

Creating Community

A Collection of Creative Non-fiction by
Immigrant Seniors and Mount Royal University Students





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2021



ABOUT THIS ANTHOLOGY

This anthology is the result of a collaboration between Immigrant Services Calgary (ISC) and Mount Royal University (MRU). Facilitated through the Community Initiatives for Immigrant Seniors Program (CISP), funded by Family & Community Support Services (FCSS), it was over the course of eight weeks that immigrant seniors worked with Prof. Natalie Meisner, PhD and creative writing students to write and craft creative non-fiction pieces on the topic of creating community.

In partnership with



Funding provided by



COMMUNITY INITIATIVES FOR IMMIGRANT SENIORS PROGRAM (CISP)

The Community Initiatives for Immigrant Seniors Program (CISP) is a locally funded social inclusion initiative designed to enhance the integration and inclusion of vulnerable immigrant seniors from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, creating welcoming and supportive environments to help them feel respected and valued.

This program adopts a proactive, holistic, outcome-driven approach to address the physical, emotional, psychological, social and intellectual needs of immigrant seniors and facilitate their integration in the Canadian society. CISP focuses on empowerment and building the capacity of our seniors to be active and contributing members in the community, and it provides them with opportunities to take part in spearheading, implementing and sustaining meaningful community-based projects.

If you are interested in learning more about CISP, or want to join this program, please visit us online:

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CISP IMMIGRANT SENIORS



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Liubov Truzhnikova came to Canada from Kyrgyzstan eight years ago with her husband and children. Now she has three granddaughters and one grandson. Her hobbies include traveling, reading, writing, singing and cooking, and her primary goal is to learn English and become independent from her children. She hopes for an early end to the pandemic to resume her travels.

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Purabi Chowdhury is from Bangladesh and was a government high school teacher before retiring in 2016. Her hobbies are travelling, dancing and reading books, and her interests are watching sports, games, dancing, yoga and learning English.

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Shahla and her family came to Canada in 2016 from Iran, where she used to be a business manager in an engineering company. Shahla enjoys traveling, writing and being happy with her family. Realizing the importance of sharing experience, she is passionate about sharing her life-changing experiences as an immigrant.

Shahrbano Ghaffari is from Iran. Farsi is her mother language. She loves to take part in different classes and thanks to CISP's literacy classes, she is excited to write creatively for the first time. Her hobbies are sewing, knitting, gardening, cooking, walking and going out with friends and family.

CONTRIBUTORS

MRU STUDENTS



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Megan Schlotter is a born and raised Calgarian. Currently, she is working toward a Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in English, and is in her third year of the program. She is also employed as a respite worker for a foster mother as well as a server at both the Rec Room and the Calgary Zoo. Her life is certainly busy, but she still finds time for her three miniature dachshunds and her two cats!

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PROJECT SUPPORT TEAM



Parminder Gill is CISP's Program Facilitator, highly devoted to giving back to her community through various ISC activities, which she has been doing for more than eight years. Born and raised in India and holding a Master's Degree in Sociology, she is very enthusiastic about encouraging the pursuit of excellence in the community and enjoys working with multicultural seniors.

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Andrea Wong is an MRU graduate who works in non-profit communications. She enjoys connecting people through storytelling, and this is her third year as the project's graphic designer.

FOREWORD

by Professor Natalie Meisner



This anthology is the product of a semester-long initiative that brings accomplished Mount Royal University creative writing students together with the wonderful seniors of Immigrant Services Calgary. In semester-long series of classes, meetings and co-working sessions the students and seniors work in pairs to find their writing voices and to craft original stories and poems that reflect their diverse experiences. This program takes place in tandem with our capstone course CRWT 4802 (Experiential Studies in Creative Writing) in the Department of English, Languages, and Cultures and really has been the project that keeps on giving: in gaining work placements for our students, in increasing the creative aging capacity of our seniors, and in bringing forth engagement with intergenerational and intercultural community building.

This is the fourth year for the partnership between ISC and MRU and we are very proud of the work you will read here, the connections that were built and the friendships that were formed. We hope you enjoy this year's anthology on the very apt theme for these times: *Creating Community*.

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FULL CUPS

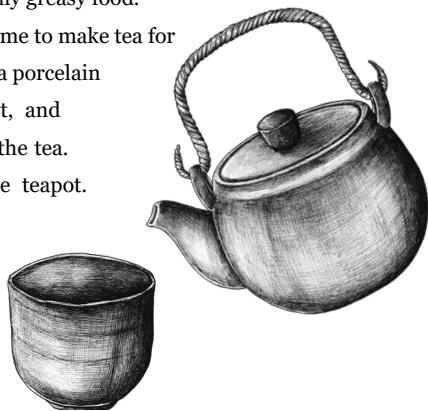


HAVE A CUP OF TEA, PLEASE

BY LILI ZHANG

Tea is the most popular drink in my hometown. There is a large variety of teas, including green tea, white tea, yellow tea, black tea, etc. Different places produce their own famous teas. For example, Dragon-well tea in Hangzhou, Wulong tea in Fujian, Jasmine tea in Suzhou, and Puer tea in Yuenan. The best quality teas are picked in early spring, and they are very expensive due to the very low production. The most popular way to treat your guests is to present a cup of hot tea to each of them. Serving a cup of hot tea to a guest indicates the guest is warmly welcome and respected by the host. The most famous tea is usually served to the most honorable guests and dearest friends. A cup of tea will make you warm in winter, make you cool in summer, make you calm down when you are angry, make you relax when you are anxious, make a talk with your relatives more cordial, and make a meeting with your friends more exciting. People often drink tea after a big meal because they believe tea could help digest food, especially greasy food.

When I was young, my mother often asked me to make tea for the guests visiting our home. I put some tea in a porcelain teapot, poured boiling water into the teapot, and then waited for a few minutes before serving the tea. The fragrance of tea would escape from the teapot. The teapot was tube-shaped, about 20 centimeters high with two brass wire handles on its top. Painted on the surface was a bald old man with a long white beard. A dragon-headed wooden walking stick was in his right



hand and a large peach on his left hand. There was a crane standing in front of him and a pine tree behind him. The old man was called the Longevity God. There was a cotton padded case made for covering the teapot to keep the tea warm in cold weather. The tea cups were specially made for drinking tea, and they were made of very thin porcelain with painted orchids on the surface. "Have a cup of tea, please!" I said to the guests when I handed a cup of tea to them. "Thank you!" they replied with smiles. I went to my room after serving the tea. Adults talked of their work, life, and stories one after another. After some time, I went into the sitting room, poured some hot water into the teapot and served the second round of tea. The taste of the second round tea is considered the best. I was happy and satisfied because I had done something as an adult.

Once in autumn, I visited one of my uncles in another town far from my home. After a big dinner, having a lot of delicious local food, we were seated at a small wooden table in the courtyard. On the table was a small ceramic teapot and several small ceramic tea cups placed in a tea tray. The tea cups were very small, just like half of an egg. My uncle handed me a cup of hot tea and said: "This is the best local tea. Have a taste, please!" I sipped a little bit. It was very tasty. I drank the whole cup of tea. My uncle poured another cup of tea from the teapot for me. We talked for a long time. I drank the tea one cup after another, and my uncle added more hot water into the teapot several times. I was very thirsty due to the long journey. I intended to ask for a bigger cup, but I did not. I wondered the reason why my uncle treated me with such a little tea cup. I could not get the answer for a long time. Many years later when I told my story to one of my friends, he told me that this way of drinking tea was called Gongfucha in Chinese. Gongfucha means it takes time to drink the tea. Because the tea cup is small, the guest has to drink the tea one cup after another; therefore, the host has to serve the tea one cup after another. In this way, the host gets more chances to show his hospitality.



Tasting Tea

BY LINDA XIAOQI CAO

I am willing to share good tea with my friends,
Different teas can bring different sceneries to mind.
Black tea has a deep background and is most worthy of deep tasting.
Green tea is fresh and fragrant and reminds me of small romantic encounters.

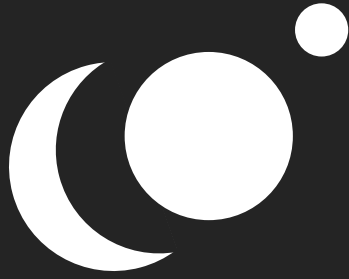
Drinking tea is like getting along,
There is no need to greet between confidants
You can talk and laugh freely if you know each other,
Discussing the best topics with full fun from each: family, children, and work.

The same tea, the same people,
Different tea can bring different moods,
Sometimes deep and sometimes shallow,
Sometimes joyful, and sometimes dreary.

I most enjoy the quiet afternoon,
Sitting in the pergola,
A pot of hot tea, an old friend, a new book,
Looking out at the mountains and the water, a beautiful sight.
Every time I travel,
I must first find a good place to drink tea and relax,
Tasting local tea, watching local people.
I savour life in a cup of tea without hurries.

I am a simple person,
It's Tea that gives me elegant enjoyment.
I have learned to taste life casually in a cup of tea,
Put aside the fame and fortunes,
and bring calm to the ups and downs of life.





Tea in Tabriz

BY ROGHIEH SAMIN

When I was student, I was drinking more tea than ever before.

Without it, I couldn't stay awake to study.

It was the most popular and cheapest option,

Always being the most available for us students.

The city, Tabriz, had cold, long winters like Calgary.

But we students gathered to drink tea and talk,
we enjoyed just being together.

Now, as I get older,

I cannot drink tea due to health problems.

I need to care of my physical self.

But I will never forget those nights in Tabriz.

matcha?

BY SARA BAIRD

"Two iced matcha lattes, with oat milk, vanilla to sweeten, please."
I will get today's round, she will get the next.
The lattes in our plastic cups are a serene shade of sage,
the taste sweet and smooth on my lips.
Every once in a while, a small undissolved ball of tea powder slips through,
leaving bitterness on my tongue.

With tomato faces and slicked back hair,
we stuff our exhausted bodies into sweatsuits
to ward off the cold air from the drying salt water on our skin.
It is only a block from the studio to the cafe,
but the icy wind hurries us along.
Our giggles billow like smoke in the cold air—
the barista recognizes us when we come through the doors.

Endorphins still coursing,
we sit on the same supple leather of the same inviting couch.
Our jackets and tightly wound yoga matts strewn around us,
we twist straw wrappers between tired fingers.
The cafe hums and purrs with low conversations,
the movement of the day like a lazy river flowing easily around us.

I have never known belonging the way I feel it here,
somewhere I never expected it to be.



TEA: FOR THE MIND, BODY, AND SOUL!

BY LIUBOV TRUZHNIKOVA

The culture of tea drinking is rooted deeply throughout history. Today, drinking tea is an essential part of communication with friends, intimate peaceful conversations, business meetings, and enjoying delicious desserts. The aroma, taste, and color—everything about tea is conducive to a pleasant conversation and delicious treat.

For a long time, our family has had its own tradition of tea drinking. The whole family gathered around the table and drank tea with honey, lemon, and sugar. For tea we serve cookies, cake, pies, sweets, sugar, dried apricots, raisins, nuts, and jam. As we drink our tea, we solve our life problems, plan new things, enjoy communicating with each other, have fun and laugh at inside jokes with all our loved ones.

We especially like herbal tea. It is not only aromatic and delicious, but also a medicinal drink. It improves mood, regulates the functioning of the heart, intestines, and lungs, calms the nerves, enhances the mental activity of a person, and treats many other diseases. The healing power of tea comes from the concoction of herbs and flowers growing in the mountains and forests within virgin nature. But only knowledgeable people can make up such a tea collection. The recipe for the mixture of herbs must be carefully observed so as not to harm human health.

My grandmother, Akulina, was a knowledgeable herbalist, having inherited this knowledge from her great-great-grandmother. The family recipe for tea in our family

has been passed down from generation to generation and has survived to this day. Tea still gives us health!

In its composition, it has more than 30 components. The main ones are flowers and leaves of St. John's wort, oregano, thyme, chamomile, mint, calendula, linden and birch, oak bark, cherry berries, mountain ash, viburnum, wild strawberries, and more. Each plant is harvested in a wild forest away from settlements and roads. This is done so that they do not absorb poisonous gases and harmful substances that get into the air and into the soil from chemical products used by humans. Each plant has its own collection period. Oregano, St. John's wort, thyme, linden flowers are harvested in June, strawberries in July, chamomile, calendula, mint in August, oak bark, bird cherry, mountain ash, viburnum, and rose hips in September. All herbs and berries



are dried naturally under a canopy. Bunches of herbs are hung on hooks so that the sun's rays do not fall on them. Dried herbs are placed in separate cloth bags. To make tea a part of the dry herb is taken from each bag, weighed on a scale and tea is made. The recipe must be strict for the desired type and medicinal properties of the tea.

In the cold wintertime we drink warming tea, in Spring—tea enriched with natural vitamins to increase energy and boost immunity. On Autumn days after work, we drink tea that restores strength and vigor of the body. In the Summer on hot days mint tea cools and invigorates us. But always, drinking tea in our family is a joyful event. Most often we have a big tea party on Sunday when we can all get together.

I am always amazed at the history of tea. From the moment tea was discovered in China to the present day, it has come a long and hard way. Currently, tea is a well-known and popular drink in all corners of the earth. It is drunk in Asia, Europe, North

America, Africa, and Australia. The discovery of tea belongs to the Chinese emperor Shen Hong. He lived in China in 2700 BC. Tea became popular in Japan in the 13th century. The Japanese came up with their own tea ceremony which, unlike the Chinese, focuses on the ritual of tea drinking and not on enjoying the taste of tea. Tea was brought from China to London in 1600, to Russia in 1618, and to India in 1728. In North America tea became famous in 1690, and in 1784 the Americans built the first ship that brought a cargo of tea to the United States. Since then, Americans and Canadians love tea and drink it in large quantities. Especially popular here is iced tea. It was invented by the Englishman Richard Blechynden in 1904.

Wherever tea went, it became popular. Starting its history in ancient China, tea has become popular in all corners of the modern world. Wherever you go, you can have a cup of tea which the locals themselves will offer you as a sign of hospitality, respect, and friendship. Studying tea in 2700 BC, Shen Hong had no idea that his discovery would later have a strong impact on the culture of many peoples and affect the course of history.

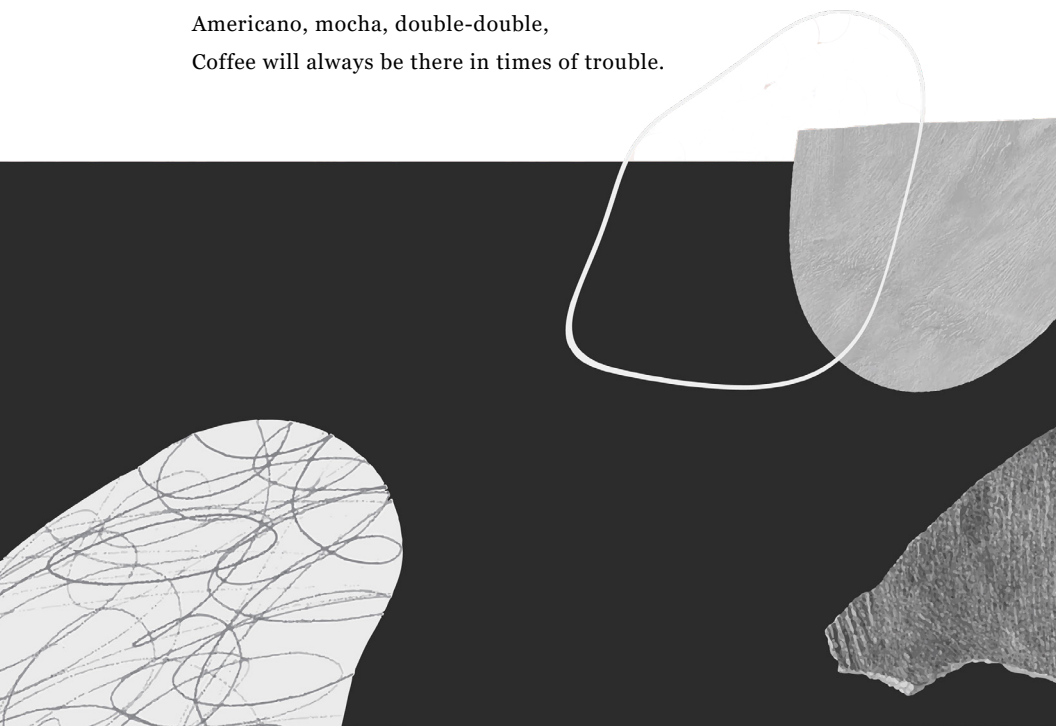
For me, tea drinking is a pleasure, mutual understanding, attitude, and a fragrant and tasty event!



The Many Roles of Coffee

BY MEGAN SCHLOTTER

A good cup of coffee is a good companion.
Warm and comforting, yet ready for action.
In conversation, coffee's role expands,
Becoming an anchor when friends meet friends.
That little cup holds the discussion's flow,
The level of bitter liquid a tell to stay or go.
Therefore, coffee also embodies time
Whether you drink quickly or slowly dine.
Coffee is not just a bean brought to a boil!
It is refreshment for the mind, body, and soul.
It is a place to gather and simply be,
Paired nicely with a good book to read.
It is the boost you need to get through the day,
It's the guard who keeps the fatigue at bay.
Americano, mocha, double-double,
Coffee will always be there in times of trouble.





The Journey of Coffee

BY GYAN KAPOOR

Coffee is a beverage with many forms:

Espresso, coffee, no sugar, no milk, black coffee,
Coffee in ice cream, coffee with stevia, for sugar patients,
Cold coffee, high caffeine coffee, and
Coffee Delight, Black Rifle coffee and
much more to suit new generations as
well as many other nations.

To start with my home province

Punjab, India,

where milk flows in abundance to drink,

school days back in fifties,

and now the 83rd winter in my life.

My grandfather had heard of,

but not tasted tea,

Father and mother enjoyed masala chai (spiced tea),

only once in the days of harsh winter,
to keep the body warm.

We children got concoctions made of paste –
almond, melon seed hulled, poppy seed,
raisins, green cardamom, sugar, wheat extract,
and milk.

Boiled to form an energy drink
known as Dodhi,
given to protect from cough, cold, chest ailment,
ENT, bone health, and longevity.

300ml to be taken daily regularly for forty days.

In winter days and in summer days.

Nowadays, grandchildren in college and school are
going crazy to visit coffee shops or restaurants with friends.

To have a cup of coffee and have talks of their interests.

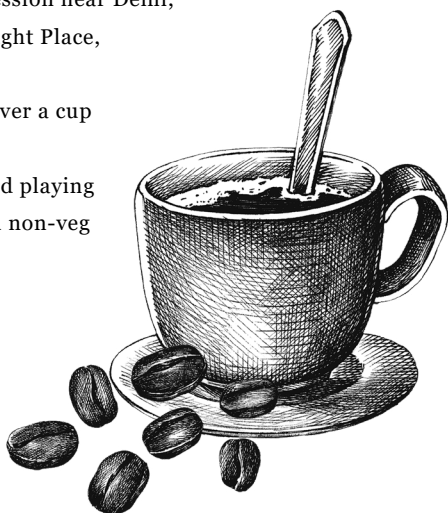
When I grew up and entered my profession near Delhi,
there was this coffee house in Connaught Place,
known as the downtown of the city.

We enjoyed dating or business talks over a cup
of espresso coffee,

That house was equipped with a record playing
system, cuisines like hotdogs, veg and non-veg
sandwiches.

Plus, coffee of many choices.

One day, my brother-in-law working
for a nearby Government office
invited me to meet there over a cup
of coffee,



and long-awaited talks.

Strangely enough, our seating was close to
a newlywed couple who presented a dramatic act.
Starting with normal family talk, they came to a point of
laughing loudly, as if they were sitting in some park
amusing with post marriage talks and
near and dear relations. Forgetting that the coffee
was getting cold.

But no matter, they just ordered another cup.

We too rejoiced alongside their talks just like they were joking for us.

Taste of South Indian coffee is unparalleled.

Made by manually grinding roasted coffee beans,

forming foamy paste,

mixing in boiling hot milk and water, combine.

The serving is peculiar, in stainless steel

cups and saucers, steam forming,

waves of flavour greeting the nostrils before sipping.

It is a unique feeling in taste, lasting

for more time than usual.

Such a wonderful sense.

While in Calgary, I find people on rail transit,

buses, or in walkways carrying a tumbler of coffee

and sucking on tobacco pipes with mobiles the other hand.

And coffee shops of different names, like Tim Hortons

and Second Cup, are filled with the smell of coffee,

even before the entrance.

SMELLING COFFEE AND TASTING SUNSHINE

BY TAYLOR STEINER



Every visit must begin with coffee – he insisted. That was the polite way to welcome any guest into your home. He’d explain that this was “the Dutch way” and that I must sit down before doing any work. He always told me stories about his stepmother. She was the one to thank for his etiquette, he’d say. There was no changing this lovely – but terribly stubborn – gentleman’s mind. Two strong, steaming cups always sat for us on his worn-out, circular oak table. In order to protect our elderly population, COVID restrictions mandated that no food or drink was to be consumed during our shifts. Instead, I’d gently clasp the porcelain mug in my hands, perch on the edge of my chair, and inhale the rich notes of the dark-roast coffee. He’d fill me in on his day and tell me stories of the past while dumping copious amounts of sugar into his own mug until he was satisfied with the taste, as we listened to old tunes on the radio.

“I biked all the way to France after the war,” he’d tell me every time. Though I’d heard this story countless times, I’d always try to match the surprise and enthusiasm on my face the first time he told me. These moments of friendship and connection over a simple cup of coffee were invaluable for both of us. He always maintained that I was his special guest rather than a healthcare worker. And at the end of my shift, he’d kiss the back of my hand with his cool, wrinkly lips and say “thank you for being my friend.”

Working in healthcare, I’ve noticed that everyone tends to assume that the relationship is one-sided – that the healthcare worker is always caring for the patient.

While it's true that my job is to help the seniors that I work with, I often find that sometimes they help me just as much, if not more. The relationships I have built by working one-on-one with seniors are precious. Health care can be tough – emotionally and physically. But it's the sweet moments – the beautiful relationships – that allow healthcare workers to persevere. The friendship I developed with the Dutch man was one that I'll never forget. He reminded me a little bit of my own grandfather. My grandfather was the type of man to say it exactly the way it was. I could always count on him to tell me the truth – not slanted, altered, or gentle truth – but the truth that you need to hear. Both men were thin and frail – witty and feisty. Determined and stubborn, yet kind and full of a playfulness.

One day after giving him a shower, I began experiencing stomach pain. I knew it was probably nothing serious – just my stomach being sensitive as usual – so I tried to ignore it. After trying to work through it, I reluctantly told my elderly friend that I needed to take a few minutes to sit down. As a former healthcare worker himself, and an ever-compassionate man, he insisted I go lay down on the soft tan couch in his living room. I nodded and gratefully accepted the offer to rest. The couch enveloped me as I curled up, the early afternoon sun kissing my skin. The living room was my favourite place in his house. The whole east-facing side was glass, and you could almost taste the golden hues of diffused light in the afternoons. Eyes closed, I breathed in the faint smell of the plants that resided in the room and stretched my legs out.

As he slowly ambled into the living room, his moccasins shuffled lightly against the sage green carpet. He began humming “You are my sunshine” and sat down on the recliner next to me. His tenor voice hit every note with perfection and a smile crept onto my face when he fell asleep mid-verse, snores filling the room. It was his song for me. Every day he'd call me just to chat for a few minutes – and every time, without fail, he'd tell me that I was his sunshine. On rainy days, he'd call me twice just so my voice could “warm up his chilly day.” I never minded. When I went out to Montreal to visit family, he'd call daily and teach me a new French phrase to try out. He became a very dear friend throughout the isolation of COVID and my visits with him were the brightest days of my weeks.

The stomach pain subsided within an hour or so and we resumed our day as usual. The kindness he showed me is something I'll always treasure in my heart and carry with me on difficult days in healthcare. I was hired to take care of him, but on that particular afternoon, he was the one looking after me. He thought that I was his sunshine, but really, he was mine.



AN UNFORGETTABLE DAY WITH TEA

BY SHAHLA



My mom and dad were both from large families. So, I was born in a lovely family with my mom's motherly love that was unique. She was a kind hostess and was known for her hospitality that was respected by all.

She always said to us, "The guest is the beloved of God. We should give him a warm welcome and respect him."

When the guest wanted to come to our house, all of us were trying to prepare the home for hospitality by cleaning, cooking, baking sweets and setting a samovar (a metal container traditionally used to heat and boil water) for tea. Everybody had a responsibility. One of those responsibilities was to serve the tea; that was for my sister and me.

My mom always said to us, "Tea trays, cups and teaspoons should be spotless and dry. Pay a lot of attention to these points. Use clean, lint-free handles and wipes to dry tea utensils so that they do not leave a trace or lint on the dishes."

One of these days, we had a special guest– my friend and his family wanted to come to our house.

Before this, my friend and I were working in the same company. Sometimes I had a job with his department, and I could see him and speak with him.

One day, my friend told me, “Shahla, I would like to get married to you.”

“I should think for a few days,” I answered.

After two weeks of thinking, my response to him was ‘yes.’

He became so happy and told me, “I will come with my family to you, for “کراگتس‌اوخ” (khastegari - a traditional Iranian proposal ceremony).

Our families had never seen each other. In this case, I was so excited because my lovely friend wanted to come to our house.

When I came back home at the end of my workday, I said to my mom, “Mom, my friend wants to come to our house with his family for the “کراگتس‌اوخ ceremony.”

My mom said, “So, we should be ready for that. When are they coming?”

“Next week on Friday,” I said.

After doing all the preparations, my mom went to the cupboard and brought a silver tray with silver cup holders and plates on it. Then she said, “The same as before when pouring tea: first place the cups outside the tray and after placing the bottom of each cup on a dry cloth, place it inside the tray for serving. Pour the tea from the edge of the cup so that the tea does not foam. To prevent the tea from spilling under the cups, place them separately on a tray next to the cup. Remember, the cup of tea shouldn't be full and there should be a little of the cup empty. Hold the tea tray a short distance from you and under your chest. Be careful my dear, according to the ancient Iranian tradition, families like to see the colour of tea.”

I kissed my mother and I told to her, “I have been training with you, and I know it. Don't worry about that.”



FROZEN GLASS

BY CALEIGH DUFFY

I've loved milk my whole life. It's the reason behind why my teeth were so strong growing up. All my teeth were pulled, except one.

I find even just the word itself...Milk...sounds like it can cure all physical and emotional pain we humans endure. Fight off disease. Cure a cold. Stop the crying. Heal a wound within seconds of it blanketing our skin. It sounds like what baby ducks bathe in.

It's soft and silky and soothes my throat. It's perfect at night before bed. It's perfect in the morning with your preferred texture of peanut butter.

It was a ritual with my parents to freeze our glasses before dinner, so that when we poured milk into them, it would be the perfect temperature of cold. Because otherwise we would be psychopaths to put ice cubes in them. I always thought it was so luxurious but genius of us to enjoy frozen cups of milk. Just for milk? I know people that make fun of other people that drink just milk, alone, for no other reason than liking it.

I am one of those people that get made fun of. I don't care though.

It's one of the many things my best friend and I bonded over. We both love milk. When we lived together, milk went the fastest. Gone within a few days. "It's your turn to buy milk this time," we'd say to each other.

Milk has always been there, and I think it always will. Even when I'm an old lady. I'll ask my daughter or son to pour me a glass of milk when I don't have the energy to myself, preferably... in a frozen glass.



COLLECTIONS



RECOGNITION OF THE EARTHENWARE ARTIST

BY GYAN KAPOOR

Each country's President House has different names across the world. In India, Rashtrapati Bhawan is where the President of India resides and performs his function. On one beautiful day in the year 1950, a lady with an appointment to see President Mr. Rajendra Prasad approached his living room with a tray covered in fine silk. The attendant explained to the President that this fine lady had brought a present for him. The president addressed her to please uncover the gift to him, listening as she removed the cover to make it visible to his highness. Mr. Rajendra Prasad showed excitement and spoke in a gentle tone, "young fisherwoman, you must have gotten this pearly fish from the ocean, but sadly I am a vegetarian Brahmin." The lady responded with sweet gestures, "Your Highness, I am not a fisherwoman, but a vegetarian earthenware artist. You have rightly said it is a pearl of the ocean, but not a catch of the water. I come from a community that makes earthen toys to sell for livelihood. We are four sisters in this game of fine art. Our items include fruits like mango, banana, apple, pomegranate and bunches of grapes. Besides this, almonds, green cardamom, pistachios and walnuts. One of my sisters makes human statues supported with a plinth, and the other makes clay birds and deity figures for worship. Festival season is time to sell, for foreigners visiting from home will carry them as gift items because they look so similar to the real ones."

"Madam you are right, I can see that this fish looks so real in its details, scale to scale in precision."

Eventually, this piece was accepted as a gift in Gift Gallery and the lady was awarded prize money with a Certificate of Appreciation by the President of India.



Return Home

BY SHAHRBANOO GAFFARI

Returned home after a long time
Early in the morning
Went to the yard
Sat on the stairs
Looked at the trees
Looked at the walls
Green and beautiful trees smiled.
They greeted me.
Met each other after a long time.
Autumn's winds shook their leaves.
They were dancing.
They had seen me.
I waved to them.
They were happy.
They saw me.
They were proud of themselves.
They had fruit.
Tangerine...tangerine
Beautiful Mandarin.
The birds jumped up and down with
love.
They sang for me.
They were flying to the sky.
They were showing themselves to me.
Yes I was back home.
I was happy too.





TIMESTAMPS

BY DEAN CORDERO

The InkGuild began as a passion project for me and a handful of other amateur creative writers in May of 2020. Together, we share our creative writing and talents with an earnest audience on YouTube and Spotify. Looking back on some of the most meaningful moments of our group's history was hard, but to truly portray how much this community has impacted me, let's start this story from the beginning.

February 14th, 2020: With a brand new DJI Osmo Mobile 3 gimbal in hand, its plastic clamp gripping onto my phone, I raise the camera to my washroom window and wave goodbye to 21. Hello 22.

Throughout the day, my phone buzzes with a birthday greeting. Stepping onto Kensington station, my parents welcome my 22 with a cringe picture of me at 21. At Higher Ground, distant family from the Philippines leave their sincerest wishes on my Facebook page. On my way to Fair's Fair in Inglewood, a pair of old classmates half-assed a greeting on Snapchat. Walking alongside the Bow River, two good friends text me mini-paragraphs and tag me in a birthday post on Instagram. Taking my seat at the Wow Chicken in Chinatown for lunch, my mom texts me when I'll be home. With a Panda Milk Tea from Gong Cha in hand, my sister spams my iMessage looking for a lost portable charger. At Central Library, I stopped checking my phone, taking in a deep breath after all that walking.

My heart warms from all the love today, but not completely. Maybe I should've

invited someone out today. Some company's always nice and all, but I don't think anyone in my life would've enjoyed today like I did. Everything's kind of out of the way and niche, like who aside from me would willingly go to a bookstore that wasn't Indigo and who else would've felt euphoric drinking from Higher Ground and god, all that walking and—

Am I missing something?

Ah, I'm in my own head again. Today was good. I take the last sip from my boba, reviewing the footage I took today.

Later that February:

Coming from a computer room in the Communications Lab at Mount Royal, I take my last sip of my double-double, throwing the cup into a nearby trash can. I groan with every step from the classroom, marching towards an Astronomy class I thought I'd love but a near-failing mark says otherwise.

A classmate from last semester's creative writing class sits at one of the open tables marking her workshop piece for this winter's Intermediate Fiction class, unfortunately at the same time as the Astronomy class. Her pen racing across the page, I take my seat in front of her. I missed that, I think to myself: the last-minute corrections made to a workshop piece, finalizing what one could before it was handed out to a class full of other creative writing students, elation and disaster spinning my head round. She and I speak briefly about the new creative writers in this semester's class: some of them were from our class last semester, most of them were new. Some of them were fantasy writers like me, and at that moment, a thought came to my head.

That something... Could it—is this a chance...

By early March, I'd meet with a small group of them after their class ended. I introduced myself and made a decent impression; decent enough, I think, to see them at least two more times, each meeting only lasting about an hour or so before we split up for other classes or to go home. I'd pick up small details about each of them after every short conversation: Brooke works out after class; Jessica works until 10 that night; Maeve's boyfriend wants to call them for an hour. With every little detail I learn about them, that adds an extra centimetre to the smile on my face. God, I thought, if hanging out with them after class was this fun, I wonder what they're like during class...

March 2020: or a second double-double; an interview for a project later that day demands I stay awake. On the way to the Astronomy class, the lukewarm coffee already cooling from my cold hands, I hesitated as I approached the door to the classroom.

What's missing one class going to hurt me if it means being with them?

I walked straight past the room for the Winter creative writing class just a couple of minutes down the hall. The professor greeted me with a warm, welcoming smile. It was nice being back, I felt. I said hello to the new friends I made, smiled at a couple of familiar faces from classes past, and took my seat originally intending to listen in, but something about that atmosphere pulled my stagnant creativity out from its shell. I found myself raising my hand first for the three workshop pieces that day.

March 12th. Dusk settles on a long day and on another temporary class with them. Brooke, Brad and I lay sitting outside the T Hall, accompanied by talks of Kpop biases, snowy weather and writer's block. That something I've been thinking about has a feeling now: something like riding on rose and alabaster clouds; something like natural 20s with translucent dice; something like euphoria's euphoric euphoria—

March 13th. The world locked down, and my eyes blurred.

May 2020; A Discord server kept us all connected over these last two months. Mostly everyone in the class joined the server, with some more active than others. Those first few spams of pet pics, dad jokes and casual hellos within the Discord server's first few weeks of creation were nice, but as the semester ended, we all needed something to keep the momentum of this friendship up. God forbid it turn out like any standard university friendship; temporary companionship for projects and projects only.

I'm on a late-night call with Gabe discussing our favourite video games as the rest of them rested after a long semester. Jokingly we talk about starting a podcast for talks like this, of two friends bored and locked in their homes. I'd helm the production, relying on the skills from my Journalism degree to manage it, and our charm would keep everyone entertained. At least, I hope it'd persuade our friends to participate in the project too. What would the name even be?

May 2nd: That night, it's us three: Gabe, Jessica, and me. We start close to 10 because Gabe had something to take care of, then we hopped on. For all the YouTubers I've watched who use and rely on OBS (Open Broadcaster Software) for their content recording, managing this new software while trying to not sound stupid but remembering that it's just a conversation with friends, so do I really need to stress about that but—

I blink my eyes, and it's a little past midnight already. An empty mug rests beside me and the recording itself clocks in close to two hours, but we stopped recording a

while ago. I didn't even realize because we were still talking. Close to 1 in the morning, Gabe and Jessica signed off, but I couldn't. Not yet or right now, not while that feeling and an unedited video file rested in my hard drive.

What's one night awake going to hurt if it means producing this special thing I recorded with my friends?

May 3rd: Two mugs of coffee and a greasy plate of eggs and bacon later, I finished editing the first episode. "The InkGuild Podcast (Episode 1): Our earliest works, our influences, and coming together" was uploaded onto an old YouTube channel I wasn't using anymore. My heart still pounding with excitement and eager for another recording, I shared the link to our Discord, hoping it catches everyone else's attention: there's something here. We have something here now. We can do this.

Late 2020 – early 2021: We must've recorded a handful of podcasts—a full season's worth by then—by the beginning of September, the first month of Zoom University. As ambitious as I was thinking I could manage an independent YouTube channel and



a full semester's worth of work, the podcasts are something for me to look forward to. They're something for all of us to look forward to, something to close the year on and maybe start the year with.

In between nightly podcast sessions and a year's worth of agonizing homework in one day entered *Among Us*, a game we thought could be fun for one night. Games between our group were either spontaneous one-offs or a series of fortunate events, so truth be told, I hoped *Among Us* would last a little while: a month, hopefully, or two, if that isn't asking for too much.

February 14th, 2021: *Among Us* lasted six. So did the podcasts; Season 3 started in early February, with friends Tyler and Marie-Soleil taking a more active role in the podcasts around this time. One year on from that lonely Valentine's Day, I revisited Higher Ground and Wow Chicken that day. During another lockdown, I ordered all

the food to take home. Greeted to a mostly empty house when I arrived, I walked downstairs and turned my PC on, waiting for Discord to boot up. There, I hopped into a Discord call with Alex and Gabe, welcoming 23 with me.

July - November 2021: Mari — my girlfriend from Georgia. Well, at least the one the creative writing friends teased me about for weeks. With every conversation she and I had, they'd pick at me and tease me for all the genuine, sincere happiness fuelling my words. They knew I was in love with her before I realized it, sensing the love dwelling in my heart for her before I admitted it. In the weeks she and I were getting to know each other, I'd hear an accompanying "oh, are you speaking to your Georgian girlfriend, huh?" or "ooooo, Dean is speaking to Mari, how cute".

September 13th. Early midnight, she and I called. We talked about how two friends of mine confirmed their relationship a few hours before we called, and only a few minutes since, Mari and I confirmed our relationship. Not even an hour after, I called the creative writing friends to share the foregone conclusion.

Through all their teasing, even now, they know how much I love her. They hear me speak of sunflowers and chocolate cake whenever I'm thinking about her nowadays, and to have my dear friends be so kind and understanding of my excessive love for her, I'd never felt that close to the sun before, that truly warm and breathing and alive before.



November 2021:

The podcasts became easy to record through OBS, our face safely masked behind the colourful JPEG that would be our thumbnail but in the back of my head, I was ambitious to break a new boundary: a documentary of our respective writing journeys

together, subconsciously serving as a milestone of our progress as content creators.

We arrived at Tyler and Marie-Soleil's house close to 6:30. Handing equipment out to Alex and Gabe for the extra help, the two hosts treated us to a house tour and a quick pizza dinner before setting up. That night, we revisited our respective episode debuts, caught up with our current writing goals but, most importantly, spent a night together.

I spent a night with my found family.

At the end of the night, my shoulders relaxed and both hands on the wheel, I drove home with a slight but bright smile across my face. Whenever this documentary uploads on our channel, accounting for all the extremely tedious editing I'm willingly putting myself through, I'll lean back into my chair and take a deep, deep breath of relief, of pride. But for now, gazing out onto the quiet Deerfoot highway after a long night, I think I can take it easy.

That something inside me. A thought-turned-feeling that lingered longer than it should've, a question without a worthwhile answer...

I smile, replaying the story I never could've written on my own.



PAGE 104

BY MADI CHALLAND

With all four windows down, the deep summer heat could roll in off melting asphalt and cling to strands of stray hairs. I was the only car left in the high school parking lot, but echoes from chants and hollers hung heavy like smog above the faded yellow lines. Sweat pooled at the slight ridges of my temples in tiny, bulging formations. I almost couldn't breathe.

I leaned back into the sticky leather of the driver's seat, feet clamouring up to the dash in clumsy, thick motions. Closing my eyes, I could feel the sun graze down my neck as it fell toward the horizon. In this moment, the last drippings of silence glaze over me like honey, and I reach for my book.

On page 104, there was the faint caramel ring from a stranger's coffee permanently stamped into existence. I can imagine a tiny apartment kitchen, white subway tiles, and Persian green cabinets. Crystal dangling in the west window where the light washes in over the table. I can imagine a middle-aged man with long, thick, black curls slouched into the decorative cross rails on the back of his chair. He aimlessly stirs at steaming gold liquid. Untouched and untasted, his coffee threatens to slip over the blue ceramic edge of his grandmother's mug. Maybe the phone rang from the lonely hook behind him, or maybe a lover clad in white sheets swept in from the night before - or maybe he simply wasn't paying attention. But I couldn't imagine the left-over ring from careless cup placement - not when its bitter ink rubbed the underside of my right thumb.

But perhaps page 104 had fallen open on the deep oak of a coffeehouse table. I can imagine a young woman toying with the collar of her blouse: uncomfortable in the dry breeze blowing in from rusted vents pressed into stained baseboards. Her chestnut hair fastened to the base of her neck in a red tortoise clip. The woman's breathing might

have been laboured while hungry jade eyes devoured word after word. Behind her, the cash register slamming into till over and over again, shackling her to the earthly realm. The bustle of left-over grinds falls to the floor like snowflakes, and a waitress with a splotched apron rushes to the woman's table. Hands cupping a full mug of bitter,

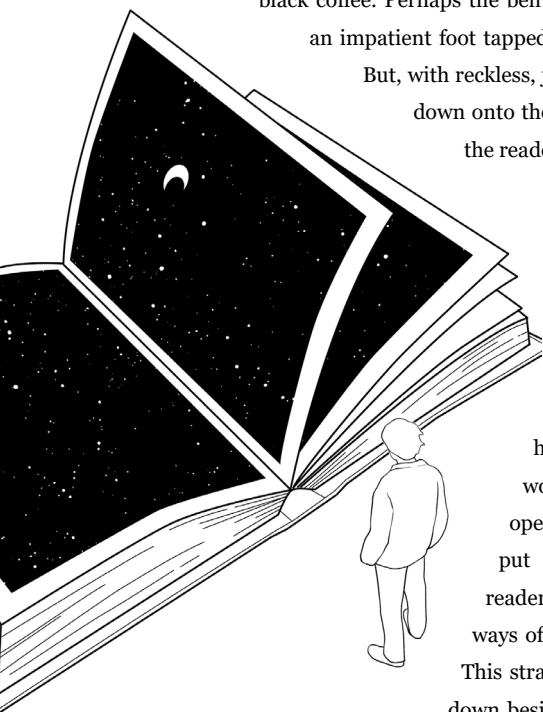
black coffee. Perhaps the bell above the glass door chimed, or maybe an impatient foot tapped its way into the waitress's frontal lobe.

But, with reckless, jerking movements, she splashes the cup down onto the right-hand corner of the novel. Sealing the reader into the stranger's world.

Or maybe, page 104 fell victim to someone like me. Clumsy and unaware, tripping over imaginary cracks in sidewalks or knocking over glass upon glass of orange juice. Maybe the reader couldn't bear to sit still. Instead, they walked in lazy circles around the house as they chomped on every written word. Juggling coffee cups on open pages to open fridge doors – too impatient to simply put down the novel. I often imagine this reader like myself. Hungry for the story, finding ways of escaping reality while I do the laundry.

This stranger felt the most real like they had sat down beside me in the car and laughed about the misfortunes of being a bad book owner. It adds character, they'd say.


And they'd be right. Sitting in my car, coffee ring burning deep into the paper's edge, I felt as though I'd sat across from all those visitors. A ghost swallowing all the tiny details of their lives. Page 104 juggling the stories of a moody protagonist and those that fell in love with the story. I can't help but wonder just how many lives touched the pages of this book before me, our stories crashing into one another like dominos from the past and into the future. I am reminded that even in the most solitary moments of one's life, a community bubbles over the edge of a coffee mug to entangle a web of bystanders.





TETHERED

BY MORGANN JOHNSON

e all have horror stories that we heard as kids. A boogeyman, a lake monster, a ghost in the mirror. Stories told on swing sets and under slides. We make up stories to terrify our friends and listen to ones that keep us awake under the safety of our comforters. We are all afraid of the monsters lurking in the corner of our eye.

Why are we tethered to ideas of monstrosity? We create our own monsters. But what does that mean? What are monsters? When we're kids, we think of Dracula and undead hoards scratching for our throats. Somewhere along the way, monsters turned into us. People became the monsters in our nightmares. We watch films and listen to stories, all trying to figure out how the person became a beast. How someone could do that.

Monster does not equate fear; from its origins, "monster" just meant different, abnormal. Born from Latin, *monstrum* is a warning, a foretelling of strangeness ahead. A monster isn't terrifying, it's just other.



My childhood was saturated in fear. I was a scared kid, I still am, in some respects. I remember the cold slide of terror down my spine. Fear that a woman would step out of the bathroom mirror and lurch the five feet to my bedroom, or that an intruder would creep through my second-floor window. I was many things; brave is not one of them.

I wasn't always this afraid; up until the age of six I was fearless. Of course, as it goes, I got into trouble, knocked over by a bicycle, ate dirt, whatever kids do. I see that kid now in echoes; in music, in writing, and sometimes in the mirror. Later on, I didn't take many risks, even if I wanted to. The fear became a constant.

I feel as if I've used up all the fear allotted in my lifetime. Like a well gone dry. Every day I found something to be afraid of. I imagined fingers grasping the wall where the stairs turned to darkness and figures floating in the corner of rooms. And I remember the fear, the intensity of it, like ice water down my back. Now, I don't know where it's

gone. Things that would freeze me in terror, now only cause lightbulb flickers in the back of my amygdala.

I wonder where the fear went. If it latched on to another kid or hopped a train heading south. I'm still standing on the porch waiting for it to come back.



In the third and fourth grade I developed a group of friends that began telling each other horror stories during recess. It started off tame, it was the third grade after all. The stories were tales of a child getting grounded until the end of time, a vampire in a castle. There's something about a child's mind however, they have the capability to imagine such unique and haunting ideas, and voice them in a way that lingers in your head. Once at a babysitting gig, a seven-year-old girl I was staying with wouldn't go to bed. When I asked her why she said, "because there's someone in the house." When kids want to scare you, kids will SCARE you. There was no one in the house, she just wanted more goldfish crackers; children are demons.

There came a point where our small group became unsatisfied with "little kid stories." We had turned our sights on stories to scare the life out of each other.

When I tell you that children scare me, they do, and they should scare you too.

Of our little group of five, I remember two stories the most. First, Riley told us the old story of Bloody Mary. He described, as best he could at a fourth grade reading level, the image of Bloody Mary being buried alive. Shredding her hands to the bone trying to dig her way out. Her voice screaming from beneath the ground, faintly being heard on the surface. I think of Bloody M--, of her still. I lean down to the earth to see if I can hear the buried screaming. I would have nightmares of her for the next three years.

It got bad. None of us were sleeping, we jumped at every sound. All at once, the fear I had lived with was being felt by other people too. My own fear had multiplied; but I was not alone. I was in a group of exhausted and anxious eight-year-olds, marked by the dark circles under our eyes and the way we felt like livewires. We looked straight out of a Tim Burton film. Our parents worried, asked us what was going on, why we complained of headaches and anxiety. The taste of children's cherry Tylenol laces itself through the memories now.

Nonetheless, we didn't want to stop telling our stories.

In our elementary school playground, structures stuck out of the ground, a spinning cone, monkey bars, a train with a smiling face. The ground was covered in about six inches of tire crumb, little pieces of tire that was kinder to fallen kids than gravel.

Liz was next, she was the bravest of us. When Liz wanted to tell her story, she made us walk through the playground and sit underneath the train. Under, was a crawlspace about two feet tall. We squirmed into the space and sat, as best we could, in a rough circle.

“There is a boy buried underneath this train.” She told us. “Someone killed him and hid him here.”

This was no third-graders story. This was straight out of a horror novel and the six kids under the train its debut audience.

“Everyone looked for him. But they never looked here. So, no one ever found him.” She stared at us and seemed delighted at how afraid we looked, and we were afraid. “He’s dead down there, but he wants to be found.” She continued as we anxiously shuffled around the small space. “He’s trying to crawl his way back up. If you dig in here, you’ll find him.” As she finished her sentence, one of us had shuffled too much and felt the wooden boards beneath the crumb. He screamed so loud everyone else in the playground stopped to look. He had thought he found the boy; we all did. The fear we felt at that moment was like teeth scraping metal, sharp, loud and a feeling you never forget. There is no greater anarchy than that of five eight-year-olds desperately trying to crawl out from under a playground train. Liz had even scared herself; she ran crying in the direction of the school. The tire crumb caught in her white-blond hair looked like Oreo ice cream. Dark pieces fell away as she ran. The four of us remained, stood side by side in front of the train. The playground resumed its noise around us, we were the only ones silent. Us, and the boy under the train.

We never told each other another story, never talked about that one. We’re not even friends anymore. But I know that there are four other people who share that memory, remember our fear and our obsession with scaring each other.

For the next nine years, each school I went to, elementary school, middle school, high school, they were all a hundred feet from the boy. I was revolving around him, a dog on a chain running in circles. Tethered.

The only tether I have to him now is in my memory, and the faint connection I have with four people doing god-knows-what. I think of the boy still. I know he’s not real, but I can see his face, his frown, and his hair filled with dust. We created the monster, that kid all alone under the train. He is ours as much as we’re his. We’re tethered.



Summer Camp Soup

BY ZACK BEER



INGREDIENTS

1 last-minute hire (preferably hired and offered a job less than twenty-four hours before they were supposed to begin training)

9 completely informed young adults excited for the beginning of the summer

1 manager (please find the most caring, collected, respectable boss available to you. Check Save-on Foods. They have the highest quality produce)

5 completely new and untested day camps

1 global pandemic to spice things up (if you prefer extra spicy, throw in a provincial government that flounders every chance it gets)

1 large museum spread across sixty acres of land (please make sure this museum contains a lakeshore, densely treed areas that hide the secrets of the city, huge fields to hold festivals and carnivals, and enough buildings to replicate a small town)

For garnish, add some bureaucracy and interdepartmental affairs.

STEPS

1. Begin preparing this recipe by preheating your classroom to a balmy sixteen degrees Celsius. Ensure the rooms remains this consistent temperature regardless of it snowing or sweltering outside.

2. Let your nine prepared employees wait outside the museum in a giant, morphing glob. Footsteps fall on brick as the employees weave through each other. The steps reverberate against the row buildings to the left and the cafe to the right. Vintage signage washes across the front of the replicated early west storefronts. Candy, clothes, and toys, all peddled in the museum plaza. The museum towers up above them, the high roof providing a shadow over the already overcast ground. The sky stretches gray, threatening to allow sparkles of water to fall.

a. Despite the fact that everyone could simply die by getting close to each other, they will indeed forget. They have been apart for so long that they vibrate with excitement at even seeing their old friends. The employees who are new to the job this year mix in just as well. Everyone gloms together.

b. Do not be dismayed if the sky rains down upon them. They were not allowed outside for three months prior.

3. Add the one unprepared employee. Now remember, this employee quit their season early last summer. They worked in a department that did not treat them fairly. They spent thirty-degree day after thirty-degree day scorching in buildings with no air conditioning and no support. Summer stretched into eons. They quit. Every single one of their friends heard the story and received the refrain that they would never work for this museum again. Their time was done.

a. Because of this, when you add the unprepared employee, you will hear choruses of “what are you doing here,” and “I thought you quit forever?” These responses are all expected. Unexpected, were the hugs and genuine excitement from the prepared employees to see their friend.

4. Immediately add the manager. She strides along, unassuming. She invites everyone to the prepared classroom.

a. As they pull open the door into the glass classroom, they will catch the slight scent of mildew leeching in the air. The light switch next to the door flicks up with a finger push,



but only illuminates half of the room. Stale white fluorescent lights irradiate the tables and chairs as they shuffle to flick the other light switch. Industrial, sharp, black spotlights shine down onto the desk in the back corner. Mustard yellow tabletops are spread through the rest of the room, framed in the neon greens, burnt oranges, and matching yellow of plastic children's chairs. Blue green cupboards mix with a fun grey-brown combo that really enlighten the overall feel of the classroom. The camp leaders sit in the neon chairs, the glass walls allowing everyone to see the chaos of the home base. Guests can see them working at any time of the day. Their eyes wander to the wall while everyone settles. Ancient gasoline and car advertisements frame the room, adding their muted colors to the assaulting array. Happy families in cars, an endearing slogan; wait. Does that one have a confederate flag on it?

5. Now, please take all of the employees and the manager, and add the new day camps. The history hunting and time travelling of the past is gone, it is now time to explore the prairies. The one unprepared employee will relax a little, and realize they are on the same page as everyone else. This breakdown is important because the flavors will begin to meld.

a. Campers will need to socially distance. Hence, prepare the employees to incorporate the phrase: "bubbles please," into their vernacular at least once every ten minutes. Children do not understand social distancing.

b. At this point the employees will feel fearful. But they know they can do it.

c. Campers will also need the fear of the general public instilled in them. Laws say that campers cannot interact with anyone not associated with camps. They scream every time someone enters the room.

d. About halfway through the summer, the law will dictate that everyone needs to wear masks. Masks on children are gross. One of the campers' masks will be wet at the end of the day. The employees gag. The mask will collect: the dust kicked into the air from the dirt roads; the mud stains from their work in the chicken coop; the ketchup from their leftover lunch; and the smile from a day amongst friends.

e. The employees are haggard.

EXTRA STEP: add a trauma bond.

6. Once all these ingredients have stewed during their government allotted thirty-minute break, add in some optional bureaucracy.

a. The manager says that, over lunch, a member of the health and safety committee walked by the glass classroom. Employees were too excited and not properly social distanced. The entire department will receive a citation. That darn glass classroom.

7. The final step is that everyone must choose their respective flavouring to add to the soup. The employees and manager choose delicious natural extracts such as Mint – and Lavender, Willow, Iris, Prairie Dog, May, even Eagle, amongst others. This soup sounds nasty.

a. One important aspect of summer camps is lying to children. These flavours represent who these employees will become over the summer. Children must never know that camp counsellors are real people.

FINAL NOTES

Once everyone has their assigned flavour, it solidifies the group dynamic. After the initial soup making, it needs time to ferment. Preferably, the process takes places from July 1st to the end of August. Fermentation will allow all of the camp leaders, as well as the manager, to deal with any sorts of obstacles that arise. Pressure is also intrinsic to this process. Their flavour deliquesces together. Eventually, it will result in tacit teamwork and a small community. Remember that if you take a portion of this soup and freeze it for next summer, the base grows even more flavourful.



2ND SUMMER UPDATE

What's up, my soup-er readers? I recently thawed and made another batch of this soup for this summer. Let me tell you, it was even better than last year's. The one unprepared employee really grew and fermented over their time in the freezer. Mint took a more prominent role the second time. In fact, all of the flavours developed over time. Everyone grew even more excited and gelled even better as a team. There were even some new flavour notes that developed in 2021. I detected hints of Rose and Honey. I will save a portion of this one – I cannot wait to see how it tastes next year.

If you enjoyed the soup then please comment below. Drop a like and follow on our Instagram. Happy cooking!

COMMUNITY IN THE HOME

BY NAZLEEN RAJANI

Time has dramatically changed over the last year and a half. Time determines our journey. When time changes, everything changes. Sometimes for the worst, sometimes for the better, and sometimes for the best. The outbreak of COVID has changed our lives and relationships. Suddenly, life has slowed down and brought family and friends closer.

At the time when masks became mandatory at school, only disposable and standard sizes of masks were available. This made it difficult for children to use them. Suddenly there was a shortage of masks in the market. My daughter mentioned her concern, "I go to the market every day in search of masks. If I don't find them, the children will not be able to go to school."

"Why are you upset?" I asked, "We can make our own masks with cotton cloths."

"Good idea! Really Mom, you do free me from all trouble in a moment."

From that day, I started making masks in different sizes. I created some children's masks decorated with flowers and colour. The children then went to school with vibrant hope on their faces. Everyone in my family started using the masks I made, some giving them as birthday gifts to friends. One of my friends was experiencing the same problem, but then I gave her some handmade masks. She liked this idea very much because they could be washed and reused. She was impressed and started sewing her own masks. She and I even started to donate homemade masks to people in need.

The masks hid our smiles, but they didn't hide the love we had for each other.





UNINTENTIONAL IMPROVISATIONS

BY MIKYLA ROSE

There's an unspoken rule at strike parties: everyone sings along when the *Rent* soundtrack plays.

I've only witnessed this awkward phenomenon once before, but it's just as beautifully chaotic as last time.

One second, everyone's milling about the room, doing their own thing; techies lounge across the stairs, trying not to get stepped on, while the actors have split into two separate groups, the first controlling the music and light sphere, the other sprawled out across the couches. We've earned the reprieve, after a full week of chaotic show after chaotic show. I should be on the stairs with the rest of my team, but somehow, I've found myself curled on the edge of the couch with some of the actresses, a soft throw pillow occupying my arms as I listen to their conversation, offering a nod here and soft remark there when they try to pull me into their chat.

And then there's those first few beats of the song, and I'm left alone on the couch as they all jump up, everyone suddenly gathering in the middle of the room. The music's been turned up, the light sphere switched to a strobe that doesn't match the beat at all; it makes my head hurt, even if it's fun. A chorus of on and off-key voices rises with the music, the lyrics escaping everyone's lips with ease.

I know the song by heart, but I stay where I am. We've come a long way over the last four months, but I'm still not completely sure of my place in that circle.

It probably doesn't help that I had never intended to become a part of this strange little group.

Having a Type-A personality when you're a theatre kid is both a blessing and a curse. I would spend hours shifting through old costumes to find the perfect pieces for a show, use my best highlighters to color code schedules for everyone, and memorize my cues down to a specific note in the overture that played during scene changes.

But none of that would matter once the show lights blinked to life. Because despite all my meticulous planning, something — sometimes everything— would go wrong. An actress would put her jewelry in her shoe, losing a pivotal necklace, or one of our crew heads would miss their cues, leaving the rest of the crew waiting on them in panicked confusion. Maybe the lead actor lost his voice on opening night, or the lead actress's microphone fell off in the middle of her heartfelt ballad. You can try your best to prepare for it, sure, but there's no way to prevent it from happening, and no time to question why it did; you just have to roll with it, trying your best to make the mistake work.

"We don't make mistakes," Tristan, one of our head techs, would joke when the teacher would call out our mishaps. "We make unintentional improvisations."

I guess life is a little bit like a show, in that way.

My personal plans weren't laid out in a perfectly curated tech bible, but they still existed. Routine dictated my life; I was set in my ways and tried not to stray from the path. Go to school and come home at specific times, eat the foods I knew I liked, only talk to the people I knew for sure I could trust. If I followed everything to plan, things would work out the way I wanted. If I followed everything to plan, there'd be no more getting hurt.

But I hadn't accounted for the fact that despite my best efforts, I couldn't control everything.

I hadn't considered the girl in my math class, who would sit next to me at lunchtime, adjusting her chestnut ponytail while ignoring my attempts to give her the cold shoulder. It took her a couple tries, but eventually she wore me down with her insistence that I'd love the theatre program at this school.

I hadn't accounted for a gangly boy with red hair and kind green eyes, who would nudge me out of my shell, encouraging me to share ideas that I'd kept buried deep inside out of fear that others would think they were stupid. I wasn't prepared for his words to strike a chord in me, the motivation to prove him right strong.

I hadn't considered that for the first time in my life, I'd have a teacher who didn't see a lost cause, but instead saw potential. A teacher who would push my buttons, not out of spite, but to help me achieve a better version of myself. His method was



unusual, but it worked, my confidence growing as he pushed me to become a leader in the program, to take younger techs under my wing and teach them the ropes (figuratively, but also literally).

I'd expected this school to be like my last, where conformity was key and anyone who was different was subjected to cruel gazes and snide words that were thrown around like grenades, knocking you down as you struggled to get up from the last attack. But here, being different wasn't only allowed — it was celebrated. And while it wasn't a perfect place, and there were still a few teenaged monsters lurking about, there was one program that could bring together students from across the school in one big, odd, happy family.

I'd joined the musical theatre program thinking it'd just be something to do. I hadn't intended to get drawn into that family, to let my guard down with them.

But things didn't always go the way I planned; I had to make some unintentional improvisations in my own life. And thankfully, they'd worked out for the best.

At the start of the semester, I'd still been holding firm, even though I could feel that the little black box theater was a safe place. But in the few months since then, that'd changed; spontaneous backstage dancing was the norm, the green room's stale stench of coffee and hairspray had become almost comforting, and that group of people, who'd once been strangers, had become my friends.

And they're now completely lost in the song, the impromptu and chaotic sing-along still going strong.

A year ago, I wouldn't have even attended a classmate's party. I definitely wouldn't have joined in on the fun.

But when the girls I'd been sitting with catch my eye and motion me over, Riley's brown ponytail whipping around her face as she dances freely to the music, it's hard not to get sucked in. Their joy is contagious. So, before I know it, I'm standing, awkwardly shuffling over, trying to hide my surprise when a couple of the actors split apart, welcoming me into the newly formed space with friendly grins. I haven't thought this far ahead, and I'm not sure what to do; I try not to overthink it too much, swaying rigidly to the music, willing myself to get as swept up as the rest of them.

I don't know it in the moment, but this strange little group isn't done messing with my plans. I've still got a year to go with them, and there's still plenty of surprises to come — some bad, but most of them good.

But by the time our next show closes, I'll have gotten good at improvising; they'll have given me lots of practice, by then. And when those first few chords blare from the speakers at our strike party, I won't hesitate to jump up and join the circle, swaying freely as I sing along (not quite as loud as the rest of them, since singing's not really my thing, but still loud enough to be heard).

We're not quite at that point yet, though; so, for now, I simply sway back and forth on my feet, trying to match their rhythm as the song blares on, covered by their voices.





MY CITY'S SUBLIME

BY MARK VERTODAZO

Last week after my classes
I chose to loiter in Downtown till dusk,
lazily cruising circles on top of my skateboard.
I chose to avoid the upcoming campus crowds
of students cramming for their semester finals
and watched each individual horde of suited polyester
force themselves into already full-capacity C-Trains.
I assumed they were heading home before the dawn of rush hour.
But I decided to hike every endlessly layered inclines
of yellowed limestone staircases,
before speeding past security for miles
through countless corridor aisles
on top cheap marble-coated plastic tiles,
synonymous to Calgary's +15.
I popped ollies over rail-road ramps
and skid onto oceans of chipped stone bricks.
I counted the macerated cigarettes
and seething tinges of smoldering whiskers
that swallow the atmosphere of Stephen Avenue on the daily.
I botched a B-Line across the Peace Bridge,
bruising my knee, scuffing my sweaters, scraping my cheek
and almost breaking my right arm . . AGAIN.

I caught myself day-dreaming in Chinatown,
watching K-Pop dance covers being recorded.
I argued with myself if I should buy another bowl
of soulful bibimbap at SSO YUMMY
or maybe indulge into building more Gundam model kits
from that hidden shop tucked in the second floor of the Dragon City mall-
Or maybe I should drag my procrastinating ass
back home where my textbooks stay suspended
against my notebook binders on the broken corner of my desk.

But if I'm being honest,
they've been buried in the back part of my backpack
and haven't been opened since the start of November.
So I lied to myself saying: "Those things didn't matter right now."
So I lapped around the block of The Bow
and sat solemnly under the shadow of the Calgary Tower.
I slashed my nails into the bottom of my deck,
scraping off the seared Wild-Rose stems
while remembering the suburban calligraphy
I scribbled on top each block of shattered asphalt.
I remembered the shapes I traced over shattered dappled leaves
shedding off forgotten Aspens.
And I remembered seeing my own chapped lips
underneath scarring sunlight, reciting raspended whims
of me trying to sing last Sunday's church service hymns.

Yet somehow,
my focus always anchored onto these heliotrope pips,
excavated from barren parking lots,
shoveled out from unruffled soil.

And from this I learned:
these are ladybugs lingering on top the spider's web,
these are angels plainly lurking in this urban jungle.
These are perished souls,
traipsing past tundras of cement
and plantations of skyscrapers reflecting street lights,
trying to place their personal memoirs
as souvenirs for their partner's next lifespan.

So perhaps they get picked up by people like me,
hoping to get packed onto the sharpened point
of a mechanical 8B pencil,
and used as a muse to pull the introspective concepts
out for a couple poems of a chapbook
about the city's sublime.
About Calgary's sublime.



DO GOOD!

BY LIUBOV TRUZHNIKOVA

Good deeds leave warmth and gratitude in the memory of a person. I've seen a lot of good things along the way and these memories continue to bring me happiness and peace.

I specifically remember one incident in my life. My family consists of my husband, daughter, two granddaughters and myself. All of us immigrated from Kyrgyzstan to Canada. We arrived in Calgary on a frosty December day. The snow laid in a thick layer on the roofs of every house and the canopy of every tree. The roads and sidewalks were covered with slippery ice. Everything was cold and sparkling, like a diamond, white with snow. For us, residents of a southern country, this was totally unusual and even a bit scary. The deep snow and bitter frost felt stressful for us. We were at a loss about what to do and how to survive in this alien terrain. We did not have experience and equipment for snow removal. Half frozen, we entered our new house and decided that tomorrow we will attempt to remove the snow and went to bed thinking, how can we do it?

Early in the morning, we awoke to a strange sound. Looking out the window, we saw our new neighbor was clearing snow in our yard. Our surprise knew no bounds! The paths in the garden, the yard, and the driveway had been cleared of snow. Snowy mountains towered along the paths and in the front garden. Our yard had acquired a cozy and residential look!

A completely unfamiliar man greeted us so hospitably in the new house. My soul felt cozy and warm from such a reception. The feeling of cold loneliness was gone. We were delighted with the attitude of our new Canadian neighbor towards us, his act of kindness helped us feel happy and at home!

Surrounded by such people, life in Calgary has become comfortable and enjoyable for my family.

I still remember this event with excitement and gratitude to our neighbor!



Human Connection

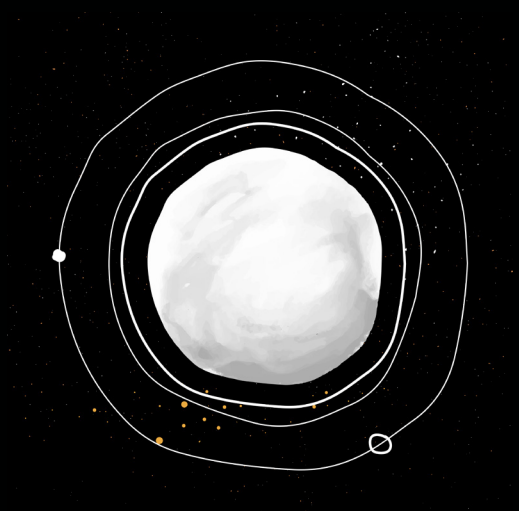
BY TAYLOR STEINER

There's a wordless tune heard
in the depths
of the ocean;

A melody radiating
in the soul –
Familiar notes and harmonies
flowing in with the tide.


They join
at each end of the earth;
Coming together
in harmony –
Creating endless symphonies

A universal song –
That consists of every spoken language
You just need to pause –
and listen –



IN THE SPRING

BY LILI ZHANG

 ne day, in the middle of May, my wife and I were climbing up the mountain in the Barrier Lake Park. We enjoyed the warm spring sunshine, breathed the pure and fresh air, and smelled the fragrance from growing trees, bushes, and a variety of blossoms. This was the first time we went out far away from home after the long and cold COVID-19 winter. Occasionally, young people went by, talking and laughing. We walked slowly, but breathed heavily. We looked back and saw a tall woman catching up to us. The woman had yellowish hair, she was carrying a baby sitting in a chair on her back and leading a yellow-haired dog. We said our “hellos” to each other. The baby stared at me as if to say “hello” to me as well. They overtook us. I was astonished that such a little baby was brought here to such a cold and dangerous place only by one person. We would never do something like this. I thought that people had different points of view because they had different experiences, backgrounds and cultures; therefore, nations should learn from each other. We continued our walk along the trail and had several turns. Suddenly, we saw the woman and baby again. The woman was sitting on a log and the baby in the chair on the trail side. They were having a break. We greeted each other again. I asked: “How old is your baby?”, and the woman replied with “nine months.” The baby looked at me for quite a while when we passed by. I thought: “Nine months. The baby is too young to remember anything from today’s trip.”

Part of the hiking trail near the mountain top was covered by ice. It was steep and slippery. There was a new path opened by hikers through bushes to avoid the ice-covered trail. We climbed up along the new path. It was a safe way to choose. The problem was that there was a tree branch stretching over the path. We had to bend over to pass through. At the top of the mountain over the lake, we were excited while viewing the vast lake, white clouds moving in the blue sky, and towering mountains on the other side of the lake.

Not long after we got to the top, we saw the woman approaching the ice-covered trail while carrying her baby and leading her dog. I wondered which way she would



choose and if she needed any help. To my surprise, she walked on the ice-covered trail. Fortunately, they got to the top safely. The woman stopped at a flat spot, laid down her baby, and then said: "Here you go." I did not understand what she said although I knew each of the words. With an effort, she achieved her goal. It was noon. We had some steamed bread and pickled vegetables for lunch. The meal was extremely delicious. The wind was strong at the mountain top. The gusty wind blew my hat off. More than ten minutes later, she stood up and got ready to go back. We said goodbye to each other. I waved my hand at them. The baby turned and looked at us as if to say: "I will climb up the mountain by my own feet soon."

The scenery was so beautiful that we couldn't help but take pictures. I took pictures for my wife and my wife took pictures for me. Not far from us, two black-haired Asian faced girls sat on the ground talking. One of them stood up and came towards us. She was short. "May I help you take pictures for both of you together?" she asked with a smile. "Sure. Please!" I replied. She took a few pictures for us then said: "See the pictures. I could take them again for you if they're not good." "All are good. Thank you for your help," I said with gratitude.

Not only is nature so beautiful, but also the people are so kind. All living creatures are growing and racing quietly into the spring.



ONE FROSTY MORNING

BY RAISA ARODZ

Ralph Nichols, a professor at the University of Minnesota, said that “The most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and be understood.” In my opinion, a good relationship between people in society depends on their ability to see and hear each other. I have seen this many times in my own experience.

One of my favourite things to do is walk in the park every morning to experience nature, especially in autumn, with its crystal clear air that smells of frost, colourful foliage, and rustling of the fallen leaves under my feet.

On a frosty morning, I was walking my usual route in the park when I saw a lonely woman, around my age, sitting on one of the benches near the water. She was saddened and puzzled by something. It is one of my regular spots; I like to sit there and look at the water with slight ripples on its surface and listen to the barely-audible sound of waves. Sometimes I think about the good things, and sometimes the bad, but every time I look at the water, I begin to relax, and any bad thoughts melt away.

I felt that the woman sitting there wanted somebody to talk to. Someone who could hear her and understand her problems. I got the sense that she needed to tell her story. I felt compassion and I wanted to help her with that, I need



i t

too, because I like to help people and understand their needs.

Sitting down on a nearby bench, I greeted her, and we started talking. Her name was Monica. We talked about the weather, about our families, and the countries from which we came. But there was a sadness on her face during our conversation. Suddenly, tears flowed from her eyes and she started opening up more. “I came to Canada two years ago,” she said. “I feel so lonely here. It’s hard to start a new life in a strange place and I want to go back home to Brazil.”

Nodding, I listened to her without interrupting. I really understood where she was coming from as I also immigrated to Canada. When she finished speaking, I told her the story of my adaptation in Canada and told her my life attitude – to keep myself busy – and how it helped me when I started my new life in Canada six years ago. I told her how I studied English, and where and how I made new friends.

When I finished speaking, I saw her eyes on her face become less sad and the tears dried up. Monica thanked me for my story, for listening and understanding. Knowing that I helped her made me so happy and warm inside.

Monica began improving her English and stayed in Canada. Our conversation was the beginning of a beautiful friendship. We became good friends. We both enjoy walking and often meet in the park. We hear, see, and understand each other fully.



RECOLLECTIONS





My name is Purabi...

BY PURABI CHOWDHURY

My name is Purabi Chowdhury. I was born in 1957 in a rural village in Chittagong, Bangladesh. Most of our villagers were illiterate. I have three sisters and one brother. My elder sisters completed only 4th grade. When I was three years old my father was blind, and my mother was sick. At that time, I was a drop-out; I stayed at home one year. Around then, a group of teachers wanted to help educate our village. They went house to house finding children for their classes. That chance to learn again; I couldn't pass that up.

When I started learning again, I looked up to one teacher specifically. He was passionate about teaching: he was helpful, thoughtful, kind and caring for his students. He taught from the heart and was willing to share his thoughts with us. His devotion to his students created a sense of community in our class. He was my friend, philosopher, and guide.

*THE WORLD IS CHANGED BY YOUR EXAMPLE,
NOT YOUR OPINION.*

DON'T STOP UNTIL YOU'RE PROUD.

NEVER BEND YOUR HEAD.

ALWAYS HOLD IT HIGH.

LOOK THE WORLD STRAIGHT IN THE EYE.

Such words from him inspired me then. They inspired a little girl who always played 'school' with her friends and pretended she had her own classroom. They inspired me when I took my M.A, B.P. ED, and M.ED. After completing my master's in education, I joined a government high school. I was promoted as vice-principal, principal, and district education officer. I worked more than three decades. Even as a teacher myself, I passed down his wisdom to my students.

Sharing wisdom like that... I realized that teaching is the best job in the world. Teachers shaped today's and the future youth, especially within my family. I have two daughters and one son. The elder daughter is a Doctor of Microbiology, finding her home in the UK. My younger daughter is an electrical engineer, taking her MS from York University in Toronto and currently waiting for her Ph.D results in Calgary. My son is a Microsoft Engineer at Facebook in Seattle. He took his MS and Ph.D from Louisiana State University.

I have spent my entire life educating students who are now very successful in their lives. Every now and then, they contact me to share their success stories. It fills my heart with joy and pride. I'm also satisfied thinking that I have contributed to building an educated family and society. Being a teacher inspired those closest to me, the same way I was inspired by my teacher when I was young.



A Letter to My Younger Self

BY SAKINEH MORADI MOGHADAM

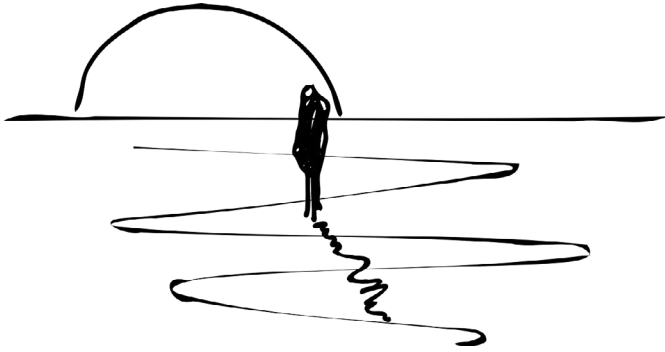
Hello Simin,

How are you? I hope you're doing well. As I remember, you're under 30 years old now. Nowadays I look back and I realize that I miss your three beautiful, cute and young children.

I haven't heard from you for a long time. I know you're very busy because of all the things you have to manage in your life: taking care of the children, studying, doing chores throughout the house, shopping, etc. But I know that you have a strong personality, needing just enough encouragement to be successful.

I can understand if you're feeling a combination of excitement, happiness and worries. In our country, a revolution has happened, and no one knows what will happen in the future. But this is normal, you're starting a new experience that you've never personally navigated. In my opinion, you should do your best to catch yourself up to the recent events and try to make yourself ready for the upcoming ones. (Oh my god, did you know that the new government in Iran has closed the universities? Maybe it'll be like that for a while. . .)

However, acceptance is more important. If you accept all the things in your life, then you can tackle them. You can manage your own time to get the best results; don't allow disappointment to overcome your mind and



effectively ruin the results. The University opened two years ago, after three years of being closed. It's very encouraging to get your Bachelor's in Psychology. I understand your choice not to earn your PhD after you got your degree, because you prefer to take care of your children as best as you can. It would be a logical choice.

In the future, when your children are all grown up and successful, you will be satisfied. I don't deny that you have a long journey in front of you, but I'm sure you will do it. Just don't forget yourself and your goals.

To be strong enough, you need to exercise your mind and your body. I know you're very eager to get to your dream job as a psychologist, so I simply advise you to work even harder to get there.

Please be in touch with me.

*Sincerely,
Simin*



SEEN & HEARD

BY SAKINEH MORADI MOGHADAM

I believe feeling seen and heard is crucial; a primary need to stay alive. Just like eating, drinking and breathing. Just like loving and being loved.

When somebody knows that they are seen or heard by their loved ones or their society: it causes them to be more confident and try to do their best and improve themselves, both in their personal and social life.

I can say the first time that I was seen and heard was by my father. He believed in me while also being a role model in my life. My father was very intellectual and ahead of the time versus people of his age. He was not conservative like his other countrymen in Iran. Instead, he believed in there being no difference between girls and boys. He believed that girls and women should study, work and be effective in their community and in humanity. He encouraged me to study hard. As I tried to become successful in the future, my father's behavior made me more confident. I would say the period in my life that I spent with my father was the best.

The second time was when I became successful in my career as a teacher. During those days, I tried to do my best to teach and support my students as well as I could. I tried to take more time, past my scheduled paid time, for the students and their family. I always took the extra step in talking about my students' problems to their family, specifically their mothers. I prioritized making a connection with the students

and their families. After 10 years of my 25-year career, I was chosen as the best teacher in my junior high school by the school committee. All of it was most valuable for me.

Other than feeling seen and heard, I wish to tell you about one of my experiences from the past. My husband was hospitalized and I went to the hospital to visit him in the morning, but they didn't allow me to see him. The official time for visiting was 2 p.m. I hesitated whether to stay on the first floor or to go home and come back at the designated time. I went to the first floor and sat in the lobby. Beside me, a woman was sitting, her face filled with worry. She was dropped off at the hospital by her son because she had an appointment with her doctor. The son wanted to pick her up at 10:30 a.m because he had to go to work as soon as possible. She didn't know what she should do. So I suggested to her, "You can come to our house, we can make food, rest and we'll be back before 3." At first she refused. But after some time, I finally convinced her and she accepted. So I called her son to tell him, "Please pick your mother up at 4.30 p.m."

We went to my house and I made khoresht-e-gheimh, a traditional meat stew, and saffron rice for lunch. We chatted about our family and how many children we had. We discussed their education, their careers and their connections between each other and with their fathers while laughing. We both shared some memories and eventually we went back to the hospital before 3 p.m. We both did our own activity, yet we spent it together, not alone.

That food we ate together was the best lunch I'd ever had.



Encourage Yourself

BY SHAHRBANOO GHAFARI

I had a great time in the past.

I was successful as a student, and successfully completed high school.

I entered the university.

In Iran, it is a big competition to enter the university.

I got married at the same time.

My first child was born after the end of the first year of university.

After graduating, I took a job as a teacher in high school and pre-university.

I was very busy, but I worked with hope and solved problems.

I have four children, all of them are highly educated, doctors and engineers.

It was not easy, but my husband and I solved problems with effort and patience. I tried to improve my English because I believed that knowing the language is a bridge between peace for communication to others.

I took care of my health by proper nutrition and exercise.

I volunteered for years and love volunteering. It's beautiful, I have a chance to help others.

Be Your Own Friend, Shahla

BY SHAHLA

Dear Shahla,

I know you are a very strong lady, and you are always thinking about what will happen in the future. I believe you can solve this period of immigration.

Remember when you wanted to immigrate to Canada, how you were worried? And you were shocked to learn many things in the new country, especially the English language and how it is a big barrier for people who have English as their second language.

Going to the community, speaking with people, and adapting yourself to a challenging environment: this is very important for an immigrant.

Be thankful for your 30 years of nonstop effort that you gave, your intuition and the wonderful impact you had around your family. Now keep going to a new life in Canada. During these difficulties, you loved your family with all your heart. Also, you do not like your family to be sad. In this case, you tried to match yourself with the new situation that you are now in. When something joyful comes, you are very happy. Do not lose your faith, you can improve yourself. Be patient. I believe you can.

You successfully finished the new program that you took for eight months at the college, that was not related to your previous studies, but it helps you to find a job different from your experiences. We are always thinking directly about our studies or experiences, but when you cannot find anything that's related you have to find another way. I think this new program will help you more than before.

Finding a job is a big challenge for any migrant, especially for you. But I know that, with perseverance and effort, you will succeed.

"Think outside the box."



Unearthed Roots

BY TAYLOR STEINER

Unearthed Roots

Is a name an empty collection of sounds?
– Vowels and consonants –
used to distinguish one person from another?

Or does it hold importance –
Significance?

These sounds are not superficial –


They reverberate within us
Why did you change your name?

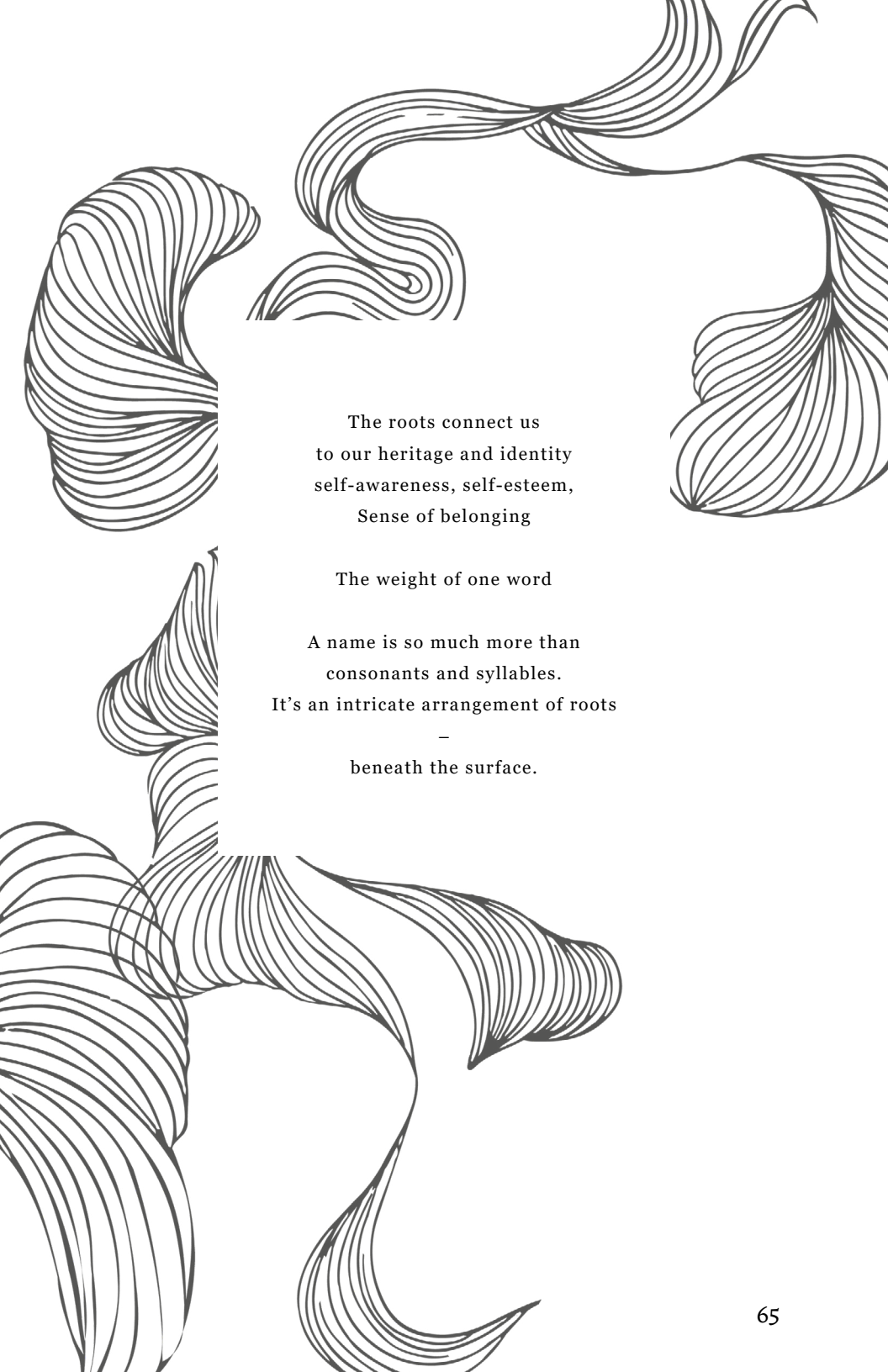
People ask.
Why uproot yourself?

With the past cleaved away,
there's room to create
a different version of myself.
An ordinary name, mottled green and brown,
The perfect camouflage
to blend in
with a forest of people

A fissure formed
between I and I.
Like tectonic plates shifting
to create a chasm
that grows larger over time

A name has an extensive root system,
like a massive oak tree –



The page is decorated with abstract line art that resembles flowing roots or liquid. These shapes are composed of many thin, parallel lines that curve and twist, creating a sense of movement and depth. They are positioned around the central text, with some shapes appearing to frame the text from the top and sides, while others flow from the bottom and left. The lines are dark and set against a plain white background.

The roots connect us
to our heritage and identity
self-awareness, self-esteem,
Sense of belonging

The weight of one word

A name is so much more than
consonants and syllables.
It's an intricate arrangement of roots

—
beneath the surface.

Tired Legs: A Dancer's Legs

BY SAKINEH MORADI MOGHADAM

I now look at my tired legs,
hugging them with appreciative fondness,
and I'm suddenly brought back to a time
when I'm watching the youth living within the old.

I lightly sat on the wings of birds
and jumped from one cloud
to another in the sky of my life
and like a ballet dancer,
I rushed to the battle of my hardships.

Looking after my nearly same-aged children,
studying for my Bachelor's degree,
and taking responsibility
for the countless chores around the house.



What beautiful paintings were being painted
in front of my eyes during this journey?
When my legs walked to the north of my country
and saw the views, showcasing God's might,
full of colours such as green, red, orange and yellow.

A mix of them in my beautiful country's jungles
and the exaggerating roads traversing throughout
all the way to the mountains
in the matrix of my land's paintings,
on the wall of my memories.

What beautiful paintings were being painted
in front of my eyes during this journey?
Besides those beautiful landscapes,
I saw more paintings
of my children's growth and development,
and how beautiful they are.

At the top of all these beauties,
when I look clearly,
I see my God who has always been with me.
And once these legs stopped me from walking
in the hardships of my life,
my God,
with all its love and majesty,
helped me to return to my youthful feet.
He filled my life's sky with light and hope.
Now once I look at these worn legs,
I still see them as the beauty they always were.
Oh, my God, I love you so much!
Thank you for always being with me and never leaving my side.

Letter to Past Self

BY NAZLEEN RAJANI

Hi Nazleen,

I hope you are well. What happened, dear? Are you upset? Why? Yes, I agree that the pace of life has slowed down and much has changed. It seems that the world has shrunk and collapsed, confined to the home. You know what mother used to say, "whatever happens is for the better."

Home, where people were living under one roof, faraway from here. It was difficult to find time to sit together and eat.

That was yesterday.

Now look at today, how close is the family? Now, people are having good moments with their children and more opportunity to spend time with their parents. Just think about the present moment, it makes our life happy. Focus all your attention on the moment you are living in, forget the past. By doing this, you will feel better and will not worry about anything. Please change your thinking, then you will get true peace. Enjoy your present because tomorrow will change into today.

Best regards,

Nazleen



HOPE



“Hope” Is The Compass Of Our Soul

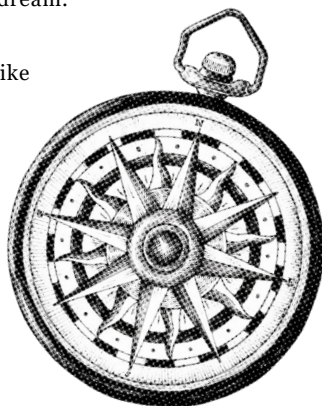
BY LIUBOV TRUZHNIKOVA

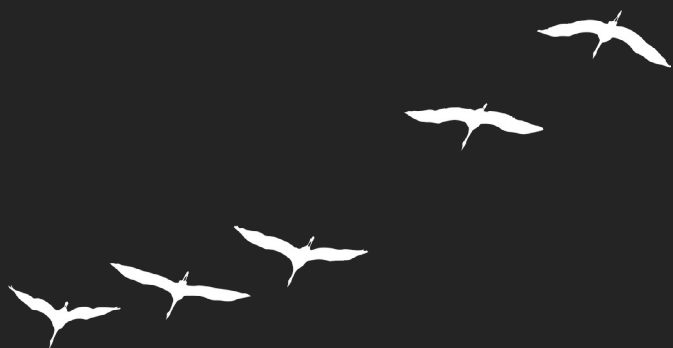
“Hope” is the compass of our soul.
As a small quivering compass needle
Steadily points and leads to the North,
So a ray of hope points the way to a dream.

A traveler walking to his goal overcomes long distances.
He passes through the desert, rises to the tops of the mountains,
Swims across the seas and oceans.
Despite the heat, rains, hurricanes, snow, and natural disasters
The small compass arrow always shows the right direction.

So is Hope!
She leads a person to his dream and gives him the strength
And courage to overcome difficulties.
On his way the person meets with joy and bitterness,
With deprivation and wealth, with delight and despondency,
With victory and loss.
But, just as the compass needle leads the traveler to his goal,
So the ray of hope leads to the achievement of the dream.

Sometimes the ray of hope is bright and powerful like
a torch,
And sometimes it is faint and dim like a candle
flame.
But the ray of hope never fades away in our soul!
As long as the ray of hope burns,
Our lives have meaning!





The Promise of Tomorrow

BY MEGAN SCHLOTTER

“Hope” is the thing with feathers-
Which perches quietly in your soul-
Until come times of anguish-
Then its strength helps lift your heavy toll-

A candle in the shade of struggle-
A delicate flame within Life’s wicked storm-
Just enough to light the way onward-
Or better still, back home-

A little bird, a sliver of sun-
Soft and warm within those chilly nights-
Singing softly of better fates to come-
And promising, dreams are worth our fight.

it will stay

BY SARA BAIRD

“never did it ask a crumb of me,”
this blind hope perched on my shoulders
so quiet, i tend to forget it is there.

even on the days when i wish to drop its weight
it blinds my peripheral,
stubborn in its presence.

even when i do not want it,
it stays—
i fear i will never grow into it.

hope must be hereditary
for it to make such a comfortable home
clung to my bones.



Hope

BY NAZLEEN RAJANI

“Hope perches in the soul.”

Like the first ray of sun.

Message of rising day —

heats up and up as

the day progresses.

A boat,

keeps floating

over the water,

keeps moving

toward the destination.

Struggle to keep balance —

fight against the waves —

do not drown in the water.

That is the straight path

of salvation.

BUT

if there is a small hole,

silent — drop — drops

begin to accumulate.

If ignored,

or not treated in time,

slowly — and silently

fear — disappointment

load into the boat, then

sink into despair.

Where is the way?


Where is the destination?

And tell me, where is the salvation?

Believe in Hope

BY ROGHIEH SAMIN

Hope is a wonderful feeling. Without it, life would be boring.

ne of my experiences is in the past. Twenty years ago, my best friend was suffering from lung cancer. She was so brave. For example, when she was going to get a diagnosis for her illness, the medical team needed to do a biopsy from her back. I remember her doctor wanted to do anesthesia, but she refused. This shows how brave she is. When I lived with her in our dorm, she was my rock. And I could rely on her. I am a conservative person, but when she was beside me, I went everywhere without any fear.

After she was diagnosed with cancer, I was so sad. While I was driving to her home, I was crying. But after we talked and I saw hope in her voice and face, I was relieved on the drive back to my home. When my husband saw me happy, he asked me to go and visit her as much as possible. He said, “she will recover as soon as possible.” Exactly that happened and she got her health back.

This event caused me to believe in hope.

Unfortunately, her sickness came back after five years, and she passed away. But during those five years, she had planned many things to organize her two children, travel, and enjoy the rest of her life.

We can see how hope affected her life.





Hope

BY LILI ZHANG

Hope is the thing with feathers.
The feathers are like clouds, tender and light,
Flowing freely in the sky.
No one could follow and seize.

Hope is the thing with feathers.
The feathers are like cotton, soft and white,
Bringing warmth to the people in extreme chilliness, making them happy and smile.
The warmth doesn't come from the cotton, but from the people themselves.

Hope is the thing with feathers.
The feathers are like a bird, singing and dancing from one branch to another,
Describing misery, misfortune, happiness and satisfaction.
I wonder how it knows our feelings and life.

Hope is the thing with feathers,
The feathers are like a thread of light in darkness,
Activating motivation, courage and energy.
Don't go away from me forever when I am alive.



In my eyes

BY LINDA XIAOQI CAO

When the crowd in the shopping mall comes and goes,
When you are in the concert hall, exhibition hall, library hall,
Appreciating classical and modern beauty,
Of Beethoven's symphony, Van Gogh's oil paintings, and the knowledge of
books,
The singing and laughter in the park and school,
The cordial interaction between teachers and classmates,
The agile little birds, the fragrance of flowers and grass,
Wow, it seems the pandemic has gone.

In my eyes,
People have already gotten used to safety measures in public places,
To get out of the house,
They are willing to wear a gentle mask attached to the smiling cheek,
Also cover wrinkles and inner complex change,
Society learns to communicate,
and be grateful to the government for providing the vaccine,
We have been injected with confidence to overcome the pandemic.
In my eyes,
Vaccines and masks are resisting the pandemic's final madness through
simple and easy use,
I have seen,
A better tomorrow,
The city is more beautiful,
Prince's Island Park is modern,
Public transportation is orderly and medical facilities are getting better,
Cultural communities are full again.
I have seen,
People cherish their health,
They pay high attention to personal hygiene,
Social communication is more polite,
Together they pursue their dreams,
In the atmosphere of wisdom and harmony,
People enjoy their family's company,
They live in freedom and happiness.

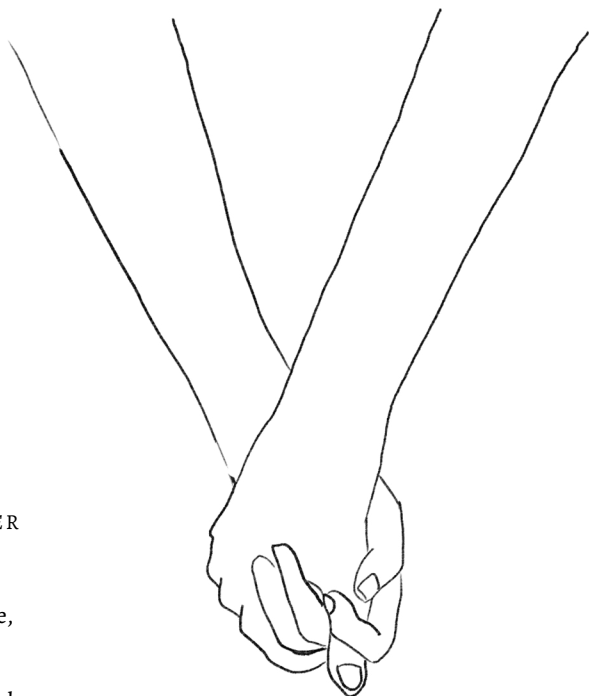
EMPTY CUPS



My Love.

BY MEGAN SCHLOTTER

I never had a nickname,
Until you came along.
My name is short already,
And rolls right off the tongue.
But you who has renamed me,
You have claimed me as your own,
With this secret language,
Between this twosome known.
Only to you do I have another name.
Only with you, my love, do I exist.
In your arms I find my home
And into eternity, our love persists.
Your names for me are more real, than the names I call myself.



SILENCE

BY MADI CHALLAND

In the front passenger seat of a rusted, red Volkswagen, the whispered hum of Louis Armstrong hovers in the shimmering glare of evening August sun. All four windows are cracked by an inch to relieve the cab of a murky fever rising in from the hot pavement below. In the driver's seat, a deep beige hand shoots out towards the quivering gear shift. With white knuckles and a flexed forearm, chaotic giggling rattles out from the pit of his chest as we swerve around a flattened cardboard box. He smiles at me and asks, "What are you thinking about?" The pavement seems to melt before us, but his searing brown eyes find mine.

What am I thinking about? You see, in the fleeting moments before – a jarring collection of all interactions I've ever had in this life - I'd wondered if this might exist. The comfort of companionship in the looming proximity of true loneliness. Even while I was surrounded by others, I had always accepted the confining isolation that comes like waves in the silence after conversations. To be human before this moment had felt taboo – a secret to be buried deep in the farthest corner of the most abandoned room in one's house. Often, I tasted the very ringing of my own ears when silence overcame the deafening black in the dead of night. In those moments, there seemed to exist a coldness buried underneath the warmth of my battering heart. But here, in this car, I feel as though the sun crawled deep into my core to illuminate all traces of frigid desperation for something to connect to. My chest expanding like the rubber belly of a balloon.

"I'm thinking about how the silence in your car doesn't feel so heavy. Like I'm meant to be here." And I'm being honest. His quiet breathing is so soft that it barely reverberates at all in the thickness of the cab's hovering heat. Still, his presence soothes over my nerves like hot tea in glacial December mornings. Perhaps it's the



smooth curvature of his nose, prominent and infused with Indonesian ancestry. Or the slippery black iridescence of his eyelashes, slick like a raven's wing. He doesn't speak, and I'm grateful for this. He lets the silence fill me up and keep me warm. There is something in the soft beating of his heart from the driver's seat, thumping on like a valiant warrior. His body heat snaking over me like a heavy blanket breaking the chill of snow-capped nights.

Outside, the sun crashes into the horizon, splashing liters of golden serum against the purple sky. The peak of his cheekbone brightens, revealing clusters of caramel freckles that shrink when he laughs. I want to sit here forever and stare at him glisten in the summer glow. I wish I could explain this. How is it that I have never felt this calm in the presence of another? My thoughts feel less like their desperately treading water to survive and more like floating in the lazy July sun. The void of silence seems to have shrunk in the time it has taken for the horizon to roll open before us.

Is this what it is to belong?

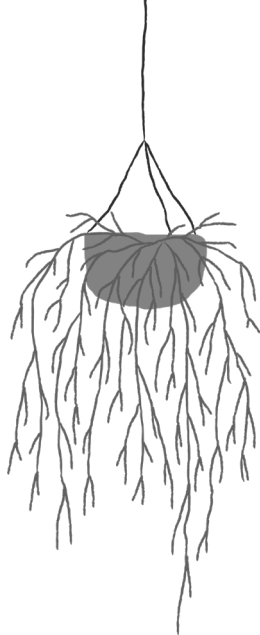


Expired

BY CALEIGH DUFFY

It fails to ask me
have I lost my value
since the very day
you saw my
vibrant
green
leaves
on the shelf of your
local grocery store
and thought to yourself
this
this is what will cure
my depression
and this
is what will ease my
tired
eyes

It fails to tell me
that it is not
fake
and that i need
to peel my still
tired eyes off
of those squared
bright devices my
kind stares at all day
before the sun it so
desires rises
and long after it falls
that all it
fucking wanted



was a glass of
water and
vitamin
D

I failed
I failed to
remember it only
has healing
powers so long
as I keep it
alive
to offer me the
very thing I
need to breath

I asked for it to
fill a sinkhole

It asked a crumb of me

Maa

BY PURABI CHOWDHURY

‘Maa’ (Mother).

The sweetest word in the world.

Dear Mother, I love you.

I was raised with your love & affection.

You are my heart, my inspiration.

I find delight & happiness when I think of you!

O Mother!

You are my companion, my friend.

Your smile showers love on me when I'm at my saddest.

You are my hope,

My first pure, selfless love.

O Mother! I want to come again and again in your lap.

I want to be home.



BY PAMELA NDUMBI

I. Playing it Cool

My mom wants to ruin my life. I swear it's her goal.
It's like she wakes up every morning wanting to irritate my soul.
I wish she wasn't so embarrassing with every move she makes.
I'm waiting for the time "18" is written on my cake.

My mom woke me up this morning to go to the mall.
I'm dreading it, so I'm trying to stall.
I tell her "Mom. Last night's soup hurt me. What was in it?"
She didn't buy that act for a minute.

We're at the mall and I want to crawl into a cave.
Because I ran into one of my classmates, Dave.
I try playing it cool, telling Dave I'm by myself,
Until mom turns around yelling "Look! Look!"—
Pointing to a pair of underwear with elves.

Things keeps getting worse no matter what I do,
Surprisingly, mom says to me "I hated hanging out with my mom too."
She goes "I understand if you want to hang out with your friends."
I can't believe my ears. I want her to say it again.

Suddenly, my mom isn't as embarrassing anymore,
And hanging out with her maybe isn't a chore.
I feel so yucky for being so mean,
Until she buys me the ugliest Christmas sweater I've ever seen.

II. The Ugliest Christmas Sweater

This is the ugliest Christmas sweater I've ever received.
It's purple and black, and in the centre: a tree.
My mom loves this sweater, and I don't understand why.
She wants me to wear it to school on Monday, and I want to cry.

What kind of a monster would come up with this design?
Was it knitted by someone who is blind?
All I know is that I want it to go away,
so I think I'll spill milk on by "mistake".

I'm supposed to wear this sweater for a family pic,
but maybe I should lie and say that I'm sick.
I think I'll just put on a pretty dress.
I feel bad, but imagine if you had to wear that mess.

I put on the dress and go downstairs by the tree.
Strangely enough, everyone's eyes are on me.
My mom turns to me and asks, "Where's the sweater I bought you the other day?"
I wish you could see the look on her face.



III. It Was a Gift

I remember wanting to grow up so badly.
Back when it was still just you and me.
A lot has happened since that day at the mall.
I keep going back to our silly little brawl.

You said "I do everything for you. Why can't you just be here?"
I closed my eyes and hoped that you'd disappear.
Even after my burning words, you still bought me that sweater.
I thought, "If this is your punishment, you can do better."

But it wasn't a punishment at all; it was a gift.
From someone whose love for me would never shift.
I needed you to be there to guide me,
Through the zits, the pain, the bullies.


Had I known that shopping trip would be one of my
last memories of you,
I would have stayed right there. I would've stuck it
through.
I wish that I had worn that sweater that day.
I wished and I wished, and I imagined what kind
of smile would've been on your face.

I went to the mall this morning, which I
haven't done in many years,
but there I saw a pair of underwear with
elves, and I shed many happy tears.
You really were painfully embarrassing, but you always made me feel
like I belong.
You live in me, pulse through me, capture me, like an undying song.



BUG

BY CALEIGH DUFFY

hen my mom first got pregnant with me, my dad didn't want to know the sex of the baby. So instead, he called me the "bug" that lived in her stomach. He didn't really care to know what or who I was, I quite literally could have been a bug, he just just knew he'd love me with everything he had. And he did.

Before I popped out of her stomach, they wanted to get me the perfect first gift. Upon their browse shopping in the mall one day, they came across a gold ladybug pendant. It was immediate for them. No questions asked.

And ever since, my nickname has been Caleigh bug. And for as long as I can remember they have shown me the pendant and said, "This is yours, but you can't wear it yet until you're responsible enough to not lose it." It was such a tease. Everytime they said that to me I argued in my four, six, eight, ten-year-old brain: but I am responsible enough. Like hanging candy in front of my face. I'd ask my mom how about when I'm 10? How about next year? And she always responded with, "We'll see."

My dad was born with a disease called Hemophilia. For those who don't know what that is, it's a bleeding disorder that prevents your body from properly clotting after any kind of injury, whether that be a scrap, a bruise, or something more serious. He was in and out of hospitals for most of his childhood just to manage the complications this disease offers. Could you imagine? Every time, as a child, you got a small scrap or bruise you'd have to go get it checked out? On top of the scheduled check ups?

It was later discovered in his late 20's that he then contracted Hepatitis C, all thanks to the Canada Tainted Blood Scandal. A time when Canada wasn't

properly checking the blood donations they received and many people were contracting AIDS and different types of Hepatitis. My dad was among one of the victims. He never played the victim though.

The third disease he chose himself. All his. It numbed both the emotional and physical pain of two divorces and inner body pain I will never understand. And it came in a pack of 6. How convenient.

My dad passed away in his sleep on the couch. A month before Christmas. The last words I said to him were *I love you*. The last conversation we had was about rock and roll.

When my mom and I went to his house to clean up, I was searching for his phone. I couldn't find it anywhere. Just beer bottles and tears. I cleaned up so many beer bottles and tears.

My mom suggested, "Have you checked his coat pockets?"

I reached his work coat pockets, nothing. I reached his rain coat pockets, nothing. I almost didn't reach for his formal coat pockets because I never really saw him wear it, and what's this? I asked myself. I pulled out a small gold box. Inside was a gold chain. A gold chain to hold a gold ladybug pendant. A gold ladybug pendant for his *Caleigh* bug.





Something Magical

BY RAISA ARODZ

What is love?

My daughter asked me.
She was only ten years old.
Is it something sweet or salty?
Something warm or cold?

– It is both, my darling, at the same time –

Can I see and admire it,
Can I hear and enjoy it,
Catch it – and hold it tight?
Is it darkness or the light?

– Yes, of course, my love, you're right –

Love is like a warm blanket in cold winter,
Reviving nature in spring,
Cool wind in sultry summer,
Bright sun in rainy fall.
Like a song without words –
And a melody without notes.



Thank you for reading

Creating Community

A Collection of Creative Non-fiction by
Immigrant Seniors and Mount Royal University Students

2021



