

# Crossroads

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## Forward

This is a collection, lovingly offered, of some local poets for you. This is a series of songs. This is not long, but it is meant for you. This is the crossroads of disparate voices. This is meant to be fairly rough in our formatting choices, but not in the content within. This is meant for mulling, discussion, & pleasure.

This is nothing more, though certainly nothing less. This is quick so come be with us.

Come listen.

Gratefully yours,  
- The Editors

*This publication unapologetically maintains the equal right of free expression without regard to race, color, religion, sex, gender, national origin, age, disability or genetics.*

*The whole is something besides the parts.*

*Cover art by Liam Wemple*

## Crossroad

Stranger!                      Sorry  
but since we've met walking this road  
by our high-ceilinged halls  
& crawl-space of pleasure  
                    could we wave –  
forgiving ourselves for stalling the other's motions  
of course & having weaved stitches of language  
sewn with passion to warm us – be for one moment  
                    one        before we go keeping on?

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## As We Fell

The sweetest cup of tea we shared  
in seconds  
between sips was more than just  
an evening melody.

Violet along stripes  
complement the floor

the way a kiss hums at night  
the way a song fades behind our room.

September carried gold on the head of a pin

the way silence carried mist  
the way I carried sugar in the palm of my hand  
so as not to taint it.

The years drank the cheapest wine and  
slowed their walks on silent floors.

Their clothes dribbled in casual chords

the way black pianos sound smooth and  
alarmed, the way the sea only reflects violet when  
it is resting above.

The room holds its breath in the space between my

*“Québec”: from kebec,  
taken from Algonquin: “Where  
the river narrows.”*

*Kuujuuarapik-Whapmagastooi.* It's a heavy lettered name. Plosive, it pops like a fish-slap. *Nunavik.* It breaks the shore with a plunge like a wound. But sea wind doesn't bother Alouec. *Québec.* It's kind. *Québec.* I walk the ridge road. There aren't many trees. *Where the river narrows,* gulls and eagles bank in high and arching circles, speckles on a bruise-green sky. *Canada. Inuit.* I think about money. I think about skulls. We're too far north. I don't know why.

*It isn't cold—he spits—until—it hits the ground with a fish-gut splat—that clinks like a goddamn wind chime.*

I see them in the  
Puddled boat hulls—cod, dying  
Fresh and uncounted.

## A Thousand Years Against the Cree

*We fought a war, you know, for all those islands over there. They're on the paved roads, all up that way—see that red-top church? All those stacked-up barrels, blue-walled houses stacked up next to 'em? That's where you put your canoes. They're the ones. He lights a cigarette. They took the Sound and shot at us with arrows. That night we killed them all with prayers. Who knows who won. No one ever goes there now. He spits. It's only bones. But bones have magic too, ya know. I guess it got to be too much.*

Street lamps in the fog  
Color me like egg yolk—black  
Shadow follows me.

I walk the ridge road, tracing the wide arc of the river mouth where it breaks the shore with a plunge like a wound, pouring its cold blood into Hudson Bay. A stone wall rims the coastline, red clay shelves bracing tall and salt-dimmed greystones—gulls and eagles bank in high and arching circles, speckles on a bruise-green sky. There aren't many trees. We're too far north. I think about money. I think about skulls. I don't know why. I wish I thought about red clay shelves and river-mouths and ridge roads and circling birds and I wish I thought of shores as anything more than plunging wounds. I think of Alouec instead. I think about magic. I spit.

fingers  
and does so, effortlessly  
the way the sky gets low at night  
the way two in love tend to speak each others fears

the lovely tradition of learning lonely  
sounds like the sugar I regretfully dropped in  
my hands and its purity left

scars that seemed more like  
blades that took my fingers

the warmth of loss was too thin  
so we learned to listen  
to time,

the way November turned and  
the waves grew black,

the way the lines on my hands only showed  
me one direction

the way my favorite song  
became our favorite chorus.

The air in our room fades.

## An Ordinary Daybreak in September

the world woke up to a gunshot  
again, a blip  
of thunder that tore open  
the dense silence of early dawn  
and sank into the river.  
the echo expanded in the empty sky  
and rolled toward the grey horizon as a cloud  
blood-stained  
thick with feathers.  
the goose flew  
in circles inside the echo,  
blood streaming from a hole  
in its chest and staining the river  
red. the wind  
carried its wail to the other  
side of the world, where a bomb burst  
through the floral  
wallpaper of a family's living room  
and showered their bedsheets  
with glass.

## The Last Known Living Speaker's Survival Manual

I am replete with unkindnesses,  
branches sprouting from my back,  
brambles clinging to my fur. The crows  
are frozen mid-flight, wings outstretched,  
talons still tangled in the thicket of me.  
I have given myself up to a language  
you can never be native to.

My hair grows rank, underbrush threatening  
to swallow my milk-face whole.  
The roots have spread through my trunk,  
buds erupting from my chest, their little green lips  
pursed in pleasure. I have always hurt so selfishly--  
I am thinking of the vines flossing between my teeth,  
spilling over my lips in a parody of sickness.  
Of the way something red and jagged unfurled in me  
on seeing the smooth white scars on a stranger's arm,  
little tally-marks of some private accounting.

The sweetgrass spraying from my ears and nostrils  
is federally protected, as if regret could stave off extinction.  
Yet every day a language collapses into silence.  
My body devours itself in dragon's mouth and dogwood.  
I am the kind of wilderness they used to call "unforgiving."

Perhaps this jungle we traverse is a kind of inheritance.  
I think I am learning to be kind. This, too, is a type of survival.

## Un-Mother

*a partial Golden Shovel after Gwendolyn Brooks*

So much depends on the accident of birth (I  
know this). Cleft palate. Club foot. I have  
so much to be thankful for. I heard

of a woman dunked in the Dead Sea, head first, in  
her father's arms. He hoped it would cure the  
palsy. I cannot fault him for this. Our voices

bend towards light like crooked trees. What fingers of  
pain are legible, we form into sentences. The  
rest of it? It pulls breath from the body like sudden wind.

The list of my homespun remedies is the  
list of my failures. The Victorians believed the stoic voices  
of their doctors: with strengthening, the deformed spine of

a child could be straightened. And what of my strength? My  
secret moonlit exercises, sit-ups by the dim  
light of an alarm clock. I have never killed

or given birth. When I think of the children  
I could bear, I think of their dirty blond hair.  
I wonder what bodies I will bequeath them.

## Waxing

the moon is tipped  
over tonight, teetering  
on its edge,  
its angle so sharp  
an exhale of wind would spill  
its light. it would pour  
into the sky and drip  
down the horizon,  
past the distant stars  
and into the trees,  
where it would pool  
in their crowns and stream  
down their trunks  
toward the water,  
staining the lake  
golden.  
the fish would choke  
on moonlight  
and when a fisherwoman plucked  
one out of the dark  
water before dawn,  
its slick, golden  
body quivering  
at the end of a hook,  
she would think  
she had caught  
the sun.

## Electric Lady J

See you       stop    & say  
get them spry hands       by that thigh on  
         up    to shock my keys & mouth  
mop around in music       pucker up -  
         we circuit on the floor humming  
silver rimmed & shining –  
         Come       clench pound & pluck as you will.  
I inhale each breath  
         regardless  
to taste & dance your hips –  
         & in the course       all vibration cracks  
skin chars & flakes  
         electrifies  
                 disintegrates

## My Father Is a Fish

My father is a berry smoothie on Sunday.  
My father is in a casket I held, his brothers  
  
linked arms in the aisle. My brothers are air,  
my father is a brain tumor, my sister  
  
is sun peeking out behind a cloud  
there far too long. My mother prodded us all.  
  
My father is a tattoo on my upper arm,  
and he always puts butter on his toast  
  
before jam, especially on Church Sunday.  
My father is a fish, who lay out in the hot sun.  
  
I sat there hoping he might spring to life.



## I Found It Under a Rock

I threw stones into the ocean, as a child, my cousins on either side.  
But if you press against a crab's hole, he might peek out the same  
way I did when I was seven. Waves have a way of rushing through  
my ribcage. But, they go back into the water sometimes, too.

My father taught me to cast a rod to catch the freshly born bluefish,  
they still fought as babies. My mother said I never cried in the  
corner. People hate Narcissus, what's the big deal?

The world seems too clean. There was this book, there was this  
book, there was this book. How many words did that bluefish  
bubble out before he flopped onto wood slats?

There was this fish that sang the blues in my father's kitchen. I  
pressed hard into the sand until one day, very slowly, out slipped my  
own gravity.

## Even the Desk Says to Go

"My friend    nobody    wants this. So you should now  
just put it away    even though I'm your desk & friend  
          I'm going    to be frank:    rubbing the dirt  
on your shirt    you outside could be more    fringed  
round in truth as you lie impressed of the velvet grass."

"Cut out the spoils    of being    crisp today & concrete  
& needing    heavy-moist things dried up & refrigerated.  
          Don't worry so much    unlike me    you see  
you can go    elderberry meadows    hell if you wanted    Go!  
          Sow! Sow of yourself! Sting in the naked air!"

"I! - I never have seen! not thru all the stackfulls of leaves  
a Tree let alone    branches & twigs    shining sound  
          sustaining more than any single chord of fruits  
(well in my view)    root & sprawl I'd miss.  
& how many leaves of grass are your lawn?"

"You don't have one!    But see!    Do you see?  
See    how it looks? Look    how it ripples?  
          Isn't it righteous    how it just scratches your nipples?  
& how many lines scratch you in a day?  
          Go.    I bet you can't count them."

## In Sickness and in Health

She had started to stiffen,  
the joints on her hands locking  
into place, grating out anthems of old age  
when she pushed,  
so he learns to paint her nails for her, bottles  
of pearlescent pink and purple lined up on the table  
like her own personal salon as he takes her palm in his and blows  
spring gusts on her drying fingers until she whoops  
with laughter, forgetting the ache underneath—  
and for a moment, with their hands clasped like this,  
her voice chiming like church bells,  
he could almost think the ring she wears  
gleaming in the kitchen light  
is new.

I stand knee-deep in saltwater as a great white tunnels  
toward me like Calypso, my odyssean body hanging  
loose  
in carnage. Nearby, a man swims ten feet away and smiles  
and this does not end with people.

The surf shop sells shark teeth for cheap for macabre necklaces,  
razor edges bumped like a plucked, headless chicken.  
I've always wanted to surf but feared the shape of my body  
contour against the board and how it mimics availability  
like my body walking down the street. But  
I said this does not end with people.

## The Apple Didn't Fall Far and Neither Do Teeth

As a four-year-old, I was quick on the uptake  
to learn the stingray shuffle.

My mom was once stung, and this may be the second experience  
I didn't want to have in common.

Feet always stay in contact with wet sand,  
moving forward one at a time like Armstrong beyond universes.

This is the trick: scare what scares you.

I have this habit of letting people walk on me  
and this does not end with people.

At Beer Can island, I found shark teeth scattered  
on the shore like litter, bits of washed up bone  
dark blue and sharp as fractured plastic.

I've seen the exhibits. Megaladon's maw open taut  
like an airplane door hanging by the hinge.  
Perpetual display of hunger. In South Florida Museum,  
kids step inside the mouth and get their photographs taken,  
torsos the length of one tooth. Sitting on jawbone,  
I am two parts lab experiment and one part understood.

I am scared of big things like coldblooded swimmers  
and drunk nights. In my dream,

## On the Last Morning

Cards encase the refrigerator, a swarm of moths  
with pen-etched wings, get-well messages both futile  
and kind. He'll pin them up as long as he can,  
until he needs to hang sympathies.

Time had cycled faithfully with the tides of her breathing,  
but one has finally begun to frost over,  
suspending the two of them together in purple daybreak,  
in the lines of her morphine drip.

He runs his thumb over her blue-tinged knuckles,  
knows there's a word for it, this drawing-in,  
but all he can think is that the color's fading out of her,  
that the sunrise is leaving her behind.

All he can think is *please stay*,  
even as the stutter in time fractures, amber breaking  
the horizon line as her breaths ease when she tells him  
"*It's okay to let go.*"

[illegible]