

Voices of Vaughan
~ a **Canada 150 Anthology** ~

by local writers



**Voices of Vaughan:
A Canada 150 Anthology**

**Vaughan Public Libraries
&
Vaughan Writers' Club**

**Vaughan, Ontario, Canada
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Foreword

When the idea to compile an anthology to celebrate Canada's 150th was introduced to the Vaughan Writers' Club, we had no idea how it would take off. Once the submission deadline had passed, the response was so great, it was difficult to choose which stories and poems to include. What we settled on reflects a wide range of talents, themes, and tales inspired by Vaughan, Ontario, the Greater Toronto Area, and beyond. Though the content and authors are diverse, they have one thing in common – their fondness for Canada, and their pride at being Canadian.

As we read the submissions to put this anthology together, we realized there was something truly Canadian in the multitude of voices represented here. Though we could not include every submission we received, we encourage everyone to keep writing and consider joining the Vaughan Writers' Club, as we're always open to new members.

Tamara Hecht, Maria Samurin, and Francesca Pelaccia
Vaughan Writers' Club
October 2017

Cherry Lips

by Athena Wright

The stage was empty. I could taste anticipation in the air. The band wasn't going on for another twenty minutes, and yet the crowd already buzzed with excitement.

"Who's playing?" I asked my brother. The launch performance for Vaughan's Concert in the Park series always drew a big crowd, but the courtyard seemed busier than I would have expected.

"Don't know," Gael said. "Some local band."

"If you don't know, why are we here?" I asked.

"We need to scope out the competition." Gael's bright blue eyes met mine as he grinned.

"Competition for what?" I asked. "We don't have a band yet. I'm not even sure I'm fully on board with the idea."

I had been, once. Singing in a band was all I ever wanted to do. My boyfriend Jason and I, we had dreams of hitting it big.

But that was before.

A black pit in my stomach yawned open. An ever-present swirling mass threatened to swallow me whole. I steeled myself against it and shoved it away. I refused to let despair consume me.

"Besides," I continued, my voice only slightly shaky, "even if we wanted to start a band, there's only two of us. We'd still need a drummer and a second guitarist."

"You play guitar," he said. "That's enough."

"I'm still not comfortable singing and playing at the same time," I said.

"Growing pains."

I wished I could be as confident in my own abilities as my brother was.

Someone jammed an elbow into my side with a muttered *sorry*. Another person stumbled into me from behind, this time without a sorry. The crowd was getting out of control. I'd never seen a Concerts in the Park audience as rambunctious as this one.

Gael glanced at me, eyeing the long hair that tumbled down my back in waves.

"That's a new shade of red." He feigned a casual tone.

And with that comment, I knew the real reason we were here. Gael was worried.

"Since when do guys notice when a girl gets a different hairstyle?" I asked.

Gael shrugged. "It's hard to miss when your lips are the same shade as your hair."

"So I bought new makeup to go with my new hair colour. Why do you care?"

"It's different, that's all I'm saying."

That wasn't all he was saying. I heard his unspoken words.

Why did you dye your hair again?

Are you feeling okay?

Have you been thinking about him again?

It's okay to miss him, but you can't let grief control your life.

"I know," I snapped.

Gael's eyes widened in surprise.

I flushed. "I mean, I know it's different. That's the point."

Gael flicked his eyes away, focusing on the stage. "There was nothing wrong with the old Cerise," he said quietly.

I clenched my jaw. "I'm going to get a drink."

A wall of tented vendor booths surrounded the courtyard in a semicircle, penning in the concert audience. Some were handing out water bottles branded with sponsor logos. I snatched one up

and, before anyone could notice, slid my way between the small gap between two booths.

There were no crowds on this side of the tent wall. The noise and furor was muted.

I took in a deep breath.

For someone who drank like a fish and brought a new girl home every night, Gael could be oddly perceptive when it came to his little sister.

He was wrong though. There *had* been something wrong with the old Cerise.

The old Cerise had been too sheltered. Too naïve. The old Cerise didn't know how awful the world could be.

The old Cerise couldn't handle losing Jason. Couldn't deal with the way he'd...

Pinpricks of tears threatened to sting my eyes. I blinked rapidly and took a swig from my water bottle to wet my dry throat.

"Hey there, Cherry Lips."

I choked, sputtering, as a voice spoke up from behind, surprising me. Droplets of water splashed down my chin and over the front of my shirt. I wiped at my face with the back of my hand, turning to face the voice.

I was confronted by a man with wavy brown hair and stunning green eyes. I inhaled a sharp breath. This guy was cute. I felt like an idiot for having made a fool of myself in front of him. I folded my arms over my chest to hide it.

"What did you call me?" My words came out strangled, still coughing water out of my lungs. So much for not looking like an idiot.

The man shrugged easily. He wore a black and white *Our Lady Peace* band t-shirt stretched tight around broad shoulders.

"Seemed appropriate," he said. "Your lips are cherry red." He scanned me up and down, from the top of my newly dyed hair, to

the toes of my black boots, to the ends of my bright red nails. "I'm sensing a theme."

That was two guys commenting on my fashion choices in one day. Maybe I was taking it too far.

"I like it," he continued. A hint of amusement sparkled in those green eyes. "It's cute."

My heart did something I hadn't felt it do in a long time.

It fluttered.

My grip tightened on the water bottle, crushing it.

I pretended to wrinkle my nose in disgust. "Don't call me cute."

"Wait, let me guess." He tapped his finger to his mouth as if thinking hard. His own nails were tipped with black nail varnish. "Dyed red hair, combat boots, thick black eyeliner... You're aiming for cool and powerful and fierce, right?"

I scowled to cover up the flush on my cheeks.

His shoulders shook with silent laughter.

"And what would you know about cool?" I shot back.

The smile on his lips didn't fade. "I know that trying to look cool on purpose doesn't work."

I cast my eyes down, avoiding his gaze.

I couldn't deny it. By dressing like this, I was trying to be someone I wasn't. I would never be that strong, take-no-BS kind of person. That just wasn't me.

"Listen," he said. "I get it."

I looked back up, meeting the man's gaze.

"The whole, *I'm-a-bad-ass, don't-mess-with-me*, thing?" His green eyes burned into me. "I get where you're coming from. But this?" He waved his hand, gesturing to my hair and boots. "This isn't the way to do it."

"Then how do I?" I hated how plaintive I sounded, how weak and uncertain.

He pinned me down with a stare. "When do you feel the most powerful?"

I paused, taken aback. "I... don't know."

"Think about it," he urged. "What makes you feel like you can do anything? Like you can take on the world?"

"I suppose..." I hesitated, but powered on. "When I sing."

His eyes lit up. "Yeah? You sing?"

I nodded.

"That's the key, then," he said. "Always be singing."

I laughed. "I can't go around singing all the time. Life isn't a musical."

"Not out loud." He tapped one finger against my chest. "In here."

My heart went into overdrive, beating madly against my ribcage. My ears turned hot. My lungs squeezed.

I hadn't felt anything like this since Jason had...

"Think you can do that, Cherry Lips?" he asked with a grin.

I nodded dumbly, silently. He winked and sauntered off, ducking between the tents. I stared at the space where he disappeared for long moments. I fought to calm my rapid breathing.

My cell phone buzzed. A text from Gael, asking where I was and telling me the concert was starting, in all caps.

I followed the mysterious green-eyed stranger's path through the tents, but I didn't see him on the other side. Disappointed but not surprised, I wandered back to my brother, elbowing my way through the crowd. The audience was reaching a fever pitch. Whoever this band was, they must have been popular.

I poked Gael in the shoulder when I finally pushed my way to him. He nodded at me and jerked his chin to the side, telling me without words to watch the stage. My mind was elsewhere, still thinking about what that guy had said.

Moments later, the screech of guitars hit my ears and the thumping of drums and bass thrummed in my chest. The first few bars of the song were catchy, but not enough to take my attention away from my inner thoughts.

A man began to sing.

I recognized the voice.

I turned my face toward the stage.

The stranger from before held a microphone in both hands.

His voice was smooth and crooning at first, then turned deep and growling, switching off between soft and aggressive in turns.

It wasn't just a song. It was a litany, tirade, a prayer.

It was joy and anger and longing and pain and desire and regret and—

A million emotions flashed through me in the space of a five minute song, the singer's voice wringing out every emotion I'd suppressed since my boyfriend Jason had died.

It was as if the man had taken every emotion in the world, as if he'd taken all the love and hate he'd ever felt, and turned it back onto the audience.

That's when I knew.

This was what I wanted to do.

He was what I wanted to be.

I didn't want to be the old Cerise, innocent and insecure and naïve.

I wanted to be someone who could take everything the world threw at her and spit it back out.

I wanted to be powerful. I wanted to be fierce.

I wanted to sing.

"I'm in," I yelled in Gael's ear.

"What?" he shouted back.

"The band thing. I'm in."

Shock crossed his face before he let out a whoop and fist pumped. "Hell yeah! Now we just need a name for the band."

"I've already got one."

He tilted his head, curious. "Yeah?"

I nodded.

"We're going to call ourselves Cherry Lips."

Virginia (Thunder Bay Revisited)

by Gregory Monteith

There is a sleeping giant in the lake
That would be a sea,
In Thunder Bay.
Our last stop on a journey east from Vancouver.
So many ships have drowned here,
Dragging men to the depths.

As I study a map of the bay,
A phone call disturbs our way,
Irrevocably.
Now the museums have nothing to show me,
No myths or history to take me away,
Not today,
For there is one spirit,
One soul,
One woman,
One friend,
One mother of the prairies,
Mother of all blessed to know her,
Who is in grave pain.

It was days ago I last saw her,
The warm home she offered us in Medicine Hat.
Her appetite was gone, her strength waning,
But the spirit-shine in her eyes
Reminded us she was there,
And what would always be.

Now I am not one for church kneeling,
But here in Thunder Bay, will I pray, to her.
From across this nation of landscapes,
Along our trans-time highway,

Pray that your pain is eased,
That you rest well.
For there is a time for passionate living,
As you have lived, an inspired life of giving,
And there is a time for rest,
And it is now.

May you recognize well,
The many thousand hearts who have known you,
And been touched,
And are better for it;
Who are here now to defend you,
Just as the stubborn knight who stands,
Restless and devoted at your bedside,
With love,
And memories carried like sacred shells,
Sounding calmer seas,
Long after the pain has stopped,
And the thunder has cleared over the bay.

And like the giant who sleeps in Thunder Bay,
Virginia, beyond myth, remains.

Squirrel

by Elana Wolff

Bolting body through a warp & woof of sugar maples.
We see the feral streak

& hear the scuttlebutt of leaves.
Ahead, inside a clearing,

where a shaft of sunlight meets the earth—
the squirrel's cavalierly reeling

air-long at a snag—a tree that's dead yet standing.
He does what he can manage

& we're stupefied
to silence—

dazed at his transition from a flyer
to a brakeman.

How he snags that trunk
& lands with handy expertise.

Buttercup Girl

by Penelope Jonas

Rose was nervous. A girl's first sale was a humongous deal. She would embark up that bramble-infested walkway a mere child and walk out a Full-crest Buttercup Girl. The house at the end of Powell Road with its flaking paint and permanently drawn curtains was the only thing standing in her way. She wasn't about to let a last minute attack of cold feet stop her.

She stepped onto the dusty front porch and inspected her uniform one last time. Everything was in order. Neckerchief tied in a flawless reef knot. Sash running from shoulder to hip, the Novice crest positioned right over her heart. Beret tilted at the perfect angle. And one regulation-sized cookie carton labelled with an artist's rendering of maple fudge clusters. She was as ready as she'd ever be. She took a deep breath and pressed the doorbell.

Nothing. No ding dong or ping. Not even the feeble buzz that cheap doorbells made. Either the house was completely soundproof or the doorbell was on the fritz.

She counted backward from twenty in her head before rapping her knuckles on the metal door exactly five times, reciting Handbook Rule #1 in her head: Never be too pushy right out of the gate.

She strained her ears for the sound of footsteps, this time counting backward from thirty. Nothing. She knocked again, twice as loud and twice as long as before. She started counting backward from forty. At the thirty-two mark, a series of clump clump sounds drew closer from behind the door. Rose flashed her sweetest smile as the door creaked open.

“Good afternoon, sir. I represent Buttercup Girls of Canada, First Vaughan Unit. We offer a selection of delectable cookie treats to suit every taste. Funds raised support—”

The man blinked and raised his arm to his face as though protecting himself from the sudden glare of natural light. A navy blue shape was tattooed on the inside of his forearm. Was that a heart? No, it was a spade, as in the Ace of Spades. The little stem thingy was faded but there.

“As I was saying, funds raised by cookie sales support a wide range of activities for girls aged nine to fourteen, including—”

“Not interested,” the man said.

“For a modest investment of five dollars, you can enjoy that world famous maple taste while helping your local community. Since 1939, Buttercup Girls have served as a beacon of hope during—”

“No,” the man said, shuffling his sandaled feet. Rose cast a downward glance. The second toe of his left foot was a centimetre longer than the big toe. The right foot was completely normal. She swallowed hard before speaking.

“—a beacon of hope during times of hardship. Your support will help this important work continue.”

This time, the man stomped his foot. Rose jumped.

“Kid, which part of ‘no’ do you not understand?”

The lines under the man’s eyes darkened as he glared down at her. Rose fought hard to maintain eye contact, but her attention kept drifting to the oversized skin tag that had taken up residence two centimeters below his left eye.

“I’m sorry, sir,” she said. “It’s just that cookie sales support our spring campout. No sales, no camp.”

“I don’t care. I can’t even eat cookies. I’m diabetic.”

“Your wife, then. What lady doesn’t enjoy a sweet treat?”

“I don’t have a wife.”

“Husband?” Rose ventured. The man’s answer was limited to a single upturned eyebrow.

“Son or daughter?” she asked. “Aged parent? Roommate? Foreign exchange student on a home-stay program? Surely

someone in your household would appreciate the subtle delicacy of maple fudge.”

The man’s face heated to a deep red as he grabbed the door and made ready to slam it.

“No! There’s nobody here but me, and for the last time, I don’t want your stinking cookies!”

Even with the man’s cold blue glare freezing the blood in her veins, Rose knew better than to break eye contact again. Remember Handbook Rule #2: Direct and constant engagement is key.

Her lip began to quiver. The man’s eyes flickered with panic as a single, fat tear trickled down Rose’s cheek. He released his grip on the door as she sniffed and a second tear began its freefall down her other cheek.

“Stop that,” the man said.

“I just wanted to go to camp,” she whimpered.

“Camp is good,” the man said. His eyes flitted from left to right, as though searching for an escape route from his own house.

Time to up the intensity. Rose choked back a wet, sticky sob and lowered her head. She punctuated each word with a tiny gasp and perfectly synchronized heave of her shoulders.

““You ... didn’t ... have ... to ... be ... so ... mean!”

“I said stop that. Please.”

“What’s five dollars ... against the happiness ... of a child?”

“Alright,” the man said. He reached into the hip pockets of his jeans and pulled out a wad of green, red and brown bills. Not a blue five or a purple ten to be seen.

“I don’t suppose you can make change,” he said.

Rose sniffed and shook her head, slowly for maximum effect. “You would have been my first sale.”

“Okay,” the man sighed. “How much for the whole carton?”

“Fifty dollars.” Sniff. Sniff. “There are twelve boxes, but if you buy ten, you get two for free.”

“Fine,” the man said. He slipped a fifty dollar bill into Rose’s hand and stuffed the rest of the money back into his pocket. “Just give me my cookies and go.”

Rose dabbed her eyes and pushed the cookie carton toward the doorway. The man nodded and bent forward, reaching for it.

Rose moved in with a vicious palm strike. The sleeve of her Buttercup jacket cracked like a polyester bullwhip as the ball of her hand connected right below his nose. The man sucked air and dropped to his knees. He teetered for a second, then flopped backward into the house. Rose stepped over the threshold, cookie carton in hand, careful not to trip over the sickly pale feet pointed straight up at the ceiling. She closed the door behind her.

She had to work fast. She fished her hand sanitizer from the cookie carton and applied a liberal dose to the palm that had struck the man’s nose. She then grabbed a pair of latex gloves and pulled them on. Kneeling next to the groaning man, she braced his head with her left hand and used her right to press hard against the soft tissue just below his ear. A tiny pop confirmed that she had activated the pressure point. When he stopped squirming, she turned him onto his stomach.

She retrieved a roll of duct tape and two zip ties from the carton. Rip, zip and lock, just like in basic training. He wouldn’t be going anywhere any time soon. She threw the soiled gloves into the cookie carton and attached her com unit.

“Aster, do you copy?”

Aster’s voice crackled through the com unit.

“This is Aster. Comm code please.”

“Foxglove,” Rose said.

“Code confirmed. Status please.”

“All clear. I am on premise, and target is secured.”

“Please tell me you made a positive ID,” Aster said. “There’s no room for error.”

“All markers present and accounted for,” Rose said. “Blue spade tattoo, facial skin tag and elongated second toe. If this isn’t Hector Barrow, then I’m the Abominable Snowman.”

“You’re sure no one saw you?”

“Not a soul. Powell Road is like a ghost town today.”

“Well done,” Aster said. “Your first cookie sale, to no less than Hector Barrow. There’s a full membership crest waiting for you here.”

Rose was barely able to contain her glee. “Thank you! Anything else I should do?”

“Do?” Aster chuckled. “You found Barrow and took him out before he could trigger any alarms. The client can handle it from here. I’m sending them the coordinates now. Better get out before they show up.”

“Understood. Buttercup out.”

Rose removed her com unit and placed it back into the carton. A casual glance at the hallway mirror confirmed that her sash, neckerchief and beret were still perfectly neat. She picked up the carton and nudged the door open with her foot, careful not to leave fingerprints. The sky rumbled with helicopters closing in fast. Barrow was in for a real treat when he woke up.

Rose pulled the sleeve of her Buttercup jacket over her hand before grasping the door handle. She took a final look at the motionless form of Hector Barrow, a smile tugging at the corner of her mouth. She closed the door without a sound.

“Enjoy your stinking cookies,” Rose said, “and have a Buttercup day.”

Waltz

by Cristina Rizzuto

Frozen citrus twilight
tinged the city's fading sight;
sleeping willow tendrils wrap around me in
this hourglass,
this naked January.

I promised a dance to Winter

and I remember
that the river, though cold,
continues
to flow, to breathe
beneath the ice.

** inspired by Jersey Creek Park in Vaughan*

Refugia

by Gregory Monteith

Where is Scotland in me?
Near two-hundred years ago
My family left the braes of Menteith,
The wooded glens and silent lochs,
The lake-lady of Scott,
And the southern Highlands,
All left behind them,
Hungering,
For a better life.

What did my grandfather's great grandfather carry
With him on the boat to Canada,
For five generations to give to me?
I return across the sea,
And settle my hands in the Lake of Menteith,
To taste the water for my origins,
Struggling to realize my face in the depths,
But only to see,
A ripple amid the endless,
Pulling away from me.

Where is Scotland in me?
I look first to the land, the water, the air.
Is it in the words of sacred bards,
In the piper's cry,
Or the rebel's stare?
Is it fibered in my clan's tartan
Or whispered in a Highland stream?
Is it written in the family motto, Ne Oublie?
Did my ancestors bring it with them
As they followed the conqueror William,
Leaving my origins across the channel

In Normandy?
Can the trail ever be found
Whether my kin were slaves
Or nobility,
Our name an honoured title or traitor's brand,
Answering nothing
But my weathered psyche,
Which seeks an origin
In the sinking sand?

Where is Scotland in me?
The answer stands with the last Scots pine,
Felled, felled, but in me.

Water Carriers

by Gregory Monteith

Hamilton,
The city of waterfalls,
Where some sixty rivers, creeks and streams
Cascade over the escarpment,
Filling the night air with trickling dreams,
Meandering like the Bruce
Through forest gardens.

The water falls,
a continuous flow,
cleansing the earth
in a restless rhythm
of sunlight reflections,
dipping into pools
where we may wash,
reminded we are alive and present
in flashing mirrors,
part of the exchange,
the communication of
rivers, streams, and creeks
carried on by cliffs,
descending to the depths,
seeking union
where all waters may join.
The Earth's blood,
flowing from all directions to the core,
And circle once more,
where bodies, storms, and waves are made,
the ancient mill on nature's wheel.

The clarity of the water is ours to preserve.

If we are to rely on nature's reflecting waters
To recognize ourselves among the machines,
Who reflect not
Who drink not,
And cry not,
Then the waters that form Hamilton's carriers
Are only as clear as the minds who forget,
The clarity of the water is ours to carry,
Ours to preserve,
Ours to bless.

Mothstocity

by Tamara Hecht

Nature. I've always had a love-hate relationship with nature. I love fresh air and forests and rivers and sunrises. I hate bugs. Of course, bugs are important. They are nature's cleanup crew. They are pollinators and soil-turners and food for much prettier animals. So, can't complain. They still freak me out, though.

Especially moths. I can't deal with moths. Even the small ones are like grotesque behemoths from my worst nightmares.

Do you know what else freaked me out when I was younger? Volunteer work. Not that I don't support the idea of benevolently working to assist a worthy cause. As an adult, I do quite a bit of volunteer work to help those in need and defend what I believe in. However, when I was a teenager, I was rather uncomfortable about anything that took me out of my usual routine. Life was supposed to be simple: go to school, come home, get your homework over with ASAP, and then waste time on the computer. Right? Right. So, when my year was told that we'd have to complete 40 hours of community service in order to graduate, I took objection. It was bad enough that we were the guinea pig year for the Ontario public school system's new curriculum. It was even worse that we'd be facing double the competition to get into university, thanks to the "double cohort" that resulted from the decision to remove grade 13. Now we were also getting voluntold.

"Mandatory community service," I lamented to my grade 11 physics teacher. "A fitting punishment for criminals and high school students."

He laughed. This did nothing to remedy my predicament, of course. I still had to find some volunteer work to do. I had already served a few hours as a reading buddy. That was okay, I guess. I got to work in a library, and libraries are cool, so that was fine. There were just two problems. One, the kid they'd paired me up with was a little, um, obstinate, and I wasn't so great with the whole "assertive leadership" thing. I wanted him to read, he wanted to play Pokémon, and once we had read all three Pokémon books in the library system, we found ourselves at an impasse. The other issue with the reading buddy gig was that it only offered a couple of hours at a time, once per week. It was a little slow for my accomplishment-driven, get-it-over-with-quickly mentality. Therefore, when my stint as a reading buddy ended, I sought a different way to complete my remaining volunteer hours.

I went to Kortright. The Kortright Centre for Conservation is a place of fond memories for me. It was the site of many a kindergarten field trip. It was one of the places where I learned to love nature and became fascinated with the science of how it all works. Yes, Kortright would be the perfect place for me to complete my volunteer requirement. Besides, I'd be doing whole days at a time. That ought to rack up those hours.

The volunteer coordinators were happy to have me. They were kind and friendly, and soon plans were in motion for me to start my work with them. I reflected on how nice it would be to give back to the place that had already given me so much. Furthermore, of all the good causes in the world, protecting the environment is the most universal, and perhaps the most urgent. I knew I was on the right path. Not to mention, it would be fun for me to work amongst the trees and rivers and hills... and it was wintertime, so there would be no bugs.

It was soon the month of March, and you know what that means. Maple syrup time! For me, it was a celebration of the convergence of my love of nature, my Canadian pride, and my unrelenting sweet tooth. Maple syrup was 100% pure goodness in every sense of the word. And it just so happened that Kortright needed volunteers for the Maple Syrup Festival. And thus began my dream job.

Kortright teaches the public about maple syrup production by demonstrating two different methods. One of them is the modern way. There is an on-site sugar shack with large glass windows so that people can view the inner workings. The other way, the way to which I gleefully was assigned, was the old fashioned method. This involved harvesting sap and pouring it into a cauldron that hangs over an open flame. It boils and boils and boils and boils until it is one fortieth its original volume. The watery, faintly sweet sap is thusly condensed into syrup. Part of this dream job of mine involved dressing up in a pioneer costume. Not to brag, but I kind of rocked that look. Another part of this job involved working in a natural forest clearing, in the cool March air, accompanied by a crackling fire and the heavenly smells of maple syrup and wood smoke. Just when I thought it couldn't get any better, I also got to explain the syrup-making process to the public. It didn't matter that I would give that talk dozens of times. I loved it. The science, the history, the impact on Canada's culture – I was happy to talk about it and the people were happy to listen. Did you know that European settlers in Canada used maple syrup as their primary sweetener because sugar cane was so expensive? Did you know that syrup-making was first developed by this very region's Indigenous peoples, and they didn't even have metal pots in which to cook down the sap. Instead, they heated stones in a fire and used antlers to transfer them into hollowed-out logs filled with sap. Did you know that Canada is the world's largest producer of maple syrup – okay, you probably already knew that one.

One idyllic day, as I gave out samples of freshly made syrup to the eager visitors, another one of the volunteers called me over. I forget his name. I remember countless facts about identifying sugar maples and the pattern of freezing and thawing temperatures, but I tend to forget people's names. Let's call him Ralph. Ralph was standing by the wooden shelter that housed our maple syrup cauldrons when they weren't in use. Like me, he was dressed head to toe in pioneer gear. He was also carrying a thick wooden stick, from which several buckets of sap were hanging. Once again, he called me over. I exchanged glances with... let's call her Marcy. Marcy was stirring the syrup as it cooked down. She assured me she could multitask until I got back from helping Ralph with the buckets. Hurrying over the slightly marshy soil, I joined Ralph by the wooden shelter. He led me to a spot behind the wooden shelter where we began opening the buckets. One by one, the lids came off, and the sap was poured into a barrel for storage until the next cauldron became available. Soon, it was down to the last bucket. I tugged at the lid. It was stuck. Normally, these lids are fairly loose-fitting, but the hinge on this one had contracted in the cold or something. Ralph reached over to help, but I was determined to get that lid open by myself. Concentrating my strength, I gripped the lid and yanked at it. It came off, and I steadied myself just in time to avoid spilling a single drop. I looked into the bucket... and screamed.

There, floating in the sap, was the bloated body of a hairy white moth. Its wings were limp and jagged. A pin-like leg spiked off at an odd angle. I ran away, screaming. When I rushed out from behind the wooden shelter, everyone stared at me. In that moment, I ceased to be the cool, knowledgeable maple syrup expert. I was just a pudgy high school kid in a pioneer bonnet, shrieking at the top of my lungs for indeterminable reasons. Fear was stronger than embarrassment. The embarrassment would come later, in wandering reminders, for years to come. However, in that

moment, I had no objective other than to escape the horrifying moth.

When I regained my composure, I apologized for startling the crowd. I made self-deprecating remarks, commenting on how I'm such a city slicker and couldn't handle nature, and subsequently pretended to be fascinated upon noticing a squirrel. Not that anyone would fall for that. All the visitors and volunteers were familiar with squirrels, and rightly doubted that I might not be.

Still miring in embarrassment, I kept my head down as I poured maple syrup into sample cups for the visitors. Ralph and Marcy went about their jobs, not talking to me. Likely, this was because sap collecting and syrup stirring were tasks that required attention, but I still took it as some sort of personal criticism. Forcing a smile, I looked up at the next set of visitors to come my way. It was a young couple. I cheerfully explained Fun Facts about the antiquated syrup-making method. My embarrassment ebbed as they listened. They nodded thoughtfully and eyed the sample cups. The man helped himself to two and passed one of them to his wife.

“Come, dear,” he said, in a quintessentially British accent. “Let's be rugged Canadians.”

The wife made a face and shrunk back from the liquid she had just witnessed coming out of a tree.

“I don't want to be a rugged Canadian,” she said, pushing her husband's hand away. I grinned, allowing myself to bask in the totally unfounded stereotype that somehow meant I was outdoorsy. Just then, the ground began to rumble. Everyone exchanged glances in concern. A little girl tugged on her father's sleeve and asked,

“Daddy? Is that an earthquake?”

A white blur shot up from behind the wooden shelter, creating a powerful upward wind. The ensuing roar sounded like a plane taking off. People’s hats and mitts were scattered on the breeze, and we all looked up to see a huge dark shape in the sky. My heart lurched. Fluttering above us was a grotesque, titanic mo... It was a mo... It was a giant moth! Its wings were splayed in layers of ruffles, heaving and unfolding like a Lovecraftian monstrosity. It twitched and jittered, its unnatural movements leading it down toward our forest clearing. Marcy urged the visitors to hide in the wooden shelter as Ralph hurried to secure the rigging that suspended the cauldrons over the fire. I just stood transfixed. The moth circled overhead, blocking out the sun and darkening the sky once more. It shuddered as it swooped. Fear gripped me. The mere sight of my worst nightmare made me feel like I was going to die.

“Tamara, move it!” Marcy called, signalling for me to take cover in the wooden shelter. I couldn’t snap out of my trance. Moth. Moth! What do moths do? They flutter. They scare me. I don’t know anything else. Moths are one of the few things in nature I’m too grossed out to study. I couldn’t even handle the movie about Mothra, and I love the Godzilla movies. Maybe that was the secret; to drain its life energy, or barring that, we could just shoot it down with a nuclear missile. Forget world peace – there’s a moth!

Just as I was wondering if anyone had NORAD on speed-dial, I thought of something better. Hitching up my pioneer skirt, I ran across the uneven ground toward the wooden shelter. In the leftmost back corner was a pile of firewood. With energy I didn’t know I had, I grabbed log after log and ran toward the fire. Back and forth, back and forth, between the shelter and the fire, I piled on more and more logs. They quickly caught flame. Soon, the

entire clearing was a giant bonfire. I crossed my fingers and hoped that my plan would work. A gust of wind tore across the clearing, thankfully not in a direction that would guide the fire toward the wooden shelter. The moth swooped down, hideous and hairy. It must have caught sight of the fire, because it altered its course and raced toward me. Crying, I fell backwards. Muddy earth coated my pioneer costume and soaked through the snow pants I had on underneath. The moth rushed toward the flame like some kind of... thing that is drawn to something. I don't know; the simile fails me. Shrieking in an unearthly timbre, the moth burnt to a crisp. Its ashes blew away on the wind. The clearing fell silent, save for the crackling of the flames and the returning sounds of bird songs. One by one, the visitors ventured forth from the wooden shelter.

“You saved us,” said a little old lady. The little girl and her father went to fetch their hats from the ground where they had landed. The British woman glared at her husband as he shrugged. I was, in my heroic moment, still lying on the ground and sobbing hysterically. Frowning, Marcy looked to the skies.

“It’s a shame,” she said, clicking her tongue. “That was a miracle of nature.”

“It wasn’t going to do you any harm,” Ralph grumbled. My embarrassment from before made a resurgence and hit me one thousandfold.

“Sorry,” I said. “I guess I’m not used to... Well... Hey, look, a squirrel.”

Perhaps forgiving me, Ralph and Marcy extended their hands to help me up off the ground. With muddy sleeves, I fruitlessly tried to brush myself off. There was still a whole afternoon left

in my shift, and I needed those volunteer hours. I spent the time greeting visitors and telling them Fun Facts about maple syrup.

Fun Fact: The majority of Canada's maple syrup is harvested in Quebec.

Fun Fact: Maple syrup is graded according to how much light passes through it. The lighter the syrup, the lighter the maple taste.

Fun Fact: With the exception of the moth monster, this story is 100% true.

Thornhill Kitchen, First Generation, After and Still

by Marilyn Kleiman

On Sunday mornings, my mother sat
At the kitchen table,
Vinyl chair made rude noises.
Radio sopranos hit highs,
Opening up her sealed memories
Of burning villages,
Young girls not yet loved,
Women in floral dresses
Who flapped by into a world of ghosts.

Her features soft with mourning,
Father entered her Sunday world, carelessly,
His face hard with grief.
Those winter grey eyes
Flicked rejection
of her comfort, the music
the memories,

I watched , ever vigilant,
As a first generation,
As my mother froze to death,
Sitting perfect,
still
On a blistering morning.

Woodpecker Woodpecker...

by Dr. Sigal Haber in Hebrew

Translated by R. Berman

In the deep of the woods I met a woodpecker
hard at work
like a busy fact-checker
waving in air he landed on a trunk
and like an acrobat climbing a circus wall
ascended a branch
and from his throat came
a loooong and continuous sound.

Woodpecker, I said, wait and linger
are you a woodpecker, or a singer?
Not a singer, just in love.
I see her, with wondrous red plume
I call to her and wish to be her groom

On a walnut tree a woodpecker I met
his hoarse voice echoed loud
Woodpecker, I said, tell the tale
are you a woodpecker, or a nightingale?
No, just a sentinel
This shall be my home and woe onto the foe
who harms my love.

Knocking hammering striking drilling
so fast, so swift,
too hard to count.
I said woodpecker, wood-breaker
are you a cabinet-maker?
Not a cabinet-maker but a builder
I shall burrow in the timber
I'll build a house so great

one much larger than a crate.

His head like a hammer strikes like thunder
on branches and limbs
tears my head asunder.
But the rhythm is simple
a uniform meter
no orchestra here
just a solo singer

And in the fall
amidst the raindrops love did bloom
He raps tick-tick
she rhymes tack-tack
a staccato duet
harmony galore

Woodpecker, you're a star, a singer you are!
Not a singer just making noises.
Like a rattle.

The Changeling

by Nanci M Pattenden

“You’re one of them, “Doctor Kumeatel said. “We’ll get you ... eventually.”

His words swirled through Jenny’s mind. His breath smelled like a decomposing corpse, hot against her ear. She struggled to get away.

“Leave me alone. I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Jenny crashed to the floor beside her bed, jolting her awake. The sheets tangled around her legs. Another nightmare. The third in as many days. She kicked her lanky legs, trying to free herself, but the sheets bound her legs even tighter. She rolled away from the bed and lay still, trying to catch her breath and wake up fully. She remembered what her mother taught her and took a deep breath, then another, and another. Her heart rate slowly returned to normal and she began to unravel the mummy-like wrapping. As she threw the sheets to the side she realized her mother wasn’t there. *Strange, Mother had come running the other times. Why isn’t she here now?*

The recurring nightmares had stopped almost four years ago, a few months after her thirteenth birthday, and Jenny had all but forgotten them. She remembered at the time asking her mother what the doctor meant. One of them? One of what?

It had started with a headache that wouldn’t go away. Her mother took her to the doctor’s office but a new doctor saw them. Theirs had suddenly retired. Unlike the old family doctor, his replacement was rude and felt a little ‘off’ to Jenny. He made her uncomfortable. Her mother had stopped suddenly when she saw him, grabbing Jenny’s arm and trying to pull her out of the office.

Jenny yelped in pain causing her mother to look at her, but she didn’t loosen her grip.

“My headache?” Jenny reminded her mother. They both turned and looked at the doctor. He sat behind his desk, smirking.

“Ah, you know of me then,” he said. A statement rather than a question. He gestured to the chairs by his desk. “What’s this about a headache?”

He gave Jenny a quick check up, then drew blood, more than she expected. Five vials. Jenny almost fainted when she got up to leave. Her mother didn’t question why the doctor did it himself or give her time to recover before dragging her out.

They’d been called back a week later when the results were ready. The doctor had written out a prescription and handed it to her mother, then leaned close to Jenny and whispered those disturbing words.

Three days after starting the pills, Jenny was rushed to the Mackenzie Vaughan Hospital. They said the prescription was too strong and her body couldn’t cope. The hospital contacted the doctor’s office and a new, milder prescription was phoned into the pharmacy. Jenny ended up back at the hospital a week later. Her mother flushed the remaining pills.

Jenny heard her parents arguing one evening soon after the last incident. She didn’t normally eavesdrop, but she heard the doctor’s name.

“He knows about us. I’m certain he’s a hunter and he’s trying to kill Jenny,” her mother said. “It’s starting. We’ll have to tell her.”

“No, not yet,” her father replied. “She hasn’t exhibited any of the signs. It could be years yet, if at all. She’s only thirteen. Way too young.”

Jenny dropped to her knees. *Trying to kill me? It’s starting?* She started to sob.

“Mommy? Mommy!”

Her mother ran up the stairs and dropped beside Jenny.

“What’s wrong with me? Why does the doctor want me dead?” Jenny leaned into her mother and they wrapped their arms around each other.

“Hush baby. Nothing’s wrong with you and no one is going to harm you. Don’t worry. Mommy and Daddy will take care of you.”

The nightmares began that night, and her mother came running. Shortly after she left, Jenny heard voices in the living room and crept part way down the stairs. She recognized the voices of several neighbours and once again heard the doctor’s name. Kumeatel, one of them said. Ironic. She scooted back up the steps as the neighbours made their way to the front door.

“Don’t worry,” one said. “He’ll be dealt with. We’ve already sent for a replacement.”

A week later the doctor was involved in a hit and run. He wasn’t killed, but he was paralyzed and his vocal chords damaged. His practice was taken over the next day, and Kumeatel was moved into a care facility. Her father said the doctor got what was coming to him, and Jenny remembered what her neighbour said. No one was ever charged.

The nightmares eventually stopped and the incident forgotten. *Until now.* On the eve of her seventeenth birthday it was starting. Something felt wrong. Whatever it was jostled her memory of the doctor and his ominous warning.

Why hasn’t someone come? It was the middle of the night and Jenny was certain she’d screamed out loud. She wasn’t as close to her mother now that she was becoming an adult. Most of her time was spent with her friends, talking to them instead of her parents. At the moment she felt like she was thirteen again and wanted her mother.

Jenny kicked the covers out of her way and slammed the bedroom door as she made her way down the dark hall towards the bathroom. She turned on the cold water tap and cupped her hands, bringing the water to her face. Her skin didn’t feel right. Something was definitely wrong. Jenny switched on the light and went back to the sink.

Seeing her reflection, she opened her mouth but no sound came out. Slowly she raised a hand and touched her face. The light flickered. Several translucent scales flaked off and fell to the sink and counter. Jenny's head banged against the toilet as she fell unconscious to the floor.

When she came to, it was still dark and she was covered in sweat despite the chill in the air. Jenny stumbled into the shower, turned the water on and stripped off her PJs, leaving them in a soggy heap. The water refreshed her. When she reached to turn off the tap she noticed the scales now covered her arms.

Was this what my parents had discussed years earlier? Why hadn't they told me? She felt lightheaded and leaned against the shower tiles before she fainted again. When she came to, Jenny balled her fists and banged them against the shower wall. Her mind raced. One moment she was frightened, the next angry. She started to shiver and stepped out to dry off. Tiny scales flaked off and a few clung to the towel. She wrapped the towel around her body and stepped into the hallway.

"Mom? Dad?" No answer. "Mommy?" Panic set in. "Where are you? What's happening to me?"

She ran down to their room and flicked on the light. The bed was empty. She glanced at the digital clock on the small table beside the bed. It was just past three thirty. *No wonder it's so dark out.*

She went to the top of the stairs and stopped. All the lights downstairs were out.

"Mommy, where are you?"

Jenny leaned against the wall. The towel rode up as she slid down the step. She hugged her legs and started to rock.

Jenny called for her parents a few more times. *Where could they be at this hour?* The pool! They often went for late night swims. She stood and the towel fell to her feet. Cold and wanting to hide the scales, she scrambled back to her room to dress. A baggy long-sleeved t-shirt and a pair of lightweight track pants were the first things she found. They covered her deformity and wouldn't rub too much.

She picked up her one-eyed teddy bear and hugged him. “What’s happening to me Mr. Snuggles?” He didn’t answer, not that she expected him to, but then again, she hadn’t expected to wake up covered in scales.

Jenny’s legs started to tingle. Then she felt tiny pinpricks as though her legs had fallen asleep and the circulation was coming back, only sharper. Her arms itched too. She pulled up a pant leg and discovered that the thin translucent scales had reached her ankles.

Join us Jenny.

“Mom? Where are you?” Jenny tossed Mr. Snuggles on the bed, ran down the stairs and through the house, turning on lights as she went from room to room. Flipping on the back light, she peeked through the window, hopeful, but the pool was empty and still.

Join us Jenny. Both parent’s voices rang through her head.

Come to us Jenny. Follow your instincts. Jenny couldn’t understand how she could hear her parents calling when they weren’t home, but she knew it really was them.

Jenny found a scrunchie, pulled her long wet red hair into a ponytail and looped it through her Vaughan Vikings baseball cap. The kitchen clock read three forty five. *Now what? Follow my instincts? What did that mean?*

She pulled a chair away from the table and sat listening to the silence. Her mother often meditated and tried to teach Jenny. ‘Clear your mind’ she would say. But how? She leaned back and closed her eyes. Nothing. She banged her fists on the table.

“I can’t do this,” she yelled. Jenny looked towards the side door and got up. *I need to go, but where?*

She opened the door and stepped out. *Strange, the door wasn’t locked.* The car was still in the driveway, so she knew her parents couldn’t have gone far.

“Why don’t I feel afraid any more? Mom? Can you hear me?” Her voice sounded loud in the quiet neighbourhood.

Join us Jenny.

She hopped on her bike and stopped at the curb. Left or right? Her heart rate increased. "Help me, Mommy."

Jenny got a sudden case of the butterflies and pushed off. Instincts? Something told her to head down Vellore Park Avenue. She stared straight ahead, paying no attention to her surroundings. She almost fell off when someone honked his horn as he sped past. She stopped and looked around. St. Mary's was across the road. Where to now?

Jenny, hurry, her mother's voice urged.

She continued down the road, but it became more difficult to turn the pedals. Her legs burned. Turning left on Lormel Gate, both parents voices called again. Jenny could now hear them, not just in her head. Something splashed in the pond at the corner of Lormel and Weston. The pond was off limits and the sound was too loud for geese or ducks. Had her parents fallen in? Jenny's pulse quickened and she tried to peddle faster, but her legs weren't working the way they should. She stopped by the mailboxes and fell as she dismounted. *What's wrong with my legs?*

Dragging herself, she crawled through the bullrushes down to the pond. Flipping onto her back Jenny clawed at the track pants, trying to free her trapped legs. Her fingers found a tear in the pant leg. She poked a finger though and pulled. The fabric stretched but didn't rip.

"Relax Jenny." Her mother's voice seemed to come from behind her. "Remember our lessons."

Jenny stopped struggling and took a deep breath, but the pain was excruciating. She clawed at the fabric, wriggling in the dirt and stones around the shoreline. Exhausted, she finally got her pants down and over her now deformed feet.

"What the ...?" The scales covering her legs had thickened and were three times the size of those on the rest of her body. The moonlight reflected off them in a rainbow of colours. Slowly she lifted the bottom of her tee. She shimmered.

"Hurry Jenny. Get in the water," her father urged.

She turned and saw her parents in the pond, not far from the shore. They weren't in any danger. She looked further from the shore and saw some of her parents' friends and a few school mates. They were all beckoning her to join them.

Why was everyone in the pond? No one is supposed to be in there.

"Give in to it Jenny," one of her friends called. "It only hurts the first time."

Jenny looked down at her legs and watched in terror as her hips changed shape, tearing her panties. Then her legs fused together.

"Get in the water, now," her father urged.

She couldn't tear her eyes away from her morphing torso, but she started to drag herself backwards. Her father moved in closer, reached under her arms and pulled her in. Jenny floated on her back, supported by both parents.

The pain decreased gradually and her friends and neighbours formed a circle around her. As the transformation completed, fear was replaced by euphoria.

"You're safe now Jenny," her father said. "We don't know how Dr. Kumeatel broke through our protection, but it's back in place, stronger than ever. No need to worry any more."

Jenny smiled, flipped over, and with a flick of her tail dove under the water, broke through the circle, and swam to the centre of the pond.

Frost Quake

by Debbie Ouellet

They say the boom came
from the Old Mother cracking her bones,
a dismaying thing
when you're not sure what made you jump
in the middle of the damned night.

As if the finger-numbing cold
wasn't enough,
or the iffy electricity,
off and on like a teenage romance.

If you ask me,
the old girl has a sense of humour.
We were expecting Old Nick,
the clatter of tiny hooves,
a shimmy down the chimney perhaps.

Instead we got the witch of winter,
decked out in her frigid best,
making sure not one us forgets
who's really in charge here.

Poem Note:

Cryoseism, also known as a frost quake; caused by the rapid expansion and contraction of frozen ground. Due to record low temperatures, Southern Ontario experienced numerous frost quakes on December 24th 2013 and again on December 30th waking many from their sleep fearing there'd been an earthquake or tree felled nearby.

Robin's Hood

by Darcy Miller

I looked outside my window what a ruckus I could hear

It seems a multitude of robins were tweeting frantically in fear

Boldly I went out and asked, whatever was the matter

Why have you returned so soon it's too cold for all this patter

Oh Missus it's so awful

When we tried to fly across the border

They claimed we violated air space in accordance with the new world order

No longer were we welcome because we had beady eyes

Apparently this led them to believing we were spies

Politely I explained that we must travel south for our survival

If we have to turn back in this bitter cold some may never see arrival

Look, they said, we don't believe in nature and you're in a no fly zone

So stop whining like a bunch of birds and flap your way back home

Our law's official quite judicial and very very sound

If you don't comply we won't hesitate to shoot you to the ground

After listening quite attentively to Mr. Robins sad account
I assured him that as Canadians there's no problem we can't
surmount
After pondering we talked at length finally reaching a solution
Then we charted out the details for a practical execution
Don't worry I said, we have plenty of food and I'll find you a
place to stay
In Canada this land we love we'll rise above the mindless fray
None of this insanity will last too long, you'll see
I'm an optimistic naturalist believing that the truth shall set us
free
Free to fly, free to choose, free to find the answers
There are many different kinds of cures for these particular types
of cancers
Just puff your chest out proudly and sing your tweets out loudly
For all of this will surely pass much like the sands of the hour
glass

Thornhill's a'Growing

by Howard Isenberg

Thornhill's a'growing
each year adds more and more
the people are a'coming
in leaps and bounds galore.

In the early eighties
there was but twenty K
and now with growth aplenty
adding hundreds every day.

Over 300K live here
the population swells
with houses and condos near
it's here families dwell.

Good restaurants abound
while shops do line the street
services can be found
there's places for friends to meet.

The city above the city
now shines a welcome light
commute if you need to
suburbia feels so right.

Please Do Not Feed the Mermaids

by Lacey D. Mermaid

My name used to be Lacey. At least, I think it was. I don't remember. I'm already forgetting my previous life.

I used to be a human like you. I lived on the land in a city called Thornhill. Then one day, a magical fairy came up to me and asked me if I wanted to be a mermaid. Just so you know, this was a really long time ago and I was not great at decision-making. As you've probably guessed, I took the deal. Come to think of it, I don't know what the deal was, exactly. The fairy offered to turn me into a mermaid. She didn't want anything in return. Maybe I was wish-granting target practice, or she had to do it for free like it was some kind of fairy internship.

Anyway, now I'm a mermaid. It's terrible. You'd think it would be great, swimming around all glamorous with shining scales and flowing hair and a voice that would put everyone else to shame on karaoke night. But no. My scales are kind of a greyish brown. It's for camouflage. Camouflage from what, I don't know. I live in this pond; there's nothing that can hurt me in here. My hair doesn't flow elegantly. It's still as short and awkward as it was before, and now it's constantly covered in pond slime and little bits of bulrushes. Worst of all, I can't leave my pond. You know, because I traded my legs for a tail. That was stupid.

So, here I am, trapped in Oakbank Pond. I guess I could do worse. Oakbank Pond is a nice little place here in the "historic" part of Thornhill. I don't know what makes it historic, but there

is a plaque nearby that tells me so. I'm here at Oakbank and Centre, so it's close to shopping – if I could go – and there are nice houses nearby – so I can tell people I live in a nice area without actually having to worry about property taxes.

When I breach the surface, I am surrounded by fuzzy bulrushes and the sky above me is framed by lovely willow trees. The land around me is marshy. Beyond that, there's a railing, so human visitors to the pond don't fall in. There's a little wooden path and a couple of benches, but people don't come by too often. There's not much going on at the surface. Not to say that there is anything interesting happening underneath.

Under the water, it's brown. That's it. Just brown.

The only thing that makes this place bad – I mean, really bad – is the goose poo. There is goose poo EVERYWHERE. It's on the wooden path, which is probably why people don't come here often. It's on the ground. It's in the water WHERE I LIVE! You can't look anywhere without seeing a bunch of smushy green logs smeared all over every surface. May I remind you, I am doomed to live here forever.

Beside the pond, there's a sign that asks people not to feed the geese. Apparently, breadcrumbs are a poor substitute for the grasses or whatever geese are supposed to eat. Also, all this poo is raising the level of phosphorus in the water. I don't know what that means for the pond. All I know is, this pond is my bedroom, living room, kitchen, and bathroom, and I share it with a plethora of goose poo. Really regretting that mermaid thing now.

Stupid geese. I hate them. I hate their honking, their hissing, their stupid grey bodies and their stupid black necks and that weird upside-down white stripe thing they have on their stupid

faces. Waddling around on their stupid skinny legs and honking and honking and *always honking*. They are the worst neighbours a girl could ask for. Imagine if your neighbours ran into your house, shouted at each other incessantly, and went to the bathroom on your floor. That is my life now.

I just want to get away from them. I could sink under the water and stay there for hours, enjoying the peace and quiet but not enjoying the murky brownness. There's algae in here. It smells bad. That's the downside to having gills. Imagine if every time you tried to breathe, you also had to smell, taste, and *drink* whatever you were breathing. And you thought downtown Toronto was bad. Actually, no, downtown Toronto is still worse than this.

I guess it's not all bad, here in Oakbank Pond. There are lots of turtles. There's one really big one who I see from time to time. Most of them are tiny, though. They're red-eared sliders and they're super cute. I think. Maybe. I haven't seen a puppy or a kitten since I turned into a mermaid, so maybe my barometer for cute is slightly off. But I like the red-eared sliders. There's one in particular who follows me around sometimes. I think of him as a friend.

So, here I am, swimming around my nasty brown pond, dodging bits of goose poo and looking for my red-eared slider friend, and then something drops into the water. It's near the railing, where people would be on the rare occasion they'd come to visit. A bunch of us – that's me, some turtles, and a school of tiny fish – swim to the area where the crumbs are dropping. I have to keep way below the surface. Thankfully, the murky brown water hides me well. Above me, the turtles examine the offering. A water strider passes overhead and gets gobbled up by one of the turtles. There's nothing for me.

I'm hungry.

Usually, I have to eat grass, which is drenched in nasty pond water. Sometimes I eat a small fish because I desperately need the protein, but it's not fun. I remind myself how much I loved sashimi when I was human and tell myself that this is basically the same thing. Even fresher, actually, because not only do I not have a way of cooking it, I don't even have a way of killing it. So... yeah... I kind of have to use the Ozzy Osbourne method. I figure that's more humane than leaving it to suffocate on the land or whacking it against the wooden railing when no one's around. Hey, I don't like to do it! This is survival.

And as I'm wondering how long I can possibly last without taking another fish, something drops into the water right next to my face. It's big. This isn't a tiny breadcrumb meant to draw creatures to the surface for viewing. This is someone's snack – a real human snack – that was accidentally dropped. I think it's a... It's hard to see in the dark water, but... Could it be? Hastily, I snatch the item and swim away to the back of the pond. Hiding amongst the bulrushes, I examine my prize.

There it is, in all its pond-drenched glory. A donut! Okay, so it's half-eaten and soaked with pond water, but it is a real donut. I haven't had a donut in ages, and this is my favourite kind; a Tim Horton's Vanilla Dip. The colour runs off the sprinkles and the donut quickly disintegrates in my hands. I raise the donut above the surface to keep it safe. As I swim toward shallower water, I am forced to dodge a floating island of goose poo.

Something inside me snaps.

Maybe it's the hunger. Maybe it's the irrational rage at seeing my favourite donut destroyed. Maybe I just can't stand the sight of goose poo anymore, and this was the poo that broke the

camel's back. Don't picture that. In any case, I am done with being a mermaid. With a fistful of melting sugar paste, I crawl out of the pond. The bank is grassy and littered with yet more goose poo. The weak and watery sun feels way too hot on my skin. Every blade of grass cuts and pinches. This body is not meant to be on land. I don't care. I crawl and crawl, using my frail mermaid arms to haul my heavy mermaid tail. The Tim's Vanilla Dip becomes a streak of gooey sand inside my fist.

At last, I reach the pavement. I look over my shoulder. For the first time since becoming a mermaid, I leave the nest of bulrushes behind me. Beneath me is only black asphalt. Squinting, I look around. I'm on that nice street with fancy-looking houses and a road that is perpetually under construction. I hear traffic beyond it. Maybe I don't know exactly where to go from here, but I know I need to find that fairy and make her change me back. I make my way along an endless narrow sidewalk. Crawling down the street, I eventually reach a busy corner. People are walking or cycling by. No one notices me. Which is weird, right? I mean, okay, so most people are only looking at their phones, but, seriously, no one sees this?

I get a flash of pain. My poor scales are bleeding from being dragged along the sidewalk. I have to stop. I sit on the corner and try to catch my breath as the traffic zooms by. Eventually, a big blue Viva bus comes rumbling along. It stops. Opens its door. The driver looks at me expectantly. With the raise of an eyebrow, he asks if I want to get on. Do I? Can I?

Even if I do get on, I wouldn't know where to go. That fairy could be anywhere. Maybe I am stuck as a mermaid forever. While I am having my existential crisis, the bus driver coughs meaningfully. Now that I'm here, I guess I could go anywhere, even if I'm a mermaid.

Let's be smart about this.

I could go down to Lake Ontario, but that might not be much better than my little Oakbank Pond. I'd have a lot more room, but the pollution would be worse. And there'd be hipsters and tourists and drugs and all kinds of poo. Besides, I don't want to live by the Waterfront. It's so pretentious.

Maybe I could go north instead. Yeah. I could go to Lake Simcoe or Wasaga Beach. I wouldn't mind living at Wasaga Beach forever.

Just then, I hear a splash coming from the pond. It's odd that I can hear this over the traffic and the grumbling of the bus engine (and the driver, and the passengers), but my mermaid ears are finely attuned to hear water sounds. I hear the splash again. My friend, the red-eared slider, is looking for me. I know it sounds weird, considering how much I hate being trapped in the pond, but... now I kind of don't want to leave. When faced with the prospect of never seeing my turtle friend again, I'm too sad. I'd miss that little guy.

Uncertain of what to do, I look down the street. Lo and behold, there is a Tim Horton's just beyond the corner. My problems are solved! Well, the food problem is, anyway. And now that I know I can leave the pond, that makes me feel a bit better. Although I should probably invest in a wagon. The only problem I can't solve is the goose poo.

The bus driver needs an answer. I tell him nevermind. He rolls his eyes and closes the bus door. The bus rumbles along down the big street. Renewed with courage and energy, I make my way toward the Tim's. I'm like a modern hunter, stalking my prey.

My name is Lacey. I'm a mermaid. I wasn't always a mermaid, but I think I can make it work from here on out.

Rainbow Haven Beach, NS

by Dina Ripsman Eylon

Take me to a place where
I can sit on a lounge chair
and count the tiny grains of sand,
the odd cloud doesn't hide
the scorching sun, and
in the distance I can hear drums
beating like lonely hearts.

Give me a day, just one day,
when the nagging noise of
daily routine doesn't abuse
that tiny space in my eardrum,
and the unsuspected melody of
winter days molds fat snowmen
from isolated flakes of ice.

Spare me the moment of truth
as I resist compliance to measured
perceptions replete with agonizing
resolutions of so-called free will,
choice, and abundance... Let me be
the flawed person that leisurely
embraces the gentle breeze of the ocean.

Tu B'Shvat

by Elana Wolff

Sky in the chill-wind
blue as the ink of a tiny biblical
snail. No one knows the actual hue.

It's not without the winter bird, its
melancholic call: Are you the one
I'm waiting for, the Other?

It's not without the creature—
forager, hoarder—
tailed and clawed. Vulnerable,

yet tough.
I'm sitting at the flank of the room.
What touched me...

Trees, their bark and bones
exposed to February weather.
Rooted in the olden earth

and sturdy in their purpose.
Mirror, shelter, nurturer,
instructor. Fruit and flower,

reproductive seed. The
tree is never obsolete,
the tree is ever-ready.

Some of the trunks
are glowing in the snow
like standing lanterns,

some of the branches
intimate with others.
Sky in the chill-wind

blue as the ink of a tiny
biblical snail. No one
knows the actual hue. The

normalcy is always new—
love-green budding, leafing
being, inching into spring.

Poem Note:

Tu B'Shvat is the Hebrew holiday of the New Year of Trees. It falls on the 15th day of the lunar month of Shvat. Tu stands for the Hebrew letters 'tet' and 'vav' which have the numerical value of 9 and 6 respectively: together 15. Shvat corresponds to February on the solar calendar. In the temperate Land of Israel, the 15th of day of the month is not nearly as cold as in Canada and the first tree to awaken out of winter—the almond—is in bloom. Here in Canada, where the poem is set, Tu B'Shvat is an occasion for extolling the beauty and blessings of the tree wherever it be.

The Apparition

by Maria Samurin

I've always hated Halloween. I'm not anti-holiday like Aunt Lucy, who wears black to every family dinner. I just don't like everything Halloween stands for. Well, practically everything... Obviously, I still like candy.

What I hate about Halloween are the scary parts, like when my brother watches horror flicks and I look up and see a swarm of corpses, or when the neighbours decorate their houses so you're afraid to walk by. Last year, Mr. Lee covered his face with fake blood and jumped out of the bushes. It still gives me nightmares. So do ghost stories, horror novels, and creepy costumes. I don't get why anyone likes that stuff.

My best friend, Anna, hates Halloween too. That's why we stayed at school so late today doing homework. I think we were hoping we'd miss most of the holiday. We only dressed up because everyone else does, but our costumes aren't scary. I'm Merida from *Brave*, since I have red hair, and Anna is Mulan.

By the time we cut through Rockford Elementary School's yard, it's dark out. A thick mist covers the empty sandbox and weird shadows peek out from behind the trees. The moon casts an eerie glow. An owl hoots, then a twig snaps. Anna grabs my hand just as I'm about to reach for hers. I can tell she's trembling and a shiver runs down my spine. When footsteps sound behind us, we spin around and come face to face with a teenage boy in a black robe, carrying a pitchfork.

"I'll send you to the underworld," the teen shouts. He laughs maniacally, turns around, and runs off in the opposite direction. This is why I hate Halloween.

Anna and I speed up, only to come to a stop when an apparition materializes a few feet in front of us. It has one fang—just one—and it howls into the mist until my heart nearly stops.

“Wh-wh-what’s that?” Anna squeaks.

“That’s Fang.” A boy in a vampire costume pops out from behind the apparition. “He ate his other fang.” The apparition gives us a look, raises one leg, and starts peeing.

“It’s just a *dog*.” Anna sighs and starts giggling, but I don’t join her. There’s no such thing as *just* a dog. I mean, let’s face it, dogs are a nuisance: they drool, they bite, and they smell funny. I like dogs about as much as I like Halloween, maybe even less.

This particular dog is huge and skinny, with grey, splotchy fur that looks painted on. “What kind of dog is that?” I ask.

“Great Dane mix.” The boy gives me a crooked smile, revealing two pointed fangs. He’s got fake blood on his chin and his face is painted a pasty white. He still looks kind of cute, and for the first time, I don’t absolutely hate something scary. This new discovery gives me pause, enough pause for the boy to decide I must like his dog.

“Do you want to pet him?” he asks. “Fang doesn’t bite.”

I wonder if that’s because Fang only has the one fang, or because he’s so big he just swallows his food whole. Either way, I shake my head in a firm, resolute no. As in, no, I don’t want to go anywhere near his creepy dog.

“Oh, come on.” The boy smiles. “Fang’s a good boy. Aren’t you, Fang?”

Anna doesn’t mind dogs like I do, so she dutifully steps forward and gives Fang’s head a pat. “Oh, I get it,” she says suddenly, “White Fang!” She starts to laugh, which makes no sense. I stare at her for a second before I remember our English reading list and giggle.

“Clever,” I tell the boy.

“Thanks.” He grins and nudges me playfully, like he’s suddenly decided we’re friends. I kind of like it and nudge him back.

“I’m Mackenzie,” I say, “and this is my best friend, Anna.”

“I’m Connor.” He grins.

“Where do you go to school, Connor?” Anna asks. She’s still patting the apparition and hasn’t lost any fingers.

“Fisherville,” Connor says.

“Us, too,” I tell him, and we spend a few minutes comparing teachers and homerooms. We chat until the icy wind seeps through our costumes and turns our fingers pink with cold.

“We should be getting home,” Anna finally says.

“I’ll walk with you,” Connor offers.

“Sure,” I quickly agree. It’s a lot less scary walking home when there’s three of us—four, if you count Fang.

“Fang here can protect us,” Connor adds, as if reading my mind.

“I thought Fang didn’t bite.” I shoot Fang a warning look so he knows not to try anything funny.

“Nah, but he looks scary.” Connor grins.

I nod in complete agreement, but suddenly, scary doesn’t seem quite so bad. Not when the scary is cute—Connor—and can protect us from crazy guys with pitchforks—Fang. I’m not saying I suddenly like Halloween or anything crazy like that, but maybe I’m willing to give it a chance.

This Verdant Land

by Honey Novick

for she who walks in beauty
you will never be alone
you will see stars and butterflies
and Queen Anne's lace
you will feel you belong

thus I drove as fast as the car in front of me allowed
eastbound, Hwy 7 toward the Big Smoke
and somehow got lost, or rather unexpectedly
veered off my beaten track
winding up in the City of Vaughan

for you who walk in beauty
your way will never leave you lonely
you will feel the wind and water current
the hope of a hatchling
and feel that you belong

upon seeing the sign welcoming me to the City
my shoulders relaxed and my breath grew even
for I knew where south was
and how to get there
just as a bird knows the way of birds

for he who walks in beauty
you will always have enough to slake your curiosity
you will feel sated and well-slept
and kind-hearted
you will know where you belong

City of Vaughan, land of the Huron and Wendat Nations
once an agricultural hub that I remember well
for my uncle bought a tract of “empty” land
where partridge and wild turkeys flew freely
now the City of Vaughan welcomes many from many lands

becoming enriched with curries and borscht and basil
when I got off my beaten track and realized where I was
I felt welcomed, I knew this verdant land
would provide some way home
allow me to dance, get lost, and still find my way home

Diaspora (upon visiting Aberfoyle antique market)

by Gregory Monteith

At what point
Do fingerprints disappear
From all the objects
Collected over a lifetime.

Do the prints age,
Do they erode,
With our bodies?

All the things
No longer thinging,
He left behind
For us to mix together
In boxes,
Hidden along back walls
Of garages,
Sheds and attics.
Making random
What he had placed
Carefully on shelves,
Telling stories of where and when
He'd accrued them.

Forgotten some stories,
Know others too well,
Making junk of his treasures.

Left behind,
For our dust,
And our rust,
For the more hospitable insects,

The great collectors
of our forgottens
and waste.

Garage sales,
Auctions,
Sold cheaply,
Prices like giving it away,
Only cheaper.

You've given away his fingerprints,
You've washed your own hands.
Pristine,
Printless,
Crystal waters,
Without fish.

He gave these objects life,
Fingerprints of their own,
Identity,
Movement,
Purpose,
Care.
Now they are thingless
Without him.

Now we have buried him,
Object,
of our affection.

The Perks

by Candice MacAulay

Magical powers come with a lot of perks.

Number one: The awesome ability to summon and control water, whether boiling hot or frozen ice. Great for when I'm parched after my mid-day nap.

Number two: A super cool transformation sequence complete with magical outfit. I don't even have to change out of pajamas to fight the good fight.

Number three: The adoration of millions. I'm kind of a celebrity.

Boiling water for ramen noodles from the comfort of my futon was just one more of those perks. I didn't even have to leave my pile of misery-soaked blankets or disrupt the week-long pity party I was throwing myself. Magic also came in handy when my tub of mint chocolate ice cream began to melt. A thin coat of ice around the inside of the container saved me from the shame of drinking it straight from the carton like milk.

Mint chocolate milk. Could be a million dollar invention, if I wasn't so busy rage-eating my feelings. I filed the idea away in the back of my mind to explore when I wasn't wallowing in angst.

I thought about calling up my friends and teammates, letting them know what happened. They'd be supportive and understanding but I was engaged in a gigantic sulk and couldn't summon the energy to reach for my phone.

I never imagined I'd be crying over a boy in my first semester of college. I should have been too busy studying and applying for scholarships to bother with dating. With two part-time jobs, I shouldn't have had time for boys. My extra-curricular activity — fighting evil — certainly didn't leave me much free time. But he'd been so sweet and doting, always surprising me with my favorite

chocolate peanut butter candy bar, or rubbing my shoulders when I was tense. I couldn't help but fall for him a little bit. After what happened with mom, I missed having someone who cared about me. Even though we'd only been together for three months, we'd been so happy. I really thought we had something special.

Until he dumped me with no warning.

I huffed out a heavy sigh and slowly slumped sideways onto the futon. My face mashed into a pile of pillows and I couldn't breathe. Breathing seemed like too much effort so I just stayed there, seeing how long I could hold my breath.

Something cold and sticky dripped onto my arm. The ice cream. Dang.

For a few seconds, I considered staying where I was and letting the ice cream melt all over me, just to prove to the universe how miserable I was. I hadn't showered in days. I'd never been dumped before and didn't know how much self-indulgent pandering I should allow myself. Sleeping in a food-stained sofa bed may have been taking it too far.

A familiar chill overtook my entire body. It was like being doused in freezing cold water. That was definitely not ice-cream. My heart pumped hard, nerves buzzing in anticipation. I tumbled off the futon, arms and legs trapped under layers of bedding. I stood ready to transform into an Eternal, one of the Heroes of Humanity, Earth's Final Hope. Fists clenched, I threw my hand up to start my transformation. Then I paused.

I should probably brush my teeth first.

I was almost too late to get in on the action.

The chimera was trapped in the Action Theatre of Canada's Wonderland. I quickly glanced around, but didn't see anyone else. No public panic or uproar. All the theme park guests had fled in

terror. The 3D movie was still playing on the screen. I knew from my previous visits the show was called *The 7th Portal*, a Stan Lee production about a group of friends who use their superpowers to fight monsters.

The universe certainly has a sense of irony.

The chimera was a grotesque creature. They all were. This one was shaped like a bear-sized raccoon, if the raccoon were rabid and covered in hedgehog spikes. It made growling noises like an angry feral dog.

A trio of cloaked figures surrounded it, large hoods engulfing their heads and obscuring their faces.

Good. The other girls had gotten here before it had a chance to cause too much trouble.

Who would have thought a chimera would show up at Canada's Wonderland of all places?

"It's working. That thing's trapped," Hae-Lee said. The wind whipped her copper and bronze cloak around her body, making it hard to see her figure. "I don't know how long we're going to be able to keep it up. It's close to coming free." She didn't sound like she was hurt. Hopefully she hadn't taken any damage before I arrived.

"Keep the heat level turned up to max," she shouted at Gwen.

"I can't go any hotter or I'll burn myself out." Gwen grunted, gritting her teeth, body braced against a theatre seat. The force of the magic pouring out of her hands was trying to push her backwards. I didn't know exactly how the physics of our powers worked, but she must have been putting everything she had into it.

"Don't force it!" Hae-Lee called out, brandishing her sword. She circled the monster, but needed it weakened before going in for the kill. We learned from previous mistakes. Chimeras could be fast.

"I'm here!" I said. I summoned a handful of pointy ice shards in my palm. "Where's its weak spot? Where should I aim?"

"Go for the eyes or throat," Amari, our healer, said. "The body is too protected and it doesn't seem to have any weak points. Aim for the squishy bits.

"Good to see you," she added. The hoods of our cloaks were deep, deep enough to hide our faces, but I could hear the smile in her voice.

"Sorry I'm late," I apologized, throwing the handful of ice shards in the chimera's direction. One paw broke free of the ring of fire. It swiped at the pointy objects heading its way, but I knew what I was doing. Two had been aimed straight into the chimera's face, while three were angled slightly behind. As it batted two out of the way, the other three came up from underneath in an arc. The shards buried themselves in the soft underside of the monster's throat. It gave a terrible growling sound and gurgled. Blood oozed from the wounded throat in thick streams. It used the free paw to claw at the shards embedded in its skin, but they had been buried too deep.

"Stand back, I'm going in for the kill." Hae-Lee hefted up her sword and leaped. She seemed to freeze in mid air for a split second. She came crashing down, sword slicing through the chimera with no resistance. We all heard the shrieking sound it made as its porcine body crumbled to ash. Even though the chimeras took animal form, they didn't leave a corpse behind. It made for a convenient cleanup.

Hae-Lee's sword pierced the ground by a few hand lengths, stuck upright in the concrete sidewalk. She knelt on the ground, catching her breath, with both hands on the pommel like an Arthurian legend. Fitting, since she was our leader. The rest of us could bring down a chimera, but using Hae-Lee's sword was the easiest way to completely destroy one. There was something special about it, like it had been made for killing chimeras.

"Everyone alright?" Hae-Lee asked, gasping for breath. She rose slowly, looking at each of us in turn. "Anyone hurt?" It wasn't all fun and games, this hero thing. Magic took energy - mental as well as physical. Using too much too quickly could lead to some serious pain and fatigue.

"I think I'm good," Gwen replied, coughing a few times. "You got it before I burned myself out."

"I saw it take a swipe at you," Amari said to Hae-Lee. "Need a heal?"

Hae-Lee twisted her body to inspect the cut on her side.

"No, I think it's fine. It's long but shallow, it should take care of itself quickly enough."

"They should give us a discount," Gwen said. "Season passes or something. It's the least they could do for us saving their amusement park from monster rampages."

"No one knows who we are," Hae-Lee pointed out. She turned her attention to me. "You got here late."

Maybe I shouldn't have taken that quick shower.

"Is everything okay?" she continued, concerned and sincere. Hae-Lee wasn't upset I didn't get there on time. She cared about me. About all of us. For all her youth, she was a great leader.

"Yeah, I'm good." I echoed Gwen's words.

She studied me for a few more seconds, then nodded.

"Why don't we all go out?" Hae-Lee suggested. "Get some food. Greasy burgers and fries. Celebrate another victory."

The other girls nodded and agreed.

I blanched at the thought of trying to celebrate anything.

"I don't know, I might just go home and—" *wallow in misery*, I thought silently. "—get a good night's sleep," I finished out loud. The second tub of ice cream I had at home — mango flavored this time — was calling my name.

"You feeling okay, Carina?" Amari asked quietly, peeking into my hood to get a better look at my face. "You sound..." She didn't finish her sentence, but I knew I looked pretty rough.

"If you need to talk..." Hae-Lee tilted her head, always ready to listen. She could always tell when something was up.

"I know we're always dealing with this monster and magical hero stuff," Gwen said, "But if you ever need to just vent, we're here for you, okay?"

Confronted with the concerned faces of my fellow teammates — my friends — that heavy feeling in my chest began to lift.

"Sure," I said. "Let's get burgers."

We de-transformed and gathered at our favorite spot, Gordo's Diner. We always situated ourselves at the table closest to the back, facing the entrance.

"So," Amari began as we sat down. "Tell us how you're feeling."

"The fight was tough, but the chimera didn't hit me anywhere so I think—"

"Not that." Hae-Lee cut me off. "How are you really feeling? I can tell something's wrong."

"And it's not just the usual fighting," Gwen cut in.

"It's nothing," I said automatically.

"Don't lie," Hae-Lee said gently. "We know it's something."

I hesitated, playing with the napkin holder. "You know that guy I was seeing...?" I cast my eyes down. It hurt less than calling him my boyfriend. "He broke up with me."

The girls made sympathetic noises.

"Tell us," Amari urged gently.

"I know we've only been dating three months," I said slowly, "but I thought he was the most perfect guy ever, you know?" I shrugged listlessly. "He clearly didn't feel the same way about me. He dumped me with no warning."

"I'm so sorry, Carina," Hae-Lee's eyes were pained, as if she felt the hurt as keenly as I did.

"He clearly doesn't deserve you," Amari said.

"Who needs some guy, anyway?" Gwen said firmly. "You've got us. We're a group of awesome, butt-kicking, world-saving,

magical heroines. Who else could you possibly want on your side?"

A laugh escaped me before I could help myself. The girls looked at each other with relief, glad to have cheered me up.

"Excuse me," Hae-Lee flagged down the waitress from across the room. "Can we please get a slice of cake with four forks?"

"Sure thing, girls," the waitress called back. "You celebrating something?"

"Yeah," Hae-Lee smiled at us. "We're celebrating being awesome."

For the first time in weeks, my heart felt lighter, warmer.

It wasn't the best life. I wouldn't have chosen this for myself. I still needed to go out and fight almost every night.

But these girls had my back. And I had theirs.

When everyone else disappointed me, I knew I could count on them.

Being a magical heroine really did have a lot of perks.

Transition

by Kamal Parmar

Vaughan changes colour
from green to yellow, then gold,
as leaves turn limp and glide down soft cushions of air,
to sink into the ground.
Days shorten and shadows lengthen,
the dusky air, still as a pond.
The crescent moon hangs limp
over a night sky, scattered with stars.
Summer fades into autumn and
Fall makes way for winter,
a time to discover oneself—
only in Vaughan.

On a Bench at Gallanough Park

by Dina Ripsman Eylon

In an attempt to master the art of doing nothing,
I sit on a bench in a park where Canada geese
raise their astute families. Here and there, a duck
trails them into the shrubs in search of fresh
worms that might have sprung up after a short rainfall.

Children pass by and wave to strangers—
myself included. Their carriages look like wheelbarrows
packed with earthy, blooming plants. You sit beside me
and take account of buzzing birds and swooshing sounds
[that contribute to this delightful cacophony].

Little do you know how I [tend to] capture moments of
genuine insight from the minds of fellow artists, who find
the mundane dreary and dull as they paint sharp edges
to words, dipped in blood. You sit beside me, aloof,
speculating whether this season is really meant for us.

My Canada

by Tony Genco

What is this thing called Canada?
What does it mean to you and me?

A past of imperfections
Created as an antidote
To an angry, rebellious world.

We respect and accept,
Appreciate, believe.

My present is a gift,
A future too, to who we are
And what we want to connect to.

The many and varied
Eyes of the world—

My Canada is Vaughan.
And building opportunity
Without the noise from the South.

The fruit of many labours
Bring us together as one.

Explore the beauty and mystery of the City of Vaughan in a series of poems and short stories that run the gamut from science fiction/fantasy, contemporary, romance and more for readers of all ages. Hilarious, heartfelt, haunting, far-fetched and at times hard-hitting, these stories are relatable whether or not you are a resident. Our vision of Vaughan is populated by imaginary creatures and characters so real, it's hard not to see yourself in them.