

Whisper

La Pincoya holds me like a grandmother and we talk of the past as I sand her teak brightwork. At times her voice drops away as if she forgot what she was about to say. Then I whisper to her how I want a child with the man, so we can raise a family on this little rocking home. Already, each month at the sight of red, the clench of cramps, I calculate the loss of what I've always wanted—a child. Something to set my life's course. I hear *La Pincoya* sigh in the light, a seagull's keel, a far-off buoy bell. I want her to keep speaking, but I'm still coming to understand that life on the water's surface is really a life below what's seen, an unsaid story expanding within the membrane of things.

La Petite Chat Grise

He, with his heavy Québécois accent, says, somewhere in the boat I'll find *la petite chat grise*. My hands reach into the kindling and paper box where she sleeps, our voices lost on her.

I never speak English to this little gray cat.
I never speak French to him.

How do I translate his gray-fur gift to me? A living thing meaning three of us now, meaning this is what he can give.

Should I reciprocate, offer him something that breathes? A hamster, a responsive indoor fern, or the child we occasionally whisper into creation.

I sing to her in French sometimes
La petite minou
qui j'aime beaucoup
using words with which he grew.
I rhyme and sway like a mother urging sleep.

In the evening, he returns and searches the wood box for the little gray cat. He wants to hold her tiny body, stroke her warm coat and padded feet.

I want to stand and say,

Elle est ici
she's here and

What can we give each other?
What lives, untranslated, between us?

I want to stand but I can't because this small gray cat
has wound around herself and settled in my lap.

She's here, I say, my voice half lost in French,
the little gray cat between us.

Clearcut

Have I brought war north? Because newspapers in Canada call it the *War in the Woods*. But Friends of Clayoquot Sound, the local environmental organization, call it *peaceful protest*, or simply *Clayoquot Summer*. Every day for three months a crowd gathers to block the Kennedy River Bridge, which leads to untouched old growth forest. It's the bridge to a day's hard work or massive profits for some. For others, it's the bridge to sacred forest or unique biosphere research. When I'm not sheepishly booking whale watching trips or failing to sell t-shirts, I drive myself and whoever can fit in the Nova to the blockades. Or I drive to a gash of burned out clearcut along Highway 4. There, I pick up or drop off protestors living at Peace Camp—a charred stumpland locals always referred to as the Black Hole.