates tofu
in a marinade he makes himself

there's something
about a twenty-something boy
marinating tofu

in a cramped kitchen
of a four bedroom apartment
(that is really a two bedroom
plus a den)

hunched over a laminate countertop
ingredients laid out in front of him

something about him
setting out
a head of garlic
a soy sauce bottle

him shopping for a soy sauce bottle
caught off-guard
by tofu options

him standing by chilled bricks of tofus
googling the difference
between extra firm, firm, medium firm, and soft

his phone autocorrecting
tofu to toe fungus

him retyping
added pressure when he taps F-U

him riffling through kitchen drawers
looking for measuring spoons

him whisking
2 tbsp soy sauce
1 tsp dijon mustard (smooth)
1 tbsp orange juice
2 tsp sesame oil
1 clove garlic (minced)

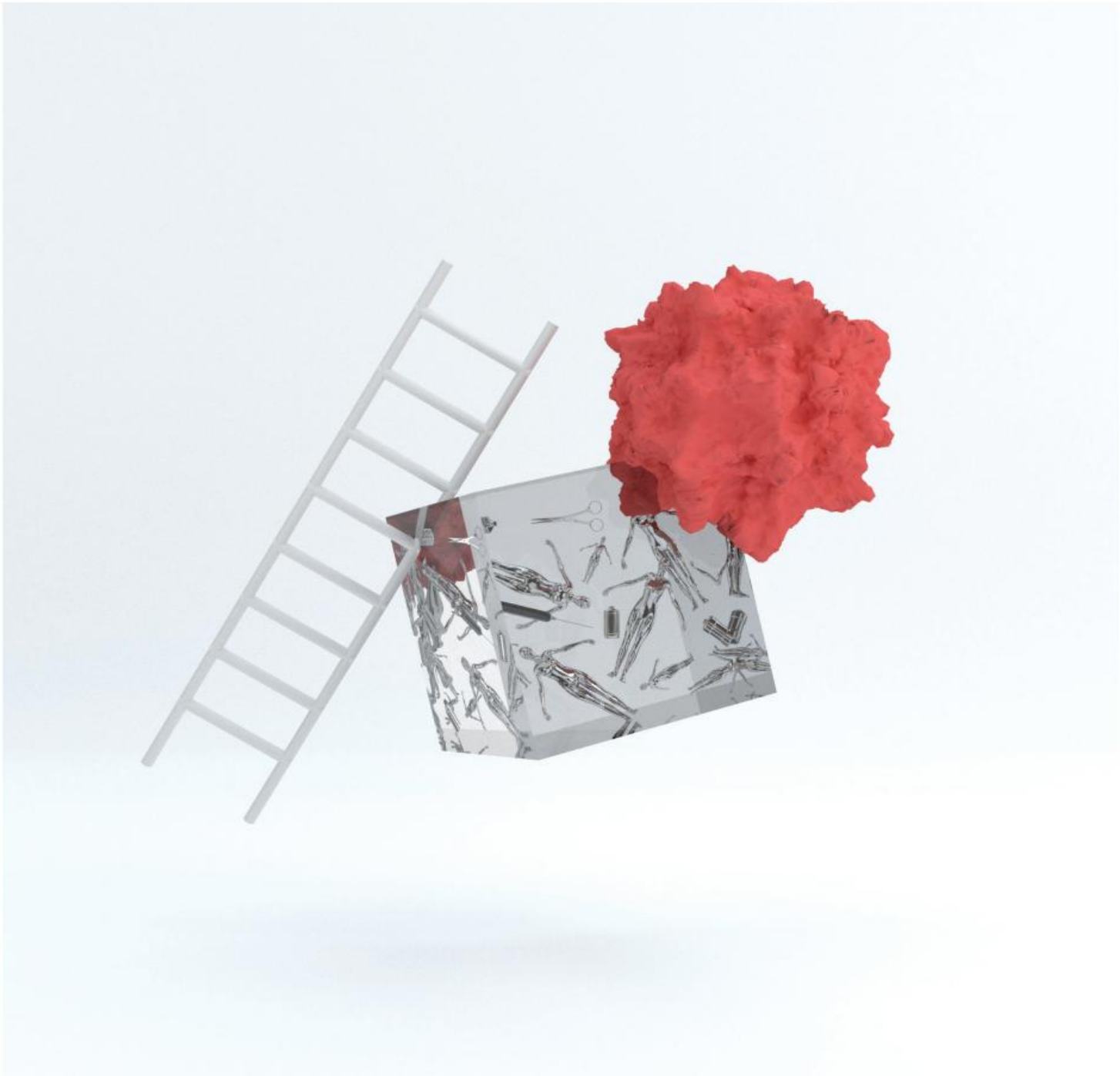
something about him
mincing garlic

something about
his mom on speaker
explaining mincing

him cutting up the tofu
him letting the cubes soak
him flipping them over
as if checking for something

he might have lost
under a tofu cube

Third Place, 2016 Victoria Poetry Contest



Untitled, Olenka Szymonski

Mermaids

Mara Raposo

1. GENTE FELIZ COM LÁGRIMAS

I always preferred overcast skies to blue ones. It was something I inherited from the island, where very few days go uninterrupted by a motorcade of clouds passing the sun, an indication of storms to come, a climactic feature so mundane in the lives of the locals that greyness is embedded in our health and businesses as an accepted fact, the same way that it's washed into our eyes and souls. The haze, the fog, and the humidity are all part of the chemical imbalances that make up who we are, even after we've set sail for new cities in colder countries. My *vavô* once told me, as I sat on his lap and nibbled on sardines, that, like mermaids, ours is a double nature: we are built of flesh and stone. I grew up seeing this in everyone around me. It was in the heat and dust radiating from *papá's* construction boots at 6pm on a weekday. In knowing that my widowed aunt was going to wear black tomorrow, all black, all day, all tomorrow, all week, all her life, until it was our turn to wear black for her. It was being enclosed by an ocean and not knowing how to swim, because the waves wouldn't let you give even one stroke. *Mamã* protecting us from the dishes and punches thrown in the air, taking them herself. The bottle of *vinho* on the table, half drunk by only one pair of lips. My *vavó* throwing the scarf around her head, under her chin, and over her shoulder as she took me to school, unclasping her palm as we rounded the schoolyard to reveal a bright pink Double Bubble gum. It was growing up with eyes the colour of seaweed, hair the colour of volcanic basalt, and an ego as stubborn as the Church. It was knowing the route to the airport by heart by the time I was 6. Speaking Portuguese first, English second, and having trouble reversing that order for years.

2. SÃO MIGUEL

Thousands of years before the Portuguese found our island, landslides carved steep, ragged cliffs that dipped right into its southeast coast. These slopes and coves were called *fajãs*; their land a lush, dewy green nesting stone cottages, eroded from decades, maybe centuries, of storms. My *vavô's* tiny cottage, perched at the edge of the cliff closest to the ocean, had watched four generations grow and die by the sea. My family, just *mamã*, *papá* and I at the time, seemed to fly from Canada only to flee into the isolation of the mountains.

After dinner we would sit on the shore for hours in the crevices between massive boulders, staring out at the never-ending blue mass ahead as the sun became submerged in the water. Though he was quite literally sitting between a rock and a hard place, there was nowhere else in the world that could have afforded my father such intimate comfort. He could look out into the

horizon until the *cagarros* came home and never say a word. He stroked his beard to the intuitive rhythm of the waves, revealing for a fleeting moment, each time his fingers slid down his chin, the small smile on his lips before his thick hand covered it once more, as though it was a secret between only him and the Atlantic. As a child, I never understood how the compulsively restless father I knew could complacently sit and acquire the tranquil status of a beach rock. It would be many years before I understood that the calm person he was with one foot in the ocean and the other on the *calhaus* of São Miguel was far more Manuel Raposo than the hustling bustling immigrant he was in Canada.

3. DUNDAS STREET WEST

Our community was a paradox. Without haste or lament, families tucked bread and expectations into tattered suitcases and embarked into the anxiety of the infinite, not looking back even once. The islands, they said, would remain exactly, sadly, the same forever. Yet the bakers, butchers, bartenders, doctors, your father, cousins, mother, the priest – they came to Canada only to live the exact same way they had in the old country. They made their sausages the same way, went to mass at the same time and raised their kids the way that they had been raised. No one had two dimes to rub together, but having each other in their little ghetto in Kensington Market was enough.

When immigration hit a ceiling, the Portuguese took Dundas West as their own. Everyone in I knew lived along Dundas. Every family on my street had a *santa* erected on their front yards, a tiled picture of Jesus Christ next to their doors and perfectly kept gardens in front of their verandas. During the week I would trek down to my elementary school at Dufferin, and on Fridays I would go with my *vavó* to the CIBC at Ossington, stopping off on the way home to get seafood from the fishmongers and fresh *paposecos* and *bolos levedos* from the bakery.

"*Bom dia, Senhora Pereira,*" the smiling bank tellers and fishmongers and bread makers would all say to *vavó*, having seen her at the same hour every Friday for the past twenty years. "How are you today?"

Every week she would say "*eh, vamos andando*" with the same sigh. She'd wait patiently for her transaction. Collect her statement or crabs or buns. "See you next week, *se deus quiser.*"

I grew up thinking every street in the city that ran east and west like Dundas came with the same robust culture, the inherent Portugueseness that was etched into the streets that I grew up on.

We moved away when I was ten. That was how I found out that not everyone in Toronto was Portuguese.

4. THERE'S NO "I" IN MARA

Every doctor, optometrist and specialist appointment started the same way.

The nurse at the front desk would call out, "Maria?" and cast an expecting glance at the waiting room. "Maria Raposo?"

I'd stand up and walk over to the front desk.

"Thank you for waiting Maria–"

"My name isn't Maria," I'd say shortly. "It's Mara. Raposo."

She'd glance back down at her sheet with a quizzical brow. "Sorry – Mara. I saw your last name and just assum –"

"I get it a lot."

I'd shuffle to the waiting area and pick up a magazine.

"Maria?" a second nurse would call out from another room ten minutes later, looking up from a clipboard. "Maria Raposo?"

I'd sigh.

Every stage introduction, conference nametag, and essay feedback sheet would have the same mistake.

"Sorry – Mara," everyone would say politely, embarrassed. "I read it quickly – saw your last name and just assumed –"

"I know," I'd say shortly. Every Portuguese woman I knew had been cursed with that name, and even though I wasn't, I still was. "It's a Portuguese thing. I get it a lot."

5. *VOLTANDO*

I tucked ashes and expectations into a black suitcase and embarked back to the place that everyone said would remain exactly, sadly, the same forever. The taxi puttered away from the hilltop overlooking my family's *freguesia*, where I stood watching the same sunset from my childhood caressing the contours of distant mountains. I walked through the town with my eyes anchored on the ocean in the distance, visible no matter where you stood so as long as you were following the sound of the waves. The only thing that had changed this town was death, having swept in to take the people who never left. Standing in the middle of my grandparents' house I imagined one of them pulling back the living room curtain to greet me with open arms and love greater than

God's. I grabbed the big rusty key over the sink and wished their ghosts goodbye.

Down by the ocean I maneuvered over the massive rocks of the *calhau*. I pulled out a flashlight as the sun slipped beneath the water to illuminate my path. When the rocks began looking familiar I flashed my light at the cliffs and found the steep gravel trail leading to *vavô's* cottage.

The night was warm and the waves were surprisingly tame. I lowered myself into a crevice between two massive boulders and looked out at the never ending blue mass ahead. I felt overwhelmed with *saudade* – payment for leaving without returning for so many years. But I also felt welcomed. As though the ocean had spent the last twelve years waiting patiently for my return.

I turned to look at where *papá* would sit and hugged the urn in my arms. I saw him stroking his beard while adoring the waves with his seaweed coloured eyes. After a long while I found the strength to walk to where São Miguel ended and the Atlantic began. With one foot in the ocean and the other on the *calhau*, I set *papá* adrift on the waves of the sea.

Hummingbirds in Trout Lake Trailer Park

Geoff Baillie

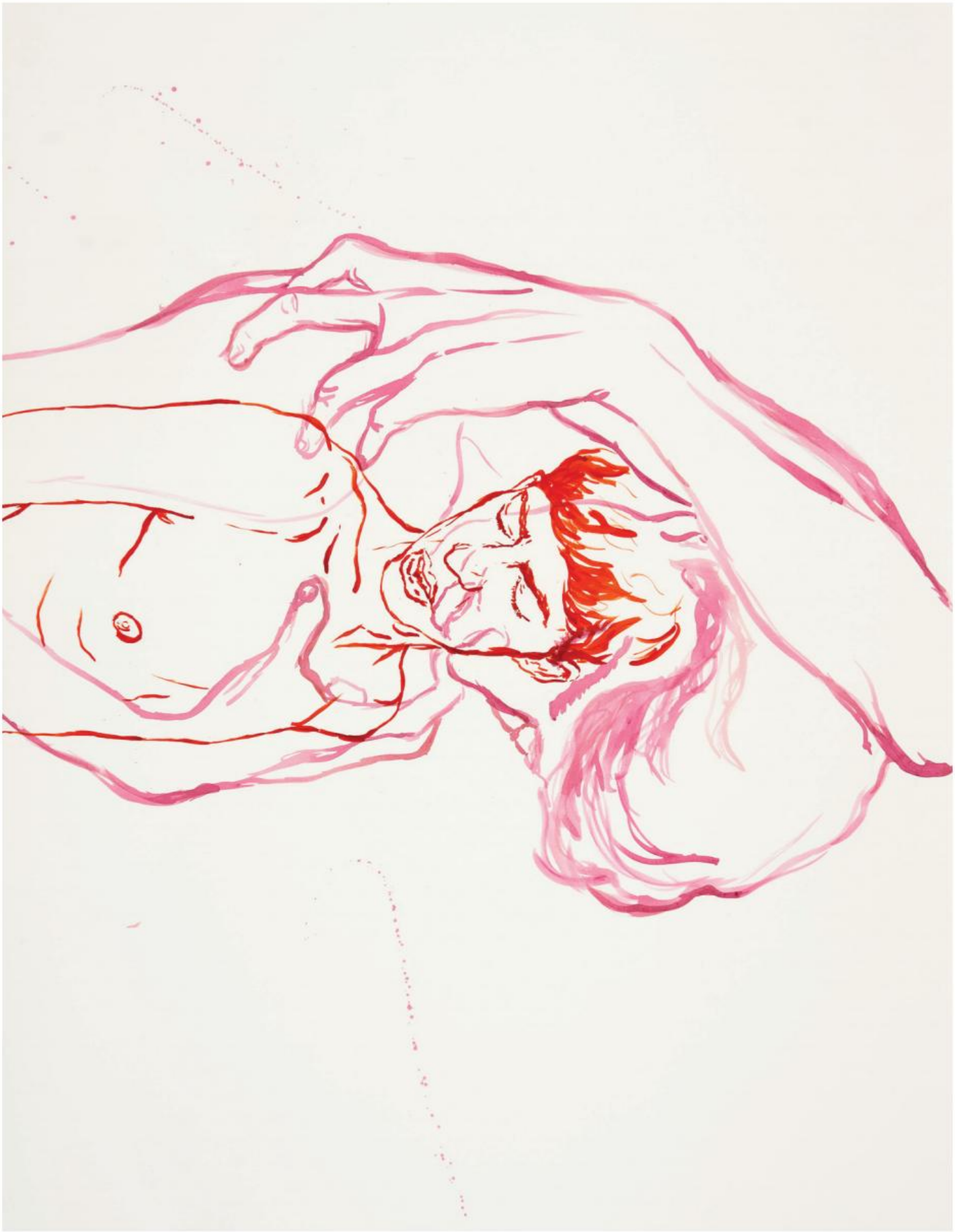
Outside the white oak bears its emeralds;
disrupting silence with their aching hum.

You stand at the faucet concocting nectar
to fill the feeder that hangs in the verandah.

You hear their chorus and watch them swarm
with appetites as unconscious as your ache

to swim in the quarry, sweeten in its water,
suntan in the shoal of trilliums on its bank

compelled to depths, ecstatic in acceptance,
the invitation humming daily in your chest.



Fluctuation, Rron Maloku

Regalian Tetrahedron-
Elm Trees.Caves.Bicycles.Helicopters.

Miles Forrester

So I read the necessary articles so I'd know the necessary means and I made the space and I made the time and so I'm growing elm trees! I'm growing a grove of elm trees in my backyard, small grove, nothing too much but I wanted a grove and I wanted vines, from the trees to the house to the heart, and I read an elm tree was the perfect kind of tree for growing those. There's even "the marriage of elm and vine" wherein one partner becomes one to the other or something. You know, they were used to cart along grapes as far as England by the Romans. What a terrible place to try wine making, though they say climate change is changing everything. There will be groves and wine in Antarctica soon and what a little Eden we'll all have there.

And I was watching a film about elm trees in caves, they'll have elm trees in caves in Antarctica, we'll have to, we'll need oxygen and they carbon and tending, and I was watching a movie about elm trees found in cave which had turned to pure carbon and they were like crystalline... But no, it wasn't like a documentary but what a beautiful image and the tree sprung to life it was too lifelike, too lifelike for the cave even which wasn't used to it, and yes I realize that they have their own peculiar ecosystems and we should respect them and it wasn't like this was even a documentary, this was some poetic movie, like a Terrence Malick or something where everyone was whispering but still I'd really like to go. Come to think of it, could the garden use a grotto?

The other day I dreamt that some idiot child had ridden his bicycle through the garden and that he had fallen and began sinking into the wet fresh soil made into extra nutritious mud from the rain and as there was no suburban grass there was no lattice to stop him and as there were no caves there, nowhere was there for him to fall further into but into the mud and as he had landed on his head there was no way for him to breathe and all that there was left of him were two out stretched arms coming out in two diagonals from the ground gripping this upside down bicycle which I guess due to how its weight was distributed or my own subconscious will was left spinning and covered in vines that had bloomed into orchids which were turning to me as if I was the sun.

And luckily I was in the garden when it happened, or what would happen if I wasn't in the garden when it happened when I felt a winding shape stop in the sky and I had read the pertinent articles and I had read how we should be feeling about surveillance, about our phones and our possessions being compromised – compromised – it makes me sick to say it, but not compromised

▲

like this as the thing that is keeping us stops and hovers and falls and crushes your house, and what was it doing over my house? Was I standing there with a shovel in my hand in the back yard as a police helicopter fell on my house? Because it definitely feels as if I was, and it was just in the sun invisibly chopping and then breaking and squealing and crashing and leaving a hole burning behind me. Had I turned, I may have seen the illusion of a motion transforming into an accident as one carries another into some irreparable present but instead emerging like a flower from the urn of my basement was an unturning crystalline wheel.

In the evening the service typically lasts until nine o'clock, when the guests split up, the women to the sitting room and the men to the drawing room. But it's almost midnight and we've been waiting at the table since a quarter after seven. To my left sits the Countess, who has somehow managed to pull a leg free from her hose. Across from us is the Admiral, in full regalia. Every so often I shift in an attempt to loosen the buttons of the shirt I'm wearing underneath my military jacket. I'm going to die in here, I'm certain of it, die before I get the chance to deliver my nephew's letter of recommendation to our hosts.

Long ago, so long ago it seems unimportant now, our hosts presented themselves with a mollifying explanation. Then there was an explosion in the kitchen, and we haven't seen them since. The heat is unbearable, and I long to unbutton my jacket so that I might expose my torso, make it as bare as the Countess's single leg. The Countess, who is now beginning to reveal a white shoulder through the collar of her blouse.

Underneath the Admiral's mountain of facial hair his face is as red as his insignia. Every so often he looks up from the table and glares at us, and whoever he chooses will, for a time, cease shedding his or her clothing—cease moving at all, caught in his tortured gaze. Tortured and withering. The gaze of a man who knows he is going to die but who can't abandon propriety, no matter how dire the situation. He is a man who rights the ship or goes down with it.
Oh, Admiral, to again share a glass of fine brandy and toast each other's health at the culmination of another chilly November night! To have you regale us with another story of maneuvers and counter-maneuvers on the black and deadly seas!

Outside the moon reflects on the snow, and in the distance I can make out the white breath of horses, so ghostly in this light that they look like they're driving spirits.

To be again on the open road, to be sitting comfortably in my cab and on my way home to my dear little ones, Natalya and Volodya! (And Grimsha, of course: their nurse.) Natalya, whose little hands, I fear, I will never hold again; whom I will never again bounce, in a game of "horsey," on my knee. And Volodya! Will I never witness him standing in the vestibule, honouring his late mother's portrait, about to ride off to join his own regiment? (As I once rode off, though with a fond kiss from my mother as well as a gentle squeeze of my father's hand.)

A foot in a long black stocking extracts itself from one of my boots, the laces loosened but not untied. My god, it's dripping with sweat!
Prince Oblonsky, Princess Krasvita, the two elderly generals, a butler leaning against the kitchen wall, a serving girl, her dress spread out on the floor round

her bent legs, the Count, Sergei Ivanovich (my friend), another Prince (whom I never became acquainted with), some merchant, and an unidentifiable owner of a shock of grey hair just visible through the entrance to the dining room: all dead, or all appear to be dead. But no, I can hardly believe it, not my dear Sergei Ivanovich! A final interrogation, during which the Admiral ogles me with his rheumy, red-veined eyes: not enough to dissuade me. Sergei's really dead, I'm afraid.

I don't know what the cause of the explosion in the kitchen was.

As teenagers they called us, me and Sergei, "the Two Frogs," because the muscles on our legs seemed inappropriately large for our heights (most tall men have thin, almost dainty, shins and thighs). On the rugby field we were invincible, and it seemed like we'd never lose a scrum— we always turned the push to our side. I don't think, until the age of eighteen, we ever did. But we found ourselves badly beaten, in the national team tryouts, by twin louts from the provinces (they were trained in St. Petersburg, had about eleven-odd caps between them, and were as big as draft horses). That was the end of that.

Sergei Ivanovich! No longer any doubt that I am going to beat him to General, if I ever get out of here alive. I still remember the odd way he had of looking askance, at the turf some- where, when I passed my arm over his and we got into our "lock":

"Crossing Hades again, Sergei?"

His answer was always muffled as we stuck our heads between hooker and prop; following this the four props (two on either side) fell into each other and engaged; the scrum begun, there was no more time for chit-chat. He told me what it was he said, once, though I forget it now.

The Countess has an arm free now. Compared to her I've made almost no progress: I managed to get the sock off my free foot by dragging it against a chair, but only after a consider- able effort, and I've only just begun to draw my leg up through my pants. The Admiral, chin al- most to the table now, looks at the Countess with envy. I think I can see little clouds of steam rising off his neck. His glare no longer has power, none at all.

"Admiral, a battle, to pass the time. I'm in the mood for something Baltic," I say, chuck- ling weakly at my inane comment.

Very seriously the Admiral looks in my direction and begins sound- lessly reciting some- thing, whether battle or reprimand I don't know. His brow furrows in concentration, and then, without cry or gasp, he's dead, his mous- taches landing on the table with a wet plop.

My god, the Countess is almost free now! Just a sleeve and the final cuff of her hose, as well as her undergarments and tiara, of course. And then what?

Will she expertly peel her skin off too, and dance away, a nimble skeleton?

I came to the dinner on behalf of my nephew, who would like to be attached to the recently founded commission. The letter is here, in my breast pocket, though no doubt it's been rendered unreadable. Still, I could scribble a few pertinent details on the limp envelope...

Now I remember! "Fuck off, I'm trying to concentrate..." (Those were the words that my dearest Sergei used whenever I caught him ruminating on the pitch.)

My belt is half undone, and I've got just a knee and thigh free from my pants, and the hair on my legs is so thick that it's like wearing another garment, so even if I do get it all off, there's no hope for me, I'm done for. In the puddle of sweat the Admiral's head is resting in I think I can make out the faintest outline of bubbles brewing from out his mouth, as well as the slightest quivering in the split ends of his yellow moustache. I'm in complete shock: the old bore's not dead, only snoring! With the utmost care I (not wishing to lose any progress by sliding too far forward and inadvertently reinserting the bare part of my leg back into its case) finally extract my whole leg from my pants and, ever so gently, lean back, lift my leg over the ledge and across the table, caressing the Admiral's cheek with my big toe.

"Admiral, I believe you were saying something?"

The Countess shoots me an annoyed look.

"Don't be an idiot!" she says. "Respect the dead!"

She just has to shimmy the loose ends of her brassiere off her shoulders, and find some way to unpin the tiara that clings, so insolently, to her head. Her underwear, very curiously, is hanging from a knob of her chair. I don't know how I missed that.

The Countess and I have a long history. We summered in neighbouring houses. In fact, we were once engaged, though secretly, and before long I broke it off. She was the first of my acquaintances to marry. I didn't see her much after that, only recently following the Count's re-establishment in Moscow. And now the Count is dead. And my own wife is dead.

"Colombe!" I say, "Marry me!" (For I always referred to her by her French name.)

"Jesus Christ!" She looks at me in horror, "I'm dying too, in case you didn't realize."

I'm feverish. "Colombe... Colombe..."

"You're not even half-undressed."

It's true, and there's a puddle of sweat collecting in my single boot. Just then, the Admiral, whose red eyes look ready to burst, perks up. He

raises his head, which he can barely hold on his quivering neck, and stares at us bleakly. He's about to open his mouth when a beam collapses, revealing a huge flame in the kitchen. The light shines on the Countess's tiara, igniting the diamonds and dazzling us all.

When I'm gone I don't know what will become of Grimsha. The children will pass into their maternal uncle's care. (I have no living siblings or relatives on my side, except for a pair of very old and decrepit aunts living in a backwards province, and about to kick the bucket them- selves.) Doubtless the children will desire their uncle keep Grimsha on, so as to have some continuity between their new life and their old, and that would be my wish too, but you can never quite predict the attitude that foster parents will take towards their children, and Grimsha, though I find her all the more charming for it, has plenty of strange habits that I'm sure will rub her new mistress the wrong way. Such as, for example, insisting on wearing nothing more than an old hair-shirt dress she picked up from some holy peddler (as well as her copious underclothing, meticulously clean, but darned and patched all over). Or her habit of breaking into spontaneous prayer, or of sneezing into an old folded piece of parchment I gave her (on which I once wrote her name, quite prettily, in Cyrillic and in the Latin Alphabet), and which she carries, not in a pocket (for her dress has none), but tucked, ingeniously, up her sleeve somehow.

"That's it! I'm making a break for it."

Possibly the glint off her tiara has given the Countess certain ideas, ideas I don't under- stand and couldn't even begin to explain. In one movement she gathers all of her clothing and leaves, before either of us, me or the Admiral, can think to say anything. As she passes the owner of the mop of grey hair lying by the entrance to the vestibule I see a hand rise up and clutch her ankle, but she quickly dispatches whoever it is by aiming a swift kick at their ribs with her free leg.

A brownish substance is leaking from the Admiral's eyes. He doesn't seem to notice, looking around the room as if surprised to find himself there. For a brief moment my eyes cross and it looks like the Admiral has three heads on his shoulders. I gasp and nearly fall off my chair.

Far off, a door bangs against something with a dull thud, and moments later a blast of cold air hits my thighs, causing the flesh to goosepimple and all of the hairs to stand up straight. The sound of glass tinkling underfoot. Shouting and coughing, remarkably close, almost as if someone were leaning into my ear. Moaning. The Admiral?

The Admiral is busy sucking on the end of a biscuit. Perhaps it was in his pocket.

It's cold now. I wish I had my own biscuit, and big, well-insulating moustaches like the Admiral's.

I must have a fever of some kind. From the sweat. Something in the kitchen collapses, but the fire is out now. Everything is dark. Frost settles in my crystal glass. The house cracks violently, like it's sinking into its grave. I motion to Sergei. "Come on now, let's get into the 'lock.'" I raise my arm and place it on his shoulder. No response. His head is bent, he's looking off somewhere, his eyes dulled.

Where have you gone, Sergei Ivanovich?

Hector
Vanessa Lent

Hector made his retreat gradually.

He first swung wildly into company of friends
and made them strangers.

Exhausted, enfolded in the stone
and pine of his family

until one afternoon
he disguised himself as a carp
(he'd been practicing in the bath)
and slipped into the lake.

There he blinked
and blinked again, slowly

until, eyes closed,
he swam in circles
unaccompanied and humming.

Untitled Collage #2, Sunny Kim

Last Poem for C

Anna Shortly

Whatever you was I left you in the hills.
Got up after putting you down and went
bathing my feet in the water, bathing my
feet in the water, 'til my feet forgot where
they'd been. 'Til my feet knew they got
kinder places to be.

sounds like rain

Malcolm Sanger

the birch buds, dressing itself in the watery morning sun
she, too, dresses herself, but she does so inside the sleeping bag
+
relentless grabbing, her hands need
something/anyone to grip, (momentarily)
and release – grip again
the relief of finding her with him
but exclusivity? do (I) need it?
does it bother me – she's momentarily
grabbing me, I, sometimes, grab back
[the rain sounds much more intense inside
the tent] she knows, too, it's temporary
– and outside the rain isn't so hard –
lots of drops are just coming from
the trees – and the blackflies;
+
the blackflies hammer my tent
it sounds like rain

Untitled

Mahdi Chowdhury

there is a lime-half
sitting in a bowl

she dries and crusts and
cakes in her little hole,
like a ditzy pale emerald
or a citrus dream foretold

and her other half used
of skin and spine, of flesh and sour,
cracked into a pitcher of hot water
with dollops of billybee honey

and you,
like a hospital fever,
craving your own watery tongue and blue
and noon green sugarhighs -

Ivy

Mado Christie

Rita lives in a halfway house that recently went all the way. It is nestled in Seaton Village, one of those niche Toronto markets that only just gained its own name. When the house was still a blight, the neighbourhood was content to remain nameless, a bit to the west of the Annex, but not west enough to be Bloor-West Village. It is a well-kept secret still, even with the new name. There are three elementary schools in the area, and one of the best grocery stores in the city. There are a good number of outdoor cats who are indulgent of strolling humans and who allow themselves to be coaxed and stroked. That is the mark of a good neighbourhood. There are animals but there are no strays.

She moved from across the street when her husband left — or when she kicked him out; the particulars are confusing even to them. She could no longer justify their spacious four-bedroom, and it would have been too much work to cobble an apartment out of the rooms she wasn't using anymore since the children had moved out. Now she lives on the ground floor of this house on the corner. The house has three other apartments — two upstairs and one in the basement. The man who owns the house lives in a tiny condo on the lakeshore. She had to go there to sign the lease. It could have fit into her apartment three times.

Everyone shares the backyard, but Rita controls the garden. Perhaps 'controls' is putting it a bit strongly. She has never had much of a green thumb but she has never had this much time on her hands, either. The garden is no solace. It wraps around the house and finishes at the limit of the backyard, which was designed by a landscaper and only requires minimal maintenance. The garden proper is an unwieldy bunch of green sinew. Rita is on the edge of destroying it, maybe taking a flamethrower to it and starting anew. But she would not know how to start again. Her true dream is to destroy the garden and then salt the earth so that nothing will grow there again; she would wait for the big rains to start so that the soil, devoid of that network of gripping roots, would be stirred into mud and finally sluiced away into the storm drain in front of the house, the stilts of the foundation showing through the remaining earth, bone white and trembling, like some fleshy appendages stripped of their complicated underwear.

When Rita wakes from these dreams — or comes back to reality, because they are usually waking dreams — she decides to leave the garden for the time being and retires to the porch.

Her friends know all about crazy dreams. They've told her it's time to consider Hormone Replacement Therapy and that she can expect the hot flashes soon enough. Secretly Rita believes that the house is haunted by the feverish visions of the detoxing addicts it used to shelter. Surely a house doesn't forget

its inhabitants so quickly.

The garden is maddening but at least it is grounded firmly in the present, with the faint threat of the future lying dormant in its green-gray veins. Rita spends an aimless hour or so a day pruning branches here and there, and pulling up what she believes to be weeds. In the spring she did online research and put in an herb garden. The herb garden was decimated one week into June. Seeing the holey leaves had awakened a spark of maternal protectiveness in Rita, and when she called her friend Esmé to diagnose the problem she was choking back tears. Hearing Esmé say that she had a slug problem merely added salt to the wound. She felt she'd failed her little plants. She should have seen this coming.

"The slugs hate copper," Esmé told her. Esmé has a green thumb. She knows about things like slugs. "It burns them right up. It makes them sizzle." She shivered when she said that, but it might have been a shiver of delight.

So Rita took a field trip to the garden centre at the grocery store, a place she'd never been before besides to buy a Christmas tree. She bought a copper basin. She borrowed a power drill from Mr. Upstairs and made holes for drainage. She wouldn't have known to do this if it weren't for Esmé, and the new plants might have drowned.

Bless her, Esmé hadn't said anything against the garden when she'd come to look at the herbs. Her only comments were that Rita had her work cut out for her, and that it had been poorly designed for breathing room. She liked the tree though, and so does Rita. It is an enormous oak that shades the whole house and part of the garden and stretches over the street. It also has a decent amount of lower leaves, which provide a good screen in front of the porch when Rita wants to smoke and people watch.

The family that moved into her old house — their old house — a few months ago is eerily similar to how her own family looked in the beginning. She wouldn't be surprised if the age differences between the children were the same as between her own children. Older brother and two younger sisters, one year between the brother and the older sister, four years between the two sisters. An unplanned third child. At least that was the case for her third child. Maybe the family that lives across from her now had a sudden resurgence of love, four years after fulfilling their quota.

Pam, her youngest, moved out when she was sixteen, having finished high school already. Rita and Thom had anticipated having her around after her older two had left, but in fact Lynn was still living with them at the time, while doing her bachelor's degree, and Errol, who was only a few blocks away, still came home for dinner once or twice a week. Pam was the one who felt she

had to escape. Maybe she had guessed the future, foreseen years of being an adult child living alone with her parents. Maybe that future had seemed unbearable to her.

Pam helped Rita move, when the time came. She asked the least questions of the three children, and even defended Rita against Lynn, who has always been her father's
champion. Errol's questions were endless, but perfunctory. Lynn's were designed to wound. Pam only wanted to know if anything had happened, if one of them had hurt the other, and she seemed satisfied with Rita's typically wan response — "No. Well, never intentionally. Well. I mean, certainly never physically. Or the other way." There are so many ready-made phrases for parents to tell their children when they divorce, but none of them even pretend to be adequate. "We disagreed on too many things." "We fell out of love." "We grew apart."

This last one is Rita's favourite and, in her opinion, the most accurate. The two meanings of the phrase hold some poetic weight in her mind. Imagining a rift in the earth between Thom and herself, some tectonic groaning that widened the gulf between them over the years. Or the other meaning, which is just as easy to visualize. Normal couples — impossible couples — begin as saplings and are grafted to each other until they continue to grow as one, barely distinguishable as the individuals they once were. She and Thom grew apart. Became their own trees, with bark too tough to graft, with branches too stiff to twine. She likes the image because it implies the possibility of continued growth after marriage. And after divorce.

They aren't divorced yet; the paperwork takes a long time, and lawyers have a way of dragging things out. But they are separated. And thank God.

Pam stayed with her for a week after the move, declared the apartment "perfect, if a bit dark." Then she went back to Northern Ontario, where she lives in the dark for five months out of the year. But Pam loved the house's high ceilings and the large kitchen's gray stone tiles, and the absence in general of carpeting.

"It's still more space than I need," Rita said.

"No, it's not," Pam said simply. "It's really not."

And after the initial shock, this has proven to be true. In fact, the furniture she brought over fits better in the apartment's layout than it did in the old house. And it's true about the carpeting. It's infantilizing. In her new home there is no reason to soften any landings.

Errol has been over a few times. He helped cart topsoil over from the garden centre when Rita decided she was ripping out some of the ivy and

putting in a vegetable patch. He's never been quick to express his opinion unless it's negative, so Rita took his silence as a good sign. Lynn, of course, refuses to come.

Pam called yesterday. She prefers calls to e-mails because they are not required as frequently. Pam might not even have a computer in her house, up where she lives. There might be computers and internet at the library where she works, but she has always called. Even the first time she left, when everyone else her age was starting to be e-mail obsessed, Pam would call from Montreal, every week, and sometimes more often. She by no means ran away. She did not abandon Rita. Or Thom.

Yesterday Pam wanted to know if Rita knew about Dad's partner Cathy's miscarriage. Of course Rita didn't know, and her hand flew to her mouth, coating the lower half of her face with loamy, black soil. (She had been wrestling with a sprawl of creeping ivy that refused to be evicted from her planned vegetable patch).

"I just thought I should call you."

Rita had known Cathy was pregnant. Cathy was Esmé's former roommate — removed enough to be permissible, but still close enough to be a sting. Esmé brought a bottle of champagne and a bottle of scotch when she found out about the pregnancy, and the two of them got uproariously drunk on the porch as dusk settled over the street, creeping through the oak leaves. Rita got drunk enough to laugh, but not quite drunk enough to cry. At least not while Esmé was there.

Rita wanted to cry again on the phone with Pam, but she didn't want Pam to know she was crying, and the way to do that was to let everything run freely without stemming anything — nose, eyes, or mouth. So the various streams ran down her face, cutting white slaloms into the dirt around her nose and mouth.

"Well, thanks," she told Pam. "Thanks for letting me know."

"Have you talked to him?"

"Talked to Dad? Oh, no. Not for weeks, I think."

"Oh."

"So you have, I take it."

"Yeah, Mum."

"Good. That's good." Rita sighed, and wanted to put down the phone. And despite her best efforts she sniffed, then sneezed out the dirt she'd inhaled. "Oh, sweet girl," she said.

"Bless you," Pam said.

Soon after, they said goodbye.

Do you talk to Dad often? is the question she wanted to ask. Do you talk to Dad more than you talk to me?

Her need for answers to these questions has lessened today, like how the sensation of hunger lessens after days on end of undernourishment. The body knows when it is being ignored.

Today, in the garden, she plants a trumpet vine and envisions it climbing up the lattice of the elevated porch. She goes to work again on the planned vegetable patch. The ivy seems to spring up overnight.

Heaven forbid this garden become a metaphor.

Cathy is thirty-eight. More than fifteen years younger than Thom.

Cathy has had a miscarriage. Thirty-eight is a risky age.

Rita pushes her fingers into the earth.

Rita never lost a pregnancy, but she almost lost a child.

She finds the cord of ivy root and follows it, holding it like a lifeline in the dark.

The call from the hospital in Montreal at midnight.

The ten hour bus ride through the snowstorm that grounded a thousand airplanes.

Thom's voice saying: She won't do it again. They have someone watching her. She won't do it again. You have time.

Rita tugs the root gently, follows the tension to its source.

What is Thom telling Cathy? Is he telling her he knew it would happen, like he told Rita, once she'd gotten Pam back home? Is he telling her it won't happen again?

She finds where the root plunges abruptly, deep into the earth.

Pam's voice saying: Dad and I talked about it.

When?

Pam's angel hair spread around her grey face on the hospital bed. The bandages on her doll's wrists.

Weeks ago. Months ago. I can't remember.

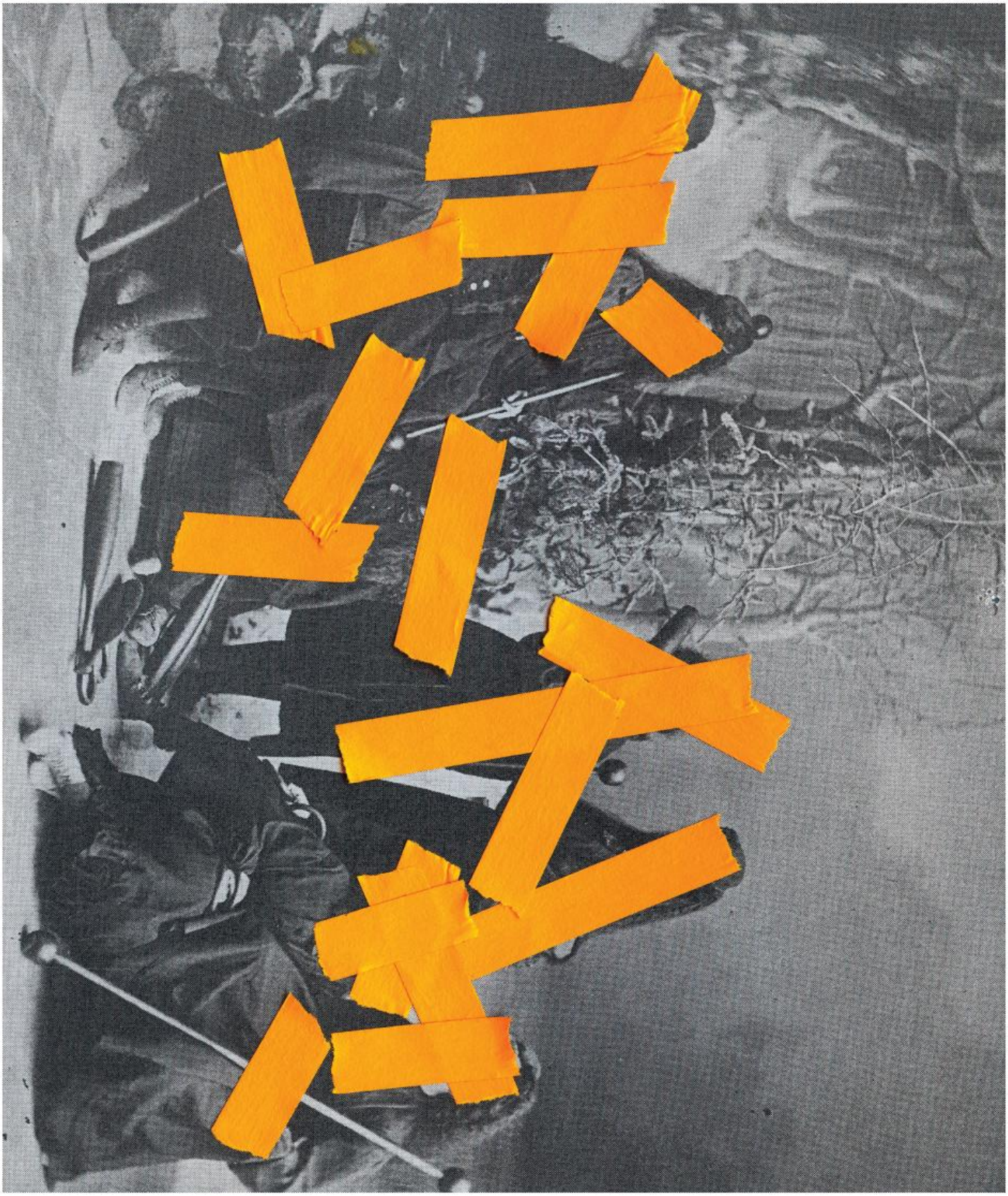
Rita pulls gently, holding her breath. She feels the tiny root hairs break off the main root every so often. She decides this is okay. This has to be okay. She eases it out of its burrow. She examines the white, dirty thing in the daylight that filters through the oak at noon. She checks to see if the end has broken off, if it is still buried deep where she cannot reach.

How do you tell your suicidal daughter that her parents are separating because of her attempt?

Can you replant eight years of recovery after pulling out the root? And what happens if the end breaks off, too deep for you to reach?

The ivy root tapers to such a small end that Rita can't tell if it's broken or not.

This is enough for her today. This has got to be enough.



On Sets

Angjelin Hila

Any arrangement to the basic structure involves a division of advantages. The division of advantages must not affect the allocation of priorities. Priorities must be ascribed to mutually exclusive sets. The set of all sets that is not a member of itself implies a contradiction. Sets of propositions are truth-functionally consistent if their members are all true on at least one assignment of truth-values to their atomic components. Inconsistent sets are ipso facto untrue. Members may walk away if unsatisfied with a set. A set is impoverished if its members intentionally decide to walk away. When a set empties out, the rigid relations of form remain devoid of the supple relations of meaning. Sets are sacs of organic material with soft tissue and thin membranes. Submerged in a fluid substance, they yield to external pressure to regulate the flow of solvents between members. Sometimes sets shrivel and contract, and sometimes they swell until they tear. Outside pressure squeezes them hollow, leaving behind a filmy exterior. Inconsistent sets are only prima facie untrue.

Tape Study 3 (After William Notman), Greg McCarthy

Extraordinary
David Gilmour

It was nearly three in the morning now. The hum from the refrigerator clicked off, leaving the room in audible silence. It seemed as though the curtains, the lamps, the pictures on the wall were all waiting too. I was standing at the window looking down at the parking lot. A man in a white jacket moved between the cars and stepped under a spotlight. He looked up. We looked at each other for an unnaturally long time. Then he waved, a big wide wave as though he were on a boat and trying to catch the attention of a passing freighter. But I didn't wave back. He seemed like bad luck and I stepped away from the window.

Sally came out of the bathroom and sat down heavily on the indentation on the couch, her usual place, and put her crutches carefully to one side, held them in place for a moment to be sure they didn't wobble over. "I'm ready to do this thing now," she said.

I looked at her face. It was grey and a little puffy, the face of an exhausted person, a partygoer who has come to the end of the night, knows it, but is too exhausted, among the wilting flowers and sweating cheese and lipstick-stained wineglasses, to get up and make it across the room to the door. Too tired to enjoy staying, too tired to leave.

I leaned forward in my chair. I closed my fingers together and then stretched them out. I saw she was watching my fingers. Then she looked up at me with a soft smile. "Could we skip this next part?"

I knew what she meant, of course, but I needed to hear her say it. "Which part would that be?"

"The questions that have obviously occurred to me a thousand times."

"And tonight's the night?"

"If you love me, please don't make me plead."

"Okay."

"Do you have them?"

"Yes."

"Are they with you?"

I took the dark bottle from my shoulder bag, which I had laid on the floor beside my chair.

"Are there enough?"

"Yes, Sally, there are enough."

"I don't have to take, like, two hundred of them, do I?"

"No."

"How many do I have to take?"

"Thirty. Tops."

She looked at the bottle. "It looks scary, that bottle. Can't we put them

in something else?"

I got up, went into the kitchen, opened the pill bottle, removed the cotton batten (we didn't need a sinister rattle coming from my bag as I crossed the room).

The phone rang again.

"Who the hell is that?" she said.

"Should I get it?"

"God, no. Please don't. Let's get on with this." After a moment, she said, "I don't want to throw up, be found half alive in a pool of vomit and spend the rest of my days with the IQ of a cabbage."

"You know, Sally, for someone who says she's had enough, you're an awfully amusing woman."

"Death concentrates the mind. I must have read that somewhere."

"No, I believe that's an original."

She thought about it for a second; quietly mouthed the words again. "You're sure? I don't want to go out on a plagiarized note."

"It's yours. Straight up."

"Where were we?" she said. I was about to open my mouth to protest, but she silenced me with a tilt of her head, a reminder to not make her plead.

I said, "Let's have a drink first."

"Yes, something fun." (A hint of postponement?)

"Okay."

"What's fun?"

"Well," I said, "what drink would you order if we were at the Cucaracha in Mexico?"

"A margarita."

"Have you got the ingredients?"

"I sure as hell do."

"You tell me what to do and I'll do it."

"Hang on," she said, "I'll come into the kitchen with you."

"Stay where you are."

"I have eternity to sit on my behind. Besides, there's a stool in there."

So she came into the kitchen with me and told me how to make a margarita.

And when we were done, we toasted each other. Then I turned off the light and brought the drinks back into the living room and sat hers down by her side.

She said, "Would you get me a glass of water, please. A big one."

"Cold or warm?"

▲

"Just medium."

I put it beside her margarita. Then I said, "Is it too late? Can we put some music on?" I found myself thinking of the man in the white jacket in the parking lot, waving. "What would you like to hear?"

"Well," she said thoughtfully. "I'd like to hear 'Take Five'? You know that one. Dave Brubeck. I've always loved that drum solo." (The approach of death, in the same way the prospect of the day's first drink rejuvenates an alcoholic, had made her chatty). "It's the only drum solo I've ever liked."

Or perhaps it was nerves, now that we were here, finally, at last.

"I agree."

"Normally I hate drum solos," she said.

I clicked through her small CD collection and there it was, the Picasso-like cover. I put it on. We listened to those delicious opening bars, cymbal and crisp snare drum.

"Now listen for the piano, that gorgeous piano," she said. "My grandparents made me take piano for a while. They knew I was artistic, but they just had the wrong thing. But they meant well."

The green liquid in her drink tilted to the rim. She reached into the bowl of pills and took one and then another. It dropped from her hand onto the carpet. I got it for her and put it back in the bowl.

She said, "This song makes me nostalgic for a life I never had. Have you ever had a song that does that to you?"

"Yes," I said, "but with me it's more to do with smells. Pears soap makes me feel like that."

"Isn't that funny. Kyle loved the smell of Pears soap. I think it evoked a life that he wanted, an organized comfort that he lacked the discipline to create for himself and knew it. Even when he was a little boy, he loved it. What do you make of that?"

"I honestly don't know."

"Do you think he intuited, even then, how things were going to go?"

I shook my head and smiled somewhat foolishly, or so it felt. We listened to the music. The saxophone was fading, making way for the drum solo.

"I don't mean I wish I'd had a different life," she continued. "I had a decent life. I could have done without that fucking carpet, but all in all, lots of love, a wonderful daughter . . ." Her eyes clouded for a moment; she was thinking of Kyle. "But when I hear 'Take Five,' especially the piano (there, you hear it?), I feel like some part of me grew up in Manhattan and went to great parties. For some reason, I always think of Playboy magazine when I hear this song. Men with tie pins. Hugh Hefner." She reached into the bowl and, with some

difficulty, removed two pills.

"I'll get it," I said.

"No, no, I'm fine." She put one pill then the other in her mouth, threw back her head, her black hair falling to her shoulders, then straightened up and took a sip of water. "You know, when I was a little girl, I used to ride cows. Honest."

I said, "How come you never came to live with us?"

She thought for a full minute. That's a long time in real time. I could feel myself sobering up more quickly than I wanted. Then: "I used to think that it was because your father didn't want to raise another man's child. For years I believed that. But near the end of her life, when the booze and the pills were starting to make her a little sloppy with her stories, Mother let something slip. I understood suddenly that it was her, she was the one who didn't want me around."

"Mother? Really?"

"Really."

"Did you see much of her?" I said.

"She'd come and go. When she felt like it. When she felt sentimental."

"But her own daughter, surely—"

"Most of the awful things in life turn out to have quite banal reasons—I've learned that. You know what I think? I think she thought her new man might like her more if she didn't come with so much furniture. It might be even more banal than that. Maybe I was too old; maybe having a daughter my age contradicted something she'd said about her own age. Once she got him, got him married, then it was okay to let the cat out of the bag. I remember going on a holiday with her once, one of the few times. I was all grown up and married by then, and determined to get over what a shitty mother she'd been. We went to a beach resort with black sand in Antigua. First night we were in the hotel, just as we were heading downstairs for dinner, she asked me not to tell anyone I was her daughter, to say that I was a cousin."

I said, "Why were you determined not to hate her? Why do you have to love everyone in your family just because they're family?"

"I can see you're thinking of your brother, Jake, again."

"He's just an example."

She said, "The truth is, sometimes I really loved my mother. When I was a little girl, I used to daydream about falling asleep in her arms. And then she'd turn up at my grandparents' and be funny and worldly and hug me and tell me I was beautiful and we'd go for these drives and I'd forgive her all over again."

"And then?"

"And then she'd go away again. Sometimes it looked like she wanted to be sure she still had me. Then she was free to get on with her life, knowing I was still there."

"But you forgave her in the end."

"Just before she died, yes, I did."

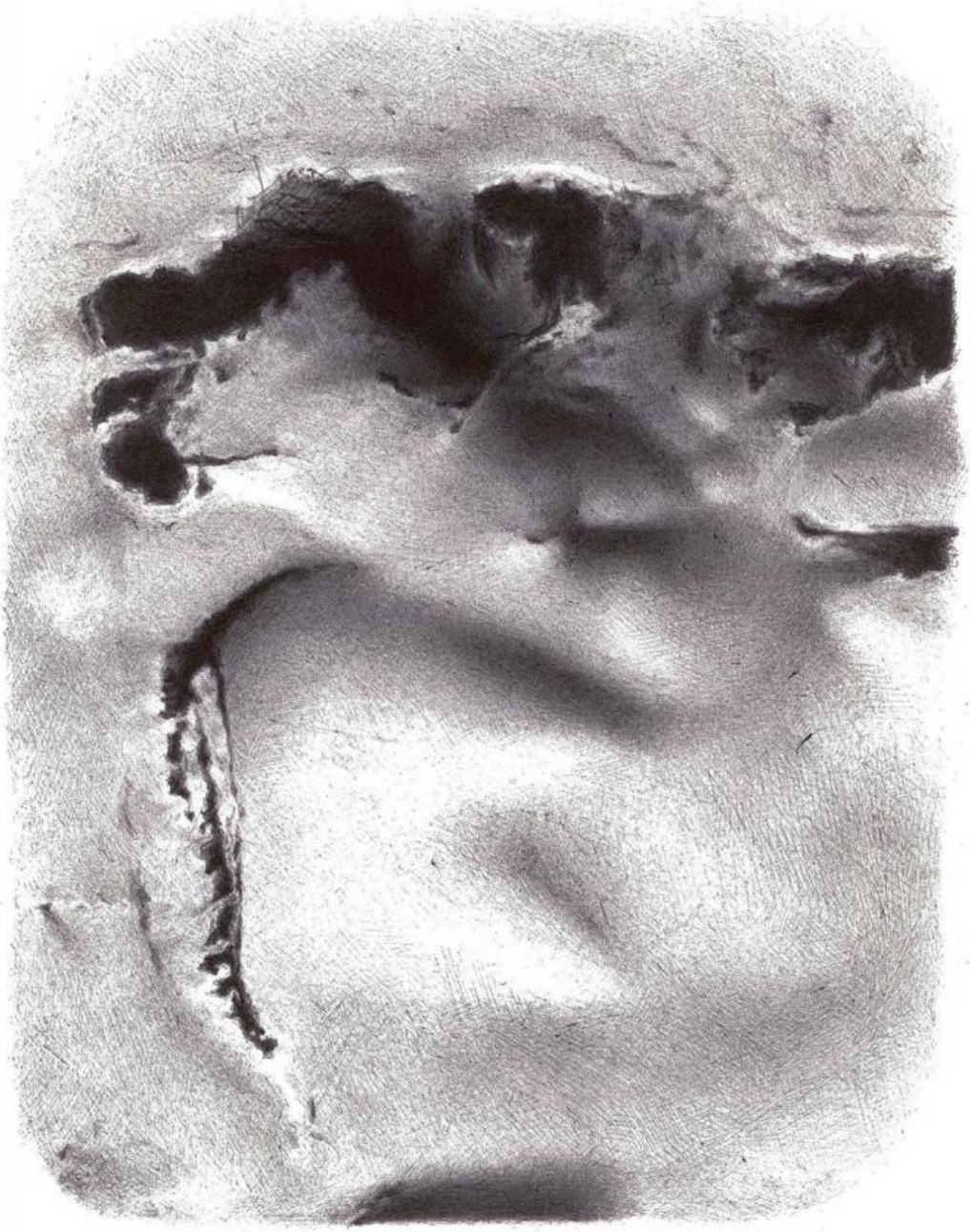
"Did she know that?"

"Yes, yes. She let her guard down once. And I got to say everything I needed to say."

"And what'd she say?"

"She just listened. That's what I needed her to do. Just listen and not argue; not defend herself; not go on the attack. And then she said, 'You're right.' And then we were okay. I never quite trusted she wouldn't take off on me—people who do that seldom do it just once—but still, we had some fun. I just kept her a little distant from my heart."

An excerpt from David Gilmour's tenth novel,
published by HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.



Untitled, Abbas Rizvi

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A. F. Moritz's most recent book is Sequence, 2015. Also in 2015, Princeton University Press reissued his 1986 collection, The Tradition, from the Princeton Series of Contemporary Poets. Moritz's poetry has received the Griffin Poetry Prize, the Guggenheim fellowship, and the Award in Literature of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Abbas Rizvi was in Iran and raised in Pakistan. He studied Biology at The University of Toronto before completing his Bachelors in Fine Art in Drawing and Painting at OCAD. He currently works at The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery and maintains his professional artistic practice in Toronto.

André Babyn is currently finishing the second year of the University of Toronto's MA in Creative Writing, where he is working on a novel. His prose has appeared or is forthcoming in Maisonneuve, Little Brother, Grain, Pank, and elsewhere. In 2015 he was the recipient of the Adam Penn Gilders Scholarship in Creative Writing, and in 2010 he won the Norma Epstein Award for Creative Writing. He is also the Fiction Editor for The Puritan.

Angjelin Hila is alum of Victoria College. He is currently pursuing a Master of Information at the University of Toronto, where he's learning about taxonomies and taxonomies of taxonomies. He's interested in the gestalt properties of organizational systems quite apart from their use and suggests Burton's voluptuous translation of A Thousand and One Nights to anyone wearied by excessive dealings with metadata.

Anna Shortly is graduating from Victoria College with a double major in English and Anthropology and with her friend Miranda. Her favourite type of tree is Weeping Willow, or White Birch, or Spanish Moss, or Douglas Fir.

Cara Schacter is a fourth year English major double minoring in Material Culture and Creative Expression. While she has marinated tofu in the past, lately she's more invested in the marination of tempeh and assorted meats. Cripplingly indecisive, she is also no stranger to letting thoughts marinate to the point of irrelevance (not a good recipe). She just heard "David" finally broke up with his long-term girlfriend so marinated tofu could make a comeback in her future (unlikely, but you never know—she'll let the thought stew anyway).

David Gilmour is a Canadian novelist whose most recent novel, Extraordinary, was published by Harper Collins in September, 2013. Gilmour is the author of several other novels such as A Perfect Night to Go to China, which won the 2005 Governor-General's Award for Fiction. His work has been translated into over 24 languages and has been praised by literary figures such as Northrop Frye. Gilmour currently teaches literature and creative writing at the University of Toronto.

Geoff Baillie is a fourth year student of English and Political Science at Victoria College.

Greg McCarthy is a multidisciplinary artist working out of Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Working primarily in collage and photography, his works have dealt with tourism in the Niagara region, circulation of photographs and most recently issues surrounding historic depictions of national identity in Canada.

Joanna Yetter's artistic practice focuses on space, interpersonal relationships, identity and growth through printmaking, book arts and installation. Documentation of her space, memory and relationships is integral to her work. Joanna has exhibited in Toronto and the United States. She enjoys writing and organizing and re-organizing her possessions.

Mado Christie is currently pursuing a Masters degree in collaborative piano at the Manhattan School of Music. Their fiction has appeared in Acta Victoriana (2014), The Spectatorial (2014), and Klipspringer Magazine (2014). They continue to balance deep love for music and for literature, and cannot seem to live without either of the two.

Mahdi Chowdhury was born in Dhaka, raised in Toronto. Artist and graphic designer with work featured TIME Magazine, My Modern Met, Buzzfeed, etc. Currently in second year. Double major in History and Philosophy.

Malcolm Sanger is studying Anthropology at the University of Toronto

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Mara Raposo grew up in the warm arms of the Portuguese community in Toronto. Like many children of the diaspora she is the first in her family to pursue postsecondary education and is specializing in Women and Gender Studies. She loves coffee and writing about small, remarkable things

Miles Forrester is a poet and conceptual artist situated in Toronto. He has been published in The Passive Collective and Acta Victoriana. In 2015 He participated in The Round Table Residency. Forrester writes lists of things and puts them into systems that are either arbitrary or not at all.

Miranda Alksnis is an erstwhile Editor-in-Chief of Acta, Anna's friend, and soon-to-be graduate of U of T with a degree in English, Semiotics, and Philosophy. She is going to spend the summer lying on grass and forgetting that school ever was.

Nika Gofshtein is a third year English student who hopes to attend grad school for creative writing in the future. Her poems have been published in Acta Victoriana two times previously.

Olenka Szymonski is a Toronto-based videographer and digital artist. Recent projects include: artisit-in-residence at Artscape Gibraltar Point this past winter, art director at Milkweed zine, featured artist at Camp Wavelength 2015 and participant of the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar Film and Architecture program this past summer. Her work has been featured on Vice USA, Noisey, Exclaim! and Chart Attack.

Rron Maloku is interested in exploring the effects of the environment on the true self through large scale drawings; Is the true self composed of fluid identities derived from experience? He is also interested in the way emotion and consciousness can be interpreted as entities separate from the individual.

Sunny Kim was born in Korea and raised in Toronto. She is a painter based in Toronto. She majors in visual arts and cinema studies at University of Toronto. Professionally a pastry chef, she combines her experience in a commercial kitchen and her studies to visually examine human/nonhuman aesthetics. Flesh is decontextualized from its original setting and re-structured into visual compositions.

Vanessa Lent lives and works in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She lives with one large human man and two small human children. You can find her work in PRISM international, The Dalhousie Review, and Wilfred Laurier UP's recent publication Public Poetics.

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 of **500**