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# VOICES



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## On The Edge

Iona McEwan

You moved here because of the wheat field. You've always imagined yourself living in nature, a homesteader woken up by the birds. The house isn't much to look at, but you can fix it up. You ignore the cracked gutter to watch your little terrier frolic in *your* beautiful back garden. You daydream of a white fence that the wheat just peeks over, hiding the barbed wire and the horrible little hand-painted "no trespassers" sign.

You don't know yet how easy it is to lose your dog in a wheat field.

So, you don't bother stopping him as he slips under the wires. This is his first taste of the great outdoors after all. Use the ripples in the wheat to follow your little dog around the field. You might see the top of his head as he jumps through the sea of yellow. But at some unexpected moment, you notice you're just watching the wind ripple through the field. You scan the field looking for your boy. Your computer-dull eyes will feel the strain of looking so far, so carefully. Run into the garden and bellow your dog's name. You shout like this for hours.

Once your voice is hoarse, leave a bowl of food in the middle of the garden, change your t-shirt, and walk down the dirt path. The rustling wheat jeers at you. Ignore it as it asks why you would let such a misbehaving dog out of your sight. It questions what kind of person a dog would want to run from. You can stuff your fingers into your ears, but it will not help.

Now, I know you don't expect a village bar to be friendly, but you are not ready for the silence that falls as you walk in. Let yourself feel the looks burning into your back as you order a

pint. They all hear you fumble the question, and they watch the bartender refuse your card. Don't look at anyone yet; stare into your glass, and see how it holds more foam than beer.

Once your cheeks stop burning, ask the man nearest you about the wheat field. Who owns it? How do I get in? Try not to take it personally when he turns away. You really should talk to someone else, but you finish your drink instead. Far too quickly. As the room takes up murmuring conversation again, you order another drink.

Stand up and walk towards a group. They'll huddle in together and look away, but ask them about the field anyway. When they refuse to look you in the eye, take another gulp of your drink and look for someone else to ask. This place has a dearth of friendly faces, but keep asking. Don't stop until you feel like a ghost. You might try to buy another drink, but the bartender will cut you off and nod at the door.

Throw your glass down. Stand proud as it shatters. Storm out of the bar and slam the door behind you.

Does the walk home calm you down? Or does it make space for the undercurrent of anxiety and fear to rise up and choke you? You shudder at every bird call. You twist one ankle in a rabbit hole, the other on a loose rock. You hobble in the pitch black countryside night.

It's a shame you don't pause and look up. You would see what the stars look like when the city lights don't drown them out. I like to think this experience would have changed you in some small and imperceptible way, made you submit to the universe as a helpless ant whose actions have no true meaning. But it probably would not have.

You get to your crumbling house in the middle of nowhere, and you howl. March up to the small bump in the barbed wire where your sweet little dog burrowed in, and start tearing up the ground with your hands. As soon as the space is big enough, drag yourself under the fence, fighting the wire as it digs into your shirt, then your flesh. Like a bloodhound, you track the paw prints on your hands and knees. You whisper-shout his name into the dark rustling stalks. Occasionally, you might hear a distant whine, but please don't be fooled; it's only the wind.

You never knew wheat had such big roots. They swallow up your dog's prints, leaving you stranded in this maze of stalks. The sky is hidden by the thick canopy of ears of wheat. You try to crawl back the way you came, hoping to hit the fence, but the fence never appears. Ants run over the back of your hands, and something buzzes in your ear. You are covered in a prickling wave of itchiness. You try to stand, but the heads of the wheat are too thick to push through. You don't know if the sun has risen, or how far you have gone. Your calls for your dog have become a whisper.

You lie down on the roots. You don't fight the ants, even as they burrow under your skin. The earth compresses under you.

You will never be found. Your flesh will crumble into the roots, and your blood will feed the vibrant heads of wheat. You will be loved by the earth, and isn't that enough?

## Box Kite

Ashley Cotter-Cairns

Nana was drunk by mid-afternoon, thunderclouds gathering behind her eyes. Mum needed an excuse to get us out of the house.

“Let’s walk up to the common, Jamie.”

“But it’s windy,” I whined. I had one eye on the tin of Quality Street chocolates Nana kept under the coffee table.

“Lesley,” Nana intoned. Her voice adopted an exaggerated upper-class clip when she was ‘tight’, like a character from a Noel Coward play. “What about the kite Daddy made for you? It’s in the garage.”

Grandpa was an executive, close to retirement. Nobody in the family was sure whether Nana drank because he spent so much time at the office, or he spent so much time at the office because she drank.

Their garage was a leaky brick and corrugated iron dungeon at the end of the front garden. We turned a rusty key in the flaky wooden door. A dim bulb suspended on a white plastic wire was the only illumination.

Grandpa cultivated mushrooms in a plastic grow-bag; their earthy odour competed with the hot glue gun tang of decayed tires, and must from a heap of ancient Playboy magazines in the far corner.

The kite hung from twin hooks on the wall, an old-fashioned box type, once the jaunty red of a ripe tomato, now blotted and bloomed with damp spots like a mouldy peach.

Mum gave it a dark frown.

“I’m not sure it’s going to work.”

Nana appeared at my side. She put a claw-like hand on my shoulder and squeezed, much too hard. I cried out in surprise.

“Don’t be ridiculous. Hugo built it to last.” She listed sideways. Some of her gin and tonic sloshed onto the concrete floor.

Mum snatched the kite from the wall, her movements as awkward and jerky as a clockwork toy. The box part lurched, losing its right angles; the tail dragged along the ground, oil stains spotting the triangles.

“It’s time to go.”

“Have fun.” Nana’s face softened in what might have been wistful nostalgia; or perhaps it was only the effects of the Tanqueray.

It wasn’t far to the common, about half a mile, but it seemed like an expedition. Langley Hill was steep. We both breathed hard on the ascent. Mum struggled with the bulky kite, its tail draped across her shoulders like a hellish feather boa. I could still feel the impact of Nana’s clutch marks on my shoulder.

We passed large houses, set back from the road, protected from prying eyes by high hedges. I ran my fingers across jagged flint walls and plucked random leaves from privet bushes. Wind gusts nipped at our hair and clothes.

Kings Langley common was a broad grassy oval as flat as a dining table. A cricket club occupied about a third of it; a copse of oak trees played sentry along two sides.

In winter, on rare snowy days, you could slide down the hill between their trunks. Grandpa's sled was like Grandpa himself: a bombproof, half-French relic which would outlast us all. He used to wax the metal runners for me.

His homemade kite had fared less well. It resembled a forlorn patch of litter as we stretched it out on the grass.

"How does it work?"

"You have to hold the string and run. I'll throw up the kite and the wind will catch it," Mum told me.

I sidled away in reverse pigeon steps and kept the line tight as I unwound it from the spool. The string felt furry and rough between my fingers.

"Run, Jamie!"

I turned and sprinted away. The kite's mass tugged at the string, and for a moment hope blossomed in my chest. Then my arms grew heavy. I was jerked to a stop.

My hands dropped to my sides as I turned back. The once-box was now a folded sandwich of near-squares connected by loose parchment, like a deckchair stacked away for the season. But I soon forgot the disappointment.

Mum was talking to a woman about her age, the differences between them obvious.

The newcomer stood to attention like a drill sergeant. She wore a tweed jacket with patches on the elbows, cream pants, long brown boots with low heels. Her hair was dyed blonde and she wore a lot of makeup, her cheeks and lips deep crimson. A tan purse over one shoulder completed the look.

My mother looked drab and shrivelled beside her, her clothes gloomy polyester blacks and denim blues, her skin as grey and colourless as a burned-out lightbulb.

I sidled over with an uncertain smile.

“Jamie, this is Penny. She was a friend of mine at school.”

“Hello, Jamie,” Penny greeted me without a smile and gave me an up-and-down appraisal. “You’ve grown. I last saw you in your Christening robe.” Her voice reminded me of Nana’s drunk voice, but it rang out as clear and sharp as a pistol shot.

“Hello,” I whispered. A blush clambered from my neck into my face.

“Flying a kite?” Penny asked. “Perfect day for it.”

“Daddy made it for me donkey’s years ago,” Mum said. “I think it’s done.”



Penny surveyed the wreckage. The old kite twitched and lurched, like a bird trying to fly after smashing itself into a plate-glass window.

“Doesn’t look like a lost cause,” Penny stated. “All the elements are here. Let’s get to work.”

“It’s all right, Penny.” Mum’s voice was small, tired.

“Think nothing of it. I’m parked over here.”

There was no more debate. Penny scooped up the corpse of the kite and led us towards a silver Land Rover. I held the tail in her wake like a bridesmaid bearing the train down the aisle.

The interior of the boxy car smelled of rich leather, with a faint tang of lavender and wet dog beneath it. Mum flopped into the passenger seat and pulled her door closed. The windows began to steam up. Penny pushed a couple of buttons and the heater whooshed and wheezed, drying the glass.

We drove in silence. Mum clutched her purse in both hands, head lowered, as if in pain, or prayer. I stared out at fields divided by grey-green mossy fences. Cows and horses watched us pass.

Penny slowed and turned into a driveway, gravel growling beneath the heavy tires. A garage door rumbled up and back. Harsh light spilled over us as we drove in.

I jumped down from the car and blinked in the sudden glare.

Penny’s garage was almost as big as Mum’s apartment. It was floodlit from above like an operating room. Tools marched in colourful formation up a pegboard wall above a workbench,

upon which a motorcycle engine lay exploded into hobby-friendly parts, like robotic intestines. An MG roadster with buffed cherry paint flashed us a cheeky chrome grin.

I helped Penny hoist the kite on to the bench.

“Just needs a steady hand and some patience,” she assured me, still unsmiling, focused on her task. “These old box kites are indestructible.”

There is comfort in observing an expert at work. Penny applied glue from a stoppered glass bottle, the contents creamy-white, dried beige drips decorating the sides like a restaurant candlestick. She clamped the box back to square, pulled the parchment taut and stretched out the tail.

Mum lurked in my peripheral vision. She didn’t radiate anger or frustration, but rather a cold detachment. I knew, without really understanding why, that I’d be in trouble later.

Penny stepped back with a flourish, an expansive smile making her prettier. I fell in love with her then, just a little. Smiles were a scarce currency in my family.

“It’s ready to fly. Shall we take it outside?”

“Yeah! Let’s go!”

“I don’t think so.” Mum’s voice was toneless. “It’s getting late. We have to go home.”

“Aw.” I knew better than to challenge her in front of others, but I couldn’t help myself. Fun seemed a million miles away when Mum was in charge.

“I’ll drive you back afterwards.”

“No, thank you, Penny. We’ll take the bus. But thank you for fixing the kite.” Mum’s voice was the rigid scrape of shovel against slate.

“You can’t carry this on the bus. I’ll keep it here for you. Come over on the next windy day. Rob and I will make you both dinner.”

“That sounds lovely.” My mother’s attempted smile was a lame twist, which got no further off the ground than our kite had.

We blinked like badgers in the fading daylight, the brightness narrowing to a thin line as the garage door lowered on its mechanism. I craned my neck as I watched Penny’s legs and feet disappear. Mum marched away at a clip; I had to trot to keep up.

Dusk blew in on the soggy October air. Mum stared into the distant sky as if she were wishing herself away.

“You really showed me up, Jamie,” she said into the gloom, unwilling or unable to look at me.

“Sorry, Mum,” I sighed, wise enough not to question her.

The bus coughed us out into full darkness. Chill rain painted the village sidewalk and street with puddles, gilded by street lamps. Mum dropped her head against the wind, her hair clumped against her collar.

I trailed behind, my feet cold and squishy wet, and took care to avoid the paving stones she had stepped on.

No Photos In It

Emily Gaudet

Your black and white film is non exposed

There are no photos in it

No record of the day you took

your cereal box camera

to the marsh, slid open and shut

a cardboard slip to reveal

a pin-sized prick for vague

exposure times. Ideal grey

conditions of photography aside,

no light made it through the ragged hole

punched in the coke can cutout

hockey-taped to pop or snap or crackle

You cannot use the film again

in case you thought of asking

Once it's brought to our lightproof room

immersed in the developer stew

to bring up strokes of former light

held safe in microscopic silver

eleven years in nine junk drawers—

with every moving truck degraded—  
it cannot ever be renewed

You have in-store credit  
You'll have to pay the difference  
May we suggest you build yourself  
a better pinhole camera  
actually capture whatever you thought mattered  
among the ducklings in the reeds  
a thousand kilometres from here

You have a time limit of three months  
but this is a matter of instants  
Do not dwell on the deadened tangle  
buried in our trash can. Bring us  
something new and we'll unspool it  
to unfurl fresh memories. Forget  
how you failed. Have a nice day

## Valuables

Carolyn Van Der Meer

They tore the place apart, looking for gold jewelry. The thing was, I didn't really have much. And for some odd reason, the burglars didn't even take all of it.

My wedding rings remained, mostly white gold and maybe not looking valuable to them in their great rush, and in the dim light. Everything else they took were things I didn't often wear. My mother's engagement ring. Her anniversary band with our three birthstones. It always seemed fitting to me that these were the rings that got stolen; for her, they had been emblems of a failed marriage—which was why she was willing to part with them. The diamonds in the engagement ring were miniscule chips. I know she always resented that. And yet they were set in platinum, which I found kind of ironic.

She gave both rings to me when I turned sixteen. Initially, I wore them all the time, but that changed—first when I started to wear chunky silver, and then when I got married myself. But I loved fingering their simple handiwork—the fine quality of their delicacy kept her close to me. These, along with her Chanel N°5 special edition bottles, given to her by my father—not surprisingly, a scent she ended up hating. But the solidity of those decanters, encased in black enamel, and those rings, double-wrapped in yellow gold, were somehow foundational to how I thought of her. Strong. Solid. Unwavering.

She's gone now. And everywhere I turn, there are things that remind me of her. Things passed down, generously given over the years, large and small. Her voice in my head. The rings don't really matter.

Continued: Edward Hopper's 'Eleven A.M.' (1926)

Donna Davis

Emerald carpet

Olive drapes

Burgundy lampshade

Nut-brown dresser

Chair electric blue.

On a table painted

Ebony black, two thick notepads

Warm yellowed in the yellow morning sunlight.

Flea market Bohemian, but

She tells the callow students

How she copied the palette

From the Van Goghs of Arles

That she saw in Paris

While posing for Matisse.

Lorelei hair, red auburn vixen pelt,

Was the talk of the demi-monde; and even Joyce, in exile.

They're all impressed. (This is called "Life Class.")

But while they buy the fantasy, and keep on buying,

It buys her time. The schools, the ateliers, the

Academies (so-called), they'll keep on calling. But  
How long? Her flesh is fallow,  
Slack, pale from long bleak hours  
Spent hunched at the old typewriter  
(With the key that keeps on sticking, I, I, I, i, i, i—  
Well—who needs First Person Singular?)  
Stark sleepless nights, she waits  
In ambush for the millennium.  
Why must she settle for this settling body, thighs, belly  
Doughy, paunchy, white bread, oleomarge? Better  
To slay that puffy dragon in the coming chapter, when  
White-knighted, bullet-breasted, our Godiva  
Rides off on massive, great-haunched gutsy charger...

But here and now, the earnest sun  
Is climbing indubitably to noon,  
While Saturn devours his children. Soon,  
Sundown, then  
More clockless hours, posing  
As strutting pin-up sluts,  
Or lolling decadent concubines,  
Or pensive muses propping head on hand,  
Or writhing contortionists, hysterics,



Fashioning pain exotic, sultry, enviable.

Along her puckering thighs, puce

Pressure bruises swelling, tucked away

Like wads of cash in cleavage.

Oh, Demoiselle d'Avignon, how long?

Use your imagination. Not a lot to think

Some kid in the drawing class may

Actually have talent,

And looking seriously hard enough will see...

What's really there. This is life class.

11:00 a.m. It's 1926.

Use your imagination, it doesn't take a lot

To ground the universe. Because,

In fact she has a great imagination,

In fact she's read a lot of books,

Has an impressive vocabulary,

And tells a cunning story. At least

Five a month get sold, pulp fiction. Last month, May–

Ten! And a contract for a serial:

“Venus Triumphant, Mars Eclipsed.”

(Six installments to that new Smith-Corona.)

Sci-fi, more fantasy; she has a second sight  
For apocalypse and Utopia, in shades  
Of violet, turquoise, taupe and purpled prose.  
She plots a decent mystery, too, for Queen.  
There's lots of women writing them, and reading.  
Why not? Each woman must devise her future  
Sentence by sentence, polishing her style.  
Create the apt scenario, write herself in.  
Not to mention every day and night  
She's had to have detectives on the case.

Of course there is a novel in her drawer...  
But no—that's for the long view, that one.  
Don't go there now—it's Kryptonite.  
Aha. Won't Saturn ever place  
His magic rings upon the aching finger?  
Close-up, she looks too hard upon  
Her fine deft hands, delicate ankles  
Slim sculpted calves, small wrists...  
Everything she thought inviolable,  
Seeing them threaded with torturous  
Blue pink and purplish veins,  
Bleeding like inept pastels and watercolours

From life class. Don't go there now, go to  
A.D. 3000, the Amazon colony of Neptune...  
Or to this sunny morning  
Metropolis: At  
11 a.m., in 1926.

I turn my face away, from conjuring  
Paris in Brooklyn, Aphrodite from  
The mirror in the washroom down the hall.  
It doesn't take that much imagination. But  
Those kids have next to none, and as for men  
All men are kids. I'll glide again  
Over the skyline into  
The out-of-the-body experience of  
Weightless space, the speed of  
Light, when time is stilled, against the sun creeping  
By tiny increments to nova.  
I, I, I—First Person there at last, striking a new key.  
Not only pristine virgins have the gift  
Of luring unicorns into their laps;  
Scheherazade, veiled seven times in  
Aging flesh, and planted in these shoes  
Would have a fine disguise.

Imagine an enigma, look for clues. A little  
Divergent thinking goes a long, long way.  
A century I'd keep them in suspense  
Of my averted face, and shameless white  
Body of flaws, my hair not princess gold—  
Black Irish copper, embers from the peat,  
The pit. And then: "She's naked yet wearing shoes..."<sup>1</sup> (?)  
Some generation, moaning for a sign!  
A hundred years from now,  
That unborn, stillborn lady keeps on looking.  
Bird-eyed, obsessed, ingenious,  
She peeks and pecks for blood, clucks for intrigue, and  
Sniffs for gas (This is called Life Class.)  
With one dry-scabbed desire, begging me  
To turn around, to turn and answer  
Her academic question, what  
The Doctorate must know, she's crazy, still to know.  
("What *IS* it with the *SHOES*?)

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<sup>1</sup> "Edward Hopper's "11 A.M.," 1926" by Joyce Carol Oates

Dark umber shoes

White feet, on

Emerald carpet;

Olive drapes

Burgundy lampshade

Nut-brown dresser

Chair electric blue.

On a table painted

Ebony black, two thick notepads,

Warm-yellowed in the yellow morning sunlight.

Because... it's '26. It's

11:00 a.m., and 1926.

Measuring

Len Richman

After so many years of designing, co-leading, and being a participant of TMI courses, there are recently three that have significance for me: “Digital Dilemmas,” at the Pointe-Claire campus, and two via ZOOM, “The Spirit of the Sixties” and “OK Boomer: Chatter or Chiller.”

At the last class of Digital Dilemmas, a student of long standing, a lady in her 70s, said to me: “This is the worst decade of my life.” She cited the Syrian Crisis; the Ukraine-Russian conflict; the division between Palestinians and Israelis; Trump’s shenanigans; Covid; the new music; the sharp polarizations in the United States; closer to home, the political-social dilemmas bedevilling Quebec within a framework of Canadian bewilderment.

Being historically-minded, I responded with: “C’mon, the sixties had its debacles, debates, disappointments, disasters, and diversity. The three assassinations of King and the Kennedy brothers; Kent State; the women’s plus Black and LBGTQ movements; environmental concerns and the Woodstock Festival garbage left over; the usual age group cavities; and of course, the Vietnam War and its implications.” And the list goes on and on.

She looked skeptical as I continued to compare the sixties with current trends and the sped-up patterns of technological transformations requiring constant adaptation. Archeological memory went back to a pre-dinner martini with my father-in-law in the 1970s that I used to further my measuring.

He had thrown aside a daily newspaper featuring on the front page the actions of a rock band’s concert behaviour the night before. I said, “is that any different from Elvis Presley’s

undulating on TV in the 1950s, and the changes wrought in that decade leading to the sixties? What's the difference?"

My father-in-law then thought of the alterations during his young and not so young adulthood ranging from the depression on the heels of the roaring 20s; yellow journalism; the impact of World Wars I and II; the inventions of the radio, the phone, aviation, and cars and their development.

"Change? Adjustments?" He said, continuing with: "but at least my daughter was able to attend a concert without being contaminated by what was going on outside. What happened inside remained inside! Things have certainly changed."

On the way home from the TMI Pointe-Claire campus I found I was in a reflective frame of mind. The three courses (listed at the top) kept going through my thinking, and my concern with generational gaps and bridges.

Then I got home for a family dinner. After supper, three people remained seated at the dining table: a 20 year old (granddaughter) more or less representing Generation Z, her dad, my youngest son, in his early 50s bordering on Boomer, and myself, exemplifying the middle-old senior between 75 and 84. (I hesitate to age labels, as handy as they are, because of differences, individual as well as geographical: city and rural environments, countries and socio-cultural climates.)

As the after-dinner conversation continued, I believe I displayed certain facial characteristics that made my son question, "What's on your mind right now?"

“On my mind? I’ll tell you.” And the concepts were pouring out with not much pre-thought other than the TMI three courses’ themes and dialogues zipping through my head. “I wasn’t part of the 1960s decade. Having married young and becoming a father unexpectedly, I look back at those years and know that whatever gains were achieved got lost by those who left idealism in favour of SUV’s, a house in the suburbs, Wall Street, and blatant consumerism. What bothers me at present is so much from that period is emerging again, with even stronger influence. Drugs, the George Floyd debacle, blatant or hidden racism, the climate crisis, and so on and so forth.”

After a few moments of quiet rumination around the table, my granddaughter looked directly at me and said: “Your puzzlement is because *your* generation didn’t finish the job they were supposed to do.”

A complete, awkward silence followed. The three TMI courses became predominant in my thinking, and during each I searched for something that was hopeful.

In *The Family of Man*, which I still consider the greatest photographic exhibition of all time, Carl Sandburg stated in his Prologue: “In the times to come as the past there will be generations taking hold... read if you can the strange and baffling eyes of youth.”

I’m waiting for the next TMI course that dwells on the chasms between generations and possible passages that links them, with some assistance in further measuring.



Pandemic Paranoia; taking a solitary walk with memories of better times.

Esther Spector

The day dawns dismal and grey. The view from my balcony opens to pavement stained black with rain. York Street, located behind my apartment building, is quiet. No one walks on the sidewalks. There are no boys playing street hockey in the middle of the road. Missing is the hollow clatter of hockey sticks as they compete for control of the ball. Instead, everything is empty, filled with a heavy, unnatural and oppressive silence.

Good news. The rain has stopped. Google Home says the skies will clear by early afternoon and I'm thinking about taking a walk.

After lunch, I head out to take my usual isolated stroll along the back alleys behind the buildings on Ste. Catherine St. adjacent to the commuter train tracks. I don't think I will meet anyone there. My "safe" route will take me down the St. Catherine Street hill, past the Glen overpass situated to my right and across the street from the outermost edge of Westmount Park. There is no one there. The lone picnic table is unoccupied. Regardless, that leafy green oasis with its large shade trees remains a comforting sight.

It is an uncomfortable experience to be out walking these Pandemic days. Seemingly alone, I remove my KN95 mask with its advertised 5 layers of protection. I breathe in the fresh air. I think this is an improvement over the lockdown. At least I can move outside and walking will relieve my tension.

I spot a lone soul walking up the hill towards me. Anxiety strikes. My stomach flutters. My pulse quickens. How old? Vaccinated? Wearing a mask? Self-preservation sets in. Quickly, I

put on my mask and judge the impending physical distance between us. Three feet? Not enough. I take a quick check for oncoming traffic. No cars. I prepare to step to my right, off the sidewalk onto the road. I will not make eye contact. I don't want to engage with someone who could be a danger to my well-being. Hah. It seems that they also harbor the same fears as they pull up their mask, edge over to their right and prepare, eyes downcast, to keep a healthy distance between us. Good thinking, other person.

Strange times when an extroverted person like me walks wrapped in a blanket of fear, worried about the danger of a random encounter with another human being. A group of teenage girls approaches. They are not masked. Seemingly oblivious to my approach, they walk three abreast engaged in an animated conversation. They live in a different world. Covid does not concern them. It is something far away, somewhere else. I envy their youthful sense of security but step off the sidewalk just the same. I want to avoid the Delta variant they are probably spewing into the air. It could make me very sick.

These are strange times indeed. What has become of me? What has this pandemic done to my mental state and that of other vulnerable seniors?

I long for Prepandemic times when I went about without a care in the world. I actually rode, unconcerned, on the 90 bus to reach my tap class. Once there, I descended a steep curving staircase to join 15 other people of varying ages in a windowless basement dance studio. Without masks, and oblivious to the air we were inhaling/exhaling; we exerted ourselves breathing heavily as we tapped to the beat of exuberant pop music. We danced in front of a long mirror that doubled our number and magnified our mistakes. Cheerful laughter bounced off the walls.

If I arrived early, I would enter a small room just off the main dance floor and sink deeply into the cushioned softness of a dark brown, well worn, brushed velvet couch totally unconcerned about who was seated next to me. I remember chatting easily with the other students as I tied my black leather tap shoes with their hot pink laces. I can still remember the faint, pleasantly familiar but indescribable odor in that room; a pot pourri of perfumes that generated a scented signature of the many bodies who waited there, eagerly anticipating their turn to dance. Most of all, I loved the scarred grey patina of that weathered wooden dance floor with its blackened scratches and pock marks created by repeated punishment from all of those metal clad shoes banging on its surface. If I concentrate, I can hear the reassuring clacking sound my tap shoes made as I walked onto the dance floor to join the class.

If I manage to survive this killer virus, will I be unscathed? Will I be able to return to my old fearless self, unafraid of the air? Will those magical carefree times ever return?

Standing still now, at the bottom of the hill, I wait for the traffic light to change. Its tinny ticking countdown to green jars me from my reverie. I heave a long sigh and continue walking alone along the deserted street.

## The Sculpture

Kathleen Dunn

She stood outside our door

In the hotel garden

Amid sculptures by local Galician artists

She alone stood out

This subtly sculpted lady

Shedding her outer shell

Stepping away from her protective coating

Daring to be herself

As if she, too, had just walked the Camino.

## A Place Full of Time

Dany Gagnon

*Places in Montreal where disorder is authorized, places that can grow, places that reflect the way how our mind works, and the way nature flows if allowed.*

### ***A place full of time***

A disruption in the illusion of order, amidst a tight mesh of concrete, of frantic overflowing traffic, of febrile lives: a square. An open space welcoming the passengers in and out of the subway.

a place  
breathe  
a window  
a city  
hoping  
dreaming

where people  
meet see  
a rift in time  
shifting  
waiting  
stopping

Space to allow momentary possibilities to illuminate the imagination. Clustering in this enclosure, thoughts swirl in the public square, striking the unsuspecting traveller.

### **Métro Mont-Royal**



Amidst a tight mesh of buildings, roads, parkings, and overcrowded sidewalks, in front of the station: an empty space! A square giving the hurried humans a place for waiting, for meeting, and for hoping. Meaning has a way of happening when given a chance to steal a few moments from lives lived too full. A pseudo-yogi scratching on a sitar in the middle of the square gives the rhythm: breathe in, breathe out.

There will always be time to rush for the next metro.



## Contributors

**Ashley Cotter-Cairns** is a British ex-pat who has been published in dozens of magazines, including *Maxim*, *Women's Weekly* and *British Airways In-Flight*. He wears his underpants on the outside for his day job as a comic book dealer, and secretly wants to be both Batman and Stephen King. He lives in Montreal.

**Kathleen Dunn** discovered poetry when she was 64 and grieving the death of her husband. Through the bereavement process, she uncovered her long-hidden creative spirit and was amazed at how much she could say with so few words. For her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, she dared to self-publish her poetry collection under the title *Second Chances*. She now shares her poetry with seniors and bereavement groups. Kathleen is a TMI graduate and a discussion leader.

**Donna Davis** completed her BFA at Concordia and her M.Ed. at McGill. Employed as a graphic artist, Donna began an ongoing personal practice of journaling and intensive collage-making. Following graduate studies in communication, she joined Angela Leuck's influential haiku circle. Donna participates regularly in AWE workshops, and community sessions with lyricist Rob Lutes. In TMI and QWF courses with Greg Santos, she has explored "hybrid" form through ekphrastic and prose poetry.

**Dany Gagnon** is a writer, translator, and editor living in Montreal. In the last six years, her poetry has appeared in over three dozen publications. Her last contribution, four poems in: *Green - Anthologies For The World* by Red Penguin, published in June 2025. She won Second Prize for the Polar Poetry Contest in 2021. She is a member of LCP (League of Canadian Poets) QWF (Quebec Writers' Federation), and the Two Susans Poetry Circle in Montreal.

**Emily Gaudet** is a poet and editor from Montreal. She was a finalist for the 2025 RBC/PEN Canada New Voices Award, and she was a recent mentee in the Quebec Writers Federation mentorship program. She holds an MA in English from Dalhousie University.

*Emily Gaudet is a winner of the 2025 TMI Emerging Writers Award.*

**Iona McEwan** is a tinkerer and a maker. With a background in immersive technology, digital art, and textiles, she loves weaving her myriad of interests into her work. After adventures in Scotland, England and France, she has landed in Montreal, where she shares her home with her partner and a roster of lively foster cats.

*Iona McEwan is a winner of the 2025 TMI Emerging Writers Award.*

**Len Richman** has been associated with the Thomas More Institute for over 50 years in various capacities. He continues to design and co-lead courses each year. He has also been an animator and educator in many outdoor/wilderness projects, as well as a producer, director and playwright. Len is the author of two books: *Raindrops, Glimpses, Moments: An Unconventional Memoir of an Unplanned Journey*, and *Shivers and Signposts: The Journey Continues*. He has also written short stories and a memoir piece, and is currently writing a novel.

**Dr. Esther Spector** is a retired clinical child Psychologist who is a longtime participant and occasional leader of courses at TMI where she was introduced to the craft of writing memoir by Pauline Beauchamp and Karen Nesbitt. Esther continues her love of writing with Offshoots, a group of former members of those classes. In addition, she belongs to two book clubs and continues with weekly tap dance sessions at Klaxxon.

**Carolyn Van Der Meer** is the author of five published books: *Motherlode: A Mosaic of Dutch Wartime Experience* (2014); *Journeywoman* (2017); *Heart of Goodness: The Life of Marguerite Bourgeoys in 30 Poems* | *Du cœur à l'âme : La vie de Marguerite Bourgeoys en 30 poèmes* (2020); *Sensorial* (2022); and *All This As I Stand By* (2024). Her chapbook, *Birdology*, was published by Cactus Press in spring 2025. She runs a small PR consultancy practice in Montreal where she lives with her family.