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☀ With much Thanks and Appreciation to: ☀

Mary Beth MacIsaac

Sue Goyette

Etc. Press

We couldn't have done it without you!

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✻ POETRY ✻

# Daily Hinterlands

by Grailing Anthonisen

The day he died:  
Peeling the last membrane of sleep  
from my eyes, I saw  
he'd constructed a cathedral  
of dirty dishes. Left the laundry half-folded  
by a finished book and the dog's leash  
near the hook in a grubby pile.

The spattering of paw prints  
led me to the napping pair,  
blocking the heater, throw pillows  
used to mop residual filth and rainfall.

Six months after:  
On a slow dog day, I hold the lazy leash  
double-handed, so neither dangle lonely.  
My mother had razed his cathedral  
before the funeral and took a fit of temper for her trouble.  
I had intended to leave them for future pilgrimage.  
Lavender scrubbed, the absence started a tenure  
of clean counters, fully folded laundry, books unlined.

I miss the shirked chores as much as his hand,  
his smell in the morning better than fresh coffee or sleep.

# Paradise

by Georgia Atkin

When the morning came,  
they took up their shovels and picks,  
went out  
and  
cracked open the black surface  
of the choking tar,  
tore up the asphalt,  
peeled away the grey layers  
of pavement  
until  
at last

they found the earth again.

**the summer I stopped wearing my mother's  
clothes and worked at raven street market cafe,  
which has a view of wallace island**

by Paisley Conrad

16 and serving  
liquor drinking  
over pour because  
I'm the one checking  
IDs.  
I've never cut  
vegetables so  
small and thin before,  
tinier than fingernails  
after they've been  
bitten off,  
but then I've never  
been paid like  
this before fat  
envelopes of  
fives, tens, once  
a fifty (red, colour  
of fake blood, right after  
bills were made to be  
plastic and sweet  
maple). First  
summer of all  
black, nice  
shoes (before I  
would wear them out  
on the sea rocks but now  
I go barefoot because  
I didn't pay for the soles  
of my feet, only  
my Oxfords).



I  
nick my fingers a  
lot, usually when  
my mind wanders to  
married men I'll  
always love, mostly  
that I'll never have.  
I've never been 16  
before and the first  
bottle I stole (Sawmill Creek  
Pinot Grigio, it's crisp, Sir) from  
the back, adding it to the  
single man's bill, paying  
for it myself

with the fifty.

**But your veins are so crowded, how do you expect  
me to fit myself inside of them?**

by Paisley Conrad

I'd give up oxygen to see  
what your blood looks like            when  
it's still in your body

I'm all molasses    even my bones  
that's why I move so slow    you have  
to wash your hands after you touch me

No thank you    I don't want to  
use your toothbrush            don't need more  
of your fluids crowding my mouth

but I would like to offer you  
a piece of my gum.

# I guess I don't know myself very well

by Paisley Conrad

itched through my skull  
absent-mindedly            but now that  
I think back            it was to see  
the pink bits inside

scraps under my nails were grey  
found storm clouds            instead of sunsets  
had thought my culmination was    rose wisps  
and not Cumulonimbus

# High Tide/Low Tide

by Trynne Delaney

At high tide:

I pick a bouquet of dune grass  
and wildflowers:  
a collection of fall thistle and dandelion  
cupped with weeds,  
picked with fingers  
stained by aromatic bay leaves too stubborn  
to be flattened by feet  
that carry me back to the beach

Shoeless toes grope for rocks  
and thickening sand.  
Desperate, I shed my outer layers  
in preparation to rejoin the waves and sun,  
skinless, unobstructed, animalistic  
I remember my fish ancestry,  
tread on their corpses,  
proclaim myself a better evolution who  
can feel these waves crashing  
between her eyelashes  
as I am submerged  
in the current that murmurs in my ears  
that I should let it foster me in its depths.  
But I resurface as the sun is lowering.  
Against the current I return to shore.  
For in the dark I am a land creature  
who recalls the ocean only in my  
bedsheets and tidal wakefulness.

At low tide:

I dreamt a dune grass and wildflower bouquet  
dropped in salt water  
where it grew into an island  
that called me back  
to bay leaf, thistle, dandelion  
and dune grass swept up in  
wind and wave and ocean.

# A Poem for Someone I Might Have Loved or Fucked (if I wasn't so scared)

by Trynne Delaney

I think I could have loved  
your arms around me the same as  
your euphonium's twists  
in heated breeze and night breaths  
too quick and anxious for sleep—  
and on this hardwood floor that creaks,  
we tiptoe to sunrise.

I try not to catch your eye, besides,  
I already know their shape and colour,  
know what's there—

I saw the photograph,  
the one where we are sitting  
too close together  
the day after  
you poured pillows over my waiting body  
and balanced on top of me,  
on top of that soft, man-made mound.  
I wished we weren't cushioned from each other,  
that I could feel your skin—

if our fingers touched  
I imagined I  
would hear the theme from  
Cinema Paradiso  
but with the chatter of tourists on  
Crescent St. where I watched you busk  
in August's relentless humidity—

I didn't need you to say  
you were grateful for me  
but you did.

I needed to say  
I was grateful for you  
but I couldn't.

# These Stories May or May Not be True

by Kathryn Green

*One night after crying at a finale of Master Chef because the emotions were too real and you had been rooting for her and she finally was crowned THE Master Chef*

this reminds me of one time  
at King Bo  
she said the word cactus  
and I was so high  
high out of my mind  
and I just started bawling in this Chinese restaurant

which reminds me of the time  
I went to a restaurant  
and choked on a mozzarella stick  
my dad just looked at me and laughed  
but quickly realized I wasn't faking it

which reminds me of the time  
I was in middle school faking to be straight  
and then high school hit  
and nobody cared cause gay is cool bro

which reminds me of the time  
my best friend/girl of my dreams  
kissed me  
and hugged me  
and reminded me that I am loved  
and taught me that I was beautiful  
and kissed me again  
and again  
and a lot  
and I felt happy.

## Salmon on Saran

by Kathleen Harper

My husband brings fish to me  
and I lay it out on the cold countertop.  
I am wife, cook, undertaker.

I have no choice but to look  
into his black cavernous eye  
while pulling slippery grey guts from his belly  
and skinning the sheen of his scales.

This salmon, cut off from wild water,  
must also lose its head. With one sharp  
cut his face falls into the sink, still  
looking up at me, knowing I had to.

I do this so they might forget it had a head,  
or how he bled red blood, like our own,  
pooling in the great white basin of the sink.

After all this I will wrap the fish  
tightly because saran wrap  
keeps death away.

Resting on the table, I cut again.  
He flakes a faultless coral pink.

## Capricious Waters

by Lauren Hazlewood

Climbing casuarina trees, collecting the tiny seeds  
of sawtoothed wood in our hands,  
we hang in the briny boughs  
and listen to the stirring of the sea.

Our hands and feet are dusted with white sand  
like powdered chalk.

You cast the conifer seeds from your palms and they  
tumble towards the earth below us,  
disappearing into the sand, carpeted with fallen  
needles turned from green to brown.

I loop my wet hair around my finger and stick  
the section in my mouth, salt settles on my tongue.

Cherry red love bugs crawl across my ankles and wrists  
which hug the chapped and peeling bark.

We laugh about everything and nothing as  
sea water drips from our salty hair down our sun tanned backs,  
when the sky is flushed and pink on the horizon line our  
mothers call us back.

I thought I'd always live beside this sea.



But islands have a roughness to them,  
water currents mixing, salt and sand,  
power stirring from the deep,  
slapping iron shore, battering reefs.  
I remember when we got caught in  
the undertow and couldn't breathe,  
hands ripped apart, eyes squeezed shut,  
throats burning with salt, our sun burnt skin  
stinging like we'd ran through maiden plum.  
I remember when the warm rains flattened the casuarina trees,  
when the wind splintered and shredded the familiar bark,  
when the waves spat the coral heads out  
dead and grey with a thud,  
and I grew scared of the sea when the wind picked up.  
Now you place white petals on the waves once a year  
and we search for things to say on the beach,  
but words are caught in our throats like hooks in fish,  
and the sea is too big to find her in.  
The petals sink and wreck beneath capricious waters.

My mother calls us both back.

## Questions asked on the sail home

by Lauren Hazlewood

The sun has sunk through the ocean,  
submerged under the August sky.  
These are the last few nights of summer,  
my skin brushed with sea salt  
like icing sugar from a sieve.

*What will you do with your life?*

They ask the questions simply, maybe only to be polite,  
maybe only to fill the quiet.  
They are the types of things you ask a person  
suspended in that nomadic interval,  
the space between child and adult.

The coast, from here, looks like a string of Christmas lights  
tacked up in space,  
its light bleeding orange into the ocean,  
dripping into ripples of black water like spilled ink.

The stars are splattered across the night,  
mottled silvers that coat the firmament  
like freckles scattered on shoulder blades.  
The sea is flat calm, a pool of thick black paint  
and it embraces the sky, darkness on darkness.

We are floating through the universe tonight,  
our boat cutting the acrylic sea like a brush.  
We are sailing through space,  
a pinpricked hole pressed into charcoal cork.

I offer generic answers that don't say much,  
my replies left behind as the boat pushes on,  
swimming away like fish to corners of the sky,  
non - committal, evasive,  
cautious even.

I am a ship with no port,  
swallowed in the raven dark,  
dropping responses from my mouth  
like pebbles into the oil slick sea.  
I hope they'll sink under sand and be buried.

I don't know what lies ahead,  
except for the nearing shoreline's trembling light,  
a string of shaky Christmas bulbs in August.

## Blueberry Island

by Lysle Hood

Smiling,  
by a blueish barrel of bullfrogs—  
caught,  
I imagine,  
by the tennis-court docks  
where the water is a warm lime paste—  
she is, in sepia-coloured naivete,  
slowly suffocating  
an enormous inflated frog  
in her hands: a prized catch.  
Her body,  
in a sunny floral swimsuit,  
is one I don't remember.  
Pinned to a wall  
of sun-stained polaroid pictures,  
I almost can't recognize myself.

# Wealth

by Lysle Hood

We sift out sticks  
and build cities of sand—  
dollars are granite rocks  
in our hands,  
traded for cray fish  
or dew worms  
or clams.

We launch potatoes,  
like pennies,  
from high wooden decks—  
of cards, we know bowers  
are most valuable yet.

We jump off the dock,  
pebbles in pockets, pink  
like the wild  
berries bought with rocks.  
We eat them all,  
poison or not.

## Small Talk

*for Anne Carson*

by Sam Krueger

You know I'm going to Toronto  
to visit my husband,  
said the woman next to me.  
He's launching a book of poetry—

into the sky we clambered  
and I nodded, remembering  
a Famous Canadian Poet who  
had quipped something about  
love and the feeling of takeoffs.  
Turning to her I said erroneously:

You know Atwood had something  
to say about love and the feeling  
of airplanes,  
taking off into love  
rather than  
falling into it.

She nodded, sagely:  
I think I understand that.

I understood it too, lifting away  
yet feeling *love running towards my life with its arms up*  
as we sat still  
and accelerated  
into love left behind.

*This poem includes a line from Anne Carson's poem "Short Talk on the Sensation of Aeroplane Takeoff"*

## a lover's kaddish

by Alex McVittie

when he slept  
his lungs released an ache audible only to me  
and when he used to have nightmares  
i spent the evening with eyes wide counting the cracks in his crown  
molding  
trying to trace where the dreams came from  
wondering how many cracks were in his heart.

trying to calm him  
i outlined the indentations of his spine  
his goosebumps making letters in braille  
begging me to read them  
my fingers trailed to the base of his scalp  
grazing the matted grass that grew upwards.

in winter, he slept well  
cultivating warmth in his hibernation  
planting perennials  
his eyes perpetually locked but lashes fluttered.

in spring, when life grew  
the gardener returned  
weeding the flowers rooted in his lungs  
bursting capillaries cut from the soil of youth.

when he woke  
he gargled with the liquid left from his dreams  
made milk from his aching bones and stumbled downstairs  
in silence.

# orpheus, leading eurydice from the underworld

by Sarah Parry

there you are  
bringing her back from a place  
you were never meant to go

your hand on her wrist  
as if she is a ghost  
and might crumble to ash  
at any moment

in that misty beyond place  
you can't quite see  
she guides your hand  
across her swollen ankle,  
clotted blood—  
the bite hasn't healed



they are gathering in the background  
behind the trees—  
mourners who already know  
how this one ends

*The Great Tragedy*  
they say,  
*Orpheus forever separated from his  
beloved Eurydice*

i know why  
you had to look back

*based on the painting 'Orpheus Leading Eurydice from the Underworld' by  
Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot*

J  
by Ella Ramsay

He stands contrapposto,  
our millennial-loving David  
who is made of modern material:

flesh and bones, and rope for hair  
that frays and whispers  
gray, a truth about his age.

He was found hanging. The letter  
found beside him read, in words  
written by his lover:

*My gift to womankind.*

He looked to me as Michaelangelo's statue  
looked to Rome: fixedly. Lust carved a lode  
down the length of his neck, so—  
    he hulled a strawberry,  
    and he hurled it at my brow,  
    and acquiescence dripped from my mouth.

He thought it was a crown his inamorata  
carved for him, that metal weighing heavy on his head,  
but it was her hand hooked in brass scissors cutting swiftly,  
and she clipped 'til all his hair, unwillingly, was shed.

The rope they found him in was laced with silver.

## Louise

by Ella Ramsay

From out the corner of my eye  
I saw you licking smooth  
the contours of your cone;  
citrus gelato that stained  
your tongue yellow.

I didn't let you see me sneak  
this look at you, I kept it all for me  
and was careful not to forget  
to wrap it up, in butcher's paper,  
and freeze it for later.

At night I tuck the package  
under my arm, leave you in bed,  
descend the stairs and stand  
above the freezer drawer  
counting the packages.

I have amassed them in moments  
of amazement, these parchment covered  
stolen looks. You: In morning light  
and while you drive  
and whisking eggs.

On the nights when you slept at your  
place I'd let one defrost  
and cook it- no, just barely  
sear the edges and I'd eat it rare.  
I'd floss with bits of your hair.

# Finding My Way Home

by Luisa Roberts

Sitting in airport halls filled with strangers,  
you begin to see they aren't that different from you.

Just people trying to get back  
to the ones they love

or yearning for love they aren't sure if  
they have lost yet—

something about rows of unrecognisable  
faces will fill you with a loneliness you can't shake.

People trying to escape from the shackles of their desktop prisons  
in search of some meaning in their guidebooks.

Children crying and parents regretting  
ever forgoing contraception.

And I am just trying to find my way home.

But I have homes in each city I have ever lived in.

The home that had thirty rooms and ten showers,  
with forty-five sisters and three kind mothers.

The home between palm trees and ocean breeze,  
with familial love burning hot as the island sun.

The home in the borrowed house,  
with the broken dryer and three confidantes.

And the home in his arms, warm with adoration,  
with the brick walls and dying fern and not a thing out of place.

I live in airport halls surrounded

by perfect strangers

and I am just trying to make my way home,  
wherever that may be.

## Worm

by Robyn Starkey

Your skin is Sunday silk when I stare,  
and your mulberry lips are lace,  
and your hair, I want to say,  
is a word like cascade  
or curtain: how it's  
red evening sun,  
light spun by  
silkworms.

But  
my words,  
cocooned, rot  
on the branch, and  
my gaze has never  
been a moth. It died as  
a larvae, a parasite  
lodged in my throat: dirty, strangled  
and small, never spun into Sunday.

 CREATIVE   
NON-FICTION

# In Which the Narrator Wears a Bonnet

by Paisley Conrad

He was my brother for the weekend. Jordan Oliver, 2 first names, played football—even if we didn't go to school together, I'd know he was a boy who played football—big, big shoulders, and I knew that if I saw him with his shift off, I would want to tuck myself neatly into the valley between his shoulder blades. But, for this weekend, he was in a cowboy hat, a sturdy button-up shirt (I think it was white, maybe ivory), and thick, thick pants (I can only imagine how much he sweat in them). I wore bloomers under my skirt, and they were thin enough to breathe, thank goodness they breathed. He's in his best pioneer clothes, he looked like a cowboy from one of those Westerns my mom loved to watch. Mine are better—mom made me 2 bonnets for the occasion, and French-braided my hair to keep it contained (everyone knows pioneers were well-kept). I look like my Swedish great-grandmother did, I think. I'm too short, Jordan Oliver is so tall that the top of my head barely clears his shoulders, I will never see the top of his head, what does he see on top of mine?

We are place in the Smith family—12 of us—all pretend pioneers, looking nothing like family. I feel like my ancestors that settled Southern Alberta in the first place, the first Mormons in the country (we are the Andersons, I promise that means something on Milk River Ridge even if it means nothing to you). I don't like him especially, but he's the cutest one of my brothers and I've already kissed Miki Sanchez twice and hated it both times. This was before I realized that I wanted to kiss Allana Davidson, which I realize is a missed opportunity, but in retrospect, she wasn't any nicer.

I think we must have walked into the woods. Curfew was late, I'm sure, because it was so dark, the kind of dark that really lets you see the tiny speckled stars, the ones that you normally missed because of light pollution and quick eyes and busy mouths. Jordan and I had very little in common—I was bored to death of boys (of everything in general, but I think mostly boys with broad shoulders), but in my boredom I would always forget that kissing them didn't make them more interesting. His arm was around me, I forget if he yawned, or used a line, or just put it there because I wasn't about to complain, how could I complain when I could see the dusty stars in the backs of my eyes? They were so nice. I couldn't believe my luck in seeing them.

You always ask what her favourite constellation is—it's a line I still use on girls with braids. I answered Cassiopeia; he wasn't familiar.

I pointed. He asked if it was the big W, which is one way of looking at it, I guess. His arms were thick, and I was cold, my pioneer coat was not practical for any other purpose than looking like a pioneer. I doubt he asked about who she was, but I told him anyways, she was a queen, she loved her daughter's beauty so much she forgot how to be a mother, and was stuck on her throne. It looks like a W because it's always almost about to tip, it'll never fall, but the sinking feeling in her stomach will never go away, and that's what I think of when I look at it, are you listening?

I didn't ask him his favourite constellation, I was afraid it would be something like Orion's Belt (could he even see Orion's raised arm?) or the Big Dipper (he didn't seem to notice the dusty stars, he couldn't see the soft pelt of Ursa Major patterned in the sky), and I would want to kiss him even less. I still wanted to fold myself into him, but I knew that if I let my mouth get that close to his, I'd lose some of my stories, he'd take some of the stars out of my eyes. I hadn't brushed my teeth yet, I excused myself to do so, told him I was about to come back, I'll be five minutes, let me change my bloomers.

I went to bed and balled myself up next to Allana Davidson.



# Skating on the Kennebecasis

by Trynne Delaney

This wasn't new. We'd been staying home alone since I was fourteen. I felt old then, but looking back I wasn't, and I was scared at night when it was just me. When it was both me and Simone, it was ok. We'd spend the night in front of the television, sleep on the couch, leave a mess in the sink for our mum to sigh at when she came back through the door and said she was sorry—that she didn't like leaving us alone, that she felt guilty. She would hope that she was not a bad mother. She wasn't.

My mum took the opportunity, now that we lived closer to my granddad, to force the two of us into becoming close with him, which we'd never been. We joked around ok when we were together, but when we were alone for long periods, I began to feel like I didn't know what to say. My sister and I would break off into our own conversations and wonder how to bring him back in.

Nevertheless, from a distance we admired our grandfather. He wasn't a hippie; he was a beatnik. He built birch bark canoes. He had a saw horse in his basement. When I was ten and homesick, I hugged him on purpose. He smelled like wood smoke and old sweat and wool. He darned his own socks. He lived in a house that he built on top of a mountain. He took us for walks into blueberry barrens, into forests, into ravines.

When he was a little boy (or as he liked to say, when he was a little girl) he used to get in trouble. He spent a night in the Woodstock town jail for tarring and haying a boy when he was a kid. He was wild. He had a beard. His eyes crinkled and twinkled like he was Santa Claus (he claimed himself a Subordinate Clause). He loved Karl Marx. He loved the tundra. He loved the ocean. Simone smiled and laughed like him even though she didn't look like Santa Claus. Their eyebrows went up the same way. We knew that he wanted to know me and Simone better. We wanted to know him better.

He brought skates with him in his dusty red Corolla. I didn't fit in mine any more so I borrowed one of the pairs from his trunk. Simone still fit in hers and I could see her silently thanking god.

The skates that my granddad brought for me belonged to a friend who used to work in the bush with him.

That's what he always said: "In the bush." I whispered to my sister to ask if she wanted to switch skates with me. I knew that toe fungus was rampant "in the bush" because I'd seen my granddad's toenails.

“No,” she said.

I wished that I had my own skates.

It was the full moon.

I knew that Simone was as glad as I was that our mum and John weren't home to bare their teeth and howl at it.

We traipsed across the field out back to the quiet Kennebecasis and laced our skates with quick fingers. We asked Granddad how he knew that the ice was thick enough. He asked us if we remembered walking out on the St. Lawrence with him when we used to live in Montreal years ago. If it was so many inches and so many days thick, it was safe even on the St. Lawrence—we shouldn't worry.

I said I remembered building an igloo on the St. Lawrence. Simone said she remembered that too. I pretended that I felt safe on this ice just like I had pretended on the St. Lawrence.

We stood up. Turned on our head lamps.

Simone and I looked at each other our faces spot-lighting one another. We felt together in this moment before movement. Then, our long legs splayed like baby giraffes. We held onto each others' shoulders. This ice wasn't Zambonied to flatness; we needed to become a four-legged creature to brave this wide slipperiness.

Granddad started skating. My mum said he was like Peter Pan and she was right: he could fly. We were like lost boys training behind, looking at the moon, looking down into the clear ice, popping the air bubbles, getting tripped up.

When we finally caught up to our granddad, he told us that he used to jump on ice floes when he was a kid. “It was dangerous,” he said, “don't try it.” We didn't want to. We found places where we could see through to the bottom of the river. It wasn't that deep. Mostly it was mud and grass that we could see. We pressed our faces as close as we could. We watched the world freeze into midnight stillness.

Sometimes we turned our headlamps off so that we could fall into the night sky.

Simone and I raced as fast as we could. I was out of practice. We smiled wide and breathless. Our teeth shone back at the moon in the dark.

We couldn't see where our home had disappeared to on the riverbank. It had receded onto the dark side of the moon. That was ok. We didn't need it to light our path anymore. Our home was out here on the river with the frost biting into our cheeks and the feeling leaving our toes.

When we finally clomped back through the door the warmth

hurt.

In the spring we watched the ice floes and talked about jumping between them. We didn't need to get the thrill on the actual river. Watching it from above on the duck blind was enough. We already knew the thrill; we'd felt it twice before when we jumped from icy river to icy river to icy river: St. Lawrence, St. John, Kennebecasis. We wondered together which floe we'd catch next, if we'd fall in, if we'd be on our way down towards another river, home free.

✻ FICTION ✻

# Seven Variations on a Stain

by Hannah Ascough

## Sunday

When Annie is six, she's named the Official Champion of the Bug Catching Club. The service is over and the adults are barbecuing in front of the church and Annie is chasing grasshoppers through the tall grass.

Her dress is flapping and she's running faster than all the boys until she's tripping, catching her foot and sprawling into the dirt.

Surprised, Annie sits up and looks at her knees, stained dark green. They look pretty, she thinks. They don't hurt at all. The boys are getting closer and Annie is afraid they'll laugh. She doesn't want that, so she pounces on a grasshopper instead and holds it out.

"Got him," she announces proudly.

The boys cheer, call her their queen, and Annie grins until her mother sees her knees and starts yelling, asking why Annie can't be like nice little girls and keep clean.

Annie tries not to cry. She doesn't know where to look so she runs away instead and locks herself in the church bathroom. She wets a paper towel and scrubs at her grass stains. She doesn't tell her mother that she's the Official Champion.

## Monday

Annie is thirteen when she feels something wet sliding down her leg. She frowns, excuses herself from math class.

She gasps at the blood once she's locked herself inside a bathroom stall—thick and crimson and staining her thighs.

Her friends have already talked about it. They trade tampons, comparing brands and colours like collectibles, making Annie roll her eyes. Who would brag about this? she thinks bitterly.

Her blood is hardening, and Annie feels rusty and old. She scrubs at her thighs furiously with toilet paper, ties a sweater around her waist. Her legs chafe against her pants the rest of the day, but she just grimaces and doesn't tell anyone about the blood.

## Tuesday

When Annie is eighteen, she loses her virginity. Or, at least, she plans on saying she lost it, to a boy who lives two doors down and smiles at her

every morning.

He'd tugged off her shirt so she'd tugged off his jeans and suddenly her hand was wrapped around his hard penis. She'd tried not to gag or run away, or hide under the bed.

Instead, she'd gritted her teeth and started pulling up and down for what seemed like forever, and now her wrist is wet, stained with semen.

She tries not to make a face. She thinks this should count as losing her virginity.

She smiles weakly at him but it's suddenly too much and she's locking herself in the bathroom, running her wrist under hot water. She sighs and closes her eyes, doesn't tell anyone that she's lost her virginity.

### Wednesday

Annie is nineteen and she's sipping beer while the room tilts to the left but she doesn't mind because there's a pretty girl in front of her whose freckles are sparkling.

Her name is Leah, and she smiles at Annie, offers her another beer. Annie giggles and asks if she's an elf because her lips are purple. Not an elf, Leah says, just makeup, and Annie nods, wonders why she can't look away, why her fingers want to touch Leah's nose, mouth, her bony shoulders.

Then Leah's lips are pressing against hers until Annie presses back and Leah's tongue is trailing down her neck and she's kissing purple lipstick into Annie's collarbone and Annie is smiling, heating up, reaching down to touch Leah.

But now the beer haze is fading and Annie is afraid because Leah has soft hair, soft lips, so she pushes her away and locks herself in the bar bathroom. She splashes water on the lipstick, but it's seeping into her skin and staining her collarbone.

She wears scarves the next day. She doesn't tell anyone what happened.

### Thursday

Annie is twenty-three when she moves to a new apartment in a new city. The rooms feel damp but she smiles doggedly, buys a can of yellow paint.

She's moved here because her old editor had called her bossy and over-sensitive and so Annie had decided to become over-sensitive and quit bossily on the spot. She's writing for a new paper now and trying to make her kitchen look like the inside of a sun. Or at least like an

inspired decision.

Fucking over-sensitive, she thinks grimly.

She scrapes her knuckles against the wet paint and sighs.

Locking herself in the new bathroom, she runs her fingers under hot water, but the paint stains her nails. She goes to work the next day with hands like a sun. She doesn't tell anyone why.

### Friday

Annie is twenty-five and sitting in a Laundromat, trying to ignore the smiling woman on the cover of the cooking magazine. The woman has white teeth and full breasts and a platter of glistening pies.

Annie had been trying to open a jar of blueberry preserves for her own misshapen scones. She'd yelled at it, run it under water until it slipped and cracked, splattering her blouse.

So she's here at the Laundromat, ignoring the woman on the cover of that magazine who looks too smug—as if it's all easy as pie, Annie thinks, irritated.

Then she looks down and realizes, horrified, that the blueberries must have trickled down her shirt because her breasts are stained blue.

She locks herself in the Laundromat bathroom and scrubs at her chest with a paper towel. She wants to scrub the smile off that magazine woman's face, but her own breasts are still blue.

Annie wears a dark shirt the next morning.

### Saturday

When Annie is twenty-seven, she stares into her mirror with her shirt off, looking at a dark stain bumping over the curves of her rib cage. She pinches it with a wet cloth but nothing happens and Annie wonders if she should be panicking.

Ella had noticed it. She'd pulled off Annie's shirt and pushed her onto the bed, kissed the line between her breasts and told Annie that she loved her birthmark.

Annie had sat up, confused. What birthmark? she'd asked, and Ella had smiled bemusedly and pointed to the stain on Annie's ribs.

Annie had leapt up to see it herself, locking herself in the bathroom, leaving Ella to fall asleep on their bed.

Now Annie is staring into the mirror and wondering how a grown woman misses a birthmark for twenty-seven years. She rubs at it,

irritating the skin, but the stain is still there. Sometimes it's red, but then it's brown and now it could be blue, and it isn't going away.

Annie drops her hands.

Annoyed, she thinks back to all the times she's pressed herself against water, baptizing her skin to wash away the stains that have migrated across her body and through her life.

It all feels like a waste now.

She looks at it in the mirror and feels defeated. She knows she must have been born with this stain, probably saw it and hid it until she forgot it when she couldn't wash it away.

But it's been here the whole time, she thinks, growing with her.

So Annie hangs up the washcloth and turns off the tap and lets her annoyance drip away. She goes back to bed and falls asleep.

And in the morning she'll wake up feeling patterned, feeling new, feeling at peace with all of her stains.



# True Egg

by Hunter McLellan

The sunrise in July, maybe August, melted like butter over Lou's face. Lou curled herself into the comforter, squeezing pockets of cool air out of the down. The Timer on her nightstand, interrupting the sun's beam, gained a halo for its martyrdom. To Lou, its polymer casing looked like pot-belly pig skin: soft and pink and alive. A mechanical ticking grew loud in Lou's ears as she watched the white digital numbers swell and fade.

*Timers make no noise. They guarantee.*

She heard Timers on buses and at school, even though there was a rule that Timers had to stay at home. She heard Timers in the pockets of strangers on the street; she heard the cacophony of Timers clicking away in the busy breakfast cafés her parents took her to.

*Timers make no noise. They guarantee.*

Lou's Mother had silky but muted blond hair, like a field of wheat in the shade. She had a very straight nose with a small indent in the tip called Character. Her upper lip was much thicker than her bottom lip. So was Lou's. If a proper Prime was chosen, there were few differences between an Original and her Egg.

*They guarantee.*

Breakfast was chickens' eggs, scrambled. At school, Lou had heard a story of an Original who cracked a True Egg for breakfast. The children spread the rumour in harsh, delighted whispers. When Lou mentioned the rumour at breakfast, her mother said she was disappointed that the children at Lou's school spoke that way about True Eggs. Her father said it had never happened, that it was impossible. Nobody would harm a True Egg, he said.

*You are not allowed.*

Breakfast was chickens' eggs, scrambled; pig's flesh, fried; and wheat's dough, baked, toasted, and buttered with July or August sun. Lou thought of hatched chickens as she ate the chickens' eggs. She thought of muddy pigs as she ate the bacon, and of a shady wheat field as she ate the toast.

"Mother?" Lou asked.

"Mhm?" Her mother's voice carried melody like an orchestra's first cello. Though Lou was young, her voice was deep and similar. Lineage was well curated.

"Do chickens have True Eggs or just chickens' eggs?"

"They just have chickens' eggs, honey. They're just chickens."

"Oh." Lou shovelled the scramble into her cheeks. She thought

of just chickens sitting on top of their just chickens' eggs, warming them with their bodies until a pink hand scooped them up so that they couldn't be born. She wondered if hens knew about Primes or if they settled for any rooster.

At night, the Timer ticked loudly. Her mother, and nearly everybody else, told her what miraculous music Timers played when they finally sounded. They said Timers played your favourite song. They said Timers played a lullaby in your mother's voice. They said Timers played rock 'n' roll.

*Timers make no noise. They guarantee.*

Lou's True Egg was nested on the mantel in the very centre of a mossy green pillow. It was in fashion to place Nests on display, so that family and neighbours could look upon the Eggs when they visited. Lou's grandmother was very fond of Lou's Egg.

"Is this our Egg?" she would cry upon entering the living room in her own maple-bodied melody tuned in perfect fifths.

"Yes, grandmother," Lou would return if her mother poked her ribs with a thin finger.

"It is so sweet, so brilliant, and so much more golden than the last time I saw it!" Lou thought her Egg was just as golden as the last time her grandmother had seen it, which was barely golden at all. Lou's Egg had a soft dusting of perhaps gold, perhaps bronze on its apex which faded quickly to a regular matte ivory shell. Lou knew there were some Eggs that were entirely gold.

"Such a perfect Egg for a perfect little girl."

*Chk, chk, chk.*

Clocks from another time made noise like that. Lou had seen pictures of the oddities: round moon faces and thin pointing fingers like her mother's. Even then, everyone had despised the audiovisual reminders of shared time. The antique was no longer fashionable. They tried very hard to make time not pass at all, and when they could not, they made it a secret. Everyone minded their own time. No alarms and no surprises.

*They guarantee.*

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The moonlight in September, maybe October, hovered like a policeman's flashlight.

*CHK, CHK, CHK.*

Lou slid her bare feet from under the comforter and reached for the cool floor. Her soft soles met the hardwood with no noise at all.

She padded hurriedly down the stairs toward the living room, toward the mantel, toward the Nest. In the moonlight, the Egg was silver not gold.

*CHK, CHK, CHK.*

Most of the girls at Lou's school were enamoured with their Eggs. Like her grandmother, they fawned over them, always. The girls whose Timers counted till they were about twenty-five spent their time planning the future together, imagining the men in their Registry: scientists and astronauts and architects. The girls whose Timers counted till after they were thirty-five spent most of their time with rebellious boys who wore shirts and pins which read "NOBODY'S PRIME." Lou didn't want to spend her time with anyone in particular, so she told the other girls her Timer counted from thirty. Aged-Thirty was considered a very lucky Timer to have. By thirty, a girl could have the Prime Registry memorized, but she also had plenty of time for herself. But Lou's Timer did not count down from thirty. Lou's Timer would only count for six more years. Lou would be fifteen years old.

Lou looked upon her Egg on the mantel, caught like a thief in a flashlight's beam. It was custom for girls to vow never to hold their Eggs until the moment their Timers sounded. Lou's mother had been one of those girls. Lou had only nodded shyly when her mother had asked her to promise.

"You only get one, Lou."

*CHK. CHK. CHK.*

Their hair had mingled indistinguishably as her mother cupped her cheeks between her elegant fingers, tapered like laboratory pipettes. Lou's fingers were thicker and short like gnarled twigs. Occasionally, they explained, Eggs had features unlike Originals, especially if an Original had chosen a Prime Partner below the ninetieth-percentile match recommendation. If these features were positive, they were called Character. If they were negative, they were called nothing at all. Lou's grandmother never said a thing about Lou's fingers.

Lou snatched up the silvery Egg between her stubby fingers like she was apprehending a criminal by the scruff. It wasn't warm; it may have been even cooler than the air. The Egg felt barely there, like there was nothing inside, not even a chicken's yolk. Especially not a baby.

*CHK. CHK. CHK.*

Lou wondered what would happen if she didn't like a single Prime in her ninetieth percentile. She hated the teenaged boys she knew. She wondered what her grandmother would say if she chose a Prime in the eighty-sixth just because he liked the same storybooks. She wondered why girls couldn't be on each other's Registries, or why she

needed a Prime at all. She wondered what the girls at school would say when they found out her time had come. She wondered if she would have to bring her baby to school, or if she'd have to stop going to school altogether. She wondered why True Eggs were warm or cold, why they were silver or gold, what they looked like when they cracked, what they looked like on the inside.

*Chk, chk, chk.*

She released the criminal from her grasp, and let it slip down into the shadows. The air chilled her empty fingertips. The Egg had been warm after all.

# Stiff

by Mckayla Schneider

Eric takes her in from head to toe, not missing an inch of her body.

She's got glossy blond hair, barely-there dimples, manicured nails, and pink lipstick – the exact same shade as her stilettos. Her little black dress is cut low in the front and the back. She isn't wearing any tights.

The acrid smell of cigarillos hangs around her like a halo and Eric bets he'll find a few of them in her faux leather clutch.

Joe had already asked around. People had a way of spilling their guts to him. It was ladies' night. They had just come to dance but her friends say she's single.

She was drinking martinis. Vodka, not gin.

Her name is Sarah with an 'h'. Eric writes it down and gets her number. Right next to it he writes: C.O.D unknown and hangs it on her toe.