

# Downtown Eastside Pastoral

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*Matt Kingcroft*

A summer on East Hastings has been nothing  
but heavy light and thick sweat. My body,  
cursed by a doubled skin of scabbed blood,  
rejoices when the sun finally makes its exit,  
pursued by a cloud. The idea of the deluge<sup>1</sup>  
brings a kind of lightness of spirit, and after—  
an alchemy. The blackberries on Glen Drive  
become icons, haloes of water wrapping light  
around acid-pricked blooms. Nested in pavement,  
apples outside our window gain a blush of blood,  
as drops of rain raise their rosy bodies for veneration,  
while a blessing flows over each leaf of Honeycrisp,  
each bud of lilac or ear of lamb. Acorns thunder  
over tarps and tents, and alleys are pockmarked  
by puddles, as sewers swallow rivers of garbage.  
The sun will come again, and all will blanch  
and bleed. Still, I will sing a new song—  
of pickled smells rinsed sweet, neighbours hidden  
together under storm-washed awnings, police  
sirens silenced by heaven's let down.

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<sup>1</sup> "Idea of a deluge" comes from Arthur Rimbaud's "After the Deluge"

# To, From

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*Matt Kingcroft*

Those first months  
after moving away,  
no work for me but  
to think of a life,  
and no visitors either,  
there was a well-trod path  
to the river. A river  
is saturated with good.  
Even as it breaks its banks,  
making human life  
fissure, it is home  
to a commonwealth  
of mercies. At the river,  
a distance in me broke  
like ice floes. I was carried  
from home to home.  
When we return, then,  
and we are met by the same  
grief told backwards,  
I pray another river  
might do the same.

# Cathedral

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*Matt Kingcroft*

We drive twenty minutes north  
to Lynn Canyon, where lichen-licked trees  
stipple the rock and a quickening  
current cuts a trail as salmon sail up  
veils of snow-capped mist. Before the drive,  
we have an argument steeped in self-  
obfuscation and repetition—the same dialogue  
we rehearse anytime we have to travel.  
We arrive, amble out of the car, and pile  
the children onto our backs. Sharp light  
shifts to shadow as trees unfold,  
making patchwork of the sky, freckled sun  
sparking as if on water. We are baptized  
by a priesthood of wood and mycelium. Our heart  
rates steady, despite knowing we will return  
at some point to the car.