

Rishma Dunlop

Stories From Boundary Bay

The road winds
a black ribbon
through the sky,
herons and cranes gracing
fields of grasses,
hawks on fenceposts
as I return to Boundary Bay
to the open arms of the sea
to the smell of kelp and ocean mists.

I arrive home
weighed down
with briefcase and groceries
stacks of term papers
to grade.
My students write about Romeo and Juliet
blur distinctions between text and film
Clare Danes and Leonardo DiCaprio
new heroes
to make their hormones surge
Shakespeare has never been so sexy
proclaim the slogans on posters
homage plastered on walls of
teenage girls' rooms

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The Boundary Bay girls,
my daughter Rachel
KaseyBrookeSaraHaley their names inseparable
multisyllabic, all for one
the phone rings incessantly

they are playing
in the front yard
petals strewn across the pathway
Haley in a veil of white sheeting
another the groom, the taller one
enactments of the marriage script

sometimes they do funerals

Daughters of feminists
spend hours
in front of mirrors
agonize about hair and nails
they pore collectively
over *Teen* and *Seventeen* magazines
wearing Tommy Girl and fragrances from The Gap:
Grass, Earth, Dream, Heaven
Letter from Colleen
her mother died of cancer.
Years ago
LorieColleenDebbie and I
spent summers reading *Seventeen* magazines
on hot days by the
Beaconsfield Swimming Pool

I see Colleen's mother finishing
the pale yellow hem
of her daughter's prom dress,
pins in her mouth
tenderly, tenderly
touches the corsage on her wrist

Today in Boundary Bay
the young girls gather
fluttering moths
to watch Brooke's older sister Nadine

prepare for the graduation dance

She is beautiful, glowing sleek
a slip of a dress-deep violet
hair upswept
the breathless waiting
for a young boy to pick her up
corsage her
time stands still
in the amber air of summer
such a bathing of expectancy
luminous promise
with its burden of radiance

and all around us
marriages fail
middle aged men leave their wives
for younger women
middle aged wives take lovers
or find basement apartments
Haley's mom left her second husband while he was out fishing, Rachel tells me

in the unrest of passion, the disordered lyrics of love
paralysis and fear threaten to choke
the neighbourhood houses
at night the sounds of the sea, the tidal winds
mingle with the mooing of cows in farmers fields,
raccoons scavenging, stealing goldfish in backyard ponds,
coyotes howling in the woods
and in our gardens
pampas grasses whisper
stories trapped in women's mouths

we lift each other up
when our knees buckle
underneath us
our children's needs
relentless magnets
anchoring us to the earth

I sit by the window
watching the night sky
the mother writing poems of girls

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the art on white sheets like love
this one will be strong and fierce
this one will be tender and she will sing
shaping angels, prophets for the world
such terrifying beauty

in the gaps between my words
my daughters and their girlfriends slip
trying out to be cheerleaders
painting their fingernails blue and green
dreaming of bouquets from lovers
romancing the script.