

said if she had to spend all day with Grandpa anyway, one of them would end up a patient in the hospital instead. Grandpa Sparks doesn't work 'cause a bomb hurt his legs in World War II and now his legs are pretty much useless. He has to walk *extremely* slow with his hands groping the wall. Usually he sits at the kitchen table smoking behind a newspaper when we're here, or he talks with Dad, or he takes a nap. He doesn't leave the house much. He says he doesn't give a good goddamn about nobody anymore anyway. Most of Grandpa's best friends and two of his four brothers died in the war. Grandma said he came back miserable and has been in a bad mood ever since, which was a rotten deal for her 'cause that wasn't the man she married before he went off.

Grandma and Grandpa Sparks say mean things and swear at each other all the time, but it's funny. Mom hopes her and Dad don't end up talking to each other the way Grandma and Grandpa do. Dad thinks Mom's mom and dad, Grandma and Grandpa Beale, have brainwashed my mom into thinking the way she grew up was normal, where nobody swears and everyone lives in La La Land and happy endings. Grandma and Grandpa Beale live on a farm about a half hour away from Grandma Sparks, but we're usually too busy to go see them.

Mom lifts our bikes out of the trailer and sets them against the house where the foundation meets the white siding. Dad backs the trailer out and they drive over to the new house to work.

Our whole family builds houses. Grandpa and Grandma Sparks built their house in the late forties when Dad was a baby. Because it's two storeys, it was probably harder to build than the bungalow Dad's working on now. Dad showed me ancient black and white pictures of them building their house: happy Grandma holding a two-by-four stabbed in a dirt hill, one foot on a cinder block—like the captain of a ship, pictures of Grandpa and his brothers sitting on the roof against blank white skies, cigarettes in the corners of their grins, grey skin, work pants, and black boots, a picture where the house was just wrapped in tar paper: a two story black block face with its neck stuck in dirt, dark empty windows for eyes, and the front door-hole like an open mouth saying "awww." There is one picture of the finished house. The massive oak at the edge of Grandma's lawn looks the same in the pictures as it does today. The maples we climb in now were scrawny babies. Trees have to survive through anything.

Michelle Hartai is inspired and supported by her family (even the strange ones), and resides in Guelph. This novel-in-progress is the focus of her current work in the Humber School for Writers Correspondence Program.

CLAUDIA COSTA

Do you remember?

Do you remember
How cold it was that night?
I do.
I could see my breath float away
The air frosty.

I remember the ground,
How hard it was.

I remember the speed,
at which your truck slammed
into my bike
The speed at which,
helpless, a rag doll,
my body was propelled.

Do you remember?

I remember the sounds:
The crunch of
metal hitting metal,
intertwining battling rams.
Bones snapping like twigs.

The sound of my voice.

Did you hear me?
My desperate whimper
The way it echoed
Down the canyon of that street?

Maybe you hear it now.
Only it sounds more like
The pounding of a gavel,
Minimal justice.

You may have also forgotten
picking up your keys.
Or how many times
you picked up that bottle.
But you will have plenty of time
to put the pieces together now.

Which is more than I
will ever have a chance to do.

Claudia Costa is a grade 12 student living in the Madawaskwa valley.