



# KOLA MAGAZINE

VOLUME 33 NUMBER 2 FALL 2021

Founded in 1987 by The Black Writers' Guild (Québec)



# KOLA MAGAZINE

In many regions of West Africa, guests upon entering a home are served kola nut and palm wine. This act symbolizes that they have received the same rights and privileges as members of the family. It is in this spirit that *Kola Magazine* was founded. At its inception and until 2015, *Kola Magazine* was a publishing outlet for literature that focused on African diasporic and continental ways of being. The focus has since become multicultural. The editors welcome your comments and suggestions.

**VOLUME 33 NUMBER 2, FALL 2021**

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# CONTENTS

<b>EDITORIAL</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>PROSE</b>	
Rana Bose	
My Neighbour	6
Chanel Sutherland	
Never See, Come See	8
Denise Westfield	
Jablesse	13
Robert Edison Sandiford	
The Return of Papa Bois	17
Maya Khankhoje	
History in a Few Tango Lessons	19
<b>POETRY</b>	
Hugh Hazelton	
The Highway of Tears	22
Dannabang Kuwabong	
Epithets on Storied Tombs	23
Norman Cristofoli	
Contract Dispute	27
For Those	28
Shirley Small	
Tribute to Toni Morrison	29
Defining a Truth	31
Ethel Meilleur	
The Poet's Poem	32
Missing the Plump Love	33
Ilona Martonfi	
Elegy for My Sister	34
Karen Ocaña	
Interspecies Love	35
Interstitial	
Ann Janice Farray	
Time's Mysterious Power	37
Janet Yensen	
Cheers?	38
<b>CONTRIBUTORS</b>	<b>39</b>

## EDITORIAL

This is the second number of *Kola* that I have compiled, and I am still learning the ins and outs of magazine publishing. That I'm a technophobe complicates the task.

**Kola** 33-2 is wide-ranging with a blend of voices and themes. As regards the prose pieces, Rana Bose's story depicts the discomfort some people feel with new neighbours; Chanel Sutherland shows us the inner workings of an insular society at a moment of crisis; Denise Westfield uses folklore as a lens to reflect on gender issues; Maya Khankhoje turns tango into an instructive metaphor; Robert Edison Sandiford takes us back to the garden.

The poetry defies captions but is just as diverse as the prose. The pieces range from an elegy to reflections on colonialism and on poetry itself to intense observations of tropical landscapes and what we might learn from them.

My profound thanks to all the contributors and to Blossom Thom, on whose judgement I relied for the poems selected and who along with Robert Edison Sandiford helped me with the copyediting.

**H. Nigel Thomas**

**PROSE**

## Rana Bose

### MY NEIGHBOUR

---

**A** new neighbour moved in last year. She is a young woman, a Francophone like me. I know because when the electoral lists were released for the recent provincial election. I verified the names of all the people in the neighbourhood. Myself, I have lived here for over 10 years. When Réjean left to be with Jesus, I moved in here from the South Shore. Here, you don't need a car. The metro is five stops away, by bus. This is a street with rowhouses. All built, they say, in a Cape Cod style right after the first great war. All the soldiers that fought on the Marne and survived got a house. Along the side of the railway line that runs side by side with Cote St-Luc Road, these identical houses were built, with little lawns around each one of them; they are for single families. I know most of the people who live on this street.

This is a mixed neighbourhood. That's what the secretary at the Clinique centre-de-santé told me. Mostly Francophones, with about twenty-five percent Anglophones and two coloured families. I know the first names of everybody on the street. Across the street is Anna. She is a nurse at the Children's hospital. Her husband, I am sure, has recently lost his job. I know this because he does not leave the house with her in the morning. He leaves later and is always wearing a tie and a jacket. Before he would wear casual clothes. I know he is going for interviews. He comes back and I wave to him. He does not smile the same way as before. Rejean would do the same. Except Môm petit Réjean had only one tie. La cravate bleue, bien sûr! Réjjie would come back, rip the tie off his neck, and shout, "Merde! Merde! Merde!" and collapse on the couch. Anna's children are grown-up. They visit once in a while.

Next to her, is Roger Boyd. I have never talked to him. He is a plumber. I know because he always comes home carrying pipes and wrenches.

In the house further down the street to the right is an elderly couple. They keep a garden that looks terribly busy, with unmatching clumps of multicoloured shrubbery, spread in uneven arrangements. The man waters the lawns, holding the hose in his hand. He could easily put a sprinkler on. But no! He must water every blade of grass himself. When he is satisfied, he washes the sidewalk in front of his house.

Last summer he put up a ladder on the east side of his house to tie strings to the tiles on the roof, so his creepers could climb up to the roof. Except his wife decided to fling open one of their bay windows and hit the ladder and he was only saved because the ladder started sliding down the side of the roof slowly and he managed to jump down before the ladder itself hit the ground. His gladioli patch was flattened and I could hear considerable commotion later from inside their house. My Réjean would have put the ladder between the two windows or would have made sure that I knew what he was doing, and personally I do not think that I would have carried out this absolutely reckless act myself. I think these people are Italian, because they love gardening so much.

My new neighbour has not spoken to me. Sometimes, I pick up the paper from my balcony while she is getting into her car. She wears sunglasses, in the morning always. I look at her, she looks at me and smiles, and that is where it has been at. The family that lived there before, were very friendly. They had two dogs, who loved to come up to my porch and sniff around. This allowed me to start a conversation. I felt comfortable with this family. He was a retired engineer. She was a retiring school teacher. Sometimes, he would come and fix things in my little cottage. He would sit in the porch and read the papers. They were Anglos. I would bake a pie and take it over. They would bring fresh vegetables from their garden, over to me. I felt very comfortable about their presence. They had a daughter, who married a young doctor and they moved to Toronto. Sometimes, they came to Montreal to visit, with their young daughter. The

daughter had big blond curls falling in a cascade all over her face. What a pretty child. So happy, always. I would pick her up and she would giggle with pleasure.

I do not feel comfortable about my new neighbour. She has not spoken to me the whole eighteen months that she has moved in. Summer went by and she did not strike up a conversation. She lives alone. She has her own car. She mows the lawn herself and rakes the leaves. I have walked by her house, during the evening and looked in. One time when her blinds weren't drawn, I saw some nice lamps and pictures hanging from the walls. All day, she is gone. She comes back from work in the evening. I watch her cooking and tasting her food with her thumb. I am beginning to dislike her—I do not know why. She has some friends visiting her on the weekends. Some young men and occasionally women. They have a good time. I see her garage is full of beer bottles for recycling. She is not noisy, but she is indifferent. It is as if I do not exist. She has come into my space and ignores that I have lived here for so many years. It is as if she doesn't know how this street functions. As if she has nothing to learn from any of us who have lived here for so many years.

Sometimes, in the evenings, a coloured man visits her. He comes in an old sports car. He bounds up the steps and rings her bell. I have seen them kiss at the doorstep. They are in there for a few minutes and then they leave together in the man's car. I wait all evening to find out when she will come home. Like I said, I do not like her and I am beginning to feel quite irritated by her presence and the absence of my earlier neighbours. They finally come home, late in the evening. The lights go up in her living room. Then her kitchen. Then her bedroom.

Later on, at night, he leaves. She is at the door. One day, he came to her house during the day, waited for a while outside, ringing the doorbell. She was probably at the back and could not hear the bell. So, I stepped out and said "Go around." He did not understand French. So, I said it in English. I could see through his beard that he smiled and then he thanked me and went around to the back. She was there alright. So, I thought she would come around and say thanks. She did not. She had on big yellow plastic gloves. She wiped her brows and looked at me. I said, "He has been waiting for a while." She smiled. But that's all. She does not even thank me. The man could have left without knowing. I did help out, didn't I?

She is not one of us. I know that. I see that she buys big bags of rice, in burlap bags. Where she buys her rice, I do not know. She carries in her grocery, and it is definitely not from the big IGA on the corner. She always brings in a lot of video films, which she watches with that coloured man. I wait patiently, for the day she will open up with me. I know, women have to be independent. But her kind of independence goes against the norms on this street.

\*\*\*

This morning I picked up the newspaper and, to my shock, there was the picture of the coloured man. The paper says, he was a Montreal poet. He was quite well-known. He was from one of those Arabic countries. But he had disappeared from Canada. He was away in a country, somewhere in the far east. He was found last week, dead on a highway. Apparently, the victim of a political feud. He was caught in a crossfire trying to save a friend, who was involved in a rebel group.

What a surprise! My neighbour came up to my house and spoke to me, because the mailman had delivered a letter from my son, who is in Timiskaming, to her house. I said thank you. And we talked at the doorstep, for a while. I told her about my son. She told me that she was a manager in a large consultancy downtown. I invited her in and made her tea, and we chatted for two hours. She did not want to leave. And kept talking about herself. About the people at work. I brought out the paper and asked her, if this was the man who visited her before. She looked at me, silently, for a few seconds and then smiled tenderly. A tear appeared at the end of her left eye. She said that this coloured poet was a good friend, but they could not resolve some basic differences, last year. So, she stopped knowing him. Period. It was her decision. She said she would come over more often. She would be a part of the neighbourhood. I found out that she liked soft chocolate cookies. I'll keep a stock of them for her. Why does she live alone? Has she been married before? Does she have parents in this city? I have not seen any.

## Chanel Sutherland

### NEVER SEE, COME SEE

---

**T**he village was called Purity. The boy's name was Cartwright Welles. The gun was a .38 caliber pistol owned by his mother's boyfriend.

Mind you, ask anyone what happened, and they'd all tell you the same thing. That they saw nothing, heard nothing, and therefore knew nothing. Some went so far as to claim that they knew little about the goings-on at the Welles' place that was at the end of the street and had a curve that obscured their line of vision.

He'd been dead all morning, the mother's boyfriend, when they found him. His blood had seeped into the concrete on the Welles' verandah, staining it a dark molasses-red like the water in the canal which flowed from Mount Lennox Distillery all the way to sea. Fruit flies had abandoned the sweet taste of rotten soursop for the enjoyment of something fresher.

It was Easter Sunday. The pews of every church in the town of Auclair, St. Vincent were filling up. Mother Gertrude's Baptist Church, a boastful building, sitting at the edge of Purity across from the seawall, was lively with its fresh coat of sunrise-yellow paint on its south-facing I. Folks took the long way round to approach the church from the south; the north side with its crumbling brick wall held in place by flame vines and creeping figs was a source of shame for Purity.

Inside, the heavy odor of paint leaned into the poignant scents of perfumes mixed with Blue Magic hair grease and cocoa butter. The women wore ornate flowered hats that blocked each other's view of the pulpit and their finest dresses; the men bright buttoned-up shirts and trousers with sharp creases. The room buzzed with the kind of rousing that comes when people gather to worship.

Before service started, the adults stood around exchanging the latest news from the village. They all had stories to tell and spoke in a tone that suggested discretion but at a volume that traveled across the entire room.

*Sable Welles must've gotten lost on her way to Easter service, Lord Jesus.*

*You nuh hear? Sable has a new man, have mercy.*

*Fancy one, too. One of them shopkeepers from down Bayou Bay, praise be his name.*

*Always had her eyes cast high, that Sable, God bless her soul.*

The young children, bored and itchy in taffeta dresses and starch-pressed shirts, played as children always and everywhere do when in God's house – with one eye on their parents, who warned them not to misbehave in the sanctuary unless they wanted their backsides skinned, and one eye on the statue of Christ behind the pulpit.

At nine sharp, seated in her wheelchair on the stage, Mother Gertrude, who knew every soul in her congregation, stared them down at them until she had silence. She was a stout woman with skin the color of cornmeal and wore the white cloth of a holy woman wrapped around her head. Her face had no smile lines about the mouth.

She was one of the few outsiders living in Purity, having come from overseas to carry out her ministry, and spoke with a diction that could scald the soul of saints.

"God is good," she said, and on cue, every voice replied, "All the time."

"All the time."

"God is good."

In the silence that followed, Mother Gertrude's grey stare wandered around her congregation like a searchlight scanning the night. Most shrank under her scrutiny, pressing whatever sins they had to hide into the varnished wood of the pews. Sweat loosened Blue Magic and carried it down the temples of men who'd spent Saturday night out, drinking and slamming dominoes, only to return home smelling like stranger's perfume. The women dropped their heads and wrung freshly pressed handkerchiefs into sweaty wads.

Mother Gertrude said, "I see not everyone felt the calling to church this Easter morning. Tell me, where's Sable Welles and her boy?"

Silence. Some appeared amused, passing meaningful looks between each other; some old ladies in the back sucked their teeth and shook their heads.

"Suddenly, cats got your tongues," Mother Gertrude said. Then turning her wheelchair, nodded at someone in the front. "Sister Louise will lead us in song."

A middle-aged woman dressed from head to toe in white rose from the first row and stood at the front of the church. She carried a tambourine in her right hand; a wooden cross dangled from her belt. "Praise be to God," she intoned in a vibrato that rolled like an approaching wave and shook her tambourine.

The congregation replied, "Amen!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the lord!"

"Amen!"

"Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!" she shouted.

"Amen!"

"I asked you to sing, Sister Louise," Mother Gertrude said. "Not give a sermon."

Sister Louise stilled her tambourine and asked everyone to open their books to hymn number 235.

The congregation rose to their feet. Pages shuffled as neighbors leaned together to share hymnbooks. Ladies cooled themselves with paper fans, and the men removed their hats and held them to their chests. Children – who attended the morning service on Easter Sunday with their parents – kicked at the back of the seats in front of them until their arms were pinched.

Sister Louise cleared her throat and began to sing. A hundred voices joined her, and *Gladly the Cross I'd Bear* rose on the air to the accompaniment of her tambourine. The hymn hovered above the congregation, who swayed, lifted their eyes, and propelled their voices to the heavens. It swelled and reverberated across the room, riding on the muggy sea breeze blowing through the window. It wound its way through the rows, the words washing over those nursing rum-sore stomachs that coconut water couldn't cure and grudges that might never heal.

It slipped through the cracks in the church's north wall and met the flame vines and creeping figs that had spread through the holes; they did not grant it passage. Trapped, the hymn pulsed in the church air, gaining strength as other tambourines joined in—as people stomped their feet, clapped their hands, spun in circles, and cried out, "Lord Jesus."

It did not reach the ears of Cartwright Welles, who sat on the floor of the verandah staring at the man he'd just shot.

\*\*\*

Sable Welles rose early, although she had stayed up late the night before. Today was a special occasion, not in the least because it was Easter Sunday. Unlike most people in Purity, Sable did not care about church things, and although the date was circled with a red heart on her calendar, it had nothing to do with the resurrection.

Sable grew up in a church-loving family a few villages over, in Bracketry Hall, and loved God until she was sixteen and thought Jeremiah Douglas was sent from the heavens above. Jeremiah had rolled in like seawater. He was all honey skin and spice tones. Her sister warned her that he was not like the boys in school. He was more experienced, but Sable did not see how that could be a bad thing.

When her parents found out she was pregnant, her physician father beat her within an inch of her life with a broomstick handle. Afterward, her mother, who jumped at every opportunity to ridicule Sable, said, "You worthless girl. You gone and bring shame to this family."

It was pointless arguing with her mother, so Sable was silent. Her small hiccupping frame curled up in the corner of her bed and wondered what she was going to do now that Jeremiah had abandoned all pretense. Her mother loomed over her and added a harangue to the beating she'd just endured.

"Your poor father. If this doesn't kill him, I don't know what will. You know he's in the front room praying for your soul as we speak? Not that it's worth a penny. *Mm-mm*. Never did know how to keep yourself still, did you? It's like you got stinging nettle in your veins. Always carrying on like you think you better. Look where better got you, huh? Where's the Douglas boy now? *Hm?* I'll tell you where – He gone. He and his people pack up and gone back to where they come from, without a single backward glance at you. Now you and you alone have to carry this. *Mm-mm*. And you know what? Alone you would carry it if it wasn't for your father, God bless that man. Come tomorrow, he 'gon take you down to the clinic, and that will be the last of that. But lemme tell you something, Sable, pull a stunt like this again, and child of mine or not, as God is my witness, you will just pack your things and go. You hear me?"

Sable watched as her mother's shadow grew longer, then shorter on the wall. She left home in the early hours of the following day and swore never to set foot in her parents' house again.

She arrived at her Aunt Agnes' place in Purity carrying everything she owned in her book bag. Aunt Agnes, a woman she only knew from her father's stories of his "unnatural sister" was sitting on the porch when Sable emerged from the back of a passenger van. She took one look at Sable and asked, "Godless, pregnant, or lesbian? Which of my brother's great sins did you commit?"

"Pregnant," Sable said. "Maybe Godless too, I don't know." She did not expect the woman to throw her head back and laugh, slapping her thigh as her laughter turned into a rattling cough sharp enough to cut her in two.

When she caught her voice again, Aunt Agnes said. "Well, that just figures. Serves him right too – the sanctimonious ass."

For a moment, Aunt Agnes said nothing more, and Sable stood in the yard trying to make up her own mind about the woman. She was tall—as tall as her father—and just as dark, but that's where the resemblance ended. Sable always wondered about her round face and pale brown eyes, features absent in her father. In her mother's family, the Rubens on one side were angular in shape and Coca-Cola in color. The Grants were stocky and a plain brown that soured their long faces and envenomed their demeanor.

Her mother took after the Grants and saw it as a personal slight that her youngest daughter did not look like her. Her father always regarded Sable with faint disquiet as if waiting for her to grow hooves and start kicking up dirt in the yard. Looking at her Aunt Agnes, Sable saw where she got her traits and felt a tenderness for the woman her father had bad-mouthed.

Aunt Agnes rose from her chair and said, "Well, you coming in or plan to spend the next nine months standing in my yard eyeing me up and down?"

Sable would learn that Aunt Agnes was an indelicate woman with a bluntness that made folks hurry past her yard on their way to the shops. In a village where everyone's affairs were tangled up on everyone else's tongue, Aunt Agnes existed just enough on the periphery to stay out of focus, yet close enough to give anyone a good word when they asked for it.

Sable's arrival did not go unnoticed, and soon all of Purity was passing by the house at a regular pace. One morning in her showing months, a woman walked by with a girl about Sable's age. They both sported long high-necked dresses, head wraps in the July temperatures, and carried Bibles under their arms. Sable was bent over in the garden picking lemongrass leaves to make tea and did not see them at first.

When the woman stopped and made the sign of the cross on the air, Aunt Agnes rose from where she was seated on the porch knitting a pair of booties. She leaned against the wall with a needle in each hand and the delicate blue fabric hanging over the edge.

When the woman pulled a small bottle of holy water out of her pocket, Aunt Agnes put the needles down and said, "Careful there now, Louise Albright."

When Louise Albright threw the bottle's content over the fence, dousing Sable in holy water, Aunt Agnes was down the porch steps like a dog that broke its chain. She made it at full sprint to the gate before a cough crept up from the depths of her cigarette-tarred lungs and halted her.

"Wait when I get my hands of your scrawny ass," she called between coughs.

Standing at a cautious distance, Louise Albright answered, "He that perverteth his ways shall be known."

Aunt Agnes said, "Be careful there, Sister Louise, or I'll make your ways known to everyone with ears to hear."

Something in Aunt Agnes' words brought an understanding to the woman who stared hard at the yard then pulled the young girl and went on her way. Resuming her seat on the porch, Aunt Agnes shook her head and said, "Some people's memories slow to catch up to them when their paths go from winding to straight."

Sable's baby boy arrived in a hurry one October morning while she was out sweeping the yard. There was no signal, just a gush of fluid, then a pain so savage and boundless, she thought she was dying.

Cartwright's arrival was a joyous occasion. When word got around that the Welles' girl had given birth, people pulled blinders over their prejudices and appeared at Aunt Agnes' doorstep bearing gifts. Aunt Agnes was cordial because gift horses were rare in Purity.

She was ever the host, accepting the best the villagers had to offer – sweetbreads, guava Jelly, homemade blankets – and letting mother and child soak up all the attention. She watched carefully and listened attentively as the women fussed over the baby and coddled Sable. For the men, it was an occasion to drink Hairoun beer.

The following day a cough held Aunt Agnes and didn't let go. While Sable and the child slept, it brought her to her knees on the verandah, where she drew her last breath.

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"What'chu making that thing for?"

"Sable, would you hurry the hell up with your preening?"

Kanon walked back and forth between the verandah and front room, holding two distinct conversations with Cartwright and Sable at the same time. The heels of his cowboy-style boots clacked on the concrete then clicked on the linoleum, and for once in his eleven years of living, Cartwright forgot his grounded-in manners. He sat where he was fashioning a stick and rubber band into a slingshot and did not acknowledge that his mother's new boyfriend was present or that he'd spoken.

Sable seemed to have taken the same attitude after being told to "hurry the hell up" more times than she cared for.

"I asked you something," Kanon said to Cartwright, prompting Sable to call out, "Cartwright, your manners."

The boy replied, "For stunning lizards."

Kanon said, "You ain't stunning anything with that. More likely the lizard'll turn it back on you."

Sable did not hear the rest of the conversation between her man and her boy. She sat in front of her vanity in a pink floral dress and a large matching hat. She was thinking about the people of Purity – envisioning the looks on their faces when she strolled into church.

Even when she followed their rules, Sable knew that they looked at her and saw a shepherdless sheep. They passed pity on her child, like she was starving him, and had abandoned her in all but pretenses and prayers the moment she lowered Aunt Agnes into the ground.

Won't they be surprised when she walked into Easter service with her man on one arm and her son on the other?

These were the thoughts occupying Sable's mind so that she did not hear when Kanon, in a hushed voice, said to Cartwright, "Lemme show you a real man's weapon," and pulled a silver .38 caliber pistol from his back waist.

Cartwright's eyes grew large. "Is that real?" he asked, the first words he'd spoken of his own volition to his mother's boyfriend.

"'Course it's real, no sense in carrying one round if it's fake," Kanon said. "Wanta hold it?"

At nine 'o clock, every church in Auclair with a working bell pulled its cord. The old bell in Saint Timothee Anglican was first to ring, a full second before the bongs of True United Pentecostal were heard coming from across the river. The distant chiming of the Free Methodist church followed suit four seconds after so that the air carried a discordant sound to the flocks making their way to greener pastures. Mother Gertrude's Baptist Church had no bell.

"Here, hold it like this," Kanon said, guiding Cartwright's wrist.

In the silence after the bells, the sound of a single gunshot split the morning open, fracturing all in it that was delicate. Ground doves jumped from their nests and took off into the glassy air. Dogs barked out of habit, but sensing real danger, fled for safety. Sable, with one shoe on, ran from house onto verandah with her child's name on her lips and a sharp fear splintering her mind.

She found Cartwright folded on the floor and Kanon lying face down in a spreading pool of red.

"Oh, my baby," she cried, patting Cartwright down and checking for injuries. Finding none, she pressed him to her breasts. "Oh, my son, my baby."

"I didn't mean to," Cartwright cried. "It was an accident."

"I know, baby, I know." Sable held her boy tight, shielding him from where Kanon lay. As she looked at Kanon, her face filled with sorrow and fear born from the wildest reaches a mother's imagination can journey to. The more she stared at him, the further she slipped into herself, a place where she'd lived through Cartwright's death in a million different ways.

Minutes passed, then hours as mother and son held each other. Sable cradled Cartwright as if he were still a small child, rocking back and forth, whispering one phrase as if she would never stop.

"I'm here, I'm here."

When the people of Purity left Easter service, they did so with their backs to the north wall, and their faces turned to heaven. They took the curving road that would lead them to the Welles' place, and as they walked, they sang hymns, clapped their hands, praised God joyously, and believed with all their hearts that they were on the path of the righteous.

## Denise Westfield

### JABLESSE

(2019 co-winner of the H. Nigel Thomas UWI  
Open Campus SVG Fiction Prize)

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She sat on a mango tree stump, waiting. All the sounds of night had ceased as soon as she had entered the thicket, as was customary when the animals sensed her approach. No crickets chirped, no owls hooted, no bats to be seen, or heard. She was a creature of the night, and even the night creatures avoided her.

She waited patiently in the dense collection of trees, hidden from the view of anyone who was brave enough to traverse this dark, lonely road.

Her keen ears soon detected drunken shuffling footsteps coming up the dirt path. A brisk wind picked up, gently and eerily rustling the tall grass around her, and the branches of the surrounding mango, breadfruit and trumpet trees.

She had much disdain for men. They were foolish creatures. No matter how many were caught in her trap, and no matter how many tales were told about her, they still insisted on having their own way and travelled paths they weren't supposed to, at all odd hours of the night. She despised them, for a man was the reason she was in her current position—cursed to serve out a punishment she didn't even deserve.

No matter. She steered her thoughts towards the task at hand, for the drunken footfalls had stumbled closer. With the footsteps, now came an accompaniment of slurred singing. The unsteady steps and voice belonged to a man. He was probably staggering home from a party in bottom Owia.

She got up deftly from the stump, took off her wide-brimmed hat, adjusted her blouse around her bosom and glided towards the road. Her long, full skirt brushed noiselessly over grass and dried twigs as she made her approach. She stepped onto the edge of the road, waiting for the man to see her. She made sure that her feet were hidden beneath her skirt. The light of the beautiful full moon suddenly escaped from behind clouds, bathing her in a soft, bluish glow. The man finally got to where she was standing and stopped in his tracks when he beheld her. She knew what he saw—a beautiful black woman with thick, tightly curled hair that fell to her waist, tall and voluptuous and seemingly vulnerable.

She sashayed towards him, her glide unimpeded by the cloven foot hidden beneath her skirt.

"S'cuse me, sir," she said in a husky, smooth-like-honey voice. "I was takin' a rest on the side of the road there. I was travellin' home from bottom Owia, but it was so dark an' am afraid to walk home by myself at this hour." She stopped in front of him and rested a hand gently on his arm.

"Would you be so kind as to walk me home?" In his stupor, the man seemed barely able to gather his thoughts. She could see a range of emotions cross his face, slowly. First, surprise and awe, then confusion, and finally some pleasure.

"Eh, eh!" he finally slurred. "I-is what you doin' here all by yuhself daaarlin'? Wh-where yuh man deh?"

"I don't have one," she responded, her syrupy voice masking her annoyance.

"T-toonight is my lucky night then," he smiled and tried hard to stop his swaying. "Come let me carry you home." He licked his lips and she could see the hope in his eyes already.

"Thank you so much," she drawled, and holding her hat, she looped her forearm around his. They continued up the road and he tried to chat her up along the way. She was far from interested in what he had to say. She mumbled

responses as necessary and used his distractedness against him. He did not notice when she led him off of the road and onto a narrow path into some bushes. He did not notice that she was leading him further and further into the deep darkness of trees whose branches formed canopies above them.

When he finally realized where they were, she sensed his sudden apprehension.

“Girl, what you doin’ livin’ in all dis bush?” He laughed nervously.

“We took a short cut,” she said, her smirk full of mischief. They had come to an area where the moonlight filtered through. He looked around, sobering slightly as it dawned on him that he didn’t know how to get from there to his own home.

He turned back to face her, to ask how he was supposed to get back to the road, and gaped in horror at what was before him. The façade of a beautiful face was gone and in its place was the mottled skin and exposed bone of a corpse.

The man could not find his voice. He backed up slowly and she stalked towards him.

“What’s the matter? Don’t you want to take me home anymore?” She licked what remained of her lips and a whimper escaped from his trembling mouth.

He turned and ran, as she had expected. They always tried to run. She followed him and cackled for effect as he stumbled through the trees, clearly running in a panic, with no idea where he was going, only focused on getting away from her. She ran swiftly behind him, raising her skirt front, mid-run. She got close behind him, and raising her cow foot, dealt him a hefty kick in his back. She intended for him to roll down a steep embankment that she knew was in front of him. She knew this forest—Windsor Forest—very well, for she had haunted it, and many other ominous locales like it in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, for more than a century.

Her aim was sure; he pitched forward with a terrified wail and she listened as he tumbled down the embankment. She did not stick around to hear where he landed. If he survived the fall, he would have a tale to tell to the villagers, once he finally found his way out of the forest.

She was La Diabliesse, or jablesse, as Vincentians called her in their creole. She was a seductress of men, who often led them to their demise. It was not a task she was pleased to do. She placed her hat on her riotous curls and drifted back the way they had come, touching her face along the way. As always, she was filled with anger and disgust, resentful of this existence she was forced to experience. She really had been beautiful once. She trudged back to the stump, wondering if another foolhardy man would fall prey to her charms this night.

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The delicate, blue-grey hues of dawn signaled it was time for her to depart this plane. She made her way deep into the forest until she came to a small clearing where a sprawling, hauntingly beautiful silk cotton tree resided. Many villagers avoided Windsor Forest, but they especially steered clear of this zone, no matter the time of day. Only bush doctors and those who wished to pay respect to their departed loved ones, and were unafraid of the “other side”, were brave enough to venture this far into the foliage. The silk cotton tree was believed to be a vessel through which spirits and creatures like her could travel between this plane and theirs—Okenn Kote—which was neither heaven, nor hell, nor even purgatory; it was nowhere. She had always just known it to be a plane that was not for those who lived.

The villagers were correct in their beliefs. The forest rustled around her as night roamers emerged from all angles, coming to the tree to return from whence they came.

She lingered for a while, not following her fellow spirits, for she had no intention of going back to this realm of non-existence. She had finally made up her mind to seek out Erzulie, even though she had been forbidden to. She could not go through another century roaming in the dark, a hideous beast for all to fear. She was tired—as tired as a being like her could be—and she was going to put an end to this “life” even if it meant she must be completely destroyed.

As she rested her hands upon the rough trunk of the tree, she thought not of the vast and foggy plains of Okenn Kote, but of the verdant domain of the goddess Erzulie.

Windsor Forest dissolved around her and she found herself standing in a field so bright, she could barely register where exactly she was. As her eyes adjusted to the blinding sunlight, she spun around, recognizing the expansive field, and the distant mountains, that belonged to Yon Kote, Erzulie’s land. She finally spotted a rambling temple in the

distance. She started her journey to that temple, filled with trepidation. She had not returned to this place since she had been cursed and knew her reception would not be a welcoming one.

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After what seemed like an eternity, she finally came to tall, heavy-looking mahogany gates. The image of a lovely woman, her hair wrapped up and palms together, was skillfully carved into it. She glared at the image of the woman as she moved closer to the gate. She leaned in and whispered to the carving, *louvri*.

The split in half as the gates swung open. Behind it, she saw the horrified, surprised face of a young woman. Her mouth fell open when she saw who had opened her mistress' gates.

"Ayanfe! How are you here?" she exclaimed. "You know you have been banished from this place."

"Be silent, Beni, and take me to your wretched mistress. I'm not leaving before I get what I risked coming here for."

Beni's smooth, brown face reflected her uncertainty.

"Beni, please," she pleaded. "I was in your position once; now look at me. I am nothing. Give me a chance to change that."

She hesitated a few seconds longer, before saying tartly, "Wait here."

She scurried off towards the temple. Ayanfe looked around her and was filled with a faint longing for what she once was. She remembered walking through the temple's garden to admire the varied flora and fauna that thrived there—there were sweetsop and soursop trees, star fruit trees and mangoes of many shapes, sizes and colors. Walkways were lined with vibrant lobster claw, heartleaf, frangipani in every color and many other plants and trees that Ayanfe could not be bothered to identify. Peacocks and peahens strutted majestically about, and noisy keskidees, busy hummingbirds and elegant butterflies could be spotted too.

Beni came panting back to break Ayanfe's reverie.

"Come," she wheezed, "she has agreed to see you briefly."

Ayanfe composed herself and followed Beni. Even now, she was still intimidated by the goddess who had once loved her. She followed Beni up the many stone steps of the temple, drawing gasps of disgust and disbelief from Erzulie's other subjects as she made her way up.

She and Beni finally made it to the last step and Ayanfe felt her insides turn to mush. She had not seen Erzulie in years and their last interaction had been a terrible one. Beni glanced at her and pushed open the solid mahogany doors before them.

She bowed quickly as soon as she entered, then turned and scrambled back down the steps. Ayanfe could see Erzulie sitting regally atop her magnificent bamboo throne. The bamboo stalks had been intricately woven together to create a high, expansive seat that would accommodate the large deity. She sat upon several soft cushions made from the finest, most delicate silk. Ayanfe walked across the silent, high-ceilinged hall, the *swishing* of her long skirts amplified by the bare, quiet space.

She finally came before the being who was responsible for her current state. Erzulie was as tall as tall could be; even seated, her stature was overwhelming in its greatness. Her dark-chocolate skin glowed, and long, thick, rope-like dreadlocks were piled upon her stately head. Thick lashes framed her golden eyes, now filled with displeasure, and the nostrils of her broad nose flared. Her plump lips were taut. The full curves of her rigidly seated body were wrapped in cloths of black and gold, and her large, narrow feet were bare.

"Why have you come here?" her voice boomed harshly off the walls of the hall. "You have maintained your banishment for centuries and now all of a sudden you decide to show your ugly face."

"My face is only ugly because of your petulant jealousy," Ayanfe fired back. "I am here because I am tired of serving a sentence I was not supposed to get in the first place."

Erzulie leaned forward. "You dare to come here and insult me! You know very well why you got what you did, La Diabliesse. Do not come here with your insolence!"

"I am a jablesse, because you believe one of your foolish suitors admired me more than he did you, and that I seduced him. I thought by now you would have come to your senses and realized that it was not so. I was your favorite handmaid. Why would I throw that away for some measly man?"

"Bèl was no measly man! You threw yourself at him and you deserve what is happening to you."

"You didn't even want him! You never want them! All you want is the attention and the praise. You make them want you, then you cast them aside." She paused, then continued.

"I am tired of this bickering. I have done nothing wrong and I am fed up of this weary existence, going around and leading men astray, hurting them. I cannot go on like this.

"I am not here to beg for my past position, but I am here to beg."

She got down on her knees before Erzulie, hands hanging at her sides, her hoof poking out from beneath her skirt tail.

"I am begging you. Please take this curse away from me. Transform me into anything else, be it tree, fish, or bee. For over a hundred years, I have roamed the earth, as you cursed me to, wreaking havoc and terrorizing the humans you love and dislike so much. I cannot convince you that what happened with Bèl was a result of his own wicked plotting, but you loved me once, so I am asking you to have mercy on me and give me some peace."

Ayanfe looked her former mistress in the eyes and waited. Erzulie looked at her former beloved handmaiden in turn. A sudden burst of laughter escaped her. Ayanfe looked at Erzulie in confusion as she shook with mirth.

"Tree, fish, or bee! I had forgotten how funny you were Ayanfe. You truly have suffered for a long time, so I will grant your request. I want to see what will happen."

Before Ayanfe could say a word, she was suddenly engulfed in a cold blackness. She felt as though she was stifling, and the cold was in her bones. Her body was light and she felt like she was floating. She saw a dim light above her and fought her way desperately towards it. She burst through the light, sucked in a huge gulp of air and immediately realized why she was so cold. She had burst through the surface of a deep, frigid river and she was as naked as a newborn baby. She struggled to the river's bank and realized that she was in McIntosh Garden, yet another section of Owia that was full of mystery. She pulled herself onto the bank panting and shivering. She was abruptly gripped with terror. Why was she able to feel this cold so acutely? She looked at her hands and feet. Feet. Her cow foot was gone. Her skin was no longer rotted and loose. She touched her face and encountered more smooth skin, and even features.

Erzulie had made her human.

No wonder she had laughed so hard. She had decided to throw her into the land of people to see how she would fare, for her own amusement. Ayanfe felt like crying. She had never felt like crying before, and this made her want to cry even harder. She was going to be all alone here. What the hell did she know about being human? She had looked at them living their lives from afar, but had never been interested in their trivial affairs and interactions.

She heard a cough off to her right, and started as she noticed an old Garifuna woman looking at her. She was wrinkled like the trunk of a tree, with soft silver hair separated into two long plaits. She sat on a big stone puffing away on a pipe and she seemed not in the least surprised to see a naked woman pop out of a river, as if out of thin air. She got up and Ayanfe saw that she had a large, white piece of cloth in her hands. She hobbled over and beckoned for her to stand. Ayanfe did so shakily and waited to see what the stranger would do. The woman wrapped the cloth around Ayanfe's body and said, "Come, *katei*. It is time for you to live."

Ayanfe silently followed the woman who guided her with a knobby hand nestled in the small of her back. She had no idea what was going to happen to her now, but she could only hope it was not as bad as being a jablesse.

## Robert Edison Sandiford

### THE RETURN OF PAPA BOIS

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Comb your hair. Brush your teeth. Make up your bed. These commands came from Mom. She was always asking in that checklist, drill-sergeant, West Indian way of hers: Did you...? Did you...? Did you...? Cleanliness was vital to Dad, too, but how it often is to men: qualified. Sometimes, you have to get dirty. Sometimes, you have to *be* dirty. Some jobs are dirty jobs.

Working in Dad's garden as a boy, the way I now work in my own, was one of them. The smell of cow manure was steamy and blanketing as we shovelled it around the garden beds hugging our house in spring, folding it into the earth as if stirring blueberries into pancake batter.

"You smell that?" Mom said. "That's the good stuff. The *right* stuff."

One miserable summer, sheep shit blighted our soil with slugs. One of Dad's "field experiments" gone wrong. The leafy crop, Dad's Swiss chard, callaloo and romaine lettuce, were pockmarked and riven instead of green and fluffy that June to August. "Gotta be careful with sheep shit," Dad was later informed by another friendly farmer. "It can harbour pests."

Definitely *not* the right stuff.

There was a time I *couldn't* tell the smell of one barnyard animal's excrement from that of another. I quickly learned. Cruising the Eastern Townships, down this *sentier* onto that *chemin*, yet not so far into the mountain chain. Soon as we started passing brown and white cows and their farms.

Dad stopped by a lonesome-looking house with aluminum siding, knocked politely at the screen door. He took a step back and asked.

"You have any manure?" He gestured with a lift of his chin to the red barn peeling paint and hanging on weather-worn hinges.

Sure, the man would say. The farmer was always a man, always about Dad's height. Greying beard. Short black hair. Sleeves rolled to elbows. Boots—galoshes, as if for an eventual storm.

"You selling?" Dad, again squarely turned to him.

"Sure." The man, hands in jeans pockets.

"How much?"

"How much ya want?"

Dad dug. So did Kelvyn and Paddington. They were The Big Boys, which meant I was The Little Boy; I wasn't expected to help just yet with the heavy lifting. Same with Sahara as the youngest *and* only girl. I watched them from the car with Mom and Sahara, our doors swung open, nibbling ham sandwiches, plain cake, and slurping thawed lemonade packed for the trip. I waited impatiently, always more settled when in motion than when stuck in one spot or arrived at a destination. Like Ria, I had trouble standing still for more than seven seconds without inducement. There was always something new and odd to see when we were driving, like the multicoloured cows. Maybe because, in passing, whatever it was—a local war monument or flooded birch forest—didn't have time to lose its allure for me.

Bags were finally loaded into the *Montreal Star*-lined trunk of our Impala.

Money changed hands.

“Thank you. Come visit us again.”

“We will. Same time next year?”

Mom yanked the half-finished sandwich and lemonade from my hands and packed me in between The Big Boys.

The fact was—the truth is—Dad didn’t really need my help at all in the garden. He included us in every aspect of it, from planting to watering and weeding, the way I try to involve Ria. Although she’s more interested in climbing our golden apple tree, where she hosted make-believe dance parties when she was four, than helping me prune the scraggly sugar apple and soursop this rainy season.

“Hey, aren’t you supposed to be holding the ladder and the bag for me?” I cry to her from my perch.

“Just call me when you’re ready,” she cries back, a little higher on a branch than makes me comfortable. Like the largest limbs of our ackee tree, I’ve learned from climbing and falling, those of our magnificent golden apple can hide their hollows.

Dad had, at one time, plum, cherry and apple trees lining our backyard as if it were a quadrangle. A red maple stood outside my bedroom window facing a detail of tall poplars. Wine grape vines draped the cabana, dewy with purple fruit into late fall. Rhubarb sprouted mushroom-like from shady places beneath cedar hedges. We had a couple generous strawberry patches. Dad’d tried his green thumb on melons a few times, but they came out small—fist-sized, far too insufficient for a family of six, and virtually tasteless.

He had better luck with corn, pumpkin, cucumber, zucchini, tomato, potato, okra, bonavist, green bean, artichoke, onion. Each summer, the potted broad-leaf thyme, fine thyme, basil, marjoram, and mint returned with the confidence of our regal street-facing perennials.

This is just the produce, just what I remember *eating* from the garden. Dad varied and rotated his crops. He experimented with seeds from other countries, including Barbados, often aware three or four months of Canadian sun and rain may not be quite enough to encourage them to yield in foreign soil.

Yes, he would have known. Intimately. Cruelly. Defiantly. Dad lived according to a certain rhythm from age to age that kept him in balance with his family and environment. He was to many in our gap a *bricoleur*, a tinkerer, a fixer-upper of his home and space. He had always been in my memory and mythology a planter, a sower and grower, a Caribbean god of cornfields, fruit trees and berry bushes. This sense of rhythm saved his life daily.

From season to season, country to country. Until it couldn’t be sensed anymore. Until he lost step with the beat. Most likely the one relationship he could trust. The only one he *did* trust.

What I want to know is how did I grow from a second-generation hobbyist gardener into an occasionally sought after journeyman fruit farmer? I have a degree in tropical agriculture. I consult with local farmers on how to increase their yield without harmful pesticides. If the money’s right, I do work for the government and regional clients. In my orchard (Mom’s word for the half-dozen bearing fruit trees wrapped around my home), the star apple has yet to produce more than blossoms, and the lime tree hasn’t started back again since stopping two years ago. Only half the sapodilla yields—maybe less than half. Same for the dwarf mango. I’ve tried to be nurturing. With fertilizers and small talk. With pruning and Epsom salts. No manure. I promise, that’s next. Some of the right stuff.

Look at Ria climb, though! The way I used to. All touch and go. Wild instinct. The golden apple needed no help from me to branch out into an enchanted crown of antlers. *Eh-eh*. Look at her. *My Papa Bois*, if he were here, would revel in her quest. He’d be like that malicious little bullfinch over there on the electric wire, watching to see how high she’ll reach. And that grey old bird would say to me, “I see you, too! In her, yes of course, but in the soil. Fool yourself, but you *can’t* fool me. Come to claim a corner of your father’s garden after all. In an island that was once his, on ground now also yours, filled with trees familiar to you both, at last.”

# Maya Khankhoje

## HISTORY IN A FEW TANGO LESSONS

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Let's get things straight. History is just a shuffle, or even a tango. One step forward, one step sideways, and if you stumble and fall down, your whole life changes. For example, if the next-door drunk happens upon the lips of your buddy's girlfriend, wow, you don't even want to find out!

Remember Katrina, Johnny Boy? Not that girl from high school but the hurricane that hit New Orleans. A cold front hit a warm front. It all happened in the high seas, but the scuffle landed in New Orleans, uprooting a bunch of trees, houses, animals and lost souls. And when Aeolus, the Keeper of Winds and his side-kick, Poseidon, the Ruler of the Seas, got tired of dancing around, everything quieted down, but things were never the same again. Many coffee-coloured folks lost their homes, their fishing boats, and the will to play the saxophone. Then a cold wind swept in from Washington and dispersed the folks all over the country. Later the suits from Wall Street jumped onto the bandwagon and remade the Ole Port into a profitable venture, killing Cajun joie forever.

Juanito, you know about Hernán Cortés, don't you? And surely you've heard of La Malinche? At first, they used to call her Malintzin, in honour of her noble birth. Then they called her Malinali, because the Spaniards could not pronounce her name. Then they christened her Doña Marina and married her off to another Spaniard to whitewash her dark skin as well as her sins. What sins exactly? Well, she was sold off as a slave when her nobleman father died, then gifted to the Spanish Conquistadors, then Cortés took her as his interpreter, mistress and adviser, in no particular order. It used to be a sin to be a beautiful and intelligent woman in those days—still is in some places. Some historians blame her for having facilitated the downfall of the Aztec Empire; others recognize that she acted as a mediator in her efforts to reduce bloodshed. What is officially acknowledged is that the birth of her son with Cortés signalled the birth of a new mestizo nation called Mexico.

What about Quebec, Johnny Boy—or should I say Ti-Jean? In 1534 Jacques Cartier, a respectable mariner from Brittany, obtained a royal commission to find a western passage to Asia. He explored Newfoundland and the Gulf of St. Lawrence and liked what he saw so much that he planted a cross on the ground and claimed it for the King of France in the name of God. The problem is that the English then sailed in and did exactly the same thing, not resorting to faith and a cross, but to cunning and the sword. Which is why here in Quebec we celebrate twice, on June 24 and July first. But hang on; history continues to be dug out and will be rewritten again.

The English, however, haven't quite given up on their colonial mindset. Nor have other former colonial powers. On the eve of the Great Lockdown of the XXI Century, Queen Elizabeth turned 93 and threw a party in grand style. She wanted her subjects to forget that the Empire where the sun never set had long ago reached its twilight. Brexit is a good case in point. Of course, you have to get along with your neighbours to be able to sell them hard goods in summer and buy their soft mangoes in winter.

After WWII many countries started breaking away from the yoke of powerful empires. But their leaders understood the value of alliances such as the United Nations, the Non-Aligned countries, the Capitalist Countries, the Communist Countries, the Third World Countries and so on. But this delicate balance came tumbling down with the Berlin Wall. Every so often the G-7— or is it the G-20? —whatever— these gentlemen's clubs, with a lady or two in pantsuits, meet in remote locations far from the madding crowds, where their suits won't get soiled with the sweat of

all those unwashed masses. Or maybe they fear the soft strength of a teddy bear catapulted over a high fence. One of those men always wore a blue suit and a red tie and would say: "yes, of course, but you'll see" to everything, and, back in his plane, he would tweet that he had changed his mind after all. What can I say! Stepping on a politician's toes is a more egregious sin than missing your lover's cue.

I'll stop here. Dancers get tired too and the history of humanity is long and messy. The Earth spins around its axis and circles other round bodies. Half of the time, the sun shines, the other half, darkness reigns. They say at some point it will stop shining. But don't worry, Johnny-Boy, Ti-Jean, Juanito, you will be long gone. As I said before, life is a shuffle, a tango. One step forward, two steps sideways, and next a pirouette. Kick up your heels but watch out, lest you come tumbling down.

**POETRY**

## Hugh Hazelton

### THE HIGHWAY OF TEARS

I know that highway myself  
used to hitch it east and west years ago, when I taught high school in a mining town  
at the dead end of a dirt road that ran north from it  
up to a reserve and then the prefab village across the lake  
from the raw-bitten stripped-off earth and giant rock-gorged machines  
gnawing away the land inhabited beloved unchanged for eight thousand years  
there was a tavern but no stores  
so I had to hitchhike down the road and then out along the Yellowhead  
another fifty k to a larger town with a supermarket  
every two weeks to get food and carry it home in my backpack  
all year long in January in the dark at -25° and June in the endless daylight  
one cold rainy afternoon I got a ride with some people from the reserve  
and we picked up a woman they knew whose face was beaten and bloody  
she didn't show her pain, just said she wanted to go into town  
occasionally I'd see girls hitching along there, but didn't know  
what might be happening to them then, the ghosts they could become  
that haunted the dark, impassive pines where they disappeared  
perhaps they were the older sisters of my students or just students themselves  
or they might make it down the highway and survive for a long moment  
or take a place among the women along East Hastings Street in Vancouver  
who left shadows on the barren wet walls along the bleeding asphalt  
before they faded away in solitude or were taken to places of no return  
and some might have been able to go back to their homes in the north or west  
to mourn the ones who never reappeared and forever ask where they had gone  
disappearance often worse than definite death because the families and others  
never know for sure no matter how long they wait always wondering hoping  
and the women who were once children with laughing eyes trying to find their way  
are struck down or vanish unseen the invisible women the murdered women  
the lost women the lonely scared brave trusting women  
loved and never forgotten by the voices asking where

## Dannabang Kuwabong

### EPITHETS ON STORIED TOMBS

---

“semper den nos kurason”  
“Drumi dushi Big Mom”  
“Rust zacht,”  
And others etch the desires of the left behind  
As fumes of corrupting flesh  
Filter through new mounts of soil  
Float to the surface in search of freshness  
Or a nostril to lodge till a day of rebirth  
I hasten to leave this silent home  
As tunes of heavy metal broth  
Call me from my heavy-metal dreaming

### *Drumi Dushi*

Saturday morning  
Silence slouches through empty streets  
As strange vapors seep into hollows  
Where tombstones sit on each other  
Beside B&B La Creole/Hostel La Creole  
Beside the Market Square of Willemstad  
Sephardics rest at Beit Haim Berg Altena  
Their silence carved in skulls, crossbones, hourglasses  
I do not see my name on angel-guarded stones

I circle back to Roodeweg Cemetery  
Tiptoe around leaning tombstones  
Reading memories hurriedly scripted  
Over peeling paint on yawning graves  
Each seeking a count of cacti of history  
When protesting Rome’s cavernous tastes  
Was an honorable sport  
I do not see my name written on stone.

I am intrigued by Kolebra Bèrdè  
Kas Chikitu, where the ghost hostel of unbelievers leans  
I enter with expectation

I search with trepidation

Here I am told lie memories of unbelievers  
Those whose temples did not face sunsets  
Caquetíos, Africans, Asians, Moors, Catholics  
Above an unnamed grave the words:  
Drumi Dushi, Big Mama  
Below, a half-exposed face  
Half-covered by a headkerchief  
Her skirt nestles between her tired thighs  
As she sits before a large cauldron  
cooking *kadushi* to purify her children  
cleanse them of the poison of history.

### ***Museo Kas Di Pali Marshi***

Our guide  
Ancient seer beyond the graves of memory  
Welcomes us below the scattered shades  
Of an old *kadushi* and wind swept *dividivi*  
Sweat like wizened silence courses down  
Her facial folds flush out some tortured memories

A branch of the *kadushi* sports a skull  
Below a rooster spruces its black tail  
And many chickens move freely  
Under the shadow of its spread wings  
The rooster's chest, a map of scars  
Traces various victories achieved with spurs  
Against enemies of the clan of combs

We move on to hear the story of sage:  
We burn sage wood for sanctification  
Its smoke as life force in bread at sunrise

Beside the now unused oven  
She points to soil heaps and stresses:  
These graveyard pits of *dividivi*  
Burnt to produce coal for braziers  
For night fires when the enslaved  
Tired from salt mining  
Returned to their hearths for stone soups

Caught in an earthen jar, cactus ash  
Preserve our grain against weevil invasions  
She shows us ancient heads of sorghum  
And clutters of finger millet

At once, I understand her look of appeal  
I raise my voice against the incomprehension  
Call the variety of sorghum by name  
Name each shape of finger millet  
Trace their roots to my Dagaaba origins  
My mother's face rises behind the guide's smile

***Heavy-Metal Broth in Curaçao***  
***(for Asyla Holt)***

i

You, my sister, steam  
In these cauldrons of cane  
Yet rise like history's ghosts  
You memorialize heartbeat  
In these heavy-metal broths  
These bottled moans in hums  
To dissolve cataract visions  
You stir mud waters of forgetting  
Free minds docked in amnesia  
And generate an avalanche of sights  
Your silent gasps are quarry  
At the gates to our catacombs  
Where new flares of visions light  
Where your words are slivers of calm  
Slither to skitter above a shimmering Atlantic  
Raise-up bleached bones of men unmourned  
Raise-up bleached bones of women unmourned  
Those who gave their all to death  
That we might sing resurrection songs  
Seated on these jagged sides of Negro Hills.

ii

Here then, dotted beyond stone frames  
These rock-fortified coastlines  
Unrepentant waves gnaw and kiss  
This ever-receding land of coral  
I hear uncorrupted maroon flutes  
Recall Sisaala sirens of rebirth  
We dance away our regrets  
Squeeze flashes of smiles  
From uncertain and hardened hearts

iii

I too a sojourner gaze at what your truth

these approaching horizons of dreams  
Lit by the green glows of hope  
Yet dispersed by red glows of pain  
Though I share no nostalgia nor amnesia  
Yet like a millipede  
I waddle in serendipity  
Among silent gazers of eyeless skulls  
Below Queen Juliana Bridge  
A katolic I trump from Punda to Otrabanda  
Reach Graf Maria Magdealena  
Some prefer to call it Santana Berg Altena  
For its parade of Afro-Catholic ghosts  
To claim a hearing among unheard moans

## Norman Cristofoli

### CONTRACT DISPUTE

---

Booked a meeting with myself  
A luncheon

Needed to discuss my contract with God  
Something in the fine print  
A loophole in the cancellation policy  
and the no-fault insurance  
It appears that my signature  
was forged by a future incarnation of my soul

God claims the contract is binding  
I disagree  
Now I can't find an impartial arbitrator

## FOR THOSE

---

For those with ears  
listen to all the mysteries  
For those with eyes  
behold beauty in everything  
For those with noses  
find the scent of love  
For those with a mouth  
voice one divine truth  
For those with a mind  
imagine the purest thoughts  
For those with lungs  
breathe in freedom  
For those who have a heart  
pump fire into your life  
For those with feet  
walk to the water  
For those with legs  
run to the ends of the earth  
For those with fingers  
point to your horizon  
For those with hands  
build your own destiny

# Shirley Small

## TRIBUTE TO TONY MORRISON \*

---

I will walk the catacombs of Time  
Through you and with you  
As you bring to life  
Our foreparents abused in their life  
Denied burial rites  
But whom you resurrect  
Freed from taint  
Their captors smeared on them

Philosopher within  
You embedded with long dormant lives  
You heard and read the accounts  
Pondered and lived those lives  
Clouded as they were  
In vaults and tunnels  
Of a cobwebbed past

For the branded rendered impotent  
The abused and tortured souls  
Forced into brutal servitude  
You found language  
To convey their anguish  
You decoded their responses  
You recorded them

By demystifying the unknown  
You cast light on their true story  
Still much obscured and often skewered  
In records commonly called history  
And widely published  
By wielders of press power

An archeologist at heart  
You delved into the past  
Unlayered fragile pigments  
Of piled grief agony pride  
And resolved to reclaim Self

With lyrical dexterity  
You brought it all to light

So Truths of their story  
Surface to the glare of day  
Their deepest angst and anguish bared

The pilloried memory  
Of their tortured lives  
Stripped of centuries  
Of deprecation and derision  
Now monuments  
To their towering strength and dignity  
Merit reverence and honour  
And in overdue requital  
The just desert  
Of tranquil rest in their Hereafter

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\* "Tribute to Tony Morrison" is a re-worked version of "Toni Morrison— Medium and Message," first published in *Icons*, Halifax: No Gyves Press, 2016.

## DEFINING A TRUTH

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<p>Music is a language, hence <i>Soul &amp; Jazz</i> are prayer and praise <i>Dub &amp; Reggae</i> exaltation and depression <i>Hip-hop</i> yet another variant <i>Steelband</i> rhythms oratory exalting spirit <i>Calypso</i> social critique and satire</p> <p>These poetic forms Are some expressions Of the prayer and praise Black souls raise ....to ease the burden bearing down even in the now ....to release physical and psychic pain Our parents bore ....to expose centuries old And ongoing abuse Our ancestors endured .... to protest ongoing brutality Our youth, adults and even tots Are subjected to in now time Often without recourse.</p>	<p>These forms of prayer Expose the psychic burden Blacks still shoulder. Hopefully, continued messaging To agents and institutions That inflict this pain will help them understand eventually pain caused by scourge of otherness and like oppressive practices.</p> <p>Listening to protest, Engaging with victims Does not change the evil. While individual involvement may, Only soul searching will Only the determination To clear individual And national conscience Of difference, superiority and ignorance Can reverse the practice And clear a path To acceptance on equal terms Only then a healthier nation Only then a healed world.</p> <p><i>Shirley Small (UCCoT)</i></p>
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# Ethel Meilleur

## THE POET'S POEM

---

Let the Poet's  
Poem  
Emerge

Crossing paths  
over  
electric cables

cellphones'  
invisible waves

The Poet's Poem  
continues  
softly floating  
over mountain  
peaks  
and tree tops

While blackbirds  
caw and gnaw  
at colourful words  
and devour each  
letter one by one

## MISSING THE PLUMP LOVE

---

I keep looking for the plump love  
but  
he's nowhere to be found

All I'm left with  
is memories of the plumpest  
love in town

He was peach fuzzy  
cottony soft, cuddly warm  
and lusciously delicious

If I could see him for just  
one hour  
By damn! I'd try once again  
to be wrapped in his  
warm embrace  
cause it's been a freakin cold  
winter

And the thoughts of being wrapped  
up in his hambone  
really turn me on to  
hot pork and beans

## Ilona Martonfi

### ELEGY FOR MY SISTER

*Mártonfi Erika Gyöngy April 20, 1946 – November 9, 2017*

---

In this house, a collection of fragments

downstairs, a clock chimes three  
white geese fly into the room

reenter the pages of night

elegizing my younger sister.  
Goddess of sleep and death  
the act of mourning a lost sibling  
iteration of incompleteness,

it took one week for the news to reach.  
Splinter off into parts  
folding the moon into umbra  
cymbals, triangles, and xylophones  
playing at her funeral

omens in dreams.  
There is a stoniness.

A box of letters, photographs,  
collages and sketches  
gesso the untreated cloth

assemble trivial remnants  
marking the sprouts of a poem

under small blue skies.

Sound of winter wind

the waters of a river.

## Karen Ocaña

### INTERSPECIES LOVE

---

At dawn I walk my fingers across the island.  
Your skin is a map I'm trying to read.

A spider guards the crumbling stairs  
I descend to cool my toes. A flounder  
flits from under a rock and salt  
tickles my nostrils. I'm ankle-deep  
in the Phillipine Sea.

Far off heron feed in tidal pools  
Blue fish remind me of a pencil I used to chew  
Collared kingfishers cry out a childhood name:  
*Reench Reench*. Forget maps,  
your skin is a territory.

Hear the snicker of flying foxes  
swooping from their roosts at sundown  
to nibble tender shoots of the pandanus tree.  
Listen, as the gods of Guahan  
whisper in Chamorro: Fanihi, fanihi.

The sweet hereafter of nevermore is now.  
Yesterday wars with tomorrow, making up  
making out. Call it pollination  
or call it interspecies love. That fruit is a bright  
yellow orgasm brought to you by a fruit bat.

The light of a dying star glints off the sea  
lapping at the eroding shores of Song Song,  
even as we wing our way out of paradise  
and I pocket my map with fingers grown  
darker and more furrowed.

## INTERSTITIAL

---

Pallor. Murk. The time between  
night and day. Dawn, the crack of, the  
rose-rimmed intersect.

The poem is nearly a nest box.

Invisible  
metaphors  
flit before our eyes.

Photons and anti-photons,  
a matter of angle.

A tree is always greening,  
elusive. perpetual.

Tree. Oh tree.  
Grass, whispering grass.

Oui, son âme, oui  
son son, avec son corps, sa résonance  
au-delà, de la question-réponse,  
la problématique tique tique,  
le son son de son fonctionnement, cette  
chose  
ce fractionnement  
multiplex, la multiplicité

Elle est forme et fente

des choses qui parlent en nous  
et nous parlons avec.  
Parlons de ces parlements.  
Perlons comme Chaucer avec ses oiseaux.

*Le poème oiseau.*  
*Le poème serpente.*

On se livre  
à lâcher la plume  
qui n'est est pas une.

## Ann Janice Farray

### TIME'S MYSTERIOUS POWER

---

The Clock is ticking.  
Peaceful people erupt into anger.  
Some fall into love's dupe,  
Others out of it.

The Clock is ticking;  
Old folks grow senile.  
The young get old;  
Children move into adolescence.

The Clock is ticking;  
The insane walk around in clouds.  
The cognitive slip into insanity,  
And, yes, some insane reclaim their hold.

The Clock is ticking;  
Those whose life contract is up  
Depart into oblivious death.  
New babes enter screaming  
As if not wanting to fall into Time's vice.

The clock is ticking;  
Good turns into bad.  
Beauty fades into ugliness  
And, rarely, ugliness into beauty.

Bringer of memories, stealer of memories—  
What is it about the stealthiness  
Of the Clock's hands,  
The slow, yet fast, passing of Time,  
That creates such confusing transformations?

# Janet Yensen

## CHEERS?

---

Haven't I won a place in the sun? Worked hard all my life,  
with much joy as well as strife. Now an old fart, who  
once took part in Quebec's "tranquil" revolution,  
I've done my bit for our evolution. I consider  
independence vital for my life to be liveable.  
I will still have a choice, but have I a voice?  
Now I'm older, it's true, than many of you,  
but active and healthy, if not very wealthy.  
Now Covid is here, less freedom, more fear.  
Social distancing is safer but what a pain,  
I must self-isolate and at home remain  
I'm not allowed to help or volunteer,  
see friends or family I hold dear;  
I live in sadness and dread  
of seeing one other  
virus spread:-  
call me  
old, elderly  
senior or wise  
ageism is schism  
whatever it's guise  
no one needs a push  
for a speedier demise;  
when I need some help  
and a little home care,  
will services be there?  
If I accept assistance  
I'll remain resistant  
to displacement  
or care home  
placement;  
of 1 thing  
you can be  
absolutely certain  
I want to live in my home,  
where memories roam, till the final curtain

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Rana Bose**, a Montreal-based writer, poet, playwright, engineer, has written eleven plays and three novels. He has just completed a 4<sup>th</sup> novel which shall be published in the fall of 2020. He is a founding editor of the arts and politics webzine [montrealserai.com](http://montrealserai.com) and was awarded the Judy Mappin Prize by the QWF for his commitment over 30 years towards bringing Montreal's English Language Arts and Culture to the world at large.

**Norman Cristofoli** has published several chapbooks of poetry/prose plus two audio compilations of spoken word. He published the “*Labour of Love*” literary magazine for over 25 years and was co-founder of the “Coffeehouse” artist networking site. His play *The Pub* and a new book of poetry, *Relinquishing the Past*, were both published in 2020.

**Anne Janice Farray** is a Grenadian-Canadian. She is the Administrative Officer, Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University. Her editorial pieces and poems have appeared in *Montreal Community Contact*, *Canada Weekend Post* and the *McGill Reporter*. She is a member of several community organisations. In February 2020, she was recognized in the *McGill Reporter* for her forty years of service to McGill University and the larger community. In September 2021 she was featured in the *Montreal Community Contact* article “The Black Presence at McGill University.”

**Hugh Hazelton** is a Montreal writer and translator who specializes in the comparison of Canadian and Quebec literatures with those of Latin America. He has written four books of poetry, and translates from Spanish, French and Portuguese into English. He is co-host, with Flavia García, of *Lapalabrava*, a series of trilingual readings at the Café La Petite Marche.

**Maya Khankhoje** was born in Mexico, and raised in Mexico and India. Her 420 publications include poetry, essays, fiction, literary translations and criticism. She has received several awards for her work in English, Spanish and French. A former QWF and CALQ jury, she is currently contributing editor of [www.montrealserai.com](http://www.montrealserai.com).

**Ilna Martonfi** is a poet, editor, literary curator, and activist. Her latest poetry collection is entitled *Salt Bride* (Inanna, 2019). Another collection, *The Tempest*, is forthcoming from Inanna in 2022. Her poems have been published in seven chapbooks/ journals across North America and abroad. She curates the Argo Bookshop Reading Series and was the 2010 recipient of the Quebec Writers’ Federation Judy Mappin Community Award. To follow her work, please visit her [Facebook](#) page.

**Ethel Meilleur’s** 2019 chapbook *Funny Girl* was received with critical acclaim. Her work in *Timeless Voices*, an anthology published by the International Library of Poets, earned her their nomination for Poet of the Year in 2006. Ethel’s poetry has also appeared in *Kola Magazine*, *The Blasted Tree.com*, and *Concordia Writes Nights* as well as several anthologies.

**Karen Isabel Ocaña** is a Montreal-based literary translator, poet and writer. Her work has appeared recently in *The Ottawa Review of Books*, *The Capilano Review* and *ellipse magazine*. *Rooms*, her translation of Louise Dupré’s

poetry collection *Chambres*, was shortlisted for the 2017 QWF Cole Foundation Translation Prize. She is working on her first book of poems.

**Robert Edison Sandiford** has worked as a journalist, publisher, teacher, and producer. He is a recipient of the Harold Hoyte Award for his editing. His essays and short stories have been published widely. He is also the author of several books, among them *The Tree of Youth*, winner of Barbados' Governor General's Award of Excellence in Literary Arts; *And Sometimes They Fly*, winner of a BMA ("Brands of Barbados") Award; and *Sand for Snow*, shortlisted for the Frank Collymore Literary Award. In 2003, he founded with sister writer Linda M. Deane the Barbadian Cultural Forum ArtsEtc Inc ([artsetcbarbados.com](http://artsetcbarbados.com)). *Fairfield* ([dcbooks.ca](http://dcbooks.ca)) is his most recent book.

**Shirley Small** is a poet, educator, community advocate, organizer and a former President of the Montreal Regional Committee, Congress of Black Women of Canada. For decades she was a teacher with the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal and was an English Department Head when she retired. She is the author of two collections of poetry: *Tribute* (2008) and *Icons* (2016); and a founding member of *Kola Magazine*. She has delivered many public readings locally and abroad, including Caribbean Women Writers' Conference, Curacao; and the UN World Conference for Women, Nairobi. She now lives in Toronto.

**Chanel M. Sutherland** left St. Vincent and the Grenadines to live in Montreal, Quebec when she was ten years old. She holds a BA in English Literature from Concordia University. Chanel is the winner of the 2021 CBC Nonfiction Prize for her story "Umbrella." Chanel is currently writing a collection of short stories that explores the Canadian- Caribbean immigrant experience.

**Denise Westfield** discovered her love of writing while she was in high school. She is a graduate of The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. She teaches English Language and Literature at Girls' High School, in Kingstown, St Vincent. In 2019 she was the a co-winner of the H. Nigel Thomas University of the West Indies Open Campus Fiction Prize.

**Janet Yensen** writes poetry and prose in English and in French. She studied graphics in England and holds an M.A. in film and television. After several years in A.V. production in Paris, she taught graphic design in B.C. before coming to Quebec, where she taught graphics and animated film at Laval University. In Montreal she worked in social communication.

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