

PLYMOUTH
SUNDANCE

Four years past his death, I'm finally
letting go of my father's car,
the Plymouth Sundance, lemon to end
all lemons. It's sat in the driveway
these last two years, a raspberry-coloured
monument to how emptiness
creates such a large space, how
a shrunken old man was replaced
by a hulk of rust and gleam,
and no-one complained that one
state was less than another. He stood
against the elements, the neglect,
without a peep of anarchy. Night
after night, a dog's afterlife, his tires
sinking into asphalt like dinosaur bones.
The only trouble was when his brakes
seized as he was being towed out
into the street. But that could be fixed
with a few harsh bangs. *Good as new*,
the next owner will claim, knowing
nothing about the past.

Bought when he was almost eighty,
this was my father's first new car.
My mother had forgotten who
she was and had lost the rights
to a thrifty opinion. He slipped out
to the dealership alone, not
wanting me to see him agree
to everything: the rustproofing,
the various fleecings, the extended
warranty. But then he drove directly
to my place, shiny as a wax
raspberry, showing off the fold-down
back seat and the air conditioning
at the flick of a button. Toyota
man myself, I wrinkled my nose
like some gruesome *Bewitched* impression
and forced him to beg me
to take the wheel. Driving shame
around the block, meanly empowered,

morphing into Captain Intolerance.
We both knew a car was never just
a car, Freud and son. I called him gullible,
a wrench blow right between his eyes.

When I wrote the cheque for my used
Camry, I forgot for a moment
how to spell my last name. Power
locks, power speakers, rooftop window,
all those braggart toys. *Something else
to go wrong*, I heard him say
when I rolled home and parked beside
his carcass. But I wouldn't let him
see me twitch, fit myself into a snug grip
and polished the door with my thighs
as I walked past. The trick isn't
knowing anything, but acting it out
in convincing little scenes.
I'm lost when it comes to getting
from one question to another.
Maybe I should stick to cabs, or
simply walk away. Now that he's
finally gone, I can't even ask
him what's always going wrong.
Instead, I'll continue driving
into distances as if they were
red stars on a map. Looking for
Plymouth Sundances I can tailgate.

Barry Dempster

I GOT YOUR NOSE!

I almost died in Japan. One afternoon I sat at my desk preparing lessons for the next day while trying to block out the busy staffroom chatter. Nakamura, the physical education teacher, passed behind me with his usual grunt; he was broad shouldered and had a little pot belly that rolled over the waist of his track pants. His face was very round and he had a goatee made of just a few whiskers on his upper lip and some on the tip of his chin. The thing that made him look most ominous was his constant furrowed brow. It was hard not to laugh because at times it seemed as though his grumpiness was all an act. Every morning all the teachers would greet each other with a happy, *Ohayo gozaimasu* good morning but Nakamura would just grunt out a slang shortened version, *Ouss* which made him sound like a bull about to charge.

When Nakamura passed my desk for the third time, I knew something was up. 'Jimu-san' I turned slowly in my chair to look at him. He was standing with his feet close together, almost touching and was looking down at a piece of paper. I had never seen him look so nervous.

'Jimu-san, aiyu wantu you preezu . . .' His face started to turn red. Frustrated he grabbed a passing English teacher, Ms. Takagi, and grunted some Japanese phrases to her.

'Jimu-san, Mr. Nakamura would like for you to go to his home tomorrow, Saturday, to teach his girl children English. He will pay you. He will meet you at the train station at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Okay for you?'

The whole time I never took my eyes from Nakamura and because it was the only time I had ever seen him squirm, I agreed to do the job. He nodded and gave me a little bow. I turned back to lesson planning and felt a bit of sweat in my lower back as I remembered the day Nakamura invited me to practice kendo with the school kendo club.

It was 2:30; I had just finished my last class and was looking forward to a steaming cup of green tea. I sat at my desk for a while looking deep in to the tea, feeling the steam hovering around reminded me of fresh cut grass. I felt Nakamura's hand drop heavy on my shoulder like a wet brick.

'Jimu-san, you kendo?' I didn't really know what he meant until I received another ordered translation.

'Mr. Nakamura wants for you to play kendo with the kendo club. He is the coach.'

Nakamura started nodding and grunting under his breath. He grabbed me at the elbow and pulled me up to my feet. It was like I was being levitated. That was the first time I felt his strength. Two students appeared suddenly. Nakamura pointed at me and barked some commands at them. They bowed and smiled motioning me to follow.

The next thing I knew I was in a kendo storage closet in the gymnasium getting undressed with a bunch of Japanese junior high school boys. Laughing, all the boys

guided me through putting on all the kendo equipment. After helping me on with the big black *hakama* skirted pants and the little blue jacket they opened the closet doors and shuffled me into the middle of the gymnasium. All the students knelt down in lines, bowed and started to put on bandanas and helmets. The same two students who escorted me helped me on with mine. The helmet has horizontal strips of metal across the face and eyes. They tied on my hard chest plate and helped me with my leather gloves. With all this dress up I felt like a big Ken doll.

One of the older students, I was told he was the captain, started yelling out commands and the class broke into lines, holding up bamboo swords and began doing large overhead strokes while hopping back and forward on their bare feet. After doing this until my shoulders and forearms felt like someone had lit them on fire we partnered up and started taking turns whacking each other on our gloved wrists and on the tops of our heads. My head was ringing with every strike and I began wondering how many brain cells I was losing with every hit. I also wondered if the fact that I was probably wearing a junior high sized helmet had anything to do with my pain level.

The students stopped moving, bowed to each other and then quickly lined up on both sides of the small gymnasium. I fell into the ranks and waited to see what the next drill was. Nakamura entered in his kendo uniform holding his helmet under his arm like a motorcycle helmet or like a trophy enemy head cut off in battle. He looked taller, taking broad steps into the middle of the room. He addressed his team as though he was a samurai general who was about to enter a war. His words started low and then grew louder into war rallying tones. The students yelled out the equivalent of, 'Yes, sir!' at the end of each sentence.

Nakamura looked around the room and then yelled out a short command, *Ku-mite!* The students partnered up quickly and started to circle around each other and fight with blistering attacks.

'Jimu-san!' Nakamura called me over as he slipped on his helmet. One of the senior students yelled out to me while fighting.

'Jimu-Sensei, you fight Nakamura-Sensei. Okay?'

We squared off. Nakamura pointed his bamboo *shinai* sword at me. His eyes became a thin black line between the metal of his mask. I tried to remember any of the old samurai movies I had seen and held my sword up in a menacing way. Nakamura started yelling in fierce rising crescendos. He raised his sword up and brought it down hard on my head. I felt my knees go weak. I noticed that the other students had stopped fighting and were standing around watching. I stumbled back a bit and as soon as I regained my balance I attempted to strike back. I raised my sword up and Nakamura stepped to the side and slashed me across the chest. I tried another attack and managed to tag him on the edge of his wrist. This lucky attack made Nakamura furious. His eyes widened and he came down again heavy on my head. This time my legs gave out and I fell like a sack of rice. I didn't want to give up. I didn't want to give Nakamura the satisfaction so I got up as quick as I could. It was a bit awkward in all that gear but I managed to stand up pretty fast. My resolve sur-

prised Nakamura. He yelled out another command, *Yame!* All the students faced their partners and bowed. I faced Nakamura, swaying a bit side-to-side, feeling kind of queasy, and bowed never taking my eyes off him. I saw the formation of a slight grin through the slits of his helmet.

Stepping out of the station I could almost see the deer of Nara Park. Right in the centre of the city stood a park that was home to hundreds of free roaming deer. It is said that a Shogun was so fond of the animal that he wanted them in the park and since then they have never left. The most astonishing part is that they are truly Japanese deer. After you feed them they look at you and bow their heads in appreciation.

Nakamura was already waiting in his car right in front of the station when I arrived. I opened the door, bowed like a deer, and sat down.

‘*Konnichi wa*, Nakamura-san.’

‘*Ouss*, Jimu-san.’ He pointed to the backseat where his two little girls sat anxiously waiting to see the strange foreigner.

‘Hello. My name is Jim.’ The car erupted with squealing laughter.

We arrived at the large apartment complex. Walking up the stairs the girls didn’t stop giggling and pointing at me. Nakamura’s wife opened the door right on cue. Her husband nervously pointed at her.

‘My wife-u. Junko-san.’ She welcomed us with a big smile.

‘Hello.’ Her English and general happy demeanor caught me off guard. I was expecting someone as sullen and rough as her husband.

The low table was already set for supper; laid out with little plates, chopsticks, beer and glasses. Nakamura slapped me on the back.

‘Eat!’ He pointed to the table like a traffic cop and then raised the same finger shaking it between us in a ‘no-no’ fashion. ‘Eat afta English. Okay?’ He yelled something at his girls and motioned me to sit down. I sat on a floor cushion and Nakamura’s daughters started to crowd around me laughing. They each tried to jump up on my lap and I began playing with them. I pinched their noses in between my index and middle finger pretending to pull them off. I pushed my thumb between my fingers and waved it at them.

‘I got your nose! I got your nose!’

The room stopped. All sound stopped. The two girls looked up at me mortified. Their mouths hung open slowly and the older one looked as though she was about to cry. Nakamura yelled something at them and they disappeared down the hall. I tried to look in the kitchen at Junko but she kept her back frozen towards me. Nakamura pulled me up to my feet and walked me to the table where he pushed me back down to sit. That’s when I noticed the swords — two beautiful samurai swords hanging from a stand on the wall. They were in shiny black hilts and the handles were carved in great detail. Nakamura was looking at me with the muscles in his face hanging heavy. He dropped his eyes and quietly started mumbling under his breath. It grew louder until his hand came up and he slammed it hard against the

table. The whole room shook. I felt my heart pounding up into my throat. Nakamura looked at me and locked his eyes with mine. I didn’t flinch. He turned his head and looked at the swords. I imagined him jumping up, in two steps reaching for the swords and the sound of my head rolling off my shoulders over the table. He mumbled something deep from the pit of his throat. That’s when Junko spoke.

She yelled one word that I thought could shatter glass. *Dame!* She glided quickly into the living room as though she was wearing skates. She grabbed me at the elbow and guided me down the hall and out the door. Outside she stood in front of me looking down squeezing her hands nervously.

‘Jimu-san’, Her voice sounded so soft and gentle as if I was her young son who had been caught stealing. ‘I am very sorry.’ Her English stunned me. ‘My husband is a very proud man.’ She paused as though she was thinking about what to say. ‘I think he did not understand you. You also maybe didn’t understand Japanese meaning.’ She raised her hand, which was shaking, and spread her index finger and middle finger into an upside down peace sign as I did before pinching her daughters’ noses. ‘This in Japan means woman.’ She then showed me her thumb ‘This in Japan means man.’ She pinched her thumb between her index and middle finger, like I did before. ‘This in Japan means sex.’

Domenico Capilongo

MOUCHOIR

At the end of that day, my mother peeled
my striped long-sleeved jersey up over my head,
and my hankie fell out of its cuff, lay folded
on the floor, white cotton moment. How the mind
puzzles at its first experience of shame,

how precisely constructed this shame was.
Compliant, observant, unfailing, my mother
stashed a handkerchief in my pocket and sent me off
each morning to *l'école*, where all the pupils held up
their *mouchoirs* for morning approval.

When I couldn't find mine that morning
my protests were dismissed, and I was made to
stand on a chair at the front of the classroom.
The nun tore a square from the newspaper
meant for the wood stove

and fixed the paper diamond-shape
with a large safety pin onto
the front of my overalls. No one
could speak to me that day.
This was France, this was 1952, the war

and its severities still fresh. Marked
like some kind of collaborator, I stood
on the chair all day, and at recess and lunch,
alone beside the high courtyard wall,
ignored or pitied by my classmates,

compliant. It took the full day
for my empty-faced puzzlement to bloom
into an anger singeing my gut and then slowly
to subside, the unowned shame
seeping into me. Precisely constructed. Truly mine.

Maureen Hynes

DRAGGING THE RIVER

combing the bottom of the dark river for a disappearance a wrinkle on water and
then an
absence
the raking of water of the unseen and hauling up the detritus of town wheels ropes
and
rust

dragging the river for the child lost abruptly in the river's door and in the heat of a
july
afternoon
could there be such vast want to be water to rock in that light where it bends and
turns
gold?

whose hand in the water whose handkerchief and slow grief whose flip-flops covered
with sand?
did anyone see footprints filled with child did someone reach and touch a warm
shoulder
turning?

horses plod along the bank raising dust and sweat they haul the invisible load and
voices
call
calling for the bride in her black dress beneath the poplars or walking away from
the
willows

raking through water fish and reeds raking for a body rolling it over and over until
it's
hooked
tines tearing through clothes and grasping time rolling forward into the past and
rolling
on

moon reaches into water and tempts us but does not reach deep enough voices
growing
away
I had a boy she says I had a son and for a moment that is all for a moment she lives
with
that

Patrick Friesen

**HARBOUR
SEALS**

They're driftwood, or worn buoys —
now as they stand up out of the water
and stare towards the shore, they're living mineral,
like people with only rudimentary eyes.
And now I see one closer, see it dive,
and realize they're seals. Lifting slicked
black heads, disappearing back down —
they're seals. At this distance, soundless,
though at other times I've heard seals cry:
pure non-human cries that go
to the human bitter root. They're out
of some unknown watery testament
made of their cries, their wavering gentle
screams. Now I see a dozen of them
farther off, sunning themselves on a log boom —
solid blacknesses bathing lazily
in the long late rays. They roll,
all black torso like the mummified
Pharaohs, the immortals of the once-imagined
Egyptian ancestors of the familiar ones,
the Gypsies who flit in and out of sight,
baptizing themselves in the dark nothing
at the savage margins. They roll over
into the water and are gone. Then bob up
new and black, being born again and again
into their blackness. Now I see that same one
swimming close, almost to the shore,
lifting liquid-like black and craning — it comes closer
as if I had whistled it up, asking for it,
and it had come, one of my lost ones,
my Gypsy dead. Seals all I can know now
of any of them. Seals that look out
in insouciant, terrible love — and can only
be other than seals because they're seals.

Russell Thornton

**IF I WERE A
SUGAR
MAPLE**

You would measure my thickness of trunk
to decide just how many wounds
you could safely inflict.
You'd learn to space those wounds
so I wouldn't lose too much sap
and could heal myself year after year
still offering sweetness.
You'd learn to drive in the sharp spile
just deep enough
through rings of my youth
so cuts would knit seamlessly.

If you sometimes feel tempted
to plunge the spile into my heartwood
because our winters seem endless,
my blood frozen and I give you nothing
you'd have the sense to stay your hand,
look down at my carpet of crumpled leaves
for the first green pins of cushion moss.
You'd listen for a woodpecker
tapping my spring
and wait patiently as the deer
that lick my bark
when my sweetness runs.

Donna Langevin