Associated Manitoba Arts Festivals

SPEECH ARTS MANUAL

PART 2: PROSE READING

2023 edition

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Table of Contents

EXCERPT FROM: WATCH OUT FOR LIONS

It was a rainy day.

"We can't go out to play," said Jake. "I don't like to stay inside. What can we do in here?"

"Let's make a playhouse," said Tessa. "Here's a big chair. Let's put the two little chairs beside it. Help me put blankets over the chairs."

"Now we have a tent," said Jake. "Watch out for snakes and watch out for lions."

"Jake, I can see a lion now," said Tessa. "Get in the tent."

Tessa and Jake hid in the tent.

"Sh," said Jake, "sh."

They waited and waited for the lion to go away.

"Has the lion gone yet?" asked Jake.

'I'll go out and look," said Tessa.

She looked out of the tent. "I don't see him," she said. "I think he's gone."

But the lion had **not** gone.

Down he jumped.

Down went the blankets.

Down went the tent.

Meow!

"What a funny lion," said Tessa.

Christel Kleitsch (A Bear With Electric Hair (Journeys), Ginn Publishing Canada Inc.)

EXCERPT FROM: WHO LIVES THERE?

One fine day as I walked down a country road, I saw a tree with a hole in the trunk.
I wonder--who lives there?

Little flying squirrels sleeping until sundown?
Or a mother screech owl with two fuzzy owlets?

Way up high in a tall pine tree I saw a nest of sticks.
I wonder--who lives up there?

Could be an eagle with little eaglets, or maybe one sleepy old crow.

Down in the meadow I found a hollow log.
I wonder--who lives in there?

A family of rabbits that are gone for the day?
Or maybe a skunk that only comes out at night?
Or maybe just some crickets.

I saw an old barn with the roof caved in.
I wonder--who lives in there?

Barn swallows or barn owls, or rats and bats like that in the dark?

On my way home, I saw a small hole in an old apple tree.
I looked in the hole and I didn't see a thing.
I listened at the hole and didn't hear a thing.
I put my finger in the hole and didn't feel a thing.
Then I put my mouth to the hole and whispered, "Does anyone live in there?"

And do you know what?
A little brown mouse peeked out of that hole,
and
I think
he smiled at me!

John Hawkinson (A Bear With Electric Hair (Journeys), Ginn Publishing Canada Inc.)

EXCERPT FROM: AS LONG AS THE RIVERS FLOW

The baby owl blinked its round yellow eyes at Lawrence, and the boy blinked back. Peering out from Papa's knapsack, the owlet was a fuzzy brown-and-white bundle. When it saw the people, it let out a demanding "Cheeep" and loudly clacked its beak.

The children jumped back, then laughed. Little sister grabbed at the fluffy feathers.

Papa spoke sternly, "Be careful, Maruk. This owl is just a baby but it is very hungry and its beak is already sharp."

Maruk quickly pulled her hand away.

Papa continued, "When I was out checking my trapline, I found this bird at the bottom of a tree. There were no other owls around, so I picked it up and brought it home. It is a wild thing but it needs us now. Otherwise it will die of hunger or be eaten by a coyote. You children must care for it. Don't give it butter and jam. Feed it wild meat until it is big enough to return to the forest."

"We can keep it in the shed," Lawrence said. "It's always dark in there."

Papa nodded at his eldest son. Lawrence was small for a ten-year-old boy, but he was already wise in the ways of their people.

"I'll fix a place for it to roost," Papa said. Carefully, he carried the owl to the shed. The children crowded around him.

"It can sleep in my old dolly's bed and use the blanket," said Maruk.

"That's a good idea, too." Papa smiled. "Now, my children, you must give it a name."

"Is it a boy or a girl owl?" asked little brother Buddy.

"I can't tell for sure," Papa said. "I think it's a boy."

They all fell silent, thinking of a good name.

"Let's call him Minos," shouted baby brother Leonard.

Minos meant cat. Everyone laughed.

"Let's call him Ooh-Hoo," Lawrence said.

"Ooh-Hoo means owl in our language," said Papa. "That makes it a good name."

Larry Loyie with Constance Brissenden (As Long as The Rivers Flow, Groundwood Books)

EXCERPT FROM: FROG AND TOAD ARE FRIENDS "THE STORY"

One day in summer Frog was not feeling well.
Toad said, "Frog, you are looking quite green."
"But I always look green," said Frog. "I am a frog."
"Today you look very green even for a frog," said Toad. "Get into my bed and rest."
Toad made Frog a cup of hot tea. Frog drank the tea, and then he said, "Tell me a story while I am resting."
"All right," said Toad. "Let me think of a story to tell you."
Toad thought and thought. But he could not think of a story to tell Frog.
"I will go out on the front porch and walk up and down," said Toad. "Perhaps that will help me to think of a story."
Toad walked up and down on the porch for a long time. But he could not think of a story to tell Frog.
Then Toad went into the house and stood on his head.
"Why are you standing on your head?" asked Frog.
"I hope that if I stand on my head, it will help me to think of a story," said Toad.
Toad stood on his head for a long time. But he could not think of a story to tell Frog.
Then Toad poured a glass of water over his head.
"Why are you pouring water over your head?" asked Frog.
"I hope that if I pour water over my head, it will help me to think of a story," said Toad.
Toad poured many glasses of water over his head. But he could not think of a story to tell Frog.
Then Toad began to bang his head against the wall.
"Why are you banging your head against the wall?" asked Frog.
"I hope that if I bang my head against the wall hard enough, it will help me to think of a story," said Toad.
"I am feeling much better now, Toad," said Frog. "I do not think I need a story anymore."
"Then you get out of bed and let me get into it," said Toad, "because now I feel terrible."
Frog said, "Would you like me to tell you a story, Toad?"

Arnold Lobel (Frog and Toad are Friends, HarperCollins Publishers)

EXCERPT FROM: MR. POPPER'S PENGUINS

The bell rang again, a little louder this time. Grumbling to himself, Mr. Popper went to the door.

It was not the postman who stood there. It was an expressman with the largest box Mr. Popper had ever seen.

"Party by the name of Popper live here?"

"That's me."

"Well, here is a package that's come Air Express all the way from Antarctica. "Some journey, I'll say."

Mr. Popper signed the receipt and examined the box. It was covered all over with markings. "UNPACK AT ONCE," said one. "KEEP COOL," said another. He noticed that the box was punched here and there with air holes.

You can imagine that once he had the box inside the house, Mr. Popper lost no time in getting the screw driver, for by this time, of course, he had guessed that it was the surprise from Admiral Drake.

He had succeeded in removing the outer boards and part of the packing, which was a layer of dry ice, when from the depths of the packing case he suddenly heard a faint "*Ork."* His heart stood still. Surely he had heard that sound before at the Drake Expedition movies. His hands were trembling so that he could scarcely lift off the last of the wrappings.

There was not the slightest doubt about it. It was a penguin.

Mr. Popper was speechless with delight. *"Ork*," it said again, and this time it held out its flippers and jumped over the packing debris.

It was a stout little fellow about two and a half feet high. Although it was about the size of a small child, it looked much more like a little gentleman, with its smooth white waistcoat in front and its long black tailcoat dragging a little behind. Its eyes were set in two white circles in its black head. It turned its head from one side to the other, as first with one eye and then with the other, it examined Mr. Popper.

Richard and Florence Atwater (Mr. Popper's Penguins, Little, Brown and Company)

EXCERPT FROM: THE DOVE AND THE ANT

An Ant was speeding along on its three pair of legs when suddenly, it stopped.

"I'm thirsty," the Ant said aloud.

"Why don't you get a drink of water from the brook?" cooed a Dove perched in a nearby tree. "The brook is close by. Just be careful you don't fall in."

The Ant sped to the brook and began to drink.

A sudden wind blew the Ant into the water.

"Help!" the Ant cried, "I'm drowning!"

The Dove knew it had to act quickly to save the Ant. With its beak, the Dove broke a twig from the tree. Then, the Dove flew over the brook with the twig and dropped it to the Ant.

The Ant climbed onto the twig and floated ashore.

Not long afterward, the Ant saw a Hunter. He was setting a trap to catch the Dove.

The Dove began to fly toward the trap.

The Ant knew it had to act quickly to save the Dove.

The Ant opened its strong jaws and bit the bare ankle of the Hunter.

"Ouch!" the Hunter cried.

The Dove heard the Hunter and flew away.

One good turn deserves another.

Aesop (Childcraft Volume 2, World Book Publishing)

EXCERPT FROM: AT GRANDPA'S SUGAR BUSH

Many of the sugar maples are more than a hundred years old. Grandpa knows every tree in the bush, just as his dad did. Someday I will, too.

Grandpa drills a hole in the first maple tree, on the southeast side. The bright spring sun warms that side first. I clean out the wood shavings with a twig.

We put in a spile and tap it gently with a hammer. It seems to take forever, but finally a big drop of sap forms at the tip of the spile. I catch it on my tongue and taste its sweetness.

We hang a sap bucket from the spile and cover it with a lid. For a while we can hear the *plink, plink* of sap dripping onto the bottom of the bucket.

Grandpa says the first robin always sings on the day the sap starts to run.

After lunch the sun grows warm and the snow becomes soft. Grandpa's feet leave deep holes in the snow. Mine leave little holes. Snowfleas gather in our footprints. They're another sign of spring, Grandpa says.

Every day we collect the sap, carrying it to big barrels near the boiling place. Last October Grandpa felled dead trees, then cut and split them into firewood. I helped him haul and pile it.

Grandpa digs snow out of the boiling place and I bring him the pieces of stovepipe. When everything is ready and the sap barrels are full, we start the fire. First smoke, then heat waves rise up the chimney.

Soon steam from the sap pan will smell sweet and mapley. Whenever we're thirsty we cool boiling sap in the snow and drink it. It gets sweeter and sweeter—and stickier.

Margaret Carney (At Grandpa's Sugar Bush, Kids Can Press)

EXCERPT FROM: PIGS

Megan's father asked her to feed the pigs on her way to school. He said, "Megan, please feed the pigs, but don't open the gate. Pigs are smarter than you think. Don't open the gate."

"Right," said Megan. "I will not open the gate. Not me. No sir. No, no, no, no, no."

So Megan went to the pig pen. She looked at the pigs. The pigs looked at Megan.

Megan said, "These are the dumbest looking animals I have ever seen. They stand there like lumps on a bump. They wouldn't do anything if I did open the gate." So Megan opened the gate just a little bit. The pigs stood there and looked at Megan. They didn't do anything.

Megan said, "These are the dumbest looking animals I have ever seen. They stand there like lumps on a bump. They wouldn't even go out the door if the house was on fire." So Megan opened the gate a little bit more. The pigs stood there and looked at Megan. They didn't do anything.

Then Megan yelled, "HEY YOU DUMB PIGS!" The pigs jumped up and ran right over Megan, WAP—WAP—WAP—WAP—WAP, and out the gate.

When Megan got up she couldn't see the pigs anywhere. She said, "Uh-Oh, I am in bad trouble. Maybe pigs are not so dumb after all." Then she went to tell her father the bad news. When she got to the house Megan heard a noise coming from the kitchen. It went, "OINK, OINK, OINK."

"That doesn't sound like my mother. That doesn't sound like my father. That sounds like pigs."

Robert Munsch (Pigs, Annick Press)

EXCERPT FROM: MIDNIGHT ON THE MOON

"Wow, it's like an armor room in a castle," said Jack.
"Yeah, with huge armor," said Annie.
"Let's pick out the smallest stuff," said Jack, "The suits can go over our clothes."
Annie found the smallest white suit. And Jack found the next smallest. They stepped into them.
Then Annie locked Jack's air tank into place.
"Thanks," he said. And he did the same for her.
"Thanks," she said.
"Gloves?" said Jack. He and Annie pulled on white gloves.
"Boots?" said Annie. They each pulled on a pair of huge white boots.
"Helmets?" said Jack. He reached for a helmet.
"Wow, they're pretty light," he said. "I thought they'd be like knights' helmets."
Jack and Annie put the helmets on. They locked each other's into place.
"I can't move my head right or left," said Annie.
"Me neither," said Jack. "Let's try walking."
Jack and Annie moved clumsily around the room. Jack felt like a fat snowman.
"Close your visor," said Annie.
They both closed their see-through visors. Cool air filled Jack's helmet.
"I CAN BREATHE!" Annie yelled. Her voice boomed in Jack's ears.
"Ow! Talk quietly," Jack said. "We have two-way radios inside our helmets."
"Sorry," whispered Annie.
Jack put the moon book back in his pack. Then he slung the pack over his shoulder.
"Okay!" he said. Remember, we only have two hours of air in our tanks. So we need to find the fourth M thing really fast."
"I hope we find it," said Annie.
"Me too," said Jack. He knew they could not go home until they did.
"Let's go," said Annie. She gave Jack a little push.
"Watch it. No goofing off," he said. "We don't want to fall over in these suits."
"Just go – go!" said Annie. She pushed him out of the room. They walked back to the airlock.
"Ready?" said Annie. "Open sesame!" She pressed the OPEN button. A door slowly slid closed behind them. A door opened in front of them.
And Jack and Annie stepped out onto the moon.

Mary Pope Osborne (Midnight on the Moon, Random House)

EXCERPT FROM: STONE FOX

Searchlight sprang forward with such force that little Willy couldn't hang on. If it weren't for a lucky grab, he would have fallen off the sled for sure.

In what seemed only seconds, little Willy and Searchlight had traveled down Main Street, turned onto North Road, and were gone. Far, far ahead of the others. They were winning. At least for the moment.

Stone Fox started off dead last. He went so slowly down Main Street that everyone was sure something must be wrong.

Swish! Little Willy's sled flew by the school-house on the outskirts of town, and then by the old deserted barn.

Swish! Swish! Swish! Other racers followed in hot pursuit.

"Go, Searchlight! Go!" little Willy sang out. The cold wind pressed against his face, causing his good eye to shut almost completely. The snow was well packed. It was going to be a fast race today. The fastest they had ever run.

The road was full of dangerous twists and turns, but little Willy did not have to slow down as the other racers did. With only one dog and a small sled, he was able to take the sharp turns at full speed without risk of sliding off the road or losing control.

Therefore, with each turn, little Willy pulled farther and farther ahead.

Swish! The sled rounded a corner, sending snow flying. Little Willy was smiling. This was fun!

John Reynolds Gardiner (Stone Fox, Scholastic)

EXCERPT FROM: LAZARUS LAUGHS

Lazarus the lamb had lived alone for so long he had forgotten how to speak.
It didn't worry him.
There was no one to speak to.
Then one day he found a fence and jumped over it.

In the field on the other side of the fence, he found a flock of sheep.
He was pleased to see them.
He did feel a little sad because he didn't know how to say Hello.

So, he just smiled.

The sheep huddled around him and began to talk.
Lazarus did not understand one word.
You see, Lazarus was an English sheep and these sheep were French.

Lazarus thought and thought.
"I don't understand them. I can't even speak to them but everyone understands laughter."
So he laughed.
All the sheep laughed with him.

They laughed all day together until the sun went down.
Then Lazarus went home to his hill.
"Tomorrow," he thought, "we will laugh some more.
I may learn to speak again.
I may even learn to speak French so I can talk to my new friends."

Christiane Duchesne (Lazarus Laughs, James Lorimer & Company Publishing)

EXCERPT FROM: A RIDE FOR MARTHA

Dark-blue shells, pearly shells and many, many shells later, they heard Martha's voice singing.

"We'd better go back now. The tide's coming in," said Lizzie.

Sarah and Lizzie turned back. Rounding a bend, they saw that Martha's boat had been lifted by the tide and was bobbing in the surf. Far down the beach running towards them was Ida, calling, "Martha! Martha!"

Martha began to cry.

Sarah and Lizzie were the first ones to reach the place where the boat was. Ankle-deep, knee-deep, hip-deep—could they get to her before the wind or current pulled the boat out of reach? The girls had to struggle against the swirl and pull of the water, almost waist-deep now. Would they make it? Could they?

And then, yes, finally they were by the boat and, yes, could catch hold as it passed them, could reach Martha's skirt, her arms and, both girls pulling, take her out, hold her close between them. The empty boat bobbed and turned towards open water.

It took the two of them to hold Martha up. They had to fight against the pull of the water, their wet skirts heavy and weighing them down. First one seemed to stumble, then the other, but somehow they'd catch themselves and help each other, holding Martha safe. Finally hip-deep, knee-deep, ankle-deep, they were back safe on shore.

Sue-Ann Alderson (A Ride for Martha, Groundwood)

EXCERPT FROM: A SALMON FOR SIMON

He would dig a channel for the salmon to swim down to the sea. That was all he had to do. He began to dig and the wet sand was heavy, but he would do it!

He dug and dug.

After a while he stopped and looked to see how far he had gone, and he had not gone very far at all. He kept on digging.

His mother called him to supper but he couldn't go because he hadn't finished yet.

The salmon was lying quietly now in the shallow water, waiting.

The sun dipped low in the sky and the air became cool. Simon's hands were red and he was getting a blister, but he kept digging.

At last, just when he thought he couldn't lift another shovelful of sand, he looked up and there he was, at the pool.

The channel was finished.

Cold water flowed into it. When the salmon felt the freshness of the sea, it began to move again. Its nose found the opening to the channel and slowly, slowly began to swim down it.

Down to the sea.

Simon watched his shining salmon. Down, down, down to the channel it swam. At last it reached the sea.

It dived deep into the cool green water, and then, gleaming in the last rays of the setting sun, it gave a great leap into the air.

And it seemed to Simon that the salmon flicked its tail as if to say "thank you" before it disappeared beneath the waves.

"Good-bye, Sukai," called Simon.

The salmon was free at last. Soon it would be in the deep, secret places of the sea.

Betty Waterlon (A Salmon for Simon, Douglas & McIntyre Ltd.)

EXCERPT FROM: FRANKLIN IS MESSY

They found boxes in the basement. They painted them and named them: toy box, puzzle box, costume box, block box. They put books on the bookshelf. Then they put a special hook on the back of the door for a new sword.

The tidying-up took a long time. But it wasn't so bad because Franklin found lots of things he thought he'd lost. Goose's puzzle, his own favourite purple crayon and enough cardboard, wood and string to make a new sword and even a shield.

The next morning Franklin dressed in full armour. He was especially proud of his new shield. It said: Sir Franklin. Loyal and Brave.

"Sir Franklin," said his mother, "I think you forgot something."

Franklin's mother whispered in his ear.

Franklin smiled. They took a crayon and added two more words to his shield.

Sir Franklin. Loyal and Brave. And Neat.

Paulette Bourgeois (Franklin is Messy, Kids Can Press Ltd.)

EXCERPT FROM: SOMETHING FROM NOTHING

When Joseph was a baby, his grandfather made him a wonderful blanket . . . to keep him warm and cozy and to chase away bad dreams.

But as Joseph grew older, the wonderful blanket grew older too.

One day his mother said to him, "Joseph, look at your blanket. It's frazzled, it's worn, it's unsightly, it's torn. It is time to throw it out."

"Grandpa can fix it," Joseph said.

Joseph's grandfather took the blanket and turned it round and round.

"Hmm," he said as his scissors went snip, snip, snip and his needle flew in and out and in and out, "There's just enough material here to make . . ."

. . . a wonderful jacket. Joseph put on the wonderful jacket and went outside to play.

But as Joseph grew older, the wonderful jacket grew older too.

One day his mother said to him, "Joseph, look at your jacket. It's shrunken and small, doesn't fit you at all. It is time to throw it out!"

"Grandpa can fix it," Joseph said.

Joseph's grandfather took the jacket and turned it round and round.

"Hmm," he said as his scissors went snip, snip, snip and his needle flew in and out and in and out, "There's just enough material here to make . . ."

. . . a wonderful vest. Joseph wore the wonderful vest to school the very next day.

But as Joseph grew older, the wonderful vest grew older too.

One day his mother said to him, "Joseph, look at your vest! It's spotted with glue and there's paint on it too. It is time to throw it out!"

"Grandpa can fix it," Joseph said.

Joseph's grandfather took the vest and turned it round and round.

"Hmm," he said as his scissors went snip, snip, snip and his needle flew in and out and in and out, "There's just enough material here to make . . ."

. . . a wonderful tie. Joseph wore the wonderful tie to his grandparents' house every Friday.

Phoebe Gilman (Something from Nothing, Scholastic)

EXCERPT FROM: MY DOG IS AN ELEPHANT

But Hector wasn't discouraged. He decided to use his costume from last Hallowe'en. The elephant took it and slipped it on, which was no small bit of business.

Once it was on, Hector went out to walk his new dog.

To make sure no one suspected the truth, he told his elephant what a dog was expected to do.

He has to bark: **Woof!**

Bring the newspaper…without the paperboy.

And lift his leg on the fire hydrant.

Everything was working out fine. The elephant was enjoying his dog's life. But one day, what had to happen happened: **Rip!** The little costume was in shreds.

Hector was discovering that camouflaging an elephant is a big business. He decided to help him return to his country, somewhere in Africa. He took his piggy bank and went to buy an airplane ticket as big as his large friend.

Back at the house, he lent his father's suit to his elephant.
"I'll have to tell Papa to go on a diet. His clothes fit you like a glove."

Remy Simard (My Dog is an Elephant, Annick Press)

EXCERPT FROM: PURPLE, GREEN AND YELLOW

Then she got bored.

She said, "I'm tired of
drawing on the paper. But
I am not going to draw on the
walls and I am not going to
draw on the floor and I'm not
going to draw on myself –
but everybody knows it's
okay to colour your
fingernails. Even my mother
colours her fingernails."

So Brigid took a purple
super-indelible-never-come-
off-till-you're-dead-and-
maybe-even-later colouring
marker, and she coloured her
thumbnail bright purple.

And that was so pretty,
she coloured all her fingernails
purple, black, and yellow.

And that was so pretty,
she coloured her hands
yellow, green and red.

And that was so pretty,
she coloured her face purple,
green, yellow and blue.

And that was so pretty,
she coloured her belly-button
blue.

And that was so pretty,
she coloured herself all sorts
of colours almost entirely
all over.

Then Brigid looked in the mirror and said, "What have I done! My mother is going to kill me." So she ran into the bathroom and washed her hands for half an hour. Nothing came off. Her hands still looked like mixed-up rainbows.

Then she had a wonderful idea.

She reached way down into the bottom of the colouring markers and got a special-coloured marker. It was the same colour she was. She took that marker and coloured herself all over until she was her regular colour again. In fact, she looked even better than before – almost too good to be true.

She went downstairs and her mother said, "Why Brigid, you're looking really good today."

"Right," said Brigid.

Then her mother said, "It's time to wash your hands for dinner."

But Brigid was afraid that the special colour would not stick to the colours underneath, so she said, "I already washed my hands."

Robert Munsch (Purple, Green and Yellow, Annick Press)

EXCERPT FROM: THE PENCIL

It was nice to spend some time with Ataata. Sometimes he even let us do things that Anaana didn't let us do.

At first, we played all our regular games.

We had a jumping contest on the floor of the iglu. Then, we played with the dolls that Anaanatsiaq had made for us.

We even played a game of hide-and-seek with a blindfold. But soon, we got tired of all our regular games and Anaana was still not back.

Peter was beginning to get restless. "What else can we do?" he asked.

I knew something that would be really fun to do using the pencil. We could never ask Ataata that because the pencil was so special to Anaana. Oh, but it would be so much fun!

As we were thinking of what else to do, Ataata did something that he almost never did – he went into Anaana's things and pulled out the pencil!

"The pencil, the pencil!" Peter and I yelled. We hardly ever got to see it. It got a little bit smaller every time we saw it.

It was very short now, with only a tiny little bit of eraser left. Ataata passed me the pencil, saying, "How about drawing some pictures for your brother?"

I couldn't believe it! Anaana always said that we needed to be very careful with the pencil and that it wasn't a toy.

I took the pencil. I was a little nervous, but I loved how it felt in my hand. Ataata pulled out a piece of paper for me to draw on. I knew it was the only piece of paper we had.

I began drawing – it was so much fun and so different from drawing on the frozen window! I quickly forgot about being so nervous and just kept going. It was so neat to see my drawings taking shape on the page. I drew pictures of seals and caribou.

"Draw me, Susan!" Peter begged, so I drew a picture that looked just like him.

Glossary:

Ataata (a-taa-ta): The Inuktitut word for "father".
Anaana (a-naa-na): The Inuktitut word for "mother".
iglu (ee-glue): The Inuktitut word for a dome-shaped house made with blocks of snow.
Anaanatsiaq (a-na-nat-see-ak): The Inuktitut word for "grandmother".

Susan Avingaq and Maren Vsetula (The Pencil, Inhabit Media Inc.)

EXCERPT FROM: KOALA LOU

It was Koala Klaws who went first. Her climb was a record-breaking twenty-two meters in seventy seconds flat. The spectators whistled and cheered and wildly waved their party hats.

"Can I do better than that?" wondered Koala Lou. "I must." As she stepped toward the tree, a hush fell over the crowd. "On your mark," said the kookaburra. "Get set—GO!"

Koala Lou leapt onto the tree. Up and up and up she climbed—higher and higher and higher. Faster and faster and faster until—there she was, right at the very top! The spectators roared and clapped and stamped their feet.

But she wasn't fast enough. In spite of all her training and all her hoping, it was Koala Klaws who won the gum tree climbing. Koala Lou came second.

Koala Lou went off and hid. She heard the shouts of Bush Olympics and cried her heart out.

When the first stars of evening appeared in the sky, Koala Lou crept home through the dark and up into the gum tree. Her mother was waiting for her. Before she could say a word, her mother had flung her arms around her neck and said, 'Koala Lou, I DO love you! I always have, and I always will."

And she hugged her for a very long time.

Mem Fox (Koala Lou, Scholastic)

EXCERPT FROM: THE MISSING SUN

Emily didn't notice the first day the sun didn't shine.
Nor the next.
Nor the day after that. And Christmas time wasn't so bad.
She found it exciting to see every house, church and store winking and blinking their Christmas lights all day long.
But now, many days after the New Year, Emily really missed the sun.

"Get away from that garbage!" Emily shouted at Raven.
'Get out to the bush and find the sun."

"Are you still trying to get raven to bring back that old sun?" Josie laughed. "Leave him alone. He's not going to bring it back."

"I told you," Josie said to Emily. "Raven stole the sun. We'll never see it again."

"My mom says the sun is hiding," Emily said. "Hiding behind the earth. It'll be back any day now!"

"No, Emily. That old sun isn't coming back! He was too small. And too easy for Raven to steal. We need a new sun. A big sun. So big that Raven will never be able to steal it from the sky again."
"Raven, bring it back here!" Emily shouted. 'Immediately!"

"Raven won't bring it back," laughed Josie. "Besides! Our new sun is here already."

Peter Eyvindson (The Missing Sun, Pemmican Publishing Inc.)

EXCERPT FROM: SIX DARN COWS

The Gate

The gate was open. THE COWS WERE GONE!

Jen and Tod looked and looked. No cows.

"Oh, Jen," Tod said, "I said, 'I wish those cows would just get lost.' But I didn't mean it!"

"I know," Jen said. "Me too."

"Mum and Dad will be very mad, I bet," Tod said.

"Too bad you left the gate open," said Jen.

"I didn't leave it open," Tod said. "It must have been you."

"I didn't," said Jen.

"I bet you did."

"Well, I don't *think* I did."

"I'm pretty sure *I* didn't," said Tod.

They both looked at Zip. He wagged his tail. They both knew that he didn't leave the gate open.

"We both must have forgotten," said Jen.

"Yeah," said Tod. "Now we have to find those darn cows."

The Bean farm was a small farm. The Bean family did not have much money. The Beans needed to sell the milk from their cows.

And now the cows were lost.

"We have to find them," Jen said. "Even if it takes all night."

Jen looked at Tod. Tod looked at Jen. It was getting dark. What if they really DID have to look all night?

What if THEY got lost?

There were no houses near. Only the fields and the deep woods. They both felt scared but they tried not to show it.

It wasn't right to go home until they found the lost cows. Zip barked and barked. He wanted to help.

"Okay!" yelled Jen.

"Let's go!" yelled Tod.

Margaret Laurence (Six Darn Cows, James, Lorimer & Co.)

EXCERPT FROM: NOBODY

When Mama found her
clothesline lassoed
around Fang; the sheets
made into tents;
and Grandpa's longjohns
flapping from the
treehouse flagpole—

"What a M-E-S-S!"
she hollered.
"And that reminds me…

…Just who was digging
for buried treasure
and dinosaur bones
all over my vegetable garden?

…And just who drew in
those moustaches, beards,
and vampire teeth
all through cousin Bea's
grade six pictures?"

"Not me!" said Snubs.
"Or me!" said Lolly.
"Me neither!" I said. "No way!"

And Mama shook her head
and wagged her finger:
"It wasn't you. And it wasn't me.
Who was it then? Nobody?"
"Yes, Mama," I said.
"It must be Nobody.
Nobody's always up to something.
Nobody's always into everything.
And Nobody makes such a mess!"

When Mama found every light on in the house,
the bubble bath dripping through the kitchen ceiling
and the dirt-bike in pieces all over the living-room
carpet—

"Such C-A-R-E-L-E-S-S-N-E-S-S!"
she hollered.
"And that reminds me…

…Just who tipped out
your giant, see-through glass,
500 worker-ant farm
all over my kitchen counter?"

Meguido Zola and Angela Dereume (Nobody, Pemmican Publications)

EXCERPT FROM: HOW BLUEBELL CAME TO BE

When her brothers, Strong Deer and Tall Birch, would return to camp with the day's hunt, Akusi would run to them. They took turns tossing her in the air and telling her stories of what they did and saw.

Lately Akusi did not feel like being a part of that. Today she had gone for a walk. She traced her steps in the direction of the sun's course. This way if she wandered too far, she could find her way back by following the sun.

As Akusi walked, she mumbled to herself, "Who wants a baby? All they do is make a mess and if they cry everyone runs to them."

All morning Akusi had been asked to help. Her sister would say, "Akusi, would you please take the birch pail and bring water to boil for our supper."

Her mother would say, "Akusi, would you please gather the branches of the poplar trees for more firewood."

Then, after she had done all that, she had to scrape the animal skin her mother had pegged to the ground to dry. This task had always belonged to her mother.

Akusi was angry. Dew Drop seemed to be talking an awful lot about the baby who was not even there.

Tall Birch and Strong Deer always seemed to be asking her what she would play with the baby who was not even there.

Akusi was so lost in her thoughts she did not realize Dew Drop had come to look for her.

"There you are Akusi," said Dew Drop. "I called and called and you did not answer. Come over here and sit for a moment."

Leo Sawicki (Pieces, Peguis Publishers)

THE JUST RIGHT GIFT (complete story)

Migizi loves his Gookum.

He wants to get her a gift, but it has to be just right.

He wants to find something as sweet as her kisses and as warm as her smiles.

Migizi goes to the store with his Mom. He finds gold earrings that sparkle in the light, but they are not just right, and he doesn't have the money anyway.

He goes to the park with his class. He finds some big, beautiful roses, but they are not just right, and Mr. Bee says you are not supposed to pick those anyway.

Migizi wants to cook a great, big moose roast – Gookum's favorite – but he doesn't know how to cook, and his dad says it's not time to hunt moose anyway.

He wants to make her the best painting ever, but he only has crayons. His sister says his drawing is good, but he can't get it just right.

Nothing he can buy, pick, make, or paint is as sweet as Gookum's kisses or as warm as her smiles.

And then he thinks of it – the one thing she always asks for. It's the one thing he can't buy, pick, make, or paint, the thing he does more just right than anyone else.

So the next time he visits, he gives her a great big, beautiful, sparkly hug.

And it is as sweet as her kisses, as warm as her smiles, and it is just right for both of them.

Pronunciation of Anishnaabemowin words:
Gookum (grandma): 'g' sounds very much like 'k'

Katherena Vermette (The Just Right Gift, Highwater Press)

EXCERPT FROM: THE BIRTH OF NANABOSHO

As she sat, full of new sorrow, she noticed a small white rabbit eating grass. She picked it up and began to pet it.

"Nokomis," said the rabbit, to her great surprise, "do you not know me? I am your grandson, Nanabosho.

With that, the little rabbit changed into her baby grandson.

Nokomis knew then, that her grandson was a powerful spirit who had changed himself into a rabbit because he had become so hungry.

When the birds and animals heard his name, they travelled the earth telling every living thing that a great spirit named Nanabosho now walks the earth. And very rapidly, the son of West Wind and grandson of Nokomis grew and learned of the world around him.

From that day on, Nanabosho, who could change himself into anything imaginable, became a great teacher of the Anishinabe in their beautiful homeland.

Joseph McLellan (The Birth of Nanabosho, Pemmican Publications Inc.)

EXCERPT FROM: WHY RABBITS HAVE LONG EARS

"Why are you crying Brother Rabbit?"

"Oh, Brother Squirrel, we will never see sunlight again. We will always have night." And away Rabbit went and crawled into a hole.

Squirrel was very frightened. His cries were overheard by Skunk.

"What is the matter, oh Brother Squirrel?"

"Oh, Brother Skunk, we will never see sunlight again, we will always have night." And away Squirrel went and crawled into a hole.

Skunk was very frightened. His cries were overheard by Lynx.

"What is the matter, oh Brother Skunk?"

"Oh Brother Lynx, we will never see sunlight again, we will always have night." And away Skunk went and crawled into a hole.

Throughout all this Nanabush slept.

This went on and on until all the forest animals had been told. Brother Lynx told Brother Fox who told Brother Deer who told Brother Moose who finally woke Nanabush up.

"What is going on?" Nanabush roared. Nanabush does not like his sleep interrupted.

"Oh, Nanabush, we will never see daylight again, we will always have night."

'Who told you this, Brother Moose?" Nanabush roared.

"Why, Brother Deer told me," said Moose.

"Why, Brother Fox told me," said Deer.

'Why, Brother Lynx told me," said Fox.

This went on and on till Nanabush got to Brother Squirrel.

"Why, Brother Rabbit told me," said Squirrel.

Nanabush went and pulled Rabbit out of his hole. By then Nanabush was very angry because he does not like his sleep interrupted.

Caroline Flett (Pieces, Peguis)

EXCERPT FROM: CLIPTAIL

There, in the bottom of a hollow tree, was a cosy little cave well-sheltered from rain and wind. Inside, dead leaves stuck together to make a warm carpet. There were four kittens, one of them the very image of Cliptail, except that he had a long tail like the one his mother used to have, a fine black tail with a white tuft at the tip. He was the one that Berthe liked best, and she patted him more than the others. Cliptail was saddened, for if there was anything that upset her, it was seeing one of her children favoured over the rest, and hearing someone say to her face: “That one, now, he’s the prettiest! That’s the one I like best!”

It wasn’t true! They were all beautiful, even the smallest, who looked one-eyed because his left eye was in black fur and his right eye in white.

That night when Aimé showed up with his big sack that could make kittens disappear, there wasn’t a cat in the house, as the saying goes!

Then the snow came. Snow, snow, snow! The sky sprinkled snow on the earth as if it had enough for all the years to come. And the North Wind came, too, shaking the snow-covered branches. When he tugged furiously at the junipers, snow fell in great chunks on the little family huddled underneath. It wasn’t a very good shelter compared with the cave in the hollow tree, but they couldn’t risk going back there. Cliptail had seen Aimé come by with his sack on his shoulder. And in any case, the kittens were getting too big and lively for Cliptail to carry around by the scruff of their necks. It had been hard enough for her to get them out of that cave with its sunken entrance.

Now Cliptail pushed her kittens down as far as she could beneath the juniper branches. She stretched out to make a long wall of warmth against the icy night air. And to make her children think that nothing was as bad as it seemed she tried a little purr. The North Wind went by just then, and caught her purr in passing and lifted it high in the air in the tumult and fury of the night.

Gabrielle Roy (Cliptail, Fonds Gabrielle Roy)

EXCERPT FROM: WOULD THEY LOVE A LION?

Anna dreamed she was a bird.
But when she woke up, she wasn't.
I could be a bird, said Anna. I could be.
And she flapped her wings.
I will be a bird.
And I'll have a nest.
A nest is too small, said Anna.
I want a cave. A big cave, a bear's cave.
I'll be a bear.
And Anna the bear growled and went to breakfast.
A bear is too small, said Anna.
No one notices a bear.
I'll be an elephant.
And Anna the elephant went outside and thumped and swung her trunk.
But that isn't enough, said Anna.
I want to make the world shake.
I need to be bigger, really big, the biggest of all.
I'll be a huge….. dinosaur! GRRRR
That's big, said Anna.
But now I'm all alone.
You can't cuddle a dinosaur.
I could be a rabbit. Everyone loves a rabbit.
And Anna the rabbit stopped for a kiss.
That's nice, said Anna. But….
A rabbit is too quiet.
I don't want to be quiet.
I want to play games.
I'll be a kitten – a cat –
A lion!
A lion loves to play.
Would they love a lion?
A lion can hide and a lion can roar.
ROAR
Lions stalk.
Lions pounce.
Lions eat fast.
Lions run fast.

Kady MacDonald Denton (Would They Love a Lion?, Kingfisher)

EXCERPT FROM: THE STORY OF LITTLE QUACK

One day Little Quack disappeared again. This time she was not at Apple Hill Farm.

Jackie tried to play with the other animals. But Woof ran off after the tractor. Chuck had her chicks to guard and Buttercup had grown too big to play.

A dozen times a day Jackie said, "Little Quack, I wish you'd come home." But a month went by and Jackie gave up hoping she would return.

One day, Jackie went to the far end of the pasture. He saw the lark's nest and chased a butterfly. He threw some corn to the gophers. Buttercup licked Jackie's hand and wandered off again. Buck tried to nibble Jackie's shirt and then ran away on his wobbly legs.

"I wish I had my duck," said Jackie. Then he came to the brook.

There was Little Quack. And swimming with her were ten fluffy ducklings.

Little Quack came out of the water. Jack fed Little Quack some corn. The ducklings came out too. "Quack, quack, quack," they said.

How would he get Little Quack and her family to the barnyard? He picked up the damp little ducklings and carried them home in his old felt hat.

"Look!" called Jackie to his mother. "I found Little Quack, and she has babies!"

"Little Quack won't be lonely now," said Jackie's mother.

"I won't be lonely either," Jackie said, filling the old tub with water. "Now I have Little Quack and her quacklings."

And the ducks swam round and round.

Betty Gibson (The Story of Little Quack, Kids Can Press)

EXCERPT FROM: LITTLE ZEBRA AND HIS LOST STRIPES

"What have we here?" said the rhinoceros, "Why all the big tears, Little Zebra?"

"Oh, Mr. Rhinoceros, I have lost my stripes and I don't know where to find them, and my mommy said I must find them before my daddy comes home."

"Where do you think you may have lost them?" asked the rhinoceros.

"I thought I may have lost them in the meadow where I was playing tag, but Mr. Elephant and I looked and looked and they weren't there," he said through his sobs. "Then I thought I may have lost them in the tall trees where I was playing with the monkeys, but Mr. Giraffe helped me look there, and they weren't there."

"Now think Little Zebra, where else were you playing today?" asked the rhinoceros.

"I was playing down by the river, I even went for a swim with my friends," said Little Zebra.

So Little Zebra plodded along after the rhinoceros to the river, where they looked and looked for the stripes. The rhinoceros even went into the river, and looked along the bottom but he couldn't find the stripes.

"I am sorry Little Zebra," said the rhinoceros, "you didn't lose your stripes in the river."

"What am I going to do, Mr. Rhinoceros?" asked Little Zebra, "this is the only, other place I played today."

"Look, look, Little Zebra, over there on that bush, aren't those your stripes?" exclaimed the rhinoceros.

"Yes, they are! I remember now, I took them off so I wouldn't get them wet when I went for a swim!" said Little Zebra happily, jumping up and down. "Put them on now, and hurry home for your supper," said the rhinoceros. "Thank you, thank you, Mr. Rhinoceros!" said Little Zebra as he danced up the path in the direction of home.

Gladys Simpson (Rapid City Anthology, Compascor)

EXCERPT FROM: CHARLOTTE'S WEB

Charlotte's web never looked more beautiful than it looked this morning. Each strand held dozens of bright drops of early morning dew. The light from the east struck it and made it all plain and clear. It was a perfect piece of designing and building. In another hour or two, a steady stream of people would pass by, admiring it, and reading it, and looking at Wilbur, and marvelling at the miracle.

As Wilbur was studying the web, a pair of whiskers and a sharp face appeared. Slowly Templeton dragged himself across the pen and threw himself down in a corner.

"I'm back," he said in a husky voice. "What a night!"

The rat was swollen to twice his normal size. His stomach was as big around as a jelly jar.

"What a night!" he repeated hoarsely. "What feasting and carousing! A real gorge! I must have eaten the remains of thirty lunches. Never have I seen such leavings, and everything well-ripened and seasoned with the passage of time and the heat of the day. Oh, it was rich, my friends, rich!"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Charlotte in disgust. "It would serve you right if you had an acute attack of indigestion."

"Don't worry about my stomach," snarled Templeton. "It can handle anything. And by the way, I've got some bad news. As I came past that pig next door—the one that calls himself Uncle—I noticed a blue tag on the front of his pen. That means he has won first prize. I guess you're licked, Wilbur. You might as well relax—nobody is going to hang any medal on *you*. Furthermore, I wouldn't be surprised if Zuckerman changes his mind about you. Wait till he gets hankering for some fresh pork and smoked ham and crisp bacon! He'll take the knife to you, my boy."

"Be still, Templeton!" said Charlotte. "You're too stuffed and bloated to know what you're saying. Don't pay any attention to him, Wilbur!"

Wilbur tried not to think about what the rat had just said. He decided to change the subject.

"Templeton," said Wilbur, "if you weren't so dopey, you would have noticed that Charlotte has made an egg sac. She is going to become a mother. For your information, there are five hundred and fourteen eggs in that peachy little sac."

"Is this true?" asked the rat, eyeing the sac suspiciously.

"Yes, it's true," sighed Charlotte.

"Congratulations!" murmured Templeton. "This *has* been a night!" He closed his eyes, pulled some straw over himself, and dropped off into a deep sleep. Wilbur and Charlotte were glad to be rid of him for a while.

E.B. White (Charlotte's Web, Harper Trophy)

EXCERPT FROM: CHARLIE AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY

"Which room shall be next?" said Mr. Wonka as he turned away and darted into the elevator. "Come on! Hurry up! We *must* get going! And how many children are there left now?"

Little Charlie looked at Grandpa Joe, and Grandpa Joe looked back at little Charlie.

"But Mr. Wonka," Grandpa Joe called after him, "there's…there's only Charlie left now."

Mr. Wonka swung round and stared at Charlie.

There was a silence. Charlie stood there holding tightly onto Grandpa Joe's hand.

"You mean you're the *only* one left?" Mr. Wonka said, pretending to be surprised.

"Why, yes," whispered Charlie. "Yes."

Mr. Wonka suddenly exploded with excitement. "But my *dear boy*," he cried out, "*that means you've won*!" He rushed out of the elevator and started shaking Charlie's hand so furiously it nearly came off. "Oh, I do congratulate you!" he cried. "I really do! I'm absolutely delighted! It couldn't be better! How wonderful this is! I had a hunch, you know, right from the beginning, that it was going to be you! Well done, Charlie, well done! This is terrific! Now the fun is really going to start! But we mustn't dilly! We mustn't dally! There's even less time to lose now than there was before! We have an *enormous* number of things to do before the day is out! Just think of the arrangements that have to be made! And the people we have to fetch! But luckily for us, we have the great glass elevator to speed things up! Jump in, my dear Charlie, jump in! You too, Grandpa Joe, sir! No, no *after* you! That's the way! Now then! This time *I* shall choose the button we are going to press!" Mr. Wonka's bright twinkling blue eyes rested for a moment on Charlie's face.

Something crazy is going to happen now, Charlie thought. But he wasn't frightened. He wasn't even nervous. He was just terrifically excited. And so was Grandpa Joe. The old man's face was shining with excitement as he watched every move that Mr. Wonka made. Mr. Wonka was reaching for a button high up on the glass ceiling of the elevator. Charlie and Grandpa Joe both craned their necks to read what it said on the little label beside the button.

It said…UP AND OUT.

"*Up* and *out*," thought Charlie, "What sort of a room is that?"

Mr. Wonka pressed the button.

The glass doors closed.

"Hold on!" cried Mr. Wonka.

Then WHAM! The elevator shot straight up like a rocket! "Yippee!" shouted Grandpa Joe. Charlie was clinging to Grandpa Joe's legs and Mr. Wonka was holding onto a strap from the ceiling, and up they went, up, up, up, straight up this time, with no twistings or turnings, and Charlie could hear the whistling of the air outside as the elevator went faster and faster. "Yippee!" shouted Grandpa Joe again. "Yippee! Here we go!"

"Faster! cried Mr. Wonka, banging the wall of the elevator with his hand. "Faster! Faster! If we don't go any faster than this, we shall never get through!"

"Through what?" shouted Grandpa Joe. "What have we got to get through?"

"Ah-ha!" cried Mr. Wonka, "you wait and see! I've been *longing* to press this button for years! But I've never done it until now! I was tempted many times! Oh, yes, I was tempted! But I couldn't bear the thought of making a great big hole in the roof of the factory! Here we go, boys! Up and out!"

Roald Dahl (Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Puffin Books)

EXCERPT FROM: THE OLDEN DAYS COAT

Sal picked up another album, and the pages fell open at a photograph of a girl about her own age, a really old-fashioned girl with a floppy bow in her long hair, and wearing a frilly dress down past her knees with a huge wide sash at the waist, and – look at that! – striped stockings and high buttoned boots! Why on earth did people wear such funny clothes away back then?

Sal chortled to herself, then suddenly stopped. Years and years from now, would her own jeans and T-shirt, or even her dress-up long skirts, look funny to some other kid? Maybe even to her own grand- daughter? What a weird thought. And could this photo right here be Gran as a kid? It didn't say, and it was impossible to tell. This girl was sort of frowning and you couldn't see her eyes clearly at all. She looked uncomfortable, as though she wasn't enjoying having her picture taken, all dressed up like that. No wonder. The frilly dress had dozens of little buttons down the front – imagine doing all those up! – and the sash looked too tight.

Sal put down the album and dug deeper into the trunk. She came up with something she had never noticed before on other visits to Gran's place. A girl's coat. An olden days coat. It was dark navy blue, with a hood, and at the waist there was attached a narrow red wool sash. It looked as though it might fit Sal. She decided to try it on. She slipped out of her own coat and into the old one. It fitted her perfectly.

And then –

Sal felt all at once very dizzy. There was a moment of darkness, and she wondered if she was fainting. She had never fainted, so she did not know how it might feel. She decided it wouldn't feel like this. For an instant or for a long time (she wasn't sure which), Sal didn't think anything. It was not like sleep. Rather, it was like going away from yourself for awhile. Like losing track of time. And yet, oddly enough, she wasn't afraid.

Margaret Laurence (The Olden Days Coat, McClelland and Stewart)

EXCERPT FROM: THE PHANTOM TOLLBOOTH

"If you please," said Milo, "my name is Milo and this is Tock. Thank you very much for inviting us to your banquet, and I think your palace is beautiful."

"Exquisite," corrected the duke.

"Lovely," counseled the minister.

"Handsome," recommended the count.

"Pretty," hinted the Earl.

"Charming," submitted the undersecretary.

"SILENCE," suggested the king. "Now, young man, what can you do to entertain us? Sing songs? Tell stories? Compose sonnets? Juggle plates? Do tumbling tricks? Which is it?"

"I can't do any of those things," admitted Milo.

"What an ordinary little boy," commented the king. "Why, my cabinet members can do all sorts of things. The duke here can make mountains out of molehills. The minister splits hairs. The count makes hay while the sun shines. The earl leaves no stone unturned. And the undersecretary," he finished ominously, "hangs by a thread. Can't you do anything at all?"

"I can count to a thousand," offered Milo.

"A-A-R-G-H, numbers! Never mention numbers here. Only use them when we absolutely have to," growled Azaz disgustedly. "Now, why don't you and Tock come up here and sit next to me, and we'll have some dinner?"

"Are you ready with the menu?" reminded the Humbug.

"Well," said Milo, remembering that his mother had always told him to eat lightly when he was a guest, "why don't we have a light meal?"

"A light meal it shall be," roared the bug, waving his arms.

The waiters rushed in carrying large serving platters and set them on the table in front of the king. When he lifted the covers, shafts of brilliant-colored light leaped from the plates and bounced around the ceiling, the walls, across the floor, and out the windows.

"Not a very substantial meal," said the Humbug, rubbing his eyes, "but quite an attractive one. Perhaps you can suggest something a little more filling."

The king clapped his hands, the platters were removed, and, without thinking, Milo quickly suggested, "Well, in that case, I think we ought to have a square meal of—"

"A square meal it is," shouted the Humbug again. The king clapped his hands once more and waiters reappeared carrying plates heaped high with steaming squares of all sizes and colors.

"Ugh," said the Spelling Bee, tasting one, "these are awful." No one else seemed to like them very much either, and the Humbug got one caught in his throat and almost choked.

"Time for speeches," announced the king as the plates were again removed and everyone looked glum. "You first," he commanded, pointing to Milo.

"Your Majesty, ladies and gentlemen," started Milo timidly, "I would like to take this opportunity to say that in all the—"

"That's quite enough," snapped the king. "Mustn't talk all day."

Norton Juster (The Phantom Tollbooth, Scholastic)

EXCERPT FROM: ALICE IN WONDERLAND

"Speak English!" said the Eaglet. "I don't know the meaning of half those long words, and, what's more, I don't believe you do either!" And the Eaglet bent down its head to hide a smile; some of the other birds tittered audibly.

"What I was going to say," said the Dodo in an offended tone, "was, that the best thing to get us dry would be a Caucus Race."

"What *is* a Caucus race?" said Alice; not that she much wanted to know, but the Dodo had paused as if it thought that *somebody* ought to speak, and no one else seemed inclined to say anything.

"Why," said the Dodo, "the best way to explain it is to do it." (And as you might like to try the thing yourself, some winter day, I will tell you how the Dodo managed it.)

First it marked out a race course, in a sort of circle ("the exact shape doesn't matter," it said), and then all the party was placed along the course, here and there. There was no 'One, two, three, and away," but they began running when they liked, and stopped when they liked, so that it was not easy to know when the race was over. However, when they had been running half an hour or so, and were quite dry again, the Dodo suddenly called out, "The race is over!" and they all crowded round it, panting and asking, "But who has won?"

This question the Dodo could not answer without a great deal of thought, and it sat for a long time with one finger pressed upon its forehead (the position in which you usually see Shakespeare, in the pictures of him), while the rest waited in silence. At last the Dodo said, "*Everybody* has won, and all must have prizes."

"But who is to give the prizes?" quite a chorus of voices asked.

"Why, *she*, of course," said the Dodo, pointing to Alice with one finger; and the whole party at once crowded round her, calling out in a confused way, "Prizes! Prizes!"

Alice had no idea what to do, and in despair she put her hand into her pocket and pulled out a box of comfits (luckily the salt water had not got into it), and handed them round as prizes. There was exactly one apiece, all round.

"But she must have a prize herself, you know," said the Mouse.

"Of course," the Dodo replied very gravely. "What else have you got in your pocket?" he went on, turning to Alice.

"Only a thimble," said Alice sadly.

"Hand it over here," said the Dodo.

Then they all crowded round her once more, while the Dodo solemnly presented the thimble, saying, "We beg your acceptance of this elegant thimble"; and, when it had finished this short speech, they all cheered.

Lewis Carroll (Alice in Wonderland, Holt, Rinehart & Winston)

EXCERPT FROM: FREEDOM TRAIN

Harriet learned the paths through the underbrush and how to imitate the calls of the birds. Each Sunday she and Daddy Ben went for a walk, exploring the woods that Ben had known since he was a small boy. He showed her his old hiding places, the caves and hollow trees and sheltered spots deep in the forest. When she grew hungry, he taught her which berries and leaves were good to eat and which would make her sick, where the best nuts grew in autumn and the clearest, coldest springs bubbled over the ground.

On the way home, he made Harriet take the lead. If she got twisted in her direction, he patiently pointed out the green moss on the oaks and pines which could be her guide.

"Moss on the north side of the trees by day and the North Star at night. You can always go by them," Ben told his daughter.

This was how Harriet, who did not have a last name, received her schooling on the Eastern Shore of Maryland thirty years before the Civil War. When her education was complete, she could neither read nor write nor add. To her, geography meant two points of the compass: South and North. History went back only a hundred years, starting with the day her grandmother was kidnapped from a village on the African plains. Science was a knowledge of the sky and the forest, the North Star and the woodland paths to which it pointed.

But Harriet's school had taught her one important lesson until she knew it with her body, with her mind and with her heart:

"Let my people go!"

Dorothy Sterling (Freedom Train, Scholastic)

EXCERPT FROM: NOBODY'S DOG

The Tartar stopped a few yards away from Duncan. Again their eyes met, as they had earlier at the edge of the woods. Duncan was aware of the size and power of the dog, and of the teeth that showed so plainly between the dog's black lips. But he was also aware of the younger children watching him. Duncan's only fame, within the school, lay in his fearlessness and meanness, and that reputation was the most valuable thing he had. Fearlessness and meanness were just about all there was to Duncan Burn, and he had a scary feeling that if he were no longer famous for his courage, he would be nothing at all. Just a big, fat, clumsy nothing.

The huge, sharp-toothed dog was in front of him, possibly mad with rabies. Possibly a wild dog, part wolf. Possibly a killer.

Behind Duncan were the children, waiting, watching silently, hoping he would give them another chance to make fun of him.

He tossed the ax down behind him and went toward the dog. From deep inside the animal came a low sound that might have been a growl. Duncan had no way of knowing that this was The Tartar's way of expressing joy, or that the dog's trembling was caused by his delight at Duncan's approach.

Duncan went up close to the dog's head, close enough to be bitten if that was what the dog had in mind. Keeping his gaze fastened to the dog's so that he could jump back at the first sign of attack, Duncan reached out and rubbed his knuckles across the animal's skull.

The Tartar's tail began to move. It lashed faster and faster. Suddenly he stood up on his hind legs, braced his front feet on the boy's shoulders, and began licking his face.

For an instant terror froze Duncan. Then the whipping tail and the warm searching tongue made their meaning clear. A thick bubble of warmth rose inside Duncan, a feeling he hadn't had since he was a very small child. It made his eyes sting. It made his arms feel heavy with wanting to wrap themselves around the dog.

Lynn Hall (Nobody's Dog, Scholastic)

EXCERPT FROM: THE B F G

The Big Friendly Giant was seated at the great table in his cave and he was doing his homework. Sophie sat cross-legged on the table-top near by, watching him at work.

The glass jar containing the one and only good dream they had caught that day stood between them.

The B F G, with great care and patience, was printing something on a piece of paper with an enormous pencil.

"What are you writing?" Sophie asked him.

"Every dream is having its own special label on the bottle," the B F G said. "How else could I be finding the one I am wanting in a hurry?"

"But can you really and truly tell what sort of a dream it's going to be simply by listening to it?" Sophie asked.

"I can," said the B F G, not looking up.

"But *how*? Is it by the way it hums and buzzes?"

"You is less or more right," the B F G said. "Every dream in the world is making a different sort of buzzy-hum music. And these grand swashboggling ears of mine is able to read that music."

"By music, do you mean tunes?"

"I is not meaning tunes."

"Then what *do* you mean?"

"Human beans is having their own music, right or left?"

"Right," Sophie said. "Lots of music."

"And sometimes human beans is very overcome when they is hearing wonderous music. They is getting shivers down their spindels. Right or left?"

"Right," Sophie said.

"So the music is saying something to them. It is sending a message. I do not think human beans is knowing what that message is, but they is loving it just the same."

"That's about right," Sophie said.

"But because of these jumpsquiffling ears of mine," the B F G said, "I is not only able to *hear* the music that dreams is making but I is *understanding* it also."

"What do you mean *understanding* it?" Sophie said.

"I can read it," the B F G said. "It talks to me. It is like a langwitch,"

Roald Dahl (The B F G, Scholastic)

EXCERPT FROM: THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE

"Good evening, good evening," said the Faun. "Excuse me – I don't want to be inquisitive – but should I be right in thinking that you are a Daughter of Eve?"

"My name's Lucy," said she, not quite understanding him.

"But you are – forgive me – you are what they call a girl?" asked the Faun.

"Of course I'm a girl," said Lucy.

"You are in fact Human?"

"Of course I'm human," said Lucy, still a little puzzled.

"To be sure, to be sure," said the Faun. "How stupid of me! But I've never seen a Son of Adam or a Daughter of Eve before. I am delighted. That is to say –" and then it stopped as if it had been going to say something it had not intended but had remembered in time. "Delighted, delighted," it went on. "Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Tumnus."

"I am very pleased to meet you, Mr. Tumnus," said Lucy.

"And may I ask, O Lucy Daughter of Eve," said Mr. Tumnus, "how you have come into Narnia?"

"Narnia? What's that?" said Lucy.

"This is the land of Narnia," said the Faun, "where we are now; all that lies between the lamp-post and the great castle of Cair Paravel on the eastern sea. And you – you have come from the wild woods of the west?"

"I – I got in through the wardrobe in the spare room," said Lucy.

"Ah!" said Mr. Tumnus in a rather melancholy voice, "if only I had worked harder at geography when I was a little Faun, I should no doubt know all about those strange countries. It is too late now."

"But they aren't countries at all," said Lucy, almost laughing. "It's only just back there – at least – I'm not sure. It is summer there."

"Meanwhile," said Mr. Tumnus, "it is winter in Narnia, and has been for ever so long, and we shall both catch cold if we stand here talking in the snow. Daughter of Eve from the far land of Spare Oom where eternal summer reigns around the bright city of War Drobe, how would it be if you came and had tea with me?"

C. S. Lewis (The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, Scholastic)

EXCERPT FROM: TICKET TO CURLEW

Suddenly he heard a great rumbling sound. Thunder. He stopped. Fear made his bones feel weak. Thunder in such cold weather must mean a storm coming fast.

Sam looked up at the sky. The high blue was clear. No clouds. But the thunder rolled on.

Then Sam realized he was hearing the thunder partly through his feet. The frozen ground was shaking. He turned around again slowly, squinting against the dazzle of the sun on the snow.

He saw horses galloping toward him. A whole herd of them running fast, their manes and tails flying in the frosty air.

Sam could not move. Maybe the horses would gallop over him, but he could not move.

He could see their colours now, black and brown and spotted. One that must be Goldie, a dark one that was surely Pete. But where was Prince? There must be a white horse among the others. He scanned the moving mass of bodies anxiously.

Then he saw that the herd had an order to it. That black horse was always in the rear and at the front was a white horse, like a shadow against the white snow. A white horse galloping straight toward him.

As the herd came closer Sam kept his eyes on that white horse. Surely he was smaller than the others. Surely it was Prince.

It was. Prince was galloping straight toward him.

But when the horses were so close that Sam could see Prince's black eyes looking at him, the whole herd suddenly veered away. All the horses followed Prince and he led them in a great circle around Sam. Three times they circled. Then Prince tossed his head and neighed. All the other horses neighed, too, and Prince led them away, straight away from Sam toward the north.

Sam watched them until they were out of sight. Once again he was alone in the middle of that great expanse of white and gold under the arching sky. He stood until a tingle in his right big toe told him he had stood long enough. Then suddenly he was running again, running toward home.

It was a long run. Sam was surprised at how far he had gone. He reached the farmyard just as Pa was leading Lady and Rabbit into the barn. They had been to town and back while he was out on the prairie.

Sam rushed panting into the barn. It was a few minutes before he could speak. Pa stood waiting. Finally Sam took a deep, steadying breath.

"Pa," he said. "Pa, Prince is the king of the horses!" And he told Pa all that had happened.

When he was finished, Pa held up both hands as if he was going to say something very important.

"Sam," he said, "if Prince is the king of the horses, we'll have to change his name."

"Change his name?"

"Yes, Sam Ferrier. From now on the horse once known as Prince will be called King."

For a long moment Sam thought about it.

"King," he said to himself, and then out loud. "King. It sounds right to me, Pa. It sounds true."

Celia Barker Lottridge (Ticket to Curlew, Groundwood Books)

EXCERPT FROM: ISLAND EXPLORERS

There was a violent puff of orange as flames raced across the shallow pool, fanned by the west wind, and black smoke billowed out toward the sea ice.

"Leaping lizards!" shouted Charlie.

"Holy smoke!" gasped Matt's father.

"It's oil! Real oil!" screamed Kayak.

"I admit," yelled Matthew, "mosquito larvae wouldn't burn like that."

"You're right." Mr. Morgan laughed as he clapped his big rough hand around Matt's shoulders. "You're staring at our fame and fortune, not in copper, nor in gold, but real black diamonds—that's what the oil men call it. I'll bet we're standing on a vast oil deposit loaded with natural gas as well. At the very moment when the whole world needs energy, we four have found it"—he snapped his fingers—"just like that!"

"Matt, run back to the tent and bring me Matilda's emergency paddle. I don't want to stand too close, but I want to stir up this pool. The water underneath should easily snuff out this small fire, unless it's highly concentrated oil, and, believe me, I hope and pray it is! I hope there's a billion barrels of rich crude and many trillion cubic feet of natural gas lying underneath our feet."

Matthew hurried back with the paddle and watched as his father carefully stirred the pool. The flames increased and billowed with black smoke.

"Wonderful!" his father said.

"It's coming up from way down under," Charlie said and danced an outback jig beside the fire. "It burns like pure oil," he yelled. "Looks like we've struck it rich."

Matt's father gave a violent sweep across the pool and snuffed out all the flames.

"Good," he said. "We don't want to waste our precious treasure." He looked around him. "There may be other pools near here that show signs of oil, or rock cracks that are seeping natural gas. You two boys might go out and have a look around for us. Charlie and I are going to stay here, gather some samples and build up a stone cairn to mark this find of ours. Matt," his father shouted, "don't light any matches!"

Kayak and Matthew shouldered their light packs and started off across the country.

Matthew let out his breath in a whistle. "I couldn't believe my eyes when that rainbow pool caught fire. It proved you were right. There certainly wasn't much water there."

As the Arctic sun dipped down into the western sea, Kayak sat on the tundra and examined the holes he had worn through his sealskin boot soles. "It's no good living far away from women," Kayak said. "When Charlie flies back to Frobisher, I'm going to send a letter written in *Inuktitut* to my mother and my grandmother, asking them to make us both some new skin boots. I only have one more pair. When the snow starts flying, I don't want to be out here in my bare feet."

Matthew leaned against a rock and, using the binoculars, examined the pools of water that lay to the north and east of them.

"That may be more oil over there," he said. They rose and hurried toward it.

"Dad and Charlie are going to do a dance when they hear that we've found more pools of oil," Matt said a little later.

They paused and rested on their packs and ate their canned meat on hardtack biscuits. Because it was soft on the tundra and the sun was warm, they both fell sound asleep.

James Houston (Black Diamonds, McClelland & Stewart)

EXCERPT FROM: THE PRAIRIE FIRE

Percy grabbed the reins and pulled the blindfolded horse toward the small fires that had started up in the farmyard. At first Maud whinnied and pulled back, but finally she shuddered and followed him.

Back and forth they went, from the haystacks to the barn and to the sod house. Back and forth until there were fewer and fewer fires to put out.

At last there were none. With a rush of hot air, the prairie fire passed by the homestead.

Percy's mother and father came through the smoke and staggered, coughing, into the farmyard. Their eyes were red and their faces and clothes black with charred grass and soot. When they saw Percy through the haze, they ran to him, and the family clung together in the smoking yard.

Late that afternoon, Percy and his parents stood in the doorway of the sod house. Curls of smoke drifted up around the haystacks and little fires still smouldered along the fireguard. Out on the prairie, the path of the fire was charred black to the edge of the sky.

'Do you think Old Jim and Frank are all right?" Percy asked, anxiously.

Father put his arm around Percy's shoulders. "They had plenty of time to reach the slough, and they probably waded out into the water where the fire couldn't reach them. Those boys are a pretty smart pair. They must be hungry by now. I think I'll walk down to the slough and drive them back to the barn."

Father looked down at Percy and smiled. "It's a job for two men. Why don't you come with me, Son? I'll need your help."

Marilynn Reynolds (The Prairie Fire, Orca Book Publishers)

EXCERPT FROM: THE MAGICIAN'S REVENGE

The egg trick was ruined.

It went on like that all through. It seemed from the whispers of the Quick Man that the magician must have concealed up his sleeve, in addition to the rings, hens, and fish, several packs of cards, a loaf of bread, a doll's cradle, a live guinea-pig, a fifty-cent piece, and a rocking-chair.

The reputation of the magician was rapidly sinking below zero. At the close of the evening he made a final effort.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I will present to you, in conclusion, the famous Japanese trick recently invented by the natives of Tipperary. Will you, sir," he continued, turning toward the Quick Man, "will you kindly hand me your gold watch?"

It was passed to him.

"Have I your permission to put it into this mortar and pound it to pieces?" he asked savagely.

The Quick Man nodded and smiled.

The magician threw the watch into the mortar and grasped a sledge hammer from the table. There was a sound of violent smashing. "He's-slipped-it-up-his sleeve," whispered the Quick Man.

"Now, sir," continued the magician, "will you allow me to take your handkerchief and punch holes in it? Thank you. You see, ladies and gentlemen, there is no deception; the holes are visible to the eye."

The face of the Quick Man beamed. This time the real mystery of the thing fascinated him.

"And now, sir, will you kindly pass me your silk hat and allow me to dance on it? Thank you."

The magician made a few rapid passes with his feet and exhibited the hat crushed beyond recognition.

"And will you now, sir, take off your shirt collar and permit me to burn it in the candle? Thank you, sir. And will you allow me to smash your spectacles for you with my hammer? Thank you."

By this time the features of the Quick Man were taking on a puzzled expression.
"This thing beats me," he whispered, "I don't see through it a bit."

There was a great hush upon the audience. Then the magician drew himself up to his full height, and, with a withering look at the Quick Man, he concluded:

"Ladies and gentlemen, you will observe that I have, with this gentleman's permission, broken his watch, burnt his collar, smashed his spectacles, and danced on his hat. If he will give me the further permission to paint green stripes on his overcoat, or to tie his suspenders in a knot, I shall be delighted to entertain you. If not, the performance is at an end."

Amid a glorious burst of music from the orchestra the curtain fell, and the audience broke up, convinced that there are some tricks, at any rate, that are not done up the magician's sleeve.

Stephen Leacock (All Sails Set, Copp Clark Publishing)

EXCERPT FROM: ANNE OF GREEN GABLES "MORNING AT GREEN GABLES"

Anne dropped on her knees and gazed out into the June morning, her eyes glistening with delight. Oh, wasn't it beautiful? Wasn't it a lovely place? Suppose she wasn't really going to stay here! She would imagine she was. There was scope for imagination here.

A huge cherry-tree grew outside, so close that its boughs tapped against the house, and it was so thick-set with blossoms that hardly a leaf was to be seen. On both sides of the house was a big orchard, one apple trees and one of cherry trees, also showered over with blossoms; and their grass was all sprinkled with dandelions. In the garden below were lilac trees purple with flowers, and their dizzily sweet fragrance drifted up to the window on the morning wind.

Below the garden a green field lush with clover sloped down to the hollow where the brook ran and where scores of white birches grew, upspringing airily out of an undergrowth suggestive of delightful possibilities in ferns and mosses and woodsy things generally. Beyond it was a hill, green and feathery with spruce and fir; there was a gap in it where the gray gable end of the little house she had seen from the other side of the Lake of Shining Waters was visible.

Off to the left were the big barns and beyond them, away down over green, low-sloping fields, was a sparkling blue glimpse of sea.

Anne's beauty-loving eyes lingered on it all, taking everything greedily in; she had looked on so many unlovely places in her life, poor child; but this was as lovely as anything she had ever dreamed.

She knelt there, lost to everything but the loveliness around her, until she was startled by a hand on her shoulder. Marilla had come in unheard by the small dreamer.

"It's time you were dressed," she said curtly.

Marilla really did not know how to talk to the child, and her uncomfortable ignorance made her crisp and curt when she did not mean to be.

Anne stood up and drew a long breath.

"Oh, isn't it wonderful?" she said, waving her hand comprehensively at the good world outside.

"It's a big tree," said Marilla, "and it blooms great, but the fruit don't amount to much never—small and wormy."

"Oh, I don't mean just the tree; of course it's lovely—yes, it's *radiantly* lovely—it blooms as if it meant it—but I meant everything, the garden and the orchard and the brook and the woods, the whole big dear world. Don't you feel as if you just loved the world on a morning like this? And I can hear the brook laughing all the way up here. Have you ever noticed what cheerful things brooks are? They're always laughing. Even in wintertime I've heard them under the ice. I'm so glad there's a brook near Green Gables. Perhaps you think it doesn't make any difference to me when you're not going to keep me, but it does. I shall always like to remember that there is a brook at Green Gables even if I never see it again. If there wasn't a brook I'd be *haunted* by the uncomfortable feeling that there ought to be one. I'm not in the depths of despair this morning. I never can be in the morning. Isn't it a splendid thing that there are mornings? But I feel very sad. I've just been imagining that it was really me you wanted after all and that I was to stay here for ever and ever. It was a great comfort while it lasted. But the worst of imagining things is that the time comes when you have to stop and that hurts."

"You'd better get dressed and come downstairs and never mind your imaginings," said Marilla as soon as she could get a word in edgewise. "Breakfast is waiting. Wash your face and comb your hair. Leave the window up and turn your bedclothes back over the foot of the bed. Be as smart as you can."

L.M. Montgomery (Anne of Green Gables, McClelland & Stewart)

EXCERPT FROM: THE BRUSHMAKER'S DAUGHTER

After invading Poland, Germany had moved on to attack other countries across Europe, and the war was getting worse by the day. We had stopped hearing from friends and family members whom we had left behind in Poland. It was as if they had disappeared off the planet. And here we were, out on the streets of Berlin, running from our home and heading to a place that Papa said would be safe for us.

"Are you sure we know where we're going?" I asked again. I couldn't help myself. It was fear that made me question my father over and over.

"I know."

A motorcar suddenly came up behind us, revving its engine and screeching its tires. Papa grabbed me and pushed me behind a building, flattening us up against the wall and encircling me again with his arm. A cold sweat trickled down my back, and I shivered in the October evening air. Winter was coming. Soon, the snow would be on the ground here in Berlin. It was usually a time to play outdoors with my friends. If the snow was deep enough, we would make snowballs and throw them at each other, laughing and ducking when one came our way. But not now. There would be no laughter this winter. There would be no playing in the snow this year. And who knew for how long after that? I pulled my scarf tighter around my neck and tugged at the sleeves of my jacket, trying to cover my bare wrists. The jacket was too small for me, and had been too small for months. I hadn't had any new clothes in a long time, and I didn't know when I would.

The car passed, belching black smoke. "Wait one more minute," Papa said as I made a move to continue walking. A moment later, a second car passed.

"How did you know?" I whispered. My voice shook.

A faint smile passed over Papa's lips. "I hear and I know."

I paused, waiting for his signal. "Now, we can go," he finally said.

We continued moving, turning left down another laneway, then right across a quiet street, and then left and right again. The cobblestones pressed up into the soles of my shoes. Like my jacket, they were also becoming too tight on my feet. One lone streetlamp flickered on and off as we crossed another street and then veered down one last narrow lane and into a small courtyard. Buildings rose up on either side of us, swallowing the last bit of light from the street behind us. Up ahead and to one side was a gray door. Papa walked up to it as if he had always known it was there.

"We're here," he said.

Kathy Kacer (The Brushmaker's Daughter, Second Story Press)

EXCERPT FROM: MUSIC FOR TIGERS

A spider the size of a man's hand is crawling slowly along the top of the doorframe. Its milk-chocolate-colored body is hairy and easily the size of a chicken egg. I'm too scared to scream at first. I watch as it makes its way carefully from the doorframe to the corner of the cabin. Then it settles, crouches, and glares at me. I am positive it plans to pounce. I let out an earsplitting scream.

Uncle Ruff bursts through the door. "What?" he yells. "What is it Lou? Are you okay?"

I shake my head and point above his head. "Be – be careful!" I stammer finally. "It's right behind you!"

Uncle Ruff turns. "What? Where?"

"The spider!" I scream. "In the corner! Can't you see it? It's huge?"

He snorts. "The huntsman, you mean?" He angles his head to get a better look at it. "She's a beauty."

"Please," I beg. "Please kill it."

"Kill it? Nah. We don't kill huntsmen. They eat the bugs, we like them. She's just come inside for a rest. Must be going to rain soon. They usually come in before the rain." He croons at her. "She's a decent size, I'll give you that." He grins. "This girl isn't going to hurt you."

"I don't care. Please get her out." I sob. "Please."

"Okay, kid," he says, reaching for my violin bow. "Hold your horses, no need to fret."

I watch, morbidly fascinated, as he nudges and coaxes the spider onto the end of my bow. Once it grips the bow with its disgustingly long, hairy legs, he opens the door and carries it to some nearby bushes. "Off you go," he tells it. "Lou isn't too keen on your visit, thanks anyway." He pops his head back into the cabin. "You okay now kid?" He can't keep the smile from his face.

I nod, relief flooding through me as we hear the sound of car tires crunching on the gravel driveway outside. I peek over Uncle Ruff's shoulder to see an SUV with the Eco Lodge logo on the side pull up.

"Come on," he says, offering me his hand. "You've had a scare, you'll be all right. Let's go see Mel." He helps me up and slaps my back playfully. "Look on the bright side. Now you've had your first spider encounter, you're a true-blue Aussie!"

Michelle Kadarusman (Music For Tigers, Pajama Press)

EXCERPT FROM: HOW THE HUMAN PEOPLE GOT THE FIRST FIRE

Then it happened—as quick as a flash—before your eyes could blink. Ah-tush-mit had turned towards the roaring fire and with a mighty leap he sailed into the air—right over the roaring fire sailed he.

"Ho-ho-ho-ho-ho," roared the Wolves. "Ah-tush-mit is on fire. Ho-ho-ho-ho-ho."

Ah-tush-mit had indeed caught on fire. His little legs smouldered between the knees. He stopped his dancing and bounded through the great doors with a mighty leap. Once clear of the great Wolf house he raced for his life towards home as fast as he could run.

All around the leaping, roaring fire the Wolves sat bemused. The whole action of little Ah-tush-mit had happened so quickly and seemingly without intent that they were taken completely by surprise. Before they realized what had occurred Ah-tush-mit was well away from the Wolf village. Ah-tush-mit, the Son of Deer, the fleetest of them all, had completely out-smarted the Wolves, the most dreaded people of the land.

With a spark smouldering between his knees he had captured the fire! With his sharp pointed feet, his flints and sandstone hooves he had successfully run the sharp broken stakes of bones.

Yes indeed, with his colourful costume, his captivating dance, he had outwitted the most cunning people of the land. Ah-tush-mit, Son of Deer, the small one, had captured the fire for the human people.

The secret something Ah-tush-mit had tucked between his knees had been a small bundle of very dry sticks he had gathered from the undermost branches of the spruce tree. It was this that had caught fire since it was dry as dry can be, and even some of the spruce gum still stuck to the twigs. When the sticks caught fire the cedar bark bands had smouldered until he reached home with the tiny sparks of fire. This was where the tinder had come from and where the human people first came to know about fire.

But Ah-tush-mit had burned himself. The inside of his knees were badly scorched. Thus it is to this day that the inside of all deers' knees are singed black. That is how the human people got their first fire.

In the growing season,
when all living things burst out in bloom
Sit in the glade of the wood at even-tide.
If your own heart be open to love
be there for Ah-tush-mit
you will hear the thump and the beat of
his little song:
Thump, thump, thump, thump.

George Clutesi (Great Canadian Animal Stories, Hurtig Publishers)

EXCERPT FROM: STAND ON THE SKY

Sneering Muscles put two rug-wrapped bundles on the table.

Beskempir pushed one toward Aisulu. “Open it, girl. Open it!”

Aisulu didn’t want anything that came from the hand of Sneering Muscles. But Beskempir was almost bobbing up and down – as Serik used to do – and that made painful hope flare in Aisulu. She undid the knots. She unwrapped the rug.

The sky was inside it.

A coat.

They had cut her brother’s shapan apart, to be pattern and padding. For the outer coat and the inner lining, they had used the silk of Kara-Kat-Kis’s wedding dress. It was a purple so bright it was almost pink, a blazing dawn colour, and the brocade was of knots and feathers. A yellow-orange piping made the colour look brighter still. Not a piece of it was blue, but it was a sky thing: a sunrise, a high cloud catching fire.

An eagle hunter’s hat was usually red, but no one in the family had enough red silk, and so they had used the orange and purple there, too, and lined it with the best of her uncle’s furs. They were corsac fox furs: a pale red-gold, thick as snowflakes, soft as feathers.

“Oh,” said Aisulu. “Oh.” She could not make a word as big as *thank you.*

“*Try it, try it!”* Beskempir sang.

So Aisulu pulled on the purple shapan, and put the hat over her damaged hair.

“Oh!” said every woman in the ger.

Even her uncle, in his big-man place behind the table, grinned like a child. Tears sprang into her father’s eyes.

The shapan fit her better than her brother’s had: it did not gape around her little waist, or fall halfway over her hands. She looked down at her wrists in wonder. She reached up and touched the thick fur over her ears.

“Look!” said Beskempir. She took Aisulu by the shoulders and spun her toward the mirror.

Aisulu saw herself. The fox fur, the sky silk: they lit her. Her cheeks were wind-raw and bright as Serik’s. Her eyes were welling, and bright as Toktar’s. She did not look like an eagle hunter, in a dark thing with bright stitches. She did not look like a poor girl with a small frame and chopped hair. She looked like something brand new.

She looked like a hero. She looked as if she could stand on the sky.

Glossary:

shapan: a calf-length padded jacket.

ger: a round tent-house. The word rhymes with ‘bear’

Erin Bow (Stand on the Sky, Scholastic)

EXCERPT FROM: OWLS IN THE FAMILY

"Are you sure this IS an owl's-nest?" Mr. Miller asked us.

"Yes, sir!" Bruce answered. "We seen the owl setting on it!"

Mr. Miller shuddered. "*Saw* the owl *sitting* on it, Bruce.…Hmmm….Well—I suppose I'd better climb up and take a peek. But if you ask me, I think its just an old crow's-nest."

He put down his big haversack and the camera, and up he went. He was wearing a big floppy hat to keep his head from getting sunburned and I don't think he could see out from under it very well.

"Boy, has he got knobby knees!" Bruce whispered to me. We both started to giggle and we were still giggling when Mr. Miller began to shout.

"Hoyee!" he yelled. "SCAT—WHOEEE! Hoy, HOY!"

Bruce and I ran around the other side of the tree so we could see up to the nest. Mr. Miller was hanging onto the tree with both arms and he was kicking out with his feet. It looked as if his feet had slipped off the branch and couldn't find a place to get hold of again. Just then there was a swooshing sound and the old owl came diving down right on top of him with her wings spread wide. She looked as big as a house and she didn't miss Mr. Miller by more than an inch. Then she swooped up and away again.

Mr. Miller was yelling some strange things, and good and loud too. He finally got one foot back on a branch but he was in such a hurry to get down that he picked too small a branch. It broke, and he slid about five feet before his belt caught on a stub. While he was trying to get loose, the owl came back for anther try. This time she was so close that we could see her big yellow eyes, and both Bruce and I ducked. She had her claws stuck way out in front of her. Just as she dived toward him, Mr. Miller, who couldn't see her coming because of his hat, gave a jump upward to get free of the stub. The result was that the owl couldn't miss him even if she wanted to. There was an awful flapping and yelling and then away went the owl, with Mr. Miller's hat.

I don't think she really wanted that old hat. It was all Mr. Miller's fault for jumping at the wrong time. The owl seemed to be trying to shake the hat loose from her claws, but she couldn't, because her claws were hooked in it. The last we saw of her she was flying out over the prairie and she still had the hat.

Farley Mowat (Owls in the Family, Little, Brown & Company)

EXCERPT FROM: CHIKABASH AND THE STRANGERS

Long, long ago, there was a young Cree boy named Chikabash who lived with his older sister. The two of them traveled all over the place, never staying in any one place for long.

Now there was one thing that Chikabash loved doing best of all and that was to hunt squirrels. He and his sister traveled all over just so he could go hunting for squirrels.

One day while Chikabash was out hunting near a bay, he saw a huge canoe way off in the distance. It looked as if it had a big tree growing out of its middle. The huge canoe came closer and closer to shore.

Chikabash was very curious and he decided to have a look at it. He walked to the shoreline and waited.

When the canoe was very near, he saw men with pale faces and light-coloured hair and eyes. They were wearing strange clothing he had never seen before and speaking a strange language he had never heard before. They stared at him and he stared back.

They waved to him and he waved back. They beckoned to him to come on board. When he had climbed aboard, they kept touching his clothing and poking at him. They finally set some food down for him and although he had never seen such food before, he decided to eat it so they wouldn't be offended.

He knew his sister would be interested in this new food, so he saved some to take back to her.

"Nimsa, nimsa," he called as soon as he was within shouting distance of their camp. "I have some food for you."

"Where did you get this?" she asked when he laid out the unfamiliar food in front of her.

"From some strange-looking men who came in a huge canoe with a tall tree growing out of the middle. They have pale faces, light-coloured hair and eyes. They wear clothes which are not made out of hides and they speak a language which I cannot understand. They invited me to climb into their canoe and then they fed me. They kept touching my clothing and poking at me," Chikabash recounted.

"And you went on board?" his sister asked, horrified. "Weren't you scared that they would kill you? I have heard that a race of people like the ones you have described would someday come to this land, and we would have a lot of problems after that."

"Where did you hear this?" Chikabash asked.

From our mother and father, and they got it from their grandparents," she replied.

"These people are very friendly," he said.

"Well, we don't want to be unfriendly," his sister said. "Take some meat to them as a token of our friendship."

Chikabash did as his sister had told him and he took one squirrel thigh to the pale-faced men in the huge canoe. Now, the squirrels in this land were so huge that when Chikabash climbed aboard the strangers' canoe and put the squirrel thigh down, the canoe listed to one side and almost capsized.

Geordie Georgekish, William Kapsu, John Mukash and Jane Pachano (The Spirit of Canada, Malcolm Lester)

EXCERPT FROM: THE NEW TEACHER

I just about screamed in August when I discovered who my homeroom teacher would be – my mother!

"Grade six!" I wailed. "But that's *my* grade!"

"It's not what I planned," Mom said. "But that's where the principal has put me, and I can't refuse. I'll try to treat you like any other pupil. You can even call me Mrs. Wallace."

"Great!" I said. Until then, we'd both been excited about Mom finishing her course and starting a job. But this made it different!

"I'm sorry, Sharie. You'll have other teachers for music and gym. And Mr. Blackwell for science. You won't have me all day."

"Small comfort," I mumbled.

All August, Mom worked on the grade six courses. She spent hours reading the texts and preparing question sheets, but I tried to ignore it. When school started, my friends were surprised, because I hadn't told them that my mom was our teacher.

"You'll have an easy year, Sharie," my friend Melanie teased. "You won't forget your homework, anyway."

"She'll get all nineties," Jason Bellows said with a fake laugh. He didn't like anyone getting higher marks than him. I walked away without answering, but inside I felt sick.

When the buzzer rang, I hurried to claim a back seat. I knew Mom wouldn't like that, because every fall she told me to sit at the front. I hoped she wouldn't say anything. "I'll assign seats later," she announced, and I breathed a sigh of relief.

The first class went all right, just filling out forms and handing out books. But in the second, we started right into math and wound up with half a page of homework.

"What a lousy start!" Jason complained. "I suppose we'll get this every night." He gave Mom a dirty look when she wasn't looking.

I didn't say anything. Part of me agreed it wasn't fair, but I remembered Mom saying she wanted to get everyone into the school mood right away.

The morning dragged through. Some of the kids were annoyed when we started a novel right off in language arts. "Can't you tell your mother to take it easy?" Jennifer Leighton groaned, later.

"It's nothing to do with me," I said. "I'm just one of the kids in this class."

"Sure!" Jason said sarcastically. I knew he was mad because Mom had bawled him out for passing a note to Jennifer.

In the afternoon we had gym and science with other teachers, but for the last class we headed to Mom's room again.

"She's dumb!" Jason whispered, as we started into the room. "Just like her daughter. Two dummies!"

"Stop being an idiot!" I snarled. He had no reason to insult either of us. I poked him hard in the back, just as Mom turned around.

"Sharie!" she exclaimed, her voice sharp. "Will you stop that?"

I felt my face go hot. Jason grinned triumphantly, as I slunk to my desk.

When the day finally ended, I grabbed my homework and hurried to the car. I didn't know whether I was angrier at Jason or at Mom.

After about 20 minutes she came out, climbed in without looking at me, and rested her head wearily on the wheel.

"Mom?" I asked. "You sick?"

"Just tired. It's been a long day."

Donna Gamache (Kid's World, Dec. 1994, author's permission)

EXCERPT FROM: SIXTIES GIRL

"You are definitely not staying here alone after school and that's final." Dad sounds like he's arguing one of his cases in court.

"Why? I'm totally responsible." I fight to calm my voice. "My teacher used that exact word to describe me on my last report card – *responsible*."

Dad tosses one of his tennis balls up in the air and catches it. "That's not the point, Will. Manitoba law says you need to be twelve to stay home alone, and in this house, we obey the law."

"But I don't have to be alone. Emmaline and Aneesh can come over," I protest.

"Is either of your friends twelve years old?" Dad asks.

"No." I push my glasses up my nose, straighten my shoulders, and try a different tactic. "Alex isn't twelve and he stays by himself after school."

Mom looks up from her computer. "Your cousin Alex lives in Vancouver. Rules are different in British Columbia. Besides, this arrangement with Grandma is only for Wednesdays when I have to teach a late afternoon class at the university."

"I KNOW! And Wednesday is the only day during the week my friends can hang out after school."

"It's just for a few months," Mom says.

"I'm not a kid anymore," I am almost shouting. "Sheesh! I've even taken the babysitter course and now you're telling me *I* need a babysitter!"

Mom snaps her computer shut. "Your grandmother isn't really a babysitter, Will. You liked spending time at her house when she lived in Rocky Creek. Now that she's moved into an apartment just down the street, it's so convenient for you to go there."

"Wouldn't it be even more *convenient* for me to stay here for a couple of hours after school? I could do helpful stuff like take out the trash or clean my room."

Mom laughs. "Now you sound desperate, Will."

I *am* desperate. Emmaline and Aneesh and I always get together on Wednesdays. It's the only day none of us has music or art lessons or soccer practice. What am I going to tell them? We can't hang out because I have to stay with Grandma? No way! They think I don't have a grandmother. It's not like I actually lied to them about it. I just didn't correct them when they assumed my grandparents had died.

Dad picks up his tennis racquet and heads towards our front door. "The case is closed, Will. We will revisit our decision in November when you turn twelve."

Great. That's more than twelve weeks away.

MaryLou Driedger (Sixties Girl, Heritage House Publishing Company Ltd.)

EXCERPT FROM: SPAGHETTI IS NOT A FINGER FOOD

I'm having a few issues at school. My teacher, Mrs. Winters, and I don't see eye to eye. To Mrs. Winters and my mom that means that when Mrs. Winters talks I don't always listen very well. I think sometimes she doesn't listen very well when I'm talking. I don't say that, though. That would be Very Bad Manners on my part.

Just this morning I tried to tell her that the class gecko, T-Rex, was stuck in the radiator, but she said "Not To Interrupt Her For The Fourth Time This Morning!" She seemed kind of screechy so I said, in my most patient and calming voice, "When I get upset it helps me to calm down by taking three deep breaths."

Then I had to take a time out in the hall.

There wasn't much to do out there, so I conducted an experiment. I wondered how many times I could spin in a circle before I puked. I was up to 24 when a sixth grader walked by and called me a "weirdo." I stopped spinning and immediately smashed into the wall. Apparently, he found this very funny, because he laughed until he snorted.

"At least I don't snort!" I called in his general direction.

It was actually kind of hard to focus because my head was spinning so fast I had to squeeze my eyes shut. My stomach started to get squeegy. I think I had gotten pretty close to puking! Awesome! . . .

. . . Luckily, while I was taking some time to think about my behavior and testing out my theories on spinning and puking, Mrs. Winters found T-Rex before he got too toasty.

I rushed across our classroom, through Jack and Evan's science project volcano, to Mrs. Winters. I had about a thousand facts about geckos jumping around in my head that I was sure she would love to know.

"Mrs. Winters, Mrs. Winters," I called as those facts started spilling out of my mouth.

I squeezed in front of the other kids who were crowded around Mrs. Winters and T-Rex.

"Did you know that although geckos are often mistaken for descendants of dinosaurs they really aren't, but birds are?"

"And did you know that Leopard Geckos like T-Rex are found in hot countries like India? So T-Rex would prefer to be warm and it is pretty cold out today. I believe that's why he was curled up in the radiator. He was listening to his natural instincts! But, Mrs. Winters," I said, "Geckos don't like to be barbecued in elementary schools."

Jodi Carmichael (Spaghetti is Not a Finger Food, Little Pickle Press LLC)

EXCERPT FROM: SAWDUST

As they removed the articles together, his mother said: “I ordered a surprise for you.”

The boy shrieked with delight. “A surprise!”

She smiled, sad that she could give him no more.

“Oh, Mamma, Mamma,” he cried throwing his arms about her and hugging her fast. “I love you, I love you!”

They examined the articles, one by one: a white cotton dress, a dainty peach blouse, a tin of green paint, rubber boots, and on and on. Then it appeared. The boy had just removed a white Sunday school shirt and the surprise lay beneath it. It was a long paper package: LITTLE YANKEE — 3 in one — 59¢. The red lettering seemed to shout at the boy. The bag contained a sturdy little hickory bat eighteen inches long and a shapeless glove, which was not much larger than the boy’s hand. It had no padding and looked much like a pancake with stubby fingers. But the third article was a shining baseball!

The boy held up the ball emitting a wild cry of joy. Then he held it up to wonder at like a child charmed by a Christmas Tree. It looked perfect. The cover was glossy white, sewn with the regular looping herringbone stitch. ‘Regulation size’ was stamped in purple ink on the cover. There was a registration number too, but the ink has smeared and only one digit could be recognized—a six. The boy had the fleeting thought that he wished it had been a lucky three or seven. He tried to squeeze it, but it was almost as hard as stone.

Then he ran out of the house. The screen-door had hardly slammed when he dashed back in to hug his mother again. Hours of joy streamed ahead of him like shafts of golden sunlight. He heard all the songs of the birds blending in a grand chorus as if they were singing just for him. Tears stung his eyes and he felt he would burst with good feeling. The joy overwhelmed him, too much to hold.

Paul A. Sigurdson (Pieces, Peguis Publishers)

EXCERPT FROM: SPARKS FLY UPWARD

Every Sunday night people would drive to the schoolhouse in Oxbow from the adjoining farms to rehearse or discuss a play. Tonight there was going to be a performance of original pieces created by young and old. Fanny had written a short monologue about coming to Canada. She'd insisted that it had to be acted by a younger person and that, in fact, she'd written it just for me. Papa and Fanny had kept after me until I'd agreed. But I'm shy and don't like the spotlight. So I was terrified.

I stared at my food and realized that I couldn't eat a bite. But with all the normal *mishegoss* in the room, twenty-one people all talking or squabbling or telling jokes, no one noticed my distress. I snuck a look at Fanny. Well *she* had noticed. She was watching me like a hawk. She made a motion for me to eat. I sighed. I couldn't let her down, I realized. I'd agreed and now I had to go through with it.

After supper the girls helped to clean up. Then there was the usual fight for water to wash in, whose turn it was, the older ones helping the younger ones -- all the time Baba's voice directing everyone: “Rose, you help Saide and Sarah. Aaron, your hands, they’re filthy! Isaac, your shirt is ripped in two places. *Oy*, go find another one, do you want to shame me in front of the entire town?”

And Mama calling to us, “Solomon and Leah, hurry up, what slowpokes, just like your papa,” and Aunt Shoshana trying to calm her baby, Abe, who was screaming at the top of his lungs.

I managed to pour some water into my washstand and washed up. Normally, since Fanny is seventeen -- five years older than I am -- I would have to wait while she used the one mirror in our room. But that night she put me in front of it, braided my hair, and helped me dress. I owned only one good white blouse and one good skirt, so the choice of what to wear was simple.

When I was ready, I slipped outside to wait for the others. Max and Sam were already there. As usual, Sam looked neat and handsome, his blonde hair combed back with water. Max looked like a comb had never touched his mop of red hair, and his face was already dirty.

I rolled my eyes, and Max shook his head at me. “Don't give your uncle such a disrespectful look!” he scolded.

“Respect must be earned, dear Uncle Max,” I said. “One day you will learn to respect a comb.”

Carol Matas (Sparks Fly Upward, Houghton Mifflin Company)

EXCERPT FROM: ACCIDENTAL DISCOVERIES – FROM LAUGHING GAS TO DYNAMITE

It was a typical Sunday in 1581. Hundreds of worshippers filled the huge cathedral in Pisa, Italy. Most of them listened intently to the church service.

But not seventeen-year-old Galileo Galilei. Instead, Galileo studied a chandelier hanging overhead. Air currents flowing through the lofty cathedral moved the chandelier from side to side, back and forth. Sometimes the chandelier moved gently; sometimes it swung in a wide arc. No matter what the size of its swing, it seemed to Galileo that the chandelier kept steady time.

There were no clocks or watches in those days. To time the chandelier's swings, Galileo felt for the pulse in his wrist. He counted the pulse beats. One, two, three beats for one swing. One, two, three beats for another.

Galileo was surprised. No matter how wide or narrow the swing, it always took the same number of pulse beats.

Right after the service, Galileo raced home. He quickly suspended a weight from a long string to create a pendulum. Galileo pulled the weight back a short distance, released it, and timed its swing. He tried it again, this time pulling the weight back farther before releasing it. After many tries, Galileo confirmed his suspicions – the time it took to make one swing was always the same whether the swing was wide or narrow.

Excited now, Galileo tried other experiments with his pendulum. He discovered that the length of string, amount of weight, and other factors all had some predictable relationship to the time of a pendulum's swing.

Some years later, Galileo experimented with falling objects. Did all objects fall at the same rate? To find out, he needed to time objects as they fell. But that posed a problem. How could he accurately time something that moved so quickly?

Galileo remembered the pendulum. The weight of the pendulum acted just like a falling object – except it didn't fall straight down. It fell on a slant and at a slower rate that could be timed.

Galileo adapted the pendulum as a timepiece. First he got a wooden board and carved a long, straight, smooth groove down the center. When he raised the board slightly at one end and released a ball, it slowly rolled down the groove. . .

. . . To his surprise, Galileo discovered that the balls didn't travel down the track at an even rate. Instead, they accelerated – or sped up – as they got farther down the groove. Falling objects, he found, picked up speed as they fell to the earth. . .

. . . In many ways, the swinging chandelier started a revolution in the world of science. With his pendulum investigations, Galileo pioneered the scientific method – the system of carefully controlled experiments and observations that modern scientists use today to prove a natural law beyond a shadow of a doubt.

Larry Verstraete (Accidental Discoveries – From Laughing Gas to Dynamite, Friesen Press)

EXCERPT FROM: SUNKEN TREASURE

The Visitors Return

It was close to supper time when the drone of an engine broke the northern quiet.

"What do you think, Ben? Someone else on a treasure hunt?" Mr. Adamson was trying to lighten the atmosphere. Ben wasn't impressed.

"Not likely, Dad. I know you think this is a lost cause but the evidence all points to this lake. Although I admit we aren't having much success."

The engine noise grew louder until the small LM Industries aircraft was visible above the trees. The plane turned over the lake and set down, throwing up a spray of water on the slightly choppy surface.

"Company again. Boy this lake is getting to be a busy place," Mr. Adamson remarked.

"That's the same plane that visited us when we were up here before. The survey crew from LM Industries. What do they want?" wondered Brad.

This time three men instead of two clambered onto the rough dock. The big bearded man, the taciturn Jake, and a third man whom the boys knew.

"Mr. Humiski! What are you doing up here?" exclaimed Ben.

"Well, well, Ben," Mr. Humiski said heartily, "I'm glad we found you. I heard that you were having a little trouble up here. How's the search for the gold coming? Is there a sequel to my award-winning story unfolding here?"

The bearded man sneered at them. Obviously he hadn't bought the story about fur trade artifacts. Brad and Ben exchanged glances. Something was not quite right here.

"No, Mr. Humiski, we haven't found anything yet. I guess we aren't going to have any more luck than the other gold hunters." Brad was finally suspicious. He wasn't telling this man anything he didn't have to.

"Is that right?" Humiski wasn't convinced. "You must be the fathers of these two adventurers. I'd know in a minute that you're Brad's dad," he said as he pumped Mr. Johnson's hand a little too heartily. "So you must be Mr. Adamson." Another enthusiastic handshake. The fathers took their cue from Brad and were cool in their welcome.

"What can we do for you—it's Myron isn't it?" said Mr. Adamson disengaging his hand from Humiski's hot grip.

"Yes, Myron's my name. You've heard of me? No? Well, that doesn't matter. We would like to bed down here for the night. I just came up to see if there might be a story here for me and what better place to follow it up than right here?" he grinned.

No one could think of a reasonable excuse for asking Humiski to leave, so the party of four became a camp of seven.

"How did you know we were here? Brad asked.

"Oh, Jake here, keeps me posted by radio," Humiski smiled.

Jim Prentice (Sunken Treasure, Hyperion Press)

EXCERPT FROM: THE WHITE STONE IN THE CASTLE WALL

John left them and he rested
in the garden of the castle,
full of fountains and flowers and birds.

There he saw a man who whistled
as he planted young red roses,
and hummed as he pulled out
all the weeds.

John told him:
"I once grew a vegetable garden
but the only thing it gave me
was this stone.
I'm too tired to return it.
You can have it
if you'll use it.
I just don't want to see it
thrown away."

The man asked John:
"Why do you care about a stone?"

John answered:
"At first, I thought it was a worthless thing
until I dug it up and pushed it up
and hauled it to the hilltop
and stood with it for hours in the mud.
Now I'm tired, wet and hungry
and this stone won't fetch a penny
but my work has made it worth a lot to me."

"My name," said the man, "is Sir Henry M. Pellatt
and I've cared for my garden just like you.
I will buy your great white stone
and I will put it in my wall
because your work has made it worth a lot to me."

Sir Henry showed John through
every part of his great castle.
He let John ride in his electric car.
Then he gave John Tommy Fiddich a shining silver dollar.
And he said:
"Please come and help me in my English flower garden.
You will like the work and I will pay you well."

Continued on next page…

The workers at the castle,
the visitors to the garden,
everybody in the village,
all said:

"John Tommy Fiddich,
you have a job at Casa Loma.
You're the luckiest boy of all."

"I've been lucky
and unlucky,"
said John Tommy Fiddich.

"But I've earned a silver dollar
all the same.
And I brought Sir Henry Pellatt
a great white stone
for Casa Loma,
a stone that's worth a lot
to him
and to me."

Sheldon Oberman (The White Stone in the Castle Wall, Tundra Books)

EXCERPT FROM: JASON AND THE WONDER HORN

The turret was further away than it looked, and as they hurried along, Jason noticed floor slits at regular intervals, he assumed to let rain water escape. Whatever this turret was, it might be somewhere a parchment could be hidden.

The turret jutted out from the wall with a place inside large enough for a man to crouch. A large slit at floor level would give a bowman advantage over anyone directly below. Jason peered inside, looking for a hiding place, but the wall was sealed and even.

"Out here," Charlotte whispered. "There's an opening underneath."

They both knelt down and Jason reached inside. Nothing. He lay on his stomach and tried again, reaching as far in as he possibly could. His outstretched fingers pulled out a few twigs and grass. "Part of a bird's nest," he said, throwing the twigs down. "Let's try the next one,"

The sun was well past its noonday position by now, its rays skimming over the walls, the walkway in total shadow. Curious as to where he was, Jason balanced on the edge of the wall to see over.

"What are you doing?" Charlotte asked. "Let's go." Jason heard her take off without him.

Pasture land and rolling hills spread in all directions, with many of the hilltops covered by trees. We were on one of those hills, Jason thought, grateful to be safely inside the castle. Looking directly down, he saw the path leading around to the castle entrance and he imagined the soldiers in their "V" formation, lined up at attention, waiting for some important event.

Without thinking, he grasped his horn and, leaning over the top of the wall, played for them. The horn shone in the late afternoon sun – the sound echoed out over the hills. Even while he was playing, he could hear them cheering, shouting "Jayson, Jayson…"

The arrow hit his bugle with such force that Jason was knocked to the stone floor. A sharp pain reverberated right up to his elbow. He ran his hand over it, sure his arm had been hit, but it hadn't. He lay flat on the ground, his heart pounding, as several more arrows whizzed over him and down into the courtyard. When he realized the horn was gone, he panicked and jumped to his feet. He had dropped it.

A shout rang out inside the courtyard and Jason heard soldiers' boots clambering up the tower steps. Where was Charlotte? And what had he done? What *had* he done?

Linda Hutsell-Manning (Jason and the Wonder Horn, Coteau Books)

EXCERPT FROM: THE EMPTY HOUSE

It was really Misty's fault—Misty our cat. Otherwise, I'd never have been involved. Out at three in the morning, she yowled enough to get me out of bed to let her out. It was no use waiting for Dad to hear her; he sleeps like a log. And Mom was away for the weekend. If I wanted to sleep it was up to me.

As I opened the door for Misty, a dim light caught my eyes, flickering in the house across the street, the house that had stood empty for the last five weeks. The light flashed a couple of times, off and on.

I should have awakened Dad. But Mom says it's like waking the dead to get Dad up in the night. And a flashing light might not mean much. I decided to investigate. Detective Diane would solve the mystery!

For five weeks there had been no sign of anyone in that house. The occupants had just disappeared. What was also strange was that nobody even knew them. In our small town we know our neighbours—but not these ones. They'd moved in last spring, but we'd never even met them. When they were home, they stayed inside or in the backyard surrounded by a high fence. But all summer, they'd been gone. I figured they'd robbed a bank, and skipped the country. But now—what was that light?

Dressing warmly, I slipped out the door. It was only September, but it was cold. The grass was soaking with dew. By morning there would probably be frost.

I glided silently across the street to the house. I crouched near the door, but heard nothing. Climbing the step, I tried the doorknob—locked. I peered in through the window where I'd seen the light—nothing.

I slid along the house toward the back, but the fence blocked my way. It was solid and six feet high. A heavy chain held the gate in the corner.

Suddenly, I heard low, mysterious voices. A door closed, and shuffling sounds came from the back yard. They were moving away toward the far end of the yard, I thought. Who was it? What were they up to?

My fingers clutched the fence. Unexpectedly, one finger broke through a knothole at waist height. Kneeling down, I pressed my eye to the hole. At the far end of the yard two light-coloured shadows moved. They bent over, lifted something and bent over again. A flashlight glowed. Whoever it was, whatever they were doing, they were up to no good. Maybe my bank robbery idea wasn't so wild!

Donna Gamache (Kid's World, Mar/Apr 1994, Author's permission)

EXCERPT FROM: REDWALL

Matthias screamed aloud with fright inside the cat's mouth. It was sloppy and hot, pink and black, smelling indescribably and seemingly full of huge yellowed teeth.

"Phut!"

The marmalade cat spat the young mouse out upon the barn floor. He lay wet and sticky, quivering all over, dust and straw clinging to his fur. Instinct warned Matthias to lie inert and play dead. He had no chance to make a run for it, surrounded as he was by the cat's paws. He could not stop his body from quaking badly. He lay staring into the feline eyes, great twin pools of turquoise flecked with gold.

The cat stared back at Matthias in disgust. Disdainfully it wiped a fastidious paw across its soiled tongue and spat as if trying to rid itself of a horrible taste.

"Ugh! I simply cannot abide the taste of mouse. Filthy little vermin, no one can ever tell where they've been."

The cat's voice, though cultured, was a high reedy tenor. It would have sounded comical under different circumstances. Matthias lay as still as possible.

The marmalade cat prodded him with an indolent paw. "Oh get up you disgusting little beast! I know you're not dead."

Slowly the young mouse rose to his feet. The cat seemed uninterested in him as a possible food source. Matthias's legs were shaking so much that he had to sit down again.

They stared at each other. Matthias could think of nothing to say. The cat spoke again. This time its voice was indignant. "Well, have you nothing to say for yourself, mouse? Where are your manners? Don't you think you should apologize for leaping into my mouth like that?"

Matthias managed to stand again. He bowed shakily. "I beg your pardon, sir. It was purely accidental. I fell, you see. Please accept my humble apologies. I am Matthias of Redwall and I sincerely hope I have not disturbed you in any way."

The cat sniffed distantly. "Yes, at least you seem to have some sort of decent upbringing, Matthias of Redwall. I accept your apology. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Squire Julian Gingivere."

"Pleased to meet you, Squire Julian", said Matthias politely.

The cat yawned regally. "You may call me Julian. The title is hereditary. I never wanted it, Squire of what? A broken-down ramshackle farm building and a stretch of river over yonder! One has no real friends, no trusty servants, not even a mate for that matter. Hmmm, I suppose the Gingivere line will become extinct when I die."

Matthias could not help feeling a certain amount of sympathy for the lonely aristocrat.

"At least you seem to lead a peaceful life," he said hopefully.

"Oh, spare me your platitudes, mouse," Julian replied in a world-weary voice. "What would you know about loneliness and trying to preserve one's standards in a decaying world? I say, do you think you could manage to clean yourself up a bit? You look an absolute fright, standing there all covered in dust and straw. And while you're doing that maybe you'd like to explain how you came to be sneaking around my barn."

Brian Jacques (Redwall, Random House)

EXCERPT FROM: HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE

The train slowed right down and finally stopped. People pushed their way toward the door and out on to a tiny, dark platform. Harry shivered in the cold night air. Then a lamp came bobbing over the heads of the students, and Harry heard a familiar voice: "Firs' years! Firs' years over here! All right there, Harry?"

Hagrid's big hairy face beamed over the sea of heads.

"C'mon, follow me—any more firs' years? Mind yer step, now! Firs' years follow me!"

Slipping and stumbling, they followed Hagrid down what seemed to be a steep, narrow path. It was so dark on either side of them that Harry thought there must be thick trees there. Nobody spoke much. Neville, the boy who kept losing his toad, sniffed once or twice.

"Yeh'll get yer firs' sight o' Hogwarts in a sec," Hagrid called over his shoulder, "jus' round this bend here."

There was a loud "Oooooh!"

The narrow path had opened suddenly onto the edge of a great black lake. Perched atop a high mountain on the other side, its windows sparkling in the starry sky, was a vast castle with many turrets and towers.

"No more'n four to a boat!" Hagrid called, pointing to a fleet of little boats sitting in the water by the shore. Harry and Ron were followed into their boat by Neville and Hermione.

"Everyone in?" shouted Hagrid, who had a boat to himself. "Right then—FORWARD!"

And the fleet of little boats moved off all at once, gliding across the lake, which was as smooth as glass. Everyone was silent, staring up at the great castle overhead. It towered over them as they sailed nearer and nearer to the cliff on which it stood.

"Heads down!" yelled Hagrid as the first boats reached the cliff; they all bent their heads and the little boats carried them through a curtain of ivy that hid a wide opening in the cliff face. They were carried along a dark tunnel, which seemed to be taking them right underneath the castle, until they reached a kind of underground harbor, where they clambered out onto rocks and pebbles.

"Oy, you there! Is this your toad?" said Hagrid, who was checking the boats as people climbed out of them.

"Trevor!" cried Neville blissfully holding out his hands. Then they clambered up a passageway in the rock after Hagrid's lamp, coming out at last onto smooth, damp grass right in the shadow of the castle.

They walked up a flight of stone steps and crowded around the huge, oak front door.

"Everyone here? You there, still got yer toad?"

Hagrid raised a gigantic fist and knocked three times on the castle door.

J.K. Rowling (Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, Scholastic)

EXCERPT FROM: LYDDIE

The racket released the bear from the charm Lyddie seemed to have placed on him. He banged the door aside and rushed in toward the ladder, but Charles snatched it. The bottom rungs swung out, hitting the beast in the nose. The blow startled him momentarily, giving Lyddie a chance to help Charles haul the ladder up onto the platform and out of reach. The old bear roared in frustration and waved at the empty air with his huge paws, then reared up on his hind legs. He was so tall that his nose nearly touched the edge of the loft. The little girls cried out. Their mother screamed, "Oh Lord, deliver us!"

"Hush," Lyddie commanded. "You'll just make him madder." The cries were swallowed up in anxious gasps of breath. Charles's arms went around the little ones, and Lyddie put a firm grip on her mother's shoulder. It was trembling, so Lyddie relaxed her fingers and began to stroke. "It's all right," she murmured. "He can't reach us."

But could he climb the supports? It didn't seem likely. Could he, in his frustration, take a mighty leap and …No, she tried to breathe deeply and evenly and keep her eyes fixed on those of the beast. He fell to all fours and, tossing his head, broke off from her gaze as though embarrassed. He began to explore the cabin. He was hungry, obviously, and looking for the source of the smell that had drawn him in. He knocked over the churning jug and licked tentatively at the blade, but Lyddie had cleaned it too well after churning that morning and the critter soon gave up trying to find nourishment in the wood.

Before he found the great pot of oatmeal in the kettle over the fire, he had turned over the table and the benches and upended the spinning wheel. Lyddie held her breath, praying that he wouldn't break anything. Charles and she would try to mend, but he was only ten and she thirteen. They hadn't their father's skill or experience. *Don't break nothing*, she begged silently. They couldn't afford to replace any of the household goods.

Next the beast knocked over a jar of apple butter, but the skin lid was tied on tightly, and, flail away at it as he might with his awkward paw, he could not dislodge it. He smacked it across the floor where it hit the overturned bench, but, thank the Lord, the heavy pottery did not shatter.

At last he came to the oatmeal, bubbling—by the smell of it, scorching—over the fire. He thrust his head deep into the kettle and howled with pain as his nose met the boiling porridge. He threw back his head, but in doing so jerked the kettle off the hook, and when he turned, he was wearing it over his head like a black pumpkin. The bear was too stunned, it seemed, simply to lower his neck and let the kettle fall off. He danced about the room in pain on four, then two legs, the kettle covering his head, the boiling oatmeal raining down his thick neck and coat.

He knocked about, searching for the way out, but when he found the open door, managed to push it shut. Battering the door with his kettle-covered head, he tore it off its leather hinges and loped out into the dark. For a long time they could hear him crashing through the bush until, at last, the November night gathered about them once more with its accustomed quiet.

Then they began to laugh.

Katherine Paterson (Lyddie, Scholastic)

EXCERPT FROM: THE GIVER

"Gabriel?" Jonas whispered that night to the newchild.

The crib was in his room again. After Gabe had slept soundly in Jonas's room for four nights, his parents had pronounced the experiment a success and Jonas a hero. Gabriel was growing rapidly, now crawling and giggling across the room and pulling himself up to stand. He could be upgraded in the Nurturing Center, Father said happily, now that he slept; he could be officially named and given to his family in December, which was only two months away.

But when he was taken away, he stopped sleeping again, and cried in the night.

So he was back in Jonah's sleepingroom. They would give it a little more time, they decided. Since Gabe seemed to like it in Jonas's room, he would sleep there at night a little longer, until the habit of sound sleep was fully formed. The Nurturers were very optimistic about Gabriel's future.

There was no answer to Jonas's whisper. Gabriel was sound asleep.

"Things could change, Gabe," Jonas went on. "Things could be different. I don't know how, but there must be some way for things to be different. There could be colors."

"And grandparents," he added, staring through the dimness toward the ceiling of his sleepingroom. "And everybody would have the memories."

"You know about the memories," he whispered, turning toward the crib.

Gabriel's breathing was even and deep. Jonas liked having him there, though he felt guilty about the secret. Each night he gave memories to Gabriel: memories of boat rides and picnics in the sun; memories of soft rainfall against windowpanes; memories of dancing barefoot on a damp lawn.

"Gabe?"

The newchild stirred slightly in his sleep. Jonas looked over at him.

"There could be love," Jonas whispered.

The next morning, for the first time, Jonas did not take his pill. Something within him, something that had grown there through the memories, told him to throw the pill away.

Lois Lowry (The Giver, Random House, Inc.)

EXCERPT FROM: ADAM OF THE ROAD

The boy called Hugh jumped down beside him. He was a proud-looking boy with curly yellow hair and blue eyes like bits of glass and a thin nose that seemed to be pulling his short lip up over his front teeth. He was wearing a sky-blue surcoat with wide sleeves edged with fur. He and Adam looked at each other, and neither one liked what he saw.

"He's got a red spaniel that walks on its hind legs," said the girl. "It's a darling dog."

She looked, Adam thought, too beautiful and highborn for words, standing there in her scarlet gown with the breeze stirring her curls and her brown eyes shining. Adam's heart softened and spread like butter in the sun.

"I saw the dog," said Hugh loftily. "It's a good enough dog for a common tumbler, but nothing to any one of a dozen dogs we have at home."

If he had said Nick was nothing to his own special dog, Adam would have understood and forgiven him, but to say Nick was nothing to a dozen assorted dogs, that was too much. Adam thought longingly of wrestling with Hugh, of rolling him over in the mud and mussing up his pretty blue surcoat, but he had been too well trained by Roger to attempt anything of the kind. Minstrels did not fight with their audiences. He turned to the girl instead, and grinned.

"It's easy enough," he said, also in French, "to boast about dogs that aren't here to be seen." It occurred to him that Hugh had also said something uncomplimentary about him. He took that up next. "As for me," he said with dignity, "I am not a tumbler. I am Roger the minstrel's son."

The girl gave him a friendly smile. "Oh, I like Roger! Where's your dog now, Roger-the-minstrel's-son?"

"He's at Dame Malkin's. I was just going to get him. My name's Adam."

"Well, you'd better go along then," said Hugh sulkily.

It was good advice, but Adam was of no mind to take it from Hugh. He pretended not to hear it. "That's the best carriage I ever saw," he said to the girl.

She made a little face. "You wouldn't think so if you had to ride in it. It bumps and jolts so that we're all bruised from being banged about from one side to the other. Father thinks it's wonderful, but I notice he never rides in it himself."

Hugh got into the carriage again and tried to pull her away from the door. "Come, Margery, don't talk so much."

"Well," said Adam, "I'd better be going." He put on his best son-of-Roger manner. "Farewell, lady, have good day." And added impudently to Hugh, "Farewell, Sir Honeycomb."

Elizabeth Janet Gray (Adam of the Road, The Viking Press)

EXCERPT FROM: A WRINKLE IN TIME

After a few moments that seemed like forever to Meg, Mrs. Murry came back in, holding the door open for – was it the tramp? It seemed small for Meg's idea of a tramp. The age or sex was impossible to tell, for it was completely bundled up in clothes. Several scarves of assorted colors were tied about the head, and a man's felt hat perched atop. A shocking pink stole was knotted about a rough overcoat, and black rubber boots covered the feet.

"Mrs. Whatsit," Charles said suspiciously, "what are you doing here? And at this time of night, too?"

"Now don't you be worried, my honey." A voice emerged from among turned-up coat collar, stole, scarves, and hat, a voice like an unoiled gate, but somehow not unpleasant.

"Mrs. – uh – Whatsit – says she lost her way," Mrs. Murry said. "Would you care for some hot chocolate, Mrs. Whatsit?"

"Charmed, I'm sure," Mrs. Whatsit answered, taking off the hat and the stole. "It isn't so much that I lost my way as that I got blown off course. And when I realized that I was at little Charles Wallace's house I thought I'd just come in and rest a bit before proceeding on my way."

"How did you know this was Charles Wallace's house?" Meg asked.

"By the smell." Mrs. Whatsit untied a blue and green paisley scarf, a red and yellow flowered print, a gold Liberty print, a red and black bandanna. Under all this a sparse quantity of grayish hair was tied in a small but tidy knot on top of her head. Her eyes were bright, her nose a round, soft blob, her mouth puckered like an autumn apple. "My, but it's lovely and warm in here," she said.

"Do sit down." Mrs. Murry indicated a chair. "Would you like a sandwich, Mrs. Whatsit? I've had liverwurst and cream cheese; Charles has had bread and jam; and Meg, lettuce and tomato."

"Now, let me see," Mrs. Whatsit pondered. "I'm passionately fond of Russian caviar."

"You peeked!" Charles cried indignantly. "We're saving that for Mother's birthday and you can't have any!"

Mrs. Whatsit gave a deep and pathetic sigh.

"*No,*" Charles said. "Now, you mustn't give in to her, Mother, or I shall be very angry. How about tuna-fish salad?"

"Alright," Mrs. Whatsit said meekly.

"I'll fix it," Meg offered, going to the pantry for a can of tuna fish.

--For crying out loud, she thought, – this old woman comes barging in on us in the middle of the night and Mother takes it as though there weren't anything peculiar about it at all.

Madeleine L'Engle (A Wrinkle in Time, Dell Publishing)

EXCERPT FROM: THE FAULT IN OUR STARS

Peter Van Houten's white row house was just around the corner from the hotel, on the Vondelstraat, facing the park. Number 158. Augustus took me by one arm and grabbed the oxygen cart with the other, and we walked up the three steps to the lacquered blue-black front door. My heart pounded. One closed door away from the answers I'd dreamed of ever since I first read that last unfinished page.

Inside, I could hear a bass beat thumping loud enough to rattle the windowsills. I wondered whether Peter Van Houten had a kid who liked to rap music.

I grabbed the lion's-head door knocker and knocked tentatively. The beat continued. "Maybe he can't hear over the music?" Augustus asked. He grabbed the lion's head and knocked much louder.

The music disappeared, replaced by shuffling footsteps. A dead bolt slid. Another. The door creaked open. A potbellied man with thin hair, sagging jowls, and a week-old beard squinted into the sunlight. He wore baby-blue man pajamas like guys in old movies. His face and belly were so round, and his arms so skinny, that he looked like a dough ball with four sticks stuck into it. "Mr. Van Houten?" Augustus asked, his voice squeaking a bit.

The door slammed shut. Behind it, I heard a stammering, reedy voice shout, "LEEE-DUH-VIGH!" (Until then, I'd pronounced his assistant 's name like lid-uh-widge.)

We could hear everything through the door. "Are they here, Peter?" a woman asked.

"There are -- Lidewij -- there are two adolescent apparitions outside the door."

"Apparitions?" she asked with a pleasant Dutch lilt.

Van Houten answered in a rush. "Phantasms specters ghouls visitants post-terrestrials *apparitions*, Lidewij. How can someone pursuing a postgraduate degree in American literature display such abominable English-language skills?"

"Peter, those are not post-terrestrials. They are Augustus and Hazel, the young fans with whom you have been corresponding."

"They are -- what? They -- I thought they were in America!"

"Yes, but you invited them here, you will remember."

"Do you know why I left America, Lidewij? So that I would never again have to encounter Americans."

"But you are an American."

"Incurably so, it seems. But as to *these* Americans, you must tell them to leave at once, that there has been a terrible mistake, that the blessed Van Houten was making a rhetorical offer to meet, not an actual one, that such offers must be read symbolically."

I thought I might throw up. I looked over at Augustus, who was staring intently at the door, and saw his shoulders slacken.

"I will not do this, Peter," answered Lidewij. "You *must* meet them. You must. You need to see them. You need to see how your work matters."

John Green (The Fault in our Stars, The Penguin Group)

EXCERPT FROM: HOLES

He could just feel a corner of it. Most of it was still buried. It had the cool, smooth texture of metal. "I think I might have found the treasure chest," he said. His voice was filled more with astonishment than with excitement.

"Really?" asked Zero.

"I think so," Stanley said.

The hole was wide enough for him to hold the shovel lengthwise and dig sideways into the wall. He knew he had to dig very carefully. He didn't want the side of the hole to collapse, along with the huge pile of dirt directly above it.

He scraped at the dirt wall, until he exposed one entire side of the box-like object. He ran his fingers over it. It felt to be about eight inches tall, and almost two feet wide. He had no way of knowing how far into the earth it extended. He tried pulling it out, but it wouldn't budge.

He was afraid that the only way to get to it was to start back up at the surface and dig down. They didn't have time for that.

"I'm going to try to dig a hole underneath it," he said. "Then maybe I can pull it down and slip it out."

"Go for it," said Zero.

Stanley jammed the shovel into the bottom edge of his hole, and carefully began to dig a tunnel underneath the metal object. He hoped it didn't cave in.

Occasionally he'd stop, stoop down, and try to feel the far end of the box. But even when the tunnel was as long as his arm, he still couldn't feel the other side.

Once again he tried pulling it out, but it was firmly in the ground. If he pulled too hard, he feared, he'd cause a cave-in. He knew that when he was ready to pull it out, he would have to do it quickly, before the ground above it collapsed.

As his tunnel grew deeper and wider -- and more precarious -- Stanley was able to feel latches on one end of the box, and then a leather handle. It wasn't really a box. "I think it might be some kind of metal suitcase," he told Zero.

"Can you pry it loose with the shovel?" Zero suggested.

"I'm afraid the side of the hole will collapse."

"You might as well give it a try," said Zero.

Stanley took a sip of water. "Might as well," he said.

He forced the tip of the shovel between the dirt and the top of the metal case and tried to wedge it free. He wished he could see what he was doing.

He worked the end of the shovel, back and forth, up and down, until he felt the suitcase fall free. Then he felt the dirt come piling down on top of it.

But it wasn't a huge cave-in. As he knelt down in the hole, he could tell that only a small portion of the earth had collapsed.

He dug with his hands until he found the leather handle, and then he pulled the suitcase up and out of the dirt. "I got it!" he exclaimed.

It was heavy. He handed it up to Zero.

"You did it," Zero said, taking it from him.

"*We* did it," said Stanley.

He gathered his remaining strength, and tried to pull himself up out of the hole. Suddenly a bright light was shining in his face.

"Thank you," said the Warden. "You boys have been a big help."

Louis Sachar (Holes, Random House Children's Books)

EXCERPT FROM: NEVER CRY WOLF "STAKING THE LAND"

Quite by accident I had pitched my tent within ten yards of one of the major paths used by the wolves when they were going to, or coming from, their hunting grounds to the westward; and only a few hours after I had taken up residence one of the wolves came back from a trip and discovered me and my tent. He was at the end of a hard night's work and was clearly tired and anxious to go home to bed. He came over a small rise fifty yards from me with his head down, his eyes half-closed, and a preoccupied air about him. Far from being the preternaturally alert and suspicious beast of fiction, this wolf was so self-engrossed that he came straight on to within fifteen yards of me, and might have gone right past the tent without seeing it at all, had I not banged my elbow against the teakettle, making a resounding clank. The wolf's head came up and his eyes opened wide, but he did not stop or falter in his pace. One brief, sidelong glance was all he vouchsafed to me as he continued on his way.

It was true that I wanted to be inconspicuous, but I felt uncomfortable at being so totally ignored. Nevertheless, during the two weeks which followed, one or more wolves used the track past my tent almost every night—and never, except on one memorable occasion, did they evince the slightest interest in me.

By the time this happened I had learned a good deal about my wolfish neighbors, and one of the facts which had emerged was that they were not nomadic roamers, as is almost universally believed, but were settled beasts and the possessors of a large permanent estate with very definite boundaries.

The territory owned by my wolf family comprised more than a hundred square miles, bounded on one side by a river but otherwise not delimited by geographical features. Nevertheless there *were* boundaries, clearly indicated in wolfish fashion.

Anyone who has observed a dog doing his neighborhood rounds and leaving his personal mark on each convenient post will have already guessed how the wolves marked out *their* property. Once a week, more or less, the clan made the rounds of the family lands and freshened up the boundary markers—a sort of lupine beating of the bounds. This careful attention to property rights was perhaps made necessary by the presence of two other wolf families whose lands abutted on ours, although I never discovered any evidence of bickering or disagreements between the owners of the various adjoining estates. I suspect, therefore, that it was more of a ritual activity.

In any event, once I had become aware of the strong feeling of property rights which existed amongst the wolves, I decided to use this knowledge to make them at least recognize my existence. One evening, after they had gone off for their regular nightly hunt, I staked out a property claim of my own, embracing perhaps three acres, with the tent at the middle, and *including a hundred-yard long section of the wolves' path.*

Staking the land turned out to be rather more difficult than I had anticipated. In order to ensure that my claim would not be overlooked, I felt obliged to make a property mark on stones, clumps of moss, and patches of vegetation at intervals of not more than fifteen feet around the circumference of my claim. This took most of the night and required frequent returns to the tent to consume copious quantities of tea; but before dawn brought the hunters home the task was done, and I retired, somewhat exhausted, to observe results.

Farley Mowat (Never Cry Wolf, Farley Mowat Ltd.)

EXCERPT FROM: CRISIS ON CONSHELF TEN

In response to my hand movements my body began to turn to the left, and then suddenly stopped and spun slowly back again. I struggled and tried to turn again, but it was as if I were imprisoned in elastic bands, which softly but definitely resisted every movement I tried to make. I looked down at myself. I was suspended about three feet off the bottom, with strong stems of kelp wrapped tightly around both my ankles and my left arm and shoulder. I pushed and tore at the tough slippery stuff and finally managed to wriggle out of the arm hold, but no matter how I fought I couldn't release my legs.

I found myself breathing hard…panting…and consciously slowed down. My Moon training took over. I knew there was death in panic. Breathe evenly. Conserve energy. make a plan….

Something was nagging urgently at my memory. Something Jon had said. What was it?..."We've got half an hour left. If we need more air we'll pick up the other packs later." How long since Jon had said that? How long had I been examining the life of the hold-fast? Ten minutes? Twenty?

I called again, and held my breath while I listened for a reply. What was the range of this thing anyway? How far had that wild current carried me from the others? I could be miles away in any direction.

Well, it was a nasty thought. But if I were really on my own I'd better smarten up and think while I still had time. Panic chased coldly through my body, and I hung on, shivering. Then as suddenly as it came it was gone and my mind was crystal clear and fast.

I reached for the knife, strapped to my right thigh, and slid it carefully out of its sheath. The kelp stalks were infuriatingly tough and slippery, and several times I came close to slicing into my leg. I sawed away. My eyes darkened. It was getting harder to breathe every moment. I sucked desperately at the mouthpiece, and remembered the emergency supply.

I turned the valve. The new oxygen was wonderful. My head cleared instantly. The knife had slipped from my hand to the sandy bottom. I reached down, hanging like an acrobat from the binding kelp stems. There it was. Reach out. One inch more. There….

I somersaulted round and sawed away. One stem gone. I kicked my right leg free. How long would the emergency supply last? Was it included in the half hour that had been in the tanks? Or was it a premium? Go on sawing. The knife was getting blunt. There. At last.

The stem snaked away from my left leg, and I turned cautiously round, careful not to catch the closely growing stems on my re-breather pack. Golden brown, smoothly gleaming, the kelp swayed around me, each stem a twin of the next. I remembered that there were three square miles of the stuff.

I had two choices, to stay where I was until I ran out of air, which wouldn't be long. Or I could swim in what I hoped would be the right direction until I ran out of air.

Either way it wasn't much of a choice.

Monica Hughes (Crisis on Conshelf Ten, Reed Books Canada)

EXCERPT FROM: LESIA'S DREAM

The sun inched into view. Its cheery brightness sliced sharply through the air, mocking the fear that clutched her stomach. "What's happened?" Lesia demanded again.

"It's Ivan." Tears glistened in the corners of Mama's eyes. "He's been taken into custody. In Winnipeg."

The words roared in Lesia's ears. Her knees buckled. Andrew put an arm around her shoulder and settled her on a stump. Her legs felt like potatoes that had been boiled to mush. She shut her eyes and tried to think.

Into custody. Ivan, what have you done?

The sun caressed her face. The dying fire warmed her legs. For a minute she focused on that and shut out all the ugliness. "Why?" she finally whispered.

"He tried to enlist," Wasyl explained. "He was caught lying about his nationality."

Lesia's eyes popped open.

"If he told them he was from Galicia, he knew he'd be classed as an Austrian and disqualified, so he called himself a Russian instead." Mama sank onto a stump beside her and filled in the details. "There were several young men and they were all taken off to jail."

"When?" Lesia asked.

"Two days ago," Wasyl told her. "Three of us escaped, but most are still there."

She didn't care about most. She only cared about Ivan. And Papa! "Papa is in Winnipeg. He can talk to them. He can make them understand."

Mama's shoulders began to shake. She was crying.

"Hush, Mama." Lesia pulled her close and rocked her back and forth. "Everything will be all right. Papa will get Ivan released." With each rock, Lesia's stomach rose and fell, like she was going to be sick.

"Papa…" Mama sobbed. "Papa's there too."

Lesia felt light-headed. Dizzy. Confused. "What are you talking about?"

"They brought your Papa in last night, just before I escaped." Wasyl's eyes were dark with pity. "They accused him of supporting the Austrians by sending a large sum of money home."

Lesia gasped. "But that was for Master Stryk. I sent money too." *What if they come after me?*

Beside her, Mama's frail body shook with sobs. Andrew dropped his head into his hands. "Bozhe," he whispered. "Some fine mess this is."

Lesia exploded. "If Ivan had had the common sense not to enlist—to stay out of politics for once in his life—this never would have happened." She turned accusing eyes towards Wasyl Goetz.

Wasyl stuck his chin into the air. "We've been persecuted for years! This was our chance to right wrongs, to fight with Canada. To support our new country. Who wouldn't do it?"

"I'll have to go to Winnipeg and see what I can do," Andrew said.

"He's probably not there any more." Wasyl's anger dissolved into weary resignation. He stood up and began to pace. "The jails are so full of enemy aliens, they're taking men to Brandon."

The internment camp! So what she'd heard at the Boychuk farm *was* true. Dear Lord! Lesia blinked back tears. What were they going to do? Surely Papa and Ivan would be back soon. But if not…? And what if they came for her?

Seizing land. Nothing they can do.

The remembered words turned her hot, then cold, then hot again. If one rumour was true, then perhaps the other one was too. She couldn't risk losing their land. She had to do everything she could to hold on to it.

Laura Langston (Lesia's Dream, Harper Trophy)

EXCERPT FROM: LOST IN THE BARRENS

Something cold and wet swishing across his face brought Jamie out of the depths of a heavy sleep. He groaned and thrust out his hand. His fingers closed on the stiff, hairy mat of the little fawn's forehead and unwillingly he opened his eyes.

The cabin was as cold as death and almost as dark as night. The lamp had long since burned out, and the fire had sunk away to a few glowing coals. The fawn Otanak was standing by Jamie's bed grunting anxiously, and as Jamie lay still, the fawn thrust its head forward and slapped its tongue over his face a second time.

Jamie sat up abruptly and pushed the little deer away. "Ugh!" he said, wiping his face. "Lay off that stuff!"

He was fully awake now and he began to realize that the usual silence of Hidden Valley had been broken. To his ears there came a steady, roaring sound as if there were a waterfall near the cabin.

Though it was dark, Jamie's stomach—and the fact that the fire had almost burned out—told him it was morning. He jumped out of bed and pulled on his clothes. The cold was terrible and he was blue with it by the time he reached the fire and had begun heaping fresh kindling on the coals. The fawn followed him, nuzzling his back until Jamie in some irritation gave it a shove. "What's eating you, anyway?" he asked.

The fire flared up and Jamie walked to the door to have a look outside and find what was responsible for the rising blare of sound that seemed to be pouring into the cabin from all directions.

He opened the door and a gust of wind almost tore it out of his hands. Snow drove into his face so hard it almost blinded him. He could see nothing except a gray, swirling haze of driven snow, and even the nearby spruce trees were completely obscured. Jamie stumbled back into the cabin gasping for breath.

He shook Awasin awake. "Get up!" he cried. "The granddaddy of all blizzards is blowing. I never saw anything so bad!"

Jamie's description of the blizzard did not do it justice. Roaring down over the darkened plains from the arctic seas, the first real gale of winter had come upon the land. Screaming in wild rage, it hurled itself with the force of a hurricane across the Barrenlands. It scoured the hard-packed drifts, lifting the frozen particles of ice and whirling them into frenzied motion. The snow drove with the force of a sandblast and nothing could face its fury. Wolves and foxes had long ago sought shelter and crouched shivering in holes dug deep under the drifts. Even the ptarmigan were huddled forlornly in rock crevices in order to escape the fury of the gale. No living thing dared stir upon the tortured face of the plains that day.

In Hidden Valley the full force of the blizzard was held back by the protecting mountains, but even in this sheltered place the storm was more than a man could face. The shrieking of the wind across the crests of the surrounding hills was like the constant screaming of unleashed demons. The boys soon found that their cabin refused to warm up until they had blocked the air vent in the floor and spent an hour repacking all the cracks between the logs with moss taken from their mattresses.

Farley Mowat (Lost in the Barrens, Bantam Books)

EXCERPT FROM: NESTING CANADA GEESE

In 1907, the third year I had my clipped Canada geese, one pair nested, and every season since I have had from one to three pairs raise young. This is the very time these old ganders especially expose their incomparable, clean, noble ways, which even we human beings might well envy them.

One spring I had a painter from town out here brightening things up a little, so one day I told him to paint the cornice of the bird house, which is about seven feet high. I paid no more attention to him, but went on with my work at the tile factory, about three hundred feet away. All at once I heard a scream that was joined with language too loud to look well in print. I got out just in time to see this scared man come rolling over the brick wall, his legs and arms sticking up like odd sections in a Ferris-wheel! To see and hear him wrinkled my red face into a broad grin; he came towards me with both torn shirt-sleeves fluttering in the wind and white paint dabbled on one leg of his trousers, without hat, paint, pail or pipe. He began to reel it off. Then it all came to me in a flash. I had forgotten to tell him about the goose-nest that was concealed in the weeds near that spot. And now it was too late to give him any explanation, for really he did not know whether he was bitten or stung. While he was not hurt a particle, he was nearly frightened into fits, and he could not, or would not, believe there were only two geese there. I finally went and found his pipe, Christy hat and paint pail, but he never would go back in that enclosure; and worse still, I doubt if he has ever forgiven me, as he thought I had put up a job on him.

One picture would do for all the pairs of Canada geese I ever saw nesting. While the gander takes no part in building the nest or sitting, turn about, on the eggs, as some birds do, yet he is always guarding her and is never over two rods away, seeing all enemies before they do him. He will usually lie flat on the ground, his black neck and snake-like head straight out, and if any creature goes right on by, all is well; but should one note him and stop, then he will suddenly jump on it from an unexpected quarter. His looks and hissing honks will almost frighten any other creature into decline; and while frightening is his chief defence, yet I know from personal experience how he can bite, and hang on like a pup, while he deals unbelievably heavy blows with the first joint of his powerful wings. The worst blow I ever got in my life was from an old gander that I caught to tag; he struck me on the jaw with the first joint of his doubled-up wings and, believe me, I had the mumps for weeks!

While I have seen the goose run at a domestic fowl or so, yet she does not pretend to do much fighting. She usually leaves that strenuous exercise for him, and depends on his protection; and well she may, for he never fails her. He will even leave his family and fight for her.

A pair once nested near the tile kiln, and a collie dog attacked this gander. The goose won out, but the dog bit the end of his backbone right off. I saw the blood running down his legs and in a few days I noticed he was always in the one place, lying down by his sweetheart. I went over and found he was sick and so weak he let me pick him up. I saw what was wrong, so I went and got the turpentine bottle and poured some in this decaying cavity. I then brought the dear old fellow water and food, but it was fully a week before he could stand up. He finally got well, and I still have him, but he was dying at his post. His name is Tom Johnson.

Jack Miner (A Century of Canadian Literature, Ryerson Press)

EXCERPT FROM: ANNE OF GREEN GABLES "ANNE SAYS HER PRAYERS"

When Marilla took Anne up to bed that night she said stiffly:

"Now, Anne, I noticed last night that you threw your clothes all about the floor when you took them off. That is a very untidy habit, and I can't allow it at all. As soon as you take off any article of clothing fold it neatly and place it on the chair. I haven't any use at all for little girls who aren't neat."

"I was so harrowed up in my mind last night that I didn't think about my clothes at all," said Anne. "I'll fold them nicely to-night. They always made us do that at the asylum. Half the time, though, I'd forget, I'd be in such a hurry to get into bed nice and quiet and imagine things."

"You'll have to remember a little better if you stay here," admonished Marilla. "There, that looks something like. Say your prayers now and get into bed."

"I never say any prayers," announced Anne.

Marilla looked horrified astonishment.

"Why, Anne, what do you mean? Were you never taught to say your prayers? God always wants little girls to say their prayers. Don't you know who God is, Anne?"

"God is a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth," responded Anne promptly and glibly.

Marilla looked rather relieved.

"So you do know something then, thank goodness! You're not quite a heathen. Where did you learn that?"

"Oh, at the asylum Sunday-school. They made us learn the whole catechism. I liked it pretty well. There's something splendid about some of the words. 'Infinite, eternal and unchangeable.' Isn't that grand? It has such a roll to it—just like a big organ playing. You couldn't quite call it poetry, I suppose, but it sounds a lot like it, doesn't it?"

"We're not talking about poetry, Anne—we are talking about saying your prayers. Don't you know it's a terrible wicked thing not to say your prayers every night? I'm afraid you are a very bad little girl."

"You'd find it easier to be bad than good if you had red hair," said Anne reproachfully. "People who haven't red hair don't know what trouble is. Mrs. Thomas told me that God made my hair red *on purpose*, and I've never cared about Him since. And anyhow I'd always be too tired at night to bother saying prayers. People who have to look after twins can't be expected to say their prayers. Now, do you honestly think they can?"

Marilla decided that Anne's religious training must be begun at once. Plainly there was no time to be lost.

"You must say your prayers while you are under my roof, Anne."

"Why, of course, if you want me to," assented Anne cheerfully. "I'd do anything to oblige you. But you'll have to tell me what to say for this once. After I get into bed I'll imagine out a real nice prayer to say always. I believe that it will be quite interesting, now that I come to think of it."

"You must kneel down," said Marilla in embarrassment.

"Why must people kneel down to pray? If I really wanted to pray I'll tell you what I'd do. I'd go out into a real big field all alone or into the deep, deep woods, and I'd look up into the sky—up—up—up—into that lovely blue sky that looks as if there was no end to its blueness. And then I'd just *feel* a prayer. Well, I'm ready. What am I to say?"

L.M. Montgomery (A Century of Canadian Literature, Ryerson Press)

EXCERPT FROM: BEATRICE AND CROC HARRY

The trick, said the purple handwriting in *Survival Tips*, was to bring all ingredients to a temperature that was warm to the touch, stirring as it thickened. *This is no time to look away, and no time to lose focus*, the book said. *Put a lid on the pot. You now have one minute to assemble whatever parts are broken and to bring them near. Remove the lid. For heaven's sake, use the bearskin potholders and do not burn yourself.*

With the back of a spoon, Beatrice shoved some glue into the cracks of her slingshot. The glue wasn't strong enough yet. It needed more cooking. She was utterly focused, with nothing else on her mind, when Croc Harry slid out of the river and dropped onto the patch of ground beside her. His tail thumped. She felt the vibrations in the ground. She had never been this close to Croc Harry. She could barely move. Or breathe. She sat cross-legged by the fire, holding the glue pot with her bearskin potholders.

"What's up this morning, Big Bea?" Croc Harry said, which Beatrice detested. He only called her big because she was tiny. She did not appreciate his mockery. However, at this moment, Beatrice had other concerns. The best policy was to appear unflappable.

"Making something to eat," she said.

"Meat?" He asked.

"You know I'm a vegetarian," she said.

"Some vegetarian. You are using bearskin potholders."

"I'm kind of busy right now."

"No 'good morning' to me?" he said. "No warm salutation? No special indication of the fact that you and I are kindred spirits?"

"Good morning, Croc Harry." She tried to sound as disinterested as possible. It would not do to appear frightened. Maybe he would forget that she was made of meat and bones. Or perhaps he would have considered that she would be mostly bone, and would thus be unappetizing. Maybe he would lose interest and slither right back into the Argilia River. Perhaps he was still busy digesting his last antelope.

"Oh, come on, Beatrice, work with me. Let's palaver. I am in the mood for conversation."

"Okay," Beatrice said.

"Did you see the fog hanging so thick over the water this morning, and then watch it disappear as the sun rose? Wasn't that a thing of beauty?"

She removed the lid and stirred the pot. "Yep," she said. The glue was nearly perfect now. But soon it would harden. *If you let the glue harden in the pot,* the manual said*, you might as well throw out the whole thing. You'll never get it out with a spoon. You will not get it out with a spatula, either.*

Beatrice hoped that Croc Harry had no clue what she was doing. She imagined the conversation. It could not go well:

So what exactly are you doing, Beatrice?

I'm fixing my slingshot. Why?

And then what would she say?

Lawrence Hill (Beatrice and Croc Harry, HarperCollins Publishers, Ltd.)

EXCERPT FROM: AUCTION FEVER

Then I saw the colt.

I don't even remember climbing up to sit on the rail of his pen. All I know is that I was up there with my toes hooked around the rail, and I was looking down on that colt, soaking him in, his shaggy coat the colour of pull taffy, his silver mane and tail, and his hoofs just like Ma's teacups.

I never said to myself, I want him. It was quicker than thinking, quick as a gopher down a hole. I wanted him so bad I hurt, the funny kind when you can't tell where you hurt but you sure know you do.

I could feel the spring chinook soft at my nose and hear it in my ears. It was whispering in the long grass at the side of the pen! It had come clear across the prairie to me and my buckskin colt.

I got down off of that fence and I headed for Jake. He knows what to get for a kid.

I found him on the edge of all the folks ringed around Colonel Hepworth and looking up at him.

"Jake!" I said. "I just been over to the stock pens and I saw a buckskin colt!"

"Did yuh now?"

"He's a buckskin, Jake, I'd like for you to look at him—he's a buckskin with a real light mane and a tail!"

"Look kinda funny without one," Jake said. 'There ain't no—"

"—sold to thuh fella in thuh trainman's cap!" yelled Colonel Hepworth. "An' now, gen'lemen, let us turn to thuh pigs!"

"—jist talkin' about it thuh other day. Yer maw figgers it's about time fer yuh to have a horse-a yer own." Jake had a real pleased look on his face. "Got yer maw's stove—Pride-a the Prairies—hot-water ressy-voar on her—on'y thirty dollars—leaves twen'y left over."

"Jake, do you think—could—I want that there colt, Jake—I want—"

"Ain't no harm in takin' a look at him," Jake said.

Whilst Jake looked at the colt I stood there and hoped like anything he would be all right so Jake would buy him.

"Risin' a year," Jake said. "Nice put-up colt."

"Can I—will you buy him for me, Jake?"

Jake spit. "I will," he said, "if he don't go over twenty."

"Do you think he—"

"Nope—I don't think he will. C'mon—we'll stick close to thuh colonel till he gits tuh that there colt."

Colonel Hepworth was standing up on the seat of an old MacDougall tractor next to the hogpens. He was pointing to the Duke of Broomhead with his cane, and he had an envelope in his hand.

"This here, gen'lemen, is thuh Duke-a Broomhead—pure-blood registered York boar with a stringa folks from here tuh thuh correction line. Take a look at that there royal pig!"

I could see the Duke of Broomhead's angry little eyes looking out between the rails of his pen. He was chomping and breathing real mad. I took a couple of steps back from the pen. Jake didn't. Jake isn't scared of anything.

"Now whut am I bid fer this here pig, gen'lemen—hup—let her go—huppa-diddle-eee-hi-widdle-ho—thanks for thuh five-dollar bid—thuh ree-dickalus sum-a five dollars fer—who'll gimme ten—an' a ten an' a ten—ten I am give!"

Continued on next page…

I didn't see anybody make a five-or a ten-dollar bid; a person doesn't dare spit when Colonel Hepworth is selling.

"An' fifteen—five an' a ten an' a ten an' a five—an' a huppy-eye-oh-ring-a-dang-doh! Fifteen ain't enuff—my heart bleeds fer the pig a-holdin' his noble head low in shame—blue blood, gen'lemen, blue as the ink in yer fountain pen, gen'lemen!"

"Lard!" Jake snorted.

"Lard, Jake?"

"All he's good for—that's a five-year-old boar—too old—he ain't no good for—"

"Who'll gimme two more—more—two more—fifteen an' a two—"

"Then what are they bidding for, Jake?"

"Auction fever, Kid—that pig ain't worth thuh haulin' away."

"One dollar is all I ask—one dollar more tuh save that there pig's pride—huppy-oh-whiddle-eee-rum—don't nobody feel sory fer that there pig?"

Jake was leaning against the Duke of Broomhead's pen with his elbow on the top rail.

"Thuh papers ain't extra!" yelled Colonel Hepworth waving the envelope around. "All fer thuh price-a fifteen dollars—fifteen once an' a fifteen twice—who'll bid me fifty cents more—four bits more—"

"Hey—ow—uh!" Just like the four-ten on a clear fall night, Jake let a whoop out of him and jumped like a startled jack rabbit.

Colonel Hepworth's cane came down with a bang. "Sold!" he shouted. "Sold tuh Jake Trumper fer fifteen an' a half—an' a very fine buy you've—"

W.O. Mitchell (Jake and the Kid, Macmillan)

EXCERPT FROM: CAUGHT BETWEEN FIRE AND ICE

The house was built of cedar logs; in all probability it would be consumed before any help could arrive. There was a brisk breeze blowing up from the frozen lake, and the thermometer stood at eighteen degrees below zero. We were placed between the two extremes of heat and cold, and there was as much danger to be apprehended from the one as the other. In the bewilderment of the moment, the direful extent of the calamity never struck me: we wanted but this to put the finishing stroke to our misfortunes, to be thrown naked, houseless, and penniless, upon the world. *"What shall I save first?"* was the thought just then uppermost in my mind. Bedding and clothing appeared the most essentially necessary and without another moment's pause, I set to work with a right good will to drag all that I could from my burning home.

While little Agnes, Dunbar, and baby Donald filled the air with their cries, Katie, as if fully conscious of the importance of exertion, assisted me in carrying out sheets and blankets, and dragging trunks and boxes some way up the hill, to be out of the way of the burning brands when the roof should fall in.

How many anxious looks I gave to the head of the clearing as the fire increased, and large pieces of burning pine began to fall through the boarded ceiling, about the lower rooms where we were at work. The children I had kept under a large dresser in the kitchen, but it now appeared absolutely necessary to remove them to a place of safety. To expose the young, tender things to the direful cold was almost as bad as leaving them to the mercy of the fire. At last I hit upon a plan to keep them from freezing. I emptied all the clothes out of a large, deep chest of drawers, and dragged the empty drawers up the hill; these I lined with blankets, and placed a child in each drawer, covering it well over with the bedding, giving to little Agnes the charge of the baby to hold between her knees, and keep well covered until help should arrive. Ah, how long it seemed coming!

I found that I should not be able to take many more trips for goods. As I passed out of the parlour for the last time, Katie looked up at her father's flute, which was suspended upon two brackets, and said,

"Oh dear Mama! do save papa's flute; he will be so sorry to lose it."

God bless the dear child for the thought! The flute was saved; and, as I succeeded in dragging out a heavy chest of clothes, and looked up once more despairingly to the road, I saw a man running at full speed. It was my husband. Help was at hand, and my heart uttered a deep thanksgiving as another and another figure came upon the scene.

Susanna Moodie (The Spirit of Canada, Malcolm Lester)

EXCERPT FROM: ON THE ROOF OF THE WORLD

At last there remained between him and the seals but one low ridge and then a space of level floe. This was the critical point. If he could writhe his body over the crest and down the other side, he would be within safe spear-shot. He would spring to his feet and throw before the nimblest seal could gain the water. He lay absolutely still, summoning wits, nerves, and muscles alike to serve his will with their best. His eyes burned deep in his head, like smouldering coals.

Just at this moment a ghostly light waved broadly across the solitude. It paled, withdrew, wavered back and forth as shaken from a curtain in the heavens, then steadied ephemerally into an arch of glowing silver, which threw the light of a dozen moons. There were three seals out upon the ice at that moment, and they all lifted their eyes simultaneously to greet the illumination. The man irresistibly looked up; but in the same instant, remembering the hunger in the igloo, he cowered back again out of sight, trembling lest some of the seals might have caught a glimpse of his head above the ridge. Some dozen rods away, at the other side of the air-hole, the great white bear also raised his eyes towards that mysterious light, troubled at heart because he knew it was going to hamper his hunting.

For perhaps two minutes the seals were motionless, profiting by the sudden brightness to scrutinize the expanse of ice and snow in every direction. Then, quite satisfied that no danger was near, they resumed their sportive plungings while the instantly frozen waters crackled crisply about them. For all their vigilance, they had failed to detect, on the one side, a narrow, black-tipped muzzle lying flat in a cleft of the ice-ridge, or, on the other side, a bunch of grayish fur, nearly the colour of the grayish-mottled ice, which covered the head of the man from the igloo beside the Little Hills.

And now, while neither the man nor the bear, each utterly unconscious of the other, dared to stir, in a flash the still silver radiance of the aurora broke up and flamed into a riot of dancing colour. Parallel rays like the pipes of a titanic organ, reaching almost from the horizon to the zenith, hurtled madly from side to side, now elongating, now shortening abruptly, now seeming to clash against one another, but always in an ordered madness of right lines. Unearthly green, palpitating into rose, and thinnest sapphire, and flame-colour, and ineffably tender violet, the dance of these cohorts of the magnetic rays went on, across the stupendous arc of sky, till the man, afraid of freezing in his unnatural stillness, shrank back down the ridge, and began twisting his body, noiselessly but violently, to set his blood in motion, and the bear, trusting to the confusion of shifting lights, slipped himself over the ridge and into a convenient crevice. Under the full but bewildering glare of that celestial illumination, he had gained a good ten feet upon his human rival. The man's eyes reappeared just then at the crest of his ridge. Their piercing glance lingered, as if with suspicion, upon the crevice wherein the bear had flattened himself. Was there something unduly solid in that purple shadow in the crevice? No, a trick of the witch lights, surely. The piercing eyes returned to their eager watching of the seals.

Charles G.D. Roberts (Great Canadian Animal Stories, McClelland & Stewart)

EXCERPT FROM: THE BLIND MAN AND THE BIRD

Shortly after that the grouse perched on the man's arm, on his knee, on his shoulder. Stiffly it stood, poised and still, the first time he brushed his fingers delicately over its trim feathers. These fingers were the old man's eyes, and touch was a keen joy to him.

"You are tame, now," he murmured, and it was truly so in the days that followed when August was waning.

His wife noticed his eagerness as he hurried away to the woods each sunny afternoon.

"You love those woods, Old Peter."

"And the birds in them," he smiled at her.

When he approached the log now the partridge came running as soon as he called. He put down a hand and lifted it to his shoulder, then tapped his way to the log while the bird whistled in response to his little questions. And there the two strange friends, blind man and bird, would spend a happy hour together.

September came and passed, and with the frosts the partridge became restless and drummed again. Blind Peter felt the bird's rich plumage swell and flaunt as it preened itself under his hand, and he smiled with understanding when it strutted back and forth the length of the log with proud head arched and neck ruffles raised and broad tail fanned. Then he would hear the bird pause, set itself securely, and beat its wings in the swift movements which produced the drumming.

After the display was finished it came back to his fondling hands and pecked eagerly at his pockets until he laughingly brought out the titbits. When it was time to go the man placed the bird on his shoulder and rose with his staff. Just before he reached the boundary fence he would stop. Then the partridge sprang from his shoulder, flying swiftly through the darkening woods with Blind Peter's good-bye floating softly after it.

October had come, with clear and zestful days that rouse an old and savage instinct in man. One day when Blind Peter was half-way across the pasture the sudden roar of a shotgun boomed from the woods.

The old man stopped abruptly, horror on his face.

"Who is there?" he called, and his gentle voice was shrill.

"It's only me," came the hearty shout of Roger, the hired man. "I'm just doin' a little huntin'."

Quickly Blind Peter framed the next question.

"Sure I got him," came Roger's response. "I couldn't miss. He was settin' a-top a big log, close as could be."

When Roger reached him, trailing the still smoking gun, Blind Peter gently took the bird in his hand.

"Tell me—Was it very beautiful?"

"Yeah," answered Roger, curiously hushed by something in the old man's face. "I guess maybe it was."

Kerry Wood (Great Canadian Animal Stories, Hurtig Publishers)

EXCERPT FROM: TRAPPED IN ICE

"Mother!" I whispered in alarm.

"Go to sleep, Helen, it's the middle of the night," her voice came back softly through the darkness.

"But something's wrong!"

"Nothing's wrong…it's just the ice…everything is all right…"

"I think she's right, Mother," Michael chimed in.

"Isn't anybody asleep?" she asked and sighed deeply. "All right, let's get up and talk for a while. I'll light the lamp."

I heard her move her bed clothing. Then there was a crash, as if she had bumped into something.

"Oh, my goodness!" Mother called out.

"Mother!" I said in panic. I quickly pulled my legs out of the sack, scrambled out of my bunk and fell to the floor.

"It's all right, Helen."

I felt a hand at my side, helping me. I was unsteady on my feet and had to hold on to the side of my bunk.

"Stand still and I'll light the lamp," she said.

I watched the dim grey outline of her body move away and then heard the sound of a match being struck. I saw a small patch of light illuminate her hand and arm and then move on to the lamp. The glow grew quickly until the entire room was bathed in a soft yellow light.

What the light revealed was frightening! The floor was tilted and the room was on a terrible angle. During the night the ice had shifted, causing one side of the ship to rise up.

"Mother, what does this mean?" Michael asked.

"I don't know, but I want you both to put on your parkas, quickly. We must get onto the deck."

Michael tried to leap from his bunk but his feet were still tangled in his sleeping sack and he crashed to the floor. Mother lurched over and helped him up. Quickly we pulled on our parkas, mukluks and gloves. It was reassuring to put them on. They were soft and warm and were like a second skin. Michael and I were warned, over and over again, not to go out, especially onto the ice, without being covered.

It was difficult to move around the cabin. We stumbled and bumped into things, and finally got through the door into the corridor. I placed one hand against the wall to support me as we made our way towards the deck. Mother led the way carrying the lamp. Coming up to the hatch she passed the lamp back to me and put both hands against the door. At first it didn't budge. She put her shoulder against it and it popped open. I pulled up my hood to shield myself from the wave of cold air rushing in through the doorway.

The deck, of course, was on the same angle as the rest of the ship, but somehow it seemed even more shocking. I heard voices and turned. Standing against the railing, on the side of the ship aimed downward towards the ice, were most of the members of the expedition.

The air was cold and still. There was no wind to blow away the cloud of steam that came each time I exhaled. On unsteady feet we joined the party of men.

"Good evening, gentleman," Mother began.

They all mumbled back greetings to us.

"Could someone please tell me what is happening here?" she asked.

"It's what's happening out there," Mr. Hadley said, pointing out onto the dim ice.

"Out where?"

His voice was drowned out by a surge of sound, followed almost immediately by a rush of air.

"What is that?" asked Mother as the din faded.

"Ice…crashing down. Two big pans are coming together, rafting up and then crashing down," Mr. Hadley explained.

"Where is Captain Bartlett?"

"He's on the ice, ma'am," Jonnie answered. "Went out ta try ta see what was what."

Mother asked, "Are we in any danger?"

"We're frozen in the ice, in the Arctic, coming into winter with no escape, Mrs. Kiruk. How can we not be in danger?" replied Dr. Mackay.

Eric Walters (Trapped in Ice, Puffin Books)

EXCERPT FROM: MOTHER KNEW A FEW TRICKS TOO

My mother was very musical. You could give her a piece of sheet music and she'd just look at it and then sit down and play it, and play it beautifully.

We had this organ. We were living in two granaries pulled together and fastened, but she had an organ. She'd brought it out from England, Manchester, when she came out. She'd waited four years in Manchester until my father sent for her, and we all met in Regina and then came out to two granaries. When the sleigh pulled up she said, "Well, George, if this is it, if it burns down we won't have lost anything." A wonderful sense of humor.

There were a lot of new people in the country at the time and young men would ride across the country to see her. They had sheet music with them. Their people in the Old Country would have sent it to them. I don't know what they thought Canada was, some sort of Edinburgh Festival or something. These young men would show up with the latest sheet music and Mother would sit down and play it for them, not once but maybe five times. Then she'd make tea and toast with cinnamon sprinkled on it.

Once there was one young fellow and he was very musical, although we didn't know it, and he showed up one night at one of these musicales, if you want to call them that, and he gave Mother some sheet music. She just sat down and away she went. Well, we nearly died. What this George Cook had done was get a blank sheet music form and made up his own tune. But he'd done it by taking eight bars of this and five of that and six of this and nine of that and put them all together. So what you had, you'd have something like five bars of "Pop goes the Weasel" and then six bars of Bach and then eight of "Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush" and five bars of "God Save the King" and so on and so on. Well, the rest caught on pretty quickly but Mother didn't. You see, she was concentrating so hard.

When she finished we all cheered and she said, "Most unusual." She said it sounded right but it didn't sound right. So she played it again. By this time we were practically rolling around on the floor. Then she caught on. I don't know which tune made her wise to George's little game, but she laughed and laughed and said it would be one of her souvenirs. She'd keep it as that.

Then she made us tea and I made the toast and it was cinnamon toast, but she arranged the passing out of the plate so that George Cook got the last piece of toast and it wasn't cinnamon toast he got. She sprinkled his toast heavily with paprika and pepper and nobody knew but she and George Cook—and I doubt if he knew what he was eating. He just told me later that it tasted horrible, but there was no way he could pass up her offerings. Mother was a pretty insistent little lady and she knew she had George over a barrel. So that night it was one for one. Tit for tat.

Barry Broadfoot (The Pioneer Years, Robert Garbutt Productions)

EXCERPT FROM: GRAMMA'S PEOPLE

The memories I have of my grandmother are now faded from time. She died so many years ago. What I do remember though is very clear.

People say that the sense of smell is the sense which evokes the strongest memories. Perhaps they are right. Whenever I smell lilac talc, or mothballs, or orange chiffon cake I remember Gramma.

My earliest recollection of my mother's mother is that she was old, very old. Her pure white hair was always rinsed a light blue. Her skin, although she had spent countless hours in the harsh prairie sun and wind, was smooth. Not even a hint of a wrinkle would dare to show itself anywhere on her stern face. Her beautiful green eyes could change colour as quickly as her mood; they would be steely grey when angry or when clouds of confusion descended upon her, as they sometimes did. In spite of this, however, Gramma was sturdy. She had a strong frame and could outwalk many people years younger than herself. She never wore clothing or shoes that were not practical. She kept herself extremely neat but had no use for a lot of curls in her hair or "pearly-fling"—her term for makeup.

Relatives would remark on how much I was like Gramma. I was aghast! Were they all blind? Did they need glasses? How could I, not yet even a teenager, possibly resemble this woman? This woman who was, without a doubt, the oldest person I had ever met. I could tell that our eyes were the same, and mine could also change colour with my moods—sometimes grey, sometimes blue, but mostly green. Beyond that, I could see no similarity whatsoever. Gramma was plump and sturdy, I was tall and thin. Gramma had blue hair, my head was covered with glossy black curls. Gramma's hands were knotted with arthritis and thick blue veins, mine were still pink with youth. Gramma always had to sit with her legs raised or her varicose veins troubled her; my long legs still had skinned knees, bug bites and bruises.

One day, several years later, while looking through a family photo album, I felt a shiver run up my spine. I felt as though my heart had stopped—it was difficult to breathe. There on the page was a picture of me. Only it couldn't have been me. The sepia tones of the photograph clearly gave away its age. It had quite obviously been taken many years before my birth.

"Mom," I said. "Who is this? In this picture?"

"Why, don't you recognize her?" my mother asked. "That's your grandmother, when she was about your age."

I stared at the picture for some time trying to visualize what Gramma had been like when she looked like that—like me—and erase the image of her as she was then. It wasn't easy.

Carmel Schneider (Manitoba Myriad, Dennis County Writers' Guild)

EXCERPT FROM: ROSIE IN NEW YORK CITY: "GOTCHA!"

The next morning I got up and got dressed as usual. Papa asked me if I thought the strike would really happen. I said I wasn't sure, but in case it didn't, I would go to work.

Maria called on me as usual, and as we walked I told her everything that had happened at the meeting the night before. I finished my story just as we reached the factory.

"You make it all come alive," she said. "I almost feel as if I were there."

We stood for a moment and stared at the hole in the wall of the building beside us. I could still see blood on the pavement.

"I don't want to go up there," I said to Maria. "What if that happens to us, or what if there's a fire?"

"We have no choice, remember?" Maria reminded me. "No other shop has better conditions, or so Mama tells me. We may as well be here as anywhere."

I took a deep breath and clasped Maria's hand. "Let's go, then," I said. "We can only hope the strike will really happen."

"You can hope," Maria said. "Our family needs the money."

I didn't want to argue with her. My family was even more desperate. Slowly, we climbed the stairs. When we got to the clock to punch in, Mr. Gold was standing there with his notepad speaking to Jenny and the others. "You will be losing a half day's pay, of course, since you didn't work yesterday afternoon," he told us.

"Do you mean," Jenny asked him, " you won't be paying us for yesterday?"

"No," he answered, "I mean I won't be paying you for a half day today as punishment for not working yesterday."

"Mr. Gold," Jenny objected, "that's not at all fair. How could we work after that accident?"

"I'll decide what's fair, Miss Lensky," Mr. Gold said. "Now, do you want to work or not?"

Jenny and the others punched in, and so did I. We started to work. I was in terrible suspense. Would any of them have the courage to stop? To simply stand up and walk out? Or would we continue to work? What was happening in the other shops? Was everyone back to work as usual, or had they walked out as promised last night?

I could barely concentrate on my work, but at least I wasn't bored. And yet the minutes seemed to go by one by one, and I could count each one! And then it happened.

Jenny stood up.

"Miss Lensky, what are you doing?" Mr. Gold called to her from across the room.

"Mr. Gold," she said calmly, "I am on strike."

I admired Jenny so much at that moment. She spoke with that quiet intensity she had, that solemn manner that made everyone want to follow her. One by one, each of the girls stood up and used Jenny's words. "Mr. Gold, I am on strike." "Mr. Gold, I am on strike." Finally I stood up and said, "I'd like to say that, for my mama, I am on strike too!"

At this the other girls broke out in laughter and lifted me on their shoulders! I didn't understand why until Jenny called, "You shall be our good luck charm and come everywhere with us. What do you say, girls?" It was the first time I'd seen Jenny really smile.

"Yes!" they all agreed, clapping and giggling. "As long as young Rosie is with us, we cannot lose!"

Carol Matas (Rosie in New York City, Key Porter Books)

EXCERPT FROM: THE GREAT BEAR

Morgan raised a crude, homemade slingshot she had made herself. She pulled back the round stone, the elastic stretching all the way to her face, and took aim at a prairie chicken. The orange-throated bird, with its striped, round body, was pecking at the ground for seeds and insects. It was completely oblivious to the presence of Morgan, Eli, and Arik, who was usually a rather loud squirrel but managed to stay quiet when on the hunt. Morgan's hands were trembling. It made her cheek tremble, her vision shaky. She lowered the slingshot.

She whispered to Eli, "Didn't you kill the exact same kind of bird, with this exact weapon, but when you were, like, in kindergarten?"

"I did it when I was learning," Eli whispered in response. "Age doesn't matter."

"That doesn't answer my question."

"If I can interject," Arik said, also whispering. "If I couldn't just sprint after the bird and kill it, I would totally use a slingshot."

"I feel like kids use slingshots because they aren't old enough to use an *actual* weapon," Morgan said. "Like Bart Simpson. He uses a slingshot, doesn't he?"

"Who's Bart Simpson?" Arik asked.

"He's a cartoon character on earth," Eli explained, rolling his eyes at Morgan.

"What's a cartoon character?"

"*Heeere* we go." Morgan sat down, and the others sat with her, in the woods just south of Misewa, in the middle of summer. Eli and Morgan were wearing Misewa clothing, made for them by villagers after their first journey to the North Country. When not on Askí, they stashed them in a sack that they hung from a tiny burl on the Great Tree, which contained the portal through which they always came to the Barren Grounds. The sack held two options for each sibling – a warm outfit and a cool one – to clothe them for all seasons.

"You know how Eli draws stuff?" Morgan began.

"Yes, of course." Arik nodded. "That's how you travel here."

"Right, okay." They were getting somewhere. "So, on earth, people can make drawings seem alive. Like, they move and stuff. They become *animated."*

"Sooo … some people can make drawings walk around on earth? Like if the drawings on the Council Hut jumped off the walls and started dancing around?" Arik asked. *"Wizards!"*

"No!" Then Morgan clapped a hand over her mouth and glanced over at the prairie chicken to see if it was still there. It was pecking away. "No," she corrected herself, whispering once more. "They don't…" She rubbed her face out of frustration. "They don't come alive. They just … move around on a screen. A screen that's kind of like, I don't know, glass paper." Morgan had tried to think of a way to explain it without complicating the matter. She wasn't certain she had succeeded. "And they're in made-up stories. They're fake."

After a moment of thought, Arik shrugged. "That sounds dumb."

"Some of them are dumb," Eli said.

David Robertson (The Great Bear, Penguin Random House of Canada Limited)

EXCERPT FROM: HARVEST '52

For most of the year she and the threshing machine were left alone. It stood neglected: great teeth stilled and frozen, belts removed, innards empty. It was she who was in charge of it then: turning it into a dragon's cave or a sailing ship; climbing up and down the grain chute; flattening herself against the sunwarmed metal to peer into the gaping mouth.

For most of the year the farm too was alone, a small white house on a large flat prairie. Today was different. The house was surrounded by cars and trucks. The threshers were here. They had come before at stooking time, wearing overalls with no shirts, canteens tied to their belts, heavy gloves to protect their fingers from the bite of the twine.

It had been amusing then to stomp through the stubble following the stookers. She had listened to their boasts, timed the team in the lead and taunted the laggards. The scratch of the stubble on her bare legs and the heat of the late summer sun had made her feel alive, part of the whole. But harvest was more. It was magic.

Her brothers would be out there already. They didn't have to attend school during harvest. The oldest was in charge of the unloading this year. He would signal the teams in: a majestic wave of his hand when they were ready for the next load, a raised palm when they were not, a two armed cross to move back if there was trouble. The teeth would not be still now. They would be tearing at the sheaves, grabbing, crushing, clanking, clanging. She shivered in anticipation. Some day, it would be her turn.

For now she didn't envy him. Chaff swirled in clouds around the machine, getting in his hair and his eyes; dry brittle stuff unfit even for cattle, yet some he would swallow when his mouth was too dry to spit. Later, in between racks, he would rush over to the truck and grab the gallon jug, hoisting it on his elbow and washing the taste away with luke warm water.

Each year it was the same, like a passion play. They were no longer just neighbours. They were a threshing gang and each knew his part. Rack followed rack. In from the belt end. Wait for the signal. Don't choke the machine. Hold Henry's new team. They might shy. Send for fuel, the tractor's low. How many loads do you think, before supper?

Her father owned the machine. His neighbours gave their work in return for its use. They would haul it from farm to farm, half a day here, a day there, until finally it was time for the machine to return home, bringing the men with it. They gave their horses, their racks and their arms in payment, bound together as much by tradition as economy.

The experienced horses knew the drill. They ambled from stook to stook, pausing long enough for the man to pitch on sheaves, then moving on. They were faster than the city farmer who towed a wagon with a pint sized tractor. At each stook he had to mount and dismount, set the gear or the brake. He wasn't much help really, but he was a neighbour and therefore part of the gang.

Shirley Melvin (Manitoba Myriad, Dennis County Writers' Guild)

EXCERPT FROM: JASON AND THE DEADLY DIAMONDS

Jason accidentally slammed the door as he came into the bathroom, a habit his mom kept bugging him about. The pile of magazines on top of the big iron radiator scattered all over the floor, and when he reached under the radiator for one of them, he felt the edge, not of a magazine but of something harder, a small book maybe. He looked down from the top but all he could see were large clumps of dust. Scrunching down with his back against the wall, he tried to reach in behind, but his wrist caught on the first ridge of the radiator and he couldn't push his hand any further.

A coat hanger finally dislodged the book; its black leather cover so dust-laden that he wasn't sure it *was* black until he rubbed both sides against his jeans. It was smaller than a paperback book and not very thick. Two fraying silk ribbons fastened under the edges of the front and back covers held it shut, their bowknot tight with age and dust.

Back in his room, Jason sat cross-legged on the floor, carefully working the knot loose with scissor points. The pages were thin and silky smooth. Inside the front cover under an insignia of some kind was printed: *This Diary is the Property of,* and beneath it was written, *Captain Joseph Andrew Elmhurst – 1939 to 1945*. This must be his great-uncle's World War II diary. Jason knew the bathroom had originally been a bedroom; it must have been Joseph's.

Over the next few days, he went through the diary page by page. His great-uncle had signed up in Cobourg, down at the armouries on King Street. Because Joseph was thirty-nine by this time and an accomplished cornet player, they'd sent him to tour in Europe as part of the first Royal Canadian Air Force Band in Ottawa.

Jason found an atlas and searched out the places mentioned in the diary. Joseph's band had been to Britain, Italy, and Sicily, sometimes flying in small planes and often in danger. They played inside in mess halls and outside in fields, even on the British Broadcasting Corporation a couple of times.

About three-quarters of the way through the diary, Jason found a small postcard tucked between two pages. The picture on the front showed a massive castle fortification leading down to a river where a blonde-haired young woman in a blue dress stood waving a gloved hand and smiling. The name "Luxembourg" ran across the bottom in fancy black lettering. Turning it over, he made out a date – August 1940 – and then:

Dear Miss Simon,

This postcard will come as a surprise as I don't imagine you remember me. We get the BBC here and I heard a concert from Toronto - you playing flute, very well I might add. We didn't make it into the city of Luxembourg. They say it's full of history. There's a legend about

Jason was mystified. Who was Miss Simon and what was the legend? Why hadn't Joseph finished writing and why hadn't he mailed the postcard? Maybe he didn't have time to mail it or maybe he planned to mail it later and then forgot. Jason got out the atlas but had a hard time finding Luxembourg, it was so small.

Linda Hutsell-Manning (Jason and the Deadly Diamonds, Coteau Books)

EXCERPT FROM: QUEEN OF HEARTS

On a cold evening in late spring, with the rain coming down hard around him, there's Oncle Gérard standing outside our farmhouse just like he's never been away.

Twenty-five years old and a pile of bones, Papa's younger brother has been riding the rails since he was nineteen. Last we heard, with a war starting in Europe, and Canada getting involved, he tried to enlist in the army. They wouldn't take him, so we thought he was still hopping boxcars to heaven knows where, living the hobo life.

But here's Maman opening the door to him as he pulls a dripping battered hat from his head. Dark damp curls fall onto his forehead just like that little movie clown, Charlie Chaplin.

"Hello, Sylvie," are the first words out of his mouth. Then with a magnificent sweep he hands our mother some red tulips he's been hiding behind his back – flowers I recognize from our own garden.

I laugh. Maman, too.

"Always so thoughtful," she says, ushering him in out of the rain.

She plunges the flowers into a pitcher of water before setting them in the middle of the table.

"Come and sit. Eat with us, Gérard. There's plenty. Henri and the hired man are down at the barn and Luc's there with them. They'll be coming up soon. Luc's grown. He was ten last February – you won't recognize him. Marie-Claire, set another place for your uncle."

Oncle Gérard winks playfully at me. He's unshaven. He's missing a few more teeth since the last time I saw him – two years ago, when I was twelve – but I'd know him anywhere.

"You've grown, too, Marie-Claire. Last time I saw you, you were – this high."

He gently teases his hand lower, lower and lower still, until it's only inches from the floor.

I laugh at this, too. It's fun to see him again.

He turns and smiles at little Josée getting up on her own chair beside him.

She looks into his face. "How big was I?"

He chuckles and shows her his thumb and forefinger, making the smallest gap between them.

"Really? Did I fit in your pocket?"

"Oh, yes, yes, of course," he says happily.

"She's six," I explain.

Just then Papa and Luc and our elderly hired man, Ambroise LaGare, appear, kicking off their rubber boots at the door.

Oncle Gérard lifts his eyes from Josée. His smile freezes on this face. "Hello, Henri, long time no see."

"What are you doing here?" Papa frowns, puts his hand on Luc's shoulder.

"I'd like to visit for a while if I might. Things, lately, have not been so good for me."

Luc looks over at Oncle Gérard, then up at Papa. "Who's he?"

"Don't be rude, Luc," says Maman. "Don't you remember Papa's brother, your Oncle Gérard?"

"The hobo?"

Oncle Gérard throws his head back and laughs.

"Ah, me," he says at last. "I like this one already. He's honest."

Martha Brooks (Queen of Hearts, House of Anansi Press)

EXCERPT FROM: THE EVERLASTING ROAD

"Let's do something fun," the bot shouted.

"Like what?" Bugz yelled back.

"Show him that flower thing you showed me when I first came here," Feng said to her.

"Alright," Bugz said as she closed her eyes in concentration.

A giant wave of red flowers came pouring out of the forest floor below and splashed down along the beach. The pulsating, writhing mass of crimson flora grew and spilled over itself as it raced toward the lake. Just as it reached the spot underneath Bugz, Feng, and the bot, the tsunami shot straight up into the air. Suddenly the trio was riding a vermilion rollercoaster that blasted them toward the heavens before banking back to earth at a daredevil angle. As Bugz regained her bearings, she decided to send them corkscrewing over the water at a terrifying speed. All Feng could do was hang on.

The Waawaate-bot roared with laughter as the trio spun wildly. "Oh yeah? Watch this," he yelled to Bugz as they huddled close together on top of the tidal wave of poppies, red roses, and cardinal carnations. A royal-blue wave of flowers came pouring out of the forest floor as well and raced to intercept the trio. In an instant, the blue wave punched through the red one and carried Waawaate, Feng, and Bugz spiraling off into a new direction.

Bugz felt the pit of her stomach jump. She had to close her eyes to centre herself again. Ever since she'd activated him in Mishi-pizhiw's nest deep below the water's surface, this virtual version of Waawaate had been able to learn every trick she'd shown him. Most of the time, as in this case, he not only learned the technique but figured out a way to do it faster and better than Bugz. It was almost scary how quickly he learned. But she wasn't about to be outdone.

Bugz refocused on the crest of red flowers and, using the power of her intuitive understanding of the block-chain gaming engine that powered the Floraverse, brought it roaring back to catch up to the bot's blue one. From then on, as in any good sibling rivalry, Bugz and the Waawaate-bot battled move for move, each trying to steer their own wave of flowers closer and quicker beneath them so they might control the group's flight path.

The combined effect of the dueling floral racers was of a tower of concentric red and blue spirals shooting up to the heavens at rocket speed. This double-helix recalled the shape of a giant strand of DNA, and it pushed the three ever higher into the clear sky above Lake of the Torches.

During the flight, Feng whispered to Bugz, "Don't you think you should rein him in? What if he gets out of control … a singularity sort of thing?"

Nearing the edge of space, Bugz simply smiled at Feng and looked at the bot she was engaged in this back-and-forth with. She didn't see a virtual being or an AI, much less a threat to her online world.

Bugz only saw her brother.

Glossary:

Mishi-pizhiw (mi-SHIP-i-shoe): A supernatural being in Anishinaabe culture
Waawaate (WAH-wah-tay): The Northern Lights

Wab Kinew (The Everlasting Road, Penguin Random House)

EXCERPT FROM: THE LAST OF THE GREAT WHITE MOLE HUNTERS

I had moved to a small village in rural Manitoba, where I purchased a rather creaky old house on a large lot with beautiful trees and a lovely garden. For the record, I am not much of a gardener – I become quite cowardly in the face of a tangle of weeds – even with the protection of a hoe in my hand, but that is another story. The newly acquired garden had been planted and had been well tended. I rejoiced in the prospect of fresh vegetables. Then my garden – a mound grew around one of my cabbages; the parsnips seemed to be disappearing – mounds and weak spots began developing. I walked down a row to inspect my poor garden and my foot sank into a hitherto unknown hole. What on earth was happening? My garden seemed to be developing acne.

As I was standing there puzzled and, although I now hate to admit it, a trifle frightened, my neighbour from across the back alley came to chat. He was a large, solid, ruddy-faced man who oozed confidence and trust-worthiness, a man who could seemingly do anything. He was the kind of a man who could tell you on a bright sunny day that it was going to rain – and even though there wouldn't be a cloud in the sky, you'd be wise to carry your umbrella, because it wouldn't dare not rain after a pronouncement from him. At any rate, he looked at my garden and said, "Well now, seems like you've got Mr. Mole visiting you." I was relieved. A mole! I had never seen one in my whole life. I'd heard about them of course, but now I was face to face with the prospects of dealing with this plundering animal. Well not really face to face – more like foot to tunnel or eyeball to molehill. I felt a twinge of excitement – my safari was in danger, a beast was attacking my cabbages and, heaven forbid, my parsnips. I now recognized the adrenaline rush that the endangered safarians must have felt. A xenophobic stirring - a mole!

What to do?

I tried to be calm as I spoke with my neighbour, after all, it wouldn't be seemly to show fear – or excitement. No, one must be cool as befits one who is having his encounter with a ravaging , pillaging beast. You may think that I'm exaggerating a wee bit, but my parsnips certainly agreed with me – those which were left. So with as much nonchalance as I could muster, I said, "Yes, pesky little devils, aren't they." My neighbour just looked at me. Did I detect a brief flicker of pity in his eyes? No, probably just my imagination. Then he said, "Yep, they sure are. What are you going to do about him?" He had me. I don't think I've ever had a question throw me as that one did. A good word to describe me would be nonplussed. (I've always wanted to use that word and this is the closest I can get to using it properly.) "Well", I replied, and hating myself for it, "I don't know." Here I was – my safari was in danger and I didn't know what to do. Then he rescued me and said, "Why don't you get Geordie Bell?" There it was – this man was recommending a Great White Hunter, and I haven't thought of it.

John Ferguson (Rapid City Anthology, Compascar)

EXCERPT FROM: WHO IS FRANCES RAIN?

Bram was nowhere in sight. I opened my mouth to call him, but something made me stop. Everything was so peaceful. Ahead of me in a clearing, I noticed a flat rectangle of sunken moss, about twelve by sixteen feet. The rim around it was uneven and bulging, as if a green blanket had been thrown over a low open box.

It had to be the remains of a small cabin. I wasn't surprised. Somehow I knew it would be there. I crouched down at one corner of the box and pulled away a handful of moss. The pungent smell of moist red earth and rotting logs filled my nostrils.

Sitting down on a small flat rock, I cleared a spot where two logs had been notched to create a corner. I felt the uneven planes of the cut where an axe had chopped out chunks of hard white wood. Now, many years later, the logs were grey and spongy and crumbled in my fingers.

Who cut these logs? A trapper? A prospector? If I carefully dug my way around the cabin site over the next few weeks, it would be like an archaeological dig. Maybe I'd find some old bottles or tools.

Just then the sun disappeared. Everything was suddenly thrown into murky shadows. A cold mist seemed to push from the ground around me.

I stood up and brushed off the back of my jeans. They were damp and soggy against my skin. When I leaned forward to put back the bits of moss, I heard a soft sigh beside my shoulder. My scalp prickled and goose bumps ran up and down my arms. Slowly and fearfully, I turned my head. There was nobody there. I started to breathe again.

All at once, a strong wind whistled a high-pitched warning above the trees, then swung lower to push around their branches. The trees slowly began to rock back and forth, their trunks swaying. I looked up uneasily, then fell forward when a rumble of thunder tailgating the wind brought something crashing through the bushes.

It was Bram. He ran as far as the edge of the cabin's buried skeleton. Then, hackles up, stiff-legged, he edged around the outside, looking at the sunken spot with rolling eyes. I had to laugh.

Bram hates thunder and usually turns into a bag of chicken bones at the first faint sounds of a storm. Overreaction is his middle name. He whimpered from a distance, his large brown eyes begging me to listen to reason and to get out of there.

"Bram," I said, "don't worry, boy. It's just a storm building up. Come here, boy, this way."

He was staring wild-eyed at something beside me, backing away and growling deep in his throat. When I took a step towards him, he bared his teeth and snarled.

"Bram? Cut it out!" Suddenly he was making me awfully nervous. "Stop it."

He growled again, showing the whites of his eyes, and began to mince around himself in a stiff-legged circle. I inched towards him, not daring to look over my shoulder where his eyes were glued.

A clap of thunder hammering above our heads did it. I scurried past Bram towards the rocky slope. He lunged after me, snapping and snarling like a rabid wolf.

Margaret Buffie (Who Is Frances Rain?, Kids Can Press Ltd.)

EXCERPT FROM: THE DIAMOND NECKLACE

Mrs. Loisel now knew the horrible life of necessity. She did her part, however, completely, heroically. It was necessary to pay this frightful debt. She would pay it. They sent away the maid; they changed their lodgings; they rented some rooms under a mansard roof.

She learned the heavy cares of a household, the odious work of a kitchen. She washed the dishes, using her rosy nails upon the greasy pots and the bottoms of the stewpans. She washed the soiled linen, the chemises and dishcloths, which she hung on the line to dry; she took down the refuse to the street each morning and brought up the water, stopping at each landing to breathe. And, clothed like a woman of the people, she went to the grocer's, the butcher's, and the fruiterer's with her basket on her arm, shopping, haggling, defending to the last sou her miserable money.

Every month it was necessary to renew some notes, thus obtaining time, and to pay others.

The husband worked evenings, putting the books of some merchants in order, and nights he often did copying at five sous a page.

And this life lasted for ten years.

At the end of ten years, they had restored all, all with interest of the usurer, and accumulated interest besides.

Mrs. Loisel seemed old now. She had become a strong, hard woman, the crude woman of the poor household. Her hair badly dressed, her skirts awry, her hands red, she spoke in a loud tone, and washed the floors in large pails of water. But sometimes, when her husband was at the office, she would seat herself before the window and think of that evening party of former times, of that ball where she was so beautiful and so flattered.

How would it have been if she had not lost that necklace? Who knows? Who knows? How singular is life, and how full of changes! How small a thing will ruin or save one!

One Sunday, as she was taking a walk in the Champs-Elysées to rid herself of the cares of the week, she suddenly perceived a woman walking with a child. It was Mrs. Forestier, still young, still pretty, still attractive. Mrs. Loisel was affected. Should she speak to her? Yes, certainly. And now that she had paid, she would tell her all. Why not?

She approached her. "Good morning, Jeanne."

Her friend did not recognize her and was astonished to be so familiarly addressed by this common personage. She stammered:

"But, Madame—I do not know—You must be mistaken—"

"No, I am Matilda Loisel."

Her friend uttered a cry of astonishment: "Oh! my poor Matilda! How you have changed—"

"Yes, I have had some hard days since I saw you; and some miserable ones—and all because of you—"

"Because of me? How is that?"

"You recall the diamond necklace that you loaned me to wear to the Commissioner's ball?"

"Yes, very well."

"Well, I lost it."

"How is that, since you returned it to me?"

"I returned another to you exactly like it. And it has taken us ten years to pay for it. You can understand that it was not easy for us who have nothing. But it is finished and I am decently content."

Madame Forestier stopped short. She said:

"You say that you bought a diamond necklace to replace mine?"

"Yes. You did not perceive it then? They were just alike."

And she smiled with a proud and simple joy. Madame Forestier was touched and took both her hands as she replied:

"Oh! my poor Matilda! Mine were false. They were not worth over five hundred francs!"

Guy De Maupassant (Short Stories of De Maupassant, Book League)

EXCERPT FROM: THE BOOK THIEF

Inside, she made her way to the bedroom. She took the ball in to Max and placed it at the end of the bed.

"I'm sorry," she said, "it's not much. But when you wake up, I'll tell you about it. I'll tell you it was the grayest afternoon you can imagine, and this car without its lights on ran straight over the ball. Then the man got out and yelled at us. And *then* he asked for directions. The nerve of him..."

Wake up! she wanted to scream.

Or shake him.

She didn't.

All Liesel could do was watch the ball and its trampled, flaking skin. It was the first gift of many.

***** PRESENTS #2 - #5 *****
One ribbon, one pinecone.
One button, one stone.

The soccer ball had given her an idea.

Whenever she walked to and from school now, Liesel was on the lookout for discarded items that might be valuable to a dying man. She wondered at first why it mattered so much. How could something so seemingly insignificant give comfort to someone? A ribbon in a gutter. A pinecone on the street. A button leaning casually against a classroom wall. A flat round stone from the river. If nothing else, it showed that she cared, and it might give them something to talk about when Max woke up.

When she was alone, she would conduct those conversations.

"So what's all this?" Max would say. "What's all this junk?"

"Junk?" In her mind, she was sitting on the side of the bed. "This isn't junk, Max. These are what made you wake up."

***** PRESENTS #6 - #9 *****
One feather, two newspapers.
A candy wrapper. A cloud.

The feather was lovely and trapped, in the door hinges of the church on Munich Street. It poked itself crookedly out and Liesel hurried over to rescue it. The fibers were combed flat on the left, but the right side was made of delicate edges and sections of jagged triangles. There was no other way of describing it.

The newspapers came from the cold depths of a garbage can (enough said), and the candy wrapper was flat and faded. She found it near the school and held it up to the light. It contained a collage of shoe prints.

Then the cloud.

How do you give someone a piece of sky?

Late in February, she stood on Munich Street and watched a single giant cloud come over the hills like a white monster. It climbed the mountains. The sun was eclipsed, and in its place, a white beast with a gray heart watched the town.

"Would you look at that?" she said to Papa.

Hans cocked his head and stated what he felt was the obvious. "You should give it to Max, Liesel. See if you can leave it on the bedside table, like all the other things."

Liesel watched him as if he'd gone insane. "How, though?"

Lightly, he tapped her skull with his knuckles. "Memorize it. Then write it down for him."

"... it was like a great white beast," she said at her next bedside vigil, "and it came from over the mountains."

When the sentence was completed with several different adjustments and additions, Liesel felt like she'd done it. She imagined the vision of it passing from her hand to his, through the blankets, and she wrote it down on a scrap of paper, placing the stone on top of it.

Markus Zusak (The Book Thief, Alfred A. Knopf)

EXCERPT FROM: A TALE OF TWO CITIES

A large cask of wine had been dropped and broken, in the street. The accident had happened in getting it out of a cart; the cask had tumbled out with a run, the hoops had burst, and it lay on the stones just outside the door of the wine-shop, shattered like a walnut-shell.

All the people within reach had suspended their business, or their idleness, to run to the spot and drink the wine. The rough, irregular stones of the street, pointing every way, and designed, one might have thought, expressly to lame all living creatures that approached them, had dammed it into little pools; these were surrounded, each by its own jostling group or crowd, according to its size. Some men kneeled down, made scoops of their two hands joined, and sipped, or tried to help women, who bent over their shoulders, to sip, before the wine had all run out between their fingers. Others, men and women, dipped in the puddles with little mugs of mutilated earthenware, or even with handkerchiefs from women's heads, which were squeezed dry into infants' mouths; others made small mud-embankments, to stem the wine as it ran; others, directed by lookers-on up at high windows, darted here and there, to cut off little streams of wine that started away in new directions; others devoted themselves to the sodden and lee-dyed pieces of the cask, licking, and even champing the moister wine-dotted fragments with eager relish. There was no drainage to carry off the wine, and not only did it all get taken up, but so much mud got taken up along with it, that there might have been a scavenger in the street, if anybody acquainted with it could have believed in such a miraculous presence.

A shrill sound of laughter and of amused voices--voices of men, women, and children--resounded in the street while this wine game lasted. There was little roughness in the sport, and much playfulness. There was a special companionship in it, an observable inclination on the part of every one to join some other one, which led, especially among the luckier or lighter hearted, to frolicsome embraces, drinking of healths, shaking of hands, and even joining of hands and dancing, a dozen together. When the wine was gone, and the places where it had been most abundant were raked into a gridiron-patter by fingers, these demonstrations ceased, as suddenly as they had broken out. The man who had left his saw sticking in the firewood he was cutting, set it in motion again; the woman who had left on a door-step the little pot of hot ashes, at which she had been trying to soften the pain in her own starved fingers and toes, or in those of her child, returned to it; men with bare arms, matted locks, and cadaverous faces, who had emerged into the winter light from cellars, moved away, to descend again; and a gloom gathered on the scene that appeared more natural to it than sunshine.

Charles Dickens (A Tale of Two Cites, Penguin Books)

EXCERPT FROM: A VISIT FROM MR. LUCIFER "RODGER"

That night, after supper, I informed Pat that he could come out with me and shoot my bow. He was ecstatic. He jumped up and down all around the kitchen. As we headed out the door, I paused and looked back and saw Father wink at Mother. There was a big grin on his face and Mother was smiling too. Then, as Pat and I walked down the lane, I looked back and saw that they had come out on the step to watch us. Father raised his arm in a salute to me as I turned to go behind the chicken coop and I felt for a second just then that I had, perhaps, made the right decision.

"You can use my telescope any time you want," Pat said to me as I adjusted the target.

"You can shoot my bow when I'm with you," I responded in kind.

When we'd walked back to the shooting line, I slowly and carefully demonstrated the technique of arching by firing three arrows into the target. Though I hesitate to bring it up here, one of those arrows was a bullseye.

"Okay," I said, putting the bow into his hands, "you can shoot three arrows and then it's my turn and then it'll be your turn again."

"Okay," Pat agreed. He gave me a big grin, one full of love. For a moment, I felt that our relationship had reached a new peak of harmony. He was my friend, my brother. I would, in future, share everything with him.

He drew the arrow back quite well, but he experienced some difficulty in holding it steady long enough to take good aim at the target. In fact, when the arrow was released, I believe it had no idea at all where it should go. It certainly did not go anywhere near the target. In fact, it even missed the straw bales. Actually, it missed the chicken coop. To be accurate, it cleared the top of it by at least twenty feet.

"Missed!" Pat said.

"Now I'll never find it!" I screamed at him.

As things turned out, it was not difficult to find the arrow. When we ran around the chicken coop to the other side, I saw it immediately. It was over in the corral, sticking out of Rodger's rump.

Thankfully, it was only a small target arrow, quite incapable of inflicting serious hurt on a huge old bull like Rodger. However, Rodger didn't seem to agree. He had a very peculiar look in his eye and his head was twitching back, perhaps in an attempt to see what had happened down at his rear end.

"I hit Rodger," Pat said. "Is he going to die?"

"I don't know," I said.

Rodger, who had at first seemed to be taking the whole thing fairly calmly for a bad-tempered bull, now decided that something had definitely struck him in his rear end. He looked at the ground, then snorted. Then he pawed the ground. Then he charged….

Rodger went through the corral fence like it wasn't there and he ran right past Pat and I. We would have had no chance at all if he'd been aimed at us. But fortunately, he wasn't; he was after the chicken coop, it seemed, perhaps having got the notion that it had shot him. In any case, Rodger tore through the chicken wire fencing and attacked the building. The air was shortly full of crazed chickens.

"Look at that!" Pat exclaimed.

"I see it!" I said.

Pat and I stood there staring at the rapidly disintegrating chicken coop, while a cloud of feathers and dust slowly rose up from the ground and engulfed the site where the demolition was occurring. Then, having apparently exacted sufficient retribution from the chicken coop, Rodger suddenly stopped his attack and wandered aimlessly to the fringe of the woods, trailing a tangled mess of chicken fencing from his left horn.

Dad and Mother arrived on the scene a moment later, having run all the way down from the steps. They looked at the devastation with amazed expressions.

"What in the hell happened!" Dad gasped.

"Pat just shot his first arrow," I said.

Don Lemma (A Visit from Mr. Lucifer, Western Producer Prairie Books)

EXCERPT FROM: THE STONE ANGEL

We remain in heavy silence, Mr. Troy and I. I glance at him and see he's struggling to speak and finding it impossibly difficult. He thinks me formidable. What a joke. I could feel almost sorry for him, he's perspiring so. Stonily, I wait. Why should I assist him? The drug is wearing off. My bones are sore and the soreness is spreading like fire over dry grass, quickly, licking its way along. All at once, an eruption of speech, Mr. Troy bursts out.

"Would you – care to pray?"

As though he were asking me for the next dance.

"I've held out this long," I reply. "I may as well hold out a while longer."

"You don't mean that, I'm sure. If you would try – "

He looks at me with such an eagerness that now I'm rendered helpless. It's his calling. He offers what he can. It's not his fault.

"I can't", I say. "I never could get the hang of it. But – you go ahead if you like, Mr. Troy."

His face relaxes. How relieved he is. He prays in a monotone, as though God had ears for one note only. I scarcely listen to the droning words. Then something occurs to me.

"There's one" - I say on impulse. "That starts out *All people that on earth do dwell* - do you know it?"

"Certainly I know it. You want to hear that? Now?" He sounds taken aback, as though it were completely unsuitable.

"Unless you'd rather not."

"Oh no, it's quite all right. It's usually sung, that's all."

"Well, sing it, then."

"What? Here?" He's stunned. I have no patience with this young man.

"Why not?"

"All right, then." He clasps and unclasps his hands. He flushes warmly, and peeks around to see if anyone might be listening, as though he'd pass out if they were. But I perceive now that there's some fibre in him. He'll do it, even if it kills him. Good for him. I can admire that.

Then he opens his mouth and sings, and I'm the one who's taken aback now. He should sing always, and never speak. He should chant his sermons. The fumbling of his speech is gone. His voice is firm and sure.

"All people that on earth do dwell,
Sing to the Lord with joyful voice,
Him serve with mirth, His praise forth tell;
Come ye before him and rejoice.

I would have wished it. This knowing comes upon me so forcefully, so shatteringly, and with such a bitterness as I have never felt before. I must always, have wanted that – simply to rejoice. How is it I never could? I know, I know. How long have I known? Or have I always known, in some far crevice of my heart, some cave too deeply buried, too concealed? Every good joy I might have held, in my man or any child of mine or even the plain light of morning, of walking the earth, all were forced to a standstill by some brake of proper appearances – oh, proper to whom? When did I ever speak the heart's truth?

Pride was my wilderness, and the demon that led me there was fear. I was alone, never anything else, and never free, for I carried my chains within me, and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched.

Margaret Laurence (The Stone Angel, McClelland Stewart)

EXCERPT FROM: LORD OF THE RINGS "MOUNT DOOM"

Sam got up. He was dazed, and blood streaming from his head dripped in his eyes. He groped forward, and then he saw a strange and terrible thing. Gollum on the edge of the abyss was fighting like a mad thing with an unseen foe. To and fro he swayed, now so near the brink that almost he tumbled in, now dragging back, falling to the ground, rising, and falling again. And all the while he hissed but spoke no words.

The fires below awoke in anger, the red light blazed, and all the cavern was filled with a great glare and heat. Suddenly Sam saw Gollum's long hands draw upwards to his mouth; his white fangs gleamed, and then snapped as they bit. Frodo gave a cry, and there he was, fallen upon his knees at the chasm's edge. But Gollum, dancing like a mad thing, held aloft the ring, a finger still thrust within its circle. It shone now as if verily it was wrought of living fire.

"Precious, precious, precious!" Gollum cried. "My precious! O my precious!" And with that, even as his eyes were lifted up to the gloat on his prize, he stepped too far, toppled, wavered for a moment on the brink, and then with a shriek he fell. Out of the depths came his last wail *Precious*, and he was gone.

There was a roar and a great confusion of noise. Fires leaped up and licked the roof. The throbbing grew to a great tumult, and the Mountain shook. Sam ran to Frodo and picked him up and carried him out to the door. And there upon the dark threshold of the Sammath Naur, high above the plains of Mordor, such wonder and terror came on him that he stood still forgetting all else, and gazed as one turned to stone.

A brief vision he had of swirling cloud and in the midst of it towers and battlements, tall as hills, founded upon a mighty mountain-throne above immeasurable pits; great courts and dungeons, eyeless prisons sheer as cliffs, and gaping gates of steel and adamant: and then all passed. Towers fell and mountains slid; walls crumbled and melted, crashing down; vast spires of smoke and spouting steams went billowing up, up, until they toppled like an over-whelming wave, and its wild crest curled and came foaming down upon the land. And then at last over the miles between there came a rumble, rising to a deafening crash and roar; the earth shook, the plain heaved and cracked, and Orodruin reeled. Fire belched from its riven summit. The skies burst into thunder seared with lightning. Down like lashing whips fell a torrent of black rain. And into the heart of the storm, with a cry that pierced all other sounds, tearing the clouds asunder, the Nazgûl came, shooting like flaming bolts, as caught in the fiery ruin of hill and sky they crackled, withered, and went out.

J.R.R. Tolkien (Lord of the Rings Part III, Grafton)

EXCERPT FROM: THE KITE RUNNER

Over the years, I had seen a lot of guys run kites. But Hassan was by far the greatest kite runner I'd ever seen. It was downright eerie the way he always got to the spot the kite would land *before* the kite did, as if he had some sort of inner compass.

I remember one overcast winter day, Hassan and I were running a kite. I was chasing him through neighborhoods, hopping gutters, weaving through narrow streets. I was a year older than him, but Hassan ran faster than I did, and I was falling behind.

"Hassan! Wait!" I yelled, my breathing hot and ragged.

He whirled around, motioned with his hand. "This way!" he called before dashing around another corner. I looked up, saw that the direction we were running was opposite to the one the kite was drifting.

"We're losing it! We're going the wrong way!" I cried out.

"Trust me!" I heard him call up ahead. I reached the corner and saw Hassan bolting along, his head down, not even looking at the sky, sweat soaking through the back of his shirt. I tripped over a rock and fell -- I wasn't just slower than Hassan but clumsier too; I'd always envied his natural athleticism. When I staggered to my feet, I caught a glimpse of Hassan disappearing around another street corner. I hobbled after him, spikes of pain battering my scraped knees.

I saw we had ended up on a rutted dirt road near Isteqlal Middle School. There was a field on one side where lettuce grew in the summer, and a row of sour cherry trees on the other. I found Hassan sitting cross-legged at the foot of one of the trees, eating from a fistful of dried mulberries.

"What are we doing here?" I panted, my stomach roiling with nausea.

He smiled. "Sit with me, Amir agha."

I dropped next to him, lay on a thin patch of snow, wheezing, "You're wasting our time. It was going the other way, didn't you see?"

Hassan popped a mulberry in his mouth. "It's coming," he said. I could hardly breathe and he didn't even sound tired.

"How do you know?" I said.

"I know."

"How can you *know*?"

He turned to me. A few sweat beads rolled from his bald scalp. "Would I ever lie to you, Amir agha?"

Suddenly I decided to toy with him a little. "I don't know. Would you?"

"I'd sooner eat dirt," he said with a look of indignation.

"Really? You'd do that?"

He threw me a puzzled look. "Do what?"

"Eat dirt if I told you too," I said. I knew I was being cruel, like when I'd taunt him if he didn't know some big word. But there was something fascinating -- albeit in a sick way -- about teasing Hassan. Kind of like when we used to play insect torture. Except now, he was the ant and I was holding the magnifying glass . . .

. . . "If you asked, I would," he finally said, looking right at me. I dropped my eyes. To this day, I find it hard to gaze directly at people like Hassan, people who mean every word they say.

"But I wonder," he added. "Would you ever ask me to do such a thing, Amir agha?" and, just like that, he had thrown at me his own little test. If I was going to toy with him and challenge his loyalty, then he'd toy with me, test my integrity.

I wished I hadn't started this conversation. I forced a smile. "Don't be stupid, Hassan. You know I wouldn't."

Hassan returned the smile. Except his didn't look forced. "I know," he said. And that's the thing about people who mean everything they say. They think everyone else does too.

"Here it comes," Hassan said, pointing to the sky. He rose to his feet and walked a few paces to his left. I looked up, saw the kite plummeting toward us. I heard footfalls, shouts, an approaching melee of kite runners. But they were wasting their time. Because Hassan stood with his arms wide open, smiling, waiting for the kite. And may God -- if he exists, that is -- strike me blind if the kite didn't just drop into his outstretched arms.

Khaled Hosseini (The Kite Runner, Riverhead Books)

EXCERPT FROM: OF MICE AND MEN

They sat by the fire and filled their mouths with beans and chewed mightily. A few beans slipped out of the side of Lennie's mouth. George gestured with his spoon. "What you gonna say tomorrow when the boss asks you questions?"

Lennie stopped chewing and swallowed. His face was concentrated. "I….I ain't gonna ….say a word."

"Good boy! That's fine, Lennie! Maybe you're gettin' better. When we get the coupla acres I can let you tend the rabbits all right. 'Specially if you remember as good as that."

Lennie choked with pride. "I can remember," he said.

George motioned with his spoon again. "Look, Lennie. I want you to look around here. You can remember this place, can't you? The ranch is about a quarter mile up that way. Just follow the river?"

"Sure," said Lennie. "I can remember this. Di'n't I remember about not gonna say a word?"

"'Course you did. Well, look. Lennie—if you jus' happen to get in trouble like you always done before, I want you to come right here an' hide in the brush."

"Hide in the brush," said Lennie slowly.

"Hide in the brush till I come for you. Can you remember that?"

"Sure I can, George. Hide in the brush till you come."

"But you ain't gonna get in no trouble, because if you do, I won't let you tend the rabbits." He threw his empty bean can off into the brush.

"I won't get in no trouble, George. I ain't gonna say a word."

"O.K. Bring your bindle over here by the fire. It's gonna be nice sleepin' here. Lookin' up, and the leaves. Don't build up no more fire. We'll let her die down."

They made their beds on the sand, and as the blaze dropped from the fire the sphere of light grew smaller; the curling branches disappeared and only a faint glimmer showed where the tree trunks were. From the darkness Lennie called, "George—you asleep?"

"No. Whatta you want?"

"Let's have different color rabbits, George."

"Sure we will," George said sleepily. "Red and blue and green rabbits, Lennie. Millions of 'em."

"Furry ones, George, like I seen in the fair in Sacramento."

"Sure, furry ones."

"'Cause I can jus' as well go away, George, an' live in a cave."

"You can jus' as well go to hell," said George. "Shut up now."

The red light dimmed on the coals. Up the hill from the river a coyote yammered, and a dog answered from the other side of the stream. The sycamore leaves whispered in a little night breeze.

John Steinbeck (Of Mice and Men, Random House)

EXCERPT FROM: LEAD FROM THE BACK

As much as Mandela loved the limelight, he always knew he had to share it. He understood that some part -- quite a large part -- of leadership is symbolic and that he was a splendid symbol. But he knew that he could not always be in front, and that his own great goal could die unless he empowered others to lead. In the language of basketball, he wanted the ball, but he understood that he had to pass to others and let them shoot. Mandela genuinely believed in the virtues of the team, and he knew that to get the best out of his own people, he had to make sure that they partook of the glory and, even more important, that they felt they were influencing his decisions.

One morning, we had been walking for about an hour and a half in the hills behind his house in the Transkei, and the early mist had cleared. It was an area strewn with rocks and boulders, with dry, short grass and few trees. Mandela stopped, lifted his head, and looked around. He said this area used to be a mealie field -- *mealie* being the African term for corn.

"It was lovely. We were supposed to be watching the cattle, but we would sometimes steal some mealies and roast them. We would look for large anthills that had been abandoned. All that was left inside was some dried pieces of grass and a few termites. We would take the corn and put it in the old ant hole and light a fire with the dried grass at the bottom. Then we would place the cob in the hole and the corn would roast while the termites provided a kind of oil that made the corn very tasty." It was as though he were transported back to his boyhood and was tasting the charred corn as he was talking.

He turned to me and said, "You have never herded cattle, have you, Richard?" I said I had not. He nodded. As a young boy -- as early as eight or nine years old -- Mandela had spent long afternoons herding cattle. His mother owned some cattle of her own, but there was a collective herd belonging to the village that he and other boys would look after. He then explained to me the rudiments of herding cattle.

"You know, when you want to get the cattle to move in a certain direction, you stand at the back with a stick, and then you get a few of the cleverer cattle to go to the front and move in the direction that you want them to go. The rest of the cattle follow the few more-energetic cattle in the front, but you are really guiding them from the back."

The story is a parable, but the idea is that leadership at its most fundamental is about moving people in a certain direction -- usually through changing the direction of their thinking and their actions. And the way to do that is not necessarily by charging out front and saying, "Follow me," but by empowering or pushing others to move forward ahead of you. It is through empowering others that we impart our own leadership or ideas. It is valuable in every arena of life. We see it in the workplace when a manager encourages her employees to help formulate new strategies. We see it at home when parents have a family meeting to guide their children towards sensible rules and behavior, rather than simply laying down the law.

Richard Stengel (Mandela's Way: Fifteen Lessons on Life, Love and Courage, Crown Publishers)

EXCERPT FROM: THE BEST OF JAMES HERRIOT

As I checked my list of calls it occurred to me that, this time, Siegfried didn't look so much like a schoolboy as he faced Miss Harbottle. For one thing, he hadn't marched straight in and stood in front of the desk; that was disastrous and he always looked beaten before he started. Instead, he had veered off over the last few yards till he stood with his back to the window. This way she had to turn her head slightly to face him and besides, he had the light at his back.

He thrust his hands into his pockets and leaned back against the window frame. He was wearing his patient look, his eyes were kind and his face was illumined by an almost saintly smile. Miss Harbottle's eyes narrowed.

'I just wanted a word with you, Miss Harbottle. One or two little points I'd like to discuss. First, about your petty cash box. It's a nice box and I think you were quite right to institute it, but I think you would be the first to agree that the main function of a cash box is to have cash in it.' He gave a light laugh. 'Now last night I had a few dogs in the surgery and the owners wanted to pay on the spot. I had no change and went for some to your box – it was quite empty. I had to say I would send them a bill, and that isn't good business, is it Miss Harbottle? It didn't look good, so I really must ask you to keep some cash in your cash box.'

Miss Harbottle's eyes widened incredulously. 'But Mr Farnon, you removed the entire contents to go to the hunt ball at…'

Siegfried held up a hand and his smile took on an unearthly quality. 'Please hear me out. There is another very small thing I want to bring to your attention. It is now the tenth day of the month and the accounts have not gone out. Now this is a very undesirable state of affairs and there are several points to consider here.'

'But Mr Farnon…!'

'Just one moment, Miss Harbottle, till I explain this to you. It is a known fact that farmers pay their bills more readily if they receive them on the first day of the month. And there is another, even more important factor.' The beautiful smile left his face and was replaced by an expression of sorrowing gravity. 'Have you ever stopped to work out just how much interest the practice is losing on all the money lying out there because you are late in sending out the accounts?'

'Mr Farnon…!'

'I am almost finished, Miss Harbottle, and, believe me, it grieves me to have to speak like this. But the fact is, I can't afford to lose money in this way.' He spread out his hands in a gesture of charming frankness. 'So if you will just apply yourself to this little matter I'm sure all will be well.'

'But will you tell me how I can possibly send the accounts when you refuse to write up the…'

'In conclusion, Miss Harbottle, let me say this. I have been very satisfied with your progress since you joined us, and I am sure that with time you will tighten up on those little points I have just mentioned.' A certain roguishness crept into his smile and he put his head on one side. Miss Harbottle's strong fingers closed tightly round a heavy ebony ruler.

'Efficiency,' he said, crinkling his eyes. 'That's what we must have – efficiency.'

James Herriot (The Best of James Herriot, St. Martin's Press)

EXCERPT FROM: THE GAME

Not long ago, thinking of the generations of Canadians who learned hockey on rivers and ponds, I collected my skates and with two friends drove up the Gatineau River north of Ottawa. We didn't know it at the time, but the ice conditions we found were rare, duplicated only a few times the previous decade. The combination of a sudden thaw and freezing rain in the days before had melted winter-high snow, and with temperatures dropping rapidly overnight, the river was left with miles of smooth glare ice. Growing up in the suburbs of a large city, I had played on a river only once before, and then as a goalie. On this day, I came to the Gatineau to find what a river of ice and a solitary feeling might mean to a game.

We spread ourselves rinks apart, breaking into river-wide openings for passes that sometimes connected, and other times sent us hundreds of feet after what we had missed. Against the wind or with it, the sun glaring in our eyes or at our backs, we skated for more than three hours, periodically tired, continuously renewed. The next day I went back again, this time alone. Before I got bored with myself an hour or two later, with no one watching and nothing to distract me, loose and daring, joyously free, I tried things I had never tried before, my hands and feet discovering new patterns and directions, and came away feeling as if something was finally clear.

The Canadian game of hockey was weaned on long northern winters uncluttered by things to do. It grew up on ponds and rivers in big open spaces, unorganized, often solitary, only occasionally moved into arenas for practices or games. In recent generations that has changed. Canadians have moved from farms and towns to cities and suburbs; they've discovered skis, snowmobiles, and southern vacations; they've civilized winter and moved it indoors.

A game we once played on rivers and ponds, later on streets and driveways and in backyards, we now play in arenas, in full team uniform, with coaches and referees, or to an ever-increasing extent we don't play at all. For, once a game is organized, unorganized games seem a wasteful use of time; and once a game moves indoors, it won't move outdoors again. Hockey has become suburbanized, and as part of our suburban middle-class culture, it has changed.

Put in uniform at six or seven, by the time a boy reaches the NHL, he is a veteran of close to 1,000 games—30 minute games, later 32-, then 45-, finally 60-minute games, played more than twice a week, more than seventy times a year between late September and late March. It is more games from a younger age, over a longer season than ever before. But it is less hockey than ever before. For, every time a twelve-year-old boy plays a 30-minute game, sharing the ice with teammates, he plays only about ten minutes. And ten minutes a game, anticipated and prepared for all day, traveled to and from, dressed and undressed for, means ten minutes of hockey a day, more than two days a week, more than seventy days a hockey season. And every day that a twelve-year-old plays only ten minutes, he doesn't play two hours on a backyard rink, or longer on school or playground rinks during weekends and holidays.

It all has to do with the way we look at free time. Constantly preoccupied with time and keeping ourselves busy (we have come to answer the ritual question "How are you?" with what we apparently equate with good health, "Busy"), we treat non-school, non-sleeping or non-eating time, unbudgeted free time, with suspicion and no little fear. For, while it may offer opportunity to learn and do new things, we worry that the time we once spent reading, kicking a ball, or mindlessly coddling a puck might be used destructively, in front of TV, or "getting into trouble" in endless ways. So we organize free time, scheduling it into lessons—ballet, piano, French—into organizations, teams, and clubs, fragmenting it into impossible-to-be-boring segments, creating in ourselves a mental metabolism geared to moving on, making free time distinctly unfree.

Ken Dryden (Canadian Content, Holt, Rinehart and Winston)

EXCERPT FROM: THE STONE DIARIES

Mrs. Flett's three children always seem to be quarreling – that's the impression she has anyway. It breaks her heart, she says, she who grew up without any brothers and sisters to play with.

But in fact, Alice, Warren, and Joanie go through long harmonious periods, especially in the summertime when the other children in the neighborhood are away on vacation. The three of them engage in elaborate games and building projects – only last week they curtained the grape arbor with blankets and furnished the tented space with cardboard cartons and orange crates and lengths of old material from their mother's sewing cupboard. Here, in the dim filtered light with the three of them kneeling around an orange-crate table, they consume graham crackers and cups of ice water and lapse into an amicable nostalgia.

This nostalgia of theirs is extraordinary, each of them feels the richness of it. On and on they'll talk; a whole afternoon will disappear while they take turns comparing and repeating their separate and shared memories and shivering with pleasure every time a fresh fragment from the past is unearthed. Living among these old adventures is beautiful, they think. Remember swimming in Buffalo Lake, how sandy the bottom was and how the water was warm as bathtub water and how afterwards we went to a soda fountain for a root beer float. Remember going on the ferris wheel at the Exhibition, how Joanie turned green. ("Did I really?" she marvels, blissful at the thought.) Remember the time we went to visit Mr. Wrightman who was in the iron lung, the drool coming out of his mouth and he didn't even notice. Remember Billy Raabe falling off his bike in the back lane and knocking out his front tooth and his mother driving him to the hospital, how he got blood all over the back seat of the car and they never got the stains out. Remember when we had a burr war with the Jacksons, and Jeannie Jackson's mother had to cut the burrs out of her hair, her beautiful long golden hair, like a princess.

At the edge of every experience is the refracted light of recollection, snagged there like an image in a beveled mirror.

Alice, bossy, excited, takes the lead in these acts of retrieval, and Warren and Joan fill in, confirming, reinforcing, inventing too. They shudder with the heat of their own dramas, awestruck by the doubleness of memory, the hold it has on them, as mysterious as telephone wires or the halo around the head of the baby Jesus. Memory could be poked with a stick, savored in the mouth like a popsicle, you could never get enough of it.

Carol Shields (The Stone Diaries, Random House)

EXCERPT FROM: LIFE OF PI

I woke up with a start, as if Ravi had burst a balloon in my ears. I looked at my watch. It was just after four-thirty in the morning. I leaned over and looked down at the bunk below. Ravi was still sleeping.

I dressed and climbed down. Normally I'm a sound sleeper. Normally I would have gone back to sleep. I don't know why I got up that night. It was more the sort of thing Ravi would do. He liked the word *beckon*; He would have said, “Adventure beckons,” and would have gone off to prowl around the ship. The level of noise was back to normal again, but with a different quality perhaps, muffled maybe.

I shook Ravi. I said, “Ravi! There was a funny noise. Let's go exploring.”

He looked at me sleepily. He shook his head and turned over, pulling the sheet up to his cheek. Oh, Ravi!

I opened the cabin door.

I remember walking down the corridor. Day or night it looked the same. But I felt the night in me. I stopped at Father and Mother's door and considered knocking on it. I remember looking at my watch and deciding against it. Father liked his sleep. I decided I would climb to the main deck and catch the dawn. Maybe I would see a shooting star. I was thinking about that, about shooting stars, as I climbed the stairs. We were two levels below the main deck. I had already forgotten about the funny noise.

It was only when I had pushed open the heavy door leading onto the main deck that I realized what the weather was like. Did it qualify as a storm? It's true there was rain, but it wasn't so very hard. It certainly wasn't a driving rain, like you see during the monsoons. And there was wind. I suppose some of the gusts would have upset umbrellas. But I walked through it without much difficulty. As for the sea, it looked rough, but to a landlubber the sea is always impressive and forbidding, beautiful and dangerous. Waves were reaching up, and their white foam, caught by the wind, was being whipped against the side of the ship. But I'd seen that on other days and the ship hadn't sunk. A cargo ship is a huge and stable structure, a feat of engineering. It's designed to stay afloat under the most adverse conditions. Weather like this surely wouldn't sink a ship? Why, I only had to close a door and the storm was gone. I advanced onto the deck. I gripped the railing and faced the elements. This was adventure.

“Canada, here I come!” I shouted as I was soaked and chilled. I felt very brave. It was dark still, but there was enough light to see by. Light on pandemonium it was. Nature can put on a thrilling show. The stage is vast, the lighting is dramatic, the extras are innumerable, and the budget for special effects is absolutely unlimited. What I had before me was a spectacle of wind and water, an earthquake of the senses, that even Hollywood couldn't orchestrate. But the earthquake stopped at the ground beneath my feet. The ground beneath my feet was solid. I was a spectator safely ensconced in his seat.

Yann Martel (Life of Pi, Harcourt, Inc.)

EXCERPT FROM: WHO HAS SEEN THE WIND?

From the darkness of sleep there came a tickling sensation, a pin point of irritation that grew. Part of his mind, submerged in sleep, responded to the cold, the stiffness in his joints, while the rest of it slept on. The tickling reached him; he sneezed violently and was awake.

It was a gray world breathless and transfigured with the thin morning light. He climbed out of the straw stack. His arms and legs were not his own. When he swallowed, his mouth had a bitter taste; his throat was tacky so that his tongue stuck unpleasantly to the roof of his mouth. He wanted water. And he was hungry with a raging hunger that took his mind from the chill of the morning and would not let him be conscious of any other thing. His stomach was a live thing that he had not known to be in him before, eager with a fierceness that could not be denied, greedy as a calf nudging at its mother's bag, anxious as pigs running to a trough, standing in their feed, and sloshing it while it dripped from the sides of their jaws, impatient as a horse pawing at the floor of its stall. He knew now that he had never been truly hungry in his life before.

And there was more than the trembling weakness of his hunger; there was an experience of apartness much more vivid than that of the afternoon before—a singing return of the feeling that had possessed him so many times in the past.

His knees almost gave out under him as he walked away from the straw stack in which he had spent the night. Just as he reached the road the sun exploded softly over the prairie's eastern edge, its long, red fingers discovering the clouds curved down the prairie sky. He began to walk along the road, at the end of which he could now see the sloping shoulders of the town's grain elevators.

He heard a wagon on the road behind him, but he did not hide as he had done the day before. It was Ab. He stopped the team and sat silently, a high and waiting grasshopper upon the wagon seat. Brian's legs refused to lift him. Still holding the reins in one hand, Ab leaned forward and Brian felt the pull of him as he helped him up.

Ab did not start the horses. Upon his wry little face lay an expression as gentle as a benediction. He cleared his throat.

"Yer Paw," he said. "Telegraft lady phoned us last night, kid. Yer Paw down to Rochester—he went an' died."

W.O. Mitchell (Who Has Seen The Wind?, Stoddart Publishing)

EXCERPT FROM: THE DOG WHO WOULDN'T BE

The prairie roads were indescribably dusty, and his nose and eyes would soon become so clogged that he would be almost blind, and incapable of smelling a dead cow at twenty paces. He did not seem to mind, but like a misshapen and misplaced figurehead he would thrust farther outward until he passed the point of balance. Then only my firm grip on his tail could prevent disaster, and on one occasion, when my grip relaxed a little, he became air-borne for a moment or so before crashing to the road behind us.

When this happened we thought we had lost him forever. By the time Father got the car stopped, Mutt was a hundred yards in the rear, spread-eagled in the center of the road, and screaming pitifully. Father assumed the worst, and concluded that the only thing to do was put the poor beast out of his misery at once. He leaped out the car and ran to a blacksmith's shop that stood by the roadside, and in a few minutes returned waving the blacksmith's old revolver.

He was too late. While he had been out of sight, Mutt had spotted a pair of heifers staring at him over the fence, and had hastily picked himself up to give vociferous chase.

Although he suffered no lasting injuries from this mishap, there was one minor consequence that allowed me to make a place for myself in the family annals by subsequently reporting that "Mutt was so scared he went to the bathroom in his pants."

Because of the dust we three human travelers were equipped with motorcyclists' goggles. Father decided one evening that this was favoritism, and that Mutt should have the same protection. We were then entering the outskirts of a place called Elbow, a typical prairie village with an unpaved main street as wide as the average Ontario farm, and with two rows of plank-fronted buildings facing each other distantly across this arid expanse. The drugstore was the only place still open when we arrived.

Father, Mutt, and I entered the shop together, and when an aged clerk appeared from the back premises, my father asked him for driving goggles.

The old fellow searched for a long time and finally brought us three pairs that had been designed and manufactured in the first years of the automobile era. They seemed to be serviceable and without more ado Father began trying them on Mutt.

Happening to glace up while this was going on, I met the clerk's gaze. He was transfixed. His leathered face had sagged like a wet chamois cloth and his tobacco-stained stubs seemed ready to fall from his receding lower jaw.

Father missed this preliminary display, but he was treated to an even better show a moment later when he got briskly to his feet, holding the second pair of goggles.

"These will do. How much are they?" he asked. And then suddenly remembering that he had forgotten to pack his shaving kit before leaving Saskatoon, he added, "We'll want a shaving brush, soap, and a safety razor too."

The old man had retreated behind his counter. He looked as if he was going to begin weeping. He pawed the air with one emaciated hand for several seconds before he spoke.

"Oh, Gawd!" he wailed – and it was a real prayer. "Don't you tell me that dawg *shaves*, too!"

We had to improvise a special harness for the goggles because of the unusual shape of Mutt's head, but they fit him tolerably well, and he was pleased with them. When they were not in use we would push them up on the lift of his brow, but in a few days he had learned how to do this for himself, and he could pull them down again over his eyes in time of need. Apart from the effect they had on unimaginative passers-by, Mutt's goggles were an unqualified success. However, they did not give him protection for his nose and one day he met a bee at forty miles an hour. The left side of Mutt's already bulbous nose swelled hugely. This did not inconvenience him too severely, for he simply moved to the other side of the car. But luck was against him and he soon collided with another bee, or perhaps it was a wasp this time. The total effect of the two stings was bizarre. With his goggles down, Mutt now looked like a cross between a hammerhead shark and a deep-sea diver.

Farley Mowat (The Dog Who Wouldn't Be, McClelland-Bantam)

EXCERPT FROM: THE STONE ANGEL

The cemetery, being on the hill, caught all the wind but wasn't cooled by it, for the wind was so hot and dry it seemed to shrivel your nostrils. The spruce trees beside the road stood dark against the sun, and the only sound there that day was the faint clicking and ticking of grasshoppers as they jumped like mechanical toys. The family plot had been tended, all right, even watered. The peonies grew as lushly as ever, although the wildflowers and the grass outside the square were withered and drained of color until they looked like the dried petals in an old china jar of potpourri.

But something was different, and for an instant I could hardly believe that such a thing could have happened, could have been done by someone. The marble angel lay toppled over on her face, among the peonies, and the black ants scurried though the white stone ringlets of her hair. Beside me, John laughed.

"The old lady's taken quite a header."

I turned to him in dismay. "Who could have done it?"

"How should I know?"

"We'll have to set her up," I said. "We can't leave it like this."

"Push up that thing? Not on your life. I bet she weighs a ton."

"All right—" I was furious at him. "If you won't do it, I will."

"You're off your head," John said. "You couldn't possibly."

"I'm not leaving it this way. I don't care, John. I'm not, and that's all there is to it."

My voice rasped in the thin air.

"Oh, all right" he said. "I'll do it, then. Don't be surprised if she collapses and I break a bone. That would be great, to break your back because a bloody marble angel fell on you."

He put his shoulders to the angel's head, and heaved. The sweat broke on his sharp face, and a hank of his black hair fell over is forehead. Ineffectually I tried to help, but only got in his way and felt the stone straining at me as I pushed. Like two moles we scrabbled in the loose dirt and the parched afternoon. I was afraid for my heart. I always feared for it after I grew stout, thinking if I pulled too hard at it, it would be like a plug jerked from a sink and I'd gurgle and go out of life like washwater. I stood aside and let John do it.

I wish he could have looked like Jacob then, wrestling with the angel and besting it, wringing a blessing from it with his might. But no. He sweated and grunted angrily. His feet slipped and he hit his forehead on a marble ear, and swore. His arm muscles tightened and swelled, and finally the statue moved, teetered, and was upright once more. John wiped his face with his hands.

"There. Satisfied?"

Margaret Laurence (The Stone Angel, McClelland & Stewart)

EXCERPT FROM: AN ASTRONAUT'S GUIDE TO LIFE ON EARTH

What follows is a wild 54-minute tumble to Earth that feels more or less like 15 explosions followed by a car crash. The Soyuz's trajectory changes from a circle to an ellipse, and when we hurtle down to the low point we begin brushing into the upper atmosphere, where the denser air instantly starts slowing us. It's like sticking your hand out a car window when you're flying down the highway, and feeling the drag of the wind. Then, 28 minutes after firing the engines, the explosive bolts blast open, lobbing the orbital and propulsion modules away to burn up. I think of Yuri, Peggy, and So-Yeon, and hope our Soyuz did its job. The loud staccato bangs as the bolts exploded had sounded right, and I saw the fabric that covers the vehicle flash by the window. Then the drag of the air starts to stabilize us and I know we're good. We still have some roll, but there's no way a reluctant module is still hanging onto our capsule.

It's getting hotter and more humid, despite the tough protective hide of the ablative shield. Looking out, I see orange-yellow flames and a stream of high-speed sparks pouring off the vehicle, and hear a series of bangs. Either there's a flaw in the shield or some trapped moisture, or we've got a real problem. I don't say anything, because what is there to say? If the shield fails, we're dead. We are a fiery bullet slicing through space, coming into sunrise.

Two minutes later, at 400,000 feet, the air gets perceptively thicker. The temperature inside the capsule is still climbing, and my Maple Leafs shirt is drenched with sweat. Now there's even more drag and a rude welcome back to gravity, which squashes us back in our seats. The g-force builds rapidly to 3.8 times Earth weight, which is crushing compared to the weightlessness we've enjoyed for the past five months. I can feel the heaviness of the skin on my face as it's smashed back toward my ears. I take little cheater breaths; my lungs don't want to fight gravity. My arms seem to weigh a ton, and suddenly it's a strain to lift one even a few inches to flick a switch on the control panel. Going from weightlessness to max g and then back to the 1 g experienced on earth only takes 10 minutes, but it's a long 10 minutes.

Once we've slowed significantly -- picture a rock sinking in a deep pond -- our drogue chute opens to cut our rate of descent. At 17,000 feet, the main chute opens and we're laughing, yelling, "Yeehaw!" The Soyuz is spinning and whipping around crazily, rattling and twisting too quickly, even, to make us sick. Then suddenly, bam! We're stabilized, hanging tautly under the parachute. We jettison the thermal shield that ensured we didn't burn up when we re-entered the atmosphere; our windows were blacked over from the heat, but now an extra layer of covering peels off and we can see the blue morning sky. All remaining fuel has already been vented to ensure we don't burst into flames when we hit the ground.

We try to catch our breath, weak after the multi-axis disorienting tumble, the wildest of amusement park rides. To complete the effect, our seats suddenly slam upward, rising automatically to the top level of their shock absorbers to cushion us from the brunt of what's about to happen. The crush of acceleration helps us tighten our straps. We know the moment of impact will be bad; the seats' liners were custom-built to mold to our bodies so that our backs don't break. Just before impact no one says anything, not even Roman, who's been narrating our descent as he is supposed to, talking a mile a minute the whole way down, telling the ground what's going on. We are all clenching our teeth, lightly, so we don't bite through our tongues.

Our little gamma-ray altimeter waits for an echo from the ground, and then, two seconds before impact, sends a command to fire our optimistically named Soft Landing Rockets -- gunpowder charges that cut our descent rate to 5 feet per second. They turn a horrific car crash into a survivable one: we hit the hard ground of Kazakhstan, a ton of steel, titanium, and human flesh.

Chris Hadfield (An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth, Random House Canada)

EXCERPT FROM: A VISIT FROM MR. LUCIFER "WARTIME CONDITIONS"

Back at the car, I sat in the back seat, just for a change. It felt funny sitting there, with no one else in the car. Then, as I was looking through the window listening to the noise from across the street, a big truck turned the corner and parked beside me. It was Aunt Margaret's truck, but Mother was driving it.

"You poor little thing," she said, hugging me to her. "And I don't suppose you've had a thing to eat, have you?"

"Uncle Max gave me a dime," I said. "I had an ice-cream cone and a Coca-Cola."

"Well, that was certainly nice of him. I think I'll just go over to the hotel and thank him personally," she said.

She didn't tell me to stay where I was, so I tailed her across the street, although I could hardly keep up with her because she was walking so fast.

When she got there, she flung the hotel door open so hard that it almost went off its hinges and into the street. Then she marched straight into the dingy corridor where I had myself been earlier that day. Only she didn't quietly try the doorknob. She grabbed it and shook it within an inch of its life.

"Sorry ma'am," the big man behind the desk said, transferring his dead cigar to the other side of his mouth. "No ladies allowed in there. Them's the rules. Besides, it's legally closed for the night. After midnight, you see."

My mother turned violently in the direction of his voice and her red hair flew around after her. She walked up the counter and looked down at him and I could tell she was angry, because her eyes were flashing like neon lights.

"You listen to me," she said in a low voice. "If you don't open that damned door in about one second, I'm going straight over to Constable Kruger's house and I'll drag him back to that door in his pyjamas. And I promise you, you'll never sell another bottle of your rotten beer as long as you live."

I had never seen my mother quite like this. She was so angry that she actually frightened me. And I was on her side. What the big man thought, I don't know, but he wasn't behind the counter anymore. He was trying to insert the skeleton key into the door.

A second later, Mother flung the door aside and stood in the doorway with her hands on her hips. The roar from the beer parlor, now revealed to me at last, was so horrific and the sudden onslaught of the smell so foul that the combined effect nearly knocked me over. But Mother didn't even flinch. She just stood there like a rock, glaring at the beer parlor. Gradually the noise began to abate as the men at the tables saw her standing there. Soon, a complete silence descended, except for one last clink from a solitary glass.

I saw Uncle Max. He was sitting up on the bar with his legs crossed, and his war wounds didn't seem to be bothering him very much. There was a bottle of beer in his hand and a look of surprise on his face.

"Max Kalisnichuk," she said. "Didn't you forget one little thing?"

She then reached for me and pushed me in front of her, so that Uncle Max could see me. When he did, he came down off the bar and started towards us with his hands out in a gesture of regret, but Mother instantly turned her back on him and walked quickly out of the hotel, pulling me along with her.

We drove in silence for some time. She did not speak and I did not, at first, care to know her thoughts or intrude on them. But, finally, I got up enough courage to ask her something:

"Are you mad at Uncle Max?" I asked.

"Yes I am!" she said, making me flinch.

But later, after we'd driven farther into the rolling country, transcendently beautiful in the moonlight, she looked over at me and smiled.

"No, I'm not mad at your Uncle Max," she said in her softer voice. "Not really….All those people are his friends and this was his first trip into town since he got back. And so he got a little carried away. He didn't mean to forget about you."

We drove on in silence, then she began to speak to me again:

"Your Uncle Max is really a kind, thoughtful man and he's very considerate of others. Normally. He's generous and everybody likes him. He's smart and a hard worker. A wonderful man, really."

"Is Father like him?" I asked.

"God forbid!" Mother said with a shudder.

Don Lemma (A Visit from Mr. Lucifer, Western Producer Prairie Books)

EXCERPT FROM: TREE PLANTING

They were supposed to be on the bus at 7:15 every morning. Before that, they were supposed to eat breakfast and make a bag lunch. By the time Stephanie got ready -- no makeup (she *was*, after all, tree planting), just a good 30 SPF sunscreen, a bit of conditioning mousse to keep her fly-away hair in place and, okay, a touch of mascara -- and had made it to the cook tent, all the good lunch stuff -- the cheese, the hummus, the cold cuts and the bagels -- was gone. She threw together a peanut butter sandwich on white bread and ran for the bus. She was five minutes late.

She sat beside a tall guy with a ponytail and a hemp necklace. His pants looked as if they were held together by duct tape. They *were*, in fact, held together by duct tape. The top half was beige. From the thighs down they were brown. He was wearing a white-collared dress shirt.

He looked like a loser. No, he looked like a totally *unprepared* loser.

Steph was wearing her new cargo pants.

Perry, the Eddie Bauer boy from the night before, was wearing orange Pumas, quick-dry pants and a dark blue denim shirt. Perry looked like a pro.

After a half-hour ride, the bus rocked to a stop on the side of a logged-out clearing. The veteran planters headed out by themselves. Scott gathered the rookies around the end of the bus.

“This is the block,” he said. He was pointing at the scarred slash in the forest. From the bus, it had looked like a field. Up close, Stephanie could see it was waist high in scrub and scattered with fallen logs.

Scott said, “You each get your own piece of land.”

Twenty minutes later, Scott and Stephanie were standing by the side of the road, beside a stack of plastic trays. “White pine,” said Scott pointing at the foot-high saplings.

He pointed at the alder bushes and the deadfalls and the upturned rock. “That’s yours,” he said.

Then he said, “The first thing is to flag your boundary so no one creams your land.” He pointed at a bag of orange ribbons. “Tie one of these off every ten feet, from here back to that small rock to the right of the tree.”

It was all rocks and trees as far as Stephanie could see. Before she could ask, Which small rock? Which tree? Scott said, “Make it happen, man,” and was gone.

Stephanie strapped on her hip belt and clipped on three canvas tree bags. Then she tied off the first orange flag, concentrating on staying straight, determined that her boundary was going to be perfect.

It took Stephanie less than ten minutes to rip her new beige pants. She tore them as she clambered over the trunk of a fallen pine. She swore out loud. Then she broke into tears, swore again and stood there wondering what to do. There was nothing to do. Nothing but tie another flag, and then another, until suddenly and unexpectedly and mysteriously, she was back on the road. She had been concentrating so much on her perfectly tied flags that she had got herself turned around. Instead of walking in a straight line back into the bush, she had walked in the shape of a horseshoe.

Continued on next page…

It took her until eleven o'clock to flag her boundaries. By eleven, she had ripped her pants, flagged her land and eaten her lunch. She was finally ready to plant her first tree. She plunged her shovel into what looked like a nice soft piece of ground. It struck the rock cap of the Canadian Shield about six inches below the surface, the vibration ricocheting through her body.

At lunch, Perry, the boy with the Eddie Bauer jacket, walked down the road and sat beside her.

"I already ate my lunch," she said morosely.

"I ripped my new jacket," said Perry.

They climbed onto the bus at five o'clock. Stephanie fell into her seat sweaty, exhausted and starving. There was a rip in each of leg of her pants. Her hands were cut and sore.

Perry fell into the seat beside her.

"I only planted five hundred," said Steph. "He must have been joking, right? No one could plant two thousand trees in a day."

"I did six hundred and fifty," said Perry. "I could have done more, but I hurt my wrist."

Stephanie didn't like that. She thought she should be able to plant as many trees as any other rookie -- but surely not two thousand. Scott was exaggerating about that.

The guy with the ponytail and the white dress shirt was sitting across from them. His left hand was completely covered with duct tape, as if he were wearing a silver glove.

"How many did *you* plant?" asked Perry.

"Twenty-four hundred," said ponytail guy, unwinding the duct tape.

Stuart McLean (Secrets from the Vinyl Café, Viking Canada)

EXCERPT FROM: SOMETHING WORTHY

Jim opened his address, and I could tell he was nervous. He said none of us gathered there that night would ever forget the memorable occasion. For the students, Jim said, it was both an ending and a beginning. He talked about the student year and the Tuck Shop and there was laughter, and that seemed to relax him.

With a sort of easy confidence now, he talked; and it didn't seem possible that once he had pitched hay and hauled firewood with Dad through the deep drifts of winter in the bush country.

Then after more bursts of laughter and words that were just words to me, Jim paused. The smile left his face; and I think everybody suddenly realized that the next part of Jim's speech was going to be different.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Jim said, "when we—your sons and daughters—receive our diplomas tonight, we are supposed to be worthy of them." You could have heard the silence then, thick and fixed and pregnant. "It means," said Jim, "that into our hands you have passed a great trust. When people come to our doctors, they will come, believing that we have not only the skill and knowledge—but the sacred regard for their bodies, to make them well. When you pass your children to our teachers, you will be conferring on us a tremendous—almost a terrible trust." Jim touched a strand of his hair that had fallen across his face. "I once heard a Divinity student say that the greatest prayer was: 'Lord, that I may be worthy.' Now, I know I at least understand."

Somewhere in the student gallery, somebody snickered. But for the rest of that hall, it was as if even breathing had stopped.

"So," Jim went on, "if we are to be worthy, it must mean that we set forth now with a realization of what others have done for us. There should be no room left for false pride. There should be only gratitude for the sacrifices, hidden and open, of all those who have made our education possible…who have given us, as it were, to the service of humanity."

Said Jim: "From the bottom of my heart, I want to say to all tonight that whatever I am, I owe to others. To my professors, who have preserved and handed into my keeping the best knowledge of all the generations. To my classmates, who have shown me and shared with me a beautiful friendship. But most of all…"

And here Jim paused.

"…most of all," he said, "I want to thank my mother, who is down there in the audience with you. With her permission, ladies and gentlemen—and yours—I'd like to tell you what she has given over the years, for my sake and, I hope, for mankind."

All of a sudden, listening to Jim's voice, I couldn't see. For Jim was up there, not pretending any longer, telling those people who knew the value of education, what it meant to be so poor in worldly goods that she'd never owned a washing machine or a toaster or one really lovely dress. She was so unlettered herself she was afraid to speak before strangers…He went on and on, telling them about the lambs and the mosquitoes, till everywhere I looked, I could see women daubing at their eyes and men staring so straight ahead that you knew what it was like with them, too.

When Jim was done, the silence followed him off the stage. Then the applause began. It swept in waves through the auditorium, till at last the distinguished-looking man stepped back and lifted his hands for silence.

John Patrick Gillese (A Century of Canadian Literature, Ryerson Press)

EXCERPT FROM: THE STONE ANGEL

Heaving, I pull myself up. As I slide my legs out of bed, one foot cramps and I'm helpless for a second. I grasp the bed, put my toes on the icy floor, work the cramp out, and then I'm standing, the weight of my flesh heavy and ponderous, my hair undone now and slithering lengthily around my bare and chilly shoulders, like snakes on a Gorgon's head. My satin nightgown, rumpled and twisted, hampers and hobbles me. I seem to be rather shaky. The idiotic quivering of my flesh won't stop. My separate muscles prance and jerk. I'm cold. It's unusually cold tonight, it seems to me. I'll wait a moment. There. I'm better now. It's only a few steps, that I do know.

I shuffle slowly, thinking how peculiar it is to walk like this, not to be able to command my legs to pace and stride. One foot and then another. Only a little way now Hagar. Come on.

There now. I've reached the bathroom and gained the shiny steel grail. That wasn't so difficult after all. But the way back is longer. I miss my footing, lurch, almost topple. I snatch for something, and my hand finds a window sill. It steadies me. I go on.

"You okay, Mrs. Shipley?"

"Quite—okay."

I have to smile at myself. I've never used that word before in my life. *Okay—guy*—such slangy words. I used to tell John. They mark a person.

All at once I have to stop and try to catch the breath that seems to have escaped me. My ribs are hot with pain. Then it ebbs, but I'm left reeling with weakness. I'll reach my destination, though. Easy does it. Come along, now.

There. I'm there. I knew I could. And now I wonder if I've done it for her or for myself. No matter. I'm here, and carrying what she needs.

"Oh, thanks," she says. "Am I ever glad—"

At that moment the ceiling light is switched peremptorily on, and a nurse is standing there in the doorway, a plump and middle-aged nurse, looking horrified.

"Mrs. Shipley! What on earth are you doing out of bed? Didn't you have the restraint put on tonight?"

"They forgot it," I say, "and a good job they did; too."

"My heavens," the nurse says. "What if you'd fallen?"

"What if I had?" I retort. "What if I had?"

She doesn't reply. She leads me back to bed. When she has settled us both, she goes and we're alone, the girl and I. Then I hear a sound in the dark room. The girl is laughing.

"Mrs. Shipley—"

"Yes?"

She stifles her laughter, but it breaks out again.

"Oh, I can't laugh. I mustn't. It pulls my stitches. But did you ever see anything like the look on her face?"

I have to snort, recalling it.

"She was stunned, all right, wasn't she, seeing me standing there? I thought she'd pass out."

My own spasm of laughter catches me like a blow. I can't stave it off. Crazy. I must be crazy. I'll do myself some injury.

"Oh—oh—" the girl gasps. "She looked at you as though you'd just done a crime."

"Yes—that was exactly how she looked. Poor soul. Oh, the poor soul. We really worried her".

"That's for sure. We sure did."

Convulsed with our paining laughter, we bellow and wheeze. And then we peacefully sleep.

Margaret Laurence (The Stone Angel, McClelland & Stewart)

EXCERPT FROM: WILD GEESE

The first hoar frost came, and Lind woke one morning to find the earth covered with white, powdered glass. The sun took its glitter within a few minutes, but the land was not the same after it had gone. It seemed to have left a shadow over the stubble and over the short brown grass of the pastures to the west, and over the black corpses of the trees that had been ravished by the fire. The days that followed were as full of mellow radiance as those that had gone before, the wind was as soft and the sky as intimate a blue, but there had come a change in the mood of the earth.

Then Lind heard the honking of the first wild goose, high overhead. On a night that was cold with moonlight she heard it, a full, clear trumpeting, in a sky that was vacant of clouds. The wild geese were passing over—passing over the haunts of man in their remote seeking toward the swamps of the south. They marked the beginning and the end of the period of growth. Next year they would fill the sky with their cold, lonely clamour at sowing time, and again when the earth would have closed in upon itself after yielding its growth. But next year Caleb Gare would not be here to note their coming or their going.

Lind felt humble as she heard the wild geese go over. There was an infinite cold passion in their flight, like the passion of the universe, a proud mystery never to be solved. She knew in her heart that Mark Jordan was like them—that he stood inevitably alone. But because of the human need in him, he had to come to her. It warmed her to dwell on the thought.

The day came when Lind locked the door of the schoolhouse and watched the children she had taught scatter to the three roads that led east and west and north.

On the following day she and Mark left Oeland, promising Amelia that they would return some time. But Amelia knew that they would never come back again, and in her heart she was glad.

They drove by night to Nykerk, to take the train from the Siding to the city. They would leave the team in the livery stable there, and the Klovacz boys would get them the following day.

"I wonder just what the mystery was at the Gares'," Lind mused as they rumbled along in the buggy over the hard road. "It seemed to vanish with Caleb."

"Strange the way it worked out—the only thing he really cared for claimed him in the end," Mark observed.

Lind shivered a little and he put his arm about her, drawing her bare head down beneath his lips.

Far overhead in the night sky sounded the honking of the wild geese, going south now…a remote, trailing shadow…a magnificent seeking through solitude…an endless quest….

Martha Ostenso (Wild Geese, McClelland & Stewart)

EXCERPT FROM: SEPTEMBER

Sunday night. And the thought strikes me that I ought to be happier than I am.

We have high tea on Sunday, very Englishy, the four of us gathered in the dining ell of our cream-coloured living room at half-past five for cold pressed ham, a platter of tomatoes and sliced radishes. Slivers of hardboiled egg. A plate of pickles.

The salad vegetables vary with the season. In the summer they're larger and more varied, cut into thick peasant slices and drenched with vinegar and oil. And in the winter, in the pale Ontario winter, they are thin, watery, and tasteless, though their exotic pallor gives them a patrician presence. Now, since it is September, we are eating tomatoes from our own suburban garden, brilliant red under a scatter of parsley. Delicious, we all agree.

"Don't we have any mustard?" my husband Martin asks. He is an affectionate and forgetful man, and on weekends made awkward by leisure.

"We're all out," I tell him, "but there's chutney. And a little of that green relish."

"Never mind, Judith. It doesn't matter."

"I'll get the chutney for you," Meredith offers.

"No, really. It doesn't matter."

"Well, I'd like some," Richard says.

"In that case you can just go and get it yourself," Meredith tells him. She is sixteen; he is twelve. The bitterness between them is variable but always present.

Meredith makes a sweep for the basket in the middle of the table. "Oh," she says happily, "fresh rolls."

"I like garlic bread better," Richard says. He is sour with love and cannot, will not, be civil.

"We had that last Sunday," Meredith says, helping herself to butter. Always methodical, she keeps track of small ceremonies.

For us, Sunday high tea is a fairly recent ceremony, a ritual brought back from England where we spent Martin's sabbatical year. We are infected, all four of us, with a surrealistic nostalgia for our cold, filthy flat in Birmingham, actually homesick for fog and made edgy by the thought of swerving red buses.

And high tea. A strange hybrid meal, a curiosity at first, it was what we were most often invited out to during our year in England. We visited Martin's colleagues far out in the endless bricked-up suburbs, and drank cups and cups of milky tea and ate ham and cold beef, so thin on the platter it looked almost spiritual. The chirpy wives and their tranquil pipe-sucking husbands, acting out of some irrational good will, drew us into cozy sitting rooms hung with water colours, rows of Penguins framing the gasfires, night pressing in at the windows, so that snugness made us peaceful and generous. Always afterward, driving back to the flat in our little green Austin, we spoke to each other with unaccustomed charity, Martin humming and Meredith exclaiming again and again from the back seat how lovely the Blackstones were and wasn't she, Mrs. Blackstone, a pet.

So we carry on the high tea ritual. But we've never managed to capture that essential shut-in coziness, that safe-from-the-storm solidarity. We fly off in midair. Our house, perhaps, is too open, too airy, and then again we are not the same people we were then; but still we persist.

After lemon cake and ice cream, we move into the family room to watch television. September is the real beginning of the year; even the media know, for the new fall television series are beginning this week.

Carol Shields (Small Ceremonies, Vintage Canada)

EXCERPT FROM: THE RUSSLÄNDER

Her mother lay on a blanket, baby Daniel cradled at her side, a straw hat covering her face. Years later someone would tell Katya that her mother had been fond of hats. Even as a young girl she wore hats, and sometimes the hat was too large and the brim concealed her eyes, but always her grin was in place, displaying a fetching space between her front teeth. She was known to have a good singing voice, sweet and clear. To be swift and light on her feet. Katya's own clearest memories of her mother were of her cradling a baby on her arm in a tub, laughing as she trickled water from a cloth over its stomach, or sitting with her feet hooked through the rungs of a chair as she took time to have *faspa*, gnawing on a piece of hard bun, dunking it in coffee to soften it, sometimes humming a tune, sometimes gazing across the room, lost in her thoughts. She remembered how the house was transformed to order and cleanliness under her touch. All these memories, but she would not be able to describe, more than anyone else could, what was in her mother's heart.

“What time is it getting to be?” her mother called from the blanket where she lay, the straw hat covering her face, and baby Daniel cradled by her side.

“Why don't you children see if you can tell what time it is from nature,” her father said. “Take a look around.”

“The sun?” Gerhard said, disappointed that their father’s challenge would be such an easy one.

“The water,” her father said, and indicated Ox Lake, out beyond the parsnips and rushes, where the water lilies grew.

Sara jumped up and down to be able to see farther out. “There is nothing to see,” she complained. As Greta turned sausages on the spit, grease dripped and sizzled, sending up a column of smoke and an appetite-rousing odour, which Katya suspected would travel as far away as Lubitskoye.

She went to help Sara look for a sign that would tell them the hour, but all she saw were water spiders and midges swarming above a rippling wake where a fish had just jumped.

“What about the water lilies, are the flowers opened or closed?” her father asked.

“Earlier, they had gone rowing among the lily pads to admire their blossoms, yellow teacups set on green saucers. Now, the teacups were tapers standing on a green tapestry of shadow and light.

“They’re closed,” Sarah reported.

“Well then, it must be five o'clock,” her father said. He took out his pocket watch. “And so it is. They’re right on time.”

Sandra Birdsell (The Russländer, McClelland & Stewart, Ltd.)

EXCERPT FROM: A TIME TO GATHER STONES

On the way back to town Daniel saw the moon rise in the twilight. "Why don't we drive by the farm?" Daniel suggested on impulse. "It'd be good to see it, for Marni too, don't you think?"

"Why not?"

Daniel turned down the next section road. Marni was asleep in her grandfather's arms.

Daniel wanted to open up to him, to say, after all the years, how sorry he was for the rift between them. But his father seemed to anticipate him. "I'm glad you came home, son." He waited for a reply and when none came he said quietly, "I always regretted the way you left. I'm sorry for my part in it."

"It's okay, dad." He didn't know what else to say.

"I was half out of my mind about your mom and I wanted to be a farmer. The farm meant a lot to me."

" I know. I guess I wasn't meant to be a farmer."

"And I had to let it go. I got a good price for it. Now with the grain prices, I'd get nothing. So it all worked out. Things work out, Dan."

As they entered the yard, Daniel saw that some of the buildings had been moved away and the old equipment shed had been converted into a granary. The house stood unused and neglected.

"They're trying to rent it. I see an ad for it in the paper every once in a while."

Marni continued to sleep as Daniel switched off the ignition. "Let's lay her on the seat for a while," he said. "She's had a big day."

The two men walked towards the house. "I'd like to see inside one more time," Daniel said. Without a word his father walked towards the equipment shed. Daniel tried to see in a window past the drawn blinds.

"Here's a key, son. I used to leave a key over the window frame on the shed. I'm sure they haven't changed the locks."

Inside the house looked as it had the day the older man moved out, complete to the debris on the floor where the fridge had stood. Mouse droppings peppered the counter and the linoleum in the kitchen. When Daniel raised the window blind over the sink, a huge orange ball of a moon surprised him with its beauty.

Then he heard Marni. "Grampa." She was sobbing. "Grampa."

Daniel walked quickly outside. "Come here, honey."

"No, I want Grampa." Daniel scooped her up, but she kicked and fussed, on the verge of a tantrum. " I want Grampa."

"I'll take her, Dan." Daniel set her down and she took her grandfather's hand. "Here, I want to show you something." He led her out into the back field, fallowed by the new owner, until the girl and the one-armed old man stood silhouetted against the moon. Daniel followed erratically, within earshot, unsure.

In the twilight he saw the old man kneel and scoop a handful of earth and hold it up to his nose. "Come here, Marni. Smell this." He held his cupped hand up to Marni's nose. "That's the sweetest smell there is. That's the smell of the earth."

"That's a sweet smell, Grampa," Daniel could hear Marni say through the encroaching darkness. "That's dirt smell. I can smell it, Grampa." Daniel saw her fragile figure turn toward him. "Daddy, come here quick and smell."

Daniel plodded towards them.

"Daddy, hurry up and smell."

Daniel seemed to remember tagging behind his father who had turned and offered him the same gift when he was a little boy. A trick of the mind perhaps. But here, now, was an invitation to life that might not fall on his ears again. He quickened his pace towards his father and his daughter. Then he broke into a run, joyful, even graceful.

Phil McBurney (Manitoba Myriad, Dennis County Writers' Guild)

EXCERPT FROM: THE COMING AND STAYING OF WAFFLE AND MRS. ROCHESTER

Remember how in the Old Possum poems, Mr. Eliot wrote about the challenges of naming cats? Our pretty calico chose her own name on the very day she chose us. She arrived a few months after our mother's death, and just around the time we were thinking about opening the house as a B & B.

This has never been a grand inn. We strive for simplicity in all things. We are not like those luxurious bed and breakfasts you read about in *Gourmet* magazine: where guests descend in the morning to find a groaning board stacked with golden pancakes and steam trays spilling over with sausages, bacon, and ham; boxes and boxes of cold cereal all arranged in their ranks; mangoes and melons and papayas pared and sliced and arranged in starlike clusters on silver trays, and fresh-squeezed orange juice in crystal decanters.

We offer conventionally prepared eggs. We deal with the usual meat products in the usual ways. We provide muffins, fruit, coffee, and toast with the expected assembly of condiments. That's all.

At the very outset, before we had settled on our “less is more” philosophy, we thought we might try something grander. On the day the cat came, we had spent a happy morning rummaging in the attic, taking an inventory of serviceable linens and hunting down flatware: the bits and pieces we'd need when the business got rolling. Of course, we kept on unearthing oddments that required exclaiming over: photographs, toys of childhood, and so on. What particularly caught our attention was our mother's old waffle iron.

It was a Proustian moment. In an instant, we were sucked back down the funnel of time, to that long ago season when waffles were our mother’s passion. We could see her so clearly, beaming with pleasure as she set them on the table, with their crusty ridges and their absorbent valleys. They were miracles of fearless symmetry. For her it was just a passing culinary fancy. But it made a lasting impression on her sons.

I looked at Virgil. Virgil looked at me. We read each other’s minds. We would serve our guests waffles for breakfast! Of course, we would need to hone our skills. And that very afternoon we set out to do just that: to transmute base batter into gold.

Historians annoy me with their blinkered selectivity. They took the time to write down the names of those who invented the telephone, the atom bomb, and the cotton gin. But the geniuses who left us with that truly worthwhile legacy of recipes have gone unheralded. Why don't we know the name of the person -- and I would wager it was a woman -- who came up with the idea of the waffle? To take flour, eggs, and milk, which on the surface seemed to have nothing to say to one another, and to combine them; then to pour the stuff onto a scorching griddle; and to finally look at the result, cock an ear to the heavens, and know that it must go by the euphonious name of waffle: well, it boggles the mind!

This is what I was thinking as we prepared to wake the sleeping iron. Virgil fixed the batter. I slathered the hardware with oil, so that its pock-marked children would have an easy release. I held my hand close above it, while Virgil stood at the ready with his thick elixir. At the moment I felt my palm might combust, I shouted out, “Now! Pour it now!”

Just then, a cat leapt through the open kitchen window onto the counter and deposited a very large mouse, or maybe a small rat, exactly on the spot the batter was meant to go. I don't know if the prey was alive or dead at the time of delivery. I let loose a loud and not very manly trill of alarm, and slammed the lid of the iron down on the ill-starred rodent. It is for situations like this that we coined the word “unpleasant.”

Looking back, it seems extraordinary that the cat was able to maintain such agility in an advanced state of gravidity. When we returned from taking the waffle iron to the trash, she had taken over the bread box and was giving birth to seven pretty kittens. Each of these found a happy home. The mother, duly christened Waffle, remained with us. And very sweet she has proved to be, too, especially since we arranged with our veterinarian to have her “altered.” I understand this is the preferred term amongst those in the know. I would rather call a spay a spay.

Bill Richardson (Bachelor Brothers’ Bed & Breakfast, Douglas & McIntyre)

EXCERPT FROM: GOING HOME

Francine came out of the past with a start. She had barely noticed the towns passing, nor the brief bus stops here and there. At Portage, she had got off and absentmindedly bought a coffee, but she couldn't remember drinking it, though the cup was empty beside her. And now the bus was nearing Minnedosa. For some time she had been watching the rim of hills to the north, marking the southern edge of the Riding Mountains. Now the Minnedosa hills appeared, green from recent rains.

The bus began to slow, turning north off the Yellowhead Route, and she saw that several businesses had expanded this far. Houses swelled out to the south, and also on the northern edge, under the hills where their house had been. To the northwest a rising smoke indicated more than houses (perhaps a factory there?), and stretching tall on the southern edge were several tall apartment buildings. And as they turned another corner, over and under and around everything were the welcoming centennial banners and pennants, hanging limply now in the light rainfall.

The bus turned again, down the back alley a short way and then rolled to a stop at the back of the depot she remembered so well. "Ten minute stop," called the driver as he clambered down and hurried inside, followed by several passengers.

Francine stood, almost without realizing it, a striking figure in her grey pantsuit and long blond hair. She retrieved her suitcase and entered the back of the depot, then without pausing walked directly through it and out the front door. She stood alone in the rain, looking north and south. How different it looked, and yet how much the same. The town clock tower stood as she remembered it, and many of the stores, though the names seemed new to her. Directly across from her a new Co-op demanded attention, and everywhere store windows were bright with painted welcomes and centennial pictures.

"Francine Dubois is home," she said to herself. "It's been a long time. But I made it. And now I'm going to show them." And then she knew. That was her reason for coming home.

She turned then and re-entered the depot. The driver was announcing his route – "departing for Russell, Yorkton, Saskatoon, Edmonton." Francine looked slowly around the depot, then crossed unhesitatingly to the woman at the wicket.

"One way to Saskatoon," She counted out the money and passed it across. Then, clutching her ticket, she reboarded the bus.

Donna Gamache (Manitoba Myriad, Dennis County Writers' Guild)

EXCERPT FROM: MY ALMIGHTY GRANDMOTHER

"Oh, I'm so bored, so bored, so bored!"

"Will you be still," said Grandmother irritably. "You make me think of a coyote howling at the moon."

I tried to be still, but soon my strange sorrow, nameless, with no cause that I could define, seized me again and I howled more loudly than ever. "Oh, I'm so bored, so bored, so bored!"

"Ah, the poor Innocents!" said Grandmother.

This was always her term for unhappy children, especially when they were in the depths of their inexplicable distress. She might have been alluding to the Massacre of the Blessed Innocents – I do not know – but whenever she saw a child weeping bitterly she would exclaim, in an indignant voice, "Ah, the poor Innocents!"

In vain she offered me all the many good things to eat there were in the house, and finally, knowing no other way to distract and console me, she said, "If you'll just stop caterwauling, I'll make you a doll."

Immediately my tears stopped.

I looked skeptically at my grandmother seated in her high rocking chair.

"You find dolls in stores," I said. "You don't make them."

"That's what you think," she said, and began as usual to complain about stores and high prices and the present-day custom of buying everything ready-made.

When she had vented her anger in this way, a little glimmer came into her eyes that I had never seen there before; it was quite extraordinary, like a light suddenly kindled in a place one had believed abandoned and overgrown. What she was going to accomplish today began, however, in the simplest way in the world.

"Go to the attic," she said, "and fetch my big scrap bag. Don't make a mistake. Get the one that's tied on top with string. Bring it to me and then you'll see whether I can make what I've a mind to make."

Still incredulous, but curious too and perhaps secretly hoping to catch Grandmother napping, I went in search of the big scrap bag.

From it Grandmother drew some bits of multicolored material, all clean and sweet- smelling – Grandmother's rags were always carefully washed before they were put away -- pieces of chintz, of gingham, of dimity. I recognized, as was always the way in her quilts, the remains of a dress that had belonged to one of my sisters, of a blouse of Maman's, of one of my own dresses and of an apron whose owner I could no longer remember. It was pleasant to be able to attach so many memories to these scraps. Finally Grandmother found a piece of white cloth. She cut this into several bits, from which she made what looked like a number of little bags of different shapes, one for the trunk, others for arms and legs.

"Now I'll need some straw or salt or oats to stuff these with. It's up to you. Which would you prefer," she asked, "a soft doll stuffed with straw or -- ?"

"Oats," I said.

"It will be heavy," Grandmother warned.

"That won't matter."

"Very well then, go to the barn. There is a sack of oats there left over from the time when I was thinking of keeping some hens. Fetch me a little dishful."

Continued on next page…

When I came back, the various parts of the doll's body were all ready to be filled with the oats Mémère had saved on the chance she might have some hens. I didn't fail to notice the way a number of odd combinations of events were all rushing today to serve my pleasure. Soon my grandmother had stitched the stuffed limbs and body together and there before my eyes was a little human form, quite nicely made, with feet, hands, and a head that was a trifle flat on top.

I began to take a keen interest in the manufacture.

"But you'll be stumped for hair," I said.

"For hair? That's what you think," she said, enlivened by the discovery that the infinite and ingenious resources of her imagination, at least, were all intact. Imagination, you might say, was our family gift.

"Go back to the attic," she said. "Open the right-hand drawer of the old chest I put up there. No rummaging, mind. Just take a skein of yarn . . . By the way, do you want one of those blonde dolls that are all the rage these days? Or a brunette? Or how about an old woman with white hair like me?"

I hesitated over the cruel choice. I felt a strong inclination toward an elderly doll with spectacles and white hair, thinking what a novel effect this would present. But I also greatly fancied a young lady doll.

"Could you make me one with blonde curly hair?"

"Nothing simpler," said Grandmother.

Gabrielle Roy (The Road Past Altamont, McClelland and Stewart, Ltd.)

EXCERPT FROM: THE DOLL HOUSE

I could have told them that I didn't want a doll house, but no one asked. Perhaps if they had, things would have turned out differently. But then, perhaps not.

Mother was pleased enough about it in the beginning. She even helped my father pull the nails from the apple boxes; and it was her idea to use the chicken gravel left behind by a previous tenant, along with some old cans of paint.

I don't know how many packs of tobacco my father went without to buy the dozens of tiny hinges, screws and other bits of hardware that went into the doll house, but sometimes when he paused in his work to consider the next step, I would see his hand reach absently for the tobacco pouch, only to be withdrawn as he realized its near-emptiness.

The harsh glare of a single overhead lamp cast his face into darkness as he bent over the table, but as the days and weeks passed I knew that the shadows I saw were something more than just a play of light. With growing awareness I matched them to those in my mother's eyes.

So it was that while my father's patient fingers worked their miracles in wood, I learned to wait for a different miracle.

He used the dining-room table for a work bench. It didn't matter because we ate our meals in the kitchen where the warmth from the cook stove and the steamy fragrance of boiled cabbage and potatoes provided a semblance of comfort and cheer.

Mother must have fretted at the clutter though, for I remember that on the two days a week my father went to work at the grain elevator, the door would hardly be shut behind him before she had the dusting cloths and lemon polish all ready to give the dining-room table a good rub. At first she was careful not to disturb his materials and tools but later I noticed that she became reckless, lifting them as she swiped at the dust and banging them down in disarray. Puzzled, I felt I should caution her but the set of her lips and the bleakness of her gaze always stopped me.

It was then I began to wonder when I had last seen my mother smile. Oh, her face would soften sometimes when my brothers and I coaxed for a story at bedtime, and her cheeks glowed when the postman brought letters from Scotland; but really smile? It was as though all the smiles in the world had been used up and there were none left for my mother or my father.

As the doll house took shape, visitors dropped in to exclaim over it. "It's nearly finished," my mother said. But I had watched my father working on it for so long that I had ceased to believe it would ever be finished and I had all but forgotten that it was to be mine when it was done.

I imagined it forever in a state of construction; always another bit to be added, another piece of carving to be placed just so, another dab of paint to brighten another corner and another and another until all the time in the world was gone. Father cut little shingles for the doll house and painted them red. The walls were of white stucco (made from the chicken gravel) and there were tiny glass windows and hinged sides that opened to reveal six rooms. Each room was complete in almost every detail from painted livingroom carpet to minute wooden door knobs and a flight of varnished stairs that led from the front hall to the bedrooms above.

Father was at the elevator the day Mrs. Chandler and her friend came to call. He had put some finishing touches on the tiny kitchen and the ladies stood peering in at it. I showed them the little kitchen sink he had carved, with the miniature faucets and the small black dots for the drain. A blue hot-water tank stood on three tiny feet in the corner and he had begun to paint a blue and white patterned linoleum on the floor, each diamond shape a masterpiece of precision.

"Hmph," Mrs. Chandler sniffed as she straightened her back. She tossed her head in the direction of our kitchen where mother had gone to make tea. "He'd be better occupied fixing a decent piece for his own wife," she whispered to her friend. "Have you seen the floor in there?"

Helen Mulligan (Manitoba Stories, Queenston House Publishing)

GEORDIE MACMURDO BIDES HIS TIME

Jules looked up as Geordie and Gavin entered. “Your coach cancelled practice.”

“Darn it all,” Geordie, the team’s captain, said. Then he had an idea. “Maybe we’ll play a little shinny.” The players who had arrived before him immediately endorsed the suggestion. More boys soon showed up, filling the building to overflowing. At about five to eight, Geordie’s nemesis, Dugald Campbell, walked into the shack. He was wearing an adult-sized Toronto Maple Leafs jersey over his suede car coat.”

“Where is the coach?” Dugald demanded to know.

“He cancelled practice,” someone said.

“Why wasn't I told?”

“It just happened,” was a reply. “We're going to play shinny.”

Dugald walked over to where Geordie was sitting. “Move, MacMurdo.”

“*Arrêtez,”* Jules said. “He was there first.”

Dugald gave Jules a look of utter disdain. “People like you don’t tell me what to do.”

Donnie MacTavish, the undertaker’s kid, came to the rescue. “I have my skates on, and I’m ready to go. You can sit here, Dugald.”

Dugald stared at Geordie. “Just stay out of my way.”

Now someone called out, “Hey, Dugald. What’s with the jersey?”

“My dad bought it for me at Maple Leaf Gardens. He saw the Leafs play there.”

“The room went silent. Everyone on the team was a Leafs fan, and Maple Leaf Gardens was their hockey shrine.

Dugald drank it all in for a few moments before saying, “Yeah, it's great to have a dad like mine.” He looked at Geordie again. “I suspect you'd be happy just to have a dad.”

The other members of the team new Dugald was a jerk, but he got away with it. His father owned the local quarry, and he was rich. Geordie's dad was dead, and his mother struggled to make ends meet. The fellows also knew Dugald envied Geordie because he was a far better hockey player, a sentiment Dugald would never acknowledge.

When the players departed the shack and walked the ten feet to the rink, Geordie saw Dugald waiting by the gate. Dugald was a head taller than him and twenty pounds heavier.

“No showing off today, little man,” Dugald said. Geordie saw the look in Dugald’s eyes and felt a shiver.

The first order of business tonight was for the team’s five rookies to shovel off the snow that had blown onto the rink during the day. When they were done, Geordie led the players in their warm up drill. They were soon skating in a jumble, round and round, laughing and jostling one another, but there was one hockey player who didn't join in the fun . . . Dugald skated by himself, seldom taking his eyes off Geordie.

Shinny is a freewheeling hockey hybrid where all the skaters are on the ice at once, and nobody wears protective equipment. Before the game started, there was a brief meeting to discuss the rules. It was agreed the nets would be turned backward, and a goal would only count if the puck rebounded off the end boards. The hockey sticks were then piled at centre ice, randomly divided to select the teams, and the game began.

The boys kept their faces warm by pulling down their toques and wrapping their scarves tightly around the lower halves of their faces. They looked like frosty Bedouins, and their scarves were soon caked with ice formed by the condensation of their breaths.

Within half an hour Geordie had banked in four goals, twice after sweeping by Dugald Campbell. After the fourth goal, Dugald shouted, “If you guys can't stop him, I will.”

Geordie won the next faceoff and sent a hard pass to Gavin. He began to accelerate, the wind biting his face and cold air filling his lungs. At full stride and bearing down hard on Dugald, Geordie glanced over his shoulder. He was looking for a return pass but, bang, a collision, a flash of pain, and Geordie somersaulted to the ice, his right leg bent in an unnatural way. The pain was excruciating.

The other players skated over to where Geordie lay in a heap, and Gavin knelt to slip a folded scarf under his head. Everybody seemed to be saying something -- Geordie wasn't sure what -- but he did hear Dugald’s distinct words: “You're never going to beat *me* again.”

Tom Goodman (Geordie MacMurdo Bides His Time, Friesen Press)