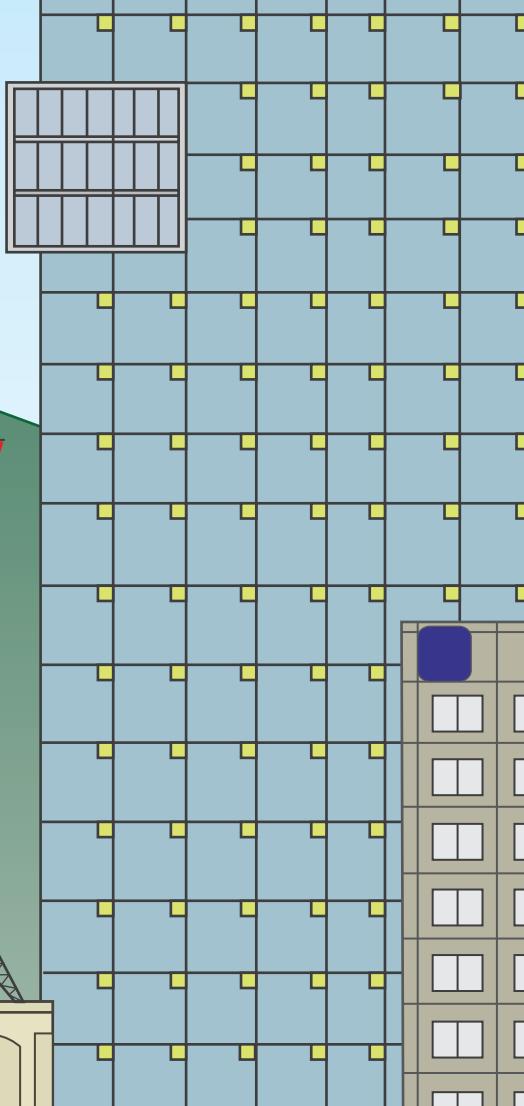


## CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

JARED HAZZARD  
CASEY WALLACE  
KELSEY SAVAGE  
SUZANNE McCRAY  
MITCHELL KWAK  
AARON GURNEY  
ZACH MATHEWS  
LAINA DEER-FERRIS



a magazine of  
award-winning  
poetry, fiction,  
and creative  
nonfiction

vol. 14



## **EDITORIAL**

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Like they say: better late than never.

This issue of W49 Magazine was scheduled to be printed and circulated in May 2010, but due to a hold up that simply could not be avoided on the part of the editor, and in part also because the design and layout is done by a different Publishing student every year, we were not able to complete Volume 14 until the Winter/Spring of 2011. But here it is. Finally.

W49 contains the best poems, short stories/graphic fiction and creative nonfiction/commentary submitted to the annual Langara Writing Contest, which is open to all current and former Langara students. For more information and specifications, see the annual call for submissions on the inside back cover. This is the third year that W49 has been made available online—through the revamped Langara website—so the writers in this volume will have their words reach a wider audience than in years past. Just “google” the words “Langara Writing Contest” and all the information will appear on your screen.

W49 thanks Chelsea Goodman, the Publishing student who designed and laid out this volume in the Spring of 2010 and who was good enough to complete the work for us in the Spring of 2011. Chelsea is the first Publishing student who included an “Editorial” in the magazine, and we are happy that she took on this extra responsibility. A big thank you goes out also to the Mina Deol, the Publishing student who is working on the design and lay out of Volume 15 but without whom we could not have brought the previous volume to completion.

We also thank the members of the English Department who read the submitted manuscripts and adjudicated the entries for the contest: Karen Budra, Heather Burt, Jill Goldberg, Caroline Harvey, Paul Headrick, Felicia Klingenberg, Ramon Kubicek, Trevor Newland, Roger Semmens, Jacqueline Weal, John Webb and Guy Wilkinson.

*Peter Babiak, W49 Magazine/Langara Writing Contest  
English Department*

## **ABOUT THE FRONT COVER**

When I was given the opportunity to design this year’s cover of W49, I wanted to avoid cover elements such as books and trees that have been overused in literary publications and go for something new. I found inspiration in some of Vancouver’s innovative architecture and breathtaking scenery. Having the Rocky Mountains as our backdrop and the Pacific Ocean as our backyard, Vancouver is a west coast gem made up of both historic and new buildings that each tells a story. From the exquisite Dominion building to the towering Shangri-La Hotel that touches the sky to Vancouver’s most famous landmark, the Harbour Centre, it is truly a city like no other. I am honoured to have been part of this design experience and hope you enjoy this year’s exciting issue of W49.

*Chelsea Goodman*

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## ARTIST TO SUBJECT

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By Laina Deer-Ferris

Honourable Mention, Poetry

My dear, I cannot leave your drawing alone.

I spend days  
with pencil and eraser  
stroking  
touching  
making you right.

From under graphite point,  
the lines  
the shade  
the skin  
slowly fade in.

By incandescent light,  
I rub  
and brush  
and smudge  
and scratch  
until the last of you  
rises through white.

I conjure you  
until you come  
your lips  
wrists  
hips  
lashes  
over languid eyes.  
My muse, the ghost  
I loved and loved on sight.

## FORGIVENESS

---

By Zach Mathews

Second Place, Poetry

Do you remember?

how you used to stand still and stare  
at the sink of your mothers kitchen  
when you'd see me behind you  
in the reflection  
of the window

You'd tilt your head to the side  
waiting for my lips on your neck  
and a whisper would melt through you

Do you remember?

the low ceiling of your bedroom  
I'd have to duck through the doorway  
towards the bed where I gave you a ring  
and we cried and we promised

But it wasn't always that pretty

Years later, I'm building wooden furniture  
trying not to think about you  
Years later, I'm alone on a train  
trying to find a way  
to forgive myself

# CORPORATE SUBORDINATE

By Aaron Gurney

Honourable Mention, Creative Nonfiction

She tells me to go fuck myself. I pull out my baseball bat from under the counter, step outside my checkout (so to create space for a proper swing) and then proceed to release my rage onto that faded-but-still-noticeable birthmark on the lower part of her jaw. She'd bleed for a while, people would watch in awe, and I'd go to prison after losing my job.

Except, that isn't what happens; instead, I suck it up, apologize, and wish her a pleasant evening. A pleasant evening! It suddenly hits me like a good old-fashioned slap across the face: I am a corporate whore! I've traded my soul in for a name badge and an 18% discount. Why bother treating people nicely if they are just going to explode at me when their tampons scan at fifty cents more than they had accounted for?

I am a ghost. More often than not, when I greet people and ask them how they are doing, I am ignored entirely. They'd reply with a direct order telling me that they want "blah blah blah", then they'd supervise me to make sure I don't pull off any sudden movements that would suggest foul play.

"Why am I being charged two dollars here?"

"It's a coupon. You're actually sav—"

"Why are you charging me for a coupon?"

And then the second I do something that is not to their liking they inform management. It's as if I'm their personal slave and I'll be scolded if I don't do exactly as they say. People who would normally avoid walking into me on the street now trample over me like a soggy newspaper.

The guy with the crappy hairdo who always buys the Classico pasta sauce and two litre Pepsi places his things by my till. He's lost in his headphones, as per usual, so I tell him about my weekend.

"On Saturday, my buddy Ryan and I had a really interesting conversation," He's not paying attention as I continue, "Yeah, so we both concluded that we like to eat babies and kill kittens. You should try it some time."

Confused, he pulls his headphones off and looks at me,

"What?"

"That'll be seven eighty-nine."

I am small. Whenever anyone from head office comes to check up on the store, I am forced to "customer service" everyone to the fullest extent. I double bag and write rain cheques for every customer, but I might as well be tea-bagging and writing poems for them as well. Sometimes there are no more than three people in the entire store (one of them being an employee on their break) and I find myself walking around aimlessly in search of the next person that I might "service." If I wanted to throw on a fake smile and stroke customers all day, I might have pursued a different profession.

Being a corporate whore, I get to try my hand at a multitude of different trades. A

Corporate Subordinate

while ago, Chuck asked me to clean the public washroom. I anticipated his request when a lady came running toward the front of the store, toilet paper trail from shoe et al, demanding to speak with a manager about how there was piss and shit all over the place.

I take pride in my work. I have simplified the task of cleaning the washroom into three easy steps. First, dunk the mop into the toilet bowl. Second, wipe down the floors and walls with said mop. Third, sweep the rest behind the toilet. Lather, rinse, repeat.

Sometimes I'm not sure why I do the things I do. A man begins to unload a shopping-cart full of groceries onto my counter. Before vanishing entirely, he consumes my entire counter with his groceries and then gives me a dirty scowl. I give him ten minutes before I start beating the shit out of his groceries. I start with punching his chow mein. It's so nice to feel the noodles crunching under my knuckles. I then move on to denting his cans and slashing his toilet paper.

The best part of my day walks in around three-thirty. With résumé in hand, she heads toward Chuck who is distinguished by his extraordinarily clean sleeves. Within seconds I get a call on my phone from one of the stock guys down the aisle.

"You would."

He hangs up, gives me the thumbs-up, and then we both go back to staring at her like a couple of gargoyles. She's so innocent and pure; she has the look of someone who genuinely likes people. I was the same when I first started, until my 'customer service cherry' got popped by some cranky old woman on the verge of

death. After she leaves, Chuck moves her application to the very top of the pile. Chuck would.

It's quiet here sometimes. As I lean against the cash register and rest my arm alongside the bubble-gum display, I keep tally of the people who try walking out the 'in' door. Winston calls me back to the receiving area and all the stock guys are there waiting for me. How could I forget? It was Sunday and it was time for our Receiving Olympics. Each week after the manager goes home, we have a new event. Today's event: the maxi-pad homerun derby. Usually, the games go swimmingly without interruption, but one week we got caught during the palate jack relay and were forced to reschedule.

Annual reviews are little more than an opportunity for managers to try and show off their grasp of the written language, they mean nothing. One year I'm "a model employee worth emulating" and the next I'm "spiralling out of control at an exponential rate." I'm definitely not as much of a keener as I used to be. When I first started, management would salivate at the opportunity to ask me to do something – I'd do just about anything. I've since learned that there's always someone that is going to trying to step on you in an attempt to move upward.

There is no way to stop people from trying to step on one another; it's the nature of the retail world. To combat this, I've decided to make myself the most unreliable stepping stone ever.

Sue, a somewhat new hire, has only been working at the store for a short while but she likes to think she's "moving up" because she sits in the office with the

managers and tattles on anyone she can. First of all, when you work retail, there is no “up” – there’s “maybe sideways” or some kind of malignant tumour. Anyway, we have this rule that we can’t have more than a certain amount of money in our till at any one time, and Sue found that I kept a little bit more than that amount one day – so she tattled on me.

Today she is taking me off cash for my break. In preparation for the tattler, who smells like a thousand lint traps, by the way, I dump almost all the cash float into the safe, leaving the till nearly empty. She takes me off and I run off to a better vantage point to see her reaction. I pay for my Coke at another checkout, and wait in anticipation for her to open her register. The till opens and I can hear the jingle of the few remaining pennies as they hit the side of the tray.

“Jesus! There’s nothing in here! NOTHING!”

“First you say there’s too much, now you say there’s too little, you’re silly!”

They recently transferred a new manager over to our store from another store, Ralf. This man is half machine and half moustache. He never takes breaks, he works twelve hour days, and if he sees you walking by, he always has to give you something extra to do. After I finish doing the garbage, Ralf calls me over to the seasonal aisle.

“You took half an hour to do the garbage today.”

“I did, eh? Well I guess there was a lot of garbage.”

“I saw you socializing there with Brittany.”

“We were jus—“

“I don’t have time for this crap. You’re wasting my time, I’ve got a list of things that need to be done and you’re useless.”

“You know what, Ralf...”

With my face already red in anger, I clench my teeth and glare at him. I want to tell him that the other stock guys and I have adopted a German codeword for whenever he is around: Schadenfreude. Did I really want to explode at work again? The last time it happened, well, it wasn’t pretty.

A man came in and bought fifteen dollars worth of groceries. His swollen hands dug into his pockets and emerged moments later, each filled with change. He then pulled out another handful, and another, and another. I told him that I would not accept all of his change and he exploded in my face.

“Why not? Are you stupid?”

“There’s too much loose coin. You’ll have to roll the pennies and nick—”

“No. You have to accept whatever I pay you with.”

“No. We’re privately owned, we can say no to coin. Sorry.”

“Where’s your manager you stupid shit?”

I called John over and he tried to calm the man down. Yelling at me and every so often giving me the finger, the man made clear to John that he was not happy with my customer service. My smug smiles in his general direction made the man even more enraged – he was inconsolable, it got to the point where he didn’t even

know which swear word he wanted to use, so he just combined them all into one big massive super-swearword, “fubitshihead.”

After the man had left and after having told the story of what had happened to all my co-workers, the man came rushing back into the store. He asked Ryan for my last name and where I lived. My co-workers began to understand what I meant by describing him as a “fucking lunatic.” I whistled at him and the man came to address me.

“What’s your last name?”

“I’m not going to tell you that.”

“That’s fine, your first name will do. I’m going to get you.”

I probably escalated the situation when I burst out of my checkout and ran up to him with my fierce eyes. I pointed at my jaw and I told him to punch me. I kept walking toward him and yelled at the top of my lungs.

“Punch me if you want to fight. Punch me! Punch me in the jaw! Get it over with! Punch me!”

Just as I realize he’s twice my size, a mob of employees and customers mercifully intervene to separate us. While I think back and laugh about this event, the man to this day is still trying to get me, this made apparent by a recent phone call.

“Customer service, how may I help you?”

“Ah, you still work there, eh asshole?”

“Excuse m—“

“Don’t worry. I’ll get you.”

In retrospect, I realize that life is just too short to be standing around and complaining about coins and tampons and price checks and carry-outs. After all, there are more important things that need to be done; the ceiling fan isn’t going to throw chocolate bars at itself.

There’s simply no point in arguing with management, or anyone for that matter, the more uninvolved I am here, the less grief I take home with me. I turn back toward Ralf and he’s standing there with his arms-crossed, ready to get in one of those big hissy-fit spiels about productivity or time management or whatever it is he normally talks about while I stare blankly into the depths of his moustache.

“I don’t have time for your shit, Ralf. I’ve got work to do!”



## **MY MIND IS A MASON JAR**

By Casey Wallace

Honourable Mention, Poetry

I will hold it longer  
I will hold it for sixteen years and remember  
while riding the bus or tying my shoe  
certain passages  
where the action has become so small

where fingers move before they should

where cold prevents walking any further

I will remember then how you called me that once  
to ask if my eyes were open or closed when I yawned

and I couldn't answer you

## **POST MODERN LOVE/ REAL LOVE BEING A FRUIT SALAD, THIS BITCH TOTALLY HAS SCURVY**

By Elizabeth Laura McIntyre

First Prize, Poetry

20 years breathing and now I know what part of me wants.

Needs. A sexy bastard hot enough to ripen tangerines,

Likes loud music but does not smoke Belmonts.

And since last weekend he's been in my dreams.

At a rave I saw him alone, not dancing.

I want again to see his serious mouth form my name.

Magnetism, my eyes on his a note on the fridge. Entrancing.

A white guy rocking precarious glasses and a longish mane.

Hmmm, been starving, a fast I want him like sunrise to break.

Chill buds, wanting to know where he is ticklish,

If this guy is up to give enthusiastically things I can take.

Is he down? And does his tongue favor that black or the red liquorice?

To peel his knit sweater, his wide chest a ripe orange,

And introduce him to that sweetest screech, my bedroom door hinge.

# BRIAN, YAEL AND HOST CELLS

By Trudie Gilbert

First Prize, Creative Nonfiction

It was one of those hot and sticky Toronto days when news anchors advise against being outside at all, let alone exercising or vigorous activity. The young women of Queen Street West—up to the current moment with their fashion, attitude and latte—the least likely to appear out of sorts, even donned oval shaped pit stains. The windowpanes of the coffee shops, the dog grooming parlours, the design studios, the swanky fusion restaurants, the independently-owned book shoppes, they all sweat condensation down the vintage decal decorated windows.

The energy in the West End, usually highly-caffeinated and crafty, was set to slow motion.

The tiny puppy dogs, the ones always perched in custom-made shoulder bags, dragged their hips in arthritic stupors. Trinity-Bellwoods Park—normally full of artist types with their newly-purchased gently used paperbacks, djembe drums, weekend tails and sketchbook diaries—was empty, other than the dirty hippies taking advantage of the abandoned green space to light up.

The juxtaposition of the starving artists who could barely afford to rent west of Yonge and the businessmen whose paycheque ought to buy his family a home with a yard in Richmond Hill was an odd feature of the ever so trendy Queen West. That day so sickeningly sweltering hot, even the suits that constantly kept the appearance of success in the most dire of situations loosened their ties, unbuttoned their collared shirts beyond what's appropriate for the office, and swigged back the last half of their bottled water.

Brian and Yael were not about to hydrate themselves. Nor were they going to take the advice not to engage in strenuous physical activity. They were, however, about to peel back the layers of their executive uniforms.

The two had been set up by Maddie and Brennan, a couple they both knew independently for some time. They were a perfect couple and they knew it. The just wanted for their two dear friends Brian and Yael, who both often engaged in casual affairs no longer than a weekend, to find the romantic bliss they had.

“Come on, it’s the 90s, who does non-monogamy anymore?” Brennan asked. Naively, Maddie and Brennan thought, given their similar relationship patterns, that it was a perfect set up.

Brian and Yael thought likely agreed but for different reasons.

After a modest number of drinks consumed, two overcooked steaks, and an inexperienced waitress, the tension underneath the table was getting to Brian and Yael.

“Do you want to...”

“Shall we get...”

Interrupting each other was a pretense neither got overly flushed about.

“Well, then, I guess we agree. My place is air-conditioned. I can show you my

Brian, Yael and Host Cells

studio.” Brian was so aggressive. Yael didn’t mind, but found his faux charm nauseating.

Yael, a 32 year old Marketing Executive, didn’t have time for relationships between her career and overly-active social life. Men loved her. They were entranced by her. She knew this, and as a joke usually left a little something for her latest to remember her by. Behind her was a string of one night stands, love affairs in various time zones, and one high school tryst that broke her poor 16 year old heart.

Brian and Yael reached his Peter Street loft and wasted little time fulfilling the day’s fantasy. They whirled around like a violent tornado—no regard for the expensive post-modern figurines Brian had perched on different surfaces in his apartment—seemingly abusing one another, but panting in anticipation.

“You’re not going to be obsessively calling me, telling me how ‘you’ve never felt like this before’, are you?” It’s what always happened to Yael. Brian rolled his eyes and continued to tear off her layers.

It was the kind of sex only virtual strangers had, slightly disrespectful and exhibitionistic as he bent her in front of his floor to ceiling windows. Their bodies left sweat marks across the glass as they approached the moment that made the over-priced appetizers and weak drinks worthwhile.

And then, it happened.

The orgasm was spectacular. It always was for both of them.

Yael buttoned up her shirt, poured herself a glass of water, downed it and smiled at Brian as she would with a client.

“Wonderful. You, lunch, your apartment. Everything. You have my number.”

As she kissed him goodbye, she thought about how much she didn’t want him to call. Turn your cell phone off this evening. She realized, too, she hadn’t left him a surprise behind.

But there was no need. Yael left Brian with an everlasting token. His cells were the newest host to the HIV virus.

The Window Period

Unbeknownst to Brian, inside of his body was a production line of white blood cells. Slaving away producing antibodies, the immune system’s response to the HIV virus is defiance and denial. Not discriminating against anyone who comes in contact with Brian, his body is giving—at its most willing and eager to infect others because the immune system has not yet submitted to the virus. At this point not only is the virus malicious and eager to spread itself to new hosts, but it’s working incognito, undercover—no evidence of HIV would even dare show its grimace in a test at this point. The body carries on as if nothing has changed...

Brian, a 37-year-old art dealer, was at the top of his game. He had chestnut coloured hair with auburn highlights, a chiselled jaw line, and a perfectly manicured

body that won him points with ladies. His career had taken off in his late 20s' after a risky investment in an up and coming local artist paid off. He was the type of guy to finish his taxes ahead of time, prepare his lunch the night before, keep dates and always floss before brushing—He took care of himself. It was unlike him to let anything slip by that could possibly harm him.

"Just fuck me," Yael's words played back in his head louder amongst the chorus of women past. Not protecting himself disgusted Brian. He shuddered when he thought of the possibilities.

"Ugh, gross," Brian shook himself out of his thoughts and decided to call his Doc to for an appointment test for all 'STD's.

"Shall we just schedule you in some extra time to do STI and HIV testing during the physical you have booked for next week?" She sounded slightly self-righteous correcting him and adding HIV. Brian agreed.

Brian's mind worked like a conveyor belt of priorities. As deadlines or appointments approached, they slid closer and closer to the forefront of his consciousness. But as his appointment to make sure everything was alright with his health—particularly his sexual health—loomed closer, he would shove the reality of what could happen to the depths of his mind.

Brian's health clinic was atop the 19th floor of a modern glass building on King Street. As he sat himself down to wait for his name to be called, he glanced around at the others. He wondered if any of these people were about to get an STI test as well? He tried to imagine it but couldn't picture a senior citizen, a 4 year old, or even the handful of suits wearing wedding rings doing anything that would warrant being so cautious.

"Brian!" He always hated how they announced his name in front of everyone.

He walked down the hall which was laden with pictures of far off places Dr. Weber had been.

"Is there any particular risk activity that you're worried about?" Brian drew a blank, and shook his head unknowingly.

"...the reason for your STI and HIV test today," Dr. Weber had obviously seen this before.

"Oh, yeah, unprotected sex. About a month ago." As the words left his mouth, he pictured Yael.

"Alright, well, we will perform the tests but I would like you to come back in about 3 months. Its possible to receive a false negative result."

Dr. Weber could tell that Brian had never done this before. He explained the ins and outs of the testing process.

"The body takes its time with infections and viruses. Especially HIV. It can take 3 to 6 months for the immune system to produce enough HIV antibodies to be measurable on a test. But this test's results," he plunged the needle in, "should be ready in 1 to 2 weeks."

As the needle sucked the blood from his arm, Brian lost himself in a daze staring

at the crimson tube. He thought of all the stereotypes he had absorbed about infections and viruses over the years. Gay men. Intravenous drug users. Minorities. Africa. Magic Johnson.

None of these matched his image of himself.

As he exited the office he picked up some 505 King West Street Car reading—pamphlets on STI and HIV testing.

He was surprised to learn that most new cases of HIV, 70%, were acquired through heterosexual intercourse.

"Hmm. Who woulda thought?" Brian thought out loud. The afternoon commuters didn't pay much attention.

He never would have thought of himself as a bigot or ill informed about world issues—but a lot of the information about HIV in this tiny little pamphlet concerning specific countries, who gets HIV, and the political issues concerning the virus was new to Brian. He took solace in informing himself, shedding his ignorant outer layer.

When Brian got home, he tossed his keys onto the kitchen table then wasted no time entering his next test date into his Blackberry. He pinned up the pamphlets, resources and appointment card onto the cork board.

Over the next few weeks, worked bogged Brain down. New appointments, dates and deadlines overshadowed his upcoming test with Dr. Weber not only in his conscience but on his corkboard as well. He carried on without the burden of constantly pondering what could be.

### The Asymptomatic Period

Things are functioning as usual in Brian's body. Inside him, the white blood cell army has been working endlessly for just over 3 months to produce enough HIV antibodies to be measurable. But Brian himself is feeling fine. His body is able to keep up with his regular fitness regime and active lifestyle. He continues to eat well and get the proper amount of sleep he needs—Brian has never been one to neglect his needs. If he continues to keep himself this healthy, he should remain asymptomatic for another 10 years.

Brian chose to be tested non-nominally, so when the phone rang asking for 'Kirk Dowding' to come in to the 19th Floor King Street Clinic for his test results he was confused.

"Right, my alter-ego." He scoffed to himself. He always used the name Kirk when he was attempting to disguise himself.

Yael was such a distant memory for Brian. So was the day that he had his first HIV test and subsequent negative result. When he stepped into Dr. Weber's office, he had no nervous feeling like before. Calm, cool, collected. Dr. Weber smiled professionally.

"You have tested positive for HIV," The walls began to melt into a greyish blur. Nausea, sweats, and a piercing headache began to infiltrate his head. Dr. Weber placed his hand on Brian's arm while he caught his breath.

"You we're very wise, Brian. When HIV is detected this early, it greatly increases

your chances of living a long and healthy life."

Brian didn't take meaning from the Doctor's words—just intonations and sound that seemed to make up sentences. Words that he had only read or heard about—antiretrovirals—but had no understanding of. Words like 'healthy' and 'normal' and phrases like 'long life' were lies to him. Dr. Weber let Brian pull himself together before leaving the office.

Once again, he left the 19th Floor King West Clinic with an armful of literature and another appointment card, this time with a new doctor.

He arrived home and called his clients to inform them that he would be taking a leave of absence, his return unknown. For weeks he buried himself in blankets with the clinical literature, learning about his fate.

He replayed the affair with Yael in his mind. Sometimes he resented her, but then reminded himself that it wasn't her fault.

Eventually, the time came when Brian was strong enough to make the phone calls to the list of women in his black book. But he couldn't bring himself to do it. His appearance, his business, everything would be ruined—he asked that the Doctor take care of it.

He did, however, contact Yael.

After a few minutes of uncomfortable small talk, Yael broke the conversation.

"I know why you're calling me. I can hear it in your voice. You sound like I did." She covered the phone as she began to sob. She never let anyone see or hear her cry.

"I do? I mean, you do? Why didn't you," Brian stopped himself from reprimanding her. He understood the feeling of shame and denial.

"I'm so sorry Brian, I've been unable to do anything. I can't, I..." She let herself be vulnerable for the first time as she cried to him. They stayed together, on the phone—periods of silence interrupted only by tears—comforting one another the way they both knew neither their families nor friends could.

"I'd like to see you sometime. You know, maybe, talk ARVs." Brian wasn't sure if Yael was trying to be funny, but he was sure that she was genuine.

"I would like that too."

"It's important to have support from family and friends. This prolongs the asymptomatic period..." All of the books seemed to put forth similar ideas and attitude. Brian began to understand that he had a long road ahead of himself. But, a person in his position, financially and geographically, had a lot on his side.

Brian and Yael forged a friendship as they shared information and supported one another. They went to Doctor's appointments, pharmacies, and support groups together. Both of them alone in the city, without many friends outside of business, they were each other's family.

### The Symptomatic Period

Because Yael has been living with HIV for considerably longer than Brian, her body is beginning to deteriorate at a faster rate than his. At this point she manifests

symptoms related to her HIV infection. Her CD4 count is likely to fall below 200. Her immune system is working overtime, giving its all to help her go on. At night her body sweats a wading pool into her bed. She has lost her curvaceous appeal, and now resembles her 16-year-old self—not an extra ounce of fat on her.

Although Brian had his own struggles, his own medicine to take, his own body to constantly monitor, he was there every hour of the night with Yael. He was her nurse, her comfort. He changed her sheets after she drenched them with sweat and held her hand when she was so dizzy she thought her world had flipped upside down. She felt so guilty, so ashamed that he looked after her, the one she infected.

"Don't worry, I am here." Brian had a way of soothing her back to sleep.

### AIDS

Yael's body is extremely susceptible to opportunistic infections. Her immune system has been working 24-hour, 7-day-a-week shifts for years now and is ready to submit to the virus. As she acquires pneumonia, it attacks her immune system without apology.

She lived this way for 6 years—strongly, happily. Yael was relentlessly powerful—refusing to let the syndrome take over her.

Yael knew the moment she woke up. She embraced her body, her condition. She asked Brian that they spend the day together.

No one spoke of any end, or any goodbye. There was no 'I love you' or tears.

Brian and Yael held hands, and sat on his Peter Street balcony, sweating profusely on that hot July evening.

Just like the day they met.

# ONE WEEK IN JUNE

By Casey Wallace

Second Place, Creative Nonfiction

My dad showed up at my house early on a Thursday morning. It was pouring rain outside. He luggered a heavy-duty floor sander up my two flights of stairs. He also had an edge sander and his own orbital sander with him. We hoped we wouldn't have to use the last one, because that would mean kneeling down on the hardwood for hours sanding out tiny pieces of wood. The large floor sander was a Clark's Du-8 sander. This thing was heavy duty and looked retro. You learn a lot about tools when you work on your own house, and one thing you do notice is that they don't make them like they used to. So whenever we have the option, we use something old, something built to last.

When I first moved into my house there was carpet in the hallway and in the back bedroom. Not gaudy carpet, not that seventies style shag that you can put up with. This stuff was smoke-filled, piss stained, disgusting "can't even tell what colour it's supposed to be" carpet. On day two, after moving late into the night, I ripped it up. Dust was floating around and for a minute I thought my new, almost one hundred year old house was in Halifax, and that it was early winter and I had left the windows open. The dust from that carpet formed a fog that rolled lazily through the entire place. Underneath the carpet was the underlay that had crumbled and stuck to the floor.

Underneath the underlay was linoleum, which peeled up quite easily, but left gross glue stuck to the floor.

That was the final layer for the hall, but the bedroom was worse because it used to be the kitchen. That's what happens in a lot of old houses that get renovated into suites; everything gets switched around but only half done. The floor in the back bedroom had one more layer: kitchen tiles from the turn of the century glued down with black tar, probably containing asbestos as an adherent. It took countless hours to chip up the tiles because they wouldn't peel or even break in large chunks. Although the room is only around one hundred and fifty square feet, lifting up an old floor inches at a time is a daunting and frustrating task. By the time it was done I had ruined two pairs of pants, one pair of gloves, mangled my contractor bar, used multiple X-acto blades and made my hands bleed more than I care to remember. But that's not all. The chipping and peeling only removed the tiles; I was still left with the black tar. I kept asking myself if all of this was worth the eventual goal of being able to walk barefoot over fir planks from trees grown in this very province, fir flooring that has withstood one hundred years of feet walking. In the end I was always convinced that it was.

-You see, houses are my porn. I go to demo sales and feel like crying, I have the Multiple Listings Site on my favourites page. My house is like a stray cat, abused but it needs love. Most of the time it is good to me, sometimes the power goes out, sometimes there are horrible things behind walls, but most of the time with enough love my house loves me back.

My parents bought me this house just over a year ago, while I was out of town. They made the down payment and handed it over. I have tenants upstairs and in the basement to help with the mortgage. Luckily last summer we managed to get both of the rental suites renovated. The down-side to this is that my suite on the

One Week in June

main floor is in serious disarray. My bathroom floor is caving in and the owner before us decided to put floor linoleum on the shower walls. Some of the windows have holes in them and the sink and ceiling leak.

We, my father and I, have done a lot of work so far: installed two new showers, replaced countless lights, filled holes in walls, installed new windows, replaced the entire back deck. On top of all of this I have tenants who came along with bedbugs, fleas, guitars and a hamster trapped in the furnace.

When we first moved in the neighbours were all quite happy. My house, it appears, used to be a crack house. I know this because on my initial attempts at gardening, I pulled as many syringes out of the garden as I did weeds.

I have to garden a lot, otherwise the weeds will take over. The entire property was bare except for one tree, one shrub, a fair assortment of weeds and a radish. The only time I had difficulty with my gardening was when I was planting an azalea in the corner of the front yard. To start off, the earth was very rocky and the roots of the morning glory that grew all over the property had a tendency to loop themselves over and over in layers. These were minor hurdles, ones I could step over, the main issue with my azalea was my neighbour Bernice.

Bernice is somewhere between 75 and 85 years old depending on the day, and has lived in the house next to mine for over fifty years. She bought the house for just a little more than what my monthly mortgage payments are now, and she has a strong opinion on what goes on within her view from the porch. On this particular day she wasn't doing well, she has some form of Alzheimer's. As I began digging the hole, she made her way down the stairs. Angry. She told me I was "digging my own fuckin' grave". I ignored her at first, already used to her dislike of gardening but she kept on at me, "No man will ever marry you if you keep doing things like this". This went on for two hours, eventually we came to a compromise. I planted the Azalea a little further away from the fence line that we shared, and a few days later she invited me onto her porch for an apple pie from McDonalds.

Bernice doesn't live next to me anymore; she migrated to a home of sorts where her daughter tells me she has afternoon tea with stuffed animals for company. I miss her.

All of this gardening and renovating was a way of not dealing with the floor.

I ignored the floor in the back room for about a year, closed the door and forgot that it was even there. Then I decided to knock down some walls and expand the room. My main reason for finally doing this is that the back bedroom is the better room. My house is located one house off of First Avenue, and the back room is on the quieter side of the house. The traffic has a way of lulling you to sleep but its inconsistent jolts in the early morning are too disruptive to sleep through. So I faced my denial, realized that the floor would not right itself, and dove in. I pulled nails, swept, made sure I had every last chunk of tile, and then swept again, all in preparation for the arrival of the Clarke Du-8 on a rainy Thursday morning.

When I arrived home late that Thursday afternoon after going to school for a few hours, my father was still there. The front hall was completely sanded and looked beautiful. The bedroom, however, was a miniature disaster. The black tar glue could not be sanded up. My father had gone through sixty dollars worth of sand paper, trying to prove this untrue. I handed him a bag of samosas I had brought

for him, figuring that he probably hadn't eaten all day. We sat down and discussed our options. Sanding was not one of them: not only was it using way too much sandpaper, but the friction from the number 16 sandpaper required for a job like this was heating up the glue and threatening to stain the floor. So I had three options, none of which were very favourable. I could give up and lay carpet, give up and lay laminate flooring, or persevere and scrape all of the black tar glue off the floor on my hands and knees with my Richards knife (similar in size and style to an X-acto knife). I decided to continue attacking my floor head on. We had been at it for a long time, and I think the floor was beginning to feel forgiving. I think it had begun to realise that I was doing something good for it; we, the floor and I, were learning to work together.

My whole house smelled like an old growth forest, hardware store, dirt and sweat. All of this mixed with the layer of tar made my house smell like the asphalt of a mountain highway.

Originally I wanted to go with the natural colour of the wood and not stain the floor. However, fir is a light coloured wood and the hallway floor had experienced some irreversible damage. So without the stain, it looked like I had bought a bunch of two-by-fours at a discount and threw them down. I opted for staining, hoping it would mask some of the imperfections. I needed to make this place mine and no longer be constantly reminded of all that my house had been through. The stain I chose was appropriately called "Provincial" finish. After the stain and clear coat were applied the floor in the hall was finished. All that was left was the back room.

I chipped and scraped the back bedroom floor. I hurt my knees and bruised the palm of my left hand. I listened to Janis Joplin and got the best abdominal workout of my life. Finally late on a Tuesday night the floor was scraped to satisfaction. I swept up all the pieces of tar and dust and started singing "Piece of my Heart". I think I was slightly delirious from spending so much time with a floor for company. The final step before we could sand was to check the floor for exposed nails because they will rip right through the sandpaper. You have to be careful not to get slivers of wood stuck in your hand when doing this. It was dark outside and I had all the lights on. Down on my hands and knees running fingers over the floor I felt like I was a child again helping my mother look for a lost pearl on the kitchen floor. Maybe someone had down this once before in this bedroom that used to be a kitchen. Maybe I am the second daughter to kneel on this floor and look for a pearl.

My Dad came over the following Wednesday morning with the Clarke Du-8 in hand and we sanded the floor from ten thirty until three that day. We are done, I still need to stain and coat the floor but the hard part is over. There were some stains, some spots where the tar leached into the floor. It is especially bad where the oven used to sit, although I'm not too worried about that area because it is where my bed is going to go. I'll cook up ideas in my sleep on what else I can get myself into with this house. I already have one idea, when we were sanding the hall near the kitchen we noticed a bit of wood sticking out from under the linoleum. It looked like oak. Maybe I'm not quite finished with the floor after all.

## SHEEP IN WOLVES' CLOTHING

By Alex Gaidachev

*First Prize, Short Fiction*

The light outside buzzes like a neon bee. One of its fluorescent bulbs begins to flicker sporadically as three men stride across the dim parking lot.

They enter the store like a pack of wolves; their clothes, their posture, the grim looks on their faces, it's all summed up in four simple words: don't mess with us. The one on the left is a short fellow, clad in a worn leather jacket and fading jeans. The tall guy on the right is scrawny, he has long, rat-like features, and an oozing piercing above his left brow. The man between them is a far cry from the roughness of his two companions: he's clean-cut and impeccably well-dressed, and his salt-and-pepper hair is slick and styled with precision. Heads swivel at the sound of the peeping door chime and the soft swoosh of the sliding glass doors; everyone in the store pauses for a moment before continuing on with their business. There is an elderly couple walker-racing towards a can of soup in front of them, and they are the only ones too preoccupied to notice.

The guy in the leather jacket moves first. He jumps up on the counter, startling the cashier and scattering the racks of impulse-buys. From the inside of his jacket bursts a pump-action shotgun, now he's shouting to everyone that they shouldn't fuckin' move and that they'd fuckin' better give up their fuckin' money, empty their fuckin' pockets, and the fuckin' registers, too! A nearby mother shrieks and shields her daughter's ears from the verbal vulgarity, her jaw sagging with disbelief. A grubby teen browsing the dirty magazines drops the skateboard he's had cradled in the crook of his arm. A little girl picking over the nickel-candies stops her chewing her bubblegum and stares. The oblivious elderly couple continue their race across the scuffed linoleum with shuffling steps, towards their can of soup.

"Well, can you fuckin' believe it, fellas?" The man with the angry piercing shouts to his buddies. "Armed men bust in 'ta here wit guns, and dees morons stand around and stare!" He eyes the elderly couple shuffling towards the soup aisle. "Hey! I'm talkin' t'you!"

"Nothing stops me from getting that can of soup," croaks the elderly woman.

"I'll fuckin' shoot ya! I ain't fuckin' kiddin'!"

"'M h'ngry," slurps her ancient husband, his false teeth nearly falling out of his mouth.

"Ma'am, forget your soup," the well-dressed gentleman says, gesturing with his Glock. "He really will shoot you."

The old man mumbles something unintelligible.

"What?" The tall guy rushes forward, snarling. He grabs the walker and brings his face close to the old man's. "What didja fuckin' say t'me?"

"'Git oot 'f muh way, yer blahk'ng muh." His unsteady frame shakes with emotion as he tries to free his walker from his assailant's grip.

"I can't fuckin' understand ya, gramps!"

The old man sticks his withered hand into his mouth and fixes his dentures. "Listen, sonny—whoever loses this race makes dinner! My wife has been winning

for the last thirteen years and I'm always the one who ends up makin' dinner. So, getoutofmyway—I'm not losing to that witch tonight!"

His wife begins to croak with laughter that sounds like a dying goose, eck-eck-eck. She passes the two men and pauses to look over her shoulder, clanking ever-closer to the shelf of canned goods.

The old man begins to cry. "Oh god, I hate her so much."

"I'll help ya," says the ratty man. "But ya hafta give me yer wallet fer the can."

"Yes, yes, yes," agrees the old man. "Anything!"

"Okay!" The ratty guy turns and dashes ahead of the old woman, but something she says as he races by stops him just short of the shelf.

"Whad'jya say?" he says, eyes bulging.

"Young man, I'll write you a cheque for five thousand dollars to not help that man," she repeats.

The extortionist hesitates; his eyes flick over to the stooped old man, who desperately whispers, "Six thousand, six thousand, six thousand!" His body starts to tremble again.

"Seven thousand." The old lady leans her head towards her husband. "Harold, you cannot pay this man any more than that—you have considerable dental bills to take care of." She reaffirms her offer: "Seven thousand is the best you'll get, young man."

The skinny thief scratches his head with the muzzle of his loaded pistol. He asks the old man whether or not he can pay any higher. Through emasculating sobs the beaten man pleads with the criminal to Help a fella out, for the love of God, man-to-man, accept my money, please!, but this merciless arbitrator has done the moral math in his head, and he figures it's worth about a thousand to betray the old coot, so the criminal tells the elderly woman that he'll take her seven grand.

"It's a pleasure doin' business wit ya—um, miss...?"

"Helga, dear," she says, signing her name in shaky letters. "The pleasure is all mine." Her lips spread to flash her yellowing teeth as she hands him the cheque. He tips his head and bounds back to his comrades by the door, turning his back on the crumpled form of poor Harold.

The shotgun-wielder spits on the plexiglass counter. "Well done, kid! We jes' made a few thousand bucks!"

"And now that we're done getting friendly with each other, it's time to move on to business," says the man in the tailored clothes. He gestures grandly about the small store, spreading his arms like a dove opening its wings. "We've only come for your money and your valuables, so, providing you do everything you're told, there shouldn't be any serious problems."

Cha-chack pumps the shotgun. "Now, why don't y'all kindly hold still as my associate relieves ya of yer paper presidents."

The scrawny one of the bunch takes his cue and tosses a gym bag to the stunned cashier, who frantically starts filling it from the front register, as the man with salt-

and-pepper locks makes his way over to the terrified customers. He first relieves the trembling mother of her purse, pausing a moment to pat her wide-eyed daughter on the head.

"Sorry about the language, ma'am, but it's probably nothing the girl hasn't heard on the playground already."

Not surprisingly, the teenager sifting through the dirty magazines doesn't have any money to on him—just a few arcade tokens, an iPod, and a bottle Johnny Walker he boasts stealing from his dad's liquor cabinet. He complains bitterly when the bottle taken, muttering quietly, This is lame, man!

The bubblegum girl is all small change and candy wrappers, so the man moves on with only minimal financial gain, but not before taking the few dollars she has and making her spit out her gum.

"Disgusting habit for little girls," he tells her.

"Hey," calls his scrawny comrade. "What 'bout dat fat man?"

"What fat man?" The guy standing on the counter cracks his neck and spits again. "I dun see no fuckin' fat men 'round here."

"Over dere, fellas. I... I think he's starin' at me." He motions to a small pharmacy counter at the back of the store, obscured by an aisle stocked high with chips and pretzels.

The thieves exchange looks.

"Go check him out," says the well-dressed one.

Keeping his pistol trained on the fat guy behind the pharmacy counter, the scrawny thief rubs at his infected peircing and stalks towards his prey. The aisle that leads to the counter seems unnaturally long; its floors scuffed with black marks and deep scratches. At the end sits the man, behind a dull, copper register that looks like it hasn't been used since the 1950s.

The man is a monolith of flesh upon a tiny leather throne. The stool's singular skinny leg has become crooked under years of strain, but the pharmacist doesn't seem to be very concerned about that—in fact, he doesn't seem to be very concerned about anything at all. He's just staring at the forehead of his advancer.

"What 'n the hell is dat stink?"

Pushing the gun into fat man's chest, the scrawny criminal bellows that he got 'bout three fuckin' seconds t'live if he don't crack that fuckin' register. The fat man's eerie stillness and unresponsiveness just causes the man shove with his gun harder, to yell louder, until he notices the cashier's unnatural stiffness under the short barrel of his pistol. He stops.

"Ain't a guy dis fat, supposed to be, y'know, soft?"

He shoves once last time with the barrel of the gun. The brunt of the force topples the fat man from his perch; he hits the ground, like a broken jar of human jelly.

"He's dead!" he sputters.

Everyone is silent; no one even shifts uncomfortably or coughs nervously, no one knows what to do next. The hum of churning slushy machines wafts over the aisles.

"Th—that's my—he is—was the owner," the front cashier says.

Crowding as he charges back down the aisle, the scrawny man leaps onto the counter with his buddy. He tells everyone that dey should grab a basket n' have anythin' dey want on account of dis here owner bein' a very generous fella!

The man with the tailored clothes wastes no time in swooping over. "What in the hell are you doing?" he hisses.

"Showin' youse fellas why I always wanted t'be a criminal!"

There is hesitation in the bewildered hostages, but only for a few seconds. They begin to scramble this way and that, clearing out the shelves. They lunge with frenzied euphoria, scattering products like hungry animals. The mother heaps massive quantities of coffee, coffee, coffee, and more coffee into her over-sized purse, while her daughter stretches her shirt out to make a pouch and fills it with coffee.

She smiles to her grinning daughter. "Won't your father be pleased, honey!"

The grubby teenager is busy rolling up dirty magazines and shoving them into his jeans. Tears shine in his eyes and, sniffing into his shoulder, he says, "I've never seen such a pretty sight." He sniffles again.

Bubblegum girl is lining her pockets with everything within her short reach: licorice, peanut butter cups, chocolate bars, gummy frogs, bubble gum. She glances at the well-dressed gentleman, who is wandering the aisles with a grimace and knitted brows. "You'll have to shoot me before I stop chewing gum, mister," she says.

He rolls his eyes and twists to look at the two men by the front counter. "Where's that elderly fellow?"

They shrug and continue to chuckle at their good fortune.

"We have more than what we came for. I believe it's about time we make our escape," the man with salt-and-pepper hair says as smoothes his furrowed brow. "In fact, we should hurry. Let's not waste our time in this zo—"

Sirens howl outside. The inside of the store is a sudden kaleidoscope of red and blue light.

"You said there ain't no alarm in this place!" the man in the leather jacket shrieks.

"There ain't!"

"I've got you now, you terrible witch!" Harold's warbling voice can be heard from outside. "Got you now, you—" his shrieking is cut off and replaced with sounds of struggle as he's withheld by police officers.

The number of squad cars lining the parking lot begins to increase at an alarming rate. Soon orders to surrender blast over a megaphone and the steady drum of a helicopter can be heard above the rising commotion. News crews arrive and a crowd begins to form. A bright spotlight shines through the tall glass storefront, illuminating the shocked faces of all the wolves inside.

## SUBTEXT

By Kelsey Savage

Honourable Mention Poetry

Where does insult take its latin root?

[EDIT: L. *insultare* "TO LEAP UPON, TO ASSAILED"]

> E. *insult* c.1620 (L. *in-* "ON, AT" + *salire* "TO LEAP")]

[ L. *injuriae contumeliam addere* > E. *add insult to injury* ]

Let's take a (sex) drive.

Push pillows between our run-on sentences,  
forgetting petty emphasis on punctuation (protection).  
Give me (careless) caution.

Take me out of context,  
the way I put you into perspective.  
Keep your ellipses above us;  
the goosebumps on our backs can  
be the braille.

Give me lack of (a) sense.  
The hands of the blind were always said  
to be better at listening.  
Give me omission.

Give me Arlington;  
polished rows, an aftermath kind of quiet.  
This symmetry (poetry, punctuation)  
shatters me. I'll read between the lines.

Give me solace.  
Just give me back whatever I thought in that second  
to be sacred

## UNEXPECTED EVENTS ON FINN ROAD

By Suzanne McCray

Honourable Mention, Creative Nonfiction

Another day of work is winding down at Super Slice Pizza. I'm on my last delivery of the night. I don't want to go, but I'm the only delivery driver on duty. I have to deliver a Carnivores Delight and a bottle of Coke to Jay Handler of Finn Road.

I can't stand Finn Road. In the best of conditions, it's barely driveable. Finn Road is a back road through the farmland area of Richmond. Ditches on both sides of the road with lanes barely big enough to fit a bicycle. Driving at night there is a bitch because the street lamps are far and few. A wind and rain storm has kicked up, and I've had to swerve my car four times to avoid hitting garbage cans or raccoons that come flying out of someone's driveway. A lawn chair almost went through my window two streets back.

I just want to get the damn delivery done. I want to go home and read my book, Unexpected Events. It's by Jimithy H. Legear, the best author ever. He's got that dry, sarcastic humour that most people don't get. Unexpected Events is about Joanne, a knife sales person. One day she has an appointment with a new client, and when she gets to the client's place, she thinks that there's something off about the guy. Weird stuff starts happening around her town, like everywhere she goes there are cut up playing cards and all the tarot card readers in town are being attacked and their injuries include missing thumbs and knuckles. After another appointment with the guy, Joanne finds out that the person behind the attacks is her client. It's actually quite a funny book. Right from the get go, I think, "didn't see that one coming, eh?" Jimithy is quite the method writer; He does his research before he writes. For this book, he interviewed six Knife Co. sales people to learn about their jobs and to make sure that everything he wrote was accurate. I was telling my manager Leo about Jimithy and Leo had to point out that Jimithy nearly got arrested for harassment because he didn't ask the sales people's permission before interviewing them. He just contacted Knife Co for appointments and badgered the sales people while they were trying to do their demos. Apparently he got mean when they wouldn't answer him. Hey, how else was he going to get the info? Get a job there?

Finally. I'm at 10 Finn Road. It's a bit bigger than a monster house, but a little smaller than a mansion. A single light glows from behind the front door. I pull into the driveway and kill the engine. I pull out my cell phone and call Leo.

"Chantalle? You made it?" Leo asks.

"Yeah, I'm here," I say.

"Good. No pleasantries tonight. The wind might blow the car away while you're in it," he says.

"Sure. See you soon," I say.

"Bye," Leo hangs up.

I pull my hair under my Super Slice hat and I grab the pizza bag and the Coke from the back seat and get out of the car. I'm nearly thrown into the hedges by a gale that's come from behind me. I stagger up to the front door. My hand barely touches the door when it's flung open. A scrawny, panicked looking man stands before me.

### *Unexpected Events on Finn Road*

"Thank God. Maybe you can help me," he says. He's out of breath.

"Uh... what?" I ask.

"It's my son. He collapsed. I called 911 and they told me to give him CPR while I waited for the ambulance. You have to help me!" He grabs my arm and pulls me into the house.

"Sir, didn't you..." he cuts me off.

"I thought I knew it, but I forgot where to put my hands. I didn't want to hurt him." He drags me into the living room.

"Where is he?" I ask.

"Behind the couch. He was jumping on it and then he fell." The man darts out of the room.

"I think I hear the ambulance!" he calls. I walk behind the couch and see nothing but the same mahogany hardwood floor that I walked on in the rest of the room.

"What the hell! There's no one here!" I turn around and see the man run back into the room. We lock eyes for a moment, and then I try to sprint past him. He sticks out his foot and I tumble.

"What are you doing?" I scream. He grabs my wrist and pulls me up.

He doesn't answer. Instead, he raises his right hand and lays a good 'old fashion Austin Powers judo chop to the back of my head.

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I can't move. My head hurts. I don't know where I am. I open my eyes carefully. I can see a man at a desk. He's speaking softly.

"She took a little spill on the way to the front door. Just a little cut on the head. I've got her patched up. She'll be on her way as soon as she can. What's that? Ok, here she is."

I feel a phone being pushed up to my ear.

"Hello?" I ask weakly.

"Chantalle? Are you Ok?" Leo asks. For a moment, I wonder why I wasn't in the warm kitchen of Super Slice. It all floods back in flashes: The delivery, the strange man and the blow to the head. I have to let Leo know I'm in trouble.

"I'm ok. I just fell," I say.

"Do you need me to come pick you up?" he asks.

"No, I'll be Ok getting back, but it would be better to send Cindy if there are any more deliveries," I say. There. I did it. I gave the Delivery person's Emergency Code #4: What to do when a customer puts your life in danger.

Leo pauses. I know he understands. "Ok, will do. See you soon," Leo says. He hangs up. I figure I have fifteen minutes until the police get here. The man takes the phone away from my ear. He walks over to the desk and begins to write. I try to stand and realize that I'm tied by rope to the arm- rest of a futon.

"What the...?" I look up.

"Delivery person gets to the house within fifteen minutes. The order has no mistakes. Customer is very happy," he says. He puts his pen down. "You know, I've been ordering from Pizza Hut for two years and they aren't anywhere near as punctual as you, and they always miss something. Impressive." He makes some more notes and then reaches for a slice from the pizza box that he has perched on the desk.

"Excuse me? What does that have to do with anything?" I ask.

"Oh, I'm writing a novel and my main character is a delivery driver for a pizza shop." He takes a bite of pizza.

"Why not come to the damn shop?" I yell.

"I've tried that. The kids at Little Caesars won't talk to me and the people at Panago's said I wasn't of authority to ask."

"Well... What about Pizza Hut? Or Domino's?" I ask.

"Like I said, Pizza Hut annoys me, and I don't like the energy in Domino's." He offers me a slice. I shake my head. I don't want this whack job hand feeding me.

"I would have been happy to answer any questions. All you had to do was stop by," I say as I try to wriggle myself free without him noticing. Whack Job waves his hand in annoyance.

"No, no, no. I need the perspective! What it's really like! I never had a job like yours."

"So get a delivery job if you want to know how it's done," I snap.

He waves his hand again. I notice something peculiar. There's a gash by the middle finger on his right hand. It's too big to be a paper cut. It's more like a gouge, like a cat successfully took a bite out of him. Maybe he tried to make the pizza himself but couldn't figure out how to chop the veggies properly.

"Ordering pizza for perspective? You sound like Jimithy H. LeGear," I mutter. Whack Job looks up sharply.

"What?" he asks. He spins around in his chair to face me. "I sound like who?"

"Jimithy H. Legear. He interviews people for 'perspective' in his writing."

Whack Job stands up and paces around the room.

"Oh dear. Oh dear. Oh dear," he mumbles. He outs his hands up to his temples. I see more gouges on his left hand. He looks at me and shoves his hands in his pockets.

"What happened?" I ask. He stops pacing, and then runs out of the room.

"Hey! Where the hell are you going?" I keep wriggling, but Whack Job tied these knots tight. I see him jog back into the room with a duffle bag. He sets it out of the floor and takes something out of his pocket. A knife. Oh God. Oh God. Where the hell is Leo?

That's when I see it. It flashes before my eyes literally and figuratively.

Knife Co.

Whack Job isn't Super Slice customer Jay Handler. He's Jimithy H. LeGear.

Jimithy cuts the rope and jerks me so I'm standing up. I try to knock him over. I probably outweigh him by fifteen pounds, but man, the guy is strong. With one pull, he has me sprawled on the ground. I can feel him tying my ankles together. He gets my wrists next and he stuffs me into the duffle bag. I try to rock back and forth to force my way out, but he zips up the bag too fast.

"Jimithy!" I scream, "I'll tell you anything you want to know. I won't charge you for the delivery. I swear I won't tell anyone if YOU JUST LET ME GO!" I scream.

"No way. You think I'm going to have that Knife Co experience again? Do you know how hard it was to get another book deal? My publisher almost dropped me, and you expect me to just let you go? No. You and me are going to go for a little ride." I feel him lift the bag off the ground.

A gust of wind rushes through the room. Jimithy drops the bag. Ow! The floor is hard.

"Drop her!" someone bellows. Jimithy yelps and I can hear the footsteps of someone running. I hear the bag being unzipped and I'm pulled out by a police officer. She looks at my bindings and quickly unties me. Behind her I see Leo. I try to run over to him, but damn, those bindings hurt my ankles. Leo runs up to me instead and he grabs me in a bear hug.

"Oh Jeez, I am so sorry for making you go out," Leo gasps. Behind him I see two police officers hand cuffing Jimithy. He's facedown on the floor, flopping around like a wet fish. One of the officers snaps on the cuffs and hoists Jimithy onto his feet. They hustle him out of the room. Jimithy looks at me as he passes by.

"I've got a great idea for the novel!" The officers push him out the door. The officer who untied me asks Leo and I to come to the police station to press charges. Leo leads me out the door and into his car.

"We can get your car tomorrow," Leo says as he drives away from the house, "Oh God, Chantalle, I am so sorry. I shouldn't have let you go."

"No... it's not like anyone could have anticipated this," I say. Leo glances at me and then back to the road as a tree branch nearly collides with the front windshield.

"Completely unexpected like his book, you might say?" he laughs.

"It's Finn Road. I should have seen it coming," I respond.

# UNTIL YOU TRY

By Zach Mathews

Honourable Mention, Poetry

Rushing an old rattle car  
humming loud down the highway  
the windows cracked  
a cold night February.  
Just saw my little sister  
who had a baby this evening  
a brand-new boy, and he healthy.  
and watched her lying there, not scared anymore  
you don't know if you can be a mother  
until you try.

So now rushing this old rattle car  
back to the cold February city  
and my eyes are crying and I don't know why.  
It's not that I'm now an uncle; it's not that I'm now alive  
no honey, I just need to see you.

Now I don't know if you love me  
I don't know much about anything right now  
and we both been hurt bad enough to say  
that we would never try again.  
But, I'm coming and honey I ain't gonna stop

cause right now I'm so scared  
you don't know if you can love again  
until you try.

My heart is racing and my breath is fast.

and it's not going to slow until  
I come up to your door, until  
you scoot down the hall, until  
your hair falls in my face, until  
your nose touches mine, until  
I pull the heavy blanket over us, until  
you whisper, everything's gonna be fine  
until you are reaching around my neck  
until you kiss me softly, and until

you are in my arms tight by the stereo light.

because my heart is racing and my breath is fast  
and it's not going to slow  
until I tell you that your love is safe with me.

Honey, your love is safe with me.



# WRECK

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By Mitchell Kwak

Honourable Mention, Poetry

The path, though overgrown, was quite inviting  
Almost pulling you along behind it.  
Trees forming a roof of leaves  
And the sun splattering the ground in dappled greens and browns.  
Warm trail in the august afternoon  
Filled with naked predators  
And their prey  
Aimlessly walking with purpose  
Through the leafy tunnels.  
There are points where they shoot you out  
Into sunlight  
Onto a lonely shore  
Where the warmth from the sun is more soothing  
Than the touch of any man  
And you can almost forget what it is  
You came looking for

# CONFESSİONAL

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By Jared Hazzard

Honourary Mention-Fiction

Who is God?

Excuse me?

You heard me. Who is God?

That is not a simple question.

I'm not looking for a simple answer.

...I don't think we have time for this.

You're a man of the cloth. Make time.

...Well, do you read the Bible?

I have.

What do you think about it?

Seems like a lot of nonsense, to me.

You must have gotten something out it, or you wouldn't have asked the question.

Fair enough, but I think questions about God supercede the Bible.

Is that so?

Sure. Many great minds have conceived of an Intelligent Being outside of Christianity. Mohammed, Siddhartha Gautama, Plato.

Yes, but you didn't come here asking about Allah, Buddha or the Good. You came asking about God.

Don't be ridiculous. You know it's all the same.

Then why did you come to me?

I don't follow.

Well, you could have gone to a Mullah, a guru, or a philosophy professor. Instead, you came to me, a priest. So, I can only assume you're interested in the God of the Bible. But since you claim that isn't the case, I'd like to know why you're here.

Easy, this doesn't have to be hostile. I guess it's because my mother was catholic, and she used to bring me as a child, so...Look, I just need to talk to someone.

That's fine. But if you're not interested in God, I might not be able to help you.

It's not that I'm not interested, believe me. It just all seems a bit naïve, you know? I mean, I haven't been perfect in my life, but I don't think I deserve hell. I don't wish that on myself,

or anyone.

So you fear death?

How can I answer that? I don't know anything about death.

You seem to know something about hell.

Ya, but...that's just pretend, right? I know it's not really real. I wonder sometimes about what comes next but, my mind just goes blank.

It's common to fear the unknown.

Maybe. But I didn't come here to talk about that. I came to talk about something else, and I need to know this is confidential.

Anything you say here is always confidential.

*Pause.*

I stole some money yesterday.

From a stranger?

No, from my boss. I work the numbers at a local Italian eatery... I got the job through a friend who knows the owner, and I've been doing it for a few years now. You have to understand, this guy is scrupulous, and *never* makes mistakes. Every month, whatever comes in goes out, either into salaries or supplies. He's not the kinda guy who likes to hold a big balance. He invests in his business, and it grows. Last month, though, I was going through the papers and noticed a surplus. I mean, that just doesn't happen. It's like it just *appeared* on the page. Anyways, I waited for a few weeks to see if he'd notice, but he's been busy and maybe a bit careless. I always keep track of my hours and then he writes me a cheque...this month I added on a couple hundred, and mentioned that I've been preparing for our upcoming audit. He didn't even blink before signing off. It was that easy.

Do you feel guilty?

That's the thing. I feel like I should, but I don't.

You don't think it's wrong to steal?

Of course I do, but it's different this time.

How so?

Here's the thing: I didn't tell you the whole story. Six weeks ago, I was walking downtown to a friend's for a poker game. I'm not a rich guy, but every year we have a big tournament and invite all the boys. We like the stakes relatively high so I brought along some cash and a nice Cuban. I figure a single guy like me's got nothing to lose, as long as I don't go bankrupt. I probably would have broken even by the time it was all said and done. Anyways, on the way I got jumped by a couple of junkies looking for quick money. I didn't put up much of a fight so it didn't last long. Needless to say, I left with some rattled nerves and they left with my wallet,

which contained exactly \$200. Then, two weeks later, *bam*.

You found \$200.

Weird, eh?

Hmm.

Yesterday when I was thinking about it, I remembered a story my grandmother told me before she died. Do you have time?

I suppose. Tuesday afternoons are pretty slow.

Ok. There was a farmer and his family living during the depression. Times were tough; I mean, *really* tough, and he was starting to wonder where their next meal would come from. One day he was going out to the outhouse, and he noticed a line of chickens at the fence. His first thought was that they had escaped from the neighbours, but when he checked with them they told him they had never owned chickens. He checked with every other farmer in the area, and they all told him the same thing. Now, this guy was honest, and devoutly religious; He wanted to eat, but he wanted a clear conscience, too. So, he went to his local priest and told him the story. The old man thought about it for a while, and then decided that God wanted the farmer to feed the chickens to his children.

And did he?

Of course.

That's an interesting story.

I thought you might like it. Has anything like that ever happened to you?

Have I ever stolen anything?

No, you know what I mean... has anything ever dropped in your lap that was maybe more than a coincidence?

It's funny you should ask that, because something like that *did* happen to me recently. I was on my way home from Saturday mass a couple of weeks ago when I got a phone call. The Archdiocese was calling to tell me that someone was making a substantial donation to our struggling parish. When I say substantial, I mean more than a year's worth of tithes. That's music to the ears of anybody in my shoes. This building is sixty years old and in serious need of repair. Plus, our soup-kitchen has been barely able to operate for months, and the money would give a nice boost. I was naturally ecstatic, and asked if I could meet with the donor. They said they would try and arrange it. Two days later, I got a voicemail saying a woman named Kate would be stopping by my office on Wednesday. I...

You mean tomorrow?

No, last week. I was a bit nervous about meeting her, although I'm not sure why. Something about the exchange of large amounts of money does funny things to people. I was kind of pacing around my office all morning until my secretary finally told me she had arrived. Then she

Jared Hazzard

walked through the door.

Did you recognize her?

No, I'd never seen her before. She stood in the middle of my office for a minute, and then suddenly burst into tears. I wasn't sure what to do, so I grabbed a box of Kleenex and told her to have a seat. I've dealt with emotional people before, but I have to tell you, this was different. There was something weighing on her. When she finally calmed down she was able to say a few words. She told me about her childhood, and how she used to attend her local parish. I guess she liked the sound of the place when it was empty, and used to go by after school and explore. One day she was spinning in the centre aisle when the priest approached her from behind. He was a bit of an oddball, but people thought he was harmless—until that day. He invited her into his office, and the rest is history. I'm sure God is with me on this one, but nothing disturbs me more than desperate people who take out their pent up feelings on the little ones. It's pure injustice, and it discredits what the church is all about. She was naturally devastated, and didn't speak about it for almost two decades. *Two decades.* A few years ago another woman came out and accused the same priest, and eventually twelve people got involved in the case, followed by a class action suit against the church. The guy was obviously guilty, and they all got a settlement. That's where the donation comes in. She didn't feel right keeping it all for herself; I guess she was searching for some kind of vindication, a way to make things right. She had recently moved to this town and started asking around about parishes in the area. A friend of hers told her about this one, about our soup kitchen and all that, and so she visited a Saturday mass. That was three weeks ago, and then a week later I got the call.

...Wow. That's unbelievable.

I know. How does a person respond to that? I've never seen her again, but our soup kitchen is going to recover and I'm meeting with a contractor next week about the repairs.

*Pause.*

It's getting late, but I'd like to ask you one last question before you go.

Fire away.

Do you think God is responsible for sending the money through that woman?

It's hard to say. If God is real, I don't see why not, although it doesn't seem fair. Why would God allow that to happen to a child?

I've been asking myself that question.

There's a lot I don't understand. I'm glad I came and talked to you today, though. I've had these questions rolling around in my head for a long time, and I've been unable to talk about them until now. I think I'm going to come see you next week. I like the privacy of this place; the cold, the dampness. I feel that I can speak my mind here.

It's a plan, then. Same time next week. We'll be just a couple of guys, asking questions in the dark.

