

A Collection of Canadian Poetry

The Night Market

By Evelyn Lau

From A Grain of Rice (Oolichan Books, 2012)

In the night market, a woman with filthy hair
and clothes dripping with threads
stares at the vats of curried fish balls
and braised tripe as if at a store front window
in Beverly Hills, her face squeezed by hunger.
Around her, hordes of families and couples,
lips shining with grease, reach for the next reward -
even the teenage girls on diets
pinch skewers of quail or scallop
between manicured nails.
I wish I could feed this stranger
like the baby seagull we found one day in the bushes by the water, so docile or damaged
it let us put our hands on its body, suffering our touch
with eyes blank as beads
in exchange for a morsel. I could buy her
a meal and not miss it. Instead
we gorge on dumplings and waffles,
the starch sloshing in my stomach
like wet cement as the crowds roars past,
goldfish mouths flapping, the sky raining down
Bitter black ash, soot in my nose and throat
from the cooking fires. This is the Richmond
Night Market on a Saturday, our stomachs straining
at our waistbands, bodies bathed in smoke
and spices, the sunset a tanker explosion
spilling across an oil-soaked sea. I stuff shrimp gyoza,
squid tentacles, kimchi pancakes
into my mouth as if into someone starving,
someone I am trying to save.

Ice Palace

by Margaret Atwood

Another ice palace. Another demi-
paradise where all desires
are named and thus created,
and then almost satisfied. *Hotel*
might be an accurate label.
Not made of glass and marzipan
and steel, and jewel-toned water,
and opal gelatin that glows
like phosphorescent deep-sea fish, as
you might think at first. But no,
it's only dreams, it's only
clouds of breath formed into
words: the heavenly bed, the all-
you-can-eat breakfast. Invisible hands
bring food, smooth down
the sheets, turn on the lights,
cause violins to lullaby
the sugared air, clean out the wad of hair
you left in the porcelain shower,
and place a rose on your pillow
when you're not there. Where
is the fearful beast who runs the show
and longs for kisses?
Where are the bodies that were once
attached to all those hands?
Backstage it's always carnage.
Red petals on the floor.
You hope they're petals. Don't unlock
the one forbidden door,
the one inscribed
Staff Only. Do not look
in the last and smallest room, oh
dearest, do not look.

Big News Cafe

by Meredith Quartermain

Corner of Granville Street and Broadway with Kaplan
Business College brick parapet, white neon letters scrawled
on blue revolving sign. Sand brick with stone moulding
and blue accents. Row of churchy pointed windows and
brick piers modernism condemned. Not structural, so no
right to appear with their peaked gables. Two enormous
churchy-pointed arches over main entrance. Stone crests on
either side, narrow twisted columns with scroll-top capitals
dreaming of quadrangles at Oxford. QAT, DAT, SAT,
PCAT, GMAT window signs. To Idle Ant in Big News Cafe.
*Horoscope: by all means help someone in dire need. Rush
in like the knight in shining armour you've always wanted to
be. But don't promise to bail them out unless you want them
ringing you up morning, noon and night.*

Shining-armour Don Quixote Ant stares through cafe
glass for big news—some Polaris or Cassiopeia for dead
reckoning—haut shops on Lord Large-village street, Blenz
Coffee under Business College. All merged in a big dream.
Northeast corner, Royal Bank. Southwest corner, Chapters
Books. Big boxes selling little cartons of fancy. RSPs make
all your retirement dreams come true. The bank's yellow
letters, black marble facing on concrete slabs and rows of
aluminum windows.

City's a lot of going into—rooms—wombs. Non-city's one
big space. In Shining-armour Ant-mind.

English 11 Honours

Ms. Shin

SUPER'S REPORT

By Peter Normal

From The Gun That Starts the Race (Goose Lane, 2015)

Weeds discovered huddled at the tower's base, in cracks,
were gassed. At last inspection, none had sprung back.

Feisty but mortal, a gangsta tag was wiped
from the north wall, leaving the merest smear, like soup on an elder's bib.

Some vague flaw vexing an exec's window was effaced,
amendable warp in her expanse of plexiglass.

All seems well and the marble's polish gleams unscuffed and chipper.
The dining room revolves, revealing dreamy views of gloaming vista.

So I sign off, yours truly, humble super, bowing out,
handing my torch to the night shift guy with his paunch and laden belt.

The chimes of his keys will chatter in halls until the dawn's cheeks blush.
His nametag will be accurate, his hounds on their leash robust.

Let's turn in, those hordes of us who need not know the night;
snore ensconced among the folds of Incident Logs unfilled.

Dozing, let's patrol the fabled room immune to grime, or sweep
with brittle straw the pristine floor that greets the newborn feet.

Pupils shifting under lids, wait, wait for the report:
the gun that starts the race, or kills the lights.

MERCY

By Lorna Crozier

The old god drops his flesh and bones
and rushes down as wind and nothing else,
not word or light or mercy. It batters the town,
slams a sheet of plywood against the curling rink,
shoves me down the alley in my slippery shoes.
In the third yard down, on a metal clothesline pole,
Strung by their necks with ropes, two coyotes sway,
weight and counterweight in a faceless clock.
Beauty graces them, even now, death graces them.
Is it a curse to love the world too much,
to praise its paws and hooves,
its thick-furred creatures, each life a fear in me?
The wind saves nothing on this earth.
The coyotes hang like coyotes from an ugly tree.
Their throats don't make a sound.

Dante's Ikea

By Asa Boxer

In the bedroom floor of Ikea,
where love's theatres are assembled
my sweetheart wept

upon the softest bed. I'd scoffed,
insisted I could neither rest or play
upon these stock sarcophagi.

We shuffled over to Living Rooms
and sat on separate couches, neither one
prepared to pay unbeatable prices.

We drifted to kitchens, sharpened
knives, testing chopping blocks, drew
close imagining winter-roasts and wine.

English 11 Honours

Ms. Shin

But the pepper-mills were plastic
and the wood was melamine.
We dared not taste the fruits.

With hearts in throat, we headed down
to the second circle. There, a horde
of howling children caged in glass.

Smiling wryly at my companion,
I queried why they bawled their eyes out so.
And answering sombrely, she replied:

'They wail so because their parents
have lied to them again about the time.
Another eternity has passed them by!'

The toilets and the urinals hissed
just down the hall, but none emerging
came to claim these orphaned babes.

Feeling they ought to know,
I volunteered that mum and dad were lost
among the boxes down below.

At which they turned their red-eyed
demon faces, and stones and stoned my image
in the glass with hollow plastic balls.

From thence we proceeded till
we stood atop the stairwell to the final
warehouse floor, and there, we paused

and thus we prayed: 'Dear God,
I hope the pieces fit this time.'
Then down we tread

to the third, most dreaded circle;
and with each awful step,
we took the holy name.

The pillows brought no comfort.
The bathmats were all wrong.
The candles smelled like poison.

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The vases lacked all grace of form.
The picture-frames and hangers,
though, were irresistible.

Further in, the daunting stacks
of all that we'd been shown above.
The boneyard of domesticity,

where bits and pieces of living
lie in boxes like the dead.
Billies, Nannas, Ivars and Johans

stacked on scrap-wood pallets.
What if Robin's legs and Markor's screws
were mixed with Mikael's top?

'Dare we crack it open?
Look inside? Is it gauche
to show a lack of faith down here?'

'I don't care,' she answered,
'nothing matters anymore.' It seemed
we'd found the fabled vale of despair.

And just beyond, awash with sun!
-O blessed sun! - Hope.
You are meant to see the light

and stand within a few short metres
of that happy plain we call the parkinglot.
With eyes asquint, you can spot

your car. But by Zeno's law, the line
you're in is an infinite series of half-steps,
halves of half-steps, halves of those.

A twisting child, red and raw with sobbing,
entangled in a wire cart-seat, shrieked
and blew green bubbles from her nose.

At the checkout, we surrendered our identities,
signed our names away; then wheeled off,
beyond the glaring exit-doors.

Becoming a writer

By Dave Margoshes

What could be easier than learning to write?
Novels, poems, fables with and without morals,
they're all within you, in the heart, the head,
the bowel, the tip of the pen a diviner's rod.
Reach inside and there they are, the people
one knows, their scandalous comments,
the silly things they do, the unforgettable feeling
of a wet eyelash on your burning cheek.
This moment, that, an eruption of violence,
a glancing away, the grandest of entrances,
the telling gesture, the banal and the beautiful,
all conspire with feeling and passion to transport,
to deliver, to inspire. Story emerges
from this cocoon, a crystalline moment, epiphanies
flashing like lightbulbs above the heads
of cartoon characters. All this within you
where you least expect it, not so much in the head
as under the arms, glistening with sweat, stinking
with the knowledge of the body, the writer
neither practitioner nor artisan but miner, digging
within himself for riches unimagined, for salt.