“faraway.” Then the job in Montreal had come up.

She knows she should start “investing” in the here and now. She is struck, as usual, by the emptiness of her large living room … a white leather sofa, a small table and the TV. Perhaps she should give a dinner party for people from work. That would mean buying a dining room set, unpacking her good dishes and finding her tablecloths. Whom would she invite and why, and could they even begin fill this vacuum?

She doesn’t want small incremental measures of adjustment. What she wants is to scream, her voice piercing the sound-proofed walls. “Fools, hypocrites,” she wants to shriek. “You with your prayer rugs, crucifixes, jargon and silences! What do you really know about human suffering? What do you know about having to pick through shards and stones to construct a life you don’t want to live?”

Irene wants her thin hair to fly in unruly clouds around her blood-suffused face, her veined eyes popping through facial distortions. She wants to be the very cartoon of a “Crazy Lady.” She wants to scrawl a letter in oily black ink, revealing to Phil the ugly but true passions that coursed through her during their many dispassionate conversations: “How do you think I feel seeing what we built up together going to a bunch of eunuchs in Oregon?”

She won’t write to Phil. She knows he would not answer. His silence, she comprehends, will accompany all her brave efforts at living. It will be there for the duration.

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A. Mary Murphy’s poetry appears earlier in this volume.