How would you answer the question posed on the Facebook page for the Canadian Authors Association?

As I perused the comments in response to this question, I realized they covered the aspects of the writing life that challenge all of us at one time or another, depending on where we’re at in the writer’s journey.

**Permission to write**

Speaking of journeys, the comment I added to the string included wisdom I received from Caroline Pignat at the Writer’s Journey workshop she led for CAA-NCR last year. Her advice transformed my writing life: **Don’t wait for conditions to be perfect to write.** You don’t have to be alone with candles burning and soft music or whatever. Write no matter who is around and what’s going on.

Giving myself permission to write when family life continued around me instead of waiting for a lull in that action **that was never going to come** removed a big obstacle from my path. (Or a dragon, as Pignat would call it.) It also sent a clear message to my family that writing is important to me and it’s something I’m going to do no matter what.

**Our Inner Critic**

_Am I good enough? Am I wasting my time? Who am I kidding? I can’t write._

These thoughts flit through all our brains at one time or another and we have to **banish our ghost,** as one commentator called it, and get back
to writing. “Believe you can succeed,” was the way another person put the push and pull of faith versus doubt.

**Awful first drafts**

First drafts are terrible. Isn’t it great? You got something down on the page. No matter how awful it is, a first draft is an accomplishment. “Get it out and then get it right,” was the way one person put it. The time for almost-perfection (don’t strive for perfection) comes once you’ve given yourself something to work with.

**Filling our wells through reading**

“Read the writing that inspires you,” one individual wrote. I agree and I would also add, read even when it doesn’t inspire you because then you learn what you don’t want to do.

Writing, like breathing, involves an in-breath and an out-breath. Before we can breathe our stories into life on the page we have to draw in the inspiration, the images and the rhythms of writing. Reading is an necessary a part of the process as the writing itself.

**The writing community**

This is where we shine. “Get out to workshops and writers’ circles in your community,” read one comment. I couldn’t agree more! The writing community is another kind of in-breath. When we ask questions of other writers, share our concerns and receive constructive feedback it feeds our work, and we grow into better writers. Read about our 2018-19 program on page 3.

Honour your writer soul and join us. You could start with our Summer Social on June 12 at 7:00 p.m. at the McNabb Recreation Centre at Percy and Gladstone. Bring some pot luck food and share songs and stories with Phil Jenkins. The writer deserves it, needs it.

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**Honourable Mention 2018 NCWC**

**Judge’s Comment:**

“A Change of Pace” is an English villanelle, popularized in the nineteenth century, following a particular rhyme scheme and structure. This poem about a student’s day at the beach, which provides a welcome break from study. The contrast of form and theme works well. Both rhyme and syntax are smoothly accomplished, reflecting an ease and familiarity with the villanelle form.

**“A Change of Pace”**

**BY GILL FOSS**

A day at the beach brings a much-needed lift from a term where his studies had cast a thick shroud. From the burden of homework at last set adrift to chose his priorities. Seaside a gift of freedom from timetable, to be allowed, with a trip to the sand dunes, the option to shift gears from dull calculus, making short shrift of his everyday troubles, he joins the beach crowd - from the burden of homework at last set adrift.

For the young generation transitions are swift no matter the sunshine or even a cloud a day at the beach brings a much-needed lift.

A dip in the sea, then with friends a makeshift volleyball game, both hilarious and loud. By the burden of homework at last set adrift.

This pace change a definite way to uplift his spirit from schoolwork, which left him bowed. A day at the beach brings a much-needed lift - from the burden of homework, at last set adrift.

**BIO:** Gill Foss is a long-time member of CAA currently enjoying life in the country. After writing freelance feature articles for Canadian Safety Magazine and two local newspapers, she now concentrates on poetry as a founding member of Ottawa's Field Stone Poets.

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**SONGS AND STORIES**

**WITH PHIL JENKINS**

**Tuesday, June 12, 2018**

7:00 p.m.

**McNabb Recreation Centre**

Bring some food to share and a flash story or poem (2 minutes max.) Become inspired for your summer writing.
Our 2018-19 Meetings
7:15 P.M.
MCNABB COMMUNITY CENTRE, 180 PERCY STREET

September Meeting
First Page Challenge
CAA-NCR Annual General Meeting
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2018
Submit the first page of your manuscript and receive feedback on how effective it is at setting up your work and capturing readers, agents or publishers.

October Meeting
Short Story Writing, with Deborah-Anne Tunney
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2018
As preparation for the National Capital Writing Contest, Deborah-Anne Tunney will share the fundamentals of spectacular short story writing. Make your work stand out in the crowd.

November Meeting
Marketing 101: Marketing for Writers, with Sarah Sambles
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2018
Publishers don’t do the work for us anymore. Writers these days need to know how to market themselves and their work. Sarah Sambles gives us tips and tools.
https://sarahsambles.com/

December Winter Social
A Warm Celebration of the Cold
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2018
1:00 P.M. AT THE HOME OF ARLENE SMITH
An afternoon of feasting on the food and words you bring to share. As the afternoon progresses, we’ll create a collaborative writing project. What will that be? It will be whatever those in attendance shape it to be. Come and add your presence.

CAA Social Media Expert (SME) in Residence
- Members who sign up receive a weekly tip from the SME—an action they can take right away to improve the way they use social media.
- Participants can also submit questions to the SME at SME@canadianauthors.org.
- Each month, the SME conducts a live Q&A where she answers questions submitted by members.

February Meeting
Step by Step to Completion, with Jennifer Mulligan
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2019
Are you mired in a mound of half-completed manuscripts or stuck in the middle of a novel you can’t quite finish? Are your notes scattered and all over the place? Accomplished screenwriter, Jennifer Mulligan, leads us in steps she follows to complete her works—steps that adapt to all kinds of writing.
http://jennifermulligan.com/

March Meeting
Polishing Your Manuscript, with Nerys Parry
TUESDAY, MARCH 12, 2019
You’ve completed your manuscript and now you want to send it out to the world. Before you do, you need to make sure it is as professional as possible. Nerys Parry shares her expertise in preparing a polished manuscript.
http://www.nerysparrywrites.com/

April Meeting
Not Your Parents’ Poetry Workshop
TUESDAY, APRIL 9, 2019
April is Poetry Month. Using ideas gleaned from sessions at the Canadian Writers’ Summit, we will celebrate and create poetry.

May Meeting
2019 National Capital Writing Contest
TUESDAY, MAY 14, 2019
7:00 P.M.
We celebrate the finalists in the 2019 National Capital Writing Contest.

June Meeting
Summer Social
TUESDAY, JUNE 11, 2019
7:00 P.M.
Margaret Hume, National Chair, and the Board of Directors request the pleasure of your company at our

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Sunday, June 17, 2018
10:00 am - 12:00 pm
Harbourfront Centre, Main Building, Board Room,
235 Queens Quay W, Toronto, ON M5J 2G8

This AGM is scheduled to follow the Canadian Writers' Summit conference. You do not need a conference pass to attend this meeting. Only members in good standing may participate. All active members have voting rights.

If you are unable to attend in person, you can participate in one of two ways:
- Attend via teleconference call (a toll-free number will be supplied)
- Give your signed proxy vote to a member of CAA who plans to attend.
  (Complete and sign the proxy form at this link.)

Please RSVP before 1:00 p.m. Eastern Time on Thursday, June 14, 2017 indicating whether you're attending in person or via teleconference by:
- Email admin@canadianauthors.org
- Phone 705 325 3926 ext 200
- Mail (postmarked no later than June 4) to: Canadian Authors Association 6 West Street North, Suite 203 Orillia ON L3V 5B8

AGENDA

- Welcome and call to order
- Approval of agenda
- Approval of the minutes of the previous meeting
- Approval of the accountants’ report (Financial Statements for the year ended December 2017)
- Appointment of chartered accountant for review engagement for 2018
- Approval of the annual report
- New business (if any)
- Motions from the floor
- Report of Governance and Nominations Committee and board elections
- Other business
- Closing remarks and adjournment

An AGM information package, including the minutes of the previous meeting, the slate of nominees to the board, and other AGM supporting documents, will be provided closer to the meeting and will be available by mail or on the CAA website in the Members' Only section.

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**Important Note**

If you are unable to attend the Canadian Writers’ Summit or the CAA Annual General Meeting, please send your signed proxy with Arlene Smith, President, CAA-NCR.

Click here, sign the form give it to Arlene in person or scan and send to NCRadmin@canadianauthors.org

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**Father Unknown**

*By FRANÇOIS MAI*

*A family struggling to survive before, during, and after the French revolution.*

www.francoismai.com
Can You Write a Poem Like Rupi Kaur? Do You Want To?

WHAT YOU MISSED AT OUR APRIL MEETING WITH JC SULZENKO

BY ARLENE SMITH

WHAT MAKES a poem memorable? This is the question JC Sulzenko broached at the April CAA-NCR meeting. JC’s poetry and prose for young adults and adults has been published in book form, in chapbooks and anthologies, and it has been broadcast on radio and television. She has written Ekphrastic poems (focused on works of art), Centos, collaborative poems and experimental forms. She has also been a judge for poetry for more than a decade. Based on her writing and judging experience, she concludes that, while response to poetry is entirely subjective, there are some basic principles at play:

- Form: The physical structure of the poem: the length of the lines, their rhythms, their system of rhymes and repetition.
- Language and Imagery: How the words appeal to the senses and conjure vision, and putting the right words in the right order.
- Subject Matter: What the story means to the reader or listener.
- Showing, Not Telling:
- Leaving Room: Allowing the reader or listener to bring something to the poem, allowing them to crawl inside it and nestle there, not necessarily comfortably.
- Rhythm: Not necessarily rhyming, but rhythmic language

JC writes under the pseudonym A. Garnett Weiss for her experimental forms of poetry. It helped her to step away from being known as a writer of children’s works, and she found it liberating as well.

She shared selections of Rupi Kaur’s poems from two books: Milk and Honey, and The Sun and Her Flowers. Kaur achieved fame through her presence on social media, and her two books of poetry have been on bestseller lists. We discussed our (entirely subjective) responses to the poems, what we liked about them and what made us a little uncomfortable. We agreed that Kaur had achieved the goal of making her poems memorable.

We were set off with the task of trying to emulate Kaur’s work. Here is what I came up with:

madam

I hear things
the young would not say
if they could see me

---

Share your copy of Byline

If you love writing hints, NCWC winning poetry and short stories, information about Canadian Authors both regional and National, and being involved with a community of writers, pass along your copies of Byline to your friends and fellow writers.

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Sentinel of the Damned
by Klothild de Baar
(Book Excellence Award Finalist 2016)

An epic tale of an ancient European dynasty whose youngest member, a magnificent daughter, is suddenly and mysteriously reported missing in far-off Canada. A story harking back centuries and told movingly by the family’s eighty-five year-old nanny, as she traces each step of her lost charge, undaunted, to the very bottom of a modern-day hell.

Byline 5
You could feel the anticipation and excitement as CAA members and family and friends of the finalists in the 2018 National Capital Writing Contest assembled at the Ottawa Public Library on May 8 to hear the judges’ decisions. The audience enthusiastically responded to the reading of the short stories and poems, alternately with laughter or sober contemplation depending upon the material.

2018 NCWC Results

**SHORT STORY**

**First Place:** Ingrid Betz, for *Leaving is Just a Suitcase Away*

**Second Place:** Adrienne Stevenson for *Rules of the Road*

**Third Place:** Sonia Tilson for *Wild Strawberry Jam*

**Honourable mentions:**

- Anne-Marie Beattie for *The Reservoir Man*
- Adam Heenan for *The Tent Man*
- Anna Rumin for *Gently into the Night*
- Jeff Shiau for *Coffee or Tea*

**POETRY**

**First Place:** Joan McKay for “A Memory of Light”

**Second Place:** Marianne Jones for “Child of the 50’s”

**Third Place:** Gill Foss for “Beyond HRV”

**Honourable mentions:**

- Gill Foss for “A Change of Pace”
- Gill Foss for “Ode to Invisible Sounds”
- Ian Prattis for “The Seasons”

The judges, Carol A. Stephen for poetry and R.J. Harlick for short stories, were in attendance to hand out award certificates and to read their comments on the material. Here is what they wrote about the winning entries:

- *Leaving is Just a Suitcase Away* by Ingrid Betz, of London, Ontario is a “A well-crafted story about hope and the surprises life brings.”
- “A Memory of Light” by Joan McKay of Kingston, Ontario is “An excellent poem both in the use of understatement and through powerful underlying imagery.”

Next November, check out the CAA-NCR branch website for details of the 2019 National Capital Writing Contest.
**2018 NCWC Awards**

**Tuesday, May 8, 201 at the Main Branch of the Ottawa Public Library**

R.J. Harlick with Alan Hawtin, accepting first place for Ingrid Betz

Adrienne Stevenson received second place in the short story category

Carol A. Stephen with Joan McKay, who received first place in poetry

Sonia Tilson placed third in the short story category

Gill Foss placed third and received honourable mentions for poetry

Susan McMaster accepting for Marianne Jones

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL THE FINALISTS

Adam Heenan

Jeff Shiau

Anna Rumin

Ian Prattis

Anne-Marie Beattie
I’m a BIG fan of bestselling author John le Carré, so I’ve often applied admiring adjectives to his novels. But I came across an unfamiliar adjective in a review of his latest book. The critic wrote: “Le Carré’s prose remains brisk and lapidary.”

Lapidary? What did it mean? Praise or reproach?

I consulted the great oracle Google and learned that “lapidary” is derived from the Latin word “lapis” for “stone.” So “lapidary” came into English as a name for stone cutters and gem cutters, and also for their art.

Used as an adjective, “lapidary” describes things “having the elegance and precision of inscriptions carved on monuments or things relating to the art of gem cutting.” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). It also describes the methods used. “The primary techniques employed are cutting, grinding, and polishing.” (Wikipedia)


And so do you. Like le Carré, you take unwieldy chunks of amorphous thought and theme, and you sculpt them into characters and plot. You form them into a story. It’s painstaking work. Precision work.

But when the labor’s done, behold: a polished gem. A thing of originality. A thing of worth.

THE MAGIC THREE

Cut. Grind. Polish. Those words aptly describe the three processes for a writer’s three major drafts. When I mentor writers, I recommend focusing on a specific goal for each draft.

In the first draft, you simply cut the raw stone. It’s always imperfect. Perhaps the story rambles. Or it’s fragmentary and unfinished. Or burdened with clichés of character and plot. So the goal is to get through it quickly – to just “get it down.”

The second draft is for serious, artistic grinding. It’s your time to be bold. Throw out a whole scene if it doesn’t work. Change a character’s motivation. Rebuild your climax to intensify the characters’ emotions and actions. Hack out extraneous backstory. Tighten any scene’s lagging pace. The final draft is for fine work: the polishing. Pluck out little burrs of clumsy dialogue. Refine overwritten passages. Replace clichés with fresh phrases. Delete every superfluous word.

Finally, you’ve finished your manuscript. Bravo! However, by now you’re likely too close to the work to judge its overall impact. So it’s wise to have an expert review it and offer specific suggestions for making it the best it can be. That’s how I can help you – with a manuscript evaluation.

Cut. Grind. Polish. Do this fearlessly and you’ll create a true gem – a book that excites agents and publishers, and leaves readers saying, “I couldn’t put it down!”

BIO: Barbara Kyle is the author of the acclaimed Thornleigh Saga series and thrillers, with sales of over 500,000 books. She has taught writers at the University of Toronto and is a popular presenter at writers’ conferences. As a mentor, she has launched many writers to published success. Her latest book is Page-Turner: Your Path to Writing a Novel that Publishers Want and Readers Buy.

www.barbarakyle.com

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When Times are Tough: Diversify

By Barbara Florio Graham

A colleague emailed me in a panic. She asked if there was anything she could do about the horrible contract sent to her by the new owner of the publication where she'd been a regular for many years. She knew that one of the services I offer is to review contracts, but this one was non-negotiable. A new publisher had taken over and the terms they set out were actually a “work for hire” situation.

She was devastated, admitting to me that she'd been writing exclusively for this publication, and the income it provided was really important to her.

First, I advised her not to sign the contract. Then I made some suggestions about finding a way to replace that regular income she needed. I suggested she see if any of the articles she's already written, where she holds the copyright, can be tweaked and recycled elsewhere. To accomplish this, do a comprehensive search for new markets. But keep in mind that in this climate of diminishing markets and difficult contracts, the best route might be to look for alternate clients for your writing.

Community newspapers are always looking for good reporters. If you don't want to cover council meetings or chase down current news, how about suggesting that you write a column where you profile local businesses? This has several benefits.

First, if you find business owners to profile who don't already advertise in the paper, your profile may encourage them to sign on. Also, you can find new markets for your profile of this person by asking them for copies of magazines they subscribe to. I sold a piece to a trade journal for jewelers this way, and also to a university alumni magazine.

You can also offer a column that will allow you to recycle articles from your old client. That might compensate for low pay for your business profiles.

Before you turn down any work as paying too little, you have to do the math. Instead of scorning the low fee per article, figure out how long it's going to take you to research and write, and what the recycle possibilities are going to be. What you're looking for is not to replace the fee per article you were earning before, but rather the hourly wage.

I had a column in my local paper for eight years. It paid just $25, but since I could write whatever struck my fancy, it usually took me only 20 to 30 minutes to turn out that 500 words. That works out to $50 to 60 an hour. And since I kept the copyright, those pieces could earn even more by being recycled to other, non-competing markets.

There are other ways to replace the income you've been counting on. Don't overlook taking a part-time job in a local store, which can provide a base income until you find new writing clients. Many bookstores are delighted to hire writers on a part-time basis, especially if you can be flexible about your hours and offer to fill in during holidays or when the owners take a vacation.

Meanwhile, prepare a portfolio containing your resume and some writing samples, and take this around to local businesses who might need help writing press releases, ads, or business profiles written for trade journals where they'd like to be featured.

Larger businesses might need someone to write an annual report or a proposal. Keep in mind that the recession has caused significant downsizing of full-time communications staff. An experienced and willing freelancer can fill those gaps, especially if you keep your prices competitive.

There's a lesson here, important in today's economy. Don't put all your eggs in one basket! The more diversified you are, the easier it is to drop a client who is too much trouble (or pays too little or too late). The added benefit is that you'll be learning new skills and meeting new people.


BIO: Barbara Florio Graham mentors writers, serves as a publishing consultant, and offers a contract review service. The author of three books, her website is full of free information.

www.SimonTeakettle.com

Do you want to improve your writing?

A writing circle is one of the best ways to grow your writing and develop constructive writing relationships.

We have booked McNabb Community Centre for 6:00 p.m. on the Tuesday evenings of our meeting dates.

If you are available and willing to commit to a group meeting at that time, contact NCRadmin@canadianauthors.org
THE TENT MAN was coming up the driveway now and I was watching him. He had his hands in his jacket pockets and I could see he was dragging his feet by the way he left lines in the snow behind him, making him seem tired and haggard in that big jacket of brown leather draped over him, saggy and wet. When he got closer to the house, I could see his wide face and the dark locks of hair stuck to his forehead like streaks of pitch.

There was a knock at the door. I stood very still. Another three came in rapid succession. What in God’s fucking name?

I went to the landing and looked down the short flight of stairs with the hardwood cool under my feet. It made me think of how cold the tent man must be out in the snow. I looked out the tall vertical windows adjacent to the door and he was there, looking in. Our eyes met and he lifted his hand feebly in a wave, his face un-moving as he stared until finally he exhaled and the cloud of air that came out of the depths of him fogged my window. I hoped it was a sigh of defeat. Jesus.

I went down the stairs slowly, wincing a little to show what an effort it was, so that the tent man would know that I did not want to come to the door at all and, really, I just wanted to enjoy my day off. He waited for me unwaveringly though until I unlocked the door and opened it in one smooth movement.

“Hello,” the tent man said. His voice was strange to hear after all this time. It had a sing-songy charm and pleasantness that I instantly regretted hearing. Fuck the tent man and his cheerful voice. We stared in each other’s eyes and he smiled a smile that spread across his whole face; it was a true smile, not the kind I would make to him. I frowned. And fuck the tent man’s stupid face.

“Hi,” I said. I watched him silently, listening very hard. I was anxious to see what had made the tent man come to my door after all this time.

“Can I use your phone?” I stared at him and after a moment he put his hands back in his pockets. The air outside was cold and I imagined that he was frozen in that damp jacket. The tent man smelled like wet clothes.

“Don’t you have your own phone?” I asked. I felt mean. But then I remembered that he was the tent man, not just any man, and I became irritated that he had not just the power to frustrate me, but to make me feel guilty too. I became angrier than before.

“No,” he answered in that warm, bright voice. “It’s dead.”

I imagined it fucking was, what with him living in a tent. Then I thought, after all this time, how had he been charging his phone at all? I bet he was plugging it in to the side of my house. The goddamn tent man.

“Um,” I said. It was the best I could do. I needed more time. Is this guy going to take my phone and bolt down the driveway, holding it up like a rally baton, laughing at me with his cheerful, sign-songy voice? I would die before letting the tent man best me and steal my phone. He doesn’t know the password anyway.

“I just need to make one quick phone call,” he said.

“Um, okay,” I answered finally. I said it sad and pathetically, and regretted it even as I inhaled to form the words.

I stepped back and the tent man came in. Christ he’s big. He took his hands out of his pockets and smiled and nodded very politely. He was at least six-three and his belly was thick beneath his bulky chest and shoulders. I felt small next to him, so I stepped back onto the first step and looked at him with our eyes level.

“You’re serious?” I asked. He looked perplexed.

“Yeah,” he answered after a moment. “I just need to make one call. Then I’ll be out of your hair.”

I stared at the tent man as he looked down at the phone and began dialing. Then I turned and went up the rest of the stairs to the kitchen where I could watch him from afar. If the tent man takes my phone, then fuck him. I’ll call the cops and then finally fuck his tent straight to hell.

“Hey do you have a long distance plan?” he cheerfully asked from the landing.

Fuck the tent man. No! He can’t be serious.

“Yes,” I said. “In Canada.”

“All over Canada?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, good.”

continued on page 12
I leaned against the kitchen counter and watched him there. He was breathing heavily with my phone pressed righteously against his damp face. Outside, a faint rain had started; it was filled with little bits of snow that was hard like street salt. It looked cold and grey and shitty.

“Yeah, hi,” the tent man said into my phone. I could hear the tinny response coming back through the speaker but I couldn’t make out the words.

“When do I get to see Jason? I thought you were bringing him by this morning?”

I leaned closer to listen. The tent man was looking down at his heavy boots on the tiles near the doorway. He had made a puddle of water.

“Well I haven’t seen him.”

He looked sad and dejected suddenly, with his body deflating like a bad bike tire. Damn, I feel bad for the bloody tent man. Maybe it’s all a ploy to get inside where it’s not so fucking cold. Maybe that’s just his friend on the phone playing along.

The tinny voice spoke for some time.

“That’s fine,” the tent man said finally. “Bye.”

He pressed his big fingers against the screen and then he looked up at me and smiled with his great big head. I stepped forward and took the phone, sliding it back into my pocket and feeling the moisture on it from his matted hair. I’m going to wipe that off later.

“I smell coffee,” the tent man said.

Don’t you even do it tent man. I stood there with my hands at my sides.

“Yeah,” I answered.

“Is there any left?”

He looked past me into the kitchen. About fifteen minutes earlier, I had carefully ground some delicious beans in there and used the French press on the counter to make some perfect coffee that tasted faintly of chocolate with nutty overtones. Now the tent man wanted it.

“It’s cold,” I said.

“That doesn’t matter,” the tent man said. “It’s probably warm to me.”

My first instinct was to throw the tent man back outside to his tent where he would be drenched and beaten down by the frigid rain-snow. Instead, I looked for a long time at his huge, baby-like face, polite and innocent.

Come in,” I said, and once the words were out I laughed at them in my head. Invite the tent man in for tea! My homunculus was laughing like a petulant stepchild. Outside, I smiled, in a way.

The tent man took off his heavy boots. I expected his feet to leave wet impressions on the hardwood but the black material of his socks was thick and dry. His boots must have been better than I thought. He took off his jacket with his arms stretched wide and I marveled at his wingspan like some huge, magnificent bird. Free from his coat, the tent man breathed heavily but looked strong and now that he was up the stairs, he towered over me again. He sat down on one of my bar stools and we became the same height once more.

I touched the French press and felt the warmth. Fuck. I wouldn’t serve this to a child rapist. I poured it into a mug and then heated it up in the microwave. I carefully chose twenty-five seconds. Fifteen seconds would be rude, but forty-five might scald the fucker. I would have done thirty for myself.

I set the mug down in front of me once it was heated and looked at it for a moment before addressing the tent man.

“I have a travel mug actually,” I said. “If you don’t want to stay.”

“No, this is fine.”

Fuck me. How did this even happen? I slid the mug across the counter to him.

“How’s the tent?” I asked.

I smiled a little and then stopped. I was unsure if what I had just said was mean. He smiled and I relaxed.

“It’s actually a really nice tent,” he said warmly. He took a sip and set the mug back down softly before exhaling loudly.

“That’s good coffee.”

“Yeah,” I agreed.

I frowned and braced myself to question the hulking, charming man.

“Are we going to talk about the fact that you’ve been living in a tent outside my house since Christmas?”

The tent man looked perplexed and then laughed warmly.

“Haven’t you seen my sign?” he smiled.

“Sure,” I said.

I waited and he just drank more coffee. He is really drinking that fast. I think he really likes it. He is probably going to have to pee soon in my bathroom.

“Where do you go to the bathroom?” I asked.

He laughed again.

“Haven’t you seen me?” he asked. “I usually piss in the ditch across the road if there’s no cars. I walk up to the McDonald’s the other times.”

“The McDonald’s?” I asked. “That’s like a forty minute walk.”

“Yeah.”

Fuck me. I’ve had a thousand opportunities to torch that fucking tent.

“That’s a long way,” I said aloud.

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“Yeah,” the tent man agreed.

He drank again and set the mug down.

“Do you mind if I use your washroom?”

I imagined punching him in the face. I saw my fist right in the centre of his huge face and him flailing backwards off the stool like some stunned giant, screaming and pissing himself out of fear, and then swearing and pleading to take his tent away and never return.

“Sure,” I said. I pointed and he went down the hall and I heard the door shut and the fan come on.

“Fucking tent man,” I said audibly. I put his mug in the sink and then went to the front window. He’s taking too long. He’s obviously shitting. I exhaled and looked out at the road where the tent man lived. There was his tent; it was a shiny orange beacon of annoyance at the edge of my snowy lawn with a sign that said, “Say no to Bill C-40.”

He came back out and saw me looking at his tent.

“I’ll be gone as soon as you shut it down,” he said plainly.

I laughed. “Yeah?” Ballys fucker. I just gave him a coffee and he shat in my house.

“Yes.”

“I can’t,” I said, shaking my head.

“Yes you can.”

“You don’t know anything about it.”

“It’s our land,” he said. His voice still had that charming sound to it but he had finally stopped smiling.

“Yeah?”

“It’s important to us.”

I frowned and went back into the kitchen. He sat down where he had been before. I thought about what he had said and looked out the smaller kitchen window at the snowy mush and thought about the tent man’s people living in teepees; this made me uncomfortable, and white hot guilt went through my stomach like a bullet.

“It’ll bring in more money if we do it this way,” I said finally. “It’ll be better. It’ll make everything better.”

“No,” he said bluntly. “Money won’t fix anything.”

I shook my head a little, mostly to myself, but he was watching me.

“Hey. Do you have any food?”

The fucking tent man! I can’t say no to this gentle behemoth with his big head and his wet hair. I frowned and opened the refrigerator. There was a tinfoil bowl of leftover Chinese food. I put it in front of him and then opened the drawer and fetched a plastic fork to put on top of it. He looked at it and stood up without any expression.

“Hey thanks a lot,” he said warmly. He had gotten the hint from the disposable cutlery. I didn’t expect that. The tent man went to the door with the Chinese food and pulled his boots on with one hand while cradling the bowl and the fork in the other.

“Hey thanks,” he said again after he opened the door. “Have a nice day.”

I thought of the tent man that night in bed. The house was quiet. I couldn’t sleep like I normally could; I knew it by the third time I flipped my pillow over to the colder side. I thought about the tent man and this Jason kid, wherever he was, and I thought of the tinny voice of whoever had sired the tent man’s son and whether she ever came to see him at his tent. Then I thought of Jessica and I wondered where she was, and whether the tent man had noticed the day she had moved out for good. I remembered her pulling out of the driveway in January with all her shit jammed in the back of her car. The tent man had waved to her and smiled. I remember that.

There was a knock and I opened my eyes. There was the grey morning light; it had come so unexpectedly, as I had expected to torture myself all night in the coal black darkness of my room. The knocks came again, all three of them.

The tent man was at the door and I smoothed my tee shirt before opening it. He was standing there, huge and looming, on the doorstep with a coffee from McDonald’s that he held towards me in offering.

“Good morning Mr. Patrick,” he said. He wasn’t necessarily smiling but he seemed happy and his fucking voice was cheery as ever.

“I had a nightmare about you last night,” I said.

“Oh?”

“Come in. I want to tell you about it.”

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**BYLINE: Call for Submissions**

Byline is a quarterly publication of the National Capital Region Branch of Canadian Authors Association. Articles on the process of writing, tips, interviews, literary events and member achievements welcome. Send to Byline.

**Deadlines:**
- Fall Issue: August 15
- Winter Issue: November 15
- Spring Issue: February 15
- Summer Issue: May 15

Byline 13
THE SMELL of strawberries is hanging in the air like the sun’s cooking them. My mom says it’s the best year yet. She’s never seen so many. She says the smaller they are, the better they taste, and these are real small, the size of my fingertips. There’s so many in this patch here, I can’t help stepping on them, so Mom says to just sit down and pick as far as I can reach all around. “And don’t forget to whistle, Doug,” she says. “We gotta let the bears know we were here first, eh? That’s your job.” She laughs, and she looks real pretty, her lips all red with strawberry juice and the blue scarf tied over her black hair.

We’re gonna pick enough to make jam. We’ve already half-filled one of the baskets that came with her from Maniwaki more than ten years ago, before I was even born. She’s picking ten times faster than me, but she doesn’t mind me being slow and eating some as I go. There’s no big hurry. We got the whole place to ourselves all day because Dad’s gone to Shawville to buy tractor parts and stuff, and he’s not gonna be back till late.

When the sun’s as high as it gets, Mom pats the prickly grass under the twisty little thorn tree for me to lie down beside her. It’s terrible hot and still. There’s no birds singing or flying about, just a black V going around and around high above us. Mom says turkey vultures can smell something dead, even a mouse, from way up there. Heat bugs are zinging all round us like electricity, and there’s that putt-putt-putt sound across the river that I used to think was some guy trying to start a motor in the forest until Mom told me it was just a lonely old ruffed grouse trying to get a lady grouse to come on over.

We lie down side by side, our arms almost touching. Hers are much browner than mine and longer, but almost as thin.

“I wanna look like you,” I say, “real brown all over, and with dark eyes and straight black hair.”

“You’re fine as you are,” she says, and gives my hand a pat. “You gonna be a real good-lookin’ man.”

I’ve got her black hair, but curly, and her nose, but my dad’s white skin and blue eyes. My dad’s skin really is white. I saw him once with nothing on, and he looked like a pinto pony with his body white and his hair and arms and face all red.

I hear a deep croak overhead and get that trembly feeling in my chest, like when I hear drums. I look up and see two ravens fooling around pretending they been shot, having fun the way they do. Then a deer jumps out the bushes along the river and high-tails it into the trees.

“Mom,” I say, “Do deer eat strawberries?”


I pull my belly in and close my eyes tight, trying to shut out the picture in my head of my dad standing on the back steps last fall, watching a mother deer and a young one chomping away at the pile of apples he’d put out in the field, and then shooting them dead. Both of them.

After some serious picking, when both baskets are just about full, Mom tells me to go cool off in the river while she lies down to have another rest.

It’s only little, but I really like the river, the way the brown sparkly water runs clear over the big stones left in it from what used to be a bridge. I pull off my shorts and tee-shirt and float around for a bit in the deep pool under the tree that leans across to the other bank. Then I take a big breath and sink down under the water, keeping still for as long as I can.

When I come up for air I see a beaver goggling at me across the pool. Then he whacks his tail on the water like a gunshot and scoots off underwater to warn the other beavers about the terrible, dangerous monster in the pool. He’s the scout, the watchman, protecting his family from danger.

After I’ve cooled down, I dry off a bit and pull on my shorts and climb up the sloping tree-trunk to the look-out my half-brother Brian showed me before he took off, a place where you can hide behind a bunch of leaves and watch the house.

I can see gray patches on the back wall where the white paint’s come off, and rust streaks on the tin roof. I look at the gaps where planks are missing on the wall of the barn and count eleven broken window panes. Then I look at my mom, lying on the hillside, her red skirt spread out.
It's still real quiet. All I can hear besides the swish of the river is insects buzzing and the plop of a small fish jumping.

And then, from further down the river I hear a different sort of noise. My ears go back as I make out the sound of twigs cracking and bushes rustling. Whatever it is, it's big, and it's coming closer. I crouch down, holding my breath, and stare through the trembly leaves at the bushes along the bank. I hear a snort and a snuffle and then I see a big black shape come slouching round the bend. My hair creeps on my head and I pee myself a bit as the bear stops and looks around.

He doesn't see me, but then he raises his head and sniffs. I can see the gleam in his small eye and smell his garlicky stink. Then he grunts deep like a pig and rears up on his hind legs to look around again, and he's huge; way taller and bigger than my dad even. He's waving his yellowy nose from side to side, like he's testing the air. His thick front legs hang down, the long claws shining light against the black fur. Then he turns his head towards where my mom is lying, sniffs hard three times, drops down on all fours, and starts off up the hill.

My heart is going like a jackhammer, but I manage to work up enough spit to wet my mouth. I lick my lips, put my two cold, shaking fingers into each side of my mouth, and pull it as wide as I can. And then I take a big breath and whistle harder and longer than I've ever whistled in my whole life, as loud and shrill as my dad ever did.

My mom sits up quick. The bear stops dead and looks back. Then he wheels around and bolts back down to the riverbank and off round the bend, so fast you wouldn't think a bear could go that fast.

Pretty soon the jam's ready to be laddled into the eight glass jars on the table. “It's been a real good day, today, Doug,” she says, lifting the pan off the heat and putting it on a stand on the kitchen table. “We got wild strawberry jam for months.” She turns around. “And you saved me from a giant bear.”

I look to see if she's kidding me.

“Seriously”, she says as she fills the first jar with the side-pointed ladle. “Them bears can be pretty mean if you get between them and something they want, specially the big old ones. He'll be used to getting his own way, that guy.” She jabs me in the ribs with her sharp elbow. “So, you're my hero now, see.”

We hear the truck pulling in and look at each other. Mom's gone pale and her mouth's a straight thin line.

“Dad's back awful early,” she says. “Here,” she gives me the ladle. “Fill as many of these jars as you can, up to this point here, while I go see to your Dad. But be real careful, now!”

I've filled four jars before they finally come into the kitchen. Dad bumps into the table, making me spill some jam.

“Careful there, boy!” he says. He sits down, nearly missing the chair.

“Give us a beer,” he says to Mom, and he bends down to fumble in a big brown-paper bag. He winks at me like we're in some kinda plot together, and then he pulls out a ginormous pair of yellow cowboy boots and plunks them on the table. They look brand new to me, with turned up, squared-off toes and them high heels they got, and fancy swirls all over them.
“Whatcha think of these?” he says. “Size twelve. A real steal!”

I close my nose against the smell of booze and keep my eyes down while I fill two more jars.

Mom comes back and bangs the beer bottle down in front of him. She stares at the boots and then back at him. “What the hell you get those for?” she says.

I hold still.

He swings his head around at her. “Any reason why not?” he says, all quiet like.

“I thought you said we ain’t got no money to throw away,” she says.

Wham! He bangs his fist on the table, making the jars jump and rattle.

“Why not?” he says, “Whaddaya mean, ‘we’? You earned some of it, did you Luce? Eh? A man can do what he likes with his own money, I should think! A man can buy himself a decent pair of boots if he likes.”

“Sure, he can, Merv,” Mom says, “but what’s the use o’ them?” She points her chin at the boots. “You can’t work in them. Prob’ly couldn’t even hardly walk in them. And anyways, what happened ‘bout the tractor parts? Did you get them boots instead? How you gonna work the field now, eh?”

I keep my head down and spoon the last of the jam into the eighth jar. It only half fills it, so we could eat it up tonight, but I’m not hungry now. I put the jars in an exact straight line on the table and carry the pan over to the sink. I wait for it to fill, hunching my shoulders against the shouts.

Why does she have to answer back like that? I put my hands over my ears until I hear a humungous crash and the sound of glass breaking. I look over my shoulder and see that Dad’s up-ended the table and all the jars are laying smashed on the floor, the jam spreading over the tiles.

“You better clean that up,” he says to me and stomps off upstairs.

I can’t see Mom at first, but she’s huddled into the space between the fridge and the hutch, her head on her knees. There’s blood dripping from her nose and one eye’s already swelling. I help her up, and she leans on me, shaking, until she sees the mess on the floor. Her eyes and lips go thin, and she takes a big breath through her nose. Without even looking at me, she takes off upstairs. I can hear her screaming at him, and off they go again, the way they always do.

After I get the table back on its feet, I fetch the dustpan and shovel. The boots got jam all over them, even inside, so I drop them into the paper bag. I try to block out the noise from upstairs while I scoop up the mixture of jam and glass on the floor as best I can and scrape it onto the boots.

I’ll take the lot out to the trash pit, even though it’s more of a trash pile these days, with bottles and cans and rags and bones all heaped up on it, way overdue for a fire, and I’ll just chuck the bag up on top. Wasps will come to it, rats, raccoons, bears even, but I don’t care. I hope they do. They’re welcome to our garbage.

When I’ve almost finished cleaning up I see I’ve missed a big jagged piece of glass laying in the corner, best part of a whole jar, brilliant red jam still in it. I pick it up, my fingertips all bloody from scraping up glass splinters. The bottom of the jar fits into my hand with one thick pointed piece sticking out like a blade.

I make my eyes small and hold the broken jar up high, and I dance around, jabbing at the air. In my mind, Dad backs away from me, his arms in front of his face. “Take that!” I say, “And that!” And I stab and stab at him, until he turns and stumbles off, running away from me down the road, getting smaller and smaller, until he disappears around the bend.