



KOLA MAGAZINE

VOLUME 34 NUMBER 2 FALL 2022

&

VOLUME 35 NUMBER 1 SPRING 2023

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* 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.

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OBITUARY

Egbert Gaye 1955-2023—by H. Nigel Thomas
Rana Bose 1950-2023—by Himmat Singh Shinhat

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EDITORIAL

Hot and Stormy Summer

Looking for a childhood friend last month, I ended up circling her house. Poor—OK, bad—directions issued on both sides, all the landmarks we referenced had changed. Eventually, my wife, daughter and I arrived at Donna’s front gate. Still, it was unreasonable to think I could find my way as before, a child of 10, more than 45 years on. I should’ve known I’d need a new plan; it didn’t matter that the terrain was much the same.

And us? What’s our plan these days: mine, yours and collectively? How do we plan for this world of ours *today*?

The pleasures, questions, concerns, and confusions elicited by the poetry, fiction and reviews in these pages (stories all) tilt intriguingly at how.

Does literature still seem like enough? Enough to do what? Shore us up? Keep us cool? After a hot and stormy summer, shade seems scarce and predictable skies seldom a promise. We can be forgiven for feeling a little brain-fried and spirit-parched. Like a fuse slowly lit that’s taking even longer to burn.

Several of the varied pieces in this double-sized issue of *Kola* explore unconventional ways to confront our worries and live more peaceably. They strike me as particularly hopeful: of better people, better days, better relations; pasts put into clearer perspective, futures freely embraced.

Maya Khankhoje’s observation about the late Rana Bose’s 2022 novel, *Shaf and the Remington*, being a “story of humanity’s resilience and innate impulse towards peace and conviviality” that “speaks to us today” is a reminder of what our artists and their works can do for us during times of tempests. They can help to make us more appreciative of our own relative fortune. And a little more determined to keep any and all good vibes going, to pass them on as we find our way.

Robert Edison Sandiford
Barbados, August 22, 2023

POETRY

MORRIS BAILEY

Lest We Forget

Spring's impatient light comes shining from high up in the east
through birch so pale parchment poplar and slate gray ash all a bud
evades their ravenous chlorophyll and carries on down to achieve
the expectant forest floor where remains one shallow snowmelt pool

deep enough to float a green-necked mallard paddling dining à la carte
below the shrouded damp dry slopes. Bright aromatic mute
their vast veil of fern is just now unfurled to waist height
primitive, ancient plants, no stem seed nor flower, they hearken back

to when great lizards roamed this earth fluted fronds vaguely Egyptian,
palm trees along the Nile fans for stately seductive Cleopatra
and beneath this airy mantle morning's first miracle a bank of trillium
blooms arctic white against their fresh, fragrant emerald olive leaves

then in their midst but separate laid out like glasses of pinot noir
in preparation for a cinq à sept some ruddy purple blossoms cluster
hints of rusted iron dried blood they only sprout on the raised, sunlit spots.
Do reds take more energy I ask myself and bending carefully to peek

discover lower still alongside and underneath, trout flowers, speckled,
en français moucheté. A concession to the light and dark petals nearby
perhaps or nature's secretive adaptation to this dappled radiance
just like their timid but tasty when pan-fried, namesake fish

in yet deeper shade, another marvel, wild ginger, each leaf like hearts drawn
by a schoolchild on their handmade Mother's Day card and nestled beneath
single flowers burgundy near black poke from last fall's curled copper carpet.
All in silence. From the hungry buds above, nary rustle nor murmur.

Then the chitter chatter brrrt brrrt sparrows teaching their young to sing
looking up to see, a yearling cardinal flits by, left to right iridescent scarlet,

then sunbeamed tangerine where it finds a short branch, settles briefly
to take in its surroundings proclamate awheet, wheetteaw, weet weet weet.

ALI IBRAHIMI

Bioekphrastic

A cornea slips
 like cover
 out of curvature
 of the earth
turns
to gaze
at the Gaia
from which it came.

A song splits in two.
 Facing selves one hums
 to its parted half, while the other screeches
 in return.
 of songs Songs
 that echolocate vibrations
 while the scattering of selves
 being torn. before,
 and after

Light,
in search of the visible,
 stumbles into a prism
 cracks Into
 reds, blues and yellows
 that debate
 the shade
 of a lost, imagined white.

Tongue like mutation
grows buds that can
taste the taste of tasting
folds and licks itself over
to circular pleasures.

Lines written,
drawn
and multiplied among selves—
not tangents
that touch and flee
the trajectories of their
curves,
but secants—
fulfilling
their promises
to return.

Voyage

(after *Voyages II* by Hart Crane)

I take the silver from your hair
and with it,
build you this ship

Sail under samite-sheeted moons
gibbous twin glow reflected
on a rimless flood

We look up at the sky
to see outlines of our bluenose
etched in each sphere

Turning shoulders wound hours so vast,
her belly laughs at us no longer

But conspires with moonwards
with tides and with leewardings

To see us to Paradise

IZZAAK BRAITHWAITE

Lucy for Darwin

Dear Darwin,

Please don't find it inane
But permit me the pleasure of asking:

I know Lucy.
Her black origin.
The long journey across the African Horn.
But what I can't understand
(Hence my question)
How did Lucy get a man?

It's a great leap from a fish swimming in the sea
To apes swinging in trees
A woman naked on the beach
To a million humans on the streets of Cape Town.
If she began all alone
Where did all the children come from?
See, procreation is my confusion
If Lucy was the beginning
And every egg needs a sperm
Then where did Lucy's donor come from?

This is not the egg and the chicken
Then ten hens scattered in the yard by one cock on the run
Monkey and ape to me
Appear in the same state to be
So what's going on?
I don't fathom the intricacies of natural selection
And life is too short to comprehend years in a thousand
Much more a million billion
Neanderthal intermediary?
Naturally, have you ever known primate to mate with human?
Was Lucy all alone in the Rift Valley?
Or was she hiding in the garden with Adam?

How did she know she should procreate
To make humans
Who got so smart?

NORMAN CRISTOFOLI

Small Voices (for Frances)

Small voices can say big words
to disheartened souls
seeking hope and transformation

Small voices rise above
the din of the braying herd
dispelling the complacency of ignorance

Small voices whisper
like a burst of light from distant stars
for the rights of all human beings

Small voices can change the world
in prophetic sonic booms
calling for freedom and justice

You have a voice
I have heard it
gentle, serene, determined
Like the voice of God
burning in the bushes
bending the rivers of profundity
A breath within the woods
beckoning for love to come home

ETHEL MEILLEUR

Lost Love Come Back

Deep down I knew my Love for you would Last
Each time we meet my heart thumps so hard
Whispering your name, a thrill from the past
You become that tiger in my backyard
I was only fourteen, I ran from you
My lips were burning from your hot kisses
I would tremble and shake, feel shy, you knew
You would smile, wink, then call me Little Misses
You were so kind, tender, loving and sweet
I couldn't handle all that admiration
Now I know I lost an amazing treat
You were so much more than an infatuation
I am wrinkly and crinkly but not yet dead
Loving thoughts of you go straight to my head.

The Funky Dance

(after *Kermis at Hoboken* by Pieter Bruegel, the Elder [c. 1525–1569])

Belly bumping drunkards swinging their
women upside down head over heels
petticoats showing lacy bloomers too
The men swing their ladies round and round
The bodies are hot as steam evaporates
in the cool night air. Everyone's having
a wonderful time. Big balloon bellies
bouncing around feet hardly ever touch the
ground. The Fiddlers are fiddling and tapping
their toes. The violins are playing
and staying in tune. The bagpipes are
blowing "What a Sound" upside down round
and round.

ILONA MARTONFI

Dawn

Add this to the language
grey tones to black purple
in photographic images
home of enchantment and dread
through old lyric voices
a temporal process of screen print
sandpaper erasure in monochrome
I asked what happened

I meant such glare in stone
not an apple tree, a wild rose
growing in the walled garden
I never once thought the spider
bare grass, the child heading out
to meet the sun.

JEFFREY MCKIE

We Are All

We could be barred from our own club
For not wearing the right opinion
Thinking the right thought
Arriving barefaced to the masked ball.

We are all emotional,
Emergencies waiting to happen

We are all undiscovered geniuses,
And unrepentant sinners

We are all engaged in the important work,
Of remaining alive

We are all put forth on our own,
From time to time

Like models and film stars
We have a good and a bad side
A way that we want to be seen
We may be open or closed about our past
And worry about how long
We will be the centre of attention.

If we arrive in last century's coat,
Will we seem as daring and innovative,
Or merely retro?
Will doors open and mouths close?
We are all nursing wounds,
That really should be looked at

We are all looking through windows,
That could use a cleaning

We are all passing,
When we should be present.
Are we like superheroes,

Our talents and powers created,
In the imagination of others?
Drawn as how they would want
A hero to be.

It takes strength to know
Your weaknesses.
To design your own costume,
And swing into action.

I am not as fearless as these words
I awake at night not to fight crime
But to battle doubt
To pace, to pray
To beg for the sun
To rise again.

Remember

I remember when I was younger
I remember I was stronger
Do you remember me?

I've lost track of time
After I lost track of you
But I haven't the slightest

They say you can't get lost these days
You can find anyone
By typing their name in

But you must remember how to spell it
If I could remember the name
Of that place that is no longer a restaurant

I've lost some hair, some weight
Gained some faith
I like some things you wouldn't know I liked

Now that I think about it
Maybe you'd still care
But you wouldn't know me at all.

KAREN I. OCAÑA

Dear Body

Soon you will go outside and feel the touch of snow
flakes frisking mothlike across your skin & melting
upon your tongue.

Where the bright moon breaks open the night
snow and ice swarmwindswept and wingèd
in the lamp's light.

Precipitation's filmic motion captivates
your vision, optic nerves anticipating the visceral
onslaught of sensation.

Mouths desiring fruit, eyes seeking fire:
art can be nothing if not this movement
involuntary and reciprocal.

... the oh! elicited by collision
the ah! announcing sweet burn
of consummation.

A whispered word
that kisses your ear
the perfume of a rose
sensing you are far
and near.

I am almost nothing but thoughts and water

Under a mauve sky, green sea turtles heave onto shore

a mesh of moving parts, enmeshed in movement.

Beyond the rain's bespeckled windowpane appear

filigreed outlines dipping pendulously.

From wires, balustrades, neither solid nor thin air

a dozen raindrops splash into my waiting mouth.

Most perfect mirror because imperfect, Stendhal

says of the eye, somewhere, somehow, sometime.

Crying, kissing, humours commingle

as heaven breaks into gales of unholy laughter.

Rather than ethics, it's art which constitutes

humankind's essential metaphysical activity.

Ticklish, tricklish, ticklish, tricklish

oh, many-chambered heart, beat on.

LORNA REDDICK

Beach

I like going to the beach
For the water is cool, clear and wavy.
The sand sticks on my toes and feet.

The conch shell at my ear,
I can have the sound of the ocean,
ooing and aahing.

Collecting small shells
Arranging into patterns on the sand.

Looking at colours and styles of bathing suits,
Worn by people sitting under beach umbrellas.
Bright red polka dots, green leaf shapes and yellow
diagonals.

ROL-J WILLIAMS

A Long-Prolonged Conflict

I tend to like light and its absence,
And see air and water as similar,
Differing only by state...
Of matter
And of mind.

I think of life as a long-prolonged conflict,
And I live knowing that one day I'll die
But hope to defer dying:
Diligently following the dying doctor's prescriptions;
Eating severed leaves of lettuce and
The half-dead fruit from the tomato
Mourning its lost child;
Working out at the gym
To keep my heart from fracturing;

Staying away at funerals too:
I mean, do we go there to stay away from people
Unless we are the subject of discussion...
And contention?

I go to the ocean's edge,
Not to fall off
But to swim in the tears and excrement
Of others like me,
And of fishes, whales and all else that wades in the water
(Like the wading in that song).
I wade too,
Trying to find peace in war zones,
Silence in the noise,
Respite from despite, from
Being an exception to rules,
To laws,
To Christian principles enshrined because
Jesus and the Bible proclaim them so.

I sit in the pew and stare at the pastor sweating

As though the devil were boiling a pot of crabs
Under his backside
And enlightening him of what's to come.
"He who cannot hear, will feel."

ANNA FUERSTENBERG

Across

Across empty heavens, starlit skies, merciless suns and perfidious moons,
Across barren tundra, rising tides, mist-laced mountains and scorching
dunes

Across savage cities, north, south, west, and east,
Across languages, taboos, bloody religions and political dues.
Across malignant famines and magnificent feasts,
Across rituals of loathing, ecstasy, gods and demons,
Across forests and jungles, raging rivers and mythical streams,
Across towns and villages, all built with hope, then ravaged by beasts.

Across hunger to understand and be understood,
Across sins against our bodies and our blood
Across the urge to smash barriers of time, race and geography,
Across our bodies' thrilled and aching topography,
Across violent armies of tortured entwined histories,
Across jackboots of intolerance and fear
Across human nature and its mysteries
Across life's chaos and death's jeer,

Across all of these, remember, remember here,
Across all you think, live, breathe and do,
There is one, across all this, who yearns to find a way across to you.

1999

ROBERT WINTERS

Prey

Come at me fast like a hungry bear that can taste blood, already opening its jaws wide and snarling with saliva glistening on its sharp teeth. Its muscles are lithe and heat rises from its steaming hide, matted fur mottled with blood and saliva.

Her cubs were hungry when she nosed them back behind the rocks and started to hunt. Three had survived so far. One had died quickly and there was little meat on that one.

It had been a long, cold winter and the snows were too deep to run through when the first sun warmed the trails near the mountains. Many deer died in the cold but other animals found them first; smaller, hungrier ones whose stomachs growled in pain while the bear slept dreamlessly in her shallow cave.

Her eyes only opened when the howling of wolves was too loud to ignore. Now it was time to kill. Berries were scarce this year and her cubs needed meat to test their sharp teeth and make them strong. She needed meat too, it would have to be soon or she would have to scavenge further just to keep her strength. And the cubs could not defend themselves if the wolves knew she was far away.

This was it: she had to kill now and there was no escape this time.

Bite me hard, I don't want to suffer, and your hunger seems stronger than my will to live. I can't speak all the languages of the street anymore. And I dream of flying high above the Earth where my eyes start to freeze in the dark night.

The bear's hot breath is close, she smells better than I feared. Her eyes sparkle as they lock on to my jugular, timing the final moves as I lift my rifle and aim.

ANNE JANICE FARRAY

Yesterday's Realities...Today's Fantasies

It was
let's go play na-na-teh an go skip
let's go see who go reach under de mango tree first!
why de sun runnin wid me...and stop when ah stop?
we was roasting nuts and busting bamboo
Ah Coming!

Now-a-days,
my mind is my playing field
it is my wandering mind that conjures up my childhood
and brings back those wonderful, funny memories
it is the recognition of faces...no just familiarity
that gladdens the searching, longing heart
Ah Coming!

It is
my reveries that give me my connection to yesteryear
I connect with family and friends in the silence of night
when I'm not the controller of my mind's eye
the unconscious takes me back then and there...to play
but sadly, rudely returns me to reality...in the early morn,
Ah Coming!

To that wondrous Place where I came into being
to share my Sunshine...and yet not to dine in my time
to play in the field where my small footprints led me...to my dreams
to share in Its naturalness, to joyously shine, to take wings!
Ah Coming! Home! Grenada!

January 2004

Where Were You Born From?

I am of African first,
born to struggle to know my place.
It is so deep in me, it makes me proud.

I am of lovers,
fighting to understand them; their treatment
of love, of caring, of despair.

Of family and friends,
for their thoughtfulness, encouragement,
approval and probing.

I am of me,
made up of religious, political,
social and economic thoughts.

Trying hard to understand me,
my feelings, my confusion, this earth.
Good humans, wicked humans,
trusting beings, deceptive beings.

I am a survivor,
of disappointments, achievements
with a love for music that seems
rooted in the deepest part of my soul
it makes me fly, high, high!

This is me, with beauty, love, deception, fear,
making my way as the years roll by.
fighting to leave my mark on this earth
I was here.... And continue to be here.

March 29, 1991

RAE MARIE TAYLOR

Paradox*

My land is the torn and tender earth
harboring rocks and ravens as guide
punctuated with songs of wilderness
and pangs of destruction
full of breaking hearts and stalwart souls
laboring hands and interminable courage
fettered with travesties of ritual, insults of crime
stemming with unending faith and unheard-of joy

* This poem previously appeared as the prologue in the limited edition of my book of essays, *The Land: Our Gift and Wild Hope*.

What I Can Tell You Is

I've grappled with the border—this one, here. North.
The 49th parallel America
Closed, now opening, still a place of complications
and viral confusion,
my whole family on the other side.
I ache so for them.

On this side, I've carried my writings through icy winters
and the greenest summers—50 some—among joyful friendships
and the society's painful micro- and macro-exclusions.
A landed immigrant, *une immigrante reçue*, pour l'amour du français.

Pero, Todo cambia. los llanos las montañas los caballeros el desierto la familia
Todo cambia

Privately, in urban isolation, I've released the long grief over the loss
of my country
its air, light and ground of home
where
I used to walk spirited vigorous
in Canyon de Chelly among
wind ripples swirling rock
and rain
le fond de l'air est frais
sprightly spring lambs
and Russian Olive glowing with heady perfume.
Mesa walls cut out the sky
a raven escorts its own shadow along the cliff.

Now, I walk to the barn,
four large birds careening above, two playing occasionally together like
ravens, but they are
not ravens. They're familiar though: turkey vultures. Leaving each other
space, flying over and beyond the cows lying calmly in the pasture,
chewing their cud.

There is a kind of silence in our cells where the real voice lurks, the cells
that in me know dust, sun, mountain lion and stream, the Pueblo Corn

and Buffalo Dances. This voice embraces now this green pasture and its people

at twilight

white cows

meandering

the sky

vast sweep

of rose

the meadow

well-watered

July green

I have found a home on this side.

Yet I still feel close to that other border. South. Mexico. Where, yes I know, you might be thinking of it too.

We think of that border, far South of here walled and policed, patrolled where so much suffering awaits in hope.

Esperanza para los niños. The children

Oh my God! The horror of my country's failures there! and in Afghanistan peoples' bellies ache and hands are desperate, reaching for welcome.

Et tu dis, "Que dire de l'Ukraine?" Oui l'Ukraine.

Three borders

Angoisse planétaire Tourment

Still.... *Comment ça se fait?*

hands here offer corn, beans, squash tomatoes, basil and flowers.

Still

my orchid blooms.

Alegria mi corazón

Alegria

2022

FICTION

VEENA GOKHALE

The Gift

Ramesh wasn't enjoying the flight at all, though he had looked forward to nothing else in the last few weeks. He was not a relaxed flyer and it wasn't a smooth flight, but that wasn't the problem. What was really bothering him was his desperate need to buy it. And yet....

He was fine till he started leafing through the duty-free magazine and saw the perfume bottle—Lisa. Of course, it was called Lisa.

He was going home, going home after three years! Three years in the Gulf, living eight to a small room. Waking up, going to work, coming home, eating, sleeping. Waking up.... Had his life really been as flat as that?

Gulbadan, dressed in her pink, floral-printed, nylon sari, the *pallu* draped over her head, would be waiting for him by the broad dust track that led into the little village of Wali; hot enough to roast a *papadum*, but still she'd be there, barefoot, statue-still, her eyes fixed on the road, an angular shadow extending from under her feet.

In fact there was no possibility of Gulbadan being allowed to stand by the dusty road leading into Wali. The idea would never enter her head either. Yet, this fancy gripped Ramesh as he sat uncomfortably in his seat, 40,000 feet above sea level. His first glimpse of Gulbadan would be on the veranda of his father's house, standing amidst a gaggle of relatives. That image—Gulbadan, alone, upright, fearless, in the merciless sun, a swirl of dust haloing her—remained with him.

But she wasn't alone anymore. She was with the baby, his baby son, Amardeep. He would be on her hip, her *pallu* draped around the infant's head. Was it a good idea for the baby to be in that much sun? Then he shook his head, smiling. He was really getting carried away.

Ramesh shifted in his seat; his lower back felt stiff. In the aisle seat next to him sat his corpulent co-worker, Ramprasad. He was fast asleep, his head beginning to push into Ramesh's headrest. Ram *Raja* (king) they called Ramprasad, because of his ability to sleep through anything. The story went that one afternoon he had slept soundly through a bad accident when a cement mixer had crushed a young, Yemeni worker's hand. No one else Ramesh knew catnapped at work, but

somehow Ramprasad managed to get away with it.

Ramesh wished he could sleep, at least a little. The airplane was spacious compared to their tiny flat, where they slept ten to a room. But he was one of those luckless travellers who cannot sleep on planes, and today it was even worse. When he let his head sink into the seat cushion and closed his eyes, the perfume bottle shaped like a woman's body rose before him. A woman's body in a red, off-shoulder gown. The glass was lightly contoured; translucent. He imagined caressing her body, holding it cool against his cheek. It made him hot. The gown had a silvery bow. Pull on that little bow and all will be revealed. Yes, everything.

Ramprasad let out a little snore.

Ramesh's brother had sent Amardeep's photo through an acquaintance soon after the baby was born, a year ago. It showed a sleeping infant. It wasn't a great photo to begin with, and the man who had delivered it to him had left a thumbprint right on the baby's bald head. Ramesh could picture Gulbadan as clearly as the full moon, but it was hard for him to see the baby she held at her hip. Amardeep! Amardeep, his son!

"He looks just like you when you were little. Carbon copy," his sister Minu had said over the phone.

That didn't mean much. There were no photographs of Ramesh as a baby. There had been one day in his life when he had been photographed, and that was his wedding day. He had ended up thinking that he understood a little how it must feel to be a film star, a film star like Nutan and Elizabeth Taylor, and he was thankful that it wasn't his fate.

Ramesh shifted in his seat again and saw that an air hostess had just entered at the head of the Economy section with a pushcart. She was making the round with the duty-free goods. Soon she would be by his seat. What would he do then? He shivered even though the cabin was a little warm.

Ramesh wished he had the widow seat, but it was taken by a white man in a business suit who had busied himself with his laptop the whole time. Ramesh had never seen a laptop so close at hand. He had tried not to stare as the man's demeanour was anything but friendly.

The only time he'd seen computers up close was during Diwali. Of course he could have walked into a shop and looked at them, but he never dared. And what purpose would that serve? The boss allowed them to make a phone call home once a year, during the Diwali Festival. Ramesh would line up awkwardly with the others, in the posh, wood-panelled office, with its fancy furniture and computers. It was far from whatever construction site they were working at, and they had to take a couple of buses to get there. Once they had gone in a large, open truck, the

kind that took them from the city to the construction sites.

How well he remembered that phone call! When it was his turn, the secretary had dialled a phone number in Wali. His father, sister and Gulbadan were waiting, had been waiting for an hour, by the phone in the moneylender's house.

That was when Minu had said, "He looks just like you when you were little. Carbon copy." His father had asked after his health. Then he had congratulated him on the birth of his son. Ramesh was overwhelmed. His father had never congratulated him, not even when he had got his Higher Secondary School Certificate. When it was Gulbadan's turn, she had asked, simply, "When are you coming home?"

Minu had described how fast the baby was growing up, and his father had talked about how they had made improvements in the house and paid off some debts with the money he had sent. When it was Gulbadan's turn, there was that question again, "When are you coming home?"

The air hostess was making rapid progress down the aisle; she had very few customers.

The perfume cost fifty-four American dollars and it wasn't even the most expensive perfume in the catalogue! Lisa. He was sure that it was the best perfume of the lot. How could it be otherwise?

When she stopped at their row he shook his head, but as she turned away he said, "Madam."

Seizing the duty-free brochure, he started thumbing through it, fingers trembling, but he could not find the right page. He looked up at the air hostess; her face was expressionless.

"What do you want?"

He glanced, panic-stricken, at Ramprasad, watched his head roll to the other side of the seat.

"Lisa," he said hoarsely, keeping his voice low.

The woman dipped her hand into the innards of the trolley and handed him a cardboard box. There was the picture again—the glass bottle shaped like a woman's body in a red, off-shoulder gown, with the little, silver bow.

He clutched at the box, disappointed. Somehow, he had expected her to hand him the bottle. Naked. He shook his head and handed it back to her.

She arched her eyebrows. "No?"

He hesitated. Then he shook his head again, feeling so dispirited that he wanted to bury his face in his hands and stay that way forever.

The woman shrugged and turned to the passengers on the other side of the

aisle.

Ramesh sank back into his seat and closed his eyes, his hands gripping the seat rests. What does she know? he thought. How can she know about Lisa? How can she know anything? But she should know; she should understand how important it was, the perfume!

He had never forgotten his trip to the cinema hall in Agra, even though that had been a long time ago. It had to be Agra, for there was no movie hall in Wali. Once in a while they showed a Bollywood movie on a travelling projector. They would tie a sheet between two trees and use a rickety, old projector (so said the village know-it-all) with the whole village assembled on one side, gawking. But in Agra they had gone to a real theatre, and they had seen an American film.

He had begged and begged his elder brother to take him to Agra. His brother was going there for some work. Finally, he had relented. They stayed with a distant uncle who had taken them, with great fanfare, to see the movie.

“*Arre, Hindi fillum nahi, angrezi fillum hai.* It’s not a Hindi film, but an English one.”

The theatre felt humid and smelt mildewy; his seat cover was torn, and he had to crane his neck this way and that because the man sitting in front was tall. But he had hardly noticed all that, mesmerized by Elizabeth Taylor in an off-shoulder gown. What was the movie called? He had no idea. He barely understood the plot; he knew very little English then. But there was Elizabeth Taylor, setting the screen ablaze. What more could he ask for?

She was in a huge room, with chandeliers, rather like the inside of a *mahal* (a palace), dancing in the arms of the suited-booted hero, who was very handsome. When the camera went close it showed her cleavage to advantage, when it was at a distance you could see the lovely sweep and sway of her gown. He had never seen anyone move with such assurance. A great impatience seized him when the camera showed the orchestra and other guests instead of the dancing couple. He found himself holding his breath, barely breathing. And then, there, there she was again, a *laal pari* (red fairy). Ecstasy!

Before his encounter with Elizabeth, he had swooned over Bollywood actresses like Nutan, but it was Eliza’s perfect curves set off by the red gown that had brought him to manhood. Much to his embarrassment, he had woken up the next morning, his underwear damp. He knew what it was, had heard enough crude jokes about it, but it seemed too simple a response to the sophistication of the scenes in the movie.

“So who is she?” Minu had asked him, laughingly, after he had got back home

from Agra. "Who are you mooning over?"

Blushing, he had escaped. Escaped to mount the rickety, family bicycle and ride through the crooked little lanes between the brick houses into the freedom of open fields covered with waving wheat stalks. He felt giddy and mixed up, experiencing a prickly kind of pleasure.

"Bata na uska naam, mai usko teri dulhan bana kar le aaungi. Tell me her name, I'll bring her home as your bride," his sister carried on relentlessly.

"Leave him alone," his mother finally reprimanded Minu.

Later, much later, he had found an old magazine in a second-hand shop in Agra with pictures of Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton on the sets of *Cleopatra*. He had bought it right away. It was obvious that she was born to royalty, a *rani* (queen). He wished he could have seen that film, seen her as Cleopatra, but he never saw her on the screen again. When he flipped through the article, trying to read it, or rather, looking for her name, he realized that she was also called Liz. He called her Eliza. Elizabeth was too long, too formal, Liz wasn't pretty enough. And now there was Lisa. He liked Lisa even better than Eliza. Why hadn't he thought of that one? Lisa, he whispered to himself, his throat dry.

The moment passed and he was confronted again with his failure. He took the in-flight magazine from the front pocket and stared sightlessly at the cover. He had a dull headache. He needed to drink some water; he was very thirsty. He could ring for a hostess. But what if she was the same one? No, he wasn't going to face that air hostess again.

He could not! He could not, should not, walk into his father's house with that bottle. Couldn't give it to Gulbadan. A gift, such an expensive gift it would be, though she had given him a son. Nothing could be more precious than that. No one would appreciate the gift, not even Gulbadan. He couldn't bring home a woman's half-naked torso. It was out of the question.

Ramesh lay back against the seat and closed his eyes. Gulbadan. He had explored every inch of her body with his hands, his lips, on that first night when they had been left alone for a couple of hours in the pitch-black corner of the large room where they all slept.

He had been working in the Gulf for two years, sending money home every month, before the question of his marriage came up. The next time he went home, his parents had lined up a few girls for him to see.

He hadn't been enthusiastic. "What's the hurry?" he had asked.

That set his mother off and made Minu laugh. She was married now, lived just

a few doors away and already had two children, a girl and a boy.

“We will find the girl who’s just right for you. *Tum fikar na karo, bhaiya*. Don’t you worry, brother,” Minu had said.

Minu was there, of course, at every girl-viewing ceremony. He had seen four girls and their families, but he hadn’t picked one. It wasn’t that there was anything wrong with any of them. What was he supposed to say, anyhow? He didn’t even know what he was looking for. He started feeling increasingly anxious, despite Minu’s reassurances that it was all going to turn out well.

Everything had transpired in the same way with Gulbadan’s family, as with the others, but when they were leaving, Gulbadan had lifted her gaze and looked straight at him, a hint of insouciance in her lovely eyes. His pulse quickened, and when she turned away, he had looked at Minu, who had given him a slight nod.

After their *suhaag raat*, the first night of their marriage, their sightless lovemaking had continued for a couple of days. He was destined to go back to the Gulf without seeing all of her. But then she had sneaked in a candle stub, and after his parents were asleep (he knew his parents’ sleeping breath better than his own) she had lit it, allowing him to see her wondrous form and to look into her eyes. What a revelation! What a revelation it had been, even in that flickering, uncertain light! And her eyes! How her eyes glowed!

The memory of those nights kept him away from the women that his colleagues went to, every now and then. They had tried hard to persuade him, telling him how good they were, and how cheap. After many months, they had finally given up.

Ramesh was titillated by the breasts and hips and waists and legs and buttocks that his roommates described with lip-smacking relish, but it was really the eyes that interested him. There was Nutans’ soft, seductive gaze, Eliza’s penetrating look, that made him hot and cold all over, and the mischievous glance that Gulbadan threw at him sometimes. “*Uski ankhone mein jaadu hai*. There’s magic in her eyes,” he had said to Ramprasad once, describing Gulbadan. Ramprasad, who had heard that line from the mouths of Bollywood heroes on the big screen, had nodded and smiled.

Everything else was lust, lust that could be remedied in the moment by a willing hand. Those women on offer would not really look at him, would not look him in the eye, of that he was certain. He had seen the indifferent expressions of the whores in Agra; their hardened faces, the impersonal, at times taunting, look in their eyes.

Alas, the candle was an indulgence, a risky addition to their lovemaking. If not the gift of sight, could they not have, at least, the blessing of scent?

Suddenly Ramesh got up and made his way past Ramprasad to the cabin at the back of the plane. As soon as the air hostess saw him approaching, she whipped out the bottle seemingly from thin air, and stood smiling broadly at him.

The transaction was done. She slipped the box into a glossy, red bag and gave it to him.

“Good choice,” she said.

“For my wife,” he said shyly.

“She’ll love it.”

He turned swiftly and went into the toilet. The bottle was all he had hoped for, and more. He caressed Lisa and Nutan and Gulbadan, then unscrewed the cream-coloured cap. What a deliciously sinful act! He inhaled the heady perfume but dared not use the spray. It was a scent for women, anyway. He had never smelt anything so wonderful. To know that things like this existed in the world; just that was precious. No resemblance to cheap aftershave, or the *attar* his mother had brought out during the wedding. This perfume contained not just one smell; it was a heady mixture of several scents. By opening the bottle, he felt as if he had uncorked a genie.

The door handle turned; someone needed the washroom. Reluctantly putting the bottle away, he returned to his seat and slipped the package into the black Rexine carry-on bag.

It had been harder to be away after the baby was born, much harder. He had never questioned his lot; in fact, he considered himself fortunate. He was able to send money to his father, while his brothers barely managed to feed their families.

“Keep your head down, work hard, don’t talk back to the supervisor, don’t get involved with politics,” his father had told him.

Never to see Amardeep, not to hold him close, not to have him touch his father’s face with his small hands—that was too much. Not to be able to play with him.

God had done well by him, all things considered, but now he asked himself sometimes if life was unjust, if it had not treated him that well after all.

“When are you coming home?” Gulbadan’s words followed him around.

Finally he was going home. That’s what mattered. That’s what really mattered. His bag was stuffed with toys and baby clothes, even though his mother had sent a message telling him not to waste his money on baby stuff; it was much cheaper in India. He hadn’t found anything suitable for Gulbadan, had planned on taking her to Agra on a shopping trip. Now he had found a gift that surpassed everything.

At Delhi airport, waiting in line to have his passport stamped, he was assailed

again by crippling doubt. How could he take the bottle home? How would he give it to Gulbadan?

After he had claimed his luggage, he gently placed the red bag on a countertop and made for the exit, his mind a desert invaded by a storm. He had parted from Ramprasad, who was from Srinagar, and was taking an onward flight from the domestic airport. Ramesh would take a couple of buses to get home. He had dissuaded his brothers from coming all the way to Delhi to receive him.

Pushing his luggage trolley, his steps heavy, he was nearly at the door when someone tugged at his sleeve.

“Uncle.”

He turned to face a young girl, dressed in jeans and t-shirt.

“You forgot this, uncle.” She held out the bag, smiling, buck-toothed.

“*Shukriya*, thank you.”

The bounty of fragrance, a token of his love. How stupidly he had almost left it behind.

I will give her the bottle at night, in the dark, when we are alone together, when no one is looking, he thought. The image of their hands clasped around the bottle brought a wave of pleasure. And her gasp, followed by her trembling, feverish embrace, awash in sweet anguish.

He would dab some perfume into the hollow of her neck; kiss her there. Yes, he would do all that. He was fearless. A husband. A father. A hard-working man. A man who was finally home.

His steps quickened. She was waiting for him by the dusty road in a pink, flower-patterned sari, under the blazing sky, their baby at her hip.

H. NIGEL THOMAS

Coonoo Moonoo

It WAS a sunny August day, and Robertson Bailey sat on his porch watching his two great-grandchildren chasing each other around the house. He looked forward always to August and December when they would sometimes come, accompanied by their mother, Mildred, his granddaughter, to keep his company for a week. Rose chased Henry up the porch stairs. He dodged her at the sheltered end where Robertson kept a pile of the magazines that Brenda-Jane, another granddaughter, a pediatrician in Boston, sent him regularly. They were there for the boys and girls of the area who wanted to come and read, ask him questions, or get help with their schoolwork. The children came up the stairs again; but this time, instead of going down, they circled Robertson's chair.

Suddenly Rose stopped. "Grandpa, why's your beard so white?"

"Every morning I dust it with flour," he said, patting her head.

Henry, who was four, was trying to get onto his lap and was pushing Rose, eight, out of the way.

"Are you telling the truth, Grandpa?"

"Why is Daddy's beard black and yours white?" Henry asked.

"Oh, that's 'cause I'm old."

"Is that why your skin's so rumped?" Rose asked.

"Yes."

"What do old people do, Grandpa?" Rose asked.

"They sit around and let their great-grandchildren ask them questions."

She and Henry laughed.

"Children, stop pestering your great-grandfather," their mother shouted from within the house. "Rose, come and take this for Grandpa."

Rose and Henry scampered into the house. Rose reappeared with a tiny tray on which there was a bowl of iced grapefruit segments, which she gave to Robertson before dashing back into the house. A short while later, she, Henry, and their mother reappeared. They sat on the balcony eating theirs. Robertson watched them, contented. The sunlight, which had been struggling to break out from behind the clouds, did so at this point, flooding the porch; the sun was just

sufficiently above the towering breadfruit tree about ten metres away to prevent the leaves from fracturing the light.

The gate opened, and Manasseh, Robertson's neighbour, who was recovering from a stroke, slowly limped his way along the hibiscus hedge that bordered the walk to the front door. Mildred got up and re-entered the house and returned with a bowl of segments for Manasseh about the same time that he began pulling himself up the steps. He was a brown man, considerably thin and wizened for his sixty-seven years. He wore a white shirt with the sleeves rolled just past his elbow and dungarees which were rolled up a couple of inches above his ankles. He lay the single crutch he used behind the chair which Rose had vacated for him.

When they finished eating, Henry collected the bowls and took them to the kitchen. When he returned to the porch, he whispered something to Rose that made her laugh. And they both looked at Robertson.

"What are you two conspiring?" their mother asked.

They laughed again. They and their mother re-entered the house. Within a few minutes they returned, Rose's deep brown, round face oozing mischief, while in the eyes of Henry's more angular face, fire beamed. Henry went behind Robertson's chair. Rose stood in front of it.

"Look at this, Grandpa." It was only a silk thread. But as Robertson pushed his hand to examine it, he heard the clipping sound of scissors and turned to see Henry attempting to clip his beard. He caught him, placed him on his knee, and tickled him.

"Next time you do this, I'll spank your little bum." He released him, and both Henry and Rose scampered laughing to the far end of the porch.

"Children," Manasseh said, "the joy they bring us."

"True. Can't imagine what life would be without mine."

"Yours!" Manasseh said and then looked at the floor. "Beautiful sunshine today. Feel it would o' been raining."

"Mine," Robertson said. "All mine."

"I didn' mean no harm. Is just that—"

"Everybody said that boy wasn't mine."

Manasseh was silent.

"You ever came into the Hanover town harbour from off the leeward coast?"

Manasseh nodded.

"Well, you see how the island looks when you're far off—just like a single range of mountains rising up out of the sea, like if a painter painted it onto the sky? But you and I who live on it know it's not like that. There's plenty mountains

and valleys and flat lands behind what looks like only peaks.

"You remember I told you it was the wrong thing to do, to put your granddaughter out 'cause she got pregnant? I still think so. And I still think you should ask her to come back home; it's not good for a sixteen-year-old to live by herself and with a baby to look after. How long you've been living in Hillsdale?"

"Twenty-seven years."

"Well, my story began long before that. You know I'm eighty-five years old. Bailey is my adopted father's name. You see, my father came to Isabella Island from Grenada. He and my mother lived together for a time, and they had me. They didn't get married, and he went back to Grenada. Some years later she heard that he already had a wife there before he came to Isabella Island.

"Well, my mother, after my father left her, just kept to herself. She used to work for a Scotsman who had plenty lands. She worked for him for many years, and he tried to get her to be his mistress, but she never took him on. One day—I was about nine at the time—he was chopping arrowroot holes, and she was dropping pieces into them, and he just dropped his hoe and said to her, 'Lucy, I want you to marry me.' She told him, 'But I can't marry you, 'cause I don't want nobody to abuse Robby. And besides, black as he is, I don't want him to become no white man's servant boy.' He told her, 'Trust me, you won't regret it.' So that's how come my name is Bailey.

"He treated my mother well, and I mean well. He went to the courthouse and gave me his name. He sent me to the best school on Isabella Island, Expatriates Academy, and he begged me—he pleaded with me—to go to university, but farming was what I wanted to do, so I told him he would've been wasting his money.

"So, I started to work on his estate, supervising, doing the bookkeeping, and so on. About two years after I left school, he died. Cars were new on Isabella Island at the time, and he bought one, but the roads weren't wide enough; so one night he was coming home from town—it had rained a lot and there was mud on the road right near the precipice at Bunyan, and the car skidded and ended up in the sea."

"Oh, that was your father. I was too young to remember. But I used to hear people talk about that accident while I was growing up. I grew up in Vista, right nearby."

"So I took over the difficult part of the estate, and Mama and me ran it for ten years. Then she got sick. Cancer of the bones, myeloma.

"We had a neighbour named Lucy Baldwin. She had four girls. Their father had left their mother and taken up with a young girl over in Summerville. The

two oldest girls were in high school when he left their mother, and they had to stop because he wasn't giving Lucy enough money to pay their school fees. We used to help them out. The oldest one—her name was Maria— was home for about four years. She read a lot and spent a lot of time at our house. I enjoyed talking with her; she knew a lot. A bright girl. After Mama got sick, Maria sometimes sat with her during the day and at those times when the woman I had hired couldn't be there. Around the time Maria was about twenty, her mother got a live-in job as a maid in town, so the two older girls ran the household in her absence.

"One evening when I came in from Hanover town, where I had gone to sell a truckload of sweet potatoes, I met my mother sitting up. She said she wanted to discuss something important with me. She asked me why I wasn't thinking about getting married. I was 39 at the time. I told her I wasn't interested. I used to sleep with a girl in the village sometimes. The girl knew I wasn't going to marry her, and that had suited me fine. 'What about Maria? She's nice. You two get along together well. Why you don' settle down with her?' I promised Mama I would think about it. Maria was a pretty-looking girl. Tall and smooth and black; not skinny, but not fat: just right. She had bold, warm, amber eyes that just stared at you and mesmerized you. But like how they were close to us, I never thought of her in a sexual way, and I was 17 years older than her. Two days later when I returned from the farm, Mama said to me, 'I had a long talk with Maria today. And if you propose, she gon' accept.' She and I were silent for a long time. Then she said, 'You going let me die in peace, Robby?' 'Yes, Mama, you will die in peace.' So that's how I married Maria. My mother died ten days after the wedding.

"I'm pretty certain that the gossip you got is about what happened after.... I'm not in the habit of discussing my personal affairs with anyone, so that gossip is mostly speculation.

"After a month of marrying, I knew it was a mistake. My libido was no match for hers. At the time, I thought something was wrong with her. That she wanted too much sex. At first, I thought, well, the experience is new; in three months or so she'd be less demanding. But a year went by and nothing changed. I had a farm to run during the day. I was falling asleep behind the tractor; sometimes getting dizzy spells. So I started to sleep in my own room, and eventually I put a lock on the door. I had to have my sleep. And, to tell you the truth, for me, sex once in a couple of weeks, even less, was more than sufficient.

"About eighteen months after the wedding, people started sending messages to me at the farm about a certain young man hanging around my house during

the day. I ignored them. The way I saw it was, if she wanted to sleep with him, it wasn't my problem. Everybody thought I was strange. One day my godmother came to the farm and told me off—said I wasn't a man; if I was, I would go home and catch the fellow and beat him up and make sure he never set foot on my property again, maybe give Maria a good licking too. If I didn't, I would disgrace my mother's memory. I laughed and she shouted, 'Stop being a coonoo moonoo!' To this day they still call me that behind my back.

"Two weeks later, I returned home around two o'clock one Wednesday, and there he was. The same person they'd described to me. I remembered him. Joseph Dellimore, one of the Dellimores: ne'er-do-wells that still live in that wattle-and-daub down near the bank of the stream. He was about Maria's age. But tough. He'd already travelled to Trinidad and managed well enough to gild his two upper incisors before they deported him. A charcoal-black fellow. Short. Muscular. In a vague sort of way, handsome. They'd told me he spent most of his time playing cards and dominoes at the rum-shop.

"When Joseph saw me, he started to run. I called him back. 'I won't hurt you,' I told him. I honestly hadn't thought of what I was going to do. He walked back slowly, smiling but staring at me like a dog watching somebody holding a stick while offering it food. He came and stood six feet in front of me. My judgement must have left me that day. I told Maria to bring a bottle of whiskey and two glasses. I beckoned him to the porch and pointed to one of the chairs there. We sat and I poured both of us a drink and toasted him. If my life depended on it, I couldn't tell you why.

"After two drinks, I said, 'Would you like to live with us?' He looked at me, frowned, then laughed, probably wondering whether I was out of my head. With his gold teeth flashing, he said, 'Sure, man.' So I told him he could move in now.

"Maria refused to serve him food that evening. I told her she had to. She did so trembling. In the night she went into her room and locked the door and refused to have anything to do with him. All through the night she kept screaming from her room that I should send him away.

"Well, I don't know how her family found out, but here news travel fast. Her mother was knocking at my door before dawn the next morning. She'd come all the way from Hanover town: twenty-four miles; there weren't any buses at that hour, so she had to have taken a cab, and that would have cost her more than she earned in a fortnight. She begged me; she pleaded. She was ashamed, she said. She knew Maria had done wrong. But I was only kicking her now that she was down, and wasn't I worried about what people would think? I ignored her.

"I made my own breakfast that morning and went off to the farm. Later that

day her mother and the Methodist minister came to see me at the farm. I told that minister—a white man from Australia—to stay out of my business. He invited me to pray, and I laughed at him. He left, holding Mrs. Baldwin's arm and shaking his head. Guess he'd never seen anything like that in Australia—something he could entertain his congregations with when he got back. I heard that Mrs. Baldwin went to my place and held on to Joseph and almost dismembered him.

"Joseph stayed on for about a week longer, and when he left, Maria moved back to her mother's house. Within a few days they had to admit her to the mental asylum. There, they discovered that she was pregnant.

"After the baby was born, they took him away from her. She stopped eating. Sometimes they forced her to; but as soon as they turned their backs, she'd push her fingers down her throat and vomit up the food. One day the nurses heard a patient screaming in the bathroom, and when they went, they met her stark naked, a razor blade in her hand, and blood oozing from hundreds of cuts she had made, from her neck all the way down to the middle of her thighs. The nurse said she smelt like a freshly butchered carcass. When the cuts healed, her skin looked like a crocodile's.

She eventually stopped bathing on her own and began wetting and soiling the bed. Right from the beginning, she screamed every time I came to the ward; but it got worse over time. Wherever she was at the time, she would throw herself onto the floor and strike it with her head while screaming, 'Beelzebub!' Eventually, they stopped my visits; her screams were seriously upsetting the ward.

"A little over three years after her son's birth, she died of TB. When she was at the stage where she was falling in and out of a coma, they gave me permission to see her. I know at one point she recognized me and held out her hand—opened her fingers, I mean. I started to beg her to forgive me, but the fingers went limp, and I never saw her conscious again because she died a day later." Robertson paused for a long while.

"What's to say? What is there to say? I won't want to be faced with that situation again. If only youth knew, if only age could? But that's life. A small part of a puzzle we can't unravel.

"The child was taken by his grandmother. God knows I gave her plenty money to look after him. At first, she made a show about not wanting my money, but destitute people can't refuse money for too long. When that boy—they called him Horace; I called him John after my adopted father—was about five, I took the chance and re-married ... to Brenda, one of the Brown girls from over in

Summerville, somebody my own age. She was my kind o' normal—and I couldn't tell you that we ever had a serious quarrel. She died six years ago. John's grandmother couldn't really manage, so she was relieved when we asked her to turn the boy over to us. Brenda and I never had any children—she was 46, I 47, when we got married—so she was only too happy to make a fuss over John.

"Well, people are funny. They criticized me for what happened to Maria. They had good reason to. But they also criticized me for accepting John as my child. Even my godmother accused me of buying a pig in a bag. 'Anybody that ain't totally blind can see that that boy is Joseph Dellimore own: his spitting image.' I told her Joseph Dellimore was a child himself, so it was better that Brenda and I look after John. The talk continued for years. But John was my son. I only had to remember that Bailey wasn't my biological father, but he'd made me his son, had wanted the best for me, and I had inherited his estate.

"You know the rest of the story. That boy made me proud. One of the best criminal lawyers this island produced. Was coming home from that famous case he was working on in Trinidad when the plane went down in that thunderstorm. I tell you not even my mother's death shocked me like that. I thought it would've killed Brenda. Probably helped weaken her heart. Anyway, look at those two." He pointed to Henry and Rose, who had been listening attentively. He was horrified that he hadn't thought about their presence.

"Rose, Henry," he said, "I hope you know that this is just a story."

They said nothing, and he wasn't sure that he hadn't frightened them.

He turned his gaze back to Manasseh. "And John's two girls, Mildred and Brenda-Jane, you know anybody anywhere with finer grandchildren? Look at these two, my great-grands." He pointed to Henry and Rose.

"Grandpa," they heard Mildred calling, "Mr. Manasseh, and you children—how come you two are so quiet? —it's time to eat."

They rose and entered the house.

GERALDINE SKEETE

Raine

Raine is staring out the window at nothing with everything before her. Anger overwhelms and threatens to enfold her if she doesn't shake it off before the meeting at 9.30 to finalize the divorce. She'll get this house and the one at the seaside in Balandra, on Trinidad's northeast coast where they spent their Trinidad vacations. She'll rent that. It'll pay for two of their three children's US-dollar tuition, at least. He'll get the five dogs and his car. What she gave, what she contributed, never mattered. Never mattered.

She turns from the window and stares at the wedding and anniversary photos she ripped to pieces and threw at her feet moments before, and says aloud to the scattered pieces, "All worthless and useless. He walked away from it all. Went to her. Two years with her. Worth more than thirty-one years with me. Thirty years younger than me." She laughs now at how blissfully ignorant she'd been, and the parakeets in the corner of the sunroom fly around for a few seconds in their cage and crash into each other. She touches the cage with her hands wet with her tears. Her laughter chokes into sobs.

She goes upstairs to get dressed. She has an hour to soak in the bathtub and must remember not to fall asleep and slip under the water again. Maybe she shouldn't have a bath. Avoid temptations. She'll be in and out of the shower in no time.

After showering and dressing, she stops to stare at herself in the wardrobe mirror, but her focus is inward and she doesn't see Kat enter her bedroom.

"Mother."

"Yes, Kat."

"I've been speaking to you for two minutes. Where's your mind at?"

"What do you want, Kat?"

"When will you be ready, Mother? I'll drive you to the lawyer's office, if you want me to."

"Why?"

"What?"

"Why do..? I'll drive myself. I need the time alone on the way to think."

"Mother..."

“Please, Kat! Leave me alone. I said I’ll drive myself!”

But Kat doesn’t budge. She stares at her trembling mother and hears her heavy, unsteady breathing.

Raine rushes to the bathroom as she stifles a scream that grips her throat. She opens the tap and stares at the running water for two minutes before scooping up some and patting her face with it.

“Mother?” Kat is standing at the entrance, unsure whether to venture in.

Raine lifts her head and looks with cold accusing eyes silently at Kat’s reflection in the mirror.

Kat begins to turn away, and as she does so Raine’s voice freezes her retreat.

“You knew. You brought that girl here. You knew and still you kept bringing her here every weekend...”

“Mother, I don’t want to quarrel with you...” Kat begins to cry.

“...even though you knew when it started happening.”

“Mother, I found out two weeks before you did! Two horrible weeks! She was an acquaintance who was becoming a friend. Why should it be my fault?”

Raine’s reply gets stuck in her throat.

Kat mumbles something incomprehensible and steps toward her mother. And she is again frozen in her tracks as Raine blurts out, “I hate the whole lot of you...You, your father, your brother and sister. The whole lot of you.” Raine brushes past her daughter, picks up her handbag, scarf and car keys, and exits the bedroom. Kat remains in the same frozen posture, still facing the bathroom. She hears Raine speeding away down the driveway and onto the main street.

Two days later, Raine is lounging in the sunroom and distractedly flipping through a magazine on her upraised lap. She’s half-listening to the radio for information about the storm predicted to strike Trinidad: “The tropical wave earlier reported to pass over Trinidad by late afternoon and the riverine flood alert issued for vulnerable areas are still in effect, with Tobago already having experienced heavy rainfall, flooding, landslides, and infrastructural damage. Trinidadians are being advised to practice extreme caution and to brace for the worst. The Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management, and local government officials have activated their emergency text alert systems.” It’s been an unusually rainy dry season, and if this is what the dry season is like, Raine thinks, God help us when the rainy season comes. Suddenly, the doorbell rings.

She isn’t expecting anyone. Curious, she approaches the door and looks through the peephole. She gasps and her body is involuntarily flung backward with surprise. Her breath is caught in her throat, the magazine hangs limply in

her right hand, and her left hand clutches her chest. It's Matt.

She stands there for several seconds while he rings the doorbell once, twice, and then for a third time. Then he calls, "Raine. Raine!"

Feeling like she's having an out-of-body experience, numb, drained of every emotion, even everything she's felt since Matt left her for Leisl, Raine opens the door. She and Matt stare at each other. For a long moment, her bare feet touching the floor feel numb. She feels a hardness inside her chest. It travels to her eyes and the sides of her mouth. She turns away, leaving the door open and Matt standing at its threshold. She settles herself in the sunroom and slowly leafs through the magazine. Matt walks in and closes the door behind him. With his hands in his trouser pockets, he approaches the sunroom and stands silently looking down at her from its doorway. She glances at him only briefly and turns her attention back to the magazine.

Matt stands there for a minute, then he goes to the kitchen. She hears the fridge opening, ice cubes falling into a glass and crackling as water is poured onto them. The glass in Matt's left hand, he returns to the sunroom and sits opposite her. With the magazine on her lap, Raine looks up and stares steadily at him. He sips the water and returns her gaze. He has come to me, she thinks, so there is something *he* wants to say.

She averts her eyes, stares out of the window at the grey clouds. Means it's raining in the south of the island and will be in Westmoorings in the coming hours. The ice in Matt's glass tinkles, and her eyes flick back in his direction. He has a wry look on his face, and his eyes hold a questioning stare. She fidgets in her seat and her downcast eyes twitch nervously. She does not want to be the first to speak, to unstick her tongue because if she speaks the two-year-old words will tumble out in ways she doesn't intend.

"Raine."

Her tongue falls, her lips part, she sighs, but the words fall and tumble silently. Grunting moans escape as she swallows the words trapped in the saliva above and around her raised tongue. Her head hangs down, her eyelids lower, her shoulders hunch, and her body tilts forward. The magazine slides from her lap onto the floor, its pages scattering around her feet.

She feels tired and relieved all at once.

"Raine, look at me."

Her body remains in the same position, but she closes her eyes.

"Look at me."

She slowly shakes her head from side to side, still with her head hung down and her eyes closed.

“Raine.”

With her eyes still closed, she continues to moan and the tears slide down her cheeks. She hears the caged parakeets in the corner of the sunroom as they flit about, striking their cage. She hears Matt rise from his chair and come towards her. She dares not look. She feels his hands grip and squeeze both her shoulders at once and she smells his cologne—the one she bought for him on their first wedding anniversary and the only one he has worn ever since. Tears and saliva splatter as she bursts into a loud sobbing and her forehead falls and rests on his thighs. Her body convulses and his hands tighten.

She wails. But he is silent; all his emotions she feels in his hands. After several minutes she stops, her head still leaning on his thighs. Then she leans back, his hands slide off her shoulders, and she reclines on the chair with her head facing the window, her eyes bloodshot, her cheeks stained, and her nose running. When she turns her head and eyes toward him after a few seconds, he is still standing over her with his arms hanging limply at his side. His head is bent and eyes lowered. He raises his head. He looks at her—eyes wet and weary. But no tears fall.

Still he does not speak. He puts out one hand towards her and she leans forward and takes it. He pulls her up and silently leads her upstairs where she washes her face in the bathroom sink as he stands in the middle of the bedroom looking at her. She towels her face and turns, looking at him steadily. A part of her wishes they could re-discover what was lost years before Leisl walked into the house with Kat for the first time that Saturday morning.

“Why did you do this to me, Matt? Why? Why? Why?!”

Silence.

“After all the years I gave to you...”

“Damn it, Raine, it had nothing to do with that!”

“Well, it should! You should have thought about that!” She’s trembling—her eyes wild and filling with tears.

“Gratitude? You think that alone could have sustained us, Raine?” His voice is strained with anger now. “Our problems were irreconcilable. You know it.”

She screams, “Well, then, why have you come here? Get out! For two years you were screwing a woman young enough to be Kat’s sister and pretending things were fine...! Get out!”

Matt slowly turns and leaves the house.

Later that night, during a restless sleep, Raine turns, opens her eyes, and listens to the rainstorm raging outside. The rain beating at the bedroom window and the intermittent, catch-me-if-you-can lightning flashes; they startle her from

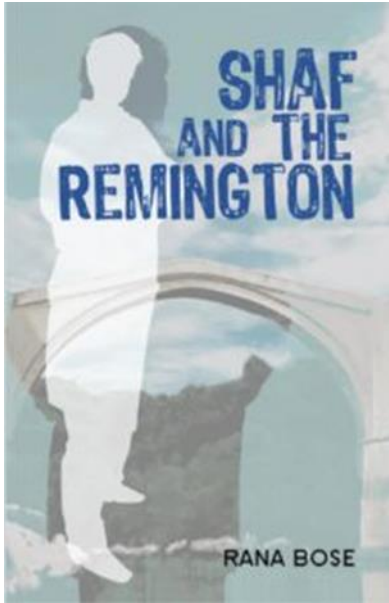
a drowsy into a wide-awake awareness. A loud, piercing thunder peal shakes the bed, and she gasps as a scream of surprise catches in her throat. Slowly, she raises herself onto her elbows, looks at the rumpled sheets around and about her and then dazedly around the room, listening for any sound of her daughter in the rooms downstairs. But, with the howling wind, the lash of the rain, the crack of the lightning and the boom of the thunder she can hear nothing else. The bedroom light is on and the alarm clock on the bedstand to her left indicates it is 1:34 am. As she is glancing away, the corner of her eye catches the unfolded yellow paper below the clock with her scribbled handwriting. Her heart leaps and she sits up instantly, snatching up the unfinished note she'd written to her family on impulse before stripping off all her clothes which had felt like an extra burden and diving into bed.

Suddenly the rain, the lightning and the thunder feel like a relief from what she is feeling inside. Somehow outside doesn't seem as bad as what she is feeling inside her mind and body. Raine suddenly needs to feel the water drenching her from head to toe. She untangles her naked body from the sheets and in a daze opens the French windows and steps out onto the balcony outside her bedroom. The wind and rain rush into the room, soaking the carpet, curtains, bed, and other furniture within their furious reach. Instantly, Raine is drenched and the lightning lights up her nakedness.

She stands there for several minutes, unafraid of the lightning and thunder and unconcerned that the bedroom too is being drenched. Then she lays down and crouches in a semi-fetal position on the tiled balcony floor, feeling the water running on top, below, and past her skin as it swirls in different directions into the bedroom and off into the balcony spouts. The ink on the crumpled note in her clenched hand slowly dissolves and, as she wearily relaxes her grip, the paper floats away and down into one of the spouts.

No one sees her, and she doesn't know when she blacks out with exhaustion and grief, or when the unstable electrical pole standing metres away on the pavement outside the wall bordering her garden—that she had only recently complained to the electricity commission about—becomes unhinged by the force of wind and rain and topples onto her house. She doesn't know when the live wires that ran from the pole to her house snapped one by one and landed on the balcony in the swirling, beckoning waters in which she lay.

BOOK REVIEWS



MAYA KHANKHOJE reviews: Rana Bose's *Shaf and the Remington*. Novel. Baraka Books, 2022.

The story of *Shaf and the Remington* begins with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, then arches up with Adolph Hitler's rise to power and his invasion of Poland and pauses with the end of World War II. The story then follows the Cold War all the way to the thawing of international relations with Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* in 1985. What a narrative arc!

Notwithstanding a turbulent century and the presence of a Remington that functions as a major character, *Shaf and the Remington* is not a tale of war. It is a tale of life, of the lives of real people and an affirmation of their capacity to live together in peace as good neighbours in spite of their different languages, religions, ethnic origins and dietary habits. It is the story of humanity's resilience and innate impulse towards peace and conviviality, if only false prophets and purveyors of weapons did not meddle. It is a story that speaks to us today.

This is indeed a complex novel with a deep subtext, and numerous flashbacks and flash forwards. It is narrated from different viewpoints in different locations and at different times but this should not deter readers. Just the opposite. Bose the writer resorts to playful language and a light touch to deftly reduce a complex human universe to its simplest subatomic components. Bose the engineer cleverly resorts to quantum physics to explain to readers that human behaviour is not subject to a linear analysis. The author zeroes in on the very core, which simply means heart.

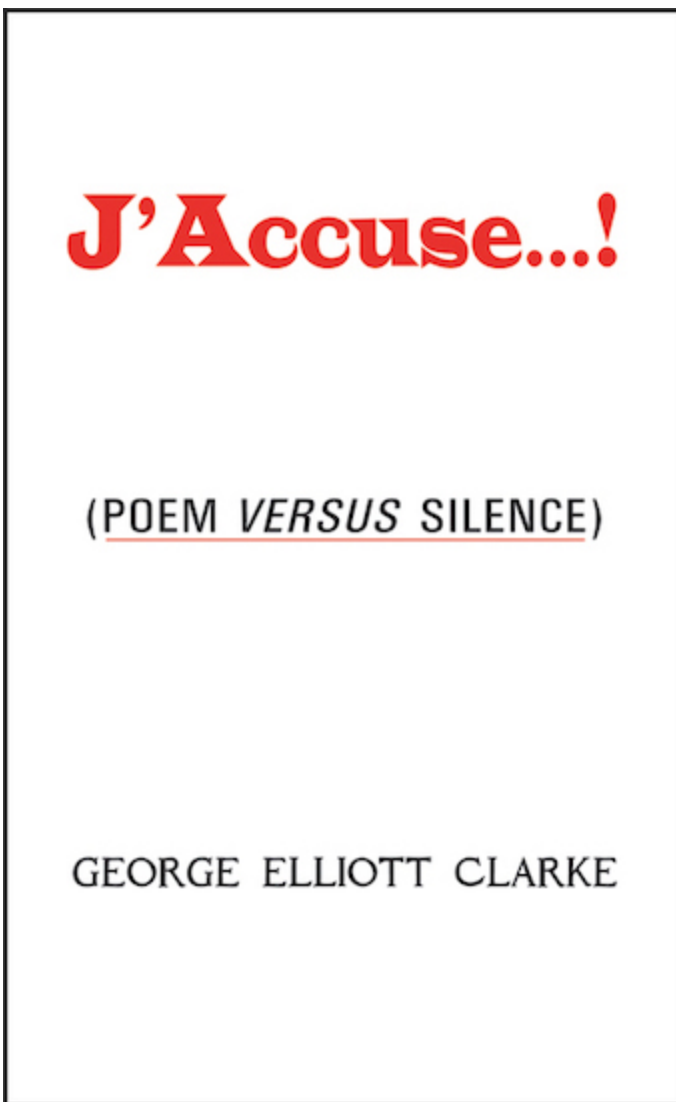
All the characters are endearing, except, of course, the evil ones whose names have survived in history books that may be rewritten and in monuments that may eventually be toppled. There is Shaf, a lover, a partisan, a mentor, whose life is a mystery to be decoded. Then there is Ben, a young boy who follows Shaf's science lessons but winds up learning much more. And Bo, a father, absent physically more often than not, yet very much present in people's hearts. Not to forget the grandfather, an imposing yet distant figure, very much a product of his times. Nika

is a young woman yearning to break free from social constraints. There are also two mothers, one whose heart will be broken and another one who will break a heart. Several minor characters are mostly off scene but at some point make their relevance known. Sabzic is the name of the fictitious town where the events play out, but history buffs will quickly identify it as the Balkan city shattered by several 20th-century conflicts.

The ending closes the loop and returns to where the story began, for another generation to take over. It is no coincidence that Rana Bose has dedicated this book—his best in his compact corpus of novels—to Josephine Chameli, Colette Daisy and Fran Amiya, not merely as an affectionate gesture from a doting grandfather to his young grandchildren, but as a pledge—and a token of faith—for them not to repeat history.

Embracing the Outrageous. ROBERT EDISON SANDIFORD reviews: George Elliott Clarke's *J'accuse...! (Poem Versus Silence)*. Poetry. Exile Editions, 2021.

In *J'accuse...! (Poem Versus Silence)*, George Elliott Clarke lays out the “chronology” of a personal-turned-public affair. Sometime in 2019, the former Toronto and Canadian poet laureate was asked to give the Woodrow Lloyd Lecture at the University of Regina. His topic was going to be “‘Truth and Reconciliation’ Versus the Murdered and the Missing: Examining Indigenous Experiences of (In)Justice in Four Saskatchewan Poets.” During his delivery, Clarke proposed to



discuss a variety of poets and their work in relation to reports of the ongoing violence against and disappearance of Indigenous women across Canada. Except by January 2020, his years-long connection to and artistic support of Stephen Kummerfield—a poet convicted of the barbaric 1995 slaying of an Indigenous, occasional sex worker in Regina, and who would later change his surname to Brown and move to Mexico—had come startlingly to light.

Clarke claims in this “essay-in-poetry—” and is credible in his assertion—that he had been unaware until months before of the crime committed by S.K.

(Clarke’s shorthand for him), and of the relatively light sentence S.K. and his accomplice, Alex Ternowetsky, received for their “pre-planned attack, downgraded to chance *Impulse*.” At the time of their crime, S.K. and Ternowetsky

were twenty and nineteen, respectively, “two privileged, *bourgeois* friends.” Clarke was teaching at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina; “[n]either offender had any existence pertinent to my *Consciousness/* or *Conscience.*” And it wasn’t a habit of his to ask those who requested to share their poetry with him, as S.K. did in February 2005 at a book launch of Clarke’s, if they’d been convicted of a crime.

The woman S.K. and Ternowetsky beat to death was Pamela Jean George, twenty-eight, Ojibwe (not Cree as here indicated), “who liked to write verses” and was the mother of two children. The crime, which S.K. confessed to him in an “email revelation in September 2019,” and all such crimes, have long resonated with Clarke as an Afro-Métis. Even so, it seemed to some, *Summarily* (as Clarke might call it), that he “allegedly [cared] more about *Poetry* and/or *Free Speech*/than I do about this Human Rights *Emergency*” of racial terrorism.

Because of Clarke’s reticence to say if he would discuss S.K. or his work during his Woodrow Lloyd Lecture—a lecture, he asserts, he had not yet properly researched or written—it appeared to many in the media and wider community “that the editing or admiring of anyone’s poetry/is tantamount to condoning the poet’s crime(s).” He makes it clear throughout *J’Accuse...!* that if he had known about the latter, he would have hardly engaged with the former, “edgy, gritty” as S.K.’s work was to him. No matter. Many individuals and groups inside and outside of academia proceeded to try to cancel their association with Clarke, i.e., to distance themselves from him as he had already done with S.K., pummelling in the process presumably shared valued notions of freedom of speech.

*

Clarke presents his thesis, or quarrel, eloquently and righteously in *J’Accuse...!* An injustice may be carried out by the well-meaning as much as by the aggrieved. Its perpetrators may act from different sides of a divide and still in tandem. As he puts it:

To suggest that either *Poetry (Rhetoric)* or *Civil Rights*
must be *cancelled* to assert sincere *Solidarity*
with any community of righteous *Grievance*
is to posit a blatant *Tyranny*.

But what was Clarke really being accused of? Is it guilt by association, as he makes much of in the section titled Psycho? Or is it the guilt of potentially projected disassociation? *J’Accuse...!* is the verse account of his unsuspecting encounter with a killer, in this case S.K. It can’t help but be, then, a rant, an apologia (in

parts), an elegy for Pamela George, a retort to his dishonest detractors, a standing-of-ground, a “crucifixion” of S.K. (in parts), and a confession.

Where his essay-poem gains most disturbing traction is in its recapitulating power. From many perspectives or angles, camera-like, Clarke is compelled to recount the killing of Pamela George. She is a mother, but one who recalls his own in “Postponed but Pertinent Elegy for Geraldine Elizabeth Clarke, i.e., ‘The Original G.E.C.’ (1939-2000)”:

Some say that I can say nothing about *Violence*
against Indigenous women...

But there you are, part-Cherokee definitely,
plausibly part-Mi’kmaq too,
and—in *your heart*—all Black,

limping,
one leg shorter than the other —
(due to Vitamin-D *Deficiency* imposed
by Royal Canuck scientists?).
So, may I not channel you who birth-canal’d me?

His own answer, further on:

My father—your husband—thought bullish fists
could cow you—
go pow-pow-pow, thuggish:
and I, a boy, witnessed the bruises, the welts, the blood.

But you fled—busted out of—his P4W....

Clarke is aware how many do not, are unable to, free themselves from their would-be jailors. The point he returns to, amid all the vivid punning, indignant name-calling, idiosyncratic end-rhyming, and scandalous humour, is clear: Pamela George, and those like her, must be the focus of any such discourse. Not him, “*The Notorious G.E.C.*” Not a public looking for others to blame for wrongs they have yet to right themselves (recalling the lynching of the poet Cinna he references). Certainly not S.K. Rather always on the battered, disappeared or murdered Indigenous women like Pamela George. They are not ever to be cancelled.

To our sober reading faces, Clarke holds up a distorted mirror worthy of the Hitchcock his section titles pay tribute to. “Blushing had been the rushing blows— /until a mom mirrored crushed rubbish.” The victims here are much like the assaulted and discarded of Jamaican poet Kei Miller’s *In Nearby Bushes* (2019). The verse-technique could turn voyeuristic for speaker and reader alike...until we remember we know what we’re seeing, have seen it all too many times before, and we should now wonder, maybe a little, at how accustomed we’ve become to these horrible sights and stories.

If we’re not trying to look away, we’re tempted to peep in. Neither quite healthy behaviour for the kind of society we claim to want. Is this who we are? Clarke’s examination of George’s death (and life), and of the behaviour of S.K. and Ternowetsky before and after their crime, make the question sad and unavoidable. No finger-pointing per se, but Clarke seems to be saying, “If we’re going to be outraged, let it be for what is *truly* outrageous behaviour.”

OBITUARIES

Egbert Gaye: Publisher, Radio Commentator, and Community Stalwart, 1955-2023

H. Nigel Thomas

The numerous testimonies by countless individuals about Egbert Gaye's contributions to community-building in Montreal are easily available online and so I will bypass them here. I met Egbert for the second time in 1987 at a meeting I had convened at the now defunct Negro Community Centre. The purpose of that meeting was to explore the possibility of creating a literary journal with a Black focus. At the time, Euro-Canadian publishers were uninterested in Black-authored creative works. Egbert said that his interest was journalism but pledged that he would support our work in whatever way he could, and he always did. He went on to found *Montreal Community Contact*; we founded *Kola Magazine*.

Montreal Community Contact emerged at a time when another newspaper, *Afro-Can* (1981-1994), stopped publishing. Because of Egbert's indefatigable efforts, aided by Novel Thomas, Yvonne Sam, and other devoted contributors,



Montreal Community Contact became the newspaper Black and Caribbean Montrealers relied on for news about themselves and community events.

Anyone who read the paper consistently would have experienced the gusto with which it

celebrated the triumphs of the community. Egbert himself wrote many of those editorials and went onsite to take the accompanying photographs. I wondered where he got the stamina to do all this.

I too was a beneficiary of his drive. He welcomed my reviews of books and ensured that *Montreal Community Contact* carried reviews of my books and my forthcoming events, and he gave generous space to the awards I received over the years, the latest being in 2022, a few months after I received the Judy Mappin Award, which was soon followed by the Canada Council John Molson Award.

Many of Quebec's Black stellar journalists honed their skills at *Montreal Community Contact*. At his funeral, Maya Johnson testified eloquently to this. His passing is a loss we will not soon recover from.

As a commentator on CJAD Radio, he had a loyal following and often set the tone for the discussions that followed in homes and Black community spaces. He was also a fervent promoter of steelpan music. He told me that a book on the steelpan that he was instrumental in publishing was part of the curriculum in Trinidad and Tobago.

May his legacy live on in community building and service to one another.

Rana Bose, Montréal-based Novelist, Playwright, Poet, Dramaturge, Activist (1950-2023)

Himmat Singh Shinhat



Rana passed away peacefully on Wednesday, May 10, 2023, surrounded by his loving family. It's difficult to capture in a few paragraphs a life that has been so hugely impactful on all of us. I still remember the day, a few years ago, when Rana called me out of the blue on Facebook Messenger. Something was strange. There was no playfulness in his voice, no urgency about things to do for the next issue of *Montréal*

Serai, the web-zine he co-founded with a group of fellow artists and activists, including myself, some thirty-five years ago now. I could hardly hear him. The usual confidence in his voice was gone, and the words came in stops and starts, one or two at a time, between deep sobs. He told me he had just been diagnosed with cancer. "I love you, Rana." The words came up by themselves. I was lost, in shock. I didn't know what else to say. "I love you, too," he said. I held my phone close to my ear as we wept together.

For a while the cancer was in remission, and he carried on working hard, taking care of the business of producing *Montréal Serai*. His priority was to bring together a new generation of activists, artists, and writers to take over. The founding generation was gradually withdrawing as members retired. He also continued to write. Baraka Books published his last novel, *Shaf and the Remington*, in September last year. The reviews were unanimously positive. This was his best work.

After a trip to India, returning through Europe, a couple of months ago, the cancer returned. Rana was in and out of hospital again. I visited him there a couple

of times, and Lisa, his partner, sent regular updates via email to his family and friends. I could feel him fighting, his love for life, his courage, and passion ever-present. I shared with him new compositions and arrangements of familiar tunes I was working on, including a song we had written together for a play decades ago. We reminisced about those times and the political and social environment back then and how things continue to evolve.

*

I first met Rana in the early 1980s, when I joined Teesri Duniya, the theatre group he co-founded in 1981 with fellow Montréal playwright Rahul Varma. It was my first time acting in a theatrical production, Sue Townsend's *The Great Celestial Cow*, with Rana directing.

In 1987, he co-founded a new theatre group, Montréal Serai, with a group of fellow activists, artists, and writers that produced a series of his plays through the years that followed, including *Baba Jacques Dass and Turmoil at Côte-des-Neiges Cemetery*, *Some Dogs*, *On the Double*, *The Komagata Maru Incident*, *Nobody Gets Laid*, *The Death of Abbie Hoffman*, *Five or Six Characters in Search of Toronto*, and *The Sulpician Escarpment*. I cherish fond memories of working together with him on these productions, as an actor under his direction, or as creator of the music that would form the soundtracks to his vision.

After several years as a printed journal, *Montréal Serai* became a web-based arts-culture-politics magazine. The writing eschewed mainstream discourse to favour alternative perspectives. Over time, the readership grew to an international audience of those hungry for critical and progressive writing. The content covered a variety of themes such as the decolonization of social and political spaces, the fight against oppression, resistance to authoritarianism, and the erosion of civil and political liberties.

Despite this, Rana maintained an active writing practice and published a series of four novels, *Recovering Rude* (Véhicule Press, 2001), *The Fourth Canvas* (TSAR Toronto, 2008), *Fog* (Baraka Books, 2019), and *Shaf and the Remington* (Baraka Books, 2022).

Beyond his many achievements, I celebrate Rana's humanity, his friendship, and the love and support he bestowed on his family and his friends. When I retired, in 2017, I began creating my first solo multidisciplinary performance using storytelling, music, and video. I wanted to relate the story of my relationship with my father against the backdrop of decolonization and my family's migration out of India into the diaspora. Rana's coaching had an immeasurable impact both on the writing and my on-stage presence. This time last year, it filled my heart with pride to see him sitting in the front row of the MAI theatre with Lisa on opening night despite his failing health. It's a moment forever etched in my heart.

Rana's contribution to, and his presence in, the artist-activist community in Montréal and abroad has been huge. His loss cuts deep for those he loved and those who have created and worked with him through the years.

CONTRIBUTORS

Morris Bailey is a Montreal poet of Jamaican ancestry, born in the UK. His poems have been published in *Vallum*, *Columba*, and *Kola Magazine*. He was longlisted for the *Vallum* Poetry Award in 2019.

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 new book of poetry *Relinquishing the Past* were both published in 2020.

Anna Fuerstenberg was born in a refugee camp outside Stuttgart, Germany, and won a scholarship to The Montreal Repertory Theatre School. Her plays and film scripts have been produced in Canada and abroad, and she has directed theatre in several languages and on several continents. She has also written short stories and poetry, which have appeared in *Parchment* and *Montréal Serai*, and has been a book reviewer for the *Montreal Gazette* and other media. She has just completed her first novel.

Anne Janice Farray was born in Grenada. In 2019, she was honoured for almost 40 years of employment at McGill and service to the community. She is featured in the March 2021 special edition New York magazine *Everybody's* in its Caribbean Women Reaction segment—"Kamala Harris takes the oath of office as Vice President of the USA." She is recently retired from the post of Administrative Officer, Institute of Islamic studies, McGill University. Some of her poems are published in *Kola Magazine* and *Everybody's Magazine*.

Veena Gokhale is an ESL teacher, author and freelance writer. She has published *Bombay Wali and other stories* (Guernica, 2013) and *Land for Fatimah* (Guernica, 2018). A journalist in India, she worked for non-profits after immigrating to Canada. Veena lives in Tio'tia:ke/Montréal, where she curates an annual literary event.

Ilona Martonfi is a Montreal poet born in Budapest. Writer, editor, curator, and activist, and founder of the writing group Rue Towers Writers. Martonfi is the author of five poetry books; her latest titles are *Salt Bride* (Inanna Publications, 2019) and *The Tempest* (Inanna Publications, 2022).

Karen I. Ocaña is a literary translator and writer. Her prose has appeared in *The Ottawa Review of Books* and *Chronicling the Days*. Poems have appeared in *Jonah*

Magazine and *Kola Magazine*. New translations of poems by Louise Dupre are due from *ellipse magazine*, and Gloria Macher's first novel from Quattro Books.

Lorna Reddick L.A.R.K., M.A. in Dance, is a lifelong student. She assisted in StArt Academy art classes for youth and participated in dance classes with MOOn hoRsE Dance Theatre. Her poems have been included in the Fat Studies issue published by *Canadian Woman Studies* journal. L.A.R.K. participated in visual art and joy journaling classes with Jennifer Jones at CMHA.

Robert Edison Sandiford has published widely in journals and magazines. He is the author of several books, among them the award-winning *The Tree of Youth and Other Stories, And Sometimes They Fly* (a novel) and *Sand for Snow* (memoir), and the most recent story collection *Fairfield*. He is a co-founder of the Barbadian cultural resource ArtsEtc Inc. (artsetcbarbados.com). He has worked as a publisher, teacher and, with Warm Water Productions, producer.

Himmat Singh Shinhat is a multidisciplinary artist. His creative expression is based on the interweaving of three disciplines—storytelling, music, and video. Himmat is a co-founder and past president of *Montréal Serai*. He is also a co-founder of the Festival Accès-Asie and past president of Montréal arts interculturels.

Geraldine Skeete is Lecturer – Literatures in English at The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. Her research interests include the short story, Caribbean literature and literary linguistics. She has published a short story in *Moko: Caribbean arts and letters* and an essay in *Short Fiction in Theory & Practice*.

Rae Marie Taylor's poetry suite *Steady. Against the Absurd. Kinship at the Core* was recently awarded finalist for the Poetry Mesa Chapbook Contest. Her non-fiction, *The Land: Our Gift and Wild Hope*, was finalist for the New-Mexico-Arizona Book Awards. Rae also produces bilingual solo shows with beloved musicians.

H. Nigel Thomas is a founding member of *Kola Magazine*. He came to Canada from Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in 1968. He is a retired professor of U.S. literature, the author of numerous essays and thirteen books, and a recipient of many awards, including the 2022 Canada Council John Molson Prize for the Arts. Additional information is available at: hnigelthomas.org.

Robert Winters is a Montreal writer whose work explores our shifting perceptions of accelerating changes in the world around us. His first novel was published as a serial in the monthly Townships *Sun* in Quebec's Eastern Townships. He is currently writing futuristic fiction related to genetic manipulation and political clashes.

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