



# SEA & CEDAR

LITERATURE & ART MAGAZINE

featuring  
artwork by  
Wilma  
Millette

SUMMER 2023





# SEA & CEDAR

LITERATURE & ART MAGAZINE



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*Sea & Cedar Magazine* is a biannual print and digital publication edited and produced by staff at Vancouver Island Regional Library. We are dedicated to showcasing thought-provoking, exciting new creative writing and artwork by writers and artists who reside on Vancouver Island, Haida Gwaii, Bella Coola, and the Gulf Islands.

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We respectfully acknowledge that this issue was compiled and produced by settlers who live on the traditional and unceded territory of the Coast Salish peoples, specifically the Snuneymuxw, Snaw-Na-As, and Stz'uminus First Nations, and the T'sou-ke First Nation. We acknowledge the privilege we have to live, work, create and enjoy art that is inspired by life on the unceded territories of Indigenous peoples whose connection to and stewardship of the land continue to this day.

**Cover Art:** *Passionnée* by Wilma Millette

Collage on wooden cradle

24x24 in

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**Web:** [virl.bc.ca/sea-cedar-magazine](http://virl.bc.ca/sea-cedar-magazine)

**Email:** [seacedarmag@virl.bc.ca](mailto:seacedarmag@virl.bc.ca)

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# A Note from the Editor

One of the joys of reading short fiction is the chance to be immersed in the various worlds of some fascinating characters, and momentarily see things from other points of view—from those that feel familiar and close to our own, to those we have never even considered, to those with which we heartily disagree. This can also be one of its major challenges. What do we do with characters who are deeply flawed—who hold worldviews steeped in ignorance, appear blind to privilege and incapable of true self-reflection, who are ultimately unreliable as narrators of the world around them? While they may be unlikeable, these can also be some of the most valuable characters to engage with and to read critically. In reading and enjoying fiction—not to mention poetry and art—we hopefully accept the invitation to see through another person's eyes, and in so doing become conscious of our own positions in the world. While this is a great opportunity to consider our potential blind spots and limitations in a constructive way, it's also a chance to celebrate the unique gifts we each bring. Our talented local writers and artists have worked hard to create pieces worthy of such detailed attention, and we're proud to present this thought-provoking collection of writing and art for your enjoyment. Happy reading!

∞ *April Ripley*



*Horizons* by Amber Lomax

Mixed media: watercolour, ink, pencil, and collage

9x12 in

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NOTES ON THE CONTRIBUTORS

# FEATURED ARTIST: WILMA MILLETTE

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COLLAGE



*Passionnée*

Collage on wooden cradle

**W**ILMA MILLETTE is a collage, mixed media artist who works out of her home studio in Maple Bay. She creates one-of-a-kind collage and assemblage artwork using paper



ephemera from the 19th and 20th centuries, vintage and antique found objects from her personal collection, and other sources in the public domain.

**S&C:** Where are you located? Does your location influence your work?

**WM:** I am a third generation Vancouver Islander, born and raised in Chemainus. My seascape pieces are influenced by my childhood spent boating around the gulf islands. I use some of the vintage charts that belonged to my commercial fisherman father in my work.

**S&C:** How would you describe your style as an artist?

**WM:** The overall theme of my work is up-cycling the past. I work in several different styles, including whimsical seascapes and collages, steam punk assemblage boxes, and collages and collage portraits with social themes.

**S&C:** What medium do you prefer to work with and why?

**WM:** I use old papers, maps, books, and found objects from the past. I find beauty in the well-made, discarded objects from the past. They come already rich with story, and I like to give them new life and a new narrative by combining them in unexpected ways.

**SC:** How do you come up with ideas and inspiration for your collages?

**WM:** I come up with ideas in different ways, sometimes from current events like the social isolation of the pandemic or climate change; sometimes the papers and objects themselves inspire ideas—like a hand-written medical receipt from 1897—and other times there is a particular idea I want to explore like healing or positive thinking.

**SC:** Do you have stories in mind for the characters and scenes you create in your work?

**WM:** Oh yes, I have a story for every piece I create. On my website and Instagram account I often write a hint of that story, but try to leave room for the viewer to come up with their own story for the piece. I have a charming fan that always writes a narrative for the pieces I post on the blog portion of my website. It delights me that my work inspires her.

**SC:** Where do you find the materials you use in your collages?

**WM:** I spend a great deal of time hunting down my materials. Sometimes I receive atlases, maps, and old letters as gifts, other times I find them in secondhand and antique shops. I also buy when I travel or find them online.

**SC:** Has the content and style of your artwork changed or developed over your artistic career? If so, how?

**WM:** The content and style of my work is constantly evolving, and sometimes I circle back and revisit an older series or style. During the pandemic, when we were all socially isolating, I

had time to explore and came up with the idea for my Collage portraits, which I am still perfecting.

**SC:** Are there any other artists that influence you or that you particularly admire?

**WM:** There are so many artists that I admire. I particularly like Matisse, Van Gogh, and Picasso, as they were outsider artists during their time. I consider myself to be an outsider artist. I am influenced by and admire many contemporary collage artists such as Sarah Jarrett, Alwen Rambo, Holly Chastain, Diane Hoffmann, Julie Liger-Belair, Jane Chipp, and so many more.

**SC:** Do you have any new projects on the go that you are excited about?

**WM:** Yes, I am currently working on two new portraits, one about positive thinking and the other about empathy. I am also working on some assemblage pieces. One is a series of driftwood boats using old local marine charts for the sails and found objects for the riggings, and the other is an old printer tray that I have cut up into smaller sections and which will house some of my found object collections.





*Pondering* by Wilma Millette  
Collage on wooden cradle  
24x24 in

# planting onions

*Zoe Dickinson*

I imagine her planting onions

her fingers cradle each fierce green spark  
separate seedling roots  
settle them into the cool earth  
of the garden bed

I imagine her

greeting earthworms and potato bugs as old friends  
celebrating the long-awaited thaw together

watching for frost warnings  
wrapping beds of tentative shoots  
in old sheets

exclaiming over the first asparagus  
and the first robin—  
her bright eyes and trim bustle about the yard  
quite similar to his—

I imagine her planting onions  
and later, cooking them—  
their sharp and vital tang  
hangs in the air  
as her hand shakes the pan  
just so—

I imagine all the onions she has yet to plant  
lining up in ghostly rows  
to testify  
that she is needed in this world  
as witnessed by the robin  
the chickadee  
the pileated woodpecker  
the cardinal and his mate

I imagine the tenacious spirit of the onion  
guarding her surgical table  
and later,  
her hospital bed  
a knight of *Allium Cepa*  
to fight off errant bacteria  
while the doctor removes  
her excess heart  
and places the crimson shavings  
on the table beside him

in the evenings  
of the long week that passes  
before she can leave the hospital  
Dad and I plant onion seeds  
in plastic tubs.  
by the time they germinate  
she will be home.  
by the time the seedlings  
are ready to transplant  
she'll be out there in the garden  
with her trowel  
ready to plant onions.

# the donation bin

*Zoe Dickinson*

each book tells two stories:  
what's written on the page,  
and what happened to the page

ripples of water damage  
turn page to pool  
paper's surface tension ruffled  
by unseen wind  
    the sound  
    when flipping through  
    will never be the same  
    a sharper crackle  
    turbulence of waves

shadow of sun damage  
cover faded  
in shelf-mate's silhouette;  
inside  
    pages toasted—  
    that perfectly browned marshmallow  
    right before it catches on fire

loose binding  
where someone cracked the spine and drank its marrow

mysterious stains  
a thumb-print  
(hopefully chocolate)

cryptic notes and doodles  
                    a sea serpent  
            sparkly star stickers  
underlining that stops abruptly  
where the reader gave up  
or the class ended

from between pages I fish out  
photos, grocery lists, fall leaves,  
a blade of grass  
a strand of cooked spaghetti  
and once  
a newborn's hospital record,  
the baby's footprint achingly perfect  
in crisp blue ink

# fledgeling

*Zoe Dickinson*

day by dry day  
lack makes things lighter

I walk the bluff  
desiccated  
as the cat's-ear seeds  
that leap in swarms  
into the sea

under my feet  
the bluff evolves  
from landmass  
to curving wing.

day by dry day  
plants shed water mass  
grow hollow as birds' bones

tasseled grass ripens into feathers:  
seed spikelets become barbs and barbules  
hooked  
to catch wind

poised on Pacific precipice  
a mutant bird of grass and stone  
unfolds its wings  
waits for the right gust  
to take flight.



*Moonlight Storm* by Wilma Millette  
Encaustic collage on wooden cradle  
18x32 in



# On Some Nights, the Sound of a Clock Ticking

*Hugh Anderson*

We put the quilt back on the bed  
and closed the door, the quilt because  
her mother stitched it before she even was.  
The door? If it was closed, we thought,  
we might still pretend.

That was Thursday, after we came back.  
The room was empty, but not; she  
had lain so long there, and the quilt,  
patterned as it was—the shining clock—  
covered her present in the past.

A trick of the eye, I'm sure,  
but the inlaid pendulum seemed to sway  
slower and slower until it stopped.  
We emptied the room of her, but the quilt  
we put back, and closed the door.

# Fugue State

*Hugh Anderson*

Just past twilight and just before zero  
breath turns crisp in sodium light.  
The world is neither here nor there.  
Time is still, waiting,  
though headlights comet along the highway  
and shoppers pack Christmas to their cars.  
Here is also Then, where the far laughter  
of children in the darkening edge of winter  
calls me back. It is clear as the empty sky,  
the cold pinpoints of space beyond.  
The crunch of boots in snow, the rush  
and shush of a toboggan's swift descent,  
the air's sharp kiss on nose and cheeks  
for only a moment. Time, after all,  
is mostly linear, but now, just now,  
I feel like singing.

# A Toast

*Hugh Anderson*

Upthrust and sudden, the rock face is not of this forest  
but bog bottom pressed solid by millennia,  
full of bones not bones but stone,  
and there a spine, mnemonic for a forest noctambulant,

for creatures that slink through cycad and fern,  
through reptilian shadows in the wax and wane  
of a young, unblemished moon,  
doomed to slam broadside into fate,

doomed to cross paths with an asteroid that dusts the sky  
enough to starve the grazers and when those are gone,  
the fearsome teeth and claws as well.

So raise a glass, make a toast, a selfie moment.  
Everything is peachy as we ride, careening  
into our brief future. We might as well be innocent.

# What This Is Not

*Hugh Anderson*

Let's begin with what is not a poem:  
this is not a poem.

A poem is not just words, though there is pleasure  
in sullyng an empty page.

Instead, a poem is something unsaid,  
something unsayable that cannot be shaped.  
A poem is a struggle, a dark inertia  
that begs to be unwritten,  
that gets violent if you push too hard.

A poem is a moment when the mind  
trips over almost anything  
and punches a hole in the universe.  
It is dangerous, could cause reality  
to become unstable, could come crashing down  
on everyone's head, or just the poet's  
because, after all, he had nothing to say,  
or perhaps too much, and kept poking the bear  
when it wanted to hibernate.

Best to leave it alone.

And what if the universe  
is just as empty as the page?  
What if the universe is nothing more  
than lines of code writing themselves?  
Why would that need words anyway?



*Blue Arrows* by Amber Lomax

Mixed media: watercolour, ink, pencil, and collage  
9x12 in

# Flame Girl

*Jann Everard*

**T***he building next door is on fire,* Shell texted from her fourth-floor apartment to her brother Lucas across town.

*Get out!* he texted back, and she lingered over the small screen trying to decide whether to tell him that the fire alarms in her building weren't ringing, and no one had banged on her door. In the end, she decided she should clear out. She could see through the window that the fire wasn't under control. And she'd never heard the alarms in her building tested, so they might not even work properly.

Her cat was in his usual spot—the chair next to the radiator—and the cat carrier was at the back of the closet where she'd stuffed it after Lucas argued the basement locker would be too far to go in an emergency. Chalky fought, spreading his front paws on either side of the crate's opening so that eventually Shell had to tip it on its end and drop him in feet first. As he mewled his protest, she grabbed her backpack and loaded it with bowls, a Ziploc bag filled with kibble, and a leash she'd stopped using after hearing about a leashed cat that was

strangled when it fell off a balcony. She added some snacks: an apple, cheese and crackers, and three tins of tuna with pull-tab lids.

Cell phone, charger, wallet, all her winter outerwear. She felt in charge of her evacuation and added her anxiety meds, a half-read graphic novel, her laptop and, as an afterthought, her passport. She remembered reading that the hardest thing to do in the aftermath of a disaster was establish identities of victims. She didn't want to be a nobody if her building burned to the ground.

By the time she locked the door behind her, the smell in the air had become acrid and the cat's protests more pronounced. There were others in the hall complaining that the smoke detectors should have activated long before now, and they threatened to give the landlord an earful if the situation turned out badly. Shell agreed with the whiners but didn't say so. As she passed a couple heading for the stairs, the possibility of becoming homeless started to feel too real.

On the third-floor landing, a bearded guy a few years older than her pointed to the cat carrier. "Do you want me to carry that?" he asked, and she shook her head. The size of people's fingers always caught Shell's attention, and this guy's knuckles looked like oversized nuts screwed on industrial-strength bolts.

A woman tried to push past her, irritated at her pace. Shell nudged the bearded guy with the crate. “Would you? I changed my mind.”

He took the handle. When they hit ground level, at least five people blocked the exit ahead of them.

“What’s the hold-up?” Shell’s companion called over their heads.

“The cops are only letting a few people out at a time so we don’t get wet from the pumps,” someone answered back, and then there was a blast of cold air and a deep voice yelling, “Move it, people! Exit right!”

Icy droplets pelted her face. Eight fire engines lined the road and sirens signalled more approaching. The building where the fire had started was blocked from view by equipment. What Shell could see didn’t look good. It was an old part of town where turn-of-the-century mansions converted to rental units were packed tightly against aged low-rises like her own. At least two rooming houses were ablaze, and it was clear that gusty winds weren’t helping the situation. Police ushered the evacuees past yellow tape and several idling ambulances.

“Where now?” someone asked, and a woman in uniform yelled back, “The church on the corner has opened as a warming station. If you don’t have anywhere else to go, you’re welcome to stay there.”

Shell hunched inside her coat. She wanted a hot drink, but all the closest coffee shops were closed. Plus, there was Chalky to think of. She'd forgotten to put a blanket or towel in the carrier. No doubt he was sliding around inside, unable to get traction on the plastic floor. He hated being trapped inside the carrier almost as much as she feared crowds of strangers.

"So, you going to the church or what?" asked Chalky's porter. He wasn't wearing enough clothes for the weather, just a cotton hoodie and canvas slip-on shoes.

"Yeah, I guess," Shell answered, and they fell into step.

"I'm Ned, by the way. Short for Alexander."

"Really?" Shell asked. "Ned is usually short for Edward or Edwin. Most people shorten Alexander to Al or Sasha."

"You an expert or something? What's your name?"

"Shell."

"Short for shell-shocked? Shell from a bullet?"

She slowed, unsure what the guy meant. "Are you trying to be funny?" she asked.

He shrugged, his neck reddening, then held up the carrier so they could both look inside. A white lump cowered at the back. "What do you call your cat?" he asked.

"Chalky. It was his name when I rescued him." She put a finger up against the front grate but the animal made no move towards her. They were alike, she and Chalky. The cat's foster

mom had promised her that, with a little love, he'd soon come out of his shell. That expression alone sealed the adoption, so many times had Shell heard her mom claim how withdrawn her daughter was.

A woman in a brown parka stood near the door at the back of the church. She was gazing at the ground, and the way she stood there motionlessly caught Shell's attention. It was possible the woman was trying to remember something she'd forgotten or was gathering her thoughts. Whatever she was doing, she seemed undisturbed and serene in a way that Shell envied. Her own thoughts were often chaotic, and it was hard to settle to tasks. While reading old comics with her brother not long ago, she'd asked if she was like the Marvel character Quicksilver. "God no," Lucas had answered. "You're too OCD," which was politically incorrect but diagnostically true, so she couldn't take offence.

The woman in the brown parka suddenly lifted both her arms above her shoulders. So close to the church it might have suggested a crucifix, but to Shell it looked like the woman wanted to take flight. She remembered raising her arms like that as she'd run through parks and schoolyards and down back alleys, hoping to be transported to another place. She tried to catch the woman's eyes but a barrel-shaped person stepped between them, her Kelly-green coat a splotch of

colour against the dull wall behind her.

“Are you the displaced people?” she asked. “Come in. We’re ready for you.”

And ready they were—an army of the elderly standing behind a kitchen pass-through cluttered with gleaming convention-sized coffee urns and cookies on paper plates. It didn’t take much imagination to see that, sometime in its history, this room had been used for church suppers that fed a hundred.

“Please register your name and address here.”

Shell took the pen that was held out to her from across a desk. “It’s Red Cross procedure,” said the woman overseeing the list, her tone officious. Shell wrote, then handed the pen to Ned. The woman smelled strongly of hairspray. She checked their entries as if to make sure their addresses matched the list of buildings she knew to be affected.

“Oh dear, your cat isn’t happy,” she added, as Chalky yowled. “Perhaps we can find a quiet place for it somewhere.” She beckoned one of the women from the kitchen and whispered to her while indicating that Shell and Ned should take a seat. They chose one of the unoccupied tables, steering clear of mothers with small children and old couples with wide, anxious eyes.

Shell pulled out her phone. “I’m afraid to look at the news,”

she said. “The last thing I want is to have to move back into my parents’ house.” She thumbed off a quick text telling Lucas she was safe.

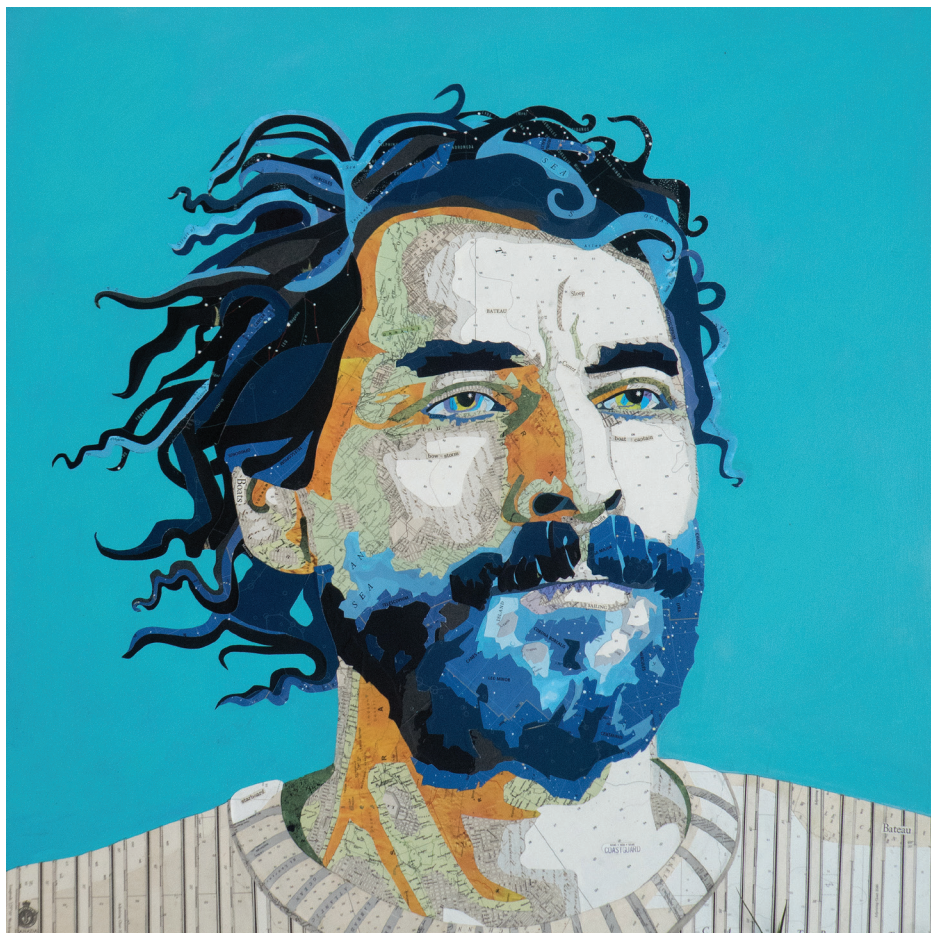
Ned shrugged. “At least you have parents. I’d be out on the street again.” He laced his fingers and it looked to Shell like he needed a moment, so she sat quietly next to him.

People continued to pour into the room, talking in high-pitched voices. Shell recognized a few from her building. After a while she rummaged in her bag. “I’m going to find some water. Can I get you something? Coffee? It looks like they’ve put out sandwiches, too.”

“I’m not hungry, but I’ll take a black coffee.” Ned patted his pocket as if the thought of coffee made him automatically search for smokes.

The church ladies had become harried as the number of clean cups dwindled and the snacks disappeared. Shell tipped an urn forward to get the last of the brew for Ned and wrapped some cookies and sandwiches in a paper serviette before stuffing them in her coat pocket. The bread was white and the filling cheap jam, more jelly than fruit. As she edged to the outside of the room searching for a water fountain, the woman at the registration desk stood up on a chair and asked for attention.

“Welcome, everyone. I’m so sorry about the circumstances,



*The Navigator* by Wilma Millette  
Collage on wooden cradle  
30x30 in

but we'll do our best to keep you comfortable while you wait. At this time, I'd like to ask those with infants and small children to move to our Sunday school nursery room where we can better look after your little ones. You can follow Mrs. Ford who is ... now where did she go? Oh, there she is, waving over by the exit. Also, if anyone feels unwell or needs medical attention, please let us know."

There was more to her speech but Shell lost track. Chair legs began to scrape against the floor and children cried. As the bodies pressed around her, she froze. An icy sensation flooded her torso and up her neck. She reached for a chair to steady herself. Under her coat and sweater, her heart pounded and her bra dampened. For a brief second, she wanted to escape outside and *into* the fire. This fleeting self-destructive instinct was familiar; she'd had similar thoughts before—on streets with onrushing traffic and in subway stations as the train hurtled in. It was important to breathe through it as she'd been taught, to be aware her brain was testing its fight-or-flight response.

Ned's coffee sloshed as she made her way back to their table. "I'm having a panic attack," she said, sliding the cup and water bowl in front of him and putting her hands to her throat where it felt constricted.

He leaned towards her, so close she could smell the spicy

scent of his deodorant. He'd taken off his hoodie and wore a black Led Zeppelin t-shirt. "Should I get help?" he asked. "Do you feel like you're choking?"

"No. Sort of. Just talk to me, distract me. Tell me what you do and how long you've lived in our building."

He kept a close eye on her. "I don't do much," he said. "I drywall when I can get the work and paint sometimes. You know, builders' beige."

She nodded at him to go on. "When did you move in? I don't think I've seen you around." Her voice sounded high; she was sipping on air.

"Two months ago. I've been clean for a year, but before that I was kind of messed up. I punched a guy at work and got in some trouble with the police..." He shrugged as if unsure how she'd react.

She nodded again, this time with her eyes closed, wrapping her arms around her chest. The sense of impending explosion was strong. She fought back, focussing her thoughts on her apartment. It wasn't much, but she'd always felt safe there. She'd schlepped home the second-hand kitchenware on public transit and cajoled Lucas into picking up cast-off furniture from the curbside. It was clear Ned had a history he didn't want to return to, and she had one, too. So, no matter what happened, she was never going back to the house where her

mom and that prick of a second husband lived.

“Come lie down a minute,” Ned said, and he steered her to the other side of their table where there was space on the floor. He sat next to her, cross-legged, blocking most of her view of the swirling room. The ceiling was white plaster, similar to the warped and pockmarked ceiling of her apartment. After a few minutes staring, she calmed down. Ned prodded her forearm to get her attention. “Nice corpse pose,” he said, grinning in a way that made his face look less wary. “What about you? What do you do?”

“I’m a Braille proofreader. Can you hand me my pack?” She sat up, embarrassed to have been lying on a church hall floor.

Ned lifted the pack from the table. “That’s a real job?”

Chalky was still huddled at the back of his box. Shell unhooked the front gate and swung it open so that she could slip in the water bowl. But the cat was too fast. He landed in her lap and pushed off, all the nails of his back paws extended for maximum propulsion.

“Shit!” She leapt up and careened after him, ignoring the pain in her thighs. The logical thing would be to call out that her cat was loose and she needed help catching him but, as usual, fear of drawing attention to herself silenced her. Instead, she elbowed past people as she made her way to the door where she could stand guard to make sure he didn’t escape

outdoors.

The woman who'd managed the registration desk when they'd arrived had since abandoned it and drifted over to stand nearby. She gazed over the room packed with people, a sheen of moisture on her upper lip, her nostrils flared as if the rising odour of wet wool and worry was offensive. "We've exceeded the room's capacity. What do I do now?" she asked.

Shell felt sorry to have to add to her concerns. "My cat's loose. I can't find it," she said, and then, distracted by an EMS worker who burst into the room, turned to him to ask, "How bad is it?"

The man swiped at his glasses, trying to clear them of condensation. "I'm afraid it's not good. The wind's against us." With surprising deftness, he put out his boot to block Chalky as the animal streaked from underfoot and bee-lined for the exit. Shell swept the cat into her arms and buried her face in his ruff. The thought that he might be the only thing she still owned by the end of the day panicked her again. She began to quiver inside her heavy coat.

The registration lady straightened her back, a look on her face suggesting here was one thing she *could* deal with. "Follow me," she said and led Shell to a large cloakroom, three sides lined with rods of empty hangers. "He'll be safe in here."

Shell tumbled the cat to the floor. The woman took a key

from a ring in her pocket and handed it over. “Keep the door locked so no one lets him out inadvertently. If I’m not around when this is over, drop the key in the suggestion box over there.”

Shell had the impression the poor woman was about to throw in the towel, that she’d just discovered disaster relief was no relief to anyone. In this woman’s world, warming shelters were temporary until friends with spare rooms could be contacted. She seemed surprised to find so many people had no place else to turn.

Back at her table, Shell threw her coat over the chair. Less overheated, and with Chalky safe, she felt better. The thing was not to anticipate the worst. That’s what her therapist always said.

Next to Ned, the woman Shell had seen outside the church sat eerily still. Small tufts of polyester fibre spiked from holes in the nylon shell of her parka. The stark white of her headscarf against her skin looked like froth on coffee.

“That’s Leila,” said Ned. “We were having a nice talk, and then...” He gestured at the unblinking eyes that seemed to focus inward and the rigid facial muscles. “I think something triggered her.”

“What do you mean?” Shell tried to make eye contact, stooping and bobbing in front of the woman. “Hi Leila. Are

you okay?” She lowered her voice and turned back to Ned. “She looks like she’s in a fugue state. I’ve seen it before when a kid witnessed a jumper in the subway. The kid completely shut down.”

She’d shut down once, too. Created an imaginary shield while her mom demanded frantically what was wrong. She’d sat on the chair at the dining room table trying to merge with the dust motes and the cat dander, to disappear into the atmosphere so that she couldn’t feel the unwanted hands on her skin, didn’t absorb the hot sweat and saliva, the other excretions forced on her in her own bedroom by her stepfather.

Now she ran her hands down the front of her shirt sleeves and shook them off. She pushed away the image of her mother’s face with its expression of rising awareness, its resolution to be ignorantly complicit.

Ned didn’t seem to notice her long silence. “Shit, that’s awful,” he said. “All I know is that when the sirens got loud, Leila clammed up.”

The vision of Leila with her arms raised outside the church returned to Shell. Maybe she’d been trying to gather strength. There were invisible powers in the universe to be embraced. She wanted to believe that. She had to believe that.

“You don’t look so good yourself,” she said, putting a hand on Ned’s.

“I don’t think Leila’s been in the country very long. She kept pointing at your cat’s box and saying she used to live like that. I told her about the tent city down by the river where I lived. Until we started talking, I was handling this. But then I looked around and it seemed like everyone was falling apart. I could *see* the cracks in their skin.”

Ned swayed in his seat. “Fuck!” His coffee cup overturned. Black brew spilled across the table towards Leila. Even when it dripped in her lap, she didn’t move.

“You didn’t take something while I was gone, did you?” Shell tried to sound soothing. “There’s fentanyl in everything these days, you know.”

“No, I told you. I’m clean. All I had was that coffee.”

Shell thought about fetching serviettes to wipe up the mess. Ned was definitely jittery. And Leila was stiff with ghosts and fears. They weren’t her responsibility, but circumstances had brought them together. More of her therapist’s advice came to mind: “Imagine yourself as your favourite superhero, Shell. Search out the superheroes around you. Unity is strength.”

It had seemed strange counsel at the time, and she wasn’t sure which superhero to envision. But she forced herself to speak. “Look guys, no matter what happens, no one is going to end up in a tent city. Churches have a long history of providing refuge. I bet we’ll be able to sleep here tonight if we can’t go

home. But we need to stay calm until we know for sure what's going on."

This time, Ned squeezed her arm. She wasn't the type who usually took charge. But just now, she also felt like she could stick her neck out for these two. She could even give Ned a quick hug, just to let him know they were in this together. He wasn't a bad guy; he'd been nicer and more helpful than she'd expected. And he had strong hands. She felt safe with him. But as she leaned forward, another man's profile caught her eye over Ned's shoulder.

He prodded her. "Hey, what's up?"

She knew she had to be the one to stop the intrusive memories, the fear and breath-holding that happened when she could see no exit, or when men looked at her a certain way. She imagined harnessing the fire outside, bolts of flame flashing from her outstretched fingertips to destroy her spectres. *BOOM! BOOM!* Which superhero did that? Flame Girl. Yes, she was Flame Girl!

She grabbed her bag and the empty cat box. Against her palm, the closet key hadn't yet warmed up. Throwing her coat over her arm, she prodded Ned. "I have an idea. Help me with Leila."

"What are we doing with her?"

She couldn't leave the woman behind, just as she knew she

couldn't escape her own past. But perhaps they could help each other. Perhaps they could all help each other.

Leila didn't resist but let the two of them haul her upright and steer her to the edge of the room. Shell murmured encouragement as they made a circuit towards the coat closet.

"Quick!" She unlocked the door, putting a foot out in case Chalky bolted.

But the cat was comfortably perched on top of one of two cases of ginger ale. Shell flipped on the light switch as the others shuffled past her.

Ned spoke first. "Now this is more like it—our own private room."

Leila turned in a slow circle. As she came back to life, Shell pried open a box and handed out sodas. "They won't be cold, but they're better than caffeine," she said. The light release of fizz sounded like a sigh of satisfaction. From the pockets of her coat, Shell unloaded the parcels of food she'd nabbed earlier and laid them out on the floor. In a few minutes, they sat in a circle before a spread of jam sandwiches, cheese and crackers, cookies and tuna.

"Eat, Leila," Shell said. "Have something to drink." She leaned forward to unzip the woman's parka and push it off her shoulders. It was fine with her if Leila wanted to stay silent; there were other ways to communicate. Resting her fingertips

on top of Leila's forearms, she traced the goosebumps. After a while, the bumps receded and they both sat back. Then Leila reached out to pull the lids off of the tins in front of her. With deft fingers, she moulded the thin metal into small scoops and handed one to Ned, another to Shell. Chalky jumped from his box and padded around them as if casting a protective spell. Remembering the leash she'd added at the last minute, Shell rummaged in her bag. She placed it handy beside her, thinking of Catwoman with her whip. Yes, today she was Flame Girl, but she could be Catwoman, too—her accessories and comrades like secret weapons. In fact, when she and Ned and Leila decided to emerge from the cloakroom to the world outside, the three of them might be completely unrecognizable.



*Migus Summertime 3* by Edward Peck

Hybrid scanographic/dye-sublimation planographic print

24x36 in

# Moss

*Allie Picketts*

I can't tell you, but you will know,  
if you have scaled an at-times stream and tried  
to match the water-trickling tune with your unwieldy voice,  
and didn't feel it leave but noticed at last that  
the pain in your throat had gone.

I think the moss absorbed it or it rose to the  
ancient branches and was caught there while you  
escaped to home, but some of the forest stayed in your feet,  
so that night you grew roots and drew from the earth  
until you could hold no more.

Be gentle with yourself:  
you are not wrong for walking on the moss.

# Hedgerow

*for Jan Zwicky*

*Allie Picketts*

The best place in this house  
(and at least one other I know, and likely more)  
is out between siding and cedar hedge,  
that sliver of space where I can creep,  
and do, from which to stare cold and  
unseen at the trees in their gold half-sungowns.  
How is it that the ones behind are lit,  
while those in front are not? as the chambers of my heart  
when nightmares are stacked yet in the mail  
come poems.

# Windows

*Allie Picketts*

I have thought much on windows,  
and much of them. Just as we burn  
small lights at night to hold the dark away  
because we fear its kiss, we build as well our  
walls on every side, and roof, and floor—  
but know enough of love, and maybe bliss, to  
leave or knock or carve out space for space, for precious joining  
space of out and in.

And I have learned of nightlights  
their other, better purpose: when a child  
is sick, or fretful, or myself, unsleeping thanks  
to language running through my soul, we  
might work through what is needed with as little glow,  
as much darkness near and patient, as can be.  
My breath, when I am inside, still seeks the windows,  
for both out and in.

# Pop-up Grebe

*Christine Lowther*

Closer and closer you appear  
little grebe,  
popping up between waves.  
Float there while hummingbirds  
criss-cross above your head, unnoticed.  
They are more substantial.  
Oh gaunt grebe,  
the loon is thrice your size.  
Tiny moulting grebe,  
did someone take you,  
splotch ink marks over your neck  
then wipe their hands  
on your juvenal wings?  
Oh grey mess, titchy grebe,  
are you just young  
or still in winter plumage?  
Horned grebe or vagrant Eared,  
you don't match the guidebook.  
Smidgen-specimen. Sooty.  
You caught and ate a minnow  
smaller than my pinky.  
But sudden vast absence!  
Blinking out behind a wave.  
Has the water claimed you?  
Did you turn and disappear?  
Deprivation!



*Kite Tails* by Amber Lomax

Mixed media: watercolour, ink, pencil, and collage

9x12 in

# Swimming to the Volcano

*Anne Hopkinson*

On the last day of summer  
the ocean is calm  
the volcano clear

white against blue  
it rises from sea level  
across the strait.

We swim, sun on shoulders,  
salt on our lips, buoyant  
in the cold zing of the waves.

Two old women, breast  
stroking from a rocky bay  
on the last day of summer.

We'll never get there.  
We don't even try,  
it's just the feeling that we could

keep swimming out to sea  
between small islands  
toward that faraway shore

where a volcano covered in snow  
towers over another bay  
another shoreline, where we,

weary and proud, would climb out,  
dry ourselves on a log in the sun,  
on the last day of summer.

# Spell for Skookumchuck Narrows

*Anne Hopkinson*

By curl of wave  
By rush of sea  
Bring the power of tides to me

By white water crest  
By whirlpool spin  
Loosen the fear beneath my skin

Cast in guilt, and deep despair  
Cast in pride and shame and debt  
The riptide rinses all regret

In the smooth green surge  
In the tidal flood  
Let water wash my willful blood

In December cold  
In the solstice night  
Ebb the dark and flow the light

By curl of wave  
By rush of sea  
Bring the power of tides to me

**\*Note:** *Skookum* means strong, *chuck* means water

# Gyotaku

*Anne Hopkinson*

1

A girl and a dead fish.  
Eye to eye. Stare.

Timid fingertip touch  
cold scales, slippery.

She rolls sumi ink,  
soot and sinew rendered

black on the glass square  
black on the frozen fish.

Then washi paper, gift  
of the mulberry bush,

boiled, bleached, beaten  
dried thin on a screen.

Small hands lay the paper.  
Press, pat

the fish body. Tap edges,  
fins, gills. stroke the tail.

Stop. A breath. Done.  
Lift an edge, reveal

Gyotaku fish, printed  
preserved, perfect.

2

Next, on a tee shirt,  
a fish story to wear,

how she made gyotaku,  
how she made it herself.

Japanese. New words,  
more than *sushi*, *soba*.

Thinks *Swimmy*, treasured book.  
Shelter in a school.

Salmon run as she runs  
gills and lungs pant,

hearts beat the same  
instinct for home.

3

Four years of growth.  
She returns to find

her forever upstream salmon,  
fabric jaws agape,

inky teeth, eyes wild, dark  
body a Coho clone.

No swish, no thrust, no leap.  
Fish caught on cotton.

Favourite tee shirt,  
worn, washed, outgrown.



*Family Fleet* by Wilma Millette  
Encaustic collage on wooden cradle  
46x38 in



*Seeding the Wind II* by Edward Peck

Hybrid scanography/dye-sublimation planographic print

24x36 in

# The Big White

*Carol Gall*

Those old textbook sketches,  
neutrons, protons, electrons  
circling in off-centre ellipses,  
atoms suspended in an empty sea.

Why did it take so long to wonder  
what's between?  
Like all that blank background  
in a colouring book left untouched,  
the important stuff up front.

Physicists talk about that white,  
its waves and hum,  
tell us it's been the most important  
all along, that alleged emptiness  
stitching everything together.

So now that we're all connected,  
is my sour sulk running  
through your body, too,  
and the table we're sitting across,  
the barista teetering our coffees?  
If I smile do the cups stand still,  
does a grin appear on your face  
all on its own, without your knowledge,  
without your permission, without your  
wanting it to happen at all?

# Under the Quilts

*Carol Gall*

Colder than it's been tonight  
under the quilts with a bucket of muted stars.  
My thoughts tumble over events  
of the day, garden chores subverted  
by a trip to the lake, that blue water  
slipping over my skin like a benediction.  
Beach swallowed under high water  
so the dog had no place to go.  
Us, perched on a silvered log,  
our clothes strung out on bushes.

It isn't truly dark  
even though I can't see the moon.  
It must be hiding behind the trees,  
flattening the horizon so all I get is dusky sky.  
I imagine the lake, the very middle  
where the moonlight shines,  
my sloughed off cells floating there,  
soaking it all in.

# Tuesday's Tide

*Heather Hendry*

a wave held me down  
breathless on a tuesday

was it my dad's email  
anticipating funerals  
appointing executors

was it the late night call  
a friend with 9 lives  
brain full of metal

was it the elder's passing  
grandfather to my student  
from the nation across the bay

was it my chapbook  
never mailed to Tahsis  
where her spirit now soars

or was it the tired tangle  
overwatered  
on my cedar windowsill

the tide will turn on wednesday  
and i will take a breath

# storyteller spirits

*Heather Hendry*

they have been visiting me for years  
when the dishes are drying  
kisses goodnight

conversations through  
an open sky  
where droplets carry words

if I listen carefully  
a poem forms



*Blue Star* by Amber Lomax

Mixed media: watercolour, ink, pencil, and collage  
9x12 in

# snake spur road

*Karl Sturmanis*

*northwestern Vancouver Island  
1991*

Rounded hills above  
a snake road  
with broken trees  
yellow splinter teeth  
faded kilometer markers  
and big dull greywhite boulders  
no reason to stop here  
for coffee or rest  
farther down than eyes  
can glide  
and final swoop  
and drop...  
there is a washed out  
lime green blanket  
of new nursery trees  
like Bunyan's stubble  
secured  
behind a rust proof metal gate

there is no red-slashed woodpecker  
carving initials  
in the green air  
or the sound of tree sap  
as it rises 300 feet  
to meet the sun  
no resonance of silence  
before September rains  
slant into old scale-skinned cedars  
giant men-of-the-swamp  
inside their hallowed shade

further on a salmon creek  
and the vague outline of a bighouse  
laid down in royal clubmoss  
and further  
in curtains of darkness  
Bokwas' breath steams  
the air alive

the forest is one colour now  
one texture  
coarse and brown  
unlike the crisp hundred-dollar bills  
that snap from wallets somewhere  
far away  
and somewhere closer  
the logger's trailer camp  
sits forlorn and deserted  
only the alders bend and dance  
in the Fall wind

this year there is a new sound  
a wired voice that spirals  
and flutters like a wounded  
radio bird  
over polished now-rusted yarders  
4x4s and cables gone  
haywire into the sideslope

the snake inside the road  
moves further up the coast  
to feed on fat old trees  
while ravens peel  
off granite cliffs  
and polish their wings  
in the salt air



# erratic

*J.E. Barnard*

*having no fixed course : wandering; characterized by lack of consistency, regularity, or uniformity; deviating from what is ordinary or standard, eccentric; transported from an original resting place especially by a glacier; archaic : nomadic*

The night whispered to Jan: waves on the rocky shore, cedar bough scraping on a cabin roof, thrum of a compact wind turbine. Steaming waters soothed her travel aches but not her weary spirit. Why had she tried to handle an away investigation? She'd barely managed cases from home, where everything was done for her. Her fluctuating energy, curse it. When this case began, she'd been at full summer power. Now the dreaded October slide, failing Lacey just when her skills were most needed.

Nearby, a new sound wove into the night's murmuring: a firmly rhythmic rustling. It seemed to be crossing the autumn-dry meadow beyond the sunken garden. Deer? Bear?

Cougar?

She shrank deeper into the hot tub, wondering if she had the strength to pull the lid over from this vulnerable position.

That waitress in Comox had spoken of a cougar killing someone's pet as a current event. Was that road she'd mentioned anywhere near this vacation rental? Lacey would know, but she was deep asleep behind the nearby window after the long day's drive and wheeling Jan plus baggage around. She'd hear a scream, this close, but it wasn't fair to wake her for a possibly imaginary cougar.

Raising her head over the tub's rim, Jan scanned the rustling night. Jagged black treetops against a sky a half-shade paler. Hazy stars shimmering on the main house's solar panels. Wan moonlight silvered a stretch of toothy white fence. No sinuous or shambling shape stirred the grassy clearing. She breathed, willing the adrenaline rush to recede.

A faint light flared across her vision, vanished, and came again. She stared at the spot where it faded until the shadows danced and she could no longer be sure she'd seen anything at all. Another light-bubble appeared, wavered, and rose again. A bluish tint, like a phone screen, glowed upon the orange poppies she'd noticed in the sunken garden during their sunset check-in. Definitely not an animal. She eased upright, droplets falling from her arm, and scratched at the window.

"Lacey. Prowler!"

The techno-light vanished. An indistinct human form rushed through the grasses, passing the pale fence in

silhouette. A long rod in one hand glinted in the faint moonlight.

Lacey's voice grunted. "Coming."

"They're gone. And it's risky when you don't know the terrain." Jan crawled from the tub and dragged herself into the terry bathrobe provided. "We'll tell the owners at breakfast."

\*

Adrenaline aftershocks wandered Jan's body the rest of the night, jerking her limbs randomly to wake her each time sleep crept near. She'd been so wiped by the travel day that she hadn't consciously examined the sunken garden on arrival, but her artist's eye had stored a snap image: an irregular oblong between the main house and the two cabins. On one end was an arc of gravel drive leading to the cabins, on the other a level wooden walkway that curved gently from the cabins' conjoined deck to the main house's stone patio. Striped chair cushions made a visual connection across the dell. Someone, some human, had crept, crouched, shone a light repeatedly from something that looked like a spear gun, but probably wasn't. That garden! A snaky maze of rocky berms less than waist height, topped with flowers and fading foliage that in some places failed to reach the level of the surrounding decks. What could be worth hunting for in that tricky terrain in the dark?

As dawn crept past the blackout blind Jan drifted off at last, only to wake when clattering began on the deck between the cabins. She towed her dead-weight limbs around by sheer willpower until her feet touched the braided bedside rug, and eased over her head the cotton batik travel muumuu that served for clothing on days when she was too wiped out to get dressed. Time to admit she was too crashed to leave the cabin, let alone do her part of their all-expenses-paid investigation.

“You look about as bad as I expected,” said Lacey when Jan groped her way to the cabin’s compact kitchen. “Want me to bring you breakfast in here?”

“Safer to pick my own.” Jan clutched the doorpost as blood receded from her head. “Ooh, bad day. I’ll need the wheel-chair.” Lacey fetched it and her wraparound shades from the car. Jan slid them on gratefully and slumped into her seat to let Lacey wheel her out.

The deck was unpopulated, its table newly laid with pottery and cutlery for six, atop a striped linen cloth that echoed the patio chairs. Their muted lines called attention to the vertical windows and siding of the buildings: incongruously linear brackets around those wandering nightmare stone berms. The poppies wavered in the morning breeze, saffron petals drifting off in the gusts. That’s where the prowler had gone: behind the poppies, closer to the house, then run past that fence, skirted

the meadow, vanished against the surrounding trees. And gone... where? What was beyond those trees?

Lacey parked her at a place setting and headed for a beverage counter near the other cabin. "Juice? Smells like orange."

"Tropical blend." Their hostess came slowly past the other cabin, hands tight on a vivid purple walker. "Orange, pineapple, and papaya. No colours or preservatives if that's important."

"Essential." Jan nodded to Lacey, who poured, and smiled sympathetically at the woman easing herself into the chair opposite. "Good morning, um...?"

"Nell." Their hostess smiled back wearily. "I don't blame you for not remembering. You were about out on your feet last night. My husband's bringing the food."

Jan couldn't bother this exhausted woman about the prowler. Her husband, vaguely recalled as a short man with a fast voice, could deal with it.

Lacey set down Jan's glass. "Nell, can I get you coffee or something?"

"Oh, no. You're a guest." Nell didn't try to get up, though. "I'll wait for my husband."

As Lacey repeated the offer, Jan gave Nell as good a smile as she could muster. "Go ahead. Lacey's used to waiting on me since we started working together. And please forgive me if I

don't take off these shades. The glare gets to me sometimes." The glare, sometimes noise, other times smells. So unpredictable. And at random her whole autonomic system might fling its control panel off a metaphorical cliff, leaving her buffeted by every breath of air on her skin, in agony from the creep of food through her digestive tract, her own blood hissing and burning in her veins. The twisting ways of invisible illness, snaky and treacherous as the berms in the sunken garden.

"There's pomegranate tea in the box, Lacey, if you really don't mind." Nell returned her faded eyes to Jan's. "I need the dim some days too. What's your impairment if it's okay to ask? Neurological or...?"

Jan swallowed a sigh. Small talk about her medical history was probably a polite prelude to Nell talking about her own ailments. At least Jan didn't have to talk any more once she'd given her first answer.

"I don't know if you've heard of ME/CFS?"

Nell leaned back to let Lacey set down a steaming mug. "I figured that or Long Covid. Or maybe fibromyalgia. They have so many overlaps. Outward, anyway. Maybe inward too."

That was unexpected. "Nobody I've ever met hasn't needed a lot of explanation. And so many people, even doctors, still deny ME/CFS exists at all. Or Long Covid."

"Twenty years since I got a minor virus and I was never the



*Bathing Huts* by Wilma Millette  
 Encaustic collage on wooden cradle  
 12x24 in



same after it.” Nell shifted one hand with remarkable economy of movement, indicating the sunken garden. “My husband thinks I wanted this house because those walls reflect my medical history. Every diagnostic and treatment path either circling backward or hitting a dead end. I hope you had an easier road.”

“Not so far,” Jan began, and then stopped as an ash-blond woman strode from the other cabin to pause beside Lacey. The long-legged, tanned pair made a picture of lanky health compared to Jan and Nell, sallow and shrunken with their mobility aids.

“Morning, all,” said the newcomer. “I’m Monica.” She gestured to an older woman behind her. “My mom, Dana.”

As Nell started introductions, her husband appeared on the opposite terrace, wheeling a serving cart. He rounded the walkway, arriving with the last “Nice to meet you,” and reminded everyone his name was Liam. After handing off bowls of fruit and racks of condiments, he opened a compact grill on the cart.

“Eggs, anyone? Scrambled, fried, omelet?”

“Fresh from our own hens,” Nell added.

While Liam started cooking, Monica hustled Dana into a chair. “She’s got a bionic leg and it’s stiff in the mornings.”

“This Twitter generation has no filters.” Dana sounded more

amused than offended. She lifted one foot, showing long-faded scars around her ankle. “It’s not a whole mechanical leg, just pins remaining from a car accident. I haven’t reinjured it in decades. I’m not a risk-taker like my daughter, jumping out of planes and all that.”

Monica rolled her eyes. “I must have got my adventurous gene from my father. You ever skydive, Lacey?”

“My adrenaline got enough of a workout in my old career.” As everyone glanced Lacey’s way, she added, “Ex-RCMP.”

“Ah.” Liam held out the plate of bacon. “Ex-Van PD. What brings you to this quiet corner of Vancouver Island?”

“Forged art.” Lacey selected a couple of crispy slices. “Checking out paintings bought from a crooked dealer.”

“Sounds complicated.” Dana poked at her toast. “Honey, please.”

“There’s the odd twist.” Lacey passed her the jam stand. “We trace the buyer, go look at his paintings, figure out if they’re fake or authentic.”

“You’re private investigators?” Monica grinned. “Do you do, like, murder cases too?”

Jan shook her head. This art investigation had begun because of a murder, but as long as that case was open, talking casually about it wasn’t happening among strangers. Information might reach someone connected to the killing, or the art,

and taint a whole web of carefully gathered evidence.

“I’m just the muscle,” said Lacey. “Jan’s the magic. She can tell when something’s off about a painting by peering at it from different distances or shining a light sideways at it.”

“Cool superpower,” said Monica. “Were you born with it?”

“It’s not a superpower,” Jan corrected. “It’s years of art education, and then gallery and museum work, at least until I got sick. I spot anomalies the untrained eye misses.” She touched her dark glasses. “When I can stand to look at the world unfiltered, that is.” There was a patch of paler stone in one of those rock berms, she realized, pinkish granite, not stream-worn like the rest. Her artistic eye wandered along the paths, looking for more.

Liam claimed his superpower was knowing when a suspect lied. Nell shook her head. “You think everyone’s lying. Occupational hangover.”

Monica said her mom’s power was picking herself up after a setback, like when her lower leg got mashed in that teenage car crash, but she was dancing again by senior prom, pins and all. Dana said Monica’s power must be over-sharing other people’s ancient history. She was smiling, but a ghost breathed on Jan’s neck. What was Dana’s whole story, that she didn’t want her daughter talking about?

After Dana went indoors and Monica drove off for her

skydiving weekend, Jan rested her head against the chair back while Lacey chatted with their hosts. Would she finally tell Liam about the prowler? She asked instead about their B&B's history.

"We bought the property for vacations ten years ago." Liam pointed at Dana's cabin. "Built the first cabin then. Five years ago, we moved into it full time while we built our retirement home. Then we got the windmill and geothermal running, then built the second cabin and decks. The whole operation's only in its second year."

"Third, really," Nell added. "But second with the chickens and both cabins rented."

"Surely that garden's older than five years?" Lacey pointed to the winding rock berms topped by their saffron and scarlet blooms.

A few crushed and bent stalks might have been signs of the intruder. If Lacey wasn't going to mention that, should Jan? Nell's voice was stronger, her eyes brighter after sitting still for the past hour. She was probably more resilient than she'd looked at first. She'd have to be, helping to run this business on their secluded acreage.

"I added the flowers," said Nell. "The man before us made the winding walls. He was an odd duck, even for a determined loner. Dug pits on the paths and stabbed blades into the

ground around the edges.”

Jan raised her head, staring. “Stabbed?”

“Knives, pruning shears, even a machete, all stuck upright among tree roots. We collected a big bin full.”

“His neighbours must have loved that.” Jan pictured the old man placing the blades in some anti-Fae ritual, or pacification of imagined deities.

“Nobody’s said.” Nell shrugged. “Most neighbours are our vintage, and the few remaining old-timers don’t overshare.” She didn’t add, “Unlike Monica,” but Jan could almost hear the words whispered on the breeze.

When Liam started clearing dishes, Lacey wheeled Jan back to their cabin. “Are you sure you have everything you need while I’m gone? Liam’s got a golf tournament and Nell might not be able to come over here for you.”

“I’ll be fine alone. Go do your scouting.” Jan returned to bed, heating pads wrapping her chilled thighs. She cracked open the window behind its blind for the fresh, cool scent of autumn and drifted off to the sound of birds, only to be groggily startled when a voice spoke outside.

“—an absolute horror. I wish I’d never come.” Dana. “He was digging traps and hiding weapons, probably afraid to fall asleep for years on end. Because of me.”

Dana had known the strange old guy? Is that what she hadn’t

wanted Monica to reveal? Dana was too short to be the one casting that silhouette against the wooden fence last night, but it could have been Monica. If it was them, what were they looking for? Had Dana come back to find a treasure hidden by the old hermit?

As soon as Lacey returned, Jan sent her to the fence to help her guesstimate the prowler's height. Taller than Monica, she thought, but any extra inches might be headwear. She beckoned Lacey back.

"We should tell Nell they're snooping."

Lacey disagreed. "We don't know they did anything. Neighbours might regularly cut through."

"Then why'd they run?"

"Maybe they thought you were a bear. Did you call out?"

Jan thought back and shook her head.

"There you are." Lacey led her back indoors. "If it happens tonight, we'll ask in the morning."

\*

After idling all day, Jan couldn't sleep. Midnight found her in the living room in the dark, watching a sliver moon climb the cedars. The pale wood fence shimmered like an enchanted portal. Of such nights were sonatas and fairy tales written, she was thinking, when a human shadow crossed the ghostly planks. She eased away from the window to wake Lacey.



*Cerulean* by Amber Lomax

Mixed media: watercolour, ink, pencil, and collage

9x12 in

Nell's first words at breakfast were, "Sorry if the motion sensor lights woke you."

Lacey handed Jan her juice. "We were awake already. What happened?"

"Prowler." Nell shuddered. "We've been leaving the sensors off so they don't wake up guests, but the other night we thought something was after our chickens. Then Liam found human footprints this morning. He's gone into Comox for materials to block off the path there."

Jan said, "That prowler looked like the same height both nights."

Nell stared. "You saw it too?"

"Likely a repeat visit," Lacey said. "We were going to tell you this morning."

"Just what we need," Jan added, "another midnight prowler."

"Prowler?" Dana clutched the corner of her cabin, all colour draining from her face. Lacey leapt to help her to a chair. Dana dropped her head into her hands. "He knows I'm alone!"

"You aren't alone," Lacey said in what Jan recognized as her old calming cop voice. "We'll protect you. Who's after you?"

"Dooley. He lives down the hill." Dana shuddered. "He's supposed to be dead."

Nell frowned. "You've been here before?"

Dana sniffed. “Uh-huh. Over thirty years ago, when I was young and stupid. He was touring the Maritimes on his motorcycle. I wanted adventure, so I got on his bike and came back here with him. What a disaster!” She sobbed. Lacey fetched a paper towel from the beverage bar for her. After blotting her eyes, she went on. “We lived in a shack that had been his grandfather’s. No power, no phone nearer than the beach store. He didn’t want us getting jobs or meeting the neighbours, just him and me chopping wood and digging up the old vegetable plot. That winter was horrible.”

Her story stumbled out in almost random order, but Jan eventually slotted the pieces together. His young sister had come to stay for the summer, giving her company when Dooley went off for days or weeks at a time. But he’d leave them no money and barely any food. He’d return hungover and abusive. When school began, his sister fled to a friend’s house. Dana snuck off to the beach store and collect-called her parents, who mailed her a plane ticket. Dooley ripped it up. He said someone would always watch the road now, to stop her leaving again. He said he’d re-break her leg if she tried. Then he beat her.

“I didn’t dare use the road after that. So, whenever he left, I’d hunt through the underbrush trying to find the highway. I found this clearing instead. That strange old man was making

one of his rock walls. He saw my bruises and said he'd help me if I needed it. The very next time Dooley took off, I came straight here with my knapsack. As soon as it was safe, the old man snuck me into Courtenay and paid my bus down to Victoria. Dooley must have terrorized him for years after. That poor man!"

Jan pictured her younger and terrified, creeping through trackless forest on her metal-pinned leg, determined to get somewhere, anywhere, that was safer.

"But why come back now?" she asked.

Dana sighed. "Last summer I saw Dooley's obituary online and thought I should finally face that part of my past. But this prowler. They might be a friend of his, still hunting me."

Nell shook her head. "How could they know you're here? We don't post about our guests without permission."

"I'll check it out," said Lacey. "Tell me where Dooley's place was. I can swing by and see if anyone's living there."

Dana sniffed. "I can't recall what road it was on. They all look different now."

"You may remember more now that you've started talking," said Jan. "The pathways of memory get stirred up." Her neck ached from being upright so long. She needed to lie down. "Let's meet here after lunch."

\*

When Jan returned to the deck later, feeling almost up to baseline, Nell and Dana were already there, looking through an envelope of faded photos. Dana showed them a grassy clearing with a shack against the trees.

“That cabin was right where the windmill is now. The root cellar had an outside entrance and the hermit covered it up once I was inside.”

“We found the cellar under the collapsed shack,” Nell murmured. “Shelves up one wall, spiders everywhere. You hid in there?”

“For three days.” Dana shuddered. “It was freezing. Dooley kept coming back to threaten him, right over my head.”

Jan eyed a yellowed snap of two long-haired girls in faded jeans and t-shirts. The shorter one had Dana’s cheekbones, the taller had eyes round and brown as acorns. As Monica’s.

“Is one of these you?”

“Uh-huh. The tall one is Dooley’s sister, Carolyn. I hated to run off without telling her, but I couldn’t risk going down the road to her friend’s place. He’d have hurt them all.” She sighed. “I wish I knew if she was okay after I left.”

“And this one?” Jan nudged over an image of a sagging cabin. “Was it Dooley’s?”

“Yeah.” Dana pointed past the windmill. “It was down that way, maybe half an hour on foot.” Jan snapped a photo to

forward to Lacey. The cabin had probably long decayed into a pile of blackberry thorns, but showing this to old-timers could jog their memories.

“Carolyn’s friend might still live here,” she suggested. “What was her name?”

“Joanne?”

No last name. No address either. A dead end.

Lacey returned, reporting that the closest homes all held newish arrivals who knew little about the area’s old-timers. Using a satellite map, she and Jan plotted a search wedge widening downhill from the windmill. It included three visible roads and eighteen clearings that held current houses, but no way to tell which were older or newer from overhead. There might be others under the trees, too. Eventually Lacey saved her marked up phone map.

“Tomorrow morning, we’ll go to these other places. Or I will.”

\*

Despite the emotional upset of Dana’s story, two days of not getting dressed or having to go anywhere had let Jan’s overstimulated nervous system settle. She slept well and long that night. Her body unkinked, and her brain too. Soon after breakfast she and Lacey drove out on their search.

The first house on the lower road was new, its residents

newer. The second to fifth places, nobody answered the door. Then an old man answered at a big new estate home. He told them he was the acreage's previous owner, visiting his son. He remembered "that scruffy biker on the Connors place." And he gave them a lead: Jeannie down on Waverley Road. Her youngest girl, Joanne, had been friends with old Connors' granddaughter. He gave them directions to Jeannie's yellow-and-white frame house and said he'd let her know they were coming.

In the car, Lacey groaned. "He'll taint her memory."

"Nah. He'll wake it up."

\*

White-haired Jeannie, decades older than Dana or Nell, was waiting on her porch. She started talking before they were properly out of the car.

"It's about Dooley and that young woman, isn't it? I knew someone would come asking someday. We tried to get that investigated at the time, but you know the Mounties didn't much care about women going missing thirty years ago. If he said she'd packed up and run off, they wouldn't bother to check up. Men, right?" She pushed aside an elderly beagle and waved them indoors. "Have some tea. Or coffee? Cameron's gone for his run, but I texted him. He'll be so happy to see you. He might even have a picture of her. You'll need that, right?"

Jan followed Jeannie indoors, feeling sick. Had Dooley lured other women to his isolated cabin? Had someone not escaped?

“Set yourselves down.” The old woman pointed to a flowered couch before hurrying away. “Did I ask you tea or coffee? I’ll bring both.”

Leaving Lacey to make friends with the beagle, Jan got her feet up on an ottoman. Those three steps up to the porch had taken a lot out of her.

Lacey hissed. Jan blinked and followed one pointing finger to the front hall they’d just passed through. Behind the door was a long, metallic wand. At one end was a screen about two hands wide, while the other was attached to a yellow-and-black plastic box, with a label spelling out G – P – R. Ground Penetrating Radar?

Had that screen been the light behind the poppies?

The ghost breathed on her neck again. Someone from here had been using that gear to search the sunken garden. For...a body?

Footsteps sounded on the porch. Lacey stepped behind the door as a tall man in jogging gear rushed in.

“Jeannie? Are they still here?” He spotted Jan. “Oh, good. I turned around as soon as Jeannie texted.”

“Cameron?” He was a couple inches taller than Lacey. Same as their prowler.

Lacey stepped up behind him. Cameron turned, flinging up his hands in what looked like reflexive self-defense. Lacey arm-locked him without appearing to think twice. Police muscle memory? She nudged him into the living room as Jeannie appeared with a tray.

“Let go of him, honey,” said the old woman. “I promise he won’t run off. He’s just as eager to see Dana found as you are.”

“Dana?” Jan repeated. “But she’s not—”

Lacey shook her head for silence, but she released Cameron. “Sorry.”

He nodded. “Jeannie told me to ask them for permission. But it’s a big deal, telling people there might a body buried on their property.”

“You think Dana’s in those walls?” Jan blurted. “Why?”

“They were the most churned up dirt around.” Cameron’s arms took in the whole region. “Dooley never confessed, but I was sure he’d hid her there, so folks would think the hermit had killed her. I thought the GPR might find the metal in her leg.” He went on talking but Jan was distracted by a strong sense of familiarity. Eyebrows? No. Chin? Not really. The eyes: round and brown, like acorn caps. She’d seen eyes like that recently. Monica, Dana’s daughter. Was this Monica’s father? Dana hadn’t mentioned another man, though. Only his sister and his sister’s friend Joanne. Honestly, if this man was a

woman, she'd look exactly like...Jan bit her tongue before she could blurt out "Carolyn."

Cameron pointed at a photo on the mantelpiece: two teenage girls in caps and gowns.

"Jeannie let me stay all that winter. That's me and Jo at our high school grad. We went to UVic, got jobs. Life went on. But when Dooley died, I inherited the old property. That's when it all came back to me, how Dana vanished, and the Mounties wouldn't look for her. They just took Dooley's word that she'd run off. I couldn't let the place go without trying to find her. Put her to rest."

Jeannie added, "And I said he should come right back here and get on with it. Don't know these new folks, but he still shoulda asked first. Never did listen to me, you." She smiled fondly at Cameron.

A lifetime Dana and Cameron had wandered, each burdened by that long-gone summer, and now they'd both returned, hoping to finally put the past to rest. Instead, here waited life. Here, relief. Here, surely, would be joy. Jan beamed at Cameron.

"There's a guest at Nell's you need to meet. She's been worrying about you for thirty years, too."



*South Michigan IV* by Edward Peck  
Hybrid scanography/dye-sublimation planographic print  
24x36 in



# Pair of Lovers and Flowers

*A Demi-Glosa*

*Nancy Issenman*

*You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
Love what it loves*

*– Mary Oliver*

On an ordinary day you walk up the mountain  
your dog trailing neatly behind you. She jolts  
ahead in chase of something neither you nor she  
can see. A rustle in the brush, a scent carried  
on the clean open air to her nose. She hoots in  
anticipation, bounces through shallow grass  
as if spring-loaded. Leaves you longing  
to follow, to slide along the underbrush, to shed  
your human skin for fur. You remember then  
*you only have to let the soft animal of your body*

be the guide. You drop to the ground  
slither and slide, thorns pricking your thin hide.  
It doesn't matter. You wriggle out of your tight  
casing, cast aside shoes for soft padded paws.  
Down in the lower field sweet scents  
of yarrow and musk mallow lift you up.  
As in Chagall's famous painting, embraced  
by your lover, you drift above the church steeple  
saturated blue and red, letting your whole body  
*love what it loves.*

# Honeybees

*Inspired by Maurya Simon's "Angels"*

*Nancy Isсенman*

whose mission is to invade every stamen on earth  
who know no borders, need no passports  
whose eyes see huge worlds in the smallest flower filament  
who shadow the air with wings  
who hum the world alive in backyard meadows  
who carry love letters in their pollen baskets  
who die slowly in nectar-sated bliss  
who swarm queens everywhere  
who surrender to death for the honour of mating the Queen  
whose waggle dance keeps the party buzzing all night  
whose gift sweetens my tea  
who smear pollen on their whiskered legs  
who wield their stingers in defense and die as martyrs  
for whom community is (everything)  
whose time is short but of essence  
who don't get enough credit for their miracles

# Cigarettes

*Kayla Trace*

life is drained from your face,  
pale and wrinkled,  
dried from the lack of sunlight  
as work sits at  
the front of your mind and  
the home around us crumbles

in dirt, litter, and broken fences  
not tall enough to keep the dog in,  
the mould sticks to outside walls,  
motivation dries up,  
money falls from pockets,  
bank accounts,

on wine and cigarettes,  
life as we've known it,  
to the sewer, down the drain  
of the public shower.  
filth clings to skin and  
we choke on the dust you kick up.

mud under our fingernails  
as we claw our way forward  
and wish to breathe  
air that's free of worry  
and never a second thought  
of holding a pomegranate seed

in the palm of our hands.  
we look at the life-lines,  
and wonder about the lives so easy,  
the change that settles  
in pockets and the allowance  
spent on cigarettes.



*Blue Glitch* by Amber Lomax

Mixed media: watercolour, ink, pencil, and collage  
9x12 in

# Bat Signs

*Tricia Dower*

He was asleep at my side, legs drawn up under the thin sheet, lower lip forming a waifish pout. I studied her eyelids pulsing as in some fast-shutter dream, the velvet black curls tumbling across her cheek. Then, drawn by rowdy voices, I slid my legs over the side of the bed and rolled to a stealthy landing, found my glasses and stepped across the sagging wood floor to the shuttered balcony doors through which stripes of sun were infiltrating. Outside: a wide-angle view of rooftops reaching to the bay and an odour akin to fruit rotting in open sewers. Our room was on the second floor of a no-frills guesthouse perched high above a boisterous Port-au-Prince Street. Below us, people moved shoulder to shoulder in the street and on the sidewalks, roosters strutting between their legs. Shouting in French and *Kreyòl*, they haggled over all sorts of shit: rice and kidney beans, conch and live chickens, bananas and avocados, shirts, and shoes. Street vendors swept the sidewalks. Beat-up cars in need of tuning, imported SUVs, and surreally painted buses called tap-taps formed their own lanes through the crowd on the street, the drivers leaning on

their horns as they inched through. Somewhere, dogs were yapping. It had rained the night before and bare-assed children played in muddy water rushing down gutters.

It was August, 2002. Jane was on freelance assignment for a pharmaceutical firm that donated five million doses of polio vaccine to Haiti and hired her to photograph afflicted children. I had refused to let her go alone to a place where the judicial system was so ineffective people were known to grab rocks and crack open the heads of suspected crooks like coconuts, leaving the corpses to rot in the streets. And to tell the truth, as a public defender, I couldn't resist seeing the result of over two hundred years of oppression and exploitation. Polio, for chrissakes! That could've been wiped out decades before.

The drug company wanted Jane full-time as a photojournalist to profile people around the world whose pathetic lives had been redeemed with research lab brilliance. It would be a cinch, apparently, to persuade a gallery of unfortunates to expose their cancer, glaucoma, emphysema, spina bifida, and multiple sclerosis to Jane's lens. I was opposed to her taking the job, had given her a six-page report documenting the reasons. I could not stomach the idea of her as a corporate hack. She was an artist, completely self-taught, who called what she did "writing with light on film." Over our nine years together, she taught me to look at photographic images

differently and I'd come to prefer the distortion of negatives to prints—the bright parts dark and the dark parts light, the colours untrue. It matched my view of a blighted world. Hers too, I'd thought.

Jane's client had arranged for Phano Laguerre, a Haitian-born physician from Québec, to shepherd us around. He'd returned to Haiti for a two-year stint with Médecins Sans Frontières. A personal journey, he told us over breakfast, to discover if the stubborn faith of his people was still within him. His English was accented but erudite. The day before, he'd traveled eighty kilometres from his post in Saint Marc, on the banks of the Caribbean and the foot of green hills, to rescue us at Mais Gate International from baggage hustlers and children who knew at least one English phrase: "Gimme one dollar."

Phano was lanky, with a pointy nose and skin the color of amber sold on the street. Although his face was unlined, early grey streaked his coarse black hair. Staying at our guesthouse, he promised to get us safely to the homes of the children Jane was to photograph. His eyes held a fragile and troubled look, yet I felt we could trust him.

With our pale bodies in white shorts and black T-shirts, Jane and I followed Phano through the guesthouse gates into oppressive heat and a stench the balcony had only hinted at. Up the road, several impressive garbage piles were burning. I

breathed through my mouth. Haitians choked the sidewalks. A rough looking swarm in our path made no move to step aside. A man in striped muscle shirt, jeans, and baseball cap jostled my shoulder. “*Gwo blan!*” he said, pointing at me, causing others nearby to stop and stare. Phano pulled us into the street, said something to the man, who laughed and moved on.

“What was that all about?” I asked.

“*Ne t'en fais pas*. He called you big whitey, big foreigner. Just a bit of teasing, bravado.”

At five-foot-six, only an inch taller than Jane, I was flattered to be called big. But the scare made my neck and shoulders cramp. A throbbing behind my eyes sent me to the backpack for meds to ward off a migraine. Jane seemed oblivious. “Isn’t Phano beautiful?” she whispered as we followed him to his red Jeep.

“Not my type,” I mouthed, making her snort.

We headed up Avenue John Brown, Jane in front with Phano while I baked in the back, melting onto the vinyl seats. We rode through the hills above Port-au-Prince, where mansions with armed guards and satellite dishes overlooked cramped shacks clinging precariously to the sheer sides of an eroding hill. Phano pointed to them and spoke but I couldn’t make out his words. Jane swung a rapt face his way, smiling and nodding, twisting her hair around thumb and

forefinger—flirting, I could swear. Phano, in crisp white shirt, was dry as drought, while I sweated a monsoon.

We turned onto a dirt road sprinkled with loose, irregular rocks and pitted with potholes the size of bomb craters. Villagers selling raw, flyblown goat heads and testicles had set up shop along the road, making it narrower. We arrived at a mission where shabbily dressed, rib-thin women holding sick babies swarmed the gates. Phano told us they were waiting for the nuns to open up and do what they could for them. One woman held her child out to us, his feet swollen, his legs covered with scabies. Jane positioned her camera as though to snap their picture, then seemed to change her mind. She walked away. I hurried towards her but she rudely waved me off.

I was still miffed at her that night when she caught me in front of a mirror, staring at a bulldog head, myopic grey-green eyes behind rimless glasses, and a nose that wasn't at all pointy. "Phano's got a lot more going for him," I said.

Jane reached around and down into my boxers to cradle my balls. "Don't you believe it," she said wetly into my ear.

*Spare me your charity*, I thought, but I took it all the same, turning to growl and yip and herd her with my nose to the bed, barking louder and louder, as she snickered and shushed me.

I woke the next day to the smell of rusty handlebars followed by intense pain between my nose and left eye. Phano and Jane trucked off to a photo shoot, leaving me in bed with the shutters closed, puking into a wastebasket.

Jane returned at dusk and stood at the foot of the bed looking down at me, her head cocked like a bird's. "Nearly half my life's gone," she said, a trace of sorrow in her flicker-brown eyes.

I pulled myself up to lean against the headboard, meds momentarily keeping pain and nausea at bay. "You're thirty-three. Planning to shuffle off this mortal coil earlier than most?"

"How's your head?" she asked, ignoring my question.

"I found the most amazing cure," I said, getting an idea from a primitivist painting on the scarred wall opposite the bed. "After you left, I heard a terrible commotion in the hallway. Opened the door to find a stunning maiden, naked, running in circles, screaming with fear. Chasing her was a bat, big as a seagull. I pulled her in, shut the door against the bat and reached for a cigarette, pondering my predicament. She cried, 'The spirits! They come for my soul!'"

By this time Jane was sitting beside me, her brows and the corners of her lips lifted in a smirk. Encouraged, I continued.

"The bat, meanwhile, was taking kamikaze dives at the door.

With each one, the maiden screamed more loudly. I waved my arms at the door, shouting ‘Demons away!’ over and over, until the attacks stopped. Exhausted and relieved, the maiden lay her grateful body down on the bed. We made mad, passionate love for hours.”

“You don’t smoke,” Jane said, but she was laughing. I’d exorcized her gloomy spirits. It was my party trick, the reason she kept me around. She massaged my tender eyelids until I fell asleep.

The next day felt brand new, the air almost fresh, the friendly *Bonjou* and *Sak pase?* of people greeting us in the street surprising and wonderful. I accompanied Jane and Phano to the home of a four-year-old girl named Iveline, at the end of an alley too narrow to walk three abreast. Held my nose against the stink of raw sewage flowing down a small trench in the middle of our path. Phano pulled aside a brightly patterned cotton cloth covering the entrance to a two-room wooden house. The front room was unfurnished except for a hard-backed wooden chair, and the walls were bare. Iveline’s mother, father, grandmother, and two brothers stood there with big grins on their faces. Our visit was clearly a special event. The spider-limbed child sat in a baby’s walker, dressed in a white dress, ribbons in her hair, the whites of her eyes enormous as eggs. Jane knelt down to greet her. Phano and I

stepped outside to wait while she took pictures.

“What do they have to smile about?” I asked him, my voice low.

“There are many paths to happiness, *mon ami*,” he replied absently. He was gazing into the alley, not at me. “We must respect the one they’ve chosen.”

It was a rebuke, I knew, and I wanted to smash his face in. What crap. As though indigence and illness are conscious choices. Try telling that to the down-and-outs I defend, the injustice of their lives etched into their faces.

Jane came out of Iveline’s looking shaken. On our ride back to the city, she sat folded into herself, staring out the window without speaking. A block away from the guesthouse, we ran into heavy traffic. An old woman approached the Jeep, motioned for money, then drew her finger in an unmistakable slice across her ropy neck. “Get us out of here,” I called to Phano.

Jane said, “Wait.” She dug into her fanny pack, held out a wad of *gourdes*.

“What are you doing?” I was convinced the woman was waiting to signal a pack of crones who’d pop out of hiding and slit our throats.

“Relax,” Jane said. “She’s only telling us she’s hungry.” The woman took the money and skittered away.

Later that night, after I thought she was asleep, Jane said,  
“The woman on the street. I heard her thoughts.”

“Come again?”

“I was inside her head. She was crying, pleading, ‘I’m hungry, feed me.’”

“I didn’t hear her say a word. There’s so much shouting all the time, you can’t be sure where it comes from.”

She was sure, she said, because all day she’d had the strange feeling of being outside herself, like an observer, floating. Then at Iveline’s, she’d left her body and entered the child’s. Whoosh! Just like that.

“I was racing at fantastic speed then, bam! It was like I hit a wall, but it didn’t hurt. I started to shrink and Iveline surrounded me, like a bubble.”

“How long were you in there?” I couldn’t believe I was even asking.

“I don’t know. A few minutes, maybe. Being Iveline was wild. Her thoughts were like happy clouds. I began to feel part of an incredible complexity. I was rich and poor, healthy and sick, perfect and imperfect, all at the same time. Have you ever felt that?”

“It doesn’t sound familiar.” I pulled her close to me in the dark. Moving speeches were *my* craft. Her sudden eloquence was unnerving. She’d been somewhere I hadn’t.



*Global Warming* by Wilma Millette  
Encaustic collage on wooden cradle  
24x30 in



“I’m sure you could feel it if you were tuned in. I must have stumbled across the right frequency. If we really are all things at once, it explains how we can tell the difference between light and dark, beauty and ugliness, truth and lies. I was repulsed by Haiti at first, but not now. Now I want to know what everything in the world feels like. I’m excited and scared, too. It’s a sign, Todd. A wake-up call.” She burrowed deeper into me, and I felt her breath on my chest.

“Seen any bats lately?” I asked, craving her reassuring laugh.

“Always the smartass,” she said, wrenching away. “What happened was real, no matter what you think. I don’t intend to waste any more of my life.”

Pinned to the mat with an insult I hadn’t seen coming, put in my peripheral life-wasting place. I lay awake for hours, listening to the cicadas’ chiding hum.

At the airport gate, waiting for our flight home, I said, “About last night.”

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

“I’m sorry. Honest. I’ve been thinking. Maybe we should come back here to live for a while. Find some way to help out.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. I’m taking the job. I feel good about their generous donation to Haiti.”

I was stunned. “Tell me you haven’t fallen for that ploy—let’s give something meaningless away while we hang onto

worldwide patent protection rights.” I wasn’t blowing air, having collected evidence of my claim from public records. It was in the report I’d given Jane before we left for Haiti. Had she even read it?

She leaned back and closed her eyes. “You are so full of cynical shit.”

“I only want you to see the truth. Ask them if they’ll send you to photograph someone with AIDS who can’t afford brand-name drugs—drugs they want to prevent the poor sucker getting in cheaper generic form. If they say yes, by all means, sign on.”

“Exactly what don’t you understand about capitalism, College Boy?” she said, standing up, whipping around to face me. “What’s so great about slogging away for peanuts on behalf of ungrateful scum?” She walked to the window and stared out at the airport’s lone runway until our flight was called.

She used to get off on thoughts of my cruising the county jail, upholding the Sixth Amendment, fighting injustice—or so she said.

On Jane’s first day working for the drug lords, she informed me she was changing the spelling of her first name and ditching her married name professionally. Her work would be credited to Jhane Kôvacs, complete with bullshit circumflex, the

last name pronounced *Kovash*, as though she'd spent her life in Budapest and picked up a New Jersey accent there. "I'll be traveling the world," she explained in a precise and edgy way, "and need the cachet of an international name."

"Spell cachet," I said.

"Why can't you just be happy for me?" she said.

I returned from having spent the week after Labour Day helping my parents move into a smaller place to discover Jane had painted the walls a green so deep it felt as if I'd fallen into the living room. Had I slept through her showing me colour chips? No. She'd wanted to surprise me. What's more, a pricey white sectional and an assortment of snooty glass and chrome tables had taken up residence in the modest two-bed, one-bath townhouse we'd scrimped to buy the year before. "Where's the old stuff?" I asked. The stuff I'd brought to the marriage: a grey tweed hide-a-bed with secrets, a worn black leather recliner, an end table that needed a matchbook to level it. Goodwill had taken it all away except for a chunky brass lamp from my university days she still found charming. It occurred to me the lamp and I were like Haitian shacks, clinging to a steadily eroding façade.

I helped her hang photos she'd enlarged and gotten framed: a shirtless, hungry-looking man straining to pull a wooden cart that was sinking beneath charcoal; women along a dusty

road frying fish in old grease; a toddler, orange-haired from malnutrition; the mud and brick, tin-roofed, death-trap Cité Soleil shanties; four shots of Iveline. “There’s something shameful about chronicling the misery of others,” I told her.

“It depends on your perspective,” she said. “I see these as self-portraits.”

A month later she got her hair cut. All that remained was half an inch hugging her head like a knit cap. It was a drizzly day and the little bit left had gone frizzy. She looked like a goat. “How could you?” I asked.

“It was time,” she said.

I had a sudden, terrifying vision of life without Jane. She’d shed her skin before. Abandoned at nine by her mother, father unknown, she was placed with a family who spent no more on her than the stipend they received from the state. She claimed to have been a fat child with thick glasses. When I met her she was diet thin, wore contacts and had those bouncy, brazen curls. After high school, she destroyed every photograph of herself she could find, moved away from her foster family, and never responded to their attempts to contact her. She never tried to find her mother. As the indulged, only child of parents who loved each other and called me on Sundays, I could only guess at her pain.

Home before Jane one evening in December, I opened the

mail. A letter from Phano, thanking us both for the used eyeglasses. Eight thousand pairs! Everyone in Saint Marc was overwhelmed with gratitude. I left the letter on the glass-topped dining room table where she'd see it. Hovered as she read, a flush spreading from the base of her neck to her chin. Done, she clutched the letter tight against her chest, lifted her head, and gave me a defiant look.

"You don't have an exclusive on good works, you know."

"Why the secret? Phano obviously thinks I was involved. Why wasn't I?"

"I was afraid you'd take it over, make it *your* project."

I checked an urge to call bullshit on her. Would I have muscled in on it?

She wanted to stay connected to Haiti, she told me, so shortly after we returned, she e-mailed Phano and asked how she could help. They were desperate for eyeglasses in Saint Marc, he wrote back. The ones Haiti got from charities rarely made it past Port-au-Prince. Jane's company let her solicit their thousands of employees. A few weeks earlier, she packaged up what they'd contributed and sent them to Phano.

"I don't know how he got our home address," she said.

"I gave it to him when he dropped us off at the airport. Thought we might want to keep in touch." I didn't tell her I did it to show Phano I wasn't threatened by him. A bit of my own

bravado. I slowly shook my head. “I gotta admit it hurts, Jane. You asked thousands of strangers to help, but you didn’t ask me.”

“I told you why.”

“Even so.”

She walked away. She was done giving out information.

The next three weeks were agony, full of senseless civility. We said: *Fine, thanks; Yes, thanks; Pardon me?* Jane made like the injured party, but I didn’t know what I was supposed to apologize for. She was frequently distracted, her lips moving and her eyebrows lifting as though in conversation with another. I tried touching her, looking for the way back in, but she blew me off. In bed, she hugged her side, pretending to fall asleep right away. One night, as she was packing for a four-day shoot in New York, planning to leave the next morning, I decided to give her a gift I knew deep down was spiteful.

“You might want to take my latest research with you to read on the train,” I said. “Did you know that US drug companies experiment on Haitians?” I opened a folder in which I’d inserted a report and read: “‘Over a hundred Cité Soleil children died after being inoculated with an untested flu vaccine.’ Here’s another: ‘A thousand women suffered uncontrollable menstrual bleeding from an experimental birth control device.’ There are tons more fascinating examples in here.

Brainwashing, mind control, trial AIDS vaccines.”

I handed her the folder. She pushed it away without looking up. “That’s old news,” she said. “Rumours. Lies. Why are you doing this?”

“They’re not lies. You need to know.”

“You don’t get it,” she said, zipping up her brand-new Samsonite. “I’m not living your life. I like the choices I’ve made.”

“But what you’re doing is immoral.”

“Is that so?” she said with a look of triumphant disdain. “If drug companies are so evil, why do you take their pain pills?”

“My point, exactly. They profit from my agony.”

She didn’t wait for morning. Called a cab and took off. I stood there for a few minutes, hands flat against the door she slammed, wondering how long it would take for her scent to disappear if she never returned, wondering if we’d lose money if we had to sell the place right away. It was crazy. I could hardly breathe for the space fear and frustration were taking up inside me. I grabbed my coat and keys and crept my way to the station behind an infuriating bozo who didn’t know how to drive in fresh snow. The platform was covered in it, the lights making it glitter, the air eerily quiet. She stood at the far end, not looking my way, her tall black boots, long black coat, and black Cossack hat stark against the snowy white. I

hung back, lonely under the cold sky, until the train pulled in. Watched as she boarded, got into a different car. As we pulled into Penn Station at 9:00 PM, I was at the door, pumped, ready to bolt. I caught sight of her going up the escalator to the street level and took the stairs two at a time. Tapped her shoulder as she stepped outside. She whirled around, startled.

“Jesus!” she said. “You scared the hell out of me! Why are you here?”

“We need to talk.”

“You followed me?”

“I had to.”

“That’s creepy.”

“Can we go somewhere and talk?”

“I want to be alone, Todd. That’s why I left. I almost hated you tonight.”

“You can’t just walk away without an explanation.”

She took me to a deli she’d been to before, to a booth in the back. She didn’t take off her coat. Under the harsh neon lights and the furry hat, her face looked jagged, unreal, like something I’d invented.

“I feel like I’m in a contest with you,” she said. “I’m tired of competing for airtime. Do you know what it’s like to just be with someone, to sit quietly, holding hands, to not have to prove a point, to just give?”

I wanted to whimper like a kicked puppy. Was there someone else? My words came out of nowhere, rushing as to the edge of a cliff. “How about I start a private practice? You know, get some clients with money. I could do it part-time and work on contract for the state.” I had been thinking no such thing, but the idea was brilliant.

“And short-shrift your poorer clients?”

“I wouldn’t let that happen. I could make it work.”

“What would be the point?”

“We’d have more money. You wouldn’t have to be a propaganda flack. You could take pictures of whatever you want.”

She leaned back in the booth and shook her head. “*I am* taking the pictures I want to take. For the first time in years I’m doing what I want.”

“What do you mean, ‘for the first time’?”

“I’ve been trying to figure out when it happened. When I started seeing everything through your eyes, not my own.”

“You’ve always had your own opinions. We just happen to think alike.”

“Do we? I’m not going to quit my job. Can you live with that?”

“How can you ignore the evidence?”

She sighed loudly. “I wonder if we ever had anything in common.”

“What do you want me to do, Jane?”

She squinted like the question puzzled her. “Whatever you want. It has nothing to do with me.”

I took the 11:14 p.m. back, the wheels on the tracks saying *nothing-to-do-with-me-fuck-you, nothing-to-do-with-me-fuck-you*. The sound of Jane wiping the mud of our marriage off her feet. I dozed off and dreamt I was in a packed courtroom, watching a man sentenced to die forced to crawl over tables and up a wall, a rope around his neck so he could hang himself. I started to speak out in his defence but the judge put a finger on her lips to silence me.

I got home and realized I'd taken the extra set of car keys, the ones without a house key. I'd neglected to wear boots and gloves, as well. I slogged and slipped through drifts in my sneakers to reach the sliding glass patio door around back. Shook the snow off a brick supporting one leg of the barbecue, wound up like a pitcher and shattered the door, not caring if lights went on in the neighbourhood or if somebody called the police. I reached through, unlatched the door. Inside, I blew on my frigid hands and noticed one was dripping bright red blood onto the kitchen's white tile floor.

Until that moment, it was as though I'd been sleepwalking. My brain snapped to and it came to me. The blood was a sign. My bat sign. It was clear as a courthouse bell: since our first

day in Haiti, absolutely everything had been my fucking bat sign. “I’m tuned in, Jane!” I shouted. “I’m finally tuned in!”

While standing in the shadows of dread, watching Jane steal away from our marriage and worrying about how much of me she was dropping along the way, I couldn’t appreciate how light I’d become, like a helium balloon about to float free.

At the deli, when she’d asked *Can you live with that?* I couldn’t have answered yes, even if I’d foreseen the lonely stretch ahead, the endless second guessing. In truth, it’s never been in me to compromise. Not for me, the easy plea bargain. *Know thyself*, the maxim goes. Even if that self is a jerk who couldn’t resist a vindictive parting shot on a snowy night.

I bandaged my hand and trekked to an all-night hardware store. Bought plywood to repair the door and a couple cans of latex. I found myself in the living room coating dark green walls with a warm, bright red. *In honour of Valentine’s Day*, I’d tell her. *I wanted to surprise you*, I’d say. I took down the framed pictures before I painted, and to this day I wonder about the hapless souls Jane had captured in them. How many were taken in the seconds of that first big earthquake, or more slowly by the cholera that followed? Swept away in a flood? Struck down by TB, malaria, dengue, malnutrition? How many more years was Iveline given to enjoy those clouds of happy thoughts? Were those who survived doomed to be

haunted by the sheer scale of the despair?

If I am still as cynical as Jane claimed I once was, it comes from a yearning for a future where life will be better for everyone somehow. For a different picture to hang on the wall, if you like: a view of Haiti from the top of a hill, say, palms spraying green into the air, the ocean shimmering in the sun, the want almost invisible.

# Another Plane

*Graham Kelly*

It is the whine of an ancient air-raid siren  
whose blare was never connected to crisis,  
and so is disregarded as test or malfunction.

It is street-level cries of “god” and “please” and “help”  
passed off, while blinds are drawn, as the pushing  
games of rough lovers or unregulated youth.

It is the serrated shrill of alarms  
that prompt a wince of annoyance  
rather than realization of imminent threat.

It is a waft of pungent smoke, assumed at first to  
be from beach- or bon- or engine fire, until it is  
stinging nostrils and strangling breath.

It is a deep tremble in the ground, guessed to be  
extremely heavy transport, or eerily low-flying craft.  
Until it rumbles again with no sound at all,  
its silence the most ominous sign.

It is to reach another plane, one our mass imagination  
has until now been too fearful merely to envision:  
the domain where titanic wave crests  
and towering flame erupts  
to engulf this moment  
wholly.

It is an ornate temple door, too sacred to believe could be  
penetrated by force until it is: a violation not merely of  
innocence but a kind of virginal purity  
not named until lost and  
looked back upon, mournfully.

It is not a sensation so much as a sense, of suddenly  
going beyond what was always seen as safe,  
while urgency rises with fast-unfurling awareness  
pulsing forward like a frantically beating heart.

It is the moment we would most like to  
wake up,  
run,  
or turn away from,  
but abruptly must accept:  
there is no way to turn away.



*Pink Pools* by Amber Lomax

Mixed media: watercolour, ink, pencil, and collage

9x12 in

# Contributors

**HUGH ANDERSON** inhabits a space between memory and a future he fears but probably won't see. So he keeps writing. Recent publications include *Awakenings Review*, *The Poeming Pigeon*, *Aji Magazine*, and *3Elements Literary Review*. He has a Best of the Web and two Pushcart Prize nominations.

**J.E. BARNARD** (she/her) is a Comox writer and editor of award-winning crime fiction. Her works have a Crime Writers of Canada Award, an Alberta Book of the Year award, and have been shortlisted for the Debut Dagger and the Prix Aurora. Her women's suspense series, *The Falls Mysteries* (Dundurn Press), tackles contemporary social issues like murder, assisted dying, PTSD, and ME/CFS.

**ZOE DICKINSON** (she/her) is a poet and bookseller from Victoria, BC. She has been published in literary journals such as *Existere*, *Prairie Fire*, and *Contemporary Verse 2*. Her first chapbook, *Public Transit*, was published in 2015 by Leaf Press, and her second chapbook, *intertidal: poems from the littoral zone*, is the 2022 winner of the Raven Chapbook competition. She is a manager at Russell Books and the Artistic Director of the Planet Earth Poetry Reading Series.

**TRICIA DOWER** (she/her) is the author of the story collection, *Silent Girl*, as well as the novels *Stony River* and *Becoming Lin*. Her short fiction has won awards and appeared in literary and other magazines in Canada and the United States. She lives a delightful hop, skip, and jump from VIRL's Sidney branch.

**JANN EVERARD** lives in Sidney. Her fiction has been published in *The Fiddlehead*, *Grain*, *Prairie Fire*, *Room*, *EVENT*, and elsewhere, and she is a past winner of *The Malahat Review*'s Open Season Award for Fiction. Her debut collection of stories, *Blue Runaways*, is due to be released in 2024.

**CAROL GALL** lives and writes from beautiful Quadra Island. She is inspired by the raw beauty of the landscape and having her hands wrist deep in the garden soil. Sometimes writing is a break from the physicality of her small homestead. Sometimes picking berries and turning soil gives her head a break from tossing around words. She'd tell you it's a good balance and a good life.

**HEATHER HENDRY** (she/her) is a schoolteacher and Tofino's Poet Laureate 2022-2024. Her work has appeared in *Arc Poetry Magazine*, *Sea & Cedar Magazine*, *Van Isle Poetry Collective*, and League of Canadian Poets' *Poetry Pause*. Originally from North Vancouver, Heather lives in Tofino, BC, on the unceded traditional territory of the Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation. *Handmade Binoculars* is her debut collection.

**ANNE HOPKINSON** writes from her home in Victoria, and is President of Planet Earth Poetry, a reading series of 27 years. She is a nature-lover, book addict, and water rat. Her work appears in anthologies and journals, recently *The Antigish Review* and *The New Quarterly*. She won The Canadian Stories Poetry Prize for 2019, and was short-listed for the BC Federation of Writers Poetry Prize in 2019. In 2021 she won the Emily Carr Poetry Contest in Victoria.

**NANCY ISSENMAN** is a Jewish queer artist living in unceded Lekwungen territory. She has retirement to thank for re-energizing her love of writing. Nancy has a chapbook of poems, *The Name Of Yes*, and her poems have appeared in publications including the anthology *The Sky is Falling*, *The Sky is Falling*, and *Island Writers Magazine*. Her story was published this winter in *Don't Tell: Family Secrets*.

**GRAHAM KELLY** ended his career as a journalist at a top news network to travel to 44 countries exploring his African, Asian and Caucasian roots, and to allow his true purpose to pull him to it. He now runs programs for at-risk Indigenous youth, as he finishes a master's degree at RRU.

**AMBER LOMAX** is inspired by imagery from her vivid dream life. Her dream journal provides fuel for painting exploration, and the act of painting itself is a dialogue between the conscious and subconscious. Born in Truro, Great Britain, she graduated from Reading University in 2001. Amber moved to Canada in 2010 and paints from her home in Sooke on Vancouver Island.

**CHRISTINE LOWTHER** (she/her) edited *Worth More Standing: Poets and Activists Pay Homage to Trees* and *Worth More Growing: Youth Poets and Activists Pay Homage to Trees*. She is also author of three poetry collections of her own. For the 2020-22 tenure, she was Tofino's Poet Laureate. For more than thirty years, Chris has lived in unceded łaʔuukwiiʔath (Tla-o-qui-aht) territory.

**WILMA MILLETTE** creates curiously creative collage artwork using original vintage maps, letters, stamps, discarded books, charts, and found objects. She combines them in unexpected ways to give them new life and a new narrative. Upcycling these treasures from the past keeps her engaged as the possibilities are endless.

**EDWARD PECK** studied photography, fine arts, conceptual art, historical techniques, film, and literature at UBC. He is currently working with experimental digital imagery and historical photography techniques. He teaches the art of photography at the Shadbolt Centre for the Arts. Peck exhibits locally and internationally; private, corporate, and public collections have acquired his work. He also edited and produced anthologies of Canadian literature and was the Assistant Editor of the Canadian Fiction Magazine.

**ALLIE PICKETTS** (she/her) is a musician, writer, parent, teacher, and lover of nature. She was born and raised on the unceded lands of the x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əy̓əm (Musqueam), scəwəθən (Tsawwassen), and other Coast Salish Peoples, and is thankful to live within the traditional territory of the T'Sou-ke Nation. Nature and music are the inspirations for her writing.

**KARL STURMANIS** was born to Latvian parents beside the lower Sto:lo (aka Fraser River). He has degrees in Zoology and Community and Regional Planning, and has worked throughout BC, the Canadian Arctic, and New Mexico. He currently lives in Nanaimo. His book of poetry, *Treeline Wedding*, was published in 1981, and his work has appeared in *Prism International*, *Boreal*, *3 cent pulp* and *New West Coast: 72 Contemporary British Columbia Poets* (1977).

**KAYLA TRACE** (she/her) is a Cree writer who was born and raised in Northern BC, and has called Nanaimo home since 2013. She graduated from VIU with a BA in philosophy and studies in women and gender, and is currently focusing on reconnecting with her culture. Her work, *Wet Our Lips*, was awarded third place in the Indigenous Arts & Stories competition in 2018.

# SEA & CEDAR

LITERATURE & ART MAGAZINE

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