

CONTENTS

- 3** EDITORIAL
- 4** CREATIVE NONFICTION | Rashad Cash
MAMA AND ME
- 10** POETRY | John Grey
VINTAGE
- 12** FICTION | Cindy Hunter
A MYSTERIOUS FRIEND
- 16** FANTASY | Shuang Gong
VENOM CLUB
- 22** POETRY | Benjamin McFee
SESTINA FOR STANDING ROCK
- 24** COMICS | Matt Smith
MAKING COUPLE FRIENDS
- 28** FANTASY | Lindsay Budge
HEARTBEAT
- 30** POETRY | Rachelle Oak
AN IMPERFECT VILLANELLE
- 31** CREATIVE NONFICTION | Sophia Dunn-Krahn
THE LONG WAY 'ROUND
- 36** FICTION | Cameron Simo
RIVAL WRITER
- 40** POETRY | Anthea Gaunt
HOLLAND POINT
- 42** CREATIVE NONFICTION | Katie Mutrie
CARRYING COMPASSION
- 46** CONTRIBUTORS



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EDITORIAL

It took a community—a whole group of people, from a myriad of backgrounds—to revitalize this formerly dormant collection of creative expression.

Communities are complex. And often, many small communities weave themselves together to form an even larger one. Communities can be found in a school, on a city block, in a dance studio—or even within a college literary journal.

Despite our differences, the word “community” implies something shared. It implies there’s something we have in common. For those of us who poured our time, energy, and artistry into this publication, it was the literary journal itself that brought us together. Editing *Beside the Point* transformed us from a collection of Camosun College students into a team. We learned to work together to realize our vision. We cultivated relationships with once-strangers and honoured each other’s individual contributions. We found ourselves collectively cradling the infant of a shared goal.

Within these pages, you’ll find poems, short stories of many flavours, works of creative non-fiction, illustrations, and even a comic! Illustrations, in particular, set our journal apart from others like it. While the written submissions came both from within the college and from without, these graphics were drawn by members of the editorial board, most of whom are involved with the Comics and Graphic Novels program here on campus.

The work of emerging artists fills this literary journal. The idea of community is unpacked to reveal many different sides and perspectives. What does it look like when community is lost? What does it feel like to

be alienated? Is community an integral part of existing? Of what it means to be human? What is the role of family influence? What about religion and spirituality? Does the generation we’re born into impact how we connect to others?

We’ve chosen to publish our journal in print for a couple of important reasons. First, the physical act of lending a book forces human interaction. This is crucial, since we live in a world that is increasingly connected via the Internet, yet is arguably also one of the most isolated. When we share a hard copy of a book with a friend, acquaintance, or loved one, we build connections and start discussions.

Second, print is still one of the only relatively permanent ways we share ideas within our community. *Beside the Point* started as an online-only journal in 2008, but since a hack in 2011, all digital archives have been lost. Two print volumes have been published since and are the only remaining issues in existence. When something is printed, it cannot be easily deleted, or succumb to data corruption. Like healthy communities, it is enduring.

Beside the Point’s motto is, and always has been, “pushing the boundaries of what’s acceptable.” We invite you, the reader, to join us in exploring what that means to our community.

—Rachele Bramly, with contributions from the *Beside the Point* Editorial Team



CREATIVE NONFICTION | Rashad Cash

MAMA AND ME

I screeched to a halt in my banged-up jalopy of a car, my hands filled with two aromatic boxes of KFC. As I exited, I made my way towards the door and crossed over the sparsely laid tiles, which parted the grassy lawn and brought me right before the house's entrance. The perfection of the day's weather made me question why I hadn't called in— but that wasn't unusual. I'd use any reason to avoid going to work. However, when I did go, I'd often spend my lunch breaks with Mama, my grandmother, who lived just a few minutes away from my work.

I knocked heavily on the window adjacent to the front door porch. My knuckles echoed against the window's thin glass. It was Mama's room. She liked being in the front of the house so she could hear all of the gossip on the street.

"MAMA, MAMA." I pressed my face against the dusty window. "OPEN THE

DOOR."

"Huh who dat?" The bed squeaked as she shifted her weight to get out of it. "Who it is?" She sounded alarmed and concerned.

"ME MAMA, SHAD!" I said impatiently.

"WHO?"

"SHAD!"

"Shaaad Who Shad?"

"SHAD! SHAD, Mama!" A knot formed between my brows, as I rolled my eyes. "Just come to the front door and see."

"Okay I coming."

A few minutes later, she finally arrived at the entrance. Slowly she pressed her face against the window of the door and peered out to confirm who it was. My glare burrowed through the door like lasers and met her eyes. I mumbled under my breath irritably.

"OHH that's you," her eyes widened with excitement. She fiddled with the door latches to open it.

"Well why you didn't say it was you?" she said. She slowly cleared the way for me.

"I DID SAY IT WA.... Never mind."

At least the weather wasn't like yesterday when the sun was out and beaming, nearly giving me a heat stroke.

She leaned against the arm rest of the sofa. I closed the door behind me and simultaneously raised the other hand with the bag of food in it. Swiftly, she stood up straight from her usual bent posture. Her cloudy brown eyes illuminated with excitement and joy at the sight of her favourite meal.

"Wha, fah me?"

She reached for the bag, which I extended towards her, with her aged, arthritis-stricken hands. She untied the bag and skirmished through the box to see if I had ordered the spicy kind she liked.

"Don't worry Mama, it's all there." I motioned to her with two thumbs up. "Two spicy chicken breasts, a wing, and a side of mash."

She, in turn, looked up at me and belted out one of her infamous, hearty, and soulful laughs. "Thank you."

Mama and I headed down the narrow hallway lined with paintings of African images. My aunt, Barbra, who lived with my grandmother, loved that kind of stuff. I stared down at the large mosaic floor tiles and noticed Mama's white cotton bed slippers. They acted as a broom, sweeping lint and debris as she dragged her feet across the ground. I smiled as I watched a single, long thread from her gown dance in loops as her dress swayed side to side.

Upon entering her room, a familiar smell caressed my nose. It was soft and gentle. It was Mama's White Diamond perfume. Although the room was filled with Mama's suitcases and bags, a queen-sized bed consumed most of the room with its large frame. The TV was on, but the screen

displayed bright blue with no imagery on it. "Mama, what happened to the TV? Did the cable get turned off again?"

"No, those boys gone mess with it and it neva came back on." She threw her hands in the air. "See if you could fix it fah mah."

"Ahh alright, I'll do my best." After a bit of screwing around with some buttons on the remote, I managed to fix it.

"GOT IT! Here Mama, see it's working." My cousins always changed the channels to play video games and never turned it back.

"Yeah? Good. Well put it on Darold fah mah, he talking 'bout the government today."

"No prob," I said while whisking to the channel.

Darold Miller was a popular radio and TV personality that came on throughout the weekdays. We both loved listening to him. He was a short, biggity, flamboyant man that always had something "provocative" to say, as was his catch phrase.

With our mouths filled with food, we laughed at his show. Mama chuckled so hard, she ended up choking a little and then cleared her throat.

"Mama, you okay?" I said while holding my hand over my mouth from laughing.

"AHAUUH AHHU! Yea. Yeah, I okay baby. AHAAUU AHUU." Tears streamed down her face.

The bellowing of her laugh always made those around her follow suit, even if you didn't want to. It was one of those laughs that grew from down deep, soulful, and high pitched.

When she smiled, her dentures resembled her former teeth exactly, even with the single gold tooth fitted into her second incisor. It wasn't like a ghetto gold tooth that you'd see in music videos. It looked nice on her and, honestly, I probably wouldn't recognize her smile without it.

“HAH HIIIIYYYYEE.” She composed herself. “So, how was work today? You still at the food store, right?”

“Yeah same ole same ole.” I tilted my head down in frustration. “I honestly don’t know how much longer I can put up with this crap! It’s like I am in a prison camp or something and the stupid midget of a general manager’s the warden, barking orders all over the place. ‘Where are you going? Get back to your cooler, meat boy.’ These people are gonna drive me crazy!”

“Awwhhh lord, I understand,” she said, pausing for a moment in silence as if thinking something over. “So, he was short like a midget?”

“IF! I could slap him with my knee right in the face. IF he stood upright!”

She started giggling once again. “HAH HAHIII!” Mama slapped her palm against the top of her knee. “Everything’s gonna be alright. You only have to hang on a little longer. How soon you graduate?”

“About another year or two,” I said regretfully. Even though it had only been a couple years, it felt like longer than that. I guess that’s what happens when you rush into college right after high school.

“Well, don’t worry. It’ll be over sooner than you think. And one day you will be the one calling the shots. Just continue to hold onto God’s unchanging hands.”

I had forgotten how insightful and motivational Mama could be. I guess that’s where I get it from—after all she was a preacher’s wife. Her handy, ivory Bible always sat on her night stand and was opened up to whatever passage she was reading that day. Amazingly, she never married again after my grandfather passed. She would always tell me how much I resembled him in the pictures she kept around.

In all her excitement, her weave had

shifted position and veered off to the side.

“Mama,” I chuckled aloud, “your hair! No worries, I’ll fix it.”

I leaned towards the edge of the bed and hovered over her. She paused eating and allowed me to fix the weave. I adjusted it back to its correct position, and its salt and pepper exterior revealed the back of her head. Her tiny, soft, curly hairs poked out like shrubs from the earth, whitened from age.

While I did this, my eyes combed through the room and took in its contents. All of her suitcases were neatly on top of one another. Their navy-blue exteriors were distressed by constant wear and tear from travelling throughout the years. Next to it were her white plastic bags of clothing and sheets, all neatly tucked in and tied tightly at the top. We would often leave the beds uncovered when she would come to town. It was pointless as she would only change it with her own bedsheets—white linens only.

And the same for beverages! They all had to be clear; she wouldn’t touch them if they weren’t.

“No roach in my drink,” she’d say.

The worst were the two cups she kept by the bed, one for cleaning her teeth in and the other for spitting. Thankfully the spit cup was always covered. Being older and much slower, she couldn’t get up as often to go the restroom and spit. Often she used an old KFC cup.

Shortly after, my aunt Barbra called to ensure Mama took her medicine and ate. I couldn’t help but notice how much Mama had slowed down throughout the year. Her doctor visits became more and more frequent. It was easy to forget she was only eight years shy of a century. I guess we never paid it too much attention seeing as she always hung around the younger generation in our family. She was sharp as a tack and stayed up-to-date with all the latest events. Each time I would

come by, Mama’s condition was harder to watch. She complained constantly about chronic body aches. We all did our best to distract her from the pain by making her as comfortable as possible, and letting her indulge in all her bad food habits.

Realizing my time had wound down, I got up, signaling to her I was leaving. She quickly wrapped up her call to see me off.

After hanging up the phone, she leaned over towards the end of the bed and rummaged through her suitcase, pulling out her stash of cookies. I was overjoyed by the sight of that golden yellow package. Custard cream cookies. I had hoped to receive one before I left. She pulled out two, then four, then reached out and handed them to me. I smiled widely and embraced her, giving her a big kiss on her cheeks.

“Thanks Mama. Today was too fun, but I have to run. Come walk me out so you can lock the door.”

She always stayed at my Aunt Barbra’s house, who was the youngest of her twelve children. Mama was my maternal grandmother and I spent most of my childhood around her. She was a tough disciplinarian in her younger days, according to my mother and her older siblings. She would hand out spankings like coupons. I rarely got on her bad side, but on those rare occasions it was easy to outrun her; we would wait it out until she was too tired to give chase. However, she never forgot, and always got us in the end when we slept.

As I exited the room with Mama trailing closely behind, a sudden foul but familiar scent hammered at my nose. It was pungent and musty. It had an indescribable funk, but not like a person’s body funk, topped off with

a pinch of Ugh! My hairs stood up and my nose burned at its fury. It was hard to believe I hadn’t noticed it before. I knew that smell. Mama had just gotten in a few days ago from Andros, and like every trip she brought boxes and sack cloth bags filled with crabs. As I made my way into the kitchen, I realized I had found the source of the nauseating trail. Arranged every which way on the kitchen’s floor, boxes and bags were lined up until they reached the back wall. Large, dark-brown bags, ranging from two to three feet in width, were all encased in dirt and wrapped in straw wire. Boxes of tough cardboard were fashioned the same way and roughly labeled in marker FROM BLUFF ANDROS TO NASSAU, BAHAMAS. NP.

“EWWW,” I said. “Well I guess this is one of the ups and downsides of when you come to town.”

Despite how awful their smell was, they were still very tasty when prepared properly. Unlike my cousins and siblings, I failed to successfully capture one without either dropping it or being nipped by its powerful claws. This undoubtedly increased my fear of them. As I quickly tried to exit the room, I caught a subtle motion in the corner of my eye. It was a crab, one that had escaped the confines of its cage.

“MMMAMA!!!” I shouted while running behind her. “The crab’s loose!”

“Wha where he at?”

“Behind the dining room table. See him right there, catch him Mama! Don’t let him get away!”

Like a gladiator rushing into battle, with a slow and steady walk-like jog, she pulled her long, flower-patterned night dress aside to avoid tripping in her haste.

“Go ’round that way and stop him from escaping through the other side!” she said. And with much resistance, I somehow willed

myself to move. I was terrified of getting bitten...again. They were super aggressive when cornered.

“There he is Mama. He’s coming your way again!” I said, as I pushed him towards her with the kitchen broom.

Scurrying around and desperate not to be captured, this armoured, six-legged, spider-shaped crab flared out its two claws in our direction, as it moved swiftly left to right. One claw considerably larger than the other, it latched onto the broom. In fright, I pushed at it and forced it in the opposite direction, towards Mama. After all, I thought to myself, she’s used to this stuff, and if all else fails she’s lived four of my lifetimes.

“GATT’EM!” she said, as she grabbed it from behind its back. The creature struggled desperately to sink its claws into her but failed. Unable to reach backwards due to its awkward shape, the jig was up. Its last-ditch attempt at freedom was over sooner than it had begun.

“YAAAAAY you got’em!” I cheered Mama on from on top of the sofa. “Don’t let him go Mama.”

Its eyes feverishly rotated in every direction.

“What’re you gonna do with him?”

“Put some dough on him and boil him for dinna, as soon as Barbra gets home.” A look of accomplishment and glee was on her face. This time, she ensured its next escape would be futile.

The snapping sound of the crab echoed as she broke off its limbs, then placed it into the sink where the other runaways were confined. Thankfully, the whole ordeal was shorter than it had felt. Only a few minutes had passed, and I wouldn’t be too late returning from lunch.

I always felt a sense of integrity when

people asked me if she was my grandmother. I would proudly confirm that she was.

Everyone in the neighbourhood who had known Mama loved her, from the little kids to the bad boys. They all greeted her with respect and would make runs back and forth to the store for her. She was the glue of my family. However, in the following year that glue became less adhesive and began to lose its grip in the natural world. I never imagined the one place I went for reconciliation and strength would become the very place I dreaded even passing. Never in my life had I considered her mortality. Especially from a jokester, who like most women, lied about her age, but in reverse. I felt like a raft lost in the current of a tide’s drift.

The harmonious Junkanoo band’s music that played at her wake lit up the night air just beyond me. But it fell on deaf ears. Although the pain would never truly subside, the memory of her golden smile, crazy stories, and infectious laughter, will always remain with me. The once cheerful, raspy sound of her voice, which called us home late in the evenings, would now resonate only inside the walls of my memory.

BESIDEThe Point

Pushing the boundaries of what’s acceptable
COMMUNITY ISSUE



POETRY | John Grey

VINTAGE

My roommate Danny always said he would return.
 He even ran his fingers down the dust
 of the bottle of wine we would share.
 And when he did come back,
 he'd have made it big time
 because he had ideas and,
 even better than that, the will
 to turn them into reality.
 No more, the failure he.
 He'd have money overflowing his pockets
 and fame enough to light neon.
 But, as successful as he became,
 he assured me he'd never forget his old friends.
 It was a big world out there, he added,
 but, at its core, it was this neighborhood,
 the tenements, the corner store, the cop on the beat.
 These were his roots.
 He could no more turn his back on them
 than forget the crazy times we had together.
 He held the wine bottle up to the light.
 He'd return and his was that promise
 made solid, made liquid, made real enough
 to slosh around in the bottle and laugh.
 Then he was gone.

I remember the fluttering curtains of that apartment.
 No matter how tight I figured the windows sealed,
 wind blew its way in.
 And, as always, the inevitable sunsets
 and the distant blocks going dark on me,
 And the traffic, and the noise from the sidewalks.
 What a bed that was, narrow but comfortable.
 But the stove...who knew what grew in that greasy bottom tray.
 Not forgetting the tiny colour television
 where I played air guitar along with the bands on Midnight Special.
 And, of course, the wine bottle, on a high shelf,
 gathering more dust.

He never did come back.
 I moved out three years later.
 1978...a common enough vintage.
 But 72 through 75
 were classics, rare,
 still sipped from time to time.



Matthew Lane

FICTION | Cindy Hunter

A MYSTERIOUS FRIEND

There are some lonely roads in my tiny village, a few with only one house. On one of those roads lived my friend, Ms. Dafoe.

When I first set eyes on her place, my footsteps automatically shifted into a lower gear, then stopped altogether for a bit while I thought about what kind of person might live in such a rundown shack and whether I should just turn around and go home. The grass in her front yard was higher than my head. The building's unpainted, grey boards looked so very tired to me, and in the windows hung plastic curtains so faded from sunlight that the flowers on them had almost disappeared.

But my Grandma had spoken of Ms. Dafoe in a respectful tone, so that helped me to feel brave. I made my way further up the unpaved road, turned left, tramped over broken, jigsaw-puzzle pieces of sidewalk leading to the front door, and knocked. Noises came from inside, as if heavy things were being shoved along the floor. After a long minute or two, a large, heavy-breathing woman opened the door. One saggy lid seemed to have permanently anchored itself halfway shut over a foggy-looking eyeball. Gripped by bobby pins, a swirling tower of milky-white hair decorated the top of her head.

"Hi, my name is Tish Adams. I was told you can read cards to tell a person's future."

Ms. Dafoe, using her clear eye, scanned the outdoors beyond the doorway.

"If that's the case, I was wondering if you could do it for me," I stumbled on.

She gave my person a serious look-over. Especially my face.

Still hopeful, I continued, "I was told you

don't have a phone, so I just came over. I hope it's okay."

Then, the lines of mistrust on her forehead dissolved into a look of pure gentleness. She smiled the softest smile I had ever seen and invited me in.

Everything inside her kitchen—walls, table, cupboards—was a shade of either grey or brown, and every flat surface covered with a thin layer of dust—except for a black, gleaming electric tea kettle on the countertop. At least, it had the appearance of a tea kettle, but it seemed so out of place in Ms. Dafoe's kitchen. I wondered if, in fact, it was a lost alien spacecraft taking a time-out to re-programme the GPS.

I also smelled cat—not a clean cat smell, but a caked-on-food-dish-and-pee cat smell.

A fine-looking, mostly white pussycat with black and orange spots on his back and the teensiest scrap of a tail strolled hoity-toity across the kitchen table as Ms. Dafoe and I sat down.

Seated in perfect posture, cat tucked into her lap, Ms. Dafoe enlightened me on the topic of "Manx." "Eight months ago, when it was freezing rain," she said, "I heard the most pitiful meowing outside. When I looked out the window, there he was—all soaking wet and cold. What a sorry little mess! I brought him inside and fed him. For the first few weeks, I couldn't get close enough to pet him, but he's still here. His claws and fangs are so quick you don't even see them—but you can feel them." She smiled at that last sentence.

Ms. Dafoe instructed me to shuffle her well-worn playing cards, three separate times. After each shuffle, she spread the cards out on the table and chatted about how she saw my future playing out. I was most of all interested in what she had to say about John LeBeaux. Did he have any interest in me? Would he be my boyfriend some day? Ms. Dafoe told

me he was a little shy and to give him some time, and I would get what I wanted. The authentic glint in Ms. Dafoe's eye and the gentle way she spoke to me and to Manx lit a wee campfire around my heart.

At the end of the reading, as she gathered up the cards, I asked how much I owed, hoping the \$20.00 worth of allowance money in my pocket would cover the visit. In a low voice, with gaze focused on the floor, she stated, "Two dollars," and \$2.00 is what I paid her.

It bothered me afterward to think about how little she charged, and I promised myself I would pay her more the next time. All through Grade 7 and nearly to the end of Grade 8, I now and again returned to Ms. Dafoe and Manx's house for a reading. Not wanting to make her feel self-conscious, I never inquired about her background or how she ended up so poor. I figured if she wanted to tell me, she would; she never did.

"No, no, no," she would murmur every time I left my \$6.00 or \$7.00 on her table, but her shy, angelic smile belied the meaning of her words, and she accepted the money.

One Saturday morning in May, after our French toast and orange juice, Mom told me God had taken Ms. Dafoe to live in heaven. Someone in the community had become concerned when they noticed Ms. Dafoe's evening living room light wasn't turned on. When they entered the home, they discovered a body that seemed to have passed away from plain old, old age.

Mom's hugs provided first aid for my tears, but still, my chest felt heavy to think of Ms. Dafoe without Manx or Manx without Ms. Dafoe. I walked over to her place to see if I could find Manx; find him I did not. Trudging down the bumpy dirt road on my

way home, I felt none of my usual springtime appreciation for the fragrance of the lilac bushes along the way. Was Manx safe? Was he frightened? He *sure* as heck was lonely. Back home, I lit a candle, curled up in my bed with curtains drawn, and clung to a big, soft pillow.

After a couple of hours had passed, my Mom knocked on my door. "Letitia, would you like some lunch? I made your favourite—peanut butter and banana sandwich." Needing another hug more than I needed lunch, I let go of my pillow, positioned feet on the floor, and exited my room. I got my hug, but only managed to eat one bite of sandwich, followed by a small sip of milk.

My Mom cleared away the dishes, then gently rubbed my back. "I could sure use some help in the flower beds," she said. "How about it? C'mon. It'll do us good."

While trying my best to focus on gardening tasks, I peered up from a mound of earth to the wondrous sight of a handsome white kitty-cat with black and orange spots on his back and hardly any tail.

For a moment, my lungs forgot how to draw air. As we stared into each other's eyes, I don't know whose heart was more full, mine or his. I picked him up, held him close, and buried my face in the oh-so-soft fur. "Can I keep him, Mom? Puhleeze? Puhleeze?" She agreed that he should move in and become one of our family.

Later that day, we took Manx to the veterinarian for a check-up. "Young lady, you've got yourself one fine cat here. A real beaut! We'll vaccinate to make sure he doesn't get sick. We want him to live a long, long time, don't we?"

That night in bed, Manx curled up alongside my pillow. His mellow snore made me giggle, and I couldn't recall ever before smiling so big for so long.

BESIDEThe Point

Pushing the boundaries of what's acceptable
COMMUNITY ISSUE



Shuang Gong

FANTASY | Shuang Gong
VENOM CLUB

I'm starving. I must eat something, or I will die.

I have been waiting for my prey for hours, but nothing I can eat ever comes. Maybe my luck would be better somewhere else. Slowly I slither across the grassland and make my way to another hunting ground about two kilometres away. It is the summer time of the year. Bright morning sunshine warms my body up, but I have to be fast to reach my next hunting ground before it's too hot. The dew on the grass makes my body wet, and I smell the fresh morning air mixed with the scent of grass and soil. I stick out my tongue to smell my surroundings. This area is familiar to me, but it doesn't mean it's safe. The predators there may be as hungry as me, waiting to kill me, and have me as their breakfasts. I must be careful and cautious at all times.

My stomach sings as I near my destination, so I speed up.

Something tall and big approaches. I hear its heavy footsteps and the scraping of its feet rubbing the grass. I freeze immediately. In front of me stands a human. He stops as well upon seeing me and lets out a low cry of surprise. I rattle my tail, warning him not to approach me. At the same time, I seek a chance of slipping away. As long as I can run away, I don't want to bite him with my fangs. The human keeps silent and makes no step forward. He is holding food in his hands. I smell it, although I don't know what kind of food it is. It makes me unhappy. Both of us are animals, but why does he have food to eat while I am starving? As I am thinking so deeply about his food, the human slowly steps back and makes more distance between me and him.

I slither away quickly.

Luck is not on my side. Instead, it is trying to kill me. For the rest of the day, I eat nothing. All my prey seems to vanish from the world. The night comes, and I struggle to move my weak body to find a shelter that won't be cold in the night. Energy leaves my body little by little with every inch I slither forward. All my senses are blurring. My time is coming. I stop and coil my cold body, waiting for that moment. But the food, the food in that human's hands still breaks into my fading mind. No matter what kind of food it is, it looks so attractive and delicious.

Does a human always have plenty of food?

How do they get food so easily?

Why am I not a human?

All these no longer bother me. I'm dying and will become a body soon.

A dead rattlesnake body.

"Hey! Wake up! Wake up!"

I open my eyes. An old man is squatting beside me, his pale blue eyes staring at me.

I back away immediately and try to coil my body, but something is wrong with my spine. I lower my head. I am horrified to see the hands, legs, and feet of a naked human body.

"Ah!" I scream out loudly. Didn't I die last night? What happened?

"Poor guy," that old man says, "what happened to you? Are you okay?"

"I don't know!" I'm touching my body from top to bottom desperately with my hands.

That old man sighs. "Can you wait here for twenty minutes?"

"Oh yeah, ok, why not." I'm absent-minded, busy looking for my rattle and fangs on my human body.

The old man stands up and leaves. I start

looking around. I am in the forest. Is this the forest I used to live in? I have no idea. Am I still in reality or in a dream that goes on forever?

The old man's returning breaks my meditation. He passes me some pieces of cloth. "Put the clothes on. I called the policemen, they are coming soon."

"What is policemen?" I ask, trying to squeeze my foot into a hard piece of cloth.

"They will help you figure out what happened."

"No!" I stand up rapidly. The height of my body makes me dizzy. "I don't need that. I can figure out everything by myself. Thank you for your clothes. Sorry, I gotta go." I don't want any more humans. I just need some time.

"Keep walking towards north and there is a city." He points at a direction as I leave. "Hope you find what you want."

The city isn't as far as I thought. Looking at all kinds of people walking busily on the streets, I think of our dens where all the snakes have a long sleep together during winter. I roam aimlessly and soon, a small square cave draws my attention. There is food smell coming out of it.

I walk straight into it. My eyes widen. Meat of different shapes, colours, and sizes hangs in front of me. It gives off an irresistible fragrance. My mouth waters right away. I never knew a cave in the human world could have so many foods in it.

"How can I help you?" A young lady comes.

I point at one piece of meat which is golden and looks tender. I can't talk. I don't want her to see me drool. I swallow hard and fix my eyes feverishly on that meat as she wraps it.

"Five twenty-five," she says.

I swallow again. "I want only one, not five twenty-five."

"It is five dollars and twenty-five cents for one." She emphasizes the word dollar and scans me up and down.

"I have to give you dollars to have the meat?"

"Yes." She frowns. "And you can't have it if you don't have dollars."

"How can I have dollars?"

"John? John! You'd better come here." She turns to the backroom and calls another person instead of answering me. She must be mad at me and want to kill me, the troublemaker, with her partner. I run away immediately before she takes action.

Although I'm still confused about dollars, at least I know I have to find them first before I can have food. I hate to starve again. I must find dollars as soon as I can. The roads, like mazes, have different kinds of caves scattered everywhere. Some caves are big and bright inside, while others are tiny and dark. Every cave has a name. I walk past a fragrant cave called *Starbucks*, a dark cave called *café & bistro*, and a noisy cave called *market*. An old man five meters away attracts my eyes. He's searching for something in a blue metal bin with a big dusty bag on his back. I run towards him.

"Hi! Are you looking for dollars here?"

He turns his head and gazes at me. The vigilant and cautious expression on his face reminds me of a bird protecting its food.

I smile sincerely and try to look harmless. I wait for the answer patiently.

He finally points his finger at the blue bin, "Yeah, dollars are here." His hoarse voice sounds much older than he looks.

"Thank you so much." I didn't expect it would be so easy to find dollars. I step towards the bin he was working on and reach out my hand. But suddenly, he pushes hard

on my chest.

"Get away!" he shouts.

Another angry human. This one is much tougher than the cave lady. My chest hurts where he strikes me. I rub it as I slink away. He won't share his dollars with me. He is stingy.

I soon find another blue bin beside a corner. I rush to it. This one is mine. I bend over it and look through the hole in its top, but I can see nothing. It's too dark inside. I don't feel safe putting my hand somewhere I can't see.

As I hesitate, a young man approaches and leaves a blue bottle beside the bin. I straighten up quickly and nervously, not knowing what he wants to do. I look at him. He glances at me as well.

Even one second's eye contact is enough. My body shivers from heart to skin and head to feet. I lean against the blue bin to support myself. A long-lost familiarity hits me.

"You are—" I'm too excited to complete the sentence. Nothing is better than meeting someone the same as me.

He smiles.

"Yeah, I am." He tilts his head. "What are you looking for in the garbage bin?"

"Dollars..."

His smile turns into a big grin.

"You don't need to do that. Would you like to come with me?"

I follow him and we reach a building. Inside it are doors scattered on both sides of the path. He opens one of the doors and I step in after him.

"Take a seat. You must be tired."

I sit down on the floor and he sits on a black soft thing.

"Rattlesnake?" he asks.

"Yeah. You too?"

He nods.

"What happened on me? How come I

became a human? How did you become a human? Do you have dollars to buy food?"

"I was killed by a human and when I woke up again, I became a human myself. I don't really know how it worked. Maybe when we were thinking of humans before death then we become humans." He shrugs. "Weird, isn't it? It's hard to accept at the beginning, but slowly you will work everything out."

I sigh heavily. A feeling of disappointment overwhelms me.

"It's okay. Now you have us. My roommate is coming back. You will know each other. He is the same as us. And I have food and dollars. Dollars are usually called money."

"Hmm." My brain is busy processing what he says. "How do you get money?"

"I work in a small deli store and they pay me cash."

"So you work with—"

"Normal humans. You need to learn to deal with them." He pauses. "My name is Vance, what's your name?"

I remember a name I saw somewhere. "Jayden."

Before Vance's roommate comes back, he has told me some basic things about the human world. When he is teaching me to use a cell phone, the door opens. It must be his roommate. I stand up right away. From the corridor comes a man with long hair. When we make eye contact, that shivering feeling comes again. He raises his chin. "Yo! A newcomer."

"This is Jayden. I met him today near downtown." Vance turns to me. "Jayden, this is Arlo. We met three years ago."

"Nice to meet you." I smile at Arlo.

He doesn't reply. He gazes at me with a meaningful smile. It makes me uneasy.

“Jayden, there is food in the fridge. Just help yourself,” Vance says. “We gonna leave home at one tonight. You come with us.”

“For what?”

“Hunting.”

It’s one-thirty in the night. On a dark street, three of us hide behind the thick bushes near a small intersection. We are all wearing black hoodies, although I don’t know why. Arlo takes out two switchblades from his pocket and passes one to Vance.

“What are we doing?” I ask them.

“You hide here and keep watching for us. If somebody comes, you must tell us. Okay?” Vance whispers. Before I nod, Arlo makes a gesture. They put on the hoods immediately and rush out from the bushes. Through the tiny chinks of the bushes I see them sneak up on a walking guy. They reach the guy at the same time. Within one second, Arlo seizes the guy forcibly on his neck and covers his mouth tightly. I hear only a muffled-low scream, and everything goes silent again. Meanwhile, Vance, with a switchblade catching moonlight in his hand, starts searching the poor guy. He digs out a wallet from the guy’s pocket and nods. Arlo hits the guy on his head violently and he collapses onto the ground like a broken sack. Arlo and Vance run back to where I stay.

“Let’s go.” Vance waves at me.

I hurriedly move out from bushes and catch up to them.

“Interesting?” Arlo asks me, smiling meaningfully.

“Why do we do this?”

“See? There is near a hundred bucks here.” Vance checks the wallet.

“Why? You said you earn money by working. What if policemen come and catch us?”

“The work doesn’t have too much money,

and it’s not stable at all.” Vance tucks the wallet into his pocket. “We are stronger than normal humans. Strength. Speed. Senses. It won’t take long before you find they are as weak as our prey. Why not take advantage of it to make ourselves live better?”

“Before you came,” Arlo adds, “we did the same thing, us two. One did watching and the other did hunting. It never failed.”

“But is it illegal? We are human, so we should follow their rules.” I have a feeling of being cheated for no reason.

Vance stares at me.

“You are too naïve,” he scoffs. “This human body is just a container. We are still what we are. You think you will be accepted if you act like a human and follow their rules? You’d better forget it. Stop trying to become a human, otherwise you won’t be accepted by humans *or* us.”

“But I feel guilty to hurt that guy.”

“Did you feel guilty to kill and eat a rat when you were a snake?”

I don’t know how to answer.

We reach home around two-thirty. Before I sleep, Arlo comes and gives me 20 dollars.

“It’s yours, kid. You have too much to learn.” He makes a big smile.

“Everything is so complicated.” I leave the money on the table.

“It is only when you try to become something you are not. Don’t forget who we really are.”

“But...” I’m still thinking about Vance’s words.

“There is no ‘but.’ You should feel lucky to have met us. Now the three of us are a team. A group. A—”

“A club,” I add.

BESIDEThe Point

Pushing the boundaries of what’s acceptable
COMMUNITY ISSUE

POETRY | Benjamin McFee

SESTINA FOR STANDING ROCK

If we let this go, it's free-for-all, and none of us will be safe.
The air is cold. The light is low. The sky, orange. The sun's about to set.
Tonight feels wrong. A storm about to blow. The stand-off of my life.
Yet life is what these past six months were all about. For what is water,
But that which gives us life? It makes us up. Is literally what's in our blood.
Now and here, is when and where we, like the famous rock, will stand.

Row on row, the unofficial army eyes the peasants. Face-to-face, we stand.
One side in heavy armour. The other not. It's clear which side is safe.
And clear that lots of these are not police. Tonight, the mercs want blood.
They brandish angry canisters of pepper spray. Predatory, cruel eyes upon us set.
Some wear black balaclavas. Armed for battle. Soldiers of oil. A war against water.
And like with these bubbling aquifers, oil doesn't mix too well with life.

I haven't felt chill that cuts through to bone like it does tonight in all my life.
The late-night cold makes our breath linger by our faces. Frozen, we stand.
I shiver despite my many layers, and yet I'm parched. Could use some water.
For a while, the troops are calm. I make the mistake of feeling safe.
My arms relax. I settle in the cold; start to walk the line, and keep the pace I set.
More faces here tonight. Children of Europe, of Africa, of the Sioux, Lakota and Blood.

I shiver, tuck my face into my scarf. But someone beside me warms my blood.
Sophia, smiles at me, and in that light, despite the darkness, brightens up my life.
I smile back and think a precedent for pleasantries may just be set.
But then, the goons begin to whisper to each other; one points to where I stand.
A private signal. Then I see their eyes, and suddenly I know we aren't safe.
One masked man shouts, "You're fuckin' scum of the Earth! Fuck your water!"

They turn on hoses, spraying us, in the winter night, with freezing water.
Dogs, pepper, rubber bullets, tear gas, stun grenades come thirsting for our blood.
Sophia's hit with a grenade. A deafening blast. Then blood. She thought she was safe.
Sophia shrieks. "Oh, God! My arm! They blew off my arm!" We fear she'll lose her life.
We light some fires to help keep warm, but most of us, by now, can barely stand.
Sophia's driven to Emergency, miles away. Doctors say there's barely any bone to set.

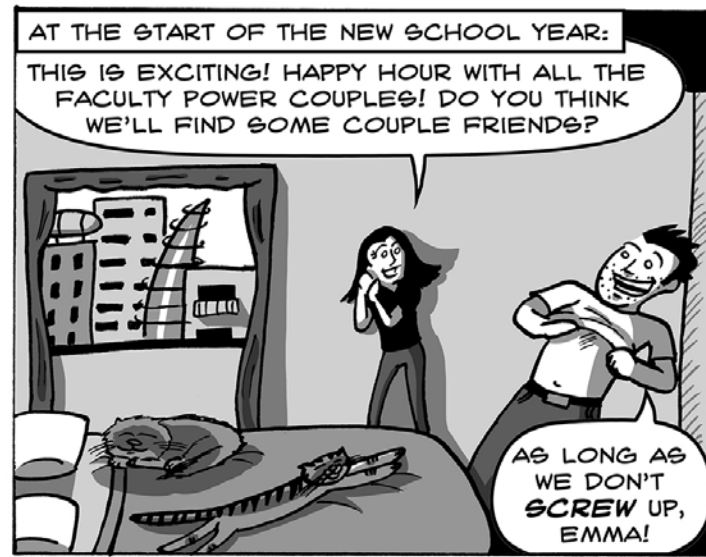
Despite the fires we light to keep us alive, the freezing liquid, like cement, begins to set.
The ones with hoses paste our hands and faces with raging torrents of water.
The ones with rubber bullets shoot people in the face and testicles where they stand.
A gas can hits me in the eye. I feel a pop. My sight goes black. The last I see is blood.
On CNN, the presidential favourite says that we should "Grow up and get a life."
The governor signs an order to remove us from our land. To "keep everybody safe."

Do not believe them when they set their media dogs on us to justify the blood.
The bullets we take are for all our water; the not-so-secret ingredient for life.
It's free-for-all if you let this stand. And if it does, not one of us is safe.



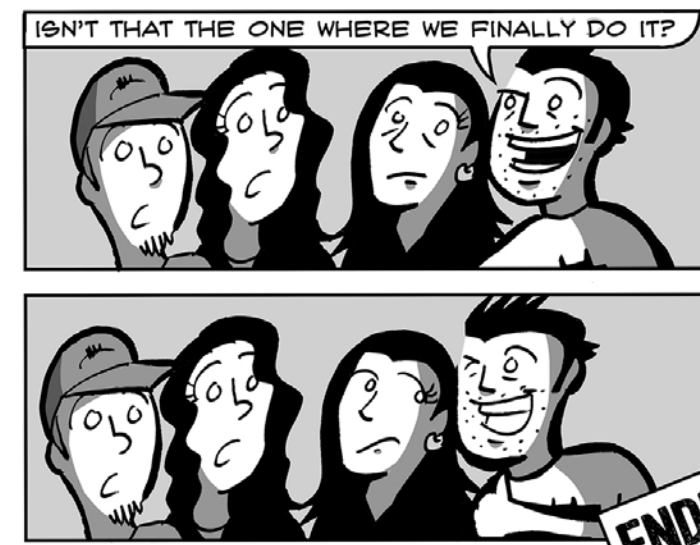
MAKING COUPLE FRIENDS

BY MATT SMITH!





WE STRUCK UP A CONVERSATION WITH A COUPLE NAMED ABBY AND KYLE. AT THE END OF THE NIGHT, WE PLANNED TO MEET UP FOR A DOUBLE DATE.



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END!

HEARTBEAT

Let me tell you a story about a young lass named Ann, from just outside of Bristol off the M32.

Sitting at the end of her bed, Ann stared at her hand—more precisely her left hand. Her eyes fixated on what used to be her wedding band. Well I guess it still would be, but her husband is dead—buried last week. The funeral was a pleasant affair with minimal crying, a boss who spoke about a spotless work record, and an aunt who talked endlessly of the time Tom got his head stuck in the fence when he was six on vacation in the countryside.

The ring that sat on Ann's finger was of the newest fad for the young couple in love. They were slick, shiny, and best of all, they let the wearer feel the other's heartbeat, when one felt like it, by simply pressing on it. That's not really my taste, but who am I to judge the young and in love?

Ann had not felt her dearly beloved husband's heartbeat since he tried to jaywalk, and was subsequently hit by the number 1 Broom Hill via Queens Rd.

This incident, in turn, led the bus driver, Frank, to have a mild breakdown. Frank currently thinks he's a hummingbird and is spending his days at the Glenside Institute in, I would say, a very tasteful floral unitard. But that is another story.

Now, back to Ann's very dead husband Tom. He had been laid to rest just over a week before, and every night since then, Ann was pressing on her ring to find a heartbeat. A bit macabre, I would say. This time when she pressed it, she felt one. This was not something Ann was expecting. So, at 8:36 at night on a Wednesday evening in June, Ann sat in her bed feeling her dead husband's

heartbeat again.

Ann's shock was redirected when she heard a key slide in the front door lock. It was as if every public information film for zombies replayed in her mind at once. She knew what she had to do. Walking across the room to an old wooden trunk, Ann opened it and retrieved a shotgun and casings. Loading the gun, she walked to the front door that had not yet opened. This is easily explained by the fact that an average reanimated corpse moves a lot slower than you or I, that is, unless you yourself are dead.

The door swung open and Ann shot Tom right in the head. His body hit the floor with a thud. Looking down at him, she noticed he was not wearing the suit from the funeral.

Now, as the story would have it, unbeknownst to Ann, the man she buried was not her husband but a pickpocket named Paul who shared a striking resemblance to Tom. Tom had been on his way to his mistress for a week-long snog fest when he was robbed. Tom did not notice until he was out at the remote cabin and thought he left his wallet at home. Sadly, for Paul, he was hit by the number 1 Broom Hill (about five minutes after taking Tom's wallet) where his face was ripped off, leaving the wallet as the only form of identification. Around the same time as Paul was hit, Tom took off his wedding ring and had only put it back on when walking down the hall to their 4th floor apartment.

Now you're thinking to yourself, "What happened to Ann?"

Oh, she was fine. The police cleared things up; it was not the first time a cheating husband was mistaken for a zombie. She was not charged with anything as it was an easy mistake anyone could have made. She now sips happily on her tea every night before bed.



Lindsay Budge

POETRY | Rachelle Oak

AN IMPERFECT VILLANELLE

an exercise in vulnerability

In fervent attempts to express vulnerability
I re-examine the persona I transmit,
my stone-cold heart closed to the possibility

that authentic transparency can birth safety
among my peers. And granted, if I can permit
fervent attempts to express vulnerability—

words burning on a page, unmasking debility—
then conceivably, I can outwit
this stone-cold heart closed to possibility.

In small leaps of faith disclosed to my community,
I thaw my stubborn snowflake spirit
with fervent attempts to express vulnerability.

With each confession I kindle the capability
to groom glaciers into growth and readmit
my stone-cold heart closed to possibility.

Remember, within my bones exists a fragility—
my front is only a front until you see through it.
In fervent attempts to express vulnerability
I open this stone-cold heart to the possibility

that through exposure
I, too, can heal.

CREATIVE NONFICTION | Sophia Dunn-Krahn

THE LONG WAY 'ROUND

“Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 19:14

Our family church was built like what it secretly was: a theatre. There was the upper and lower balcony, the eaves, the control booth, the stage, and the backstage. The service started like this: our family, my mum, my grandma, and my brother, entered through the front doors late. June, the usher, handed us a program, whispered welcomes, and touched my mum's shoulder. The congregation was murmuring. We sat on the left most side of the room, near the front. Then, once the congregation settled, the show began! Costumes! Scripts, rehearsed! Lights! Instruments! Music!

My friend Judith sat in the corner opposite. My friend Nicole was in the right wing of the balcony. Technically, I suppose, we could sit wherever we liked, but everyone kept quite firmly to their spots. The upper balcony was strange and unknown to me. I would only venture there to collect Nicole, or irritate whoever was manning the projector that Sunday. We were small, and we helped, and we never questioned anything around us. Me, Nicole, and Judith.

The minister told us to rise. We sang a song we had sung a thousand times before. Not a hymn, but one of those modern Christian songs which talked about how God is our light. A hymn would have been a blessing. This kind involved rock drums. Teagan was the drummer's name, and he left the church well before I did.

Now all the children came forward, and it was time for a puppet show (the puppets quietly horrified me to my bones). Either

that, or the pastor said a couple Bible verses about children. Then, off we were herded into the Sunday School room, where my mother reigned. All the children loved her, and she loved them all. She taught choir, which was all Sunday School really consisted of, besides an occasional Bible verse or craft. She worked us hard, and we worked hard for her.

“Sophia,” she once said to me, “your voice is beautiful, and you're getting all the right notes, but why do you make such horrifically strained faces when you sing?”

Beside me was Judith. Blond, pale, with a front tooth that stuck out of her mouth even when she closed it. She made all the jokes and had a thick Scottish accent. On the other side was Nicole, with long, black, smooth hair; big eyes; and a flat nose. She was training to be an Olympic figure skater, and she laughed as easily as anything.

Then Sunday School was over. Away we ran, happy and free. Here we were, and we were children swimming in a big soup of love and care. We could fall, and someone would catch us, dust us off, and place us right side up. Cookies in the lounge! We alerted all the other children. Cake in the lounge! The grown-ups gathered there after the service.

After a baptism, once, in ran all us kids to the sanctuary, where the baptism pool had been left open. Holy water, holy water! We splashed the water on our faces and hands. I drew a cross with the water on Nicole's forehead. We were Baptists, but we all envied the concreteness of the Catholic rituals. I remember burning with admiration when I watched a boy cross himself before one of my track races.

Then someone came and shooed us away from the water. It was not holy water. It was only the pool water. Baptists don't have holy water. They are Protestant, and therefore condemn any physical religious objects and ceremonies. Baptism's okay, though. Just not

holy water.

“...you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.” James 1:6

But then we grew, and we began to notice the cracks. We could detect the moral decay which crept in through the walls. This was a place of morals, but there were people here, as there were everywhere, who were filled with hate, malice, and bad intent. Once, when my mum pinned up the pictures she took of all the Sunday School kids, the next Sunday, somebody had ripped down the pictures of all the black kids. When the church started getting a large influx of Chinese immigrants, many were opposed. Meetings were held about *what to do* about the new part of the congregation. People presented their *problems*.

“They’re not really Christian,” they said.

“We can’t understand their accents.”

“We can’t tell them apart.”

Other things I began to notice were less tangible than the presence of racism and homophobia. The church was large, and filled with what I called the Scary Places. It had a strange, unused feeling about it—as if its heyday had passed, but the ghosts of that day still lingered. The church preschool, the left side of the Gathering Room, the gym equipment room—all had a lingering feeling of unfamiliarity, hostility, and hauntedness. We were hardly ever there, in those rooms, and they had an unwelcoming sort of feeling in them: unused, unamused, and dangerous.

Our congregation was shrinking and stagnating. Two of our pastors left. More and more rooms became unused, in disrepair. We were in some dark cave, and our fire kept dwindling lower and lower, so we huddled closer to it as the places we had once occupied crumbled.

We graduated from Sunday School onto something that was just like Sunday School, but called Youth Group, and I decided to get baptised. The baptism came first.

Before you get baptised, you have to go to a pre-baptism class. This is what they teach you to do:

1. To say *I do*, as if you were getting married, when the pastor asks you the three questions.
2. Breathe out through your nose as the pastor pushes you under the water.
3. Count to five, and then the pastor will lift you out of the water.

On the day, we changed into our white robes in the bathroom. When it was time, I walked down the blue stairs into the baptism pool. I thought I’d meet Jesus, but when Pastor Rob pushed me under, I met nothing but the water. It clogged my ears, clouded my eyes, and sucked accidentally into my nose. I thought about nothing but counted to five. Then Pastor Rob pulled me up, out of the water, and the congregation clapped. My grandma bought me a silver cross to wear around my neck. This seemed almost pagan to me—a physical talisman to ward off evil spirits—so I wore it.

“How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn!

How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low!” Isaiah 14:12

The Youth Group classes were held in one of the Scary Rooms, with an abandoned pool table and a foosball table. Dust accumulated there. The walls were faded orange, and a feeling of repression pervaded. Judith, Nicole, and I dusted off the foosball table (we didn’t know how to play pool), and played furiously before and after lesson. Would that

we could have played right through lesson, as well. Because this, we now realized, was not just like Sunday School. At this time, a feeling of rebellion was quietly settling in. No longer did the church have anything to offer us, except rules and expectations. Nothing compared to what lay outside. We three often sat on the windowsill, as if to bring ourselves closer to the world beyond the glass, to stare out at it, and distance ourselves from the man speaking at the end of the room.

His name was Paul, and his chest jutted out oddly. He taught lessons from a book and showed us religious videos on the projectors, which he could never seem to work very well. He could never command the respect that my mum had, and something had awoken in us that could not be quelled. Nicole started wearing low cut tank tops and skinny jeans, Judith, butchy plaid flannel. I wore black dresses, torn fishnets, and black lipstick, and dyed my hair. We played foosball, and wished we could drink whiskey and smoke cigars. We draped ourselves over the dirty couches, purposefully taking up space, and glared at Paul while he taught. As he spoke, the church world and the outside world grew further and further apart, and we knew which one was preferable.

One day, we were going through the regular tin can lesson, and Paul exclaimed suddenly that all those who don’t believe in Jesus were going to hell. Silence in the room. I raised my eyebrows. I knew that there were many, many people who believed this, but I had never heard anyone in the church state it so bluntly.

Catherine, Judith’s admired older sister, spoke up. Her Scottish accent was more pronounced than Judith’s because they had moved when she was older. She left the church a little after I did. “Well, I don’t know that that’s true. I mean, it doesn’t

make sense that God created people just to send them to hell...”

“He created us, yes, but he gave us a choice.”

“What about people who haven’t been around Christianity? They wouldn’t even know.”

“It’s their job to find out about Christ.”

I leaned back on the window. I felt sick and tired, and I wanted to leave the room. Stupid Paul. I thought about my dad, an atheist, probably reading or cleaning the house at home this Sunday morning. My dad was not going to hell.

A quiet anger that was becoming familiar leapt up in me. It had moved in quietly, slowly, like the coals of a fire. There I was, in the sermon, and suddenly someone said something about missionaries. Bang, flash of anger. Who were they to tell anyone what religion they should be? Then someone spoke about how Jesus died for our sins, and I thought—*How do you know?* And, *I’ve never even met Jesus*. I was doubting. We all were. Nicole left, too, about six months before I did.

I had one last religious hurrah before I left the church for good. I had heard the term *God-fearing man* before, and it had always confused me. Why be afraid of God? Isn’t he love? Then suddenly, one day, I became afraid. Before a piano recital, I would be extra good so that God wouldn’t make me make a mistake at the keyboard. If I accidentally swore, I imagined the hand of God coming to smite me down. I became ultra-religious, afraid of everything, regulating my mind to every degree. It became energy-consuming. Exhausting.

I sat in the service as per usual, passive and sleepy. Nicole was gone now, and Judith and I had grown apart. A guest speaker came in to speak about the Church of Canada’s

decision on homosexual marriage. I perked up at the mention of *homosexual*, as I always do. And she proclaimed, happily, they had decided that it was against God. My face went red, and my mum, fuming, stormed out of the church. She grabbed my hand and my brother's and pulled us out, even though the service was far from over. As we walked home, I sort of deflated like a balloon. I was done with this junk. And that was really it. I didn't have the energy, or the willpower, or any drive left whatsoever. Though my mum returned to the church the next week, I didn't go back after that. I was thirteen years old.

"turn to God...that times of refreshing may come from the Lord" Acts 1:8

A few things brought me back to religion: Wicca, Joan of Arc, and an epidemic of death during the winter of 2016.

I don't know how I found out about Wicca. All I know is that I had always felt an inexplicable pull to nature, and that sort of drew me in. I was fascinated by the discovery of non-deity religion. I loved witches, I loved witchcraft, I loved woman-power, and I loved nature. So, I went for it.

I lit incense and celebrated the equinoxes. I drew the wheel of the year and pinned it on my bulletin board. I mixed herbs and steeped them in my bath. I had some tarot cards, but was too scared to use them. I drew sigils and carved the little symbols into wood.

So, here I was, being Wiccan. Doing the motions, doing the things. Yes, this must be it, I thought. But, I couldn't stop wondering, after all this, what the heck is this supposed to do? What am I supposed to *believe*?

So, I read *Saint Joan* by Bernard Shaw. And all of Christianity was refreshed. Christianity did not live in dingy little unused rooms in 80s churches, but in old,

sacred Celtic wells, and on the battle plains of England and France, and in the deserts of Egypt. The Bible was a collection of stories about people doing what they thought was right, and making mistakes and failing a lot, but always trying to do right. Heroes. Joan of Arc represented something I had never seen before—a power in religion. The belief that religion was between only the person and their God. The church had nothing to do with it.

Then came the parade of death. My cat of twelve years died. So we got a new kitten. My dad's uncle—his only real father figure—died. David Bowie and Alan Rickman died within a week of each other. Two young friends of the family died—one from a brain tumor, one from fentanyl. One of my chickens died, reducing our flock to six. Then the kitten got hit by a car, and died.

I started getting the *bouts of horror*, as I called them, at night time, thinking about my family getting into car crashes. My head went hot and terror filled it. I stayed up until two in the morning one night waiting for my dad to come home from his uncle's wake. My mum was ten minutes late coming home from dance class, and I waited at the window. My mind convinced itself that she was dead—everything seemed to be a sign that she was. It was a bad place. So, sometimes, I prayed.

Which was weird. But it was sort of nice. It cleared my head. It brought reason.

Slowly, quietly, I settled into my own form of religion. It was based on truth, and against hatred. It had nothing to do with the church, or anybody else. A private connection. And in that, there was calm.

A couple of days ago, my grandma was pestering me to go to church more. I smiled and raised my eyebrows. I told her that God and I had an understanding. And that was true.

BESIDEThe Point

Pushing the boundaries of what's acceptable
COMMUNITY ISSUE

RIVAL WRITER

“My fellow readers, these are indeed dark times in which we live. It’s a time in which thematic guidelines have been thrown onto the creative process. A time where deadlines suffocate our efforts. A time where word counts hinder the ideas we wish to express. Yes, I am indeed talking about this very—”

“Stop.” I hold a hand out in front of me, shaking my head. “That’s seriously what you’ve come up with since our last meeting?”

“I thought it was a good idea.” Madeline paces the small study room, holding her papers behind her back. Her ponytail bounces with each exaggerated step.

“I mean, I guess it’s okay. But I know we can do better.” I adjust my drooping collar so it stands up. “You like to write, and we each like to pass our classes. We just have to think of an idea that both of us can agree on.”

Madeline sits back down at the table. She turns her head to look through the window while she taps the eraser tip of her pencil against the table and thumps the leg of my chair with her foot. Thump. Tap. Thump thump tap. I glare at her and sigh heavily. It’s almost impossible to concentrate. I lean back in my seat, frustrated.

“What kind of assignment is this, anyways?” I say. “Who the hell sits down and thinks, ‘boy, am I sure glad that I know exactly what community means to me?’ No one does that.”

“Everything happens for a reason, Travis,” Madeline replies. “It’s been a long few days, but I think we’re finally starting to get somewhere.”

Her optimism baffles me. If I were her, I’d be pissed about having to work with someone I never bothered to speak to until the teacher

forced us to pair up.

I roll my eyes in response and turn my attention to coming up with an idea to save the sinking ship we’re both on. The connections I attempt to make are given sound effects by Madeline as she drums on her stomach to the tune she’s quietly humming. Despite her ear-grating melody, I manage to piece something together.

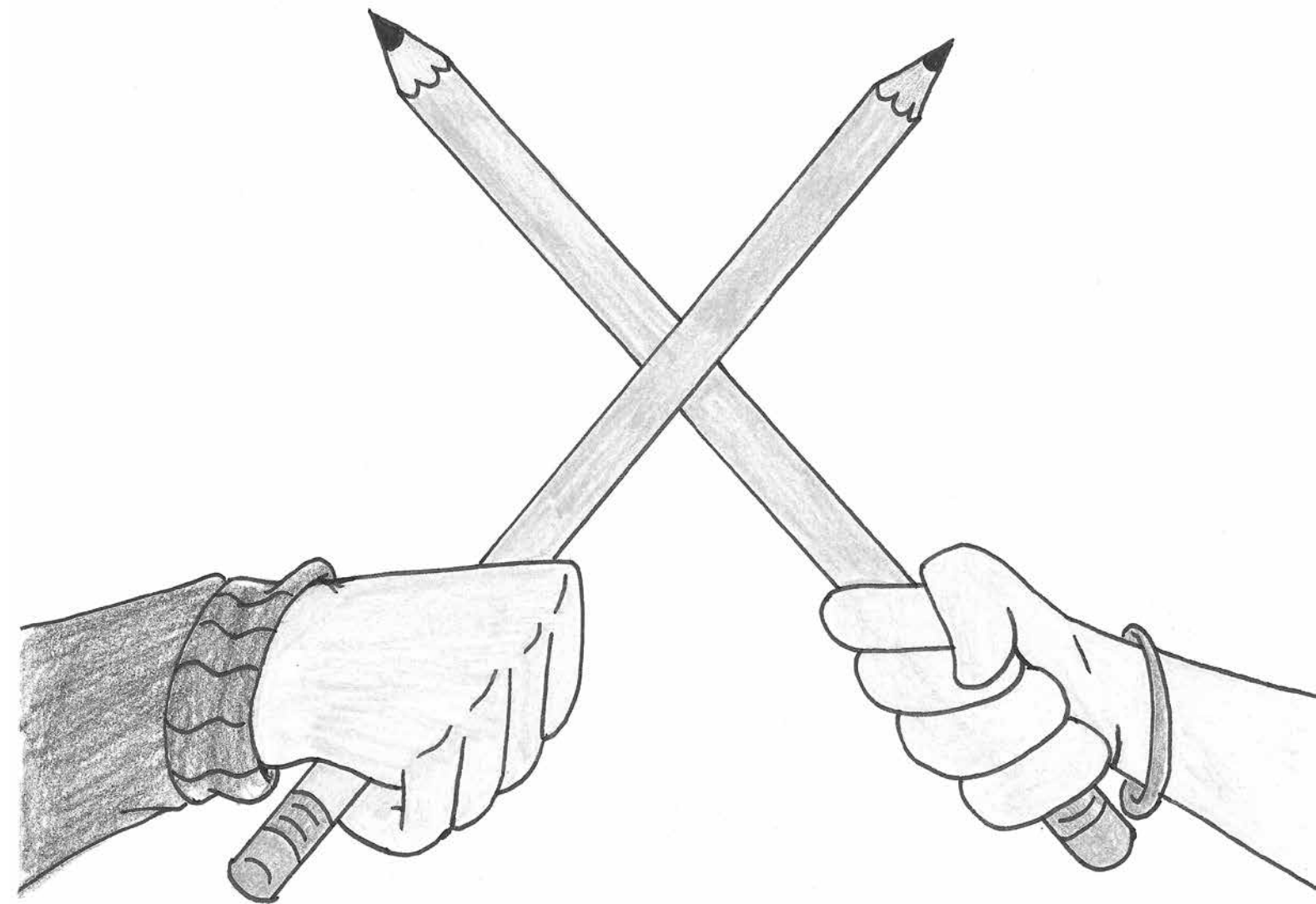
“How about this,” I run my hand through my hair. “You’re an admin for a big writing website, and I’m a member of the gaming league in town...maybe we can write about that.” I grab my pen to jot down an opening. “It can start like this: ‘Humans are naturally social creatures. We can get energy from interactions with other people, and we have shaped our society around our need for these encounters.’ There we go. That’s more like it.”

“Hm. Yeah. Sounds good, Travis.”

I look up to see Madeline writing feverishly. She isn’t paying attention to what I’m saying. She’s too preoccupied with whatever is swirling in that empty head of hers. I sneer. “Are you even paying attention?” I stand and lean over the table towards her. “It really seems like I’m doing all of the work here while you’re just daydreaming!”

Madeline jumps in her seat after noticing how close I am, our faces only inches apart. We lock eyes. She then stares at the ground and moves away from the table. “I-I’m sorry,” she stammers and laughs nervously. “It’s just that I had an idea, a-a-and I was writing it down before I lost it.”

I turn her binder around and recite what she had done aloud: “The chilled breeze swept the forest floor, carrying the campfire’s heat to Carthy. The woman brushed her tangled hair with her fingers, picking out the twigs and leaves that—” I slam my palm against her binder. “Well, what do you know, this has nothing to do with the



Sam Duncan

Sam
Duncan

assignment. You're just writing something for your stupid little novel again!"

"At least I'm writing something creative, Mr. Putting-The-Anal-In-Analytical." Madeline puts her hands in the air mockingly. "Sorry, is it not up to your ridiculous standards and ideals? I'm trying my best here, you know."

"Yeah, you're right, I'm totally in the wrong. I'm only trying to come up with an idea. Meanwhile, you're not taking any of this seriously. Clearly, I'm the bad guy here."

"I am taking this seriously! Maybe we'd have an idea by now if you didn't shoot down every single one that I came up with."

"Well, if your ideas didn't all suck, maybe we wouldn't be having this issue. You know, I'd be better off doing this on my own. At least then, I wouldn't have to suffer through your intolerable tapping, or your idiotic ideas, or your annoying attitude. I don't need you, so just get out!" I feel my words hang in the air as I point towards the door.

Madeline's face twists, and she grabs her binder, shoves it into her backpack, and hastily approaches the door. She pauses. I hear her shaky swallow as she rests her hand on the doorknob. "I just want to be—"

"Leave."

The slam of the door alerts everyone in the library, and I feel the gaze of at least fifty students follow Madeline out the building. Upon her exit, the stares boomerang back to me as I stand silently in the study room, visible through the glass entrance. I shrug at one of the angered students sitting close by and sit down at my table, facing the window. I read through the opening written down earlier. As I'm about to continue writing, my mind goes blank. Words suddenly escape me. I'm not worried; they will come to me. I lean back in my chair and close my eyes.

With Madeline gone, I can hear the clock

softly click through the seconds. It's almost relaxing. I sink slightly in my seat, softly tapping my pen on the table to the clock's rhythm. I get up and shake my head. "I'm not about to start that," I say, as I turn to a blank page in my binder. "Let's try another prompt." I stare into a blank sheet of paper briefly before starting a paragraph.

Pyrin walked into the small classroom with a stack of papers underneath his arm. He was disappointed to see only a handful of people scattered around the room.

Something about the idea seems familiar, but I continue.

He wasn't expecting the whole student body to show up, but he did want at least more than half of half of a dozen.

"More than half of half a dozen," I repeat to myself. That's when it hits me; Madeline came up with this idea during our previous meeting. Only she would come up with a line like that. I rip out the page, crumple it up, and toss it against the wall. I can come up with my own ideas.

The clock becomes a constant reminder that I'm wasting time debating what to put on the page. Its ticking morphs into a metronome again. Unaware of my actions, I tap my pen on the table and thump my foot on the carpet in time. Thump tick tap. Thump. Tick tap. It's strangely fun to do, yet I quickly snap myself away from the distraction. An idea pops into my head shortly after, and I scrawl it on the page.

Jeffery Schnitzel was a bank accountant by day. At his job, he was a quirky fellow. His coworkers frequently came up with outlandish rumours regarding his private life, yet none of them suspected that one in particular would be true. He was indeed a serial killer by night. Yet, no matter how much he murdered, he couldn't shake the feeling that something was missing. What he wanted more than to quench his

bloodthirst, was someone to love.

My palm engulfs my face after I read through what's written down. Shame and frustration pump through me, and I huff as I slam my binder closed. I get my stuff together and leave the library. If I am going to waste time, I want to do it at home rather than on campus. I check the time on my phone; the Number Thirty-One bus doesn't arrive for another ten minutes. I may as well take my time.

I arrive at the exchange a few minutes later just in time to watch the Number Seventeen bus circle in. The students aboard pour out, and a new swarm comes together to get on. Amongst the group, I recognize a certain ponytail, and a strange sensation rushes through me. I scoff and shrug it off. I guess she had the same idea as me. As the last few students get on the bus, the sensation gets stronger. The bus begins to pull away. I break into a sprint. I wave my arms frantically at the bus driver until he stops to let me on.

I scan the cabin while I catch my breath. Near the back, Madeline meets my gaze, then frowns and looks down at her feet. I wait until my heart rate slows to squeeze through the other passengers. I stand beside her. Her backpack rests in the seat next to her as she listens to music. I breathe heavily and tap her on the shoulder. She removes an earpiece and looks up at me, her eyes glazed over.

"Hey," I sheepishly say, "can I sit with you?"

Madeline looks at the seat next to her, then at me, and then at the people around us. She sighs and slowly moves her stuff to the floor and herself into the empty spot. I smile slightly as I sit and place my bag on my lap. She puts her earpiece back in and stares out the window. She taps her foot and hits her knee with her finger to what I imagine is the beat of the song she has on. We pass a few

stops and continue to sit in silence. I count down from five in my head after passing the fourth stop and tap her on the shoulder, prompting her to remove her earpiece again.

"What do you want," she asks half-heartedly.

"I... I-I," This is harder than I thought. Madeline watches me struggle and stares at me intensely. "I-I want to tell you that... that I'm, I'm sorry."

Madeline's stare eases up. She sniffs and wipes her nose with the sleeve of her coat. She turns off her music and removes her other earpiece in the process. "I'm listening," she replies.

"Look, I'm sorry for not giving your ideas a chance, and for yelling at you. It was really uncalled for, and... I was so determined to have an idea I come with be used, I disregarded all of yours, even if they were good. I actually thought that presidential speech one was kind of funny. Better than what I could come up with."

Madeline chuckles and rubs her eyes with the other sleeve. I smile wider. She leans back in her seat and stretches. She then turns to me, gives me a warm grin, and nods.

"I appreciate you saying that, Travis. Thank you," she says, wrapping her arm around me and giving me a hug. I stay still, awkwardly shifting my eyes from left to right quickly.

"I guess this means that we can work together again?" I ask as I squirm in her prolonged grasp.

"Sure. I'd like that." Madeline releases me, opens her backpack, and finds her binder. She pulls it out and holds it out in front of her. "I'm glad that you liked that president thing. I've got at least another twelve ideas here, want to hear them?"

"Twelve? Are you —" I stop myself and take a deep breath. "Yes. Yes I would."

POETRY | Anthea Gaunt

HOLLAND POINT

I breathe deep the briny air,
Cleansing mouth and lungs.
Sacrificed to the whisking wind,
I exhale the bated breath of day,
Staring at the hypnotic rhythm,
The primordial ebb and flow.
The dark cerulean waves are dancing,
Tumbling stones upon the shore.
Seagulls chant an echoed call,
As salt water sprays my brow,
Washes my temple with icy tears.

Fellow islanders nod in passing,
Here for relief, same as I.
Coastal communities understand
The healing the sea provides.

Vestiges of the Sun: gold, coral and mauve,
Cast a haze over distant mountains tipped with snow.
The patter of fresh raindrops releases the scent of life:
Essence of Indian Plum, Nootka Rose and Garry Oak,
Wafts down from the cliffs to mingle with the sea.

CREATIVE NONFICTION | Katie Mutrie

CARRYING COMPASSION

The car rolled to a stop just as the rain let up. I scrambled from my spot in the middle seat. As everyone stretched after the half-day trip from Vancouver, I walked to where Rebecca still sat in the front seat, holding the box on her lap. I took it carefully so she could climb from the car. Through folds of bright fabric, I could just glimpse his golden face.

“Take him inside,” Rebecca said, struggling to her feet.

“Right,” I mumbled, in shock that anyone thought I could carry him anywhere. But I didn’t say so. Rebecca and I had had a special bond since the first time I attended a day course at the centre. We’d gone to the diner next door, shared a Fatso Burger, and created a day-course tradition.

“We’ll wait here so you can get your stuff,” Krista said as she opened the trunk.

The box felt heavy in my hands as I turned toward the sprawling, pink, tropically-themed hotel that our centre members had nicknamed the Pink Palace. The main doors to the lobby weren’t far, but the distance had tripled since Avalokiteshvara, Buddha of love and compassion, was placed in my hands. Kadampa Buddhists are encouraged to regard any image of a Buddha as a living deity. It’s an aspect of *correct imagination*, the choice to believe that which makes your mind more peaceful—the most beautiful concept of imagination I have ever encountered.

From imagining giving peace and happiness to others (though we may have nothing material to offer), to believing our meditations truly transform the world, to viewing everyone as our own kind mother and cherishing them as such, correct imagination encourages us to choose beliefs

that make us better. I like to imagine the world we would live in if everyone tried to do that.

However, after four years of study and practice, I couldn’t yet cherish everyone like my mother. When I gave change to people begging on corners, although I imagined giving not just a dollar but real peace and freedom, it was hard to believe that what I did made a difference. As for the statues, I struggled to see them as more than figures carved and painted by imperfect human hands. Yet, as I clutched him to my chest, Avalokiteshvara felt like more.

I was ultra-aware of each slow step I took on the pavement. My stomach was tight and my mind knotted with images of tripping, falling, and dropping Avalokiteshvara right there in front of a hundred Buddhists. I was in my third year of attending the Western Canada Dharma Celebration. The event is a gathering of Kadampa practitioners, the kindest, most welcoming people I’d ever met. A whole weekend meditating with a bunch of blissed-out Buddhists had become an annual treat, and I was determined not to start by letting the embodiment of love and compassion fall into a puddle.



When I had first encountered Buddhism four years earlier, I just wanted to learn how to meditate. I found an everyone-welcome, drop-in class Thursday nights at a nearby church. I hoped to find some elusive sense of peace, longed for the healing that comes with self-understanding and forgiveness. My stomach fluttered with nerves as I opened the church door that first Thursday night.

Following paper signs taped on the walls, I climbed a creaky, battered staircase, turned right, and entered a cozy, somewhat shabby



room. This was where I first met Deb and Bob, a quirky couple of former hippies who I felt I had known all my life. This was where I first met Buddha's teachings.

Six months of upheaval passed before I found my way back to that warm room with its dim reddish light and squashy old sofas. When I did, I was broke, working full-time writing a novel, and living with my parents. I showed up early with a plate of homemade cookies.

"You've been here before," Deb said.

"Yeah." She had driven me home after my first session. "I'm not working right now and can't afford the class." I uncovered my plate. "I was hoping I could bring snacks instead of paying the drop-in fee?"

Deb waved her hand as if the ten dollars were nothing. "I'd rather you got the benefit of the teachings."

I had no knowledge of Buddhism and not that much interest, but my mind and heart were open. Hearing about the health benefits of meditation hadn't prepared me for the depth of peace that was possible.

"Close your eyes... Set the intention that our meditation will develop good qualities to benefit both ourselves and others... Exhale dark smoke, the essence of all negativity... Inhale white light, the essence of all positivity, and feel your body fill with light... Hold that feeling, that body of light; it is the object of our meditation... Conclude by dedicating any positive energy to the highest benefit of both ourselves and others."

Twenty minutes of Deb's soothing, white-light voice was worth sitting through the teachings, until the teachings were the reason I went. Intensely practical and profoundly written to address the problems of the modern world, the teachings of Dharma always came back to love and compassion for all living beings.

On the night I first heard Deb say, "The whole point of freeing yourself from suffering is so you can help everyone else do the same," my mind went limp with relief. As if I'd been searching for this answer my whole life without ever knowing the question, an inner voice cried out with eureka enthusiasm, *of course that's why I'm here!* Never one to set low goals, I decided to become a fully enlightened Buddha immediately so I could benefit everyone else.



After a year of drop-in classes, partway through summer break, I stepped down off a dresser and hurt my back. I spent that summer in bed, waiting for the pain to disappear and reading library books about Buddhism. That September, still in pain, I took the next step, joined the in-depth Foundation Program class, and became a regular member of the Dharma centre. Despite fear that I wasn't ready to go deeper, from the moment I stepped into the centre, I knew I was where I needed to be.

Deb and Bob showed me around on my first night, introduced me to other students and the resident teacher, and even bought me my copy of the book we were studying. I was by far the youngest person there, and my natural shyness and social anxieties reared up every Tuesday, despite everyone's kindness.

Maybe it was the age difference. Maybe it was the fact that it seemed to come easily to everyone else while, despite glimpses of peace, I couldn't seem to stick with it. Maybe it was my predisposition to feel rejected, lingering after an awkward childhood that left me feeling like an outsider. Whatever it was, I felt perpetually out of place among my sangha, my spiritual community.

Most nights during tea break I stood by

the snack table, with little to contribute to conversations. Often, I was in so much pain that socializing was beyond me, even if I'd had anything to say. No one seemed to mind my silence. There is a freedom in spending time with people you know have spent years trying to become more accepting, loving, and kind. Unlike most social gatherings, my pain didn't prevent me from enjoying myself.



Like everything, spiritual practice came with wild ups and downs. I spent joyful hours contemplating, studying, and meditating until enlightenment felt almost within reach. But when treatment after treatment failed and finally a routine of chiropractic treatments added agony in my neck and shoulder rather than removing the ache in my back, lows of drifting hopelessness began to overwhelm me.

I spent days in bed, exhausted and defeated by pain. Unable to read or watch TV because of the specific angle my neck needed, I spent my time staring at the ceiling. From my bed, through the wall, I overheard my family's kitchen conversations and felt oddly included despite my isolation.

I could work only four to eight hours a week. I was no fun since all I could do was lie lethargically on someone's couch, so I rarely called my friends. If it weren't for Dharma classes Tuesdays and Thursdays, I barely would have left my house during the year the neck and shoulder pain started.

Months trickled by, seasons changed as I lay in bed. An ambitious perfectionist, I measured the success of a day by what I accomplished. Pain robbed me of my self-worth. I pictured a future where I was a burden on my family.

Contemplating Karma was all that prevented me from drowning in the bitter

injustice of it all. Studying Buddha's reasoning proving that I am not my body was all that prevented the pain becoming part of who I was. Taking and giving, a meditation focusing on all suffering beings. Imagining taking their pain and giving happiness instead were all that lessened the ache in my own back, neck, and shoulders. Imagining purifying light bathing my body while reciting mantras was the only thing that kept me sane at night when my body hurt too much to sleep.

Meditating was the one thing I could do just as well in my bed, the one way to feel I was useful. Except on the days pain won and overtook my mind, the days I stared at the ceiling, frozen and incapable of even trying.

At the centre, I bonded with Kay and Rebecca, once joking that we were the chronic pain club, a club I felt I shouldn't have to join at twenty-two.

"Pain can be used to practice Dharma," Rebecca encouraged me. "My pain helped me develop compassion."

I agreed. Dharma was what made my pain meaningful and therefore bearable.

Having friends who had lived with pain for decades was a comfort. Seeing the joy and grace with which Kay and Rebecca approached life and the ways they transformed their suffering into strength gave me hope and made me feel less alone.

For three years, I waited for the pain to disappear. When I realized it wasn't going to, I gritted my teeth and took back my life. I returned to college, worked more, and exercised to gain the strength needed to heal. I had things to do and felt I could finally do them. After four years cocooned at home, I was suddenly busy, and the first thing to slip was my Dharma practice.

With my abandoned ambitions screaming for attention, and lingering pain still hindering me at every turn, I hated myself

for all the wasted time. After years in bed, I felt I'd thrown away an opportunity. If I were wiser, stronger, better, I could have ignored the pain and used every second to meditate. Was it ever even that bad? I should have made so much more progress on my path.



During last year's Dharma Celebration, I'd limped and dragged myself to every session, enduring a weekend of unusual agony. Eventually my roommate acquired a special-needs sticker for my nametag, so I could avoid standing in lines. After that weekend, despite the pain, I'd joyfully meditated every day for months. Until, once again, my meditation practice slipped from a daily source of peace and inspiration, to a chore. Disheartened and guilty about my lack of progress, I'd been looking forward to this year's celebration as a chance for renewed inspiration.

Yet, as I approached the Pink Palace, squinting as the sun glared off glistening pavement and holding Avalokiteshvara, Buddha of Compassion, embodiment of universal love, against my chest, I couldn't help thinking I was the person least worthy to carry him. As beautiful a goal as universal love was, most days I struggled even to like myself, so what did I have to offer anyone else?

I stepped carefully up onto the curb and toward the lobby doors. In this tacky, tropical hotel, just wearing the burgundy lanyard and nametag meant you were family. Here, I felt I belonged to something bigger, even when I didn't feel like I belonged at all.

I managed to open the door without smashing Avalokiteshvara into a million pieces. I made my way to the group of smiling faces at the bustling reception desk, where members of my sangha were checking

people in. As always, everyone said how wonderful it was to see me. They assured me Avalokiteshvara would be safe while I went back for my bag. My roommate from the year before offered me the sticker for my nametag.

"I'm okay," I said. "My back is a bit better this year."

"How wonderful!" She smiled as if she'd just found out her own pain had lessened.

As I turned away and sighed with relief, I felt a rare moment of perfect calm, the kind of moment where the world seems to bathe you with acceptance, and you wish you could cling to it forever, but trying to do so only makes it end that much faster.

I took a deep breath and closed my eyes to drink in that moment of peace.

When I opened them, it was like turning my senses back on. I saw that every single person in the lobby was laughing, grinning, greeting friends, and looking forward to a weekend devoted to becoming kinder people. Though most of them were strangers, everyone smiled at me, smiled warmly and deeply as if I were a dear friend, the way it had been since the first day I walked into my own local centre.

I smiled back. I breathed it in. Maybe, if I could carry the embodiment of love and compassion in my arms, I could carry it in my heart as well.

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Lindsay Budge is a Canadian Muslim artist and writer. This will be her first written work published in a literary journal, though her art has appeared in international art reviews. When it comes to the written word, horror with a smile, dark comedy, is what can best describe her style.

Rashad Cash is a graphic novelist from the Bahamas, currently living in Victoria B.C. His books can be found at all of the major bookstores in the island's capital, Nassau, Bahamas. He is married, to somebody just as crazy as he is, and has a dog named after a famous celebrity's pet. All dedications due to the Most High, his Mother, Wife, and late teacher.

Sophia Dunn-Krahn is a student in the Camosun College Comics and Graphic Novels program. When she grows up, she wants to be a farmer. She lives by the sea with her family and her chickens. Find her at theyoungforest.tumblr.com

Anthea Gaunt is an aspiring author and a first-year student at Camosun College. Her favourite genres to work with are poetry, fantasy fiction, and scriptwriting. She was thrilled to be chosen for publication in *Beside the Point*, and to be involved in the editing process. Anthea hopes to continue developing her skills at Camosun to further her career as a freelance writer and editor.

Shuang Gong moved to Victoria two years ago. She is a student at Camosun College learning comics, editing and publishing, and scriptwriting. She is a new writer and artist who always wants make her ideas come alive. She has been addicted to horror and fantasy

stories since middle school. She believes that the best ideas for stories come from observation and reflection on daily life.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident. Recently published in *New Plains Review*, *Stillwater Review* and *Big Muddy Review* with work upcoming in *Louisiana Review*, *Columbia College Literary Review*, and *Spoon River Poetry Review*.

Cindy Hunter is a middle-aged woman who has spent most of her adult life working in secretarial-type jobs. She only recently started sending out her work as a writer. In October 2016, she had a piece of nonfiction published in *The Globe and Mail* entitled, "What it's like ... to live with a roommate with a seizure disorder." She was born and raised in Ontario and currently resides in St. John's, Newfoundland.

Benjamin Longshot McFee is a longtime author and playwright. While primarily specializing in science fiction and horror, themes of social injustice and the human condition permeate his work. His most recent work was the 2013 play *A Brief History of Tomorrow*, which imagined the world 300 years from now, through the eyes of its historians. This is his first foray into poetry.

Katie Mutrie grew up in Victoria B.C. She has been writing fiction and journaling since childhood. Using self-reflection and careful observation of others, she attempts to reveal the stories unfolding in everyday life. She has been a member of the Bodhichitta Buddhist Centre in Victoria since 2012.

Rachelle Oak is a writer, artist, and student at Camosun College. In her free time, she dabbles in tarot reading, farming, and thrift-

shopping. Rachelle is usually reading five to ten books at any given moment and is determined to make all her hopes and dreams come true.

Cameron Simo is a second-year Camosun student, and he is working towards becoming a middle school English teacher. His previous writing endeavors include winning minor online awards for Creepypastas such as "April 12th Mind Story" and "Revolution." He is currently writing a novel-in-progress called *Taplica*. He is very grateful for the opportunity to be published in *Beside the Point* with many other talented writers.

Matt Smith is a Canadian educator, filmmaker, and cartoonist. He has lived all over the world including Malaysia, Japan, and Kuwait. While in Kuwait he met his wife, Emma. They continue to travel the world with their two cats. Matt's comics appear in Camosun's *Nexus* and the University of Victoria's *Martlet*. You can see more of Matt's work at SmithvsSmith.com or buy his books at Legends Comics.

Call for Submissions: *A Brief History of Tomorrow*—created by Ben McFee

Project description: Based on the play of the same name by Benjamin McFee, *A Brief History of Tomorrow* is an experiment, both in form, and content. The goal of the project is to create a history of the next 300 years, based on events from real-world historical events. Instead of regurgitating the mantra that history repeats itself, we simply show it repeating itself.

The finished product will resemble a legitimate history book, except the copyright page will read: © 2315.

CONTENT REQUIREMENTS: Much of the material of the finished product will be written by the original author. HOWEVER, a unique feature of this work will be the inclusion of works submitted by outside authors. Works that fit into the canon of future events will be included in the final "history text" with the authors names listed as "additional researchers." Proper acknowledgement of writing credit will appear on the copyright page.

Works that differ from canon will be, with the authors' permission, published in a separate collection of "fiction from the future." The intended format of this publication would be appear as a collection of short works (also "published in the future") that are intended to be seen as fiction, both in the real world and in the fictional world of the future.

This allows for writers to have some liberty in creating their works, but also opens up the venue for anyone who wants to take a shot at building the history of the future. Any works inducted into canon will be referenced in subsequent "historical" works set in this world of the future and be treated as though their events really took place. Works that do not adhere to canon may still be referenced; however they will be spoken of as though they were the popular culture of the time.

CONTACT: Any persons interested should contact the author directly by sending an e-mail to briefhistoryoftomorrow@gmail.com, expressing interest. Parties shall be provided with a timeline of events that "took place" between the years 2017 and 2315. From that, they may choose which point in time they wish to write about. Please send any questions or concerns you may have, and the author will respond directly.