

Colleen almost said, "I don't want to be insular. I want to be loved. I want to love. I want to get married and have children, like normal people. Like you." But she felt her throat seize up. Each sentence seemed shadowed as if a parade of perverse imps lurked behind them, refuting them. She'd bent to clip fulva lilies and false spirea, filling two silver bowls, her hands shaking in confusion.

Now, she walks back down the Gratton Street hill to still more music from *Mama Mia*. "Waterloo." She can hear people singing along. She had a few boyfriends in university. She lived with Bruce Bonnycastle her entire final year. He was a great dancer but he was too big for the little apartment. He was always there: talking to her, including her, making plans, asking her opinion, trying to make her come up for air, to be present. She could not think, she could not read, she could not sketch or dream or design in her head. Her brain closed down. For two weeks that spring, she twisted in shame until she understood the extent of the waste, the travesty of the relationship. She was living with him because that's what women did. Women had boyfriends. They moved in with the guy. They were together forever. The thought gave her the horrors and so did the shame at her dishonesty to herself but especially her dishonesty to him.

She broke the news to him after the graduation dance.

Back inside, she slips on her heels, repairs her hair and lipstick. The dance floor is crowded. The single women are jiving up a storm. "Take a Chance on Me," bellow the guests. The same men stand and watch. Why don't they dance with each other, she thinks, get out on the floor and have some fun? It's ludicrous, pitiful, laughable. Just as idiotic as she is. She walks over to her brother Guy on his wall.

"I'd like to dance with you before you go away," she says ignoring his surprise. "Will you do me the favour?" They float out to "Unchained Melody." Guy dances like he skies or plays hockey, with such grace he makes it look easy. Her apricot silk flares around her legs. Her feet in the expensive heels move like delicate leaves caught by the wind. The single women don't dance to the slow music. Chatting and laughing, they head for the tables or the bar. The bride and groom are nowhere around. She hopes she's missed the bouquet toss.

"I caught the garter," Guy says in her ear. "I'm taking it to Kosovo."

"I'll miss you," she says. "I hope the garter brings you a wonderful wife." He laughs. The band segues, speeds into "Dancing Queen." Her mother waves during a complicated step. Colleen decides that later she'll ask her new step-father for a dance.

"Do you want a drink?" Guy says.

"No, I'm going to dance with Posie and the other gals.

Then I'll come over and join you at your wall."

Later, at home in bed, watching the moon top up the garden, she remembers she almost said, *with the other wallflowers*. She's glad she didn't say it. Her body still feels energized but her mind is melting into sleep, forsaking her thoughts about men, about women, about herself.

She thinks about her brother off to Kosovo, the bride's garter tucked into his bag. And she has a new brother-in-law, the handsome Alex. But he's more than a single person, she realizes. Alex's entire family is now linked to hers, tendrils emerging and merging, just as, a few years ago, the numerous kin of her new step-father were slowly grafted on.

Sprawling vines of connections.

She turns over into a happy thought. Her Aunt Joyce is coming to tea tomorrow. She'll pick a special bouquet for the tea table.

The dark yellow lilies called *Fata Morgana* are just moving into bloom.

Joan Baril lives in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

A. MARY MURPHY

words keep bursting out of books

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birds startled into flight
butterflies clouding home from winter
keep the lids of all these books
closed to stop the words from getting out
like all flighted things they know secrets
the elaborate choreography of journey
they settle with their tissue-paper wings
their talons in my heart

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