A surrealist painting featuring a city with floating islands and a ship. The scene is set against a vibrant blue sky with yellow stars. A large, ornate building with a red roof and a circular window is visible on the left. A winding staircase leads up to a platform with a sign that reads "PARIS". In the foreground, a ship with a white hull and a red stripe is visible. The overall style is painterly and dreamlike.

# SEA WOLF

## LITERARY REVIEW

Islands Short Fiction

Ekphrastic Poetry

Nanaimo Arts Council Vol. 1 - 2024





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## SEA WOLF LITERARY REVIEW

*Sea Wolf Literary Review*, a free magazine published annually by the Nanaimo Arts Council, features winning entries from the *Islands Short Fiction Review* and the *Ekphrastic Poetry Celebration* competitions.

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We respectfully acknowledge that we live on the traditional and unceded territory of the Coast Salish peoples, specifically the Snuneymuxw, Snaw-Na-As, and Stz'uminus First nations.

## 4 EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to the inaugural edition of the Sea Wolf Literary Review, an annual magazine showcasing winning entries to the *Islands Short Fiction Review* and the *Ekphrastic Poetry Celebration*. These competitions provide a creative outlet for fiction writers and poets from Nanaimo and surrounding communities to hone their craft.

Volume one features ten short fiction stories representing writers from three age groups - junior (12 and under), youth (ages 13-18), and adults (19 and over). While the authors differ in age and experience, we trust you will find they share a passion for creative writing. Raw or refined, their writing is captivating.

We are also delighted to present three outstanding ekphrastic poems - poetry inspired by visual art - submitted by local artists to the Ekphrastic Poetry Celebration and poems from our guests Paige Pierce and Kamal Parmar, City of Nanaimo's poet laureates.

A dedicated group of volunteers and supporters deliver these literary programs, including librarians at Nanaimo North Library, student interns from Vancouver Island University, local poets and authors and Nanaimo Arts Council members. We are indebted to all of them. And special thanks to all the writers and artists who submitted their work.

### ***Islands Short Fiction Review***

*Program Coordinators* - Jenaya Shaw & Laurent Lemay

*Judges* - Julie Carter (Junior), Darby Love (Youth)

Tracy Balanik & Elke Sorensen (Advance Readers - Adult) &

Kathy Page (Final Judge - Adult)

### ***Ekphrastic Poetry Celebration***

*Program Coordinator* - Maggie Stevens

*Judges* - Paige Pierce & Carla Stein

Colleagues asked why we publish in print when we make material available online. The answer lies, in part, in the reader's experience. Reading the printed word is immersive and engaging. It is off-the-grid, easy on the eyes, and a more tactile experience. It feels real.

For the authors, more importantly, a printed work offers credibility, and a legacy found in the archives of Canadian publications. It is a powerful affirmation of one's voice. As one youth participant said, "I just realized I'm a writer."

**Steven Dennis**



# these things I've done in jest

Dalton Derkson

*read children's books in search  
of zen enlightenment.  
talked a blue streak about it  
in a bar full of stragglers.  
sweat shirts yellow with anxiety,  
awaiting your speech.  
slept off the orange of the after  
noon alone.  
held white sheets up to windows  
& muddied them tracing your face.  
awoke to work green hands  
rusty between smokes with the boys.  
moved mauve & bruising  
beneath the bounce in other's steps.  
i broke brain  
contemplating  
a crossroad  
perceived  
at black & white.  
i missed miles of grey road ahead.*



'The Lone Jester' by Melissa Bain

# GLASS TIGER

Leah Dunham

I rubbed the smooth glass against my cheek, feeling the ridges and curves and raised bumps of the perfect carvings slide over my skin. The glass felt cool between my warm fingers. The tiger's four, sharp-pawed legs stood straight and proud, its head arched backwards like a wolf howling at the moon, chest fur ruffled in the imaginary wind.

The opposite of what I felt.

The exact, complete, opposite.

Pride seemed to course through it, filling its amethyst eyes like it could do anything, anything in the world. Even though the glass tiger was the size of my fist, I felt small and insignificant compared to its majestic poise and powerful expression. Sometimes, that proud expression would become more and more familiar and real, until it felt as if I could almost hear her voice echoing through the glass. It would wrap around me, a bit like a blanket, until bittersweet memories washed away any other thought and it felt as if she was here, with me, right now.

But, deep down, I knew that her voice wasn't really there. I knew that it couldn't be, that all I had left were those bittersweet memories, captured within the beautiful glass carving.

My memories of Mum.

*Playing badminton in the yard against her.*

*Watching Ratatouille, her all-time favourite movie.*

*Baking sugar cookies for Grandpa when he'd been sick.*

*Listening to her read bedtime stories to me, many years ago.*

*Trying to sneak a peek into her art room where she'd been working on that special surprise for me.*

The hardest memory of all, the one that made me cry myself to sleep every single night, only to wake me up again.

Mum handed me a shiny box from her hospital

bed, her shaking hand placing the delicate cardboard in mine.

*"This tiger is made from the rarest of glass," she'd rasped as I opened the box. "I hope that when you hold it tight, you'll remember all those days we spent together, me, you, and your father. The tiger is a creature of fierce pride and loyalty and love. Just like our special family."*

Then she'd turned to my dad, wrapped her hand around his, and whispered to us both quietly; *"We'll always be a family—"* She placed her other hand over my heart. *"Because we have each other in our hearts. Always."*

Pain and fear were building up inside me, and I couldn't help but choke out my last words. *"But how can we be a family if you're not here?"*

I would do anything to get those days back. Anything. Just to see her face once more, to hear her laughter, to see her smile.

\*\*\*

I heard a knock at the door.

"Bell!" Dad called from down the stairs. "Pansy's here!" I quickly placed the tiger back in the box and on to the shelf, then opened my mouth to call back.

"Coming!"

I thought about hiding the tiger, afraid that something might fall on it, or that it might get knocked over and break, but I dismissed the thought. I trusted Pansy. She'd been my friend for over three years, and this was the first time she was coming over since... it all happened.

I wanted to show her. She's the kind of person who'd understand.

I slipped out the door, shutting it quietly behind me. The wood floor was flawlessly smooth under my thick woolen socks. I hurried down the stairs, taking them four at a time, then slowly entered the kitchen. Dad greeted me, his worn-down face weary with exhaustion and sadness crinkled the edges of his eyes, but a true smile was on his lips.



"Hey Honeybee," he said as I entered.

I rolled my eyes. "Enough with the nicknames." I hurried to the doorway and opened it wide.

I didn't have time to look before something strong tackled me in a hug. "Bell!" Pansy shrieked as she practically lifted me off my feet. "I haven't seen you in almost forever!"

"Uh huh," was all I managed to croak through her thick sweater.

I carefully wrapped my arms around my friend, grateful for her presence. When she finally let go, her beaming green eyes stared right into my coffee brown ones. "I've missed you, Bell," she said. Not something meaningless about her condolences, like everyone seemed to say.

Pansy was a good friend. "I've missed you too, Pansy," I told her sincerely, leading her into the kitchen and closing the door behind her. "It's really good to have a friend around right now."

"Absolutely!" Pansy cheered excitedly, then accidentally nudged a chipped flowerpot with her elbow. "Whoops," she said as I caught the pot with one hand. "I should be more careful around here. Your house is very... decorated."

I laughed easily, standing the pot upright. "My dad's work. He says the various flowers and pictures remind him of... of Mum." My voice cracked unexpectedly.

I was surprised to hear sniffing beside me. Pansy was tearing up, rubbing her eyes viciously. "Oh, Bell. I'm so, so sorry all this happened to you. I can't even imagine a life without my mother in it." She came over to me and gave me another long hug.

I was so overcome with unidentified emotion. "Yeah, your mum is pretty awesome," I agreed shakily.

"Yeah," Pansy mumbled into my shoulder, her long reddish hair tickling my chin.

When she finally let go, I tugged her toward the stairs. "Come on, I have something to show you." We raced upstairs, our socks slipping on the smooth floor. This was the happiest I'd felt in many long days.

We entered my room, and Pansy flopped on the bed. "OMG! This pillow!" she shrieked in a very Pansy-like way when she saw the tiny plush pillow Dad

had bought for me the day before. It had a tiny panda face sewn into the front.

"I'm glad you like it," I said distractedly while reaching up on the shelf for the shiny box. My fingers brushed the corner, and I lifted it down with the utmost care.

"Here," I breathed as I gently opened the box in front of Pansy. "This is a very special gift my mum gave to me. She carved it herself." I lifted the lid and revealed the gorgeously crafted glass sculpture.

Pansy reached out carefully to touch the tiger's head. Then she stopped herself. "May I?" she asked softly, drawing her hand back.

I nodded, slowly folding away the tissue paper. She reached out and grasped its body, pulling it from the box. Stupidly, my heart jumped in fright. I couldn't bear to see the tiger in someone else's hands. What if Pansy dropped it? What if it shattered into pieces? What if I lost it forever? What if—

After another moment, I couldn't take it anymore. "Give it back," I said a little too sharply. I held out a hand. This was a mistake. I shouldn't have shown it to anyone else. Paranoia started to build up inside me.

Pansy blinked. "Don't worry. I'll be careful." She continued to gaze at its intricate carvings.

"Give it back," I repeated forcefully, now reaching for the tiger. But Pansy held it away from me. "Just a second," she said quickly, but then added, "This really is beautiful."

I felt panicked. With a lunge, I attempted to snag the tiger from her grip.

I missed.

Confused, Pansy fell backwards, her hands flinging up, the tiger flying out of her grip.

I watched as if everything was going in slow motion. The tiger flew and flew, across the room, finally falling down, toward the hard floor.

I watched as it hit the ground.

Shattering.

Shattering.

Shattering.

Into tiny, *endless pieces*.

The beautifully proud, loyal, fierce tiger,  
shattered into dust.

And my heart seemed to break along with it.

I felt like screaming out loud, but I didn't. I  
felt like collapsing into a heap, but I didn't.

I just stood there, frozen in anguish. "*M...my...  
tiger...*" I gulped softly, staring and staring at the  
broken glass.

I turned to Pansy, who was staring at the  
broken glass with a mildly confused expression.

"You—you broke it," I whispered, shocked.

"You—you broke it!" My voice raised higher.

My head was spinning. I couldn't think.

Pansy stared at me in shock, as if she'd  
suddenly realized what had happened.

"N—no, you knocked it away..." her voice  
trailed off. She stared at me. "It—it wasn't *my* fault."

I stared her down, tears welling in my eyes. My  
hands balled into fists. "Yes," I seethed, digging my  
fingernails into my skin. "*You* dropped it! It's *ALL your  
fault!*"

Pansy gave me a wide-eyed stare.

I stared back at her angrily. "Get. Out." I could  
have whispered those words, or I could have shouted.  
Instead, I let all my grief and anger pour out. Pansy  
looked up at me, tears welling in her eyes.

"I... I'm so sorry," she whispered, like that would  
make it okay.

Nothing was okay. Nothing at all.

"Get out," I whispered again, pointing to the  
door. "Now."

Pansy fled. And I collapsed onto my bed.

Huge, choking sobs overtook me. Tears rained  
down my face. "It's not fair," I rasped through the tears.  
"Not fair."

I reached down and shakily gathered the glass in  
my arms and piled it beside me on the bed. I stared and  
stared at the broken pieces, my stomach twisting. All  
those memories of Mum were shattered along with the

glass. As was my heart. This wasn't fair.

"And now I've lost you forever," I couldn't help but  
mumble dully. "Oh Mum, you'd be so disappointed in  
me."

I buried my head in my hands.

And suddenly, it felt as if my mind were flashing  
back to all the things my parents had ever told me. About  
love and trust and kindness and how you should always  
keep your loved ones close. And my mum's last words to  
me. "*We'll always be a family, because we have each other  
in our hearts. Always.*"

Mum would be so disappointed to see me  
clinging to the tiger like it was all I had left. She would  
have wanted me to remember her in my heart, not in a  
glass sculpture. Suddenly, I felt ashamed. Ashamed of  
myself for thinking all I had was the tiger. Ashamed of  
myself for not remembering her from my heart.

I'd been holding on to the tiger like it would bring  
her back.

She would never have wanted that.

I gathered all the glass and placed it gently on  
my desk. The pale evening sun was shining dully on the  
oak wood, illuminating the glass with hundreds of bright  
colours. I carefully arranged the glass in the form of a  
lumpy heart on the desk.

"Maybe... maybe this was meant to be," I  
whispered softly. "It's made me truly realize where the  
greatest memories are kept." I lifted the largest fragment  
of glass. "Not in a sculpture," I pressed it to my heart.  
"Right here."

I glanced out the window, listening as the  
birdsong echoed from the trees, watching the  
neighbour's dog bound across the grass, breathing in the  
scent of fresh summer flowers.

I made a promise.

"Even if the world shattered to pieces all around  
me, even if my life turned upside down, I will *never* forget  
you. I love you, Mum."

That left one last thing to do. I needed to  
apologize to Pansy.

All she had ever been was a great friend.

I was so lucky to have her.





# OCEAN FRIENDS

**Elliott Richardson**

Deep beneath the ocean, there was a little eel named Wolfie. He was a lonely eel, because the other fish were afraid of how he looked. While other fish had beautiful, shiny scales that glimmered and flashed, Wolfie had sharp teeth and beady eyes. Wolfie lived with his mom and dad, who loved him very much, but he was lonely. He wanted friends. One day, he woke up and left his cozy eel nest to see if he could find other fish to play with.

At first, he didn't have much luck. Every fish he approached bubbled with fear and swam quickly away. Little Wolfie was feeling discouraged, but still he continued.

After swimming for what seemed like hours, Wolfie took a rest in some sea grass. Suddenly, there was a flurry of activity and the sea grass that Wolfie was in smacked him on the nose! "Stay away, eel!" the sea grass shouted.

But it wasn't sea grass at all. Before Wolfie's eyes, the sea grass seemed to transform into a creature.

"What are you?" Wolfie asked in surprise.

"I'm a pipefish, of course" the creature said, sounding annoyed.

"Oh, I thought you were sea grass. Sorry! I'm Wolfie," said the eel. He smiled, showing all his teeth.

The pipefish shrank back in fear but didn't swim away. She looked at him for a moment and then said, "My name is Piper."

Wolfie smiled even wider. She didn't swim away! "Will you be my friend?" he asked her shyly. "I'm on an adventure to find some friends who aren't scared of me".

Piper looked at Wolfie and then smiled back. "I would love to play with you", she said. And then looked at him seriously, "just don't mistake me for sea grass again!".

"Promise" said Wolfie and the two of them swam off together to look for more fish friends.

Wolfie and Piper swam together happily for quite a while before they realized that they had headed into much deeper waters.

"Is it just me, or is it much darker now", said Piper looking around nervously. Wolfie was about to reply, when suddenly it became even darker still as the two of them were surrounded by swirls of ink.

"Piper? Where are you? I can't see", shouted Wolfie.

"Me neither!" shrieked Piper.

"Me neither!" said a third voice from the shadows.

"Who is that?" asked Wolfie, looking around nervously.

"Oh, it's just me," said the voice. "My name is Reacher, and I didn't see you there. I was just practicing my hiding technique with my ink and you must have been caught up in it!" The ink started to disappear, and Piper and Wolfie quickly found each other again and huddled close. In front of them, they saw a giant eye blinking at them. The two friends were about to swim away in panic when Reacher spoke again.

"Please don't leave," he said sadly. "I didn't mean to scare you. I was just playing around with my ink."

Reacher slowly swam forward, revealing himself to Wolfie and Piper. He was much bigger than the others, with shiny skin and many exploring arms in front.

"What are you?" asked Wolfie, swimming forward curiously.

"I'm a squid!" said Reacher, and he waved his many arms. "Nice to meet you!" Once Wolfie and Piper were sure that Reacher wasn't out to eat them, the three of them started talking. They quickly determined that they were all a little bit lonely.

"So the other fish are afraid of you too, huh?" asked Reacher sadly. "I can't even get close enough to talk to anyone before they swim away." His arms drooped.

Wolfie and Piper looked at each other and then back to Reacher. "Same here," said Wolfie, and Piper nodded. The three fish floated for a moment in friendly silence before Wolfie spoke up. "Want to be our friend? We're not afraid of you!"

Reacher was delighted. He waved his arms so fast that he made a curtain of bubbles. "I would love that!" he said and grabbed his new friends close in a hug.

Piper squirmed away before getting squished. "Do you mind?" she squeaked.

"Sorry," said Reacher, "I was just excited!"

The three friends swam together, deeper into the ocean. They were talking and laughing and they didn't notice that it had become very cold and very, very dark.

"Guys? Is it really dark all of a sudden?" asked Piper, who stopped swimming suddenly.

The other fish stopped beside her and noticed their surroundings. The water was colder, much deeper and darker than any of them had ever seen. Before they could react further, Reacher's big eyes caught a shadow moving silently in front of them.

"Did you see that?" asked Reacher, trying to track the shadow without moving. "Who's there?" he said, trying to sound braver than he felt.

And then, a light where there was just darkness before. The three fish stared at it—they had never seen something so beautiful in the ocean. Without even thinking about it, they all began to swim closer to it.

Piper was the first to approach the light. She reached a fin towards it when the light spoke! "Hello!" a small voice exclaimed, holding back a laugh.

Piper yelped in fear and swam back to be with Wolfie and Reacher. The light spoke again.

"What?" it said, "you've never seen an anglerfish before?" The light tilted itself back to show the fish underneath. It grinned at them, showing off sharp teeth. "More specifically, I'm a dreamer anglerfish, which is why I look like a shadow!"

"Whoa," said Reacher, sounding excited. "I've heard about you, but I've never met an anglerfish before." He swam around the light to get a better look, then turned back to his friends. "We must be in the Midnight Zone."

"Well, that explains why it feels so cold," said Wolfie, wrapping himself up tight.

"Who are you?" asked the dreamer anglerfish curiously. "I don't get many visitors this deep."

"I'm Wolfie and this is Piper and Reacher," said the eel. The pipefish lifted her fin in greeting and the squid waved a few of his many arms. They stayed back, still a bit afraid.

The dreamer anglerfish swam closer to the three friends to get a better look. "My name is Flicker," she said. She shone her light on each fish one by one. "What are you doing down here? I don't think you belong in the Midnight Zone."

Wolfie said, "We are on a journey and looking for friends." He looked back at the other fish before he continued. "...Do you want to join us?"

Reacher spoke up. "All the other fish are scared of us, because we're different, and they don't want to play." Flicker took in their comments and tipped her head to the side, shining light into the shadows of the deep water.

"Please," said Piper. "We'd love more friends!"

"Well, ok," said Flicker with a shrug. "It has been pretty lonely down here."

They all started to swim back up to where the sunlight reached the water, but Flicker stopped them. "Wait!" she cried out. "I can't go up that far. I need to stay closer to the Midnight Zone! It's dangerous for me to go close to the surface, it makes my tummy hurt!"

"Well, we've made it to the Twilight Zone, which is in between the surface and the Midnight Zone," said Piper. "Why don't we play here? We can see a bit better, and Flicker can stay and play with us."

"Plus, there's lots of good hiding spots around here," said Wolfie as he eyed a crack in a nearby rock.

"Speaking of hiding," said Reacher, "let's play hide and seek! You all go hide, and I'll find you." He covered his enormous eyes with his arms and started to count.

The friends scattered! Wolfie quickly swam into a hole in the rock, Piper disguised herself like a bit of sea grass, and Flicker slowed her swimming to become as shadow-like as possible.

"...six, seven, eight, nine...ten!" Reacher



uncovered his eyes and darted around, searching for his friends. After a long while, and some intense searching, Reacher found Flicker and Piper, but not Wolfie. The three fish worked together to find their fourth friend, and it wasn't until Flicker's light reflected off the eel's eye that he was found. He came out of his rock hole laughing at how well he was disguised!

The four fish were delighted by their game and spent the afternoon taking turns hiding and seeking.

Each fish got the chance to show off their special hiding

skills: using shadows or ink or small spaces.

Eventually, they grew tired of hide and seek and took a rest.

"I'm glad we're friends," Wolfie said, smiling at the other fish. "What shall we play next?"

Before anyone else could answer, Reacher grinned and spread out all his arms. "Tag—and I'm it!" he said and darted after his friends.



## WEREWOLF

### Josephine Sawyer

The night was dark, and moonlight was leaking through the faded, old, tattered curtains of the little worn-down shack. Inside, a man slept peacefully, his hair and beard greying with age, and his face weathered and tanned from many long days of working in the sun. Beside his little metal bed lay a shepherd's stick, elegantly carved with a sheep's head at the top. It was made of wood, and polished so much that one could use it as a mirror.

The little bed creaked and groaned noisily as the man shifted in his sleep, still dreaming.

It looked like nothing could wake this man. Not the gentle cooing of an owl, nor the wind rustling the trees. Not even the frightened bleating of his sheep cut short and drowned out by a loud howling.

\*\*\*

"Mom, why can't I go to the village by myself?" Cassie complained loudly to her mother, who was busy discussing a trade in the village square with the butcher, a tall, fair-haired man named Tom. Her mom looked over at her sternly, her blue eyes scanning Cassie with an icy gaze.

"How many times do I have to tell you?" she snapped. "You should know!"

Cassie gazed up at her mother evenly. "I don't know anything," she said, opening her eyes wide and pretending to be innocent. "Nothing."

Her mother's disappointed sigh sliced Cassie like a knife, but she wasn't about to let it show as her mother turned back to the butcher with an apologetic look. "We'll talk about your behaviour later, Cassandra."

Now it was Cassie's turn to sigh. She hated it when her mother talked to her about her *behaviour*. It wasn't her fault she was smarter than her mom.

\*\*\*

"Now, Cassie," her mother started in her 'trying to be nice' voice. "I've talked to you a lot about this, okay? And I'll only tell you one more time."

Cassie waited patiently. She knew, word for word, what her mother was going to say. There are werewolves, they ate some shepherds' sheep, blah blah blah. The only reason she had brought it up was because she had an argument.

"So you see?" Cassie's mom was saying, wiggling one of her eyebrows towards Cassie, which she knew Cassie hated. "That's why you're not allowed to go alone."

"Okay," she mumbled, but then spoke up. "You know, all my friends go to the village alone." She tried to imitate her mother by wiggling her eyebrow, but figured she only ended up looking silly.

"Yeah well, those are your friends," her mother responded sternly, and her tone of voice told Cassie that the conversation was over.

*Hey Cassie, me and some friends are going to the village to hang out at 11:00 pm tomorrow night, and we were wondering if you'd like to come. It's okay if you can't or you're scared of werewolves like your mom is, but either way, please reply as soon as possible.*

*Yours truly, Astrid*

Cassie crumpled the note with one hand, the other clenched in a fist, words spiralling in her mind: *too scared to go... afraid of werewolves.*

Who did these people think she was?

Astrid would've never written anything like this. Cassie knew that she knew that she wasn't afraid of werewolves. But, then again, Astrid had been growing more and more distant from her, ever since Pearl had moved into town. Still. Something was wrong with the letter. Maybe it was the fact that the ink was red, or that Astrid was nicer than this, but whatever it was, that letter hadn't been from the Astrid she had been friends with.

With the paper still tightly clenched in her hand, she stiffly moved to her small writing desk on the corner of her room. Cassie loved her room. It was painted a deep indigo blue, which made it look like you were looking into the night sky thanks to the little stars that her dad had painted before he'd gone to war.

Cassie felt tears spring up in her eyes, and she had to blink rapidly to keep the tears from pouring down her cheeks as they sometimes did. Sitting down, still blinking, she grabbed a piece of paper and started to write.

*Dear Astrid,*

*Thank you for your letter and I just wanted to remind you that I'm not afraid of werewolves. As proof, I will meet you there.*

*Yours always,*

*Cassie*

She sat back with a sigh. Now all she had to do was wait until tomorrow.

\*\*\*

Cassie woke up just as her mom started cooking breakfast, and the smell of pancakes was so strong and irresistible that she could do nothing more than walk out of bed and down the hall as if she were in a trance. And in a way, she was.

Sitting herself down at their old wooden table, she noticed her mom was wearing a dress, something that she almost never did, and she never wore a bright yellow dress.

Her mom turned towards her, smiling and

showing off all her teeth.

Cassie stared at her, her mouth open and her mother's smile faded.

"What's wrong dear?" she asked in a kind voice, and not her 'I'm trying to be kind but you're making it hard' voice, but an actual kind voice. Something that Cassie hadn't heard in a long time.

"Uhh, it's just..." Cassie stammered, still staring at her mother as she smiled at her.

"Honey? Are you okay?"

"Yeah, um, it's just, well," she took a deep breath. "Why are you wearing that?" She looked up at her mom, afraid she'd start yelling, but instead she laughed.

"Sweetie, have you forgotten that today your father's coming home?" Her mom's smile widened, and her eyes shone. "Isn't it great?"

"Wait," Cassie said slowly, unable to believe her ears. "You mean that dad is coming home today? For real?"

"Yes!" her mother squealed so loudly that Cassie was sure the neighbours had heard. "Of course, unless he's been, well, dead, but I'm sure we would've gotten a message of some sort if he had died."

Suddenly Cassie wasn't sure. "Are you positive that we would've gotten a letter?" she asked her mom.

"Yes, I'm sure, sweetie." Her mom placed her hand reassuringly on her back and Cassie gave a little contented sigh.

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The dark cloudless night was cold, and the full moon hung just above the mountains in the distance. A chill ran down Cassie's back. A full moon was when werewolves transformed.

*Oh, don't be an idiot, she told herself. You sound just like mom.*

So she continued, creeping silently along the old, brick road that led from her house to the village. Off to one side of her, she could see the silhouettes of a large group of people.

*That must be Astrid, she thought, but something was wrong. She started to run. Sprinting along the road, stumbling here and there where there were*



cracks in the road. Then it hit her; what had been wrong with the letter. How had she not noticed it? The words had been written in blood.

A fear so strong that it made her blood turn cold forced her to stop—but it was too late.

Astrid and Pearl stood before her. Astrid's menacing eyes glowed in the dark, her hands curled into fists. Pearl's beautiful white hair was all over the place. Cassie started to back away, but more people came out, hidden in the shadows of the building surrounding her.

Then they started to transform.

Astrid's nose lengthened into a snout, her eyes shrank back into her skull, becoming black and beady.

Her body grew hairy and shaggy, her clothes falling off to reveal muscular arms and legs. Then, in the village, all of them began to howl.

Cassie turned, her face full of fear. "Please, Astrid, don't do this. You were my best friend!"

Astrid growled, low and menacing, and Cassie understood. Pearl had been a werewolf when she had bitten Astrid and everyone else.

"Look, Cassie," Astrid said gruffly. "You're going to have to die tonight, or you'll tell everyone we're werewolves."

"But why?" Cassie sobbed, unable to hold her terror back. "We were friends!"

"What do you mean, we were friends? You pushed me away!"

Cassie looked up in surprise. "No, you befriended Pearl and left me!"

"B-but you left me!" Astrid was stumbling over her words now, unsure if what she was saying was true anymore.

"Astrid," Cassie murmured, "it's okay."

Cassie reached out her arms, Astrid leaned into the embrace, and they clung to each other.

Pearl watched on in disgust. "So, Astrid, are we gonna kill her or what?"

"I don't think we should kill her," Astrid spoke softly, still hugging Cassie.

"But aren't you worried she'll tell everyone we're

werewolves?" Pearl asked, taken aback.

"No, not really," Astrid replied.

Pearl sighed and turned towards the other werewolves. "This is what I was afraid of." She pointed to Cassie and Astrid. "No one can know that we are werewolves!" She sprang forward.

Cassie turned towards her just as Pearl's teeth met her neck.

No!" Cried Astrid, but it was too late. Pearl's fangs had sunk deep into Cassie's neck, the light fading from her eyes.

Cassie's eyes met Astrid's, and she said one last sentence. "Tell my mom I love her."

Okay," Astrid said, tears running down her cheeks, soaking her fur. "I will."

She slumped to the ground as well, Pearl standing over her, blood gushing out of a deep bite mark at the base of her neck.

"Oh, I don't think you'll be telling anyone anything," Pearl growled at Cassie's body.

\*\*\*

Alone in a house, a woman in a bright yellow dress cried, sobbing over two objects she clenched in her hands: a newspaper clipping and a letter. Only a small portion of both objects were visible.

The newspaper read:

*The body of a 13-year-old girl was found this morning in the... been identified as Casandra Felicity Meadows, daughter... werewolves.*

*We are terribly... Jack Tom Meadows has been killed...*

The woman continued to sob as the truth came to light. Both her daughter and her husband would never come home.

noc

# Sanderlings

Shelley A. Leedahll

*Morning's first human footprints on Combers Beach.  
Irregular waves hammer barnacle-crustecl islets,  
and much closer, flood current chases our hiking boots.  
Go on, keep trying: we can play this game  
in our slickers all day.*



'Spring Storms in Tofino' by Erin Tzvetcoff

*Kelp-tangle. Gulls rummage out oyster and crab bits.  
And there, a kindergarten of sanderlings  
plays follow the leader, leaving beak-pecked Braille in the sand  
beside a calligraphy of washed-ashore eel grass.  
Moon and egg yolk jellyfish, crustaceans: the shoreline's story  
of textural opposites. Its syllables feel good on the tongue.  
You climb a slick outcrop  
to capture what a camera simply can't:*

*the Pacific's animal rawness. Violence and vitality.*  
*There you are, becoming smaller*  
*in the distance, closer to the edge and roar.*  
*Could this be the top of life?*

*Where Combers meets Long Beach,*  
*I too find a rocky rise. White crustose lichen flowers*  
*the rocks. On the horizon, the last breaths of sea fog*  
*become nothing, and my tongue tastes like salt.*

*Shuck boots, peel off socks. Jeans rolled to shins—*  
*not high enough.*  
*My sprained right ankle, your plagued Achilles tendon—*  
*both relieved in the numbing surf.*

*The comical sanderlings are obsessed: black legs blur*  
*as they race in sync toward receding waves.*

*And here come the birders*  
*with notable lenses and tripods*  
*to seize the rare snowy plover on the scene.*  
*You stick-draw our initials in the sand.*  
*I pocket a brown-and-tan oyster shell.*

*Everything I fear and desire—erased.*  
*Here, I only am.*



# FISH

## Catriona Hicks

As I slipped through the gathering crowd, I felt insignificant. Like a petal falling into a bustling river, I wound around men and old women who barely acknowledged my passing as their necks strained like herons to see above the others out into the street. No doubt looking at the new shipment of FISH. Females Inciting Senseless Harm. We knew that that name was nothing but lies. Another excuse to label women as something evil so men could put them in their place.

I managed to peer through the gawking crowd and caught a glimpse of the show. Lined up in rows, dozens of women were held in place by masked soldiers with batons in their belts and guns slung over their shoulders. My eyes followed a girl, maybe twelve. She was wearing lime green shorts which did nothing to protect the fragile skin on her knees which was pressing painfully into the asphalt.

A gust of wind blew my hair over my eyes, a gentle reminder to continue on. But as my gaze lingered on the women, I couldn't help but make the connection that, like salmon, struggling to beat the current, they thrashed in the grips of their captors.

The girl with the lime shorts was fighting with particular vigor, until the masked soldier holding her pinned her arms to her side. Bile rose up in my throat when I noticed the cobalt ribbon around the female soldier's arm. She'd been sterilized.

"To their knees!" A commander shouted, not even bothering to speak to the women he knew would rather die than obey his order. He aimed his command at the masked soldiers. I continued walking, wincing at the clean sound of batons whacking the back of the women's knees.

I used to think about helping them. About joining protests or forcing myself through the crowd to save them. That was before I realized how insignificant I was. One person against an army is the equivalent of an ant against a tsunami. Surely every last person in this crowd had made that connection. That was why none of us did anything when the commander shouted again. "Raise your guns!"

I put my hood on as though that feeble fabric would shield me from the deafening sound that was bound to erupt at any moment, and I finally made it away from the crowd. I walked along a roadside ditch until I found the familiar trail that led to the river where I caught my food. I needed to come back home with something. Another night without a meal and I feared my brother wouldn't wake up tomorrow.

The forest was eerily quiet. My footsteps rustled some twigs, and I could hear birds flitting above me in the sun-battered branches. I breathed in the smell of the dirt, the trees, and the rushing river. Then my heart caught in my throat.

BANG.

Gunshots rained. I didn't dare turn my back even though I knew I wouldn't be able to see anything from where I stood. I covered my mouth with my hand and my shoulders shook with each ear-splitting scream. Suddenly the forest's beauty didn't feel like a blessing. It felt like a mockery, taunting me with its peaceful perfection while our city was torn apart from within.

When the government started solving overpopulation by sterilizing females, obviously there was resistance. The government labeled the resisters as enemies of humanity and commenced executions en masse. A quick fix to the population problem.

When the shooting finally stopped, my downcast gaze led me to a bush heavy with orange gold berries.

I was viscerally reminded of the women as I dropped to my knees. But hunger triumphed over sorrow, and I began filling my trouser pockets with sour-sweet sustenance.

I imagined my brother's face, how his eyes would alight with pride when I return. How he'll wait for me, nursing his bad leg while I march to his bedside with berries, he hasn't had the chance to eat since last spring, when he risked everything to protect me.

Mindlessly, my hand drifted to my *own* cobalt ribbon.

I hadn't wanted to comply with this new world. At one point, I even considered joining the FISH to fight

against the injustice. One afternoon, I was seated at the edge of my bed, lacing up my boots to prepare to join a protest when my brother came bursting through my door. He was barely recognizable. Layers of crimson poured from his wounds. I leapt to my feet. "What happened?"

He looked at my boots, then his eyes shot back to mine. "Don't fight," my brother urged. "Take this." He slipped a hand into his pocket and pulled out a bloody bag, tossing it to me since he couldn't leave the support of the doorframe.

I moved out of pure shock, unwinding the laces of the bag and beheld the cobalt-coloured armband inside. I looked back up at my brother, horror etched on my face. "What did you do?" The look in my big brother's eyes was cold, resolved and unfeeling. "What I could. For you."

"You took this from someone! Someone who sacrificed everything to survive, and you took that away!" I couldn't believe it.

My brother rolled his eyes and I nearly vomited at the stranger who stood before me. "Oh, grow up. I didn't want the world to turn into this either but here I am, *adjusting*. Making it so we don't lose another damn family member to these protests! Now tie that around your left arm and get the first aid kit."

The shock wore off while I cleaned my brother's wounds, and I too understood what I had to do. *Never fall out of line. You'll only become a burden to those who really matter.* With each stitch I sewed I grew up. I grew until I was so high above my past self that I could pass the executions as though they were nothing more than tragic news stories I would soon forget on my way home.

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I headed back down the path, my hands hovering over the precious berries in my pockets. My nose crinkled as I turned onto the same street where the slaughter had taken place. Nobody had gotten around to moving the bodies yet, probably to teach a lesson to anyone else thinking about rising up.

I watched a man kneeling over a woman. It seemed as though he were grieving over her body, his hands clasping the woman's, his body heaving with—oh. He slipped the watch from her wrist and the ring from her finger.

He stood up sharply and shoved his winnings into his pocket as his gaunt eyes met my own. For a moment, caught in my stare, he looked guilty, his eyebrows drawing together in fear, his teeth clenching in shame. Then he saw my cobalt ribbon and all his features turned into a sour self-righteousness as though he were in a position to admonish me for selling my soul. I glowered at his back as he trudged away.

I kept my eyes forward as I continued my walk past the bodies, but the corner of my eye caught it, that lime green colour. I stopped in front of her. She had fallen in a peculiar way. She was still kneeling, propped up on her heels, her head lolled in a way that kept her in balance.

Kept her from seeking rest on the blood-stained street. I didn't blame her corpse for seeking a final shred of dignity.

I couldn't help but look at her knees. It looked like so much pressure, even though her skin had now gone bloodless. I shrugged off my jacket and knelt before her, carefully placing the soft fabric beneath her knees. At least in death, she could feel less discomfort. That's the best a person like me could do.



# Supernatural

Lilika Bagshaw

## CHAPTER ONE

"Katie!!" yells my older sister from the kitchen.

"What?" I say, peering down the stairs from my bedroom to see her standing at the bottom waving a frying pan around.

"I think you missed your bus!"

"WHAT? Again?" Sometimes I wish my superpower is waking up early.

"Yeah."

I dash down the stairs with a comb, two books and a sock. I run to my backpack and toss my books in.

"I put your lunch in for you," says Christie, a little smirk pulling on the tips of her lips.

"What did you make for me? It better not be that ham and mustard sandwich." I give her a look of annoyance. I run to the living room and rip my phone from the charger, while vigorously brushing my hair. I throw my brush on the couch and sprint to the kitchen and grab a half-made bagel from Christie's hands, while putting my sock on. I take my things and run out the door.

Christie steps on to the porch. "Don't do anything crazy!"

"Don't go skipping college!" I turn back to her, giving her that smile that tells her 'I'll be fine'.

My older sister is the only one who knows about my secret. She's my best friend and caregiver because my parents are always away on big business trips. We never talk about their jobs, and I have no idea what they really do, but they make a heck of a lot of money.

I drum a little beat on our mailbox, and then I sprint to the forest in our back yard. I walk a decent way where no one can spot me, then I transform into a hawk and soar out of the forest. I see my sister staring up at me and giving me that wicked smile she always does when I transform. You know, the smile that lets you know you did something stupid. I know I might get caught, but it's not like I'm gonna walk to school.

I glide through the air for a few seconds before finding my bus. I fold my wings and dive down onto the roof. I perch there for a while until the bus gets close enough to my school called Greenford High. Then I spread my wings and jump, catching the air and gliding for a bit. I circle around the school once before I find my usual hiding spot and fly in and make sure that nobody is around before turning back into a human. I brush some feathers off my clothes before walking towards the school. I climb up the steps to the entrance to see Natalie waiting for me at the top. Natalie and I have been best friends since preschool, and we were lucky enough to stay in the same classes all our lives.

"You wake up late again?" asks Natalie.

"Yeah." I look up at her and we start laughing.

"You really need an alarm," she says. "See you in class." She turns and waves.

"K, bye!"

I run to my locker, throw my books in, pull out my biology notebook covered in stickers and my textbook. I notice a note stuck in the vents of my locker. I pull it out. Here we go again. I open it. I get these every morning.

*I know you have the gift, it reads.*

*Meet me in the gym at 12:00 pm sharp.*

I never listen to this; I just throw it in the trash and hope it doesn't come back the next day. I'm about to throw it away when I notice some writing on the other side.

*P.S. If you don't come today, I will call the D.S.F.*

Definitely a threat, but what can I do? The Destruction of Special Forces or D.S.F., is an organization of special police that eliminates people like me. I guess I'll just have to do what this person says. I don't have lunch at 12:00 but the kids a grade higher than me do. I'll just have to get a bathroom pass. I stuff the note in my pocket and rush to my class.

## CHAPTER TWO

He wakes up in pitch black, surrounded by monsters, all with ugly, cruel faces snarling and hissing.

He tries to move, but he can't feel his body. He can't even scream. He stands quietly as the creatures rush towards him.

He wakes up finding himself in a bed, gasping. He looks around and sees a tiny grey room, with shelves filled with books all around him. He sees a desk and a computer beside a mirror. A closet is on the other side.

Good. He is in his room. Safe. He just had his usual nightmare. He gets up and turns his light on and walks to the mirror. Only, he doesn't see himself, just the blank wall behind him. *Not again*, he thinks. He uses his willpower to reappear and looks at himself up and down before realizing he is naked. He spins around and shoves himself in the closet and puts on a big beige sweater, and long baggy ripped denim pants. His curly ink black hair is everywhere, indecisive on where to lay. He rummages through his sock drawer before pulling out a pair of Christmas themed Rudolf socks. He throws them on and checks his mirror one more time before walking out the door. Then he quickly comes back and grabs his phone and science homework off his desk.

He steals a look at the empty room at the end of the hall, wishing it still inhabited his sister.

He steps down the rusty stairs to see his dad holding a cup of coffee and reading the newspaper. He turns his head and gives him a look over. "Anton, you look so depressing with those clothes on. Go change."

"I know, I couldn't find any other socks," he says with a smirk.

"Ha-ha, so funny," his dad replies.

"I'm not changing my clothes and you know it." He drags himself to the kitchen and pours himself a cup of coffee.

"And no coffee either, you don't want to end up like me." His dad stares him down long enough for him to put the cup of coffee down on the counter and grabs a muffin instead.

He takes his black backpack off the bench and stuffs his lunch and homework inside. As he closes his door, he gets a text from his girlfriend: *Where are you? I'm waiting...*

He texts back, *Just left the house.*

While walking down the creaky metal steps of the front porch, he looks up at the sky to see a beautiful hawk fly up above, doing loops and tricks. He knows

exactly who it is. Hopefully, she will understand how urgently he needs to talk to her.

He gets to school twenty minutes early and makes his daily round to drop off a note in the girl's locker. Then he meets Sonya, his girlfriend, in their usual meeting space and chat for a bit before the bell rings. He gives her a long kiss and hugs her goodbye for the day, then walks toward his math class and gets ready for a long six hours of torture.

### CHAPTER THREE

At about 11:50 am, I check my watch and ask to go to the bathroom. Miss Lansdale, my French teacher, always lets us out whenever we need to. I walk slowly towards the gym door, dreading to see who was giving me those notes. As I peek in through the door, I am relieved to see a guy who looks not much older than me, pacing the gym floor. Honestly, I thought I would have to confront one of the football guys or something. So, I think I can handle this.

He sees me and immediately lights up. "You're finally here!"

"What do you want? And what's your name?"

"I'll have you know I have been waiting in this very gym every day for the past month. Do you know how much work I missed?" he sneers. "And my name is Charlie."

"I wasn't going to just meet up with a stranger and talk to them about the D.S.F.," I reply. "Why do you want to talk?"

He clasps his hands together. "I know you can shape-shift, and I wanted to talk to you about it because I have a gift too."

I hold my breath. I haven't met another human with abilities like mine, ever in my life. "And you want me to help you?"

"Please," he says. "My sister was taken by the D.S.F. because they 'caught' her using her power. But it was all my fault. I was outside with her and using my ability, when a man saw us and phoned the D.S.F. My sister said that it was her that had the gift and she was taken away a few minutes later. My dad always thought that she went missing because he didn't see her leave. I would have told him, but he supports the D.S.F and it's their mission to eliminate all people with gifts. I want you to help me save my sister." He pauses for a



moment, and we stand in silence.

"I'll help you," I blurt out.

He looks up at me in disbelief. "Really? You would do that for me?"

"Yes, but we need a plan." Am I crazy? Would I risk everything for him? I just met him a few minutes ago.

"I already have one."

Just like that, we exchange numbers and walk back to our classes.

#### CHAPTER FOUR

Charlie can't believe she decided to help him find his sister. He always thought his plan was crazy and nobody would ever help him, but ever since he saw her shape shift, he knew she would be the only one to understand.

Splayed out on his bed, he is on a call with Katie. They talk about his plan to sneak into the D.S.F headquarters, which he believes is where his sister is trapped. She's probably somewhere inside the tower. Katie says they need to leave as soon as possible because her parents are coming home in two weeks.

"What about taking a sky train into the city on Friday? That leaves us enough time to get there and back before Monday morning, right?" he asks.

Katie says, "We will just have to skip a day of school, and if it goes badly and we're there for longer, we can just say we're on a trip." He hears a muffled voice come through the phone. "What should I say to my sister?"

"It's better no one knows. Tell her you're going on a trip with a friend."

"Ok, I've gotta go. See you tomorrow at school!"

#### CHAPTER FIVE

Friday morning, I wake up with my backpack on my bedside table already stuffed with supplies. My sister knows I am going on a 'very important trip' with my friend out to the city and knows I will be coming back sometime on Monday.

Charlie and I are meeting up at the main sky train at 8:00 am. I get in a taxi and arrive at the train station a little early. I search through the train for Charlie and see him at the very end, sitting near huge

windows so we can see the view.

"Hey Charlie!" I say, waving. "Do you want to go over the plan again so we can—"

"What plan?" A familiar voice stops me in my tracks. I turn around to see my mom and dad staring at me. I look down and suddenly notice their D.S.F. uniforms.

"What plan, my dear?" my mother asks again.

Charlie steps in front of me. "Leave us alone." Then he turns to me. "Do you know them?"

"Yea..." I muster. "They're my parents."



# Lost Woman

## Cosmo Marchand

Ms. Dowdy had things to do. She had been rushing all morning, a poisoned smile poised carefully on her glossed lips. Her hair had been the first priority of the morning; pinned back and curled slightly at the ears, it sat prettily on her head as if it were her a royal crown. Her sister, Mrs. Jexton, observed the blank expression on her face with apprehension. It was so utterly devoid of emotion that Mrs. Jexton was beginning to feel concerned. She watched carefully as her sister walked quickly towards their mother, Mrs. Dowdy, with whom she compared two pieces of lace. Mrs. Jexton watched the interaction with sharp eyes and a small frown, searching for a small tremor or a hint of a slump in her sister's physique, but found absolutely nothing out of the ordinary in her movements.

Ms. Dowdy, finding her lace query satisfied, left her mother for some other task. All around her, women hurried, carrying with them all manner of delicate objects. One held a large bouquet of fragile, soft roses. Another carried a tray of small sandwiches, cut precisely into uniform squares. Still another, assisted by two others, carried a large creamy white dress. A simple cut with a simple design, the material was so proudly expensive and rich, and unlike others of its kind, that the woman rushing about the room could only stop and stare. Ms. Dowdy's smile did not waver for a moment, even with the sickening scent of jealousy wafting inconspicuously through the room. Mrs. Jexton observed with a frown, certain that something was not quite right.

As the women resumed their business, Ms. Dowdy, Mrs. Jexton, and Mrs. Dowdy followed the women with the dress. They entered a small private room, pretty in pink and white and adorned with delicate blossoms. On the walls stretched large mirrors, shining and reflecting the little company. Then Ms. Dowdy began to undress, slow and controlled, as though the movements were not performed by her but by some master puppeteer holding the strings from the sky. As soon as she was finished, Ms. Dowdy was offered the dress. Assisted by the ladies, she stepped into the silky tresses, and with a sharp intake of breath, it was fully buttoned and secured. The woman around her gasped and exclaimed, as free with their

compliments as they were with the quiet, jealous glances they exchanged behind Ms. Dowdy's averted eyes.

Kisses were exchanged and quick alterations were performed, before the ladies trailed out of the small room to leave Ms. Dowdy to finish getting ready. With her family gone, she took a moment to stare sternly at herself in the mirror, soft smile intact, to search for imperfections. She glanced over her silken face and unassuming smile and found perfect, practiced beauty. She glanced at her dress, stretched so tight over her ribs and chest that she had to breathe slightly shallower than usual. Perfection.

She raised her eyes to search her hair, certain it would complete the picture. But there, on the nape of Ms. Dowdy's left shoulder, curled a small piece of hair, completely out of place. A shudder ripped through her, violent and disconcerting, and she found herself shocked at it. Deciding to ignore her strange reaction, however, she picked up a small ebony pin from a dresser and set about to fix it.

As she picked at the little piece of hair, she found herself inexplicably angry at it. Something coiled and twisted in her stomach as she watched the strand of hair, and without the ability to stop, she began to pull. She looked in the mirror in shock as dainty fingers dragged the hair out of its bun until it stuck up on the top of her head. With practiced poise, the fingers reached back into her hair, no longer with thought of pinning it back but only with malicious intent. Her eyes widened and narrowed with disgust as, strand by strand, her bun was picked and pulled apart until the pieces resembled snakes.

She was no longer confused. She hated her hair as she had never hated anything before. The very thought of it made her sick. Bile bubbled up her throat and she gagged at the reminder of her body, so visceral and inescapable as it was. She clawed at her face until it was pink and streaked, and her eyes bugged like the pale unseeing eyes of a deformed corpse. Seized by sudden shudders she convulsed on her chair, tears streaming down her eyes without a hint of sadness. No, Ms. Dowdy was not sad. She was furious. She shook

and shuddered, and her teeth chattered and clenched. All at once she began to scream, a terrible bone-chilling scream that ripped from her throat like it was clawing its way out on bony wings. She thrashed on her chair as a woman possessed, limbs flung and crashing carelessly into everything that surrounded her. There remained no regard for safety or even humanity, only that deformed body seizing and the inescapable screaming. Its eyes were fixed on the mirror, enraptured in its own horror, and it smiled at itself—a true smile, with raw bloodied lips.

When Mrs. Jexton heard the scream, she knew instantly that her sister had begun to break. Followed by a flurry of ladies, she rushed into the small changing room and took hold of Ms. Dowdy's shoulders as she thrashed and shook in the chair. The ladies streamed into the room until every single one of them was standing shoulder to shoulder in the space, calmly watching Ms. Dowdy convulse. Mrs. Jaxton motioned to three of them and they moved forward, armed with compacts and brushes, and set about painting Ms. Dowdy's face. Two women held her arms to her sides and two others held her legs while she thrashed under their grasp. More women set about combing back her hair, pinning each piece back until it settled into its former beauty.

Soon, Ms. Dowdy was fitted back together, section by section. By the time everything was put into place, she could barely move, twitching softly in utter exhaustion. She had been reduced to a child crying for her mother, unable to articulate even the simplest of things. The light hurt her eyes, and her bones ached from beneath tissue and thinly stretched skin. She whimpered and curled into herself as tears began to leak from the corners of her eyes like some kind of perfunctory service. Mrs. Jexton and Mrs. Dowdy knelt before her and clutched her hands. They talked softly to her like they might talk to a child after a tantrum, reassuring her. Ms. Dowdy babbled like a baby pleading, sobbing, imploring the women to help her escape. The women laughed softly. They told her that she was being silly, that she was overreacting. Their faces were painted in amusement and soft compassion, but their eyes shone with a different emotion. A heavy guilt settled in each of their guts, and looking at Ms. Dowdy, they felt only pity. They were disgusted at themselves, completely, for dimming her rage, for putting her back together. Slowly, she regained composure and became perfect once more. She smiled

self-consciously and said she didn't know what came over her. Her eyes betrayed no emotion, and her words were apologetic. The woman hated her for it.

Mrs. Jexton smiled. The beast was dead, and her duty had been done. Ms. Dowdy would live a good life, an expensive life in a beautiful home where everything would be perfect. Her sister, the one she remembered as a child who ran gayly down grassy fields and argued with her father over dinner, could not survive this life. So, the exorcism was complete, and only beauty remained. Beauty had always been better anyway.

"I do."

The words were spoken, and the audience collapsed into applause. The blushing bride gazed lovingly into her husband's eyes, alight with joy. All around her in the audience the women laughed and smiled, overjoyed for their friend the new Mrs. Smith. Only the most observant could see the grief written in their faces as they mourned the woman, Ms. Dowdy.



# A sad shriveled jester

Robert Bowerman

*A sad shriveled jester*

*weary of speaking truth*

*to power, curls up*

*and sheds a tear*

*for what has been lost.*

*No longer young he looks*

*back over the years*

*and wonders what did it*

*all mean?*

*Kings laughed and powerful*

*people pretended to listen*

*but nothing changed.*

*Courtiers still shuffle*

*pieces on the chessboard*

*and another jester mocks*

*their moves.*

*Now wiser, this fool*

*knows one man alone*

*is not enough.*



'The Lone Jester' by Melissa Bain



# Hospice

Shelley A. Leedah

Had he grown up in my era, he would have been a tree-planter. That Hydra-haired guy to drag out a battered acoustic, pluck a pick from deep inside his pocket, and sing “American Pie”—all the verses—near the end of the party, when the last of the drugs were gone. He would have slammed his mouth onto mine without warning, minced my heart out with his smoker’s teeth, then licked the ends of each of his fingers, a wildcat who’d verily enjoyed the meal. But the road apparently forked, for he became someone quite different. Now he occupies a warm bed in an open-windowed room at the top of a Craftsman his distant nephews will fight over, and I have been hired to sit with him until he dies.

Wind rattles the poplars, as if cheerleading my charge toward the finish line, and a week ago a crow touched down on the window ledge, but it was premature. As quickly as it landed, the twig-legs pushed off. The bird morphed into an inky smear against the white and watery sky. Randolph’s ready to go, but the world’s not giving him up just yet.

I set my book down and study his hands: soft, spotted toads. He raises one—the right, the other lies helplessly by his side—and I bring cold oolong tea in a tumbler. I hold the glass against his bottom lip, still red as holly berries, and his blue eyes—they’ve resisted the degradations of age and illness and would fit into a four-year-old’s face—send fingers of pleasure across my spine. I wipe his mouth with a linen handkerchief—he’s from the time, like my father, when men carried hankies and wore galoshes—and pull the blanket higher up the railway of his chest. I stroke his hand like a real nurse or matron, automatic with my ‘There, there’ that mocks present and past. If he could speak, he would denounce me. And I would not blame him.

Thirty years ago, I was a twenty-year-old undergrad and often mysteriously found myself in scholarly stratospheres far beyond my intellectual league. I was a good student, yes, but a student, just the same. Or perhaps mystery played no part in it. I knew how to make the right noises, as they say. How to query and animate when professors engaged me beside elevators, or at Faculty Club socials arranged for visiting

writers and scholars. I knew just enough about migrating songbirds, Zone Three perennials, the Boer Wars (they loved when I said Voortrekkers), and Jung to titillate the academy. They approved of my slim-hipped athleticism—swimming and tennis—and I made sure they knew I was studying French cooking.

In my second year, invitations were extended to faculty dinner parties. I could pin my hair up and put on a little black dress, inauspicious cubic zircons in my earlobes, and assimilate with the best of them. The secret is to say little, lead a lot. Most people only want to talk about themselves.

The Dean of the English Department was precisely what I think of when I hear the word rakish. At fifty-five, Randolph Krist still seemed to be getting used to his long legs and duckish feet, sheathed in calf-leather—brown with small black flecking, and thick soles underfoot. The shoes gave him an effeminate little bounce, which I believe he quite enjoyed. Randolph’s wife was Danish, and short. An engineer who designed urban sewage systems, Ilse was reputed to be some kind of genius: there was an intimation that Canada was lucky to have her. Seated, Ilse swung her legs as she spoke; her miniature feet dangled like a child’s. “I am a strictly technical person,” she would say, snapping her Ts in that endearing Danish way. They did not have children, and I’m not sure they even believed in them.

A dinner party in the spring of my final year, my name in black cursive on a name-plate next to the Dean’s. A mistake, I thought. A dozen dinner guests, and two invited students. The other, Geoffrey, a brown-nosing classmate from a hard right family—he quoted Blake and Keats, and had recently taken to wearing spats and bow ties, each oddity rendering him ever more metaphorically kickable.

The host—a Shakespeare professor fond of making her students work in groups—was showing off with salmon en crouete. When I reached for the new potatoes, my right thigh ever so slightly bumped against the Dean’s left. Against Randolph. My fingers may have grazed his when I passed the salad: frisée, avocado, and blue cheese. He kept turning to me, conspicuously including

me as topics of discussion—mayoral candidates, Joni Mitchell albums, the host's new Tibetan terrier—blew back and forth across the crystal wine goblets and heirloom silver.

Randolph was a Nabokov scholar—oh, irony—and flavoured his social discourse with Nabokovian trivia, whilst simultaneously, I felt, probing my intellect. Was I aware that Nabokov's process included expanding ideas into paragraphs on hundreds of index cards, and shuffling these to determine his novels' structure? Yes. Had I any interest in lepidoptery? Not particularly, though as a teen I'd been part of a moth club. And which of Nabokov's titles was my favourite? Cigarette smoke and port made an enticing cocktail of Randolph's breath. His eyes were an eclipse: dangerous to view directly. "The film-novel, *Laughter in the Dark*," I said, to the safe space between his ear and chin. "His use of colour in that text was extended far beyond clichéd symbolism." Randolph might have pressed his leg momentarily to mine. "You know," I continued, voice low and tempered to register an appropriate mix of internship and acumen, "wherein a writer might, for example, use the colour black to represent sin, death, or despair, or red to signify passion. In fact, I believe Nabokov spoke of symbolism with vitriol." A distinct pressure against my knee. I caught my breath, and my brain flared with gold sparkles. Suddenly snow-globe; I was turned upside down.

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The Krists were flying to New York for an extended Easter vacation. I volunteered to house-sit; they insisted on paying me. Palms and philodendrons were watered, the lashing yellow cat fed, and I'd sit in Randolph's bow-windowed office, ringed in floor-to-ceiling books, and vibrate. I slept in his bed, pressing his pillow to my breasts like a head. I poured through old photos—yes, there, the lanky youth in a black T-shirt, cigarette not so much hanging as falling from his lips, hand raised in the stop position.

Another of him reading on a bed. Blurry, black and white, and creased. But still.

Shortly after I'd completed my English degree (with Great Distinction) and published a few introspective poems in respected literary journals—I harboured no delusions; others were much stronger writers—I was offered the position of Secretary to the Dean, College of English. Work was, and is, my religion, and my buoyant disposition was, I believe, a breeze that

flounced the dust off the aging department.

My wage afforded the purchase of my own small bungalow at a time when friends were still living with parents or rooming together in basement suites and sterile new apartments, where walls were too thin and one smelled her neighbours' curry or meatloaf in the hallways, or heard headboards rhythmically bang the wall.

Randolph's seasonal gifts included tickets to the good theatre in the crime-plagued west side of town. I acquired culture by association; I often attended productions with the Krists. I'd come to feel a commensurable affinity with them both, though I was aware (and they were not) that I was perhaps too attentive, too ready with the right question, the punctuating pause, or sigh, or two fingers on an age-spotted arm. I expect they sincerely believed they knew me. Ah, the ruses, the ruses: one plays so many games in a lifetime, she risks losing track of the rules.

The thimble of collegial prestige, the healthy income, the shoulder-rubbing with local and visiting literati—these I could have walked away from. Only Randolph kept me trekking across the University Bridge every morning—weather be damned—toward the pretty buildings on the other side. My alma mater was weft from greystone excavated north of campus, and, when that inventory ran dry, from Tyndall stone, quarried at Tyndall, Manitoba. Once my darling had said "Good morning," I could begin to breathe again. The cocktail of intellect and peculiarity—it quickened my blood.

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No one can refute that I was always there. I was there when he put his little Ilse in the ground. When he was forced to deal with budget cuts and department in-fighting and personal income tax audits. I helped with his Nabokov research. All those years, five days a week, the door between our adjoining offices left open, I waited. I hung on the wine of his words, his aggregate wisdom.

He never once reached for me.

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Dementia is ruthless. When he could still walk, he'd grab the backs of the dining room chairs and push them from room to room, as if this were his job. He sees what's not there, and swats at me sometimes, and repeatedly says, "Shut that damn dog up."

He does not seem to care for movies, but I

pretend he still appreciates documentaries. I scroll through the possibilities and find one about African children making their insufferably long and parched ways through the savannah's snakes and lions to attend a one-room school. I have arranged his pillows and here we are, watching or not watching, together. My chair's pulled close to his bed, and I'm preternaturally aware of his shallow breath, the leaf's-width of distance between us.

October rain audibly collects in the eaves troughs. A shadow flaps through my peripheral vision. So little time left.

I lie on my side beside him, undo the buttons of his striped pajama top, slide it off his thin arms while supporting the adolescent weight of his back. Those determined African children—three barefoot siblings with bottled water tied to ropes around their waists—are singing their way through the impossible heat. Randolph's abdomen dips beneath the cage of his ribs. "Like a coulee," I say, following the hollow with my fingers. "Like what the glaciers left behind as surprises."

His face is a road map. The hands every second their age. His feet I know to be tragedies. Ah, but the banquet of his skin. I float my palms across the sculpture he's become, press my nose to his neck and smell the honey of him. Rain on the window. Rain, now, on his face.

The children have made a safe journey and sit with red pencils at old-fashioned desks. I hold my love's head, my hands on either side of his face—tucked wings—and look for reason, but see only the unremarkable passing of my own life and the stony truth: I was not careful about what I wished for.

Randolph opens his mouth. Spittle's dried white in the corners. He opens, and closes. Again. Again. "What kind of bird are you?" I ask. But of course, no intelligible answer comes.



The **VANCOUVER COASTAL SEA WOLF** is a subspecies of northwestern wolf found along the Pacific Northwest coast, particularly Vancouver Island. They consume a diverse diet that varies by season including salmon, crustaceans and sea mammals, deer fawn and elk during the summer and beaver in the winter. They are intelligent, adaptable and beautiful creatures.



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vancouver\\_Coastal\\_Sea\\_wolf](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vancouver_Coastal_Sea_wolf)

# May Long Weekend

Janet Miller

I'm a kid, on the farm. Every spring after the snow is good and gone, I tromp around in my gumboots, rubbing horses' warm necks, counting eggs against chickens, followed by a straggle of cats. I explore: under the porch, wood shed, root-house, barns, fence lines, corrals, the iron-red ditch behind the house, the swampy bit behind that. I am not on the hunt for anything in particular.

What I find, almost every year, is a nail to step on. A nasty rusty nail punctures the rubber sole of my boot and stabs into the fleshy ball of my foot.

I limp back to the house, track mud, bloody up the kitchen floor. My parents sit me in a chair, grip my foot, hold it up to a good light and come up with a diagnosis and a course of action. A good soak in a concoction of warm water and that purple dye kept on hand to treat livestock but does for a kid as well. A train trip to Squamish Hospital, sixty miles south.

There is no clinic or resident doctor in Pemberton.

I've been to Squamish for emergency medical attention already a few times in my young life; first in the PGE speeder, unconscious in my father's arms when I was three and had eaten my mother's heart pills; and when my cousin pulled my sleigh across the frozen pond, did a fancy whiplash turn and I flew off and landed my face on the ice.

I've had my tetanus shot. The Gentian Violet, a slosh of iodine, a band-aid applied. The boots are okay after a swish-out with water. I get used to having at least one wet sock.

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As I get a little older, I step on nails less often. This is good because my older sister and her friend connive a plan to ride their horses all the way down the road and over to the Mount Currie Rodeo on the May long weekend. I whine and beg until they say, "Okay. Okay. You can come." Our parents agree to let us do the twelve-mile ride. Our father's precautions are few: "If you open a gate—shut it," and "Skirt the village. Be careful of cars."

Saturday morning of the long weekend, we dress in our brand-new blue jeans from Mr. Pipe's store. I already have a sunburn—from the high school track meet the day before. For our horseback ride, we don't wear sunglasses, or pack water, or sandwiches.

We saddle up; Dad has made sure the horses, my sister's, Shammy, mine, Pooch, are properly shod and the cinches tight. We wait for Margaret's whoop and holler as she rides into our yard. Her horse, Lonesome, tough old thing, is high of wither, narrow of hip. Margaret is not.

Off we go, on our bay horses; passed Erickson Road, Lex and Elenore's, Dill's straight stretch, across Ryan Creek bridge, Miller Creek Bridge and on to Uncle Morgan's where we pick up our cousin, Vera, who is riding Highlife, a dappled grey and spunky, maybe part Arabian.

Our own horses are sturdy and mostly dependable, although Shammy likes to nuzzle her rider after she stops short and sends that rider over her head into a crumple on the grass. Pooch bucks and can jump any fence he pleases.

Back out to the road with Vera we are joined by a bunch of boys on their own horses who have appeared out of nowhere. The boys I know but not the names of their scruffy horses. It was magical how they knew where we'd be and when.

Sammie, Jimmy, Eddie, and Bob bring a zesty element to the remainder of the ride to Mount Currie. They race their horses, break branches and try to whip each other, shout out yodeling cowboy songs. Tease the other girls. Nothing these wacky boys do makes any sense to me.

I know that Sammie fancies Vera. They grew up on farms on either side of the road. To his great unresolvable disappointment, Vera surpassed his five-foot-four stature a couple of years ago. What can he do with all that pointless longing but gallop his horse until foam collects around the sides of the bridle's bit, scoop up the grassy-greenish horse slobber and throw it in Vera's direction over and over.



Although I wish to be in the midst, I keep Pooch to the side and myself out of the action. I wonder how tall I will get.

These are the kind of boys I've seen, at the winter snowmobile races, flirting with girls that they presumably have a crush on—they sneak up behind, pick the girl up and hurl her headfirst into a snowbank. I think I will never be one of those lucky girls. Never.

At Taylor's Corner, to avoid riding through the town of Pemberton, we leave the main road, take a side route back to the Lillooet River and follow along the dyke, opening and closing gates, then under the railway bridge, along, and back out to the road at Zurcher's.

At the dusty rodeo, which is really horse, chuck wagon and foot races, I sit around on Pooch in the shade with other kids who are sitting around on their horses. I give rides to kids from school who ask, get money from Mom, eat hot dogs, and drink grape pop.

One year, not the first one, I entered the women's race on a borrowed sorrel horse. Tang is leggy, fast and jumpy. Although my legs tremble when I'm up in the saddle, I think we might just win. By the halfway point of the huge round track, in a storm of pounding hooves and dust I lose my stirrups and downgrade my goal to *do not fall off*.

On Saturday and Sunday nights we drive home with the family at the end of the day. Dad arranges for Shammy and Pooch to board somewhere—that's his department—we don't give it a thought.

On the Monday, we ride our horses all the way home under the hot sun, accompanied part of the way by some of the same, some different, gang of nutty boys. I am still an outlier, observing but not participating in the shenanigans. By the time we finally reach home, I am suffering an exuberant exhaustion, sunburn on sunburn, legs rubbed raw from the seams of the new blue jeans. I look forward to next year. I'll be older. Braver. I'll do some flirting of my own.

I am fourteen when we plan our final ride to the Mount Currie Rodeo. My sister isn't sure she wants to commit, and Margaret and Vera are both going off to Nursing School in the fall. If it happens, it will be the last one.

I am ready. I am so much older now. I will bat my eyes at one of those boys; I'll decide which one

when I see who shows up. I can sing cowboy songs, gallop a horse. I won't complain if I get thrown in a lake or a snowbank.

Am I there to decide which boy might warrant my smile?

Am I there in my new jeans, laughing at nonsense?

No, I am not. I have stepped on a nail.

I sit on the brown plaid couch with the dark orange curtains drawn claustrophobically against a scorching late May sun. My foot soaks in a bucket of purple dye. My whole family is at the Mount Currie Rodeo. I don't care if anyone rides anywhere.

After the nail incident, my right foot became infected and swelled up to the size of a ... a small chicken.

There is no clinic or resident doctor in Pemberton. Still. My mother calls around and finds a doctor, here for the May long weekend, on his hobby farm. We don't know what sort of medicine Dr. McGillvary practices, but if he's a vet, all the better. A vet will know what to do. The worry with both man and beast is always blood poisoning.

My father drives off in the truck and brings the doctor back.

I recollect that my father sat on me. He said he just held me firmly so I wouldn't move when the doctor sliced into the bottom of my right foot with a freshly sterilized razor blade held in the grip of a pair of pliers from the basement.

"There's a rodeo this weekend," the doctor says, stating the obvious. He holds tightly to my ankle, looks at his incision. "No bucking broncos for you, young lady." He doesn't even have a little black bag. Maybe he is a Doctor of Divinity, a Doctor of Philosophy.

He doesn't know all that I am missing.

He doesn't know my heart is probably broken and I haven't even flirted yet.

He doesn't know I will never have a handful of horse slobber lobbed in my direction.



# Plain Jane

Amy Mattes

*Miffed.* Out of west coast oysters. East coast oysters only. Jane sneered at the sandwich board and ran her hand straight through the fine chalk cursive. She turned to the nicely dressed couple waiting in line in front of her.

"We're celebrating our one-year anniversary," the woman said to the host with her back to Jane's face. He smiled too large, and his eyes creased.

"Well, allow me to get you a nice table by the bay." He corralled them near the open waterfront seating, where a thin pink line of sun held up the ocean and the moored boats bumped and scraped against the docks in an ambient lull.

When he returned to the podium Jane shot out, "I'm celebrating too." Clutching her laptop to her chest and still wearing her sunglasses.

"Okay," he said, his torso bowing slightly. "What are we celebrating this fine summer evening?"

"Me, it's just me. I'm celebrating my birthday," she said, "and I'm getting a divorce." She wished to sound unapologetic, finessed, but it was an off-putting tone.

The host ushered Jane to a table near the bar, tucked away like a shameful hiding place. He fanned the menus on the table side that didn't face the ocean, so Jane yanked the opposite chair and sat, lifted her glasses, and asked immediately for a glass of Viognier. "You're out of west coast oysters, how? You just opened?" Her comment wasn't about the oysters, rather the way they made her feel superior to those who could not stomach them. Their lavish, sexual quality. It was a boost of dopamine she could administer herself, but it was true, the further their freshness, the farther their fun. She regretted her announcement of the split. It was sharp. When it came down to it, the leaving, the act of moving out was going to be silent. She would stow away with her things and wish to be soft. She opened Tinder on her phone, not sure if she was truly ready to take the leap of defeat. The men all young and had beards and held fish. She couldn't find a photo where her forehead wrinkles were minimized.

Her intention was to be in a fine establishment for some alone time with her laptop and maybe some John Coltrane. The keys and her fingers meeting in a bebop fast tempo of relief, an unpredictable virtuoso making sense of the world one stroke at a time.

The host returned with a complimentary glass of Prosecco and apologized. Jane flipped her phone upside down and took a sip, thought it was Baby Duck, or even sparkling apple for expecting moms, and shuddered. When the waiter brought the Viognier, the first sip elevated her good tastes and placated the promise of her evening escape. She would after all, be home the rest of the weekend, parenting without his help, having her tits pulled on in the middle of the night, her sweatpants stained with mysterious crud. A pile of their laundry to fold, little socks stuck to all her silk.

Her body hummed with the weight of confusion, the inertia of uncoupling and how to go about discussing the finances. It coursed through her insides, tightening at her bite. It made swallowing difficult. Plain tired of her brain shadow boxing against her heart. Her stomach held the answer all along. She knew that she had failed, would end up renting, hyper independence telling her to walk away without what she was due. Pride is an annoying thing.

A group of ladies wearing sashes and tiaras were celebrating a fiftieth birthday, they cackled in unison, and threw their heads back and pecked at their food like chickens. They were well dressed, their hair dyed to the roots, rings and accessories, fine bags propped against the legs of the table and hanging off the backs of chairs. Jane wondered who took care of them, how they got their needs met, if the flourless chocolate cake was the pleasure centre of their evening.

Across the lounge a large group of men came in, fresh from the golf course, still dressed in hats and sweat-wicking fabrics. One was loose and buzzed and lingered behind. They ordered lagers and cheered and one of them, the alpha, stretched his body and arms beyond the lengths of the bench, sitting with his thighs agape. Jane was terrified of them, their arrogance, their propensity, and disregard. They left their hats on and spoke to the alpha like a focal point of testosterone

worship. He sometimes puffed up and bellowed and they all nodded in agreement.

Jane turned her gaze to the two men occupying the bar. They talked of boats and motorcycles and then Super Sexe.

"You never been to Super Sexe? It is the most iconic strip club in Montréal," one said.

"Was," Jane interrupted.

"That's right, they closed. You been there?"

"A lot. I used to live in Montréal. Fun city." Jane hoped her comment would make her seen, enjoyed, like she still had value or shelf life. She wanted to impress the men, who were drab and passed middle-aged, with rolls sticking out the sides of their boring shirts. One of them turned his chair towards her, while the other didn't. As she perused the menu, she fantasized for a moment that the man who moved to see her more clearly, would in turn offer to buy her dinner. 'It's your birthday, you're getting divorced? You? But you're so fun and you've been to strip clubs, you dine alone, you must be brave and confident,' he'd say, 'You deserve it.' He would fiddle with his motorcycle gloves, continuing to try and make conversation with her, but the momentum was stale, and Jane returned to her menu.

Jane ordered and when the caprese salad arrived, an anxious weight gripped her heart. She could not expand her lungs. She was on the verge of tears. She was all the things *he'd* said to her: too intense, too reactive, too dramatic. She felt around her mouth for the bits of Wolden salt, internalizing the monologue that she was a woman who was just too much. Jane was the source of his anger. The reason he drank. The reason his birthday was ruined two years in a row. The presence of the waiter brought her back from this blame belief, convinced it was all her doing.

"How is your salad ma'am?" he asked. Jane resisted the urge to say, 'don't call me ma'am.'

*Would you also like to say I look tired?* She swallowed a block of tomato. The salad was, in truth, too plain for twenty-six dollars. It did not have enough dressing. It was like eating an arrangement of fresh cut veggies and she didn't have the gumption to mention it. They were a new establishment, feedback would be helpful, but she did not have the confidence left to say so. She was held together with her defenses. The home fires, the gas lights burning in her soul, reminding her

that to be an assertive woman, was to emasculate you husband. To speak your mind, was too much. To admit the load was too heavy, was weakness. After all, he drank because of her and maybe now, in this moment, she drank because of him.

She ordered the spaghetti vongole and when it arrived, the grit in the clams ravaged her teeth. She powered through because the herbed buttery juices were soothing, but buttered noodles could be made at home. Did she need an uptick in her antidepressants? Was it all just mom rage? Was everyone staring? The ladies continued laughing and the men postured. The men at the bar returned to discussing engines, the ones that roared and purred at a snap of their fingers, cooperative vibrations between their legs with torque and thrust that didn't talk back or nag.

After the main course. She ordered an Americano and a lavender crème brûlée. A seal to the deal of a tasteful experience, despite her inability to relax. The server came by and placed the cream, the sugar, the saucer, then the spoon. All brought and placed delicately with intent to charm her.

"I like my coffee, like I like my women, you know." Jane gripped the coming sarcasm in her teeth, not positive she needed to hear more. "Strong and valued in the workplace," he said, nodding and Jane smiled large, puffed out a laugh and released the tension into the air.

"How true," she said, and he nodded again and winked. She knew he was gay. When there was nothing left to order or consume, Jane paid the 230.00-dollar bill and got into her SUV. She questioned whether the meal or she were of any value. The money could have been spent on new sheets, or soccer registration, groceries. An experience that previously brought her satisfaction, now felt disappointing. Was it because the ultimate one, a marriage, had ended? Oysters, after all, were just juicy sea water, flecked with E. coli and brought to life with vinegars and hot sauces that mask, or enhance the taste, depending on who you ask. She rested her forehead on the cool of the steering wheel and turned the ignition over. Before driving away, Jane stared over the water in a trance, disillusioned with the start of her forties.

She backed out of the lot carefully, but drove fast along the paved road, recognizing for the first time since the Prosecco sip that she was tingling with the

warmth of alcohol. This brought waves of bad memories from the time she drove home from a wedding with her son when she was drunk. The time that only two beers made her consider suicide, the bottles upon bottles of vodka she found in their house, the shed, his truck. It was alcohol that ruined her marriage, not her, yet the escape from reality now, to drink, was the gearshift to alter real life. The sweet caress of the buzz undulating within.

She called a friend on speaker, and they didn't answer. She didn't leave a message. She willed herself to feel the power of a song, but it wouldn't come. She tapped off the radio and pushed down on the gas. She opened the windows, pretending to smoke a cigarette and driving erratically, because no one cares about mothers. No one cared about her. She let her topknot fall, shaking her hair across her cheeks, gritting her teeth, and growling like a threatened dog. The engine

revved and she considered driving into a telephone pole, only the area had undergrounding. Her vehicle bounced in a pothole and crossed the centre line. She swerved back into her lane, careening onto the gravel side shoulder, nearly losing control. She pulled over. Turned off the engine, gripping the steering wheel until her knuckles throbbed, and lost their colour. She screamed and then she cried.

She opened the Tinder app on her phone and decided she would go ahead with a bio. If anything, who was she now, what was she looking for? Someone who wasn't a little bitch when they were sick, someone who didn't spit in the sink or drive too fast or hate the police. Old, discontent, and insecure, she wrote, if you don't see these red flags coming, you're an idiot.



The **NANAIMO ARTS COUNCIL** is a grassroots volunteer charitable organization comprised of local artists and arts organizations in Nanaimo and neighbouring communities. The council supports artists in multiple genres, particularly visual, literary and media arts, by creating developmental programs and engaging the community through print, online media and public exhibitions in venues across the city. NAC welcomes everyone interested in pursuing arts and culture in our community, including artists, arts organizations, businesses, volunteers, donors and sponsors.

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# I've Got You Now

## Robert Bowerman

Cal knows that Pete has had more than a few when he calls. His slow careful enunciation gives him away. Cal hears Ruth begin to stir beside him.

"Been a while," Pete says, "what say we go for a couple of beers?"

One month, thinks Cal. He's been expecting the call ever since he turned on the T.V. that morning and saw hundreds of Afghans swarming the airport in Kabul. Unbidden, images from the past flooded his consciousness and threatened to unmoor him from the anchors that held him to the present. His wife's gentle touch and his son's smile held him firm, but Pete had been drifting ever since he got back. The current of recent events might sweep him away.

"Are you okay?" Cal asks.

"When I saw the news, I lost it and well I started breaking things. Judy kicked me out."

"Where are you?"

"The Brass Rail."

Cal rings off and dresses as quietly as he can but by now Ruth's awake.

"Pete called. I have to go," he says.

"For heaven's sakes." Ruth rolls over and covers her head with the duvet.

On the drive over, Cal remembers the wedding. Pete and Judy had been childhood sweethearts and they'd lived together for three years before they married. They held their reception at the Legion. On wood panel walls hung a portrait of Queen Elizabeth, memorial plaques, and photos of fallen comrades. All the old gang had gathered along with new friends, recent recruits about to deploy. Cal smiles wistfully at the memory of the fresh unlined faces full of hope and confidence. He'd been the best man and before the music and dancing began, he proposed a toast. "To Judy, who's managed to tame the lion. She makes us all want to be better people."

It was all true. Judy had changed Pete, curbed some of his wildness. It was here that Cal met Ruth; never had the world seemed so full of promise.

Two weeks later, in the first week of July, Pete and Cal stepped off a Hercules transport onto the shimmering tarmac of the Kandahar International Airport and into a country of lunar landscapes and dried-up wadis. Sometimes, behind rounded foothills, Cal saw the white jagged edges of the Hindu Kush cutting through the clear blue sky. For a moment he imagines he can feel the heat and taste the dust. A dust as fine as the talcum powder Ruth had used on their son's bottom. Months after he got back, violent paroxysms of coughing still seized him and left him wheezing for minutes.

Most of all he remembers the stink of sweat and fear.

It's closing time when Cal pulls up in front of the Brass Rail. Pete flags him down as if he's a grand prix driver finishing a race. When Cal gets out, Pete claps him on the shoulder.

"Glad you could make it, Ruth let you off the leash, eh?"

Cal ignores the question. "What're you gonna do now?"

Pete pulls up his pants so that his ass-crack doesn't show. He's not wearing a belt.

"Got plans. Plenty of fish, know what I mean?"

"Sure, sure, but what about right now?"

"Say, let's go to Marco's booze can. Should be open by now."

Marco's place inhabits the basement of his house from where he sells liquor and beer to people in the know.

"I dunno Pete, Ruth'll be worried and I gotta work tomorrow. Why don't you crash on the couch? You could stay until things settle down. I'm sure she won't mind."

The last time Pete stayed over he'd puked all over the carpet. Pete glances at him, then turns his head away and laughs. "Nah, a few brewskis with Marco and the guys and I'll be good. Something'll turn up."

Cal doubts this. Pete's burned too many bridges. He thinks he should give Marco a heads-up. Better if someone keeps an eye on Pete. Cal shivers in

the cool of the night, but Pete doesn't seem bothered by the cold. Marco's place is close by, so they walk along the strip past adult movie houses, dollar stores, thrift shops and a fast-food joint that reeks of stale grease. Cal knows they look an odd pair. Pete's a good six inches taller and eighty pounds heavier than he. Age and inactivity have softened Pete's features and a paunch strains the buttons of the floral shirt he wears. Because of a limp, Cal struggles to keep up. When a motorcycle backfires, Pete jerks his head, whirls around and drops to his knees.

"It's okay, everything's okay, you're home now," Cal says.

"Home, yeah home." Pete stands, shakes his head from side to side and takes a couple of deep breaths. From a plastic dispenser he extracts a small white pill and swallows it.

"You ever think about them, Kenny and Mandeep I mean? And all the others?" he asks.

"Matter of fact I called their families this morning. I figured that the news stirred up a lot of memories."

Pete shakes a fist and begins to shout. Across the street, a couple of late-night revelers quicken their pace. Their footsteps echo in the distance.

"What was it all for? Christ Cal, the bastards came back, and it'll be like we were never there." By the end of the sentence, Pete's voice cracks and he stops walking and leans against a lamppost. His shoulders heave and moisture streaks his face. For a moment it looks like he will break down completely, but when Cal moves closer, arms outstretched, Pete waves him away.

Cal lets his arms fall limply to his side. "Anyway, I passed on your regards," he says.

"Yeah, thanks. I keep meaning to call but you know -" Pete's voice trails off. He throws back his shoulder and starts walking again. "To hell with it. Let's get drunk."

They get there just after two, and the place is going full tilt. Pete snaps his fingers and sings along with the music. It's a mixed crowd; university students looking for something authentic, business types there for the women, the women there to service them, and musicians who come to jam and to listen to the retro tunes that Marco likes. Hard-core drinkers sit in the dimly lit recesses of the room and drink until closing

time. Marco polishes glasses behind the bar and his eyes dart back and forth as he scans the room. He lifts a hand and smiles to acknowledge Pete and Cal when they come in. Cal stops to talk to some old friends. By the time he joins Pete and Marco, Pete's working on his second beer and retelling a story that Cal has heard too many times.

"Remember the big game? What happened afterwards?"

"Sure do," says Marco, "that was something else."

Cal recollects a glorious fall day in their final year of high school. The leaves of the trees had turned into a riot of color and the weather was unseasonably warm. The three of them wore the uniforms of St. Josephs, but they soon shed their burgundy blazers and loosened their ties. They sat together in the stands smoking weed and sharing vodka hidden in a brown paper bag. Pete drank more than he and Marco. As the game entered the final minutes and the score began to mount, Pete got louder and louder. Cal could feel his stomach tighten as Pete began to taunt kids from the rival school. Somebody threw a bottle, and the fight was on. All this had happened over twenty years ago, but to Pete it seemed like yesterday.

"So, there I am, standing on top of a bench. I got one of the little pricks by the scruff of the neck and with my free hand I clock another guy in the nose. Blood all over the place, cops had to break it up. Jeez it was fun." Pete finishes his beer and Marco brings another.

Cal remembers it differently. He'd never been in a fight and only the fear of letting his side down stopped him from walking away. In desperation, he grabbed the guy nearest to him and hugged him close. They waltzed round and round until they both collapsed in a heap too exhausted to do anything but gasp for breath. He'd heaved a sigh of relief when the police came.

Over the stereo, James Brown starts to sing:

*Whoa ... I feel good, I knew that I would ...*

Pete moves away from the bar, a beer bottle microphone in his right hand. His left hand stretches out in front of him and his hips sway as he begins to belt out the words. People raise their drinks and some clap but when he tries to do a leg cross-over he runs into trouble. He lurches and reaches for a table to

steady himself, but his momentum carries him on top of it. A woman in a slinky short skirt screams as the table upends. She finds herself wearing her cocktail.

Her client, a fat man in a checked sports jacket, falls flat on his back still in his chair. Now Pete's on the floor propped up against the table. He still clutches the beer. Except for James Brown, the room has gone quiet. Pete looks at Cal, shrugs, and examines his bottle.

"Hardly lost a drop." He turns to face the fat man. "Sorry about that buddy." Pete leers at the woman while he says it. The man, still dazed, doesn't answer.

As Marco and the doorman rush over to put things right, customers start to back away. Cal can hear murmurs of disgust and he sees the smirks on their faces.

But they hadn't been outside the wire the day a light armored vehicle ran over an IED. And now Cal is right back there again. Up top, Mandeep and Kenny sit back to front, exposed from the waist up. They die instantly from the blast. Down below, it's a nightmare of vomit, Red Bull cans, candy wrappers, smoke, and shrieks of pain and terror. Cal sees blood from inside his pant leg pool onto the floor below. The A/C has been knocked out, and soon the heat, fear and closeness begin to suffocate him. He feels the darkness coming.

From far way, he hears Pete say, "Stay with me, I've got you now." Pete leans down, slaps him awake and pulls hard on the back of his body armor. Cal hears grunts and then, inch by inch, two hundred pounds of dead weight lift straight up until he's clear of the driver's hatch; a triumph of adrenalin, grit, and love. Eager hands help them down and then he's carried across the dusty road until they gain the relative safety of hand-hewn stone walls. All the while there's the whine of rocket propelled grenades exploding all around them, tearing big chunks out of the rotten ground of a manure field. Behind the wall, he feels rough hands probe his leg, then pressure. The RPG's suddenly stop, and they wait for the choppers. He smells the acrid smoke of burnt wiring and hears the staccato of urgent commands behind him, but looking forward everything is peaceful, a pastoral scene of mud walled structures with thatch roofs and thick adobe walls.

For months afterwards, Cal woke up night after night dripping in sweat and shouting. Ruth would cradle him in her arms and soothe him. Slowly, she brought him back. She'd got him into counselling and made sure

he never missed an appointment. Cal knew that Judy had tried, but Pete never went and never talked about it.

Cal watches as his friend shakes off offers to help and struggles to regain his feet, then lurches and almost falls. Cal catches him, offers an arm and step by step they start to move ahead.

"I've got you now," he says.



# Standing In Your Place

Paige Pierce

*here  
take these words  
into the warmth of your hands  
bring them back to me  
love-worn and broken in*

*hear how I use the languages  
roaring from the back of my stomach  
to settle into you  
and your midnight eyes  
downcast  
timid and holy*

*you were born into literature  
so you do not know the growing pains  
of finding salvation  
scraped and bruised  
between the spines of something cliché*

*I am water-logged  
so the only explanation  
is that you showed up at my door  
and I opened it to find poetry  
standing in your place*

# Spring Rain

Kamal Parmar

*You came in the gentle glimmer of early Dawn,  
when the world is still in deep slumber,  
your gentle pitter-patter on my roof top  
and window panes reminding me of an Angel  
who once visited me in my dreams.*

*Drawing aside my lace curtains,  
I saw your misty veil with its faint trickle of raindrops  
sprinkle the bosom of the earth,  
just awakening from the deep sleep of winter.*

*As far as the eye could see, there was magic everywhere.  
Tulip buds on the verge of blooming,  
purple petals of the crocus unfold, breathing in Spring,  
pink frilly rhododendrons unfurl, as gentle Spring breeze caresses them.  
Pearly white snowdrops bend low to kiss the hallowed ground,  
its fresh earthy smell rising up in the newly born morn.*

*I look up,  
the dark veil of the night has already lifted.  
A gentle breeze sweeps in,  
and the flouncy clouds drift away.  
The rain becomes a drizzle,  
as a faint crescent moon still blinks from behind the drifting clouds.  
The earth fresh and reborn.  
Spring rain.*



# About the Contributors

**LILIKA BAGSHAW** is in 8th grade and likes to play soccer and volleyball, and loves to bake. She enjoys reading fantasy and romance books, which inspired her to write her short story, 'Supernatural,' which appears in *Sea Wolf 2024*. If she is not writing a story, she's daydreaming and making up tales in her head. She doesn't know what job she wants when she's older, but she loves working with kids, as well as writing. This is the first story she's entered in a contest but not the first one she's written. She wishes to enter more writing contests in the future!

**MELISSA BAIN** (born 1976 in Whitehorse, Yukon) is a professional full-time artist based in Nanaimo, BC. She is self-taught in the arts and creates with a Dionysian nature—displaying an expressive, intuitive power in her unique, boldly-coloured paintings. Melissa paints in various mediums, including oils, acrylics and ink on canvas. Her work is versatile in style, ranging from illustrative abstracts to realistic and expressionist figurative, portraits and landscapes. Melissa has exhibited her artwork in various Canadian galleries, art fairs, private shows and retail. Her work has been licensed commercially, allowing for international distribution and recognition of her work. Her works can be found in many private collections around the world. Her acrylic painting 'The Lone Jester' appears in *Sea Wolf 2024*.

**SONJA BILLARD** was born and raised in Saskatchewan. In her early years of art, she took art education courses, was involved in art clubs, and showcased her work in group exhibitions during her career as a physiotherapist. Participating in both solo and group shows over the years, she developed her work from mostly landscape to abstract floral and her favourite, mixed-medium abstract. Sonja loves exploring ideas of time and space and the joy of nature and expression using a varied, saturated color palette and often found objects. Her collage/mixed-media painting 'Wish Up On A Stair' was selected from the 2024 Ekphrastic Celebration entries for the cover of *Sea Wolf 2024*.

**ROBERT BOWERMAN** is a retired teacher living in Nanaimo. Among others, his work has been published in *The New Quarterly*, *The White Wall Review*, *Sea and Cedar*, *Portal Magazine*, and on the Nanaimo Arts Council website. He is the winner of the Nanaimo Arts Council Ekphrastic Poetry Celebration (2023), the Van Isle Collective Poetry Contest (2023) and the Islands Short Fiction Review competition (2022). He has been awarded the Meadowlarks Award for short fiction and the Bill Juby award for academic excellence at VIU. His short story 'I've Got You Now' and poem 'A sad shriveled jester' appears in *Sea Wolf 2024*.

**DALTON DERKSON** is a poet and radio host residing on the traditional territory of the Snuneymuxw First Nation. His work has been published by *Discordia Review*, *Book\*Hug Press* and others. He is a co-host of Into The Void on 101.7 CHLY-FM. His poem 'these things i've done in jest' was the ekphrasis of 'The Lone Jester' by Melissa Bain and appears in *Sea Wolf 2024*.

**LEAH DUNHAM** is in grade 8 and competes provincially with Nanaimo's artistic swimming club. She loves reading and writing fiction, although she can rarely seem to finish her stories. Leah loves drawing as much as she loves writing and swimming. Her short story 'Glass Tiger' appears in *Sea Wolf 2024*.

**CATRIONA HICKS** is in grade 12 and loves swimming in the ocean and reading books with her cats. She is inspired by nature and her favourite television programs. She speaks Japanese, and her dream is to have a job that lets her travel and experience new things and maybe write about them. Her short story 'FISH' appears in *Sea Wolf 2024*.

**SHELLEY A. LEEDAHL** is the author of thirteen books, including poetry and short story collections, novels, an essay collection, and two illustrated children's books. Her most recent titles are *Go* (poetry, Signature Editions); *The Moon Watched It All* (illustrated children's book, Red Deer Press); and *I Wasn't Always Like This* (essays, Signature Editions.) She has been the recipient of several international fellowships, and frequently leads writing workshops, writes book reviews and edits manuscripts. Leedahl lives in Nanoose Bay and Ladysmith. Her short story 'Hospice' and poem 'Sanderlings,' an ekphrasis of Erin Tzvetcoff's 'Spring Storms in Tofino,' appears in *Sea Wolf 2024*.

**COSMO MARCHAND** attends Gulf Island Secondary School and lives in Duncan with her parents and two dogs. She is an avid reader of books and enjoys authors like Donna Tartt, Jane Austin, Sylvia Plath, and Margaret Atwood. She has been writing her own stories for most of her life, including many short stories, several unfinished novels, and a novella. Her short story 'Lost Woman' appears in *Sea Wolf 2024*.

**AMY MATTES** holds a degree in anti-oppressive social work from the University of Victoria and is currently enrolled in a bachelor of arts in creative writing at Vancouver Island University. She is working on a second novel, writing poetry and raising a child. She won second place in the Islands Short Fiction Review in 2023 and has been previously published in *The Globe and Mail* and *Portal Magazine*. Mattes lives in Nanaimo, BC. 'Late September' is her first novel. Her short story 'Plain Jane' appears in *Sea Wolf 2024*.

**JANET MILLER** grew up in a valley tucked between rivers and mountains—a horseback rider, tractor driver, cart-wheeler, and friend to all four-legged creatures. At Pemberton Meadows Elementary, in a Grades 1-6 classroom, she developed an aptitude for fine cursive handwriting and an aversion to arithmetic. Throughout her life, she has never stopped writing: letters, journals, articles, short stories, and a children's book. She left home in the 70's for a bit of adventure: hitch-hiked around Canada, cooked in an oil rig camp, pulled lumber off a green chain, dropped out of university, dropped out of a plane on purpose, and took a red-eye bus to Mexico. Janet now resides on an island, situated off another island in the Salish Sea, and is currently working on her second novel. Her short story 'May Long Weekend' appears in *Sea Wolf 2024*.

**PAIGE PIERCE** is the City of Nanaimo's Youth Poet Laureate (2024-2026) and serves as a literary ambassador for young writers in the community. Paige has hosted a poetry summer camp and workshops, performed with the Vancouver Island Symphony, served as a judge for the Nanaimo Arts Council's Ekphrastic Poetry Celebration, and appeared at many public events since being appointed to the position. She is also the author of eight published poetry books, including *Losing Languages* and *Stomach Aches*. She will graduate from Vancouver Island University's Bachelor of Education program in June of 2025 as a high school English and Social Studies teacher. Her poem 'Standing in Your Place' appears in *Sea Wolf 2024*.

**KAMAL PARMAR**, a Nanaimo poet and writer, has been passionately involved in writing for the last 20 years. She has several poetry and non-fiction books to her credit and poetry publications in reputed Canadian literary journals and magazines and books published in the UK, Canada, and India. Kamal has won many Honorable Mentions and prizes for her poems and has given numerous poetry readings in various libraries in ON, SK and BC. Her books are available in most libraries in Canada. Kamal is an active member of various Writers' organizations and Guilds. She is a member of the League of Canadian Poets, Haiku Canada, The Writers Union of Canada and a Board member of the Canadian Authors Association—BC Branch. She is currently compiling a book of personal essays. Her poem 'Spring Rain' appears in *Sea Wolf 2024*.

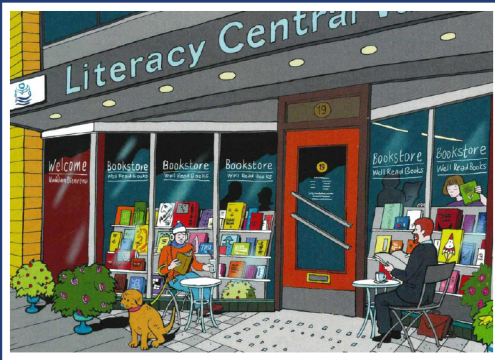
**ELLIOTT RICHARDSON** is in grade 4 at Oceanside Elementary School in Parksville. He loves reading and exploring nature. He is inspired by the ocean and loves learning about all the creatures that live within it. He hopes to one day become a Marine Biologist. 'Ocean Friends,' which appears in *Sea Wolf 2024*, is his first story.

**JOSEPHINE SAWYER** is in grade 8 and loves reading, writing stories and playing her fiddle. She is inspired by fantasy and mystery books, and enjoys stories by J.K. Rowling, Rick Riordan, and Agatha Christie. Her dream is to study creative writing in high school and university and become a professional fiddle player. She has written other stories on her own and in collaboration with friends, but 'Werewolf,' appearing in *Sea Wolf 2024*, is her first story to be submitted for publication.

**ERIN TZVETCOFF** has always been drawn to art as a way to express emotion. She has been inspired to try a variety of art forms over the years. The tactile, three-dimensional nature of pottery is her favourite. She can often be found with a camera in hand, capturing the spectacular beauty and intricacy of life on Vancouver Island that inspire her. Her acrylic painting 'Spring Storms in Tofino' appears in *Sea Wolf 2024*.

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# *SEA WOLF*

## LITERARY REVIEW

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#### FICTION

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Shelley A. Leedahl  
Cosmo Marchand  
Amy Mattes  
Janet Miller  
Elliott Richardson  
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Paige Pierce

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