

# The broken

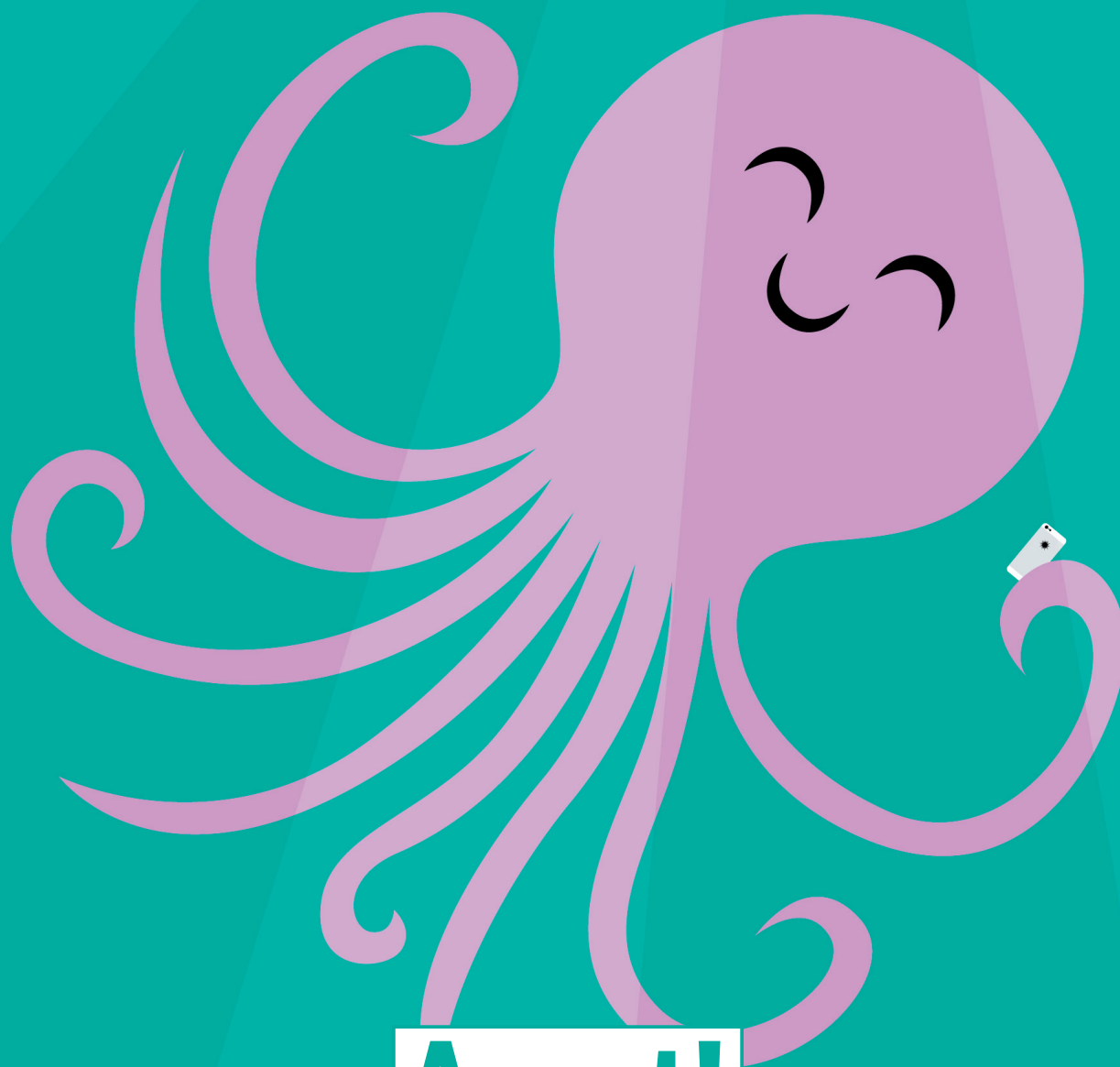
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Beware the will-o'-the-wisp

Horoscope: Pisces

The great escape from Krakatau

A summer of endless rains



## Avast!

# The broken

Summer 2014 Issue 14



*The Broken City*, ISSN 1916-3304, is published semiannually out of Toronto, Canada, appearing sporadically in print, but always at: [www.thebrokencitymag.com](http://www.thebrokencitymag.com). Rights to individual works published in *The Broken City* remain the property of the author and cannot be reproduced without their consent. All other materials © 2014. All rights reserved. All wrongs reversed.

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## In this issue:



All hands on deck for *The Broken City's* water-themed issue.

In this edition, our writers take us kayaking, fishing, pearl hunting, volcano outrunning, driftwood whittling, pool lifeguarding and library

voyeuring—from Yuquot to Etobicoke and all points in between.

## Cover Image:

“Octopus Selfie,” by Mouki K. Butt

Mouki K. Butt is an illustrator who currently resides on Vancouver Island. She loves to spend the summer swimming in the ocean, but sometimes her own shadow in the water startles her. [moukikbutt.com](http://moukikbutt.com)

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*The Broken City* is currently accepting submissions for its winter 2014 edition: **The Big Chill**.

No, we're not branching out for a remake of a baby boomer movie. *The Broken City* is putting together a wintry issue: snow; ice; Chanukah; Festivus; hockey; sleigh bells; touques; New Year's Eve. If it has something to do with winter, we want to see it; we'll even read poetry about Santa Claus.

Send your poetry, fiction, essays, comics, illustrations, photography, music/book reviews to [thebrokencitymag@yahoo.com](mailto:thebrokencitymag@yahoo.com).

Deadline is: November 1, 2014. Submitters will be contacted after that date, with news of acceptance or rejection.

Nothing that fits the theme? Send something anyway—there may be room for non-conforming work too.



## Beyond Yuquot

### Harold Macy

No one wants to turn their kayak and head back. But we've been paddling for eleven days, riding the western swells over nightmare shoals, and are desperately out of supplies. Dry clothes are but a memory and the aroma rising when we pull off our cockpit covers is staggering—smoky wool and stale wet neoprene, pungent seaweed, the unmistakable musk of sleeping bag romances, and the rapidly decomposing leftovers of what little rations remain: Rye-Crisp which is anything but crisp, tea-bags used and re-used, barely colouring already-tannic outer coast water, and all the rolling papers stuck together in a long accordion spliff.

Even so depleted, nobody is ready for land—the lure of the ocean rising thus strong. The hypnotic staccato tappa tappa of the bareback corduroy sea ripples beneath the eager boat. As we make night crossings holding Polaris on our right shoulder, below us luminous streaks reveal the passing dart of sculpin and flounder. Hawaii over the western horizon seems within reach and quite reasonable. We are addled by saltwater, so like our own blood.

Seated snugly in a boat, we are more of the water than on it—akin to the sleek otter whose supple curlicues we envy. On the sea for so long earth feels foreign when we go ashore on rubbery legs. Out of the kayaks we are inelegant, naked and slow.

Three stay on the narrow fringe between ocean and hemlock to set up camp. The rest scatter in search of protein. Some drop handlines into clean water and sit motionless as beach herons, twitching the bait to tempt the wily codfish and salmon. Others scramble onto black headlands to pry gooseneck barnacles and sweet orange-meated mussels off the shattered rocks where sea and continent so fiercely embrace. A crab trap loosed from the deck of a kayak disappears with a hopeful gurgle into the dark and deep fronds of a seaweed forest. Whoops of delight echo as bounty is reeled in.

From all points of the compass we return to camp. The beach crew followed deer trails up the nearby creek to a patch of salmonberries to gorge and gather. We are cousin to buck and bruin.

The feast begins. Driftwood fire bbq'd salmon, colourful cod and mussel kebobs, crab steamed in a kelp-lined pit, and the sweet meat of roasted barnacles slurped, salty chin juice worn like a feral badge. Cavorting around the flames, we dance catastrophe and rapture. Last night out. Beyond Yuquot.

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*Harold Macy lives in the rural community of Merville, BC, surrounded by old hippies, fundamentalist Christians, badly-aging cowgirls, loggers, and urban defectors—great sources of characters and story. He has been published in PRISM International, Eye & I, Island Word, and Woodland Almanac. His first book was The Four Storey Forest: As Grow the Trees, So Too The Heart (2011).*

# Rapids

## Alexandra Missett

They push the kayaks through the reeds. There is nothing for metres and miles, just the rush of water and the smell of soil. Darcy has the urge to go further. She can see, downstream, a turn that is white with rapids and overgrown with willows. The path seems dangerous. It feels romantic, not like modern movies are romantic, but like classical literature is, foggy with danger and risk and sacrifice. But as she watches Jane scrape her boat against the shale, Darcy knows they are stopping there. This is the place.

This shore holds rough boughs and trillium; it carries nostalgia for summer camp. Darcy thinks that is typical of Jane. She thinks that maybe this is Jane surrounding her with simple, innocent things because that is how she sees Darcy. Unassuming. An oak sapling among pines. Darcy disagrees. Jane marked the end of her innocence as well as the start of something new.

Jane has rings on ribbons. Darcy has words on cards. They hold their breaths as a louder boat passes by, looking down as the captain of aluminum looks up. Darcy considers living in the woods for the rest of her life, with a spring for water and stumps for seats. They are used to being visible. The antithesis of invisible was not a strong enough word for what they are when they are together. They are used to being a lighthouse, a beacon—a will-o'-the-wisp that would lead those of weak and naïve minds to their deaths.

The sound of the motor fades. Birdsong returns, as does river song. As does heart song. Darcy holds Jane's hand as shoreline holds trillium. Darcy wears a ribbon made of promises carrying a ring made of risk around her neck. She thinks of the river. She thinks of rapids.

---

*Alexandra Missett is an abstract concept that exists in the back of your mind as you drift off to sleep. She lives in Hamilton and writes short fiction and poetry. She occasionally blogs at [steelcityempathy.wordpress.com](http://steelcityempathy.wordpress.com).*

## Spindle Gatherine Kyle

He skips white stones  
across moan-peeling  
water, feeding found  
coins to the wheel of  
fate, the *rota fortunae*  
that swallows bright  
tribute down its red  
gullet, a birth in reverse.  
Wood becomes metal,  
metal to ash, the cycle  
of progress jammed in  
lockstep. North Star,  
precipice, prelude  
incarnate, skip all  
your stones down  
the foxhole of prayer.  
Tomorrow the pebbles  
you toss to the wheel  
will all have resurfaced,  
elaborate myth.

# Oyster's Clutch

## Catherine Kyle

You are the grit,  
the jagged speck embedded

between silver folds of memory  
and the mantle of dispassion.

Gut of heart and hourglass eye  
cannot dislodge the wound.

The splinter of beach glosses to luster,  
a small and white-knuckled ravaging ball.

With two prying fingers I unhinge the shell  
and rob the furtive chamber of its oceanic sore.

I string them on a rosary, these wretched gorgeous pearls,  
a collar of stars that glows like wet teeth

in lean hands ribboned with teal.  
I thumb the touchstones faded and mutter fevered prayers,

circle coral mandalas, and serenade slow fins.  
Specter of salt, anguish of time,

here in the sea belly church you  
are transcended.

Although you have haunted  
this oyster mind for years,

you are now a muted pebble  
in the graveyard of dark dreams—

meditative, harmless, a talisman rent  
by searching nimble fingers

from obsession's clenched bone jaw.

---

*Catherine Kyle is a PhD candidate in English at Western Michigan University. Her poetry, fiction, and graphic narratives have appeared in The Rumpus, Superstition Review, Lunch Ticket, and elsewhere. Her hybrid-genre chapbook, Feral Domesticity, is available through Robocup Press. Learn more about her at [catherinebaileykyle.com](http://catherinebaileykyle.com).*

# Off Somerset Island

## *Richard King Perkins II*

Like a pale-gray shard  
whittled from timberous ice sculpture

I nudge your buoyant form  
through pristine frigid waters.

For a week I have nurtured you,  
my wooden plank surrogate—

since the pale bear murdered my calf  
beneath a placid Arctic sky.

Can you hear my sea canary lullaby  
O' mindless driftwood child?

Can you hear my beluga song  
O' pale-gray infant shard?

Sleep now, my graceless offspring,  
let me lead you to a stainless world

where mothers are never fearful  
and thick milk never spoils in their hearts.

Can you hear my beluga song  
O' pale-gray infant shard?

Can you hear my sea canary lullaby  
O' mindless driftwood child?

This is the sanctum where I tried to lead you.  
These are the perfect waters where I have no fear.

---

*Richard King Perkins II is a state-sponsored advocate for residents in long-term care facilities. He has a wife, Vickie, and a daughter, Sage. He is a three-time Pushcart nominee and a Best of the Net nominee. He has poems forthcoming in Broad River Review, The William and Mary Review and The Louisiana Review.*

# Language of Water

## *Anna Mioduchowska*

Moist breath settling on the windows  
has sealed them shut, our home  
an ice cave carved under the cover of night.

The phone rings, and the receiver  
erupts in a mountain stream. Child's voice  
rushing down an incline leans hard  
into the bank to round a bend,  
swerves to pick up slivers of bark.

Bodies burrowed into the couch,  
we are all ears  
*...dinosaur... friend... bump on the head...*  
This crude instrument! We strain  
to distinguish words from the chatter  
of trees on the shore, the current scraping  
against rocky bottom,  
we close our eyes, our mouths

dive in—  
a pair of speckled trout  
exquisitely fluent in the language of water,  
tracking down every syllable,  
meaning distilled by gills.

Minutes stretch and shrink.  
We splash and kick in this most soothing  
of streams, our windows clear.

---

*Anna Mioduchowska's poetry, translations, stories and book reviews have appeared in anthologies, in The New Quarterly, PRISM International, CV2, The Fiddlehead, Prairie Fire, on the radio and on city buses. Her poetry collections include Some Souls Do Well in Flowerpots, In-Between Season, and the collaborative Eyeing the Magpie.*

# Summer of Endless Rains

## *Chloe Burns*

In the summer of  
endless rains your lips grew  
darker every day. We worried  
as they turned orchid, with veins of  
winey depth spidering through.  
Moths wound their way off  
the corners of your mouth like  
gilding, their wings so velvet  
I allowed them to settle over my  
hips and stomach. In the summer  
of endless rains everywhere  
you kissed me flowered  
with Michelangelic bruises.  
Your lips shaded a purple  
almost black I started crying,  
I couldn't stop, you came home  
with your arms full of breads and  
fishes and found me sitting in a  
lagoon mirroring the rising floods  
outside. There was a sandpiper nesting  
in my hair, a minnow nipping my toes,  
and your mouth shadowed as a wound.

You made me peppermint tea, ripping  
sweet pellets of bread from your  
loaves, you sang to me a lullaby so  
vast it was almost biblical.  
In the summer of endless rains I said  
you were my ruby in a black man's  
ear, and my tears finally stopped  
after seven days & nights when you  
wet a cloth with them and welded  
a lukewarm temporary tattoo  
of a mermaid onto my lower  
ribs. I traced your lips as  
cold as hypothermia, as blackberry dark as  
the melting ice on the  
floes. My toes hummed with  
missing when you'd get up in the middle of the night  
to make toasted cheese and  
hot chocolate; in the summer of endless rains we had to  
change our sheets every  
afternoon, they'd be sodden from the  
humidity of the air. In the summer  
of endless rains our ivy plants we'd named  
Eve and Noah grew and grew their clinging  
tendrils swallowing the windows and the  
walls like a wedding, until we were  
ensconced, insulated, sleeping beauty  
in her muffled castle, we stayed that way,  
sipping at puddles like wild deer, your lips  
tracking stormclouds all through the summer,

Oh God,

we loved then.



## horoscope: pisces

### *Chloe Burns*

when you fall in love with  
the boy who was the fisherman  
in a past life, his hands wrapped  
around coffee bitter hot while his breath  
paints the dawn austere, when you  
fall in love with the reincarnation  
of his winter blue eyes  
and netted lips, the way his words  
bloom out of him in the  
brick high school hallway,  
don't start smoking.  
even if you admire the way cigarettes  
trail unconcerned with you from his fingers,  
the way his mouth shines through smoke.  
don't start smoking like magnets  
to pull his eyes on to you  
like a magic charm to loosen  
the lungknots he makes, like a ball of yarn  
spelled to spin you through  
the labyrinths of his halftruths.  
don't start smoking to treasure  
the sparks like lightning bugs  
between you  
as you lean in, as you breathe in  
to keep the ember  
glowing, when you fall  
in love with the boy whose hands remember  
how it was to knot ropes and  
cast lines, don't start smoking.  
find another way to keep from  
running away.

---

*Chloe Burns has recently been published in The Casserole, Lantern Magazine, Tendril Literary Magazine, Ijagun Poetry Journal, Bitterzoet and Red Kitty Magazine. She agrees with William Carlos Williams, who said: "I think all writing is a disease."*

## Walker's Point (1868)

*Lauren Carter*

The station was an outpost  
between wild sea

and wilderness. Seven  
dropped ashore

like relocated animals  
looking for a ready den.

The lake sand sucked at their  
soles as if begging them to stay

and John began building  
on a limestone flat

where the woodshop  
would be.

It wasn't what she'd planned—  
sons toiling within the great

water's dream, daughters  
marrying labourers, the sharp

stench of fish part  
of the air.

But it was the life  
that came. She gathered

the days and ordered  
them. Made jam

from blackened clearings,  
braided earth

in plaits of green.

# Following Sea

## Lauren Carter

The weather turns the world  
to cloud and water painted in slate

and I keep my eyes aimed ahead  
as Wiarton vanishes like a sailor's illusion

of land. That morning,  
in the library, I had searched for clues

of my grandparents, found my uncle's  
book on the shelf. All day, the cemetery

tugged at me, but I didn't go. Stayed inside  
and counted names, sifted

through old notations, ran my finger down death  
notices and photocopied script. In a book,

my great-great-grandparents stared out  
at me in a blur, all the life

fallen from the page.  
I don't know what I wanted.

To walk by my grandmother's  
house and see the barn

still standing, trees laden with red cherries  
and pears? To enter her yellow kitchen

and smell the oil stove, the musty  
hollow of the root cellar where she kept

the kid's crayon bucket, her canned  
pear preserves? The town is empty, no one

left but strange relations who don't know me  
like she did. On Division Street, around the corner

from her house, we bought smoked trout  
and carried it back to the boat. Ate

the last of it tied to a cement mooring  
off White Cloud Island while the wind

hollered down the bay, bringing ghosts  
again. Those restless ones

I thought would wane when we tacked  
east, leaving the path we built

behind us, swallowed  
by a larger whole.

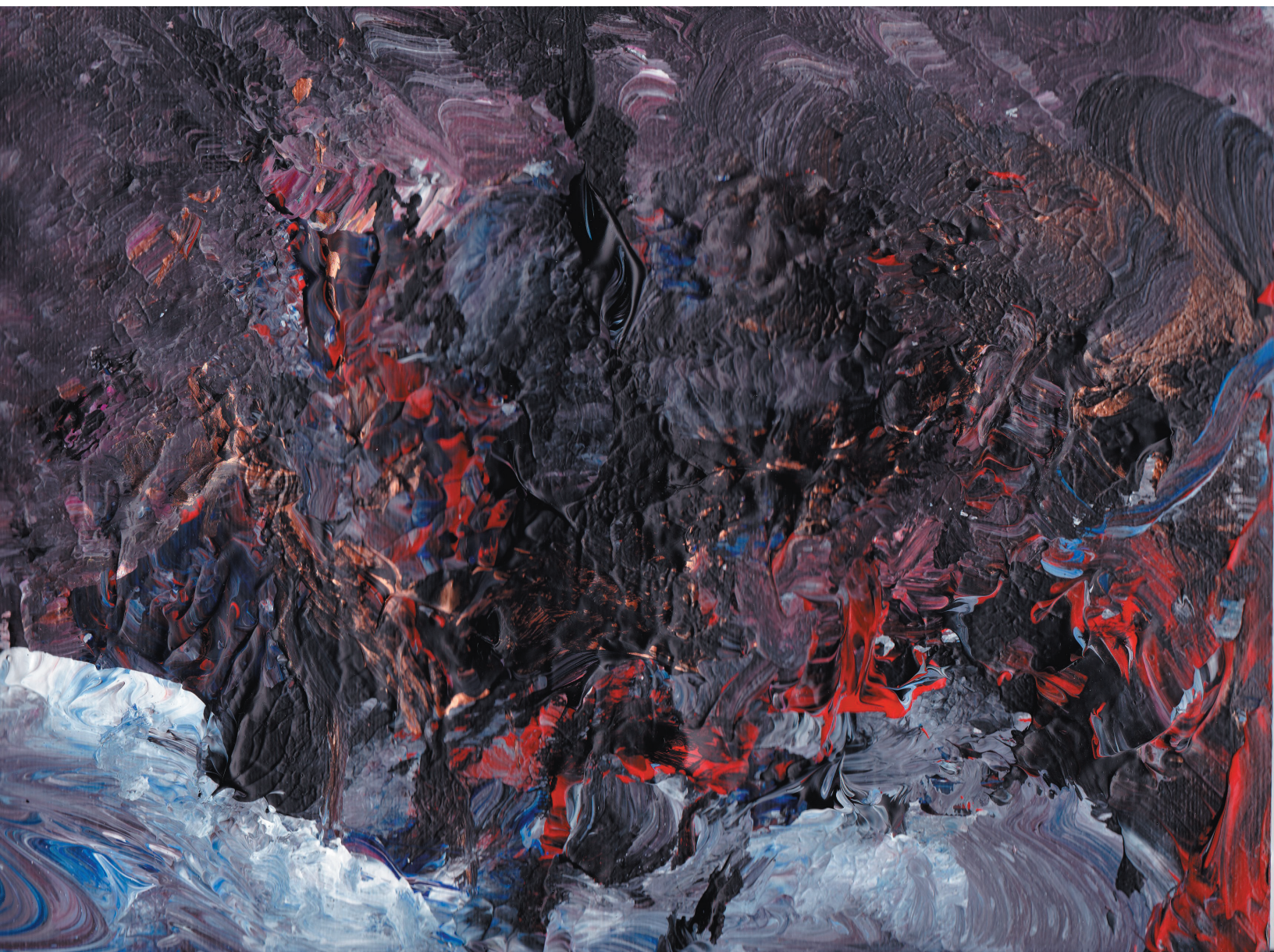
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*Lauren Carter has published Lichen Bright (Your Scrivener Press, 2005) and Swarm (Brindle & Glass, 2013), a novel. A selection from Migration, her recently completed second poetry collection, was long-listed for the CBC Poetry Prize. She lives in The Pas, Manitoba, where she's at work on another novel. She blogs and interviews writers at [laurencarter.ca](http://laurencarter.ca).*



## **Their Last Visit to the Rocky Shore**

***W. Jack Savage***



*W. Jack Savage is a retired broadcaster and educator. He is the author of seven books, including Imagination: The Art of W. Jack Savage ([wjacksavage.com](http://wjacksavage.com)). More than 50 of Jack's stories and 180 of his drawings and paintings have been published worldwide. Jack and his wife Kathy live in Monrovia, California.*



## Krakatau

### Devin Murphy

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*Devin Murphy's work appears in Glimmer Train, Chicago Tribune, Michigan Quarterly Review, The Missouri Review, Shenandoah and many other journals. He holds an MFA from Colorado State University, a PhD from The University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and is an Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at Bradley University.*

- I The American frigate crew felt deep time pound through their chests when they heard Krakatau, that old island and eater of storms crack open to their distant starboard. The first officer watched from the wheel as a pillar of flame rose from the silvered waterline, then his liquid red barometer heaving as it caught the foul breath of the gathering squall about to paint their coiled topsails with dark pumice and ash, and lift their bow on each feral shoulder of violent waves before sliding off their rippling backs. The sky turned so black by noon, Sailor, 2<sup>nd</sup> class Hughes, who had known a lifetime of shorelines and straights, could not comprehend the gray waste whispering from the clouds. The galley boy began his first authentic prayer at what he took to be the rapture come for him and his shipmates for whoring in Jakarta on port leave. Captain Diaz called for the release of both anchors to be let adrift so all the chain could swing loose below, searching out the deeper waters for balance to keep from capsizing beneath the new blackness of the world.
- II The French Expedition edged out onto what was left of the ruined island, knowing here they could watch an ecosystem build itself from nothing, or not nothing, but the lifeless remnant of scorched rock and cliff stacks. Debris and clouds of dust still burped from the earth making musket firing noises, and for all the men crawling along the newest of shoreline, they only found a microscopic spider, building its web, and waiting with supreme faith for life to start again.
- III The French spent their days walking the island and their nights on deck talking of the little spider. The survivor they called it. The propagator they called it. The eight-legged regeneration of God they called it. Was it a swimmer, did it float on a log, had it hidden deep within the earth and managed not to have its insides boil. They dreamt of the spider, of its sad web that was capable of seeing further into the future than they could or was it setting a mystic edge where the earth could shift upon and begin mending itself.
- IV They did not know of the spider's flight, how it stood at the edge of a leaf and let a thread of string from the spinnerets out and out until it found an air current to lift it, to balloon it upward, and in a way magic and in a way God, and in a way something these little creatures do without knowing where they will land—all those spiders descending into the waves and lost—and this one, which touched upon the earth's deepest stones, upturned and made bare, brought life to the purged core of the planet. And that life was aching to fill the gap and those French who wanted to watch it happen were foolish for trying to bid time and life to hurry, for that ache moved slower and was in no hurry to launch and land the little Aeolian arachnid, and no hurry for the monitor lizard to start its swim and the birds to carry microbes tucked under the wings to the rock, and crabs to emerge from the sea and the pulse to spread and grow and live upon the newest soils.

# Vital Signs

*Robin Sutherland*

It's so hot that Corie can feel the Banana Boat sunblock melt into every pore across her forehead and shoulders. The afternoon sun in the Toronto suburbs sears down—relentless, toxic, and unnatural. Thankfully, it's time for a guard rotation. *Where the hell's Solomon?* She looks longingly at the crowded pool. The water is murky, but wet, and she's going to hop in on her break to cool off.

Corie is sprawled magnificently in the deep-end lifeguard chair, the one the hornets like to buzz about. As she flicks away a couple of the stinging insects, she feels a tickle of sweat roll down between her breasts, a strange sensation that she blots away by lightly pressing her fingertips into the bony ridge—the xiphoid process—at the base of her sternum. She unconsciously measures up two fingers, to where she would place the heel of her other hand in position for CPR: and one-and-two-and-three. One and a half to two inches down for an adult. Corie wonders what it would feel like to do actual compressions, and if ribs would always get broken like the instructor said they would; if the bones would crunch or snap; if the bones would shift and slide over one another, or get pushed vertically and gouge an organ.

Corie sits up straight. She dangles a tanned foot over the edge of the chair. She readjusts her sunglasses; if she looks a certain way she can see a close-up of her eyebrows and forehead, sometimes even a molecular close-up of a strand of hair. Corie crosses and uncrosses her eyes until she can catch a magnified glimpse of the highlights screaming through her hair: the blondes, the light reds. She feels good

with dark skin and light hair.

Corie's in love with her supervisor, though she pretends she doesn't notice him when he appears on the pool deck (with Solomon) to survey the jumble of swimmers before striding off to the filter room. Corie waits. And waits. And waits some more. "Now what?! No, Reggie, you can't wear cut-off jeans in the pool!" Solomon stops to have a chit-chat with Dominic.

"Why? Because I said so, and because this is a swimming pool, not a laundromat!" Solomon then stops to give a "Ready, set, go!" signal to a couple of the kids who want to race to the buoy line.

"What?! Reggie, you've got five seconds to get out of the bloody pool!" A couple of parents glance over at Corie's explosion, but she beams at them because she's got everything under control.

Corie's already half-dismounted from the guard chair when Solomon arrives. "Yeah, yeah, things are good, I'm outta here," she tells him, but he needs a whistle, he left his with Dominic, and Corie seethes as she struggles to remove hers from a sweaty bathing suit strap. Solomon rambles on, "Oh yeah, Dominic says that Dan says that you got a phone call, so check with him for the message. He says he wrote it down, but lost it."

Corie nods. Stands there for a few moments. Scans the pool from shallow end to deep end, and back again. Makes sure her co-worker is settled. "Everything good to go? Good." She then removes her sunglasses, hops in the pool, squeezes her eyes shut, holds her breath and dunks under water.

The change in sound is instant as Corie moves from articulate, air-borne shrieks to the muted underwater sounds of public swim. An inner sanctum, this weighty medium of water, chlorine, soda ash, and the silky snotty particulate residue of human activity. When Corie emerges, she shakes the water from her hands, then uses her guard shirt to dab the streams of water, sweat and sunscreen away from her eyes. Corie blinks and slides her sunglasses back over burning eyelids while she weaves through the communion of public swim, the bodies that come together for several minutes in a single day, or week, or through the two months a year the pool is open. Some are there to escape the heat; others, the loneliness or despair of their homes, the nearby Ontario housing complex a compound of metal fence, insipid landscaping and low expectations. Much Minutes, a complex inhabitant who spends his days hanging on to the fence howling "How much minutes 'til public swim?" wants to know if Corie is there to rescue someone (he'd been hauled out of the deep end himself, earlier this summer), but no, she is quick to reassure him that she is just there to cool off.

Back out on the deck, Corie's wet nylon guard shirt and the ugly, city-issue shorts feel good plastered to her skin. She knows Solomon and Dominic are watching to see how quickly she'll race off to the filter room, so she wanders over to the emergency exit, which is supposed to be kept clear at all times—"Okay Robbie, time to pack up your little entourage and move somewhere else." Corie is almost afraid to know what *coorvah* means, which

is what Stanley is screaming at her as he wheels his bike around the tennis courts; she kicked him out for a week after he spit on her towel. "So Robbie, what exactly *is* he saying?" But the 13-year-old, embroiled in the politics of teenage angst, is too busy telling Jughead to tell Sherry to mind her own fuckin' business, he never said nothin' to Marty about wanting to feel-up Dee Dee, and now Luciano wants to kick his fuckin' head in. But Jughead towel-snaps Robbie's legs and drawls, "Yah, whatever, man, ya got any fuckin' cigs?" Prompted by Corie, there's some incoherent negotiating, pushing, shoving, fuck-ing, and general dispersal.

Corie continues her trek to the filter room. On her way past the office, though, the phone rings, so she ducks inside the dark room to answer it. While she recites the hours for public swim, she sees the University calendar she's been trying to decipher and flips it open with a pencil. Corie needs to choose courses and register for her first year at school. It's all quite confusing, and Corie doesn't know if the required Latin course she needs for an Archaeology degree is going to be at all do-able. She'd taken Latin for three years in high school, but was better at memorizing lines of text from *Ecce Romani* than she was at really understanding the construct of the ablative case. *In picture est puella*, she remembers, and also that stuffed dormice was considered a Roman delicacy.

Everyone keeps telling Corie that university is nothing like high school. She's counting on that. She's had enough of the awkwardness: enough of the girls who smoke in the washroom during lunch, the ones with the tight jeans and fluffy hair; enough of the guys in her co-ed gym class, especially Brad Stephens who shouted "You loser!" when she missed a spike from

the opposing team; and enough of the math classes and the incomprehensible formula ' $y=mx+b$ ' that for no apparent reason will stay with her forever.

Momentarily sidetracked, Corie leafs through the calendar, imagining herself in the colour photos of the campus, and wondering what her room in residence will look like. She'll get herself a knapsack with the university's crest and motto on it, and pack it with all the new textbooks she'll have. Corie frowns, and flips back to the description of the different types of degree requirements. She's got an appointment with the Dean of Arts next Wednesday, on her afternoon off. Her dad said he'd drive there with her. Yeah, things are going to be different next year, Corie muses. Maybe like this summer, when she realized that maybe she wasn't the chunky, homely coward she always thought she was.

Dan! Corie almost forgot about the filter room.

She's almost there when one of the kids from her swim team, the Eastfield Park Pool Eels, cuts her off by the water fountain. The 14-year-old is one of the strongest swimmers on the team, and her mom always helps with the bake sale fundraisers they organize, so everyone can have a team baseball cap or t-shirt. Coach Corie's expecting the usual friendly queries about what they'll be doing for today's practice, but Eva's hunched against the wall and stammers, "Umm, well... I, well... please I, well, you see, I, umm..." Eva blinks and stares at her green apple-coloured toenails. She blushes. "I just got... well... you know, and I don't have anything, and my mom isn't going to be here until the end of practice, so..." Eva's voice trails off into a hopeful whisper.

*Oh. Ohhhhh.* Before Corie can censor her embarrassment, she hears her voice blabbering the most useless

small-talk: "Soooo, is your mom going to be able to drive some extra swimmers to the meet next Wednesday?" And: "That's a nice shade of green on your toes; what does your mother think of it?" *This isn't right, damnit, but what?* "So, heh-heh, why don't we go into the pool office and see what, well, find something, well, you know, take care of things."

Back in the office, Corie tries to be the professional and efficient person she needs to be. Her back to Eva, Corie cringes as she digs around for the tampons she knows are lurking about the bottom of her storage box; she hopes they're still there... oh good, they are. Corie plunges deeply into the box, grabs a couple, and hands them off to Eva. Eva moves awkwardly for the pass, but their hands swing wide, and Corie lets the paper-wrapped bullets drop. The tampons fall to the ground, and Eva is left scrambling for them while Corie gestures with her hands and says, "Um, oh yeah, um," both of them dreading that someone might arrive in the doorway during the unfeminine bungle. Corie can barely hear the "Thanks" the younger girl whispers as she darts out of the office and shuffles into the women's washroom.

Alone, Corie reviews the disaster of the past few minutes, and attempts to reason with herself. She was caught off guard. She has enough trouble dealing with her own body, let alone someone else's. She tried. She would be more adult next time. She replays the moment over and over, but this time with a breezy, confidently-scripted dialogue: "*This happens to every one of us at least once, and we'll take care of it... It's your body, and these things happen... It's okay and nothing to be ashamed of... I have some extra tampons you can use.*" Corie putters about in the shade—she gets a drink of water; she washes her

face; she rolls the clinical language of the Menstrual Industry around in her mouth: San-i-ta-ry nap-kin. Tam-pon. Pant-y li-ner. The regimented rat-a-tat names that surely no woman could have invented for the drippy business of bleeding. Tampax. Kotex. Stayfree. New Freedom. Corie contemplates the new freedom of a squishy, one-inch diaper wedged between your thighs. And good old Tampax. Corie still remembers her Grade 5 trip to the zoo, when she'd importantly informed Miss Bradley that her family was flying down to Tampax for the March break.

Corie gazes at her reflection in the mirror and remembers Miss Bradley, her Grade 5 teacher. She remembers Miss Bradley's beautiful strawberry-blond hair, and her steely-but-kind voice. She remembers the precise way Miss Bradley required her students to inscribe the date in the top right-hand corner of their workbooks, underlined in red. And the way Miss Bradley taught grammar, and how to parse a sentence with various lines and geometric shapes: single lines for nouns, jagged lines for adjectives, wavy lines for verbs. Circles were for conjunctions, squares for articles. All done in red pencil crayon. Corie wonders if Miss Bradley ever thought of the little girl who was heading to Tampax.

Still staring at her reflection, Corie suddenly remembers Dan and the filter room. But just as she's about to head back out on deck, Eva reappears in the office.

"Ummm," she says, "I've never used these before."

"Oh," Corie says, "oh." And then

she has a sudden flashback to an afternoon, years ago at the cottage, when her mother said there was no reason Corie shouldn't go swimming when she had her period, and that she was old enough to use a tampon. They were a cinch to use, her mother said, the mechanics were, well, here... watch. And then she'd matter-of-factly yanked one out of its flimsy wrapper and explained how the cardboard plunger worked, and how you should stand to insert it, and what happened once it was up there, it was, well... it was like this. She then pushed the tampon out of its wrapper and tossed it into a basin of water she was heating up for the dishes. Corie remembers how the skinny cotton plug expanded as it filled with water, and her mother waiting for a few seconds before hauling the thing out of the basin by its white string. She had just let it dangle there. Corie had been fascinated and horrified that someone might walk in while she and her mother stood watching the strange lump of cotton twirl and drip and be a tampon. It was, well, it is something she can hardly do with Eva. But what to do?

"Well, how bad, well are you sure you don't want to try this out?" Corie hears herself ask. And Eva mumbles, and the conversation is strained, and she holds out the unopened tampons for Corie to take back, which she does, and stuffs into a pocket of her wet shorts.

Eva looks like she's about to cry. Corie, deflated, her neat 'n' tidy plan gone awry, reaches for the only other solution she can think of. "Okay then," she says to the younger girl, "we'll just

have to get a bit creative." In a business-like manner, Corie removes several layers of industrial, brown paper towel from an unopened package, and rummages about for some masking tape. She passes both to Eva, along with a pair of Parks & Rec. shorts. "This is the best we can do for now," she says. "When you're finished, you can sit in here or on the pool deck and organize the time cards and permission slips for the swim meet. No one will know." Eva bundles everything up in the shorts—thankfully she doesn't ask any questions—and hurries off to the change room for the second time.

Corie's break is almost up, but there's still the foggy thought of Dan waiting for her in the filter room. She gives herself a careful once-over in the mirror: nothing hanging out of her nose, no gook in the corners of her eyes, nothing stuck in her teeth, good, she's fine, she's triumphed over a bodily function, she's ready for the filter room.

Dan's waiting impatiently, overheated and irritable in the cramped, closed-in space, breathing in the stuffy chemical dust air. "It's about time," he says. "You know, sometimes I wonder if you even want this relationship to work." And, because Corie can only look at him speechlessly, he sandwiches her between his lean, wanting self, and the hard, vibrating filter tank, where, between the whirling roar of the filter pads and his whispered endearments—"Sweet, this is so sweet"—Corie finds comfort in his muscular warmth, but winces softly as the tampons grind against her hip bone. *Amo, amas, amat*, she thinks. *Veritas omnia vincit*.

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*Robin Sutherland lives in Charlottetown, PEI, but was born and raised in the suburbs of Toronto. Water often appears in her work—she draws particular inspiration from her lifeguarding days in Etobicoke, and her childhood summers in Muskoka. "Vital Signs" belongs to a cycle of short stories.*



# The Weaving Woman

## Josh Greschner

When contemplative silence settles among the wooden desks, among the aging ochre pages, thoughts tingle, thighs shuffle, and silently, galaxies within the empty space of O's swim in circles.

Walled within three barren slabs of diffidence, but with her back exposed, she tilts her head at a studious angle, draped in wild hair harangued, then negotiated into X's of bobby pins like slanted crosses. Her fingertips, drifting over waves of frozen text, have yet to callous like the Weaving Woman's, a widow of the sea, a master of delicacy and attentiveness.

Waves whip the coast, and tails lash at the sky. "Only strings," mutters the Weaving Woman, embroidering details of her life: birth, mid-age and resolution against dying. What happens when the ship doesn't fully sink, when the line snaps but stays lodged inside? The knowing don't speculate. "It'll wash up," she says, assuredly, "sure as hell along with everything."

Within the library's silence, my gaze lingers. She gets up, drinks from the fountain. I follow, hiding among shelves of towering ruin. She walks back intently, free from reticence, her arms dangle uncrossed, like tranquilized vines on a tree slipping out of the forest, unnoticed. She runs bare fingers through matted and ferocious hair, cuts loose the weak ties and shakes free her head. Wreckage spins and disintegrates within hurricanes forming and calming. Ancient history resuscitates, to die within moments. Bare fingers emerge from rapture like blanched pillars, uneroded. After fastening shut the ocean, she turns and looks at me.

I, standing naked in my shameless voyeurism, droplets diving down my temple, pooling on the indifferent floor, get a sudden impulse to plunge into the water, to hide from the tempestuous stare of the shore. She recoils, gathers her things and leaves. I sit back down. My sweat dries.

The Weaving Woman bites the final thread of a pall-thin blanket, with her remaining shards of teeth, without her cloudy eyes.

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