

# CPR

*Resuscitating the art  
of Canadian poetry*

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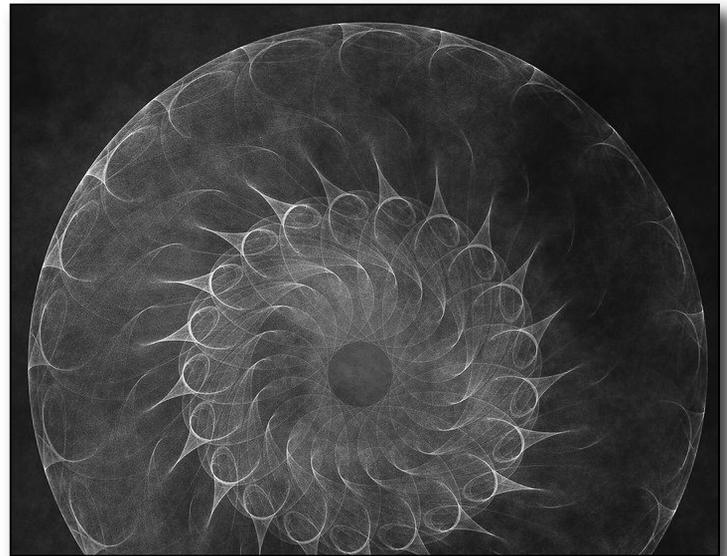
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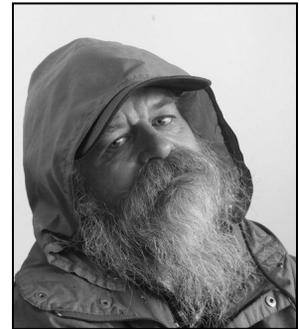
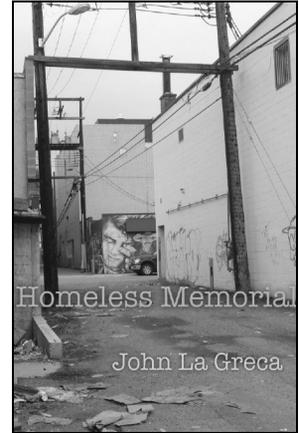
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# from Homeless Memorial

## John La Greca

Ekstasis Editions  
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Poetry  
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### Rita's Revenge

Rita is the cook at the Mission.  
Correction: she's the longest surviving cook at the Mission.  
I've seen various cooks returning home in the evening.  
They had their children with them to act as bearers.  
These ladies were unfortunate.  
They didn't have cars to stow away food during the day.  
Some cooks are generous and are popular.  
Rita is tending towards elderhood.  
She says she raised two kids all on her own.  
Probably. I'm sure Rita is where she is because she knows secrets.  
Sometimes those who know secrets  
Get temporarily banned to show who's boss,  
But sometimes I wonder if there is a boss in the place,  
Which is why most of the addicts  
And hookers at the Mission skip Rita's "soup"  
And head to the donuts.

### Life Should Not Be Lived at All Costs

Whimpering like a dog,  
Hanging on in a prison camp in Siberia,  
In Dachau or on the streets of Calcutta  
Is for martyr-complexed individuals  
Who have not learned saintliness.  
Buddha said *Accept suffering, death is inevitable.*  
I do not think he meant that suffering is an end to itself,  
That it earned merit toward his brand of salvation.  
If there is no meaning, hope or quality in life,  
Let go and feed the sharks,  
Send the soul to the wind! If there is wisdom,  
Then I am sure that a well-fed dog  
Can impart it without half so much anxiety,  
Depravity, degradation or humiliation.  
There is only one statue to a starving Buddha.  
The rest are fat and serene, in contemplation.  
Buddha took a healthier approach to life,  
As did Christ after his time in the desert.  
Wealth is a trap that denies the suffering of the poor.  
Jesus was not asking us to praise suffering and death,  
Like Buddha. He wanted us to be ready to go through it.  
He knew desperation on the Cross  
When He called to His Father.  
He knew He had no choice but to accept His end.  
In my mind, He did it no more gracefully than the average person.  
Heroism in suffering and death exists  
In the God-induced hallucinations of forest-dwelling warriors  
And die-hard Nazis of the Second World War.

### I Don't Know You from Adam

This is God speaking.  
No. It isn't. It is John la Greca.  
In the morning, at the Food Bank,  
Before I can snatch two cans of beans  
And some good bread off a shelf  
That they hide in a back room and then roll out,  
I have to listen,  
Along with the rest of a great crowd,  
For up to fifteen minutes,  
To prayer and inspirational talks.  
God has blessed me with poverty.  
He has love for me. There's a plan for my life.  
They all want me God blessed.  
Their message is clear: take what you are given.  
If someone gives you three toothbrushes  
And three years' supply of toothpaste,  
Take it and be grateful.  
Tomorrow it may be a case of spoiled avocados.

### I Want a Job

One day, a woman my age,  
With dyed, blond hair, beautifully cut,  
Well brushed, wearing an expensive,  
Knee-length wool coat,  
Presented me with a dollar. I shook my head,  
And gruffly said no thanks. Ten feet from her,  
I muttered that I would rather have sex with her.  
In some ways it was a form of protest,  
Like a British Trotskyite protester  
Flashing her breasts before a Conservative  
Member of parliament.  
Shock value, I suppose.  
Some kind of urban Cargo Cult.  
I didn't want a quickie with that woman.  
I wanted something tangible,  
To smell and touch,  
All with her pinky up at tea.  
You can't do all that  
If you have no income beyond chump change.  
I get angry when a woman  
Thinks that all I want for the day  
Is a coffee.

*John La Greca is Canada's Charles Bukowski, writing with deep and at times blistering honesty and humour of a side of Okanagan culture never seen in tourist brochures.*

*For nearly fifty years, he has been our greatest poet of the streets. For all this time, he has lived with a mind given many diagnoses, including schizophrenia and obsessive compulsive disorder. He has been in and out of care since 1967, surviving on inadequate government and community support, drawn by poverty, curiosity and community into close relationships with homeless and disenfranchised people on the margins of society.*

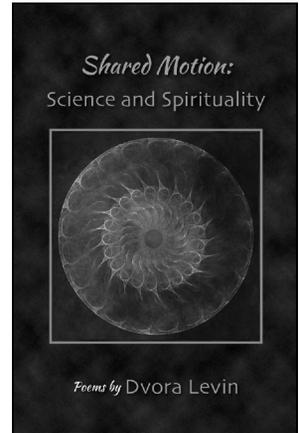
### A Love Poem to Brandi If She Never Wanted Me Horny And Foolish

If you were someone I liked  
The night would begin  
With me smiling into your eyes.  
It would pass  
Into the cool of morning  
And we would sigh  
As our hands parted  
And finger tips  
Regretted the distance  
The day would bring.  
Let's get the picnic basket you suggested.  
Find a park, stay for the sunset  
And not think of another night  
By the Seven Eleven  
Calling up for directions  
For the next bag of heroin  
Or crack or weed or methadone,  
Suffering, more pain, more near death,  
More affirmation of you  
By all those who predicted  
You were as lousy a person  
As they thought.

# from Shared Motion

Dvora Levin

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Poetry  
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## Twinning

Like identical twins who share DNA,  
science and religion peer into the void,  
scribbling their separate creation stories.

Science begins with a primordial fireball,  
a critical density bursting into gravity,  
sliding along the curvature of spacetime.

For religion, it's a deity consciously creating  
a perfectly tuned universe, teeter-tottering  
between subject and object, faith in the all  
powerful One.

Based on vacuum fluctuations, the uncertainty  
principle,  
some cosmologists suggest the universe could  
have arisen  
from nothing, spontaneously.

Yet, what if the deity is not a fixed presence  
but that wily, unpredictable spontaneity itself,  
delighting in watching her twins, science and  
religion,  
playing tennis with that fuzzy free-choice ball?

## Holding

The centre is everywhere.  
The circumference, nowhere in sight.  
Everything radiating from the centre  
of the unknowable.

My attention, a flutter-stop  
stuttering on the surface, reaching out,  
searching for something, anything  
proven I can lean upon.

When I surrender my holding on,  
let my fantasies, my memories  
of life's catastrophes evaporate,  
I touch centre.

A dynamic stillness settles me.  
All those facts and theories, fractals and DNA,  
the immensity of the ineffable,  
everything spiraling.

This is not a grasping faith,  
a careful research study,  
nor a prescribed path but  
a stumbling into the unity,

an exponential expansion into  
a fragile certainty, a brief escape  
from the force of gravity  
always pulling us apart;

to arrive at the centre of the maze  
we are forced to inhabit throughout our lives.  
The gift – to briefly know the unknowable  
that knows itself perfectly;

before that inevitable return  
to wobble about the circumference  
desperately holding on,  
just holding on.

## Story Telling

So many faith stories torn and shredded  
by facts, measurements, new discoveries,  
as scientists create their own archipelago of  
stories,  
their sacred texts and commentaries all peer-  
reviewed,  
free of morality, unburdened by consequence.

Some scientists are declared atheists, dismissing  
rabbis, priests, country vicars at church bazaars,  
while others are agnostics, tapping their toes  
at the sidelines, ready to jump either way.

Monks and mystics now are forced to hide out in  
their caves  
sifting through the rubble of fact earthquakes,  
picking up and polishing pulsing shards of belief,  
putting them on display in case a scientist or two  
should wander by.

Fact-finders who dare to enter the arched dome,  
to sit with the silence, will feel  
their pulse quicken, will feel  
the embrace of the ineffable.

## Liminal Journey

Entering those in-between places hiding  
beneath the unbroken surface of the ordinary.

Sensing that sudden spell-casting shadow,  
our known self submerged in a slurred reality.

It can happen in an elevator, in the shower,  
perhaps as a dull lecture empties the mind,

or as we say the same prayers,  
the same chant over and over again.

We go through a gap in the hedge,  
begin a mystical journey, beyond

our controlled attention, unaccompanied  
by gremlins, goblins or griffins with wings.

Once having been a Director for Social Change  
Projects in Victoria and Israel, **Dvora Levin** now  
devotes herself to poetry. She has published four  
collections of her own work: *To Bite The Blue  
Apple*, *Sharav*, *Ragged Light* (published by *Ekstasis  
Editions*) and a unique hand-bound book, *Zeroing  
In On Nothing*. Dvora also edited two poetry  
collections written by the homeless, sex workers and  
addicts in recovery: *Voices From The Edge*  
(*Ekstasis Editions*) and *Victoria On The Banks Of  
The Mainstream* (funded by the City). She  
continues to lead weekly poetry writing sessions with  
federal parolees living in a halfway house.

---

The curse of the liminal – fear of the strange,  
of unspooling foolishness, the allure of going  
insane.

A few enter through minus numbers, quantum  
possibilities,  
multiple dimensions curled alongside.

How many tangled strings are tugging  
at our carefully honed minds?

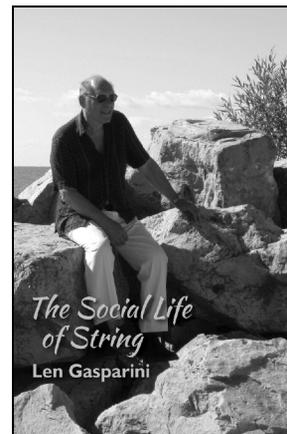
How many thresholds are waiting there,  
open, expectant, drawing us in,

enticing us to take this journey  
to stand poised on the rim of the mystery?

# from The Social Life of String

## Len Gasparini

Ekstasis Editions  
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74 Pages  
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### Halloween 1945

I remember riding on my father's shoulders  
when I was four years old,  
gazing at the starry sky  
up above the world so high.  
On front porches, jack-o'-lanterns  
leered, grinned, or grimaced.  
Silhouettes of bats, cats, and witches  
clung to lighted windowpanes, trying to flee  
into the deepening shadows outside.  
Across the street a huge maple tree  
stood in the midst of its own darkness.  
Masquerading children chanted:  
*Trick or treat, smell my feet,  
give me something good to eat.*  
On such a night old terrors crept to life again.

What mischievous djinn assumed the shape  
of a mushroom cloud? What mystery split the  
atom

for better or for worse?

"The spirit of the *Perverse*,"  
said so-and-so, quoting Poe.

Or was it Oppenheimer's horror-scope?

"Now I am become death, the destroyer of  
worlds."

A gang of children gamboled around a lamppost  
where a boy, dressed as the devil,  
had built a bonfire of dead leaves.

The children danced with impish glee,  
doing wrong for the wrong's sake,  
feeling the thrill of fear.

And I, safe on my father's shoulders,  
thrilled at the spectacle.

### The Social Life of String

When did you last see a piece of cotton string?  
String, you know—thinner than a cord  
and thicker than a thread—used to tie, hang,  
or fasten things. String: a strong word,  
cosmological too, like the string theory.

Try to sing, *I've got the world on a string*  
when you're living on a shoestring budget.  
The blonde starlet in the string bikini  
lounged poolside, fingering a string of pearls.  
This tableau tugged at Errol Flynn's heartstrings.

Said Frank Costello to a crooked politician:  
"I can pull strings, with no strings attached."  
A verb with verve: string someone along;  
string someone up; strung out on crack, smack...  
You don't see string around much anymore.

### Film Noir

*Are you contrite?*

~ Eugene McNamara to the author

The shadowy woman in my dream  
standing on a rain-glistening street  
in front of a neon-flickering hotel  
impressed herself  
on my subliminal memory.  
I only recognize her as you would  
recognize the compulsive figure  
of your desire when you waken alone,  
late at night, clutching a gun  
in a strange room  
on some journey whose purpose  
you can't remember.

### In the Bar of the Pontchartrain Hotel

The old man sitting beside me in the bar  
of the Pontchartrain Hotel was talking nonstop.  
The barkeep poured him a slug of whiskey.  
He swallowed it faster than you could slap a tick.

"Yessir," said he, "I used to be  
an agronomist—oh, way back in sixty-three  
when boll weevils deviled the cotton,  
and floodwaters hurled the levees—"

Suddenly he nudged my arm, looked at me...  
"What's the loneliest bayou in Louisiana?"  
I didn't know what to say. I smiled.  
"Bayou *self!*" he chortled at his own pun;

asked where I hailed from, and said: "I live  
in town now, but I'm as country as a plate  
of butterbeans"; then gestured to the barkeep:  
"Bourbon, straight. With a bourbon chaser."

### Untitled

And when I told my son  
half jokingly  
that his newborn son  
might become a poet,  
he jeered: "Don't jinx him."  
I bit my lip.  
I've had better moments  
in jail.

**Len Gasparini** is the author of numerous books of poetry, including *The Broken World: Poems 1967-1998* and a collection for children, *I Once Had a Pet Praying Mantis*. He is the author of three story collections, *Blind Spot*, *A Demon in My View* and *When Does a Kiss Become a Bite?*, and a work of nonfiction, *Erase Me*, with photographs by Leslie Thomson. In 1990, he was awarded the F. G. Bressani Literary Prize for poetry. He lives in Toronto.

### Nocturne

Sometimes I walk the empty streets  
of my old neighborhood at night,  
and the night gets into my head.  
It gets into my head because  
people who once were neighbors  
have long since moved or are dead.

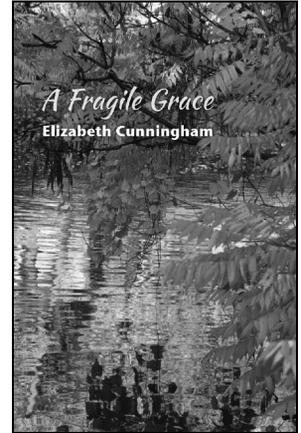
I look at the house where I was born  
(the house that my father built)  
and I want to knock on the door;  
but strangers live there now.  
The house and I—doubly haunted—  
do not look the same anymore.

The alleys too I remember,  
the backyards I raided for fruit ...  
My lost youth comes back to play  
with the spirits of the night.  
The past has a stronger hold on the night  
than it has on the day.

# from A Fragile Grace

## Elizabeth Cunningham

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### **Intrepid Wanderers**

We are intrepid wanderers,  
stubborn, beaming elderwomen,  
our hair blanched colourless  
or streaked steely-grey,  
faces etched with life's  
inscrutable scars.

We slog the deep snow,  
denying the weight and ache  
of so many decades.  
We draw our breath deeply  
from the troughs of the mountains.

We stop and gasp at liminal clouds,  
Some of us sing,  
harmony the only mystery  
that can approach what is revealed.

Some of us speak  
of grief unsurmountable,  
peering into unfathomable  
chasms of loss.

None of us turn back.  
We may meander off the trail,  
stagger and fall.  
But we are never lost.

### **Under the Larches** *for Patricia Rose*

We walk a pathway  
of long light,  
the colour of burnt sienna.

Dark shadows  
brush silently against us  
while the illuminated trail  
leads us further  
into the forest.

There is a subtle  
movement in the air.

We look up  
and gold filigree,  
continuous as snowfall,  
drifts down  
from the glowing crowns  
of the vibrant trees.

The reaching branches  
gaze ceaselessly  
at the sky,  
turning their soft needles  
into tiny shafts  
of light.

They fall in delicate strands  
into our outstretched hands.

Gold is an elusive hue;  
and these filaments  
ephemeral as the scent  
of forest incense  
and the faint glimmer  
of a fading autumn day.

### **Hoar Frost**

Sparse hoar frost  
crisps the crackling branches  
of countless gnarled trees  
that clutch the mountainside.

The brightly wrinkled faces  
of our tromping gaggle of women  
beam at the impossible stars shimmering  
on countless mounds of snow  
clumping between the trunks.

Pale winter sunlight  
glimmers on the ice-shattered limbs.  
They cackle with us  
as we pass.

We clomp steadfastly,  
leaving shuffle marks in the snow.  
The going up is hard,  
the descent worse.  
Mysterious blue shadows  
block the light.

Beneath our dazzlefrosted hair  
and deeply furrowed brows  
are young and laughing minds,  
wondering which part of us  
is telling lies  
about our age.

### **An Everlasting Glacial Flower**

In winter the mountains close in,  
sullen and magnificent,  
heaving their white shoulders,  
and shrugging off the sky.

They hunker down  
over the valley and the town  
where the cleaving, silent river  
scarcely breathes.

Even the breath of birds is white.  
They must move ceaselessly,  
as does the water,

*Born in Toronto, Elizabeth Cunningham moved to Eden Mills, near Guelph, with her three children and husband for a teaching position in the 90's, Elizabeth volunteered for many years at the Eden Mills Writer's Festival where eventually she read her own poetry after winning first prize in the literary competition at that event in 2015. This award encouraged her to keep working towards publishing this collection of poetry.*

to keep from freezing.

The limbs of trees are colourless  
as they crackle in dismay.  
How long must they wait  
to whisper softly of spring breezes?

Too many days are dark.  
Loneliness mingles with the ache  
that moans in the bones of all creatures  
who wait for the thaw.

When the sun strikes  
the glistening wings of the night-blue jays,  
they shriek a cacophonous awakening,  
shocking me from my winter's daze.

I go alone to climb  
the glaring summits  
which even the squawking birds  
have forsaken.

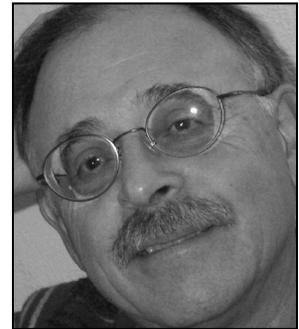
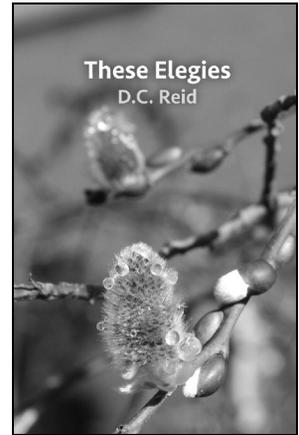
I bring back down  
to the valley and the town  
an everlasting flower  
from the perpetual glacier.

It is radiant  
like the perennial dawn,  
beaming precariously  
in my grateful hands.

# from These Elegies

## D.C. Reid

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### All of these

What never happens in time never  
heals in time

~ Stewart Mosely

We invaded our luck until it was lost to us  
We showered our happenstance until it was  
drowned  
We elegized our arms until they were dead to us  
We sequestered our water until it rose against us

All of these we did them for you

We followed our tracks until they lead back to us  
We sought the solace of bomb until we found no  
peace  
We imagined good fortune until we were paupers  
We lost our fellows until they became our heroes

All of these we did them for you

We held guns until they melted from our hands  
We searched for us until we found us nowhere  
We welcomed us until we were missing in action  
We founded our thoughts until they were  
corporeal mud

All of these we did them for you

We yelled into the ground until its echo came  
back to us  
We were soldiers until we killed humanity  
We would have killed the earth but it cannot be  
killed  
We returned to you less than what you gave us to

All of these we did them for you

### Canada's hundred day war

On the road, sleet has drunk a little dirt  
and left stalagmite evidence of our passing.

All is safe on the western front except Amiens.  
All is well on the northern front except the enemy

heard Canada was coming and massed his armies  
to make a silence of us. Acceptance of Arras

was foreseen by those exposed to long  
expectation  
of nothing, not even the self. What is victory

when it no longer has meaning? And the casualty  
clearing centre where the lucky of us would land

was the biggest bluff. We'd been a cliff above men  
who loved us with their weapons.

All is safe at the Hindenburg line. We shout so  
long

no one is left to hear our cheers. Our sounds

be conveyed to the enemy. From the small  
box of shells the marvellous velocity of sniper

magic. The puff of bullet in chest,  
and ricochet bringing it back through.

We were the waste of Arthur Currie, the scant  
pink  
flesh made flowers of the bodies we lay down

to light our way to the enemy. All is well  
in Bourlon Wood. All of all have laboured to our

end and in its achieving, laid ourselves down.  
A division of us made the earth, the hay and oats.

But in need of something new, some spring,  
we did be dead, waving our hearts before us.

### No ideas but in things

so much depends / upon / a red wheel /  
barrow

~ W C Williams

And everything depends upon how  
near you sleep to me

~ Leonard Cohen

Sleep is the night for us.  
Our eyes unplanning to be awake

suffer most when they create  
the world, and let the rest

be unperceived. An apple, say.  
A Cezanne apple

rigid in perception of itself  
before the mind has taken its place.

As though eyes are meant for seeing,  
when our brain loads heavy,

and the snick  
of weapons love the men we kill.

No ideas but in things.  
And so, we are searched

by unthinking bullets  
thrown from canine snouts.

*D.C. Reid's poems have been published widely in 50 literary magazines in Canada, and just as many around the world, with his work translated into Spanish, Chinese, French, Greek, Hindi and Bengali. His sixth book of poems, You Shall Have No Other, has been made into web-based movies on [www.sandria.ca](http://www.sandria.ca) – fifty-five so far. Reid is a past president of the League of Canadian Poets.*

And colloquial, our words  
are slippery as worms,

ones who do not suffer  
their impending deaths.

They are not with miles  
of cables in the head

from past to morning light  
to warn us of our deaths.

O the lucky worm,  
o the unthinking it has and

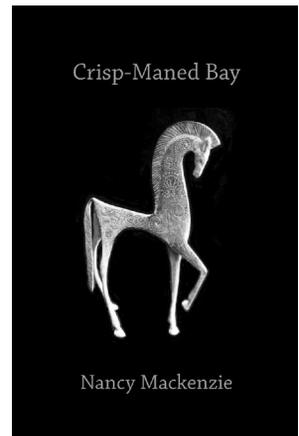
we simply take it on our fingers  
when it carves out of the walls

of trenches and keep it as a pet or  
maybe food.

# from Crisp-Maned Bay

## Nancy Mackenzie

Ekstasis Editions  
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 Poetry  
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### Calling in the Ghosts

If the heart is an abyss  
 I would be a stone  
 gravitating toward the unfathomable,  
 but if the heart is a stone  
 like Marble Island  
 three miles wide and ten miles long  
 quartzite measured off by Arctic Ocean shores  
 a mirage of aurora borealis,  
 magical animals, and sunken ships  
 or any other kind of stone for that matter,  
 I would be, I confess, the abyss I am.  
 A deep interior closet  
 a vast, but fathomable ocean  
 where currents tug and pull  
 at memory and desire.  
 And I would trust that stone  
 to bring me, not home per se, but to a sense  
 of being home.

After all, I've left off finding excuses  
 and must to the alpine again,  
 where, perhaps, a heart divided,  
 I could bear light in a stone, return heroic  
 with gleaming eyes,  
 washed clear through to this magical animal  
 swimming backward against the tide.

Among stones: crevasse; among wildflowers:  
 bees.  
 Lakes would make aqua mirrors where,  
 tomorrow

I could string a clothesline between two pines  
 and tonight, before the curtain falls  
 and trusting to my old weathered hiking boots  
 this trail and that bus, I will to the alpine again;  
 friends have tethered my old dog there  
 as if finding me she would need the rope.

Some kind of echoed hope  
 yodel-eh-he-ho.  
 It's quiet.

A thrush bursts from a nest and I feel like I'm  
 folded  
 in the closet or behind the dishwasher  
 where I've hid (with the Arctic sleeping bag)  
 from my brother  
 who won't let me watch *The Wizard of Oz*.

I punish him by staying hidden.  
 The farmyard darkening past dusk,  
 some chore I forgot to do a sunken treasure  
 of unintegrated emotional charge. Why else  
 do I return here to this home? The dog  
 is long dead, but with me, in my heart,  
 and I heard her voice last night among the  
 coyotes.

The heart doesn't feel, it sees.  
 And looking about while canoeing  
 with slid-in electricity  
 echoing off the walls  
 the crags jut into the sky  
 above this crystal shore,  
 and the tangerine flutter of my pup tent  
 peeks into view, and by its campfire stones  
 paws crossed, my coy-dog, Enalyion,  
 voices her welcome.

And then the silence, building its abyss  
 and sinking into stone.

And offshore amid the mist  
 ghostly and triumphant, I behold an angel,  
 who, after this confession  
 listens to my prayer, I know he does  
 because of the lessening shadows, the bird  
 that lifts off from darkened stone, an owl in the  
 night.

A dove, cooing, in the eastern farmyard  
 while the fiery sun  
 flares across the Rockies.  
 Birdsong picked up, like this Arctic sleeping bag I  
 trail to my bed  
 westward as the light travels through the waxwing  
 wood,  
 touching every blade of grass, quartzite, clasts of  
 chert, forests,

*Nancy Mackenzie is the author of several books of poetry and books for children. A dressage enthusiast and long-time fan of horseracing, Mackenzie lives in Edmonton, Alberta where she operates a professional writing service called Bronze Horse Communications. A novel, Nerve Line, was published by Ekstasis Editions in 2014.*

unto the sea. Unto the sea. Where the red to  
 purple light  
 sinks and glows and rises like campfire flames  
 or an angel performing rites and guarding me,  
 my heart a luminous stone in the deep sea.

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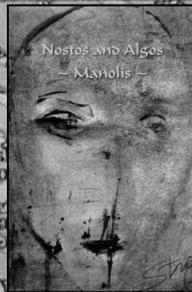
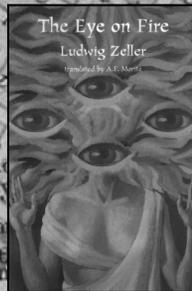
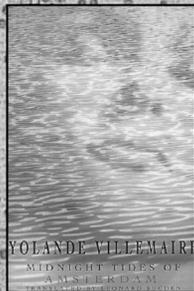
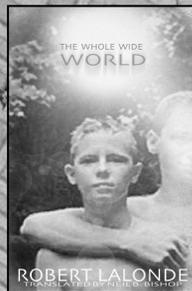
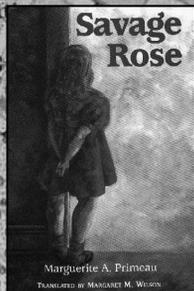
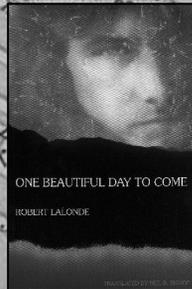
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