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**BRENDA  
CRAIGDARROCH  
DOESN'T CARE  
IF YOU READ  
THIS BOOK**



**TORSTEN SCHOENEBERG**

## Praise for *Brenda Craigdarroch Doesn't Care If You Read This Book*

Wry humour, keen observation and memorable characters make Torsten Schoeneberg's writing unforgettable. You'll laugh and be left wanting more.

JEREMY LOVEDAY,  
*Victoria City Councillor, Founder and Director  
of the Victorious Voices Youth Arts Festival  
and spoken word poet*

Brenda Craigdarroch is likely a relative of Anne Shirley (of Green Gables fame): a witty philosopher, a naïve daydreamer and a bit of a brat. Brenda does not have adventures in the world; rather, she is an adventure that happens *to* the world. I would like to sit down with her for tea and conversation about her views on stinging insects and lost objects and snooping through strangers' houses — partially because she is such an intriguing character and partially because I want to punch her.

Torsten Schoeneberg's narrative poetry flows as easily as warm conversation: thought-provoking, relatable, punctuated with surprising moments of laughter. This collection is a delight to both read and listen to, and is recommended for reading aloud amongst friends over tea or wine and witty banter.

SUSAN CORMIER,  
*Producer, Vancouver Story Slam  
and The Short Story Show podcast*

*Brenda Craigdarroch Doesn't Care If You Read This Book* but I did and found the whimsy of it startling and humourous, not in a laughing-out-loud way, but in a way that Brenda would deeply appreciate, a kind of slightly odd interior chuckle at irony and happenstance at memory and forgetting.

Torsten Schoeneberg offers this curious and wonderful collection of stories in verse form steeped in observations about life and things ordinary from an unusual vantage. Brenda sees the world her own way. Fun to read and worth pondering, even if like Brenda, you don't believe and are always right.

DANIEL SCOTT,  
*Artistic Director, Planet Earth Poetry*



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*Thanks to my wife and daughter  
for accepting Brenda  
as part of our extended family*





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The Word Congress  
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Speak, Easy  
Planet Earth Poetry  
Open Mic Night Brentwood Bay

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Hillside Coffee and Tea

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Also, many thanks to the Vancouver Story Slam (and its offspring, the Short Story Show podcast), organized by Susan Cormier and Bryant Ross and facilitated by the staff at Hood 29, who have introduced Brenda to a very welcoming audience on the mainland.

A chapbook with earlier versions of ten of these stories appeared in 2018. Shout-out to everyone who got a copy: Hold on to it, it might become a collector's item. Not least because it contained little vignettes by Irma Rodenhuis, whose support in this and many other things has been invaluable.

Said chapbook also benefited hugely from help by Kyle Hawke, who since then has worked unremittingly to publish this book. Beyond this, his enthusiasm for subtleties of word order, punctuation and line breaks made him a congenial editor. Paradise would be a place where we could discuss all these things without time pressure.



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# Brenda Craigdarroch Never Believed Them

Brenda Craigdarroch never believed them.  
When they sang songs about the glory of God, in churches,  
before Christmas, in perfect harmony,  
she did not believe them.  
When they posted their philosophical whimsies on Facebook,  
with witty political asides,  
making use of evolutionary theories  
to demonstrate that their latest life decision makes perfect sense  
in what they called a “global context,”  
she did not believe them.  
When they told her that her morning would be  
a *happier* morning  
if she had bought that specific brand of coffee,  
she did not believe them.  
She might drink that specific brand of coffee anyway.

Not believing them was, from a very young age, one of Brenda’s habits.  
She did it quite regularly,  
often several times a day.  
While sitting on the bus, she did not believe them;  
when she was chopping garlic, she did not believe them;  
in particular, she did not believe them when she was having a shower;  
sometimes she strongly not believed them in the middle of a movie,  
or while collecting chestnuts,  
or at the hardware store she used to frequent  
on the first Monday

of each month,  
where she occasionally — not often, but occasionally — stopped in the  
middle of an aisle and paused for a few seconds,  
during which she did not believe them,  
before she resumed her shopping activities for water-resistant caulk  
and metal screws:  
flat-head, pan-head, oval-head, hex-washer-head both slotted and  
unslotted, zinc-plated.  
Brenda liked to screw.

She tried to restrict her strongest fits of disbelief to times when  
she was by herself,  
especially in the bathtub,  
but every now and then a sort of panic possessed her,  
that some person thought *that* she believed them  
because she had not expressed her disbelief, nor acted it out,  
and also,  
even though Brenda by principle assumed  
that all the others did not believe them either,  
she could not be certain of that,  
and the others might actually believe them.  
The assumption that they believed them was not in  
apparent contradiction to most of their actions,  
so maybe,  
she thought,  
actually everyone  
except her  
believed them:  
she was the only one who persistently not believed them.

The ridiculousness of this thought got her over it,  
usually.  
Only three occasions are known wherein Brenda panicked enough  
to let loose  
and forcefully expressed her disbelief to people around her:

One time, when her third boyfriend,  
a programmer of Bengali descent

with Australian citizenship,  
who was always surprised how much she seemed to enjoy sex,  
asked her why she had not taken the garbage out,  
she replied that she had been busy.  
“Busy with what?” he asked.  
“Not believing them!” she yelled,  
and he accepted that and made tea.  
They later broke up for reasons entirely unrelated.

One time, on a bus going up Johnson Street, after seeing a sign  
on a store wall,  
she pulled the cord,  
got off at the next stop, ran back in her boots,  
positioned herself on the street a few metres in front of that sign  
which read

“Our greens, proteins and supplements will help you live agelessly,”  
tried to stop each and every car and, when successful, told the people  
therein what that sign was:  
a fucking lie.

And one time, at the checkout of the hardware store,  
where she had been waiting in line just a little too long,  
she  
somewhat unexpectedly  
started to say

“It is all not true! It is all not true!”  
in a calm but strong, convinced, persuasive voice,  
whereupon,  
somewhat unexpectedly,  
other people in line started nodding their heads, then gleefully began to  
join in, saying

“It is all not true! It is all not true!”  
getting into a kind of rhythm, chanting.  
And even when Brenda had already gotten over her state,  
the customers  
as well as the clerks,  
and an elderly couple who had come in from the street,  
started to modulate certain tunes on the sentence



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“It is all not true! It is all not true!”

going up and down the scale, using counterpoints,  
elaborating the chant into more and more intricate melodies,  
finally reaching a song of perfect harmony,  
while Brenda quietly put her pack of  
*#8 Stainless Steel Pan-Head Phillips Sheet Metal Screw (5 Count)*  
on the counter  
and did not believe them.

# Brenda Craigdarroch

## Once Gave a Jigsaw Puzzle

Brenda Craigdarroch once gave a jigsaw puzzle  
of a Japanese painting  
as a Christmas gift  
to her fifth boyfriend,  
a bitcoin miner from Winnipeg.

The bitcoin miner from Winnipeg loved Japanese culture.  
He explained to Brenda, while putting together the edge of the puzzle,  
how this drawing, and he pointed to the image on the box,  
consisted of only 17 distinct brushstrokes and yet  
showed a clearly discernible monkey staring at the reflection of  
the moon in a pond,  
a composition which was of course open to various philosophical  
interpretations.

However,  
the bitcoin miner from Winnipeg added,  
what predominantly amazed him was the connection of  
simplicity and expression:  
the simplicity of just 17 brushstrokes, expressing a clear but  
multi-valued image.

That is the quintessence of Japanese art,  
the bitcoin miner from Winnipeg explained to Brenda.  
It takes long years of hard practice and training, the bitcoin miner said,  
to achieve the ability to express  
so much  
with so little.

He said there were other drawings, made up of only  
10 or 11 brushstrokes,  
which elucidate elaborate landscapes  
with mountains,  
rivers,  
and cherry blossoms;  
only 10 or 11 brushstrokes, thrown onto the canvas by a master  
seemingly within a couple of minutes,  
but based on years of exercise, meditation and preparation,  
the bitcoin miner from Winnipeg said  
as he was separating the puzzle pieces with grey parts  
from those that were entirely white,  
and Brenda was folding up some of the wrapping paper  
for possible reuse.  
Then she started to help with those pieces that were entirely white.  
The best method she came up with was testing each of them  
against each other,  
seeing whether they fit.  
This was in the old days,  
when bitcoin mining was still feasible as a private business,  
with some expensive but affordable special processors  
whose cooling fans were quietly humming behind the Christmas tree.

After their third date, he had explained his bitcoin mining to her.  
Then Brenda had read all she found about bitcoins on the internet  
in one afternoon, and understood enough to see that  
most questions asked on the bitcoin forums  
were dumb,  
and eventually bought five bitcoins from money  
she originally had saved for Christmas presents.

“There are drawings that consist of just four brushstrokes,”  
the bitcoin miner from Winnipeg said.

“Four brushstrokes,  
conjuring a detailed scene of rural life,  
with a farm and the fallow lands and wet meadows  
and several sheep.  
And a dog strolling at the riverbanks.

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And through one window in the farmhouse, one can see  
the family having tea.

Amazing craftsmanship. Amazing,”  
the bitcoin miner from Winnipeg said.  
Then he recounted that the artist who made that drawing  
had lived in a monastery for 34 years,  
taking a vow of silence  
and eating nothing but three bowls of rice with raw vegetables a day  
and fish on Fridays.  
He had made his brush from a tree that had been grown  
on the south side of a hill just outside the monastery boundaries,  
planted 250 years ago for that exact purpose.  
Eventually the tree was cut down in a spiritual ceremony,  
the best part of it was made into a brush,  
the best ink was prepared and the best canvas was prepared, and then  
within 20 or 30 seconds or so  
but after four days and nights in which the master stared, open-eyed,  
at the canvas,  
he threw that magnificent rural scene on it  
with the family in the farmhouse, and the sheep, and the dog,  
and a flock of birds rising in front of Mount Fuji  
with four brushstrokes.

“That’s fucking amazing, isn’t it?”  
the bitcoin miner from Winnipeg said.

Brenda had managed to connect patches of seven, four, three and  
another four pieces respectively.  
Her boyfriend had finished the monkey and the reflection of the moon.  
Some of the ripples on the pond were still in disarray.  
She really liked him.

Months later, she was quite sad when he followed the path  
of cheaper electricity  
and set off to work on a bitcoin mining farm in Mongolia.  
From there, he wrote Brenda a letter  
in which he enthused about the clear skies at his workplace,  
and related to her that among the miners, after their shifts,  
word went around about a painting,

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made by a 97-year-old hermit  
who lived in a tree in the Hokkaido highlands,  
who on a canvas spun out of leaf fibres,  
with ink made of the blood of a sacred frog  
mixed with abandoned spider webs,  
using his left little toe as a brush,  
had drawn a painting of the forest he had lived in for the last 60 years,  
as well as the sad love story which had turned him into a hermit  
60 years ago,  
in 48 panels,  
with two strokes.

Brenda folded the letter for possible reuse  
and with part of the money in her bitcoin savings  
bought a two-year supply of finest organic rice.

# Brenda Craigdarroch and the Philosophers

Brenda Craigdarroch once submitted an entry  
to an essay writing contest  
held by the Department of Philosophy  
of the University of Northern British Columbia in Prince George.

She got invited to the award ceremony  
albeit it was made clear in the invitation that she would receive only  
an honorary award.

She drove up and sat down in an auditorium next to  
a pale man in a tweed jacket.

The pale man in the tweed jacket was a professor of ethics  
at the Saskatoon College of Trinity and Rye.

He was the winner of the contest  
and told Brenda that he had been flown in, all expenses paid, by the  
philosophy department, which consisted of sixteen people who  
seemed to fill up the rest of the auditorium:

Eight people on the left side  
men with black hair in grey suits  
and women with blonde hair in blue blazers —  
and eight people on the right side,  
men and women in alpaca sweaters  
with somehow unspecified hair colours.

The men in suits  
and women in blazers  
sat upright in their chairs,  
several of them looking at their phones and tablets;

the men and women in alpaca sweaters were mostly hanging their limbs  
over their chairs,  
one squatting on the floor,  
and some of them playing with their genitals.

When the chair of the department, a blonde woman in a blue blazer,  
gave her speech,  
the contest winner listened attentively,  
the philosophers in alpaca sweaters hissed and rolled their eyes,  
and the philosophers in suits and blazers applauded.  
Her speech sounded as if she had recently taken a course in rhetoric  
and was now using the occasion to try out some stylistic devices.

When the vice chair of the department, a man in an alpaca sweater,  
gave his speech,  
the contest winner listened attentively,  
the philosophers in suits and blazers showed each other stuff  
on their phones  
and giggled,  
and the philosophers in alpaca sweaters said  
“Nice one!” and “Right on!”  
His speech sounded as if he had read an article in the *Guardian*  
last night  
or watched some John Oliver clip on YouTube  
and was now using the occasion to recycle some witty bits from that.

What Brenda foremostly learned from the speeches was  
that she must have had misunderstood the contest criteria,  
and her essay  
“How Numerology Upsets Me as a Spiritual Being”  
had received an honorary award even though it did not address  
the actual topic of the contest,  
which seemed to be something about identity politics, art  
and gardening.  
She decided to consider *that* quite an honour, all the more  
since she had composed most of it in her head  
while being held awake  
by the snoring of her second boyfriend

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a poet from Portland  
who referred to himself as 'The Verge'  
in his waking hours.

While Brenda was waiting for the contest winner to give his speech,  
The Verge was at her apartment, working on his epic  
*Mealybugs of California*  
which would get published sixteen months later as  
*The Mealybugs of California*  
with a definite article  
to avoid confusion with a taxonomic standard work of the same title,  
but without definite article.

In ignorance of these future events,  
Brenda listened to the speech given by the contest winner,  
the pale man in the tweed jacket,  
which sounded as if he had put actual effort into it,  
and wherefrom Brenda remembered the remark  
that  
    "Asking questions is a good start, but pointless  
    if one lacks the ability to assess answers"  
which she used several months later,  
in an argument with The Verge,  
albeit in an entirely different context.





# Brenda Craigdarroch Would Not Stop Smoking

Brenda Craigdarroch would not stop smoking.  
She did acknowledge that smoking was detrimental to her health,  
but so is driving around in a car or eating steak,  
and as she would not interfere when people did  
those things which she did not,  
she saw herself having a rightful demand for non-interference  
regarding her tobacco habits.  
Whenever a person told her to stop smoking, she invariably replied  
“Go fuck yourself”  
or,  
if that person happened to be from Seattle,  
“Go fuck yourself, asshole!”  
If somebody tried to criticize her smoking  
via a suggestive question  
like  
“You know that smoking is bad for you, right?”  
or  
“Have you ever considered *quitting* cigarettes?”  
she would always reply  
“Shut up, asshole.”  
However, if a person asked that last question  
in a tone of genuine interest,  
without the implied suggestion to stop smoking, like  
“Have you *ever considered* quitting cigarettes?”  
she replied with a sober  
“Considered, yes; decided against it”

or,  
if that person happened to be from Seattle,  
“Considered, yes; decided against it, asshole.”

Besides the actual joy that smoking a cigarette could give her,  
a joy which faded a bit over the years, like with any hobby  
when it becomes a habit  
and is done too often without real awareness and conscious presence,  
she occasionally found it a very practical excuse to get out  
of a situation,  
like if she had been having dinner at a Greek restaurant with  
her fourth boyfriend  
and there was a party of 23 high school teachers taking up two-thirds  
of the room  
and the five of them sitting closest to Brenda and her boyfriend  
were sharing gossip  
that made one of them cry out ecstatically,  
Brenda would have, with mild complacency, taken the opportunity  
to leave the room and smoke a cigarette.

This one, smoked out in the cold next to a sign with fake Greek letters  
and while several busses passed by,  
she would smoke with an awareness and mindfulness  
which reminded her  
how much she was no longer doing *any* thing with that much  
awareness and mindfulness  
and she'd decide to come back in  
to her boyfriend  
in spite of the frolicking teachers,  
and enjoy the rest of her stuffed eggplant,  
the conversation,  
and later at home the sex with her boyfriend  
much more than she had enjoyed anything lately,  
thanks to that one cigarette in the cold.

Brenda chose her places to eat partly by the criterion of how easy it was  
to get out and smoke there,  
with the exception of a cake place and bakery downtown she

regularly frequented  
even though its owner enforced a strict  
— fair to say: militant —  
anti-smoking policy in and around his establishment.  
That owner was a German immigrant  
who among his loyal customers, who all, including Brenda,  
had a love-hate relationship with him,  
was known as  
'the cake nazi'.

Brenda fell in love-hate with the cake nazi on the day  
when she was having some buttercream cake and suddenly heard  
from across the room

“Are you sure it’s ze processed sugar zat  
makes you feel uncomfortabel at night  
or ze creeping realizashun zat your  
pseudoprogressive hedonist vestcoast lifestyle  
is just as meaningless as evrry uzzer kind of existence?  
Just asking.”

Then and there, Brenda knew that she would come back to the place,  
even though she was not allowed to smoke  
within ten metres of the building.

She felt that a gooseberry cream cake and a hot chocolate would  
cushion her longing for a cigarette anyway and were also  
worthy of relishing  
bite by bite  
with clear consciousness.

At that bakery, there was always a bowl of apples on the counter  
whose purpose was that,

if an uninitiated customer came in and ordered something like

“A vegan blueberry muffin, please,”  
the cake nazi could point at the bowl and say  
“Vant sumsing vegan? Eat an apple!”

Customers were actually free to take an apple.  
There was an assortment of Fuji, Elstar, Braeburn,  
Gala, Ambrosia, Kanzi,

Jonagold, Lady Alice, Spartan,  
Boskoop, Honeycrisp and Golden Delicious;  
and Brenda knew *all* the apples were delicious,  
and so were the cakes,  
which is why a sustaining group of patrons,  
including Brenda,  
kept coming to the place  
and just sat through the occasional yelling one could hear  
from the counter, like:

“You vant vat?!

Dairy-free gluten-free cheesecake?!

Zat's cheesecake vizout cheese and cake!

Eat an apple!”

One day

four teenagers came in and ordered:

“A pumpkin-spiced decaf latte with soy milk,”

“A gluten-free oatmeal cookie, low-carb, no sugar,  
with carob chips,”

“Can I have two-thirds of a banana loaf like that but made with rice  
flour, and some cashew butter on the side, but only with cashews  
in it, please make sure it's not mixed with sesame or sunflower  
seeds, and I cannot eat almonds either,”

and

“A piece of the strawberry cake, but without the crust if it  
contains eggs, and almond cream but make sure it's a non-  
GMO kind, and... do you have kombucha with coconut  
flavour?”

While the staff ushered the teenagers out  
the cake nazi ordered the kitchen to close for the time being  
then proclaimed that

“Zis country is doomed!”

and went on a five-day hiatus.

Each of those five days,  
Brenda stopped by the place,  
observed a growing number of patrons lingering there,

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waiting for it to re-open,  
trading addresses of ersatz bakeries for the time being,  
and exchanging the best insults they had heard from the cake nazi.  
Rumour had it that after what was now called  
the “coconut kombucha incident”  
he had locked himself up in a darkened room  
with two of his own loaves of dark rye bread  
and five gallons of water  
reciting paragraphs of  
Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Immanuel Kant and Hagenbuch  
in order to, as he said,  
“pyoorify” himself  
and be able to bake again  
“viz nusing but bootter, flour, shugar, eks,  
and prrezence of ze mind.”

And Brenda smoked a cigarette or two,  
and invented some new curse words for the city of Seattle  
which she abhorred and despised  
without having a specified reason for that.



# Brenda Craigdarroch's Keys

Each time Brenda Craigdarroch moved out of a place  
— her father's home, the student dorm,  
her sixth boyfriend's house, the apartment on Finlayson —  
she always kept a little something that allowed her  
to access the memories she had of that place:  
A key.  
A door key.  
She kept actual door keys to those places.  
And then sometimes she sneaked into them.

Whereas that was certainly normal and actually wished for  
by her father  
when she moved out of his place at 17,  
it was a bit unusual for the other places.  
Brenda had made it a habit to make and keep  
duplicate keys of every place she moved into,  
starting with the student dorm,  
and even did it for her girlfriend's condo  
where she just stayed for two weeks between moves.  
It gave her a feeling of safety:  
It meant that even though one day she would leave the place,  
she would not entirely leave it.

Of course, she was very careful not to disturb the new inhabitants  
and always made sure they would not witness her coming in,  
staying inside for a while,



and then leaving.  
She was quite good at that.

She took firm precautions not to change  
any of the new inhabitants' arrangements,  
not to move furniture or ornaments  
or even dirty mugs standing around.  
Instead, Brenda often singled out a certain spot in the place  
which presumably was of no importance to the new owners,  
nor had been of great importance to her when *she* had lived there,  
but now had become special to her  
because it had not changed,  
or something about it had not changed,  
and when Brenda was in that spot, she could most easily  
access the memories  
of the entire place  
and her life there.

In the student dorm, that was the toilet.  
In her sixth boyfriend's house, it was a dusty corner  
— far from the kitchen, on the right side of the couch —  
which was not quite reached by the sunlight from the window  
across the room.

When she was in the neighbourhood and could fit in a visit  
while her ex and his current girlfriend were both off to work,  
Brenda sneaked in and squatted in that dusty corner for a few minutes,  
and even though much of the furniture had changed,  
from that perspective, the room looked most familiar to her,  
and she could most easily see it  
as it had been  
when she had lived there.

In the apartment on Finlayson, it was the bedroom closet.  
The three or four times Brenda sneaked in there  
some months after she had moved out,  
she rushed through the narrow hallway,  
dodging the mirror,  
and through the living room with the new paintings and chairs and

distastefully nonmatching colours,  
and headed straight towards the bedroom closet  
and hid in there,  
quietly breathing in  
the bedroom closet smell  
which had stayed just the same.  
Her hiding in there, in the dark,  
was rather convenient one time because the new tenant,  
a small round man whose breathing sounded like constant sighing,  
had suddenly come home early,  
and Brenda, not wanting to disturb him,  
stayed in the closet for about two hours, until he took a shower,  
which opportunity Brenda used to quietly sneak out.

It was surprising that few people ever changed their locks.

The key for the student dorm had had a very visible “do not duplicate”  
written in capital letters on it,  
but she was known at her hardware store as one of the best customers,  
and the young guy working there as locksmith pretended not to notice,  
and instead knowingly smiled at her.

She was a bit taken aback when the lock to her sixth boyfriend’s  
house had been changed,  
apparently on the initiative of his new girlfriend.  
So now she could *only* visit the place,  
and for moments stand in the dusty corner beside the couch,  
on the few occasions when she was actually invited to the house  
for his birthday parties and, later, the baby shower.  
She decided to not take it personally though —  
maybe they were annoyed not by her,  
but by somebody else who had lived there once.

Thinking about that, Brenda started to wonder  
whether she, in turn,  
was having visitors at the place where she was living right now.  
She paid more attention to details  
and after a while figured out

that there were at least two people semi-regularly visiting  
her apartment.

One who could not resist the urge to dust off an old vase,  
which Brenda had found on a shelf when moving in,  
and just left standing there,  
which maybe had not even been theirs, but had now become  
special to *them*

because it was the one thing that had stayed exactly the same for them.  
And one other person who came every Wednesday evening,  
when she was out for her pottery class,  
and took a bath in the bathtub.

Brenda liked the idea and deliberately stayed out longer after her class.

But eventually, some weeks later, when Brenda's pottery class was over  
and she was home on Wednesday evenings,  
the bather now came during the night between

Tuesdays and Wednesdays,  
usually from 2 to 3 am,  
and tried very hard to let the water in as quietly as possible.  
Brenda was usually asleep at that time anyway,  
but when she was not,  
she pretended not to notice,  
and instead knowingly smiled into the dark.

# Brenda Craigdarroch in Buenos Aires

Brenda Craigdarroch dreamed about living in Buenos Aires.  
Not metaphorically,  
in the way that she would daydream about living there  
on her bus commute,  
or would have half-baked plans to move there  
after quitting enough jobs,  
or would mention it as a place to be  
to friends during conversations at housewarming parties,  
but literally:  
Every couple of weeks, in her sleep, she had dreams wherein  
she lived in Buenos Aires.  
Which is remarkable because she had never been to Buenos Aires;  
in fact, Brenda had never crossed the equator in her life  
and had only a vague idea about what Buenos Aires looked like.  
Accordingly, the cityscape she saw in her dreams looked  
rather like Florence,  
which is also remarkable  
because Brenda had never been to Florence either.

So in her dreams  
Brenda would walk the dusty orange hills of Buenos Aires  
in the hot sun  
along the stinking river  
avoiding the mopeds  
now and then being held up by market people  
who tried to sell her screensavers

or jigsaw puzzles with maps of Scotland on them,  
speaking Italian,  
while she could see the dome of the cathedral far off  
in the hazy smog  
of Buenos Aires.

In several dreams  
she arrived on an airplane that landed in a gorge  
between gigantic skyscrapers.  
The airplane went down into the water,  
and Brenda would get off  
onto a beach which immediately turned into a lawn  
(with a decent slope)  
where many people lay on towels and made love.  
In some other dreams, she arrived by train  
or rather on the subway  
in the huge subway station that connected many of her dreams,  
with one connection going to Vienna.  
And two or three times, she just fell from the sky  
and landed on a dusty grey hill with suburban houses,  
and a view of downtown,  
and a milk car going around,  
and there were little garden patches  
and cafeterias  
and the Eiffel Tower  
in Buenos Aires.

Then she would sit in a restaurant  
with an astronomer and her English teacher from grade ten  
and her English teacher would try to tell a joke, but Brenda would focus  
on the astronomer  
mentioning that when she was a kid, she wanted to be  
an astronomer herself  
to which the astronomer replied that  
of course, all the cool kids want to be astronauts  
but the nerdy ones want to be astronomers  
and her English teacher still tried to tell a joke  
in that colourful vegetarian restaurant

with servers dancing sirtáki  
in Buenos Aires.

Or:

Brenda's family was having a hefty argument about  
some religious issue  
out on the street, on a huge avenue actually.  
The debate soon turned into a cake fight  
when the Portuguese navy came in  
with their nuclear-driven sailships  
and reinforced the peace  
in Buenos Aires.

Or:

The earth cracked open  
and all sorts of flowers and plants came up, some of them carrying  
Patagonia outdoor clothes as their fruits,  
and somehow everybody just started to play golf,  
*golf golf golf*  
said one of the car salesmen to Brenda,  
and the head nurse asked  
what's the colour of golf?  
what's the temperature of courage?  
and does snow have corners?  
To which Brenda replied with a warm honest smile  
that stayed with her all through the jungle  
and when the warm snowflakes came down  
and she wrote her postcard,  
she had a clear feeling that golf is blue  
in Buenos Aires.

True, not much in her dreams was faithful to the real Buenos Aires,  
but then again, even if it had been, Brenda would not have known.  
Still

it was always clear, in the clear sense of dreams,  
in the part of dreams where you just know something for a fact  
without it being connected to what you see or sense,  
you just know it

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as if it had been put on one of the title cards in a silent film  
that this was in Buenos Aires,  
that *this was* Buenos Aires  
and golf,  
the sport golf,  
the abstract concept of golf,  
is blue.

# Brenda Craigdarroch and the Dishwasher

Ever since an unspecified traumatic event in her childhood,  
Brenda Craigdarroch lived in irrational fear of dishwashers.  
That was a strange but harmless condition  
during the first years of her adult life  
because she lived in places without dishwashers  
and in the rare case that she  
attended a party  
and the whole party crowd moved to the kitchen  
and the kitchen contained a dishwasher  
she just pretended to have to poop  
and locked herself up in the bathroom  
occasionally checking whether at least one interesting person  
had moved back from the kitchen  
to the nice orange vintage sofa in the living room,  
the dishwasher-free living room.

Also, Brenda was actually able to stay in the kitchen  
for a few minutes;  
her condition was not terribly bad.  
She might even walk past the dishwasher  
and give it a playful punch,  
which looked like one of the funny things *Brenda* would do  
in the eyes of her friends  
like a weird thing *that person* would do in the eyes  
of the people who did not know her  
but which, in or behind her own eyes,



was mostly a test of strength and an attempt to see  
if she had made progress  
so that she might stay around dishwashers one day  
and have  
the *option*  
of living a bourgeois life  
with a house, a car, a husband, two children, a dog and a dishwasher,  
and could stop pretending to have to poop so much.

Indeed, her condition seemed to improve over the years  
which is why she made the decision  
to move in with her sixth boyfriend  
even though his kitchen incorporated a dishwasher.

It was unclear what, exactly, *was* her fear.  
Was she afraid of some improbable but real possibility,  
like the dishwasher breaking and leaking lots of water,  
causing a huge mess and lengthy arguments  
with insurance agents and landladies?  
Or did she fear the dishwasher could cause a short circuit  
or suddenly explode —  
an event which admittedly was *very* rare,  
but according to her Google search *had happened*  
at least three times in the US,  
once in Australia  
and once in Nigeria,  
although the Australian article in particular was vague  
about the exact incident  
and was hosted on a potentially unreliable news portal  
whose other articles were concerned with an alien civilization living  
underground on Jupiter  
and the havoc supposedly wreaked on businesses by the supposedly too  
liberal Australian refugee policy.

Or was Brenda afraid of something supernatural happening  
like, when she walked into the kitchen at night,  
the dishwasher would suddenly start to glow red  
and speak to her in a growling and mocking voice

threatening to eat her  
bathing in the power  
a demonic kitchen appliance holds over a woman in pyjamas.

Brenda felt that all these possibilities were part of her fear  
to some extent  
although none of them, when followed through, rang entirely true.

Her boyfriend tried his best to be understanding  
once he got over his insistence that Jupiter is a gas planet  
therefore has no 'underground' where an alien civilization might dwell  
and fake climate change to make humanity easy prey by tricking it to  
give up industrialization.

But  
his occasional jokes about himself being afraid of  
a poltergeist in the microwave,  
although well-intended,  
did not help Brenda.

Eventually, the issue resolved itself  
as Brenda more and more lost her fear of the dishwasher,  
or transferred it to issues whose fear garners more social acceptance  
like termites, getting pregnant and lack of real estate.

Because of the pregnancy issue, she eventually broke up  
with that boyfriend  
who found another woman with whom he soon had  
the kids he had wanted,  
kids in whose eyes Brenda, who stayed on good terms  
with his new family,  
would be Auntie Brenda,  
as opposed to their real aunt Sherri, a nice lady who lived in  
a house in the Kootenays  
with her husband, two children, two cars, a cat and an interest  
in Buddhism,  
who one day slipped on some spilled dish soap in her kitchen  
and fell flat, face-first, into the cutlery basket of her dishwasher.



# Brenda Craigdarroch and Social Media

Brenda Craigdarroch had the following approach to social media:  
She had accounts on every single network, platform and sharing site  
known to her,  
and spent a significant amount of time browsing through them,  
following friends, acquaintances and people she followed  
for no reason known to her,  
but Brenda would not contribute, share or post anything,  
ever.

Actually, Brenda *used* to post, share and comment occasionally  
until one day,  
a friend of hers,  
or rather a friend of her third boyfriend's,  
shared an article about the Black Lives Matter campaign on Facebook  
and wrote a few sentences about it  
which led to some arguments being posted as comments  
to which Brenda wanted to contribute a comment of her own,  
wherefore she wrote three declarative sentences and one exclamation.  
But before Brenda clicked 'post'  
she read again what she had written.  
Then she changed the word order in two of the sentences  
and added a fourth.  
Then she read it to herself again  
and replaced the exclamation with a different one.  
Then she rephrased the final sentence,  
and then

copied the whole comment out of the Facebook tab  
into a Word document  
and went for lunch.

Over lunch, she forgot the whole thing,  
but the next day when she browsed through her daily Facebook feed,  
she remembered yesterday's Black Lives Matter discussion and opened  
the Word document.

She went on to check her boyfriend's friend's page,  
where she had to scroll down to find yesterday's Black Lives Matter  
discussion,  
because meanwhile, her boyfriend's friend had shared two articles  
on different issues

and a photo of the tacos he'd had last night.

When Brenda found yesterday's Black Lives Matter discussion,  
the comment she had wanted to comment on had been commented on  
by two other people,  
which had led the discussion in a slightly different direction.

So Brenda copied all comments so far  
into her Word document,  
and spent 45 minutes writing a new comment,  
which eventually boiled down to five sentences  
with an implicit but no explicit exclamation.  
She copied it  
into the comment box in the Facebook tab  
read it to herself again...  
inserted a comma...  
then felt that this time,  
finally,  
the entire discussion so far  
and all former comments considered,  
she was completely fine with what she had written  
and deleted it.

This happened on impulse —  
felt strange,  
but gave her a peculiar feeling of satisfaction.

It felt good.  
So good that she wanted to feel that again.

Ever since then, Brenda did it that way:  
She wrote multi-paragraph comments on hotly debated topics  
putting serious effort and considerable time into, say,  
a differentiated view of the constitutional crisis in Brazil,  
and when she felt absolutely sure about what she had written  
and saw no way to further improve it,  
she slowly let the mouse slip over the ‘post’ button...  
and instead deleted the whole text and closed the tab.

She wrote some nice posts of her own, spending half-hours and hours  
arranging sentences and pictures  
and then did not post them,  
got excited about political articles or music videos, copied the links  
and then did not share them.  
On various forums, from chemistry.stackexchange to the hardware store  
self-help site,  
she wrote thoughtful answers in which she backed up  
each important claim  
with more than one source,  
then marked the entire text and clicked ‘cut’.

Over the months and years, Brenda wrote hundreds of tweets  
which were not tweeted,  
composed dozens of Facebook posts, funny, thoughtful or sad,  
which were never posted.  
One day, she had seven browser tabs,  
three Word documents  
and two picture editors open,  
working on:  
Her Instagram photo series “Rice Puffs: An Abomination”;  
Her deliberately unironic comment on the latest WatchMojo video  
(“Top 10 Cartoon Shows from the 1970s Which Do Not Feature  
Dragons”);  
and four tabs just to be able to put the comment  
“remember when we had true music, not the crap the industry

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sells to young people today” simultaneously under

- a) a Bob Dylan bootleg from 1967 of extraordinarily bad quality
- b) a video of ABBA live in concert, 1979, Agnetha singing “Gimme Gimme Gimme”
- c) a video of diverse Earth, nature and outer space footage set to Pink Floyd’s *The Division Bell*
- d) the 2015 updated music video of The Connells’ one-hit wonder “’74-’75”.

This fourfold simultaneous comment she almost *did* post because she really wanted to know under which video she would get the most thumbs up, but instead, she just rewatched all four videos, one after another, and then closed all tabs without leaving a trace.

Over the years, Brenda kept a Word document, titled ‘internet drafts’, where her complete unpublished musings, essays and several photo albums were kept, and all her unpublished comments, her “I really do not care about your beach holiday pictures,” as well as her own beach holiday pictures, her “I like you, but could you stop posting your supposedly ironic self-centred trivialities,” as well as her own (mildly ironic) self-centred trivialities, her “I agree with the intention behind this video but the main argument is flawed, hence it really does a bad service to a good cause,” each of them with a link and a concise description of what post, file, video or other content posted by whom and on what date it referred to, all combined in one big .doc file which at one point had reached 237 pages and which Brenda ritually, each year on the evening of April 12th, from the first to the last line, deleted.

# Brenda Craigdarroch and Religions

Brenda Craigdarroch had the following approach to religions:  
She tried to be a member of each and every religion known to her,  
which was easy for some because you could be a member  
by just believing yourself to be one in your head,  
you did not have to sign up or register for anything;  
whereas for others, you did have to register or sign up and pay  
for a membership  
or at least get ostracized if you didn't donate.  
Which Brenda never did  
so she was kicked out of many religions  
but liked to stay in the ones that let her in  
and never bothered her for just being there,  
silently watching and listening but never responding,  
never joining a chant,  
never saying amen,  
never signing up for next time.  
And occasionally Brenda just went to  
a temple, mosque, synagogue, church,  
whatever building she found where some worshippers let her in  
without asking too many questions,  
then she attended a ceremony, quietly watching and listening  
and not bothering anyone and not being bothered,  
and feeling a little less lonely.  
As a surprise to herself, her favourite were the Jehovah's Witnesses.





# Brenda Craigdarroch and the Biocapacitator

Brenda Craigdarroch got reasonably upset when she learned that the federal government had seized her and her neighbours' storage lockers to build a biocapacitator in the basement of their apartment building. She had not seen that coming.

One day when she came riding home and wanted to put her bike in the locker, she found many yellow barrier tapes in the basement with little stickers dangling from them, saying 'government property' and a paper note on the wall to inform residents about the national interest in biocapacitators, which gave the former owners of these lockers a grace period of 72 hours to remove all their stuff.

Even though Brenda was not in principle against the building of a biocapacitator,  
"For what it's worth, let them build biocapacitators," she said to her dad on the phone, she was not at all content with the fact that they'd build a biocapacitator right under her feet, and with having to find a new place to put her bike and with having to remove her stuff from the locker.

The government announcement had been that the building of biocapacitators

was in the interest of  
*all Canadians*  
and that  
*all Canadians*  
benefit from biocapacitators,  
and that the federal government was to make sure that the interest of  
*all Canadians*  
was protected against the so-called 'special interests' of  
*actual, individual* Canadians,  
like the egoistical desire to live without a biocapacitator  
in the basement.

At first, Brenda wanted to just disobey  
which conveniently would have meant to do nothing.  
She also wanted to talk to her neighbours, having vague ideas about  
a common resistance  
which, however, did not materialize  
primarily because she shied away from knocking at their doors,  
and instead sat on her couch, disobediently watching YouTube videos.

But in the evening before the government deadline, Brenda got nervous  
and eventually moved most of her stuff out of the locker.  
She left *some* stuff inside, to test how far they would go,  
but made sure it was not really important stuff  
like two broken lamps,  
some comedy records from the '50s which her fifth boyfriend had left  
when they split up  
and  
a plastic bag  
full of plastic bags.  
She thought  
the government would have to deal with that:  
"If they want their biocapacitator, they can remove that junk  
themselves,"  
she said to her mom on the phone.

When she came home from work the next day  
and had a quick look into the basement,

she found all the storage lockers empty  
and lots of red hazard tape,  
warning that unauthorized people had no access  
to this part of the building anymore.  
She also found a letter in her mailbox  
informing her that some of her items had been taken away  
but could still be picked up at a certain government office downtown.

She also found a handwritten note at her door  
which called for an emergency meeting of all tenants  
that very evening.

At the meeting  
at first, some people stressed that since the building was on  
unceded territory  
of...  
some...  
First Nation whose exact name they could not remember right now,  
any government action was illegal anyway  
without prior informed consent of the involved First Nation...  
bands... or...  
whatever  
— and all the white people agreed.

Then somebody said that in Quebec, the building of biocapacitators  
had been halted  
by initiatives, and it was suggested that somebody read up on that  
on the internet.  
Which was difficult because no one in the room spoke French,  
but Brenda and a woman from the third floor spoke some Spanish,  
so they volunteered for that.

It needs to be said that  
the whole meeting proceeded in a certain mood of unease  
which to some extent was caused by the fact that  
no one in the room actually knew what a biocapacitator is  
and a bearded guy from the second floor consistently  
called them 'biocompressors' instead

whereafter several people got unsure and referred to them as  
'these things'  
or 'B.C.s'  
and made general statements about  
the bad impact of B.C.s on the environment  
and the feeling that B.C.s did not bring as many jobs  
as the B.C. industry alleged.

Brenda left the meeting with mixed feelings  
among them  
the cursing of her initials  
which she now had to share not only with that province she lived in,  
but also with some technical device  
whose exact functionality, purpose and even name were unclear to her.  
But also  
with the feeling that at least she had gotten to know  
some of her neighbours better  
like the woman from the third floor who had co-volunteered to read up  
on the Québécois stuff  
which they sort of did, but over the next weeks they also  
just met for coffees and chat  
and realized they both liked the same cake place downtown  
which happened to be right next to the government office  
where the junk was.

"Let's meet there tomorrow. I'll pick up my stuff beforehand,"  
Brenda said to her new friend on the phone,  
and they actually met there the next day  
and Brenda told her neighbour that she  
had retrieved her ex's comedy records  
but defiantly had denied possession of the broken lamps  
and finally, had not been keen enough to ask for  
her plastic bag full of plastic bags  
which for some unspecified reason  
was of a certain nostalgic value to her.

# Brenda Craigdarroch's Famous Raisin Cookies

Every time Brenda Craigdarroch made her famous raisin cookies, she had to think about how crappy the new *X-Files* episodes had been. She could not help it.

The first time, that thought just randomly passed through her mind at the moment when she poured the raisins into the batter.

As it sometimes happens, you suddenly think of something for a few seconds

without apparent reason.

You might be writing a birthday card to your cousin and suddenly think of an old Coca-Cola commercial; or be preparing a college lecture on Russian novelists and suddenly remember a ping-pong game you lost

on a school excursion;

or be walking around a lake

and suddenly think of Pierre, not Justin, Trudeau.

So that just happened — Brenda poured the raisins into the batter which she had prepared in the medium-sized red bowl, and at that moment

she suddenly thought of the new *X-Files* episodes,

and the next moment she thought

what complete and utter shit those new episodes had been,

and then she lost that thought and thought about something else.

Maybe... lightbulbs.

But,

the next time she made her famous raisin cookies,

two months later or so,  
at the very moment she poured the raisins into the batter  
which she had prepared in the medium-sized red plastic bowl,  
an image shot to her mind  
of Mulder and Scully in a cabin in the woods  
and there she thought again  
how  
with the possible exception of half an episode,  
they all were outrageously crazy horseshit,  
really horribly bad, uninteresting,  
pathetically poorly written and filmed  
and, for long awkward sequences, just dumb as fuck.  
And  
Brenda remembered  
that she had had  
that exact same thought  
the last time she had made her famous raisin cookies.  
True, soon again she thought of something else  
and when she put the tray into the oven,  
there was nothing *X-Files*-related on her mind anymore,  
but after this it was a lost cause.

Even though she completely forgot about it  
for the next couple of weeks,  
even when she had a conversation  
with her brother-in-law  
which touched upon the *X-Files* for a few back-and-forths,  
wherein she certainly enforced her view about the new episodes,  
she did not think of the raisin cookie incident  
until eventually  
Brenda made her famous raisin cookies again.  
She got the medium-sized red bowl out  
(which she had used for a dozen other things in the meantime),  
she made the batter  
(still clear of thoughts of anything related to mystery TV shows),  
put the raisins in and *BOOM!*  
How unbelievably disappointing were those new *X-Files* episodes:  
miserable,

dreadful,  
cockamamie.

That

went through her mind and, at the same time,  
she distinctly remembered that she had already had that thought  
the last two times she had made her raisin cookies,  
and then she knew that from now on she would be cursed;  
apparently by now, her brain had  
wired  
her annoyance at the new *X-Files* episodes  
to the moment when she poured raisins into the cookie batter in the  
medium-sized red plastic bowl;  
she knew this would happen again and again  
for *of course* she would occasionally make her famous raisin cookies  
and *of course* she would always use that red plastic bowl for that  
without thinking of any mystery series from the '90s  
neither the *X-Files*  
nor *Dark Skies*  
nor *Quantum Leap*  
nor *The Visitor*  
nor *Seven Days*  
nor *Time Trax*  
nor *Millennium*  
nor the '90s remakes of the *Twilight Zone* and *The Outer Limits*  
she would not have her mind on that  
but when the moment came to pour the raisins into the batter  
the *X-Files* would come up again,  
and her disappointment,  
mixed with a minor confusion about the crush she used to have  
on David Duchovny,  
or rather on the character he played, back in the '90s,  
a crush which never even sparked again during the new episodes;  
she had been mildly excited to see whether she would  
still have that crush,  
but when she watched the new episodes, she felt  
nothing for his character,  
or any of the characters,



nothing  
but embarrassment.

This embarrassment  
and her whole *X-Files* complex  
and on top of it, the thought that it was now trigger-wired  
to a specific step in the preparation of raisin cookies,  
this time  
stayed on her mind for a bit longer,  
all through the shaping of the cookies  
and up until putting them into the oven, only then fading away  
or rather being replaced by an erotic fantasy about a coworker  
and a question about seagulls.

She went through the breakup with her sixth boyfriend at that time  
and made no raisin cookies for many months.

When she made them again, finally, for her classmates  
in a course on the influence of Russian novelists  
on David Foster Wallace,  
the moment she poured the raisins into the batter,  
*BOOM!* Fox Mulder was not sexy anymore.  
Not even interesting in a platonic way.  
And that, even though this time  
she had used  
the big red bowl,  
not the medium-sized one,  
because she had wanted to make enough cookies for all the people  
in her Russian novelists and David Foster Wallace class.

So, accepting her curse, she just thought on  
about the crapness  
of the new *X-Files* episodes  
and how she never wanted to watch the old *X-Files* episodes again  
for fear that they would seem just as silly to her now as the new ones  
and her mind walked her through  
the general disappointment she felt about many so-called  
remakes and relaunches and franchise extensions and homages,

and with a resigned exasperation pondered  
while her hands formed sad raisin cookies:  
    why do these people do that?  
    why do they keep making sequels and remakes and extensions  
    and homages  
    inevitably failing and spoiling the original?  
    even with good sequels, you can just spoil the original.

Brenda thought

while forming more cookies for her Russian novelists class  
how

Gogol had destroyed the sequel he had written  
to his novel *Dead Souls*

and rightly so, the parts which were saved *are* bad,  
the scholars, in their commentaries, try to hide behind  
scholarly words,

you can feel their embarrassment, they write that  
what survived of the second part is

“not quite at the level of the first part” or

“he seems to have struggled with this” or

“these chapters still need some redaction”

which is all horseshit and cowardly words for

this is crap,

apparently Gogol had lost it; let's be happy with the first part  
and forget about this new shit.

Gogol actually went insane

probably because he knew that whatever he tried to write  
after *Dead Souls*

would just appear as crap,

so he burned it and went insane,

or,

Brenda thought on

as the oven was preheating

Dostoevsky, he wrote *The Brothers Karamazov*

and called it the first part,

but kept it quite self-contained

and then

Dostoevsky,

instead of writing the second part,

just died.

He just died, of old age,  
not even of one of those fancy Russian-novelist-deaths  
like epilepsy, or bankruptcy, or tuberculosis, or suicide,  
he just died of old age, thereby abstaining from writing,  
and spoiling,  
a sequel to *The Brothers Karamazov*.

So, Brenda thought  
when she angrily shut the oven door  
why could those people in Hollywood  
not burn their film after making sequels  
or format their hard drives  
or just die?  
but that

Brenda thought while she angrily set the timer  
would not help.  
Now, they boost stuff with recently deceased people in it.

This is the sentence Brenda thought when she put on the timer:  
Death could stop Gogol and Dostoevsky from ruining sequels  
and writing shitty new *X-Files* episodes,  
but in our time, not even death can stop people  
from making sequels and remakes or parodies and homages,  
in fact, death seems to spur them,  
once an artist dies other people seem to think that now is the time to  
'honour'  
them with homages and adapting their style  
as it happened to Nabokov  
and it happened to Bukowski  
and it happened to Bernhard  
and it happened to David Foster Wallace  
but, Brenda thought,  
gesturing on her dining chair where she was now waiting  
for the cookies to bake  
David Foster Wallace fucking killed himself  
and that is in the back of your head if you want it or not  
when you read his stuff, of course you can and should

look at most of it  
for a long time  
without thinking that David Foster Wallace fucking killed himself  
but it would be wrong to ignore that fact completely —  
if you want to make a complete and detailed and  
differentiated assessment of the situation  
you will have to regard the fact that David Foster Wallace  
fucking killed himself  
and of course you will have to say that, basically,  
what the fuck do you know  
and who the fuck are you to assess that and all these things are  
as complicated as life and death  
and what do we know about the interrelation of the  
life and death of a writer on the one hand  
and their writing on the other?  
well, you can assess David Foster Wallace's writing  
with all the methods of  
literature theory and art theory and whatever theory  
and you might even invent some new theory,  
and on the other hand you can state the fact that  
David Foster Wallace fucking killed himself,  
but what method do you have  
and what clue do you have  
and what right do you have  
to somehow speculate about connections of one to the other?  
well, you can say you *have* every right  
but then what do you say? do you say that he filled his books  
with obsessive footnotes  
and just trust that the word 'obsessive' will sound  
as if there's a hint, there's a trace?  
but if you look closer, do you want to say that  
he just wrote too many  
obsessive footnotes  
and that David Foster Wallace fucking killed himself  
*because* he wrote  
too many obsessive footnotes?  
was it the obsessive footnotes that pushed David Foster Wallace  
over the edge,

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would he *not* have fucking killed himself if he had written fewer  
obsessive footnotes,  
and what, fifty obsessive footnotes less,  
or twenty, or ten, or five, was it three specific obsessive footnotes that  
he should *not*  
have written, would that have made all the difference?  
but then you say, you know what,  
maybe he did not write enough obsessive footnotes,  
maybe he wrote one obsessive footnote too few,  
maybe one more obsessive footnote would have saved him,  
or ten more, or fifty more,  
maybe he was a hundred obsessive footnotes short of being an  
obsessive writer who does *not* fucking kill himself,  
maybe in a hundred obsessive footnotes more he would have found  
something that would have made him not fucking kill himself  
or just kept him interested or busy or  
occupied with something that would have  
distracted him from fucking killing himself  
maybe just for ten minutes and then somebody  
would have called him  
and he would not have fucking killed himself at least on that day  
and maybe not for the next week or some months or even years,  
who knows?  
Well, I don't, you don't, nobody does, that is the fucking problem,  
nobody has a clue and the fact remains that David Foster Wallace  
fucking killed himself,  
and all talking about whether this was  
somehow related to his writing and his writing style  
and whether he wrote one obsessive footnote too much or  
too few is just empty talk  
and probably the obsessive footnotes have fuck-nothing to do  
with the fact  
that David Foster Wallace fucking killed himself  
but the fact remains  
that David Foster Wallace fucking killed himself.

Brenda thought when the timer rang for the first ten minutes  
And also, nobody should try to imitate his style,

regardless of whether he fucking killed himself or not  
— that is on a different planet —  
no one should try to imitate anybody else's style,  
Brenda thought when she checked the cookies,  
regardless of whether that someone has fucking killed himself  
or burnt his manuscripts or just died  
of tuberculosis, bankruptcy or old age,  
and especially no one should try to imitate someone else's style  
as an homage or parody.  
homages and parodies are the two dumbest forms of expression  
and also the dumbest forms of admiration,  
Brenda thought while she set the timer for five more minutes  
and the raisin cookie scent filled the air  
see, Dostoevsky admired Pushkin,  
but he would neither try to imitate nor parody Pushkin,  
knowing full well that the truest spirit of admiration for an artist is  
to just leave the admired art alone and create your own work  
and if Gogol came back today  
and Tolstoy came back today  
and Dostoevsky came back today  
they might admire their own old writings  
but they would not write in that style today,  
but in a new one, a very distinct one,  
something distinct even from Nabokov,  
and if David Foster Wallace would not have fucking killed himself,  
well, okay,  
he might still write in his obsessive footnote style,  
but if instead he remained fucking dead and would be reborn  
fifty years from now  
he would quite certainly just shit on  
the old David Foster Wallace style  
and not write obsessive footnotes anymore,  
not even as homage or parody,  
and maybe he would not write literature at all,  
he would just shoot at old doors with paintballs  
or bake raisin cookies  
or conspire with the reborn Russian novelists  
to burn down film studios

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and the mansions of TV executives  
and kidnap the mothers of every homage-writing screenwriter  
and create live art performances  
where they all together literally shit on hard-copy scripts of  
every relaunch of every mildly successful TV show  
and every sequel to every movie that tries to  
“stay true” and “pay homage” to the original and  
“develops the story in a sensible and interesting direction”  
which is all fucking horseshit and the  
cowardly way for film reviewers to say  
that it did not need to be made,  
hence should not have been made  
and Gogol would have burned it  
and Dostoevsky would simply have died.

This is the sentence that Brenda thought  
when the timer rang and her famous raisin cookies were hot and ready:  
Gogol would have burned it  
and Dostoevsky would simply have died.

# Brenda Craigdarroch and Her Dentist

Brenda Craigdarroch's girlfriends never figured out exactly when, where and how Brenda had developed the notion that her dentist had a crush on her.

Andrea, who'd known Brenda for the longest time, remembered vividly that Brenda had uttered something to that effect during a long car ride the two of them had taken from Kamloops to Calgary, as well as the lighthearted conversation which followed and had them laughing lots whilst driving through the Rocky Mountains. That car ride, however, took place not very long ago, in the summer when Brenda and Andrea had reconnected after running into each other in a Zumba class. Andrea had known Brenda previously in high school but they had been out of touch for some years after that. In Andrea's view, it was unlikely but not impossible that Brenda had already conceived of her dentist having a crush on her when she was in high school, and just had not shared that with Andrea who had not been particularly close to Brenda back then. Also, as far as Andrea remembered, in their high school time,



Brenda had not been a person who would share  
lots of private details with anyone anyway.

Cassidy, who had taken Brenda in as her roomie for two months  
after Brenda's breakup with her fourth boyfriend,  
learned about the issue when, one day,  
she was surprised to see Brenda dress up a bit,  
and Cassidy teased her for not telling her about her date,  
to which Brenda replied that she *wasn't* going on a date,  
just going out to a dentist appointment  
and to buy some groceries,  
and some body lotion,  
and an impact wrench at her favourite hardware store.  
Cassidy did not let her off the hook  
and although one can find some justification  
for dressing a bit nicer than usual  
when running errands as those,  
it was impossible even for Brenda to get a sound argument working  
for putting on lipstick before seeing her dentist,  
especially since Brenda was not a person who would normally wear  
lipstick anyway.  
So eventually Brenda confessed  
but stressed that of course she did not reciprocate  
the feelings her dentist supposedly had for her  
and that she was just in a bit of a mess because of her recent breakup.

Isbel, Brenda's most consistent friend over the years,  
who'd forgotten when she'd first heard of Brenda's dentist's  
purported philandering  
— it was just something that Brenda mentioned as an aside  
in half-sentences  
at odd times, maybe twice a year  
during chat over lunch —  
Isbel was the one who *almost* brought it up to the other girlfriends  
one night when they were all out for tapas  
but Brenda was home due to a bad cold.  
And if Isbel *had* brought it up  
and said,

“Hey, I guess you’ve heard that story from Brenda too  
that,  
you know,  
she thinks  
her dentist  
sort of  
secretly  
flirts with her,”  
then they would all have said  
“Oh yes!”  
and  
“Yeah, that’s a bit weird, right?”  
and putting together the bits of information each of them  
had on the topic  
they would soon have gathered  
that Brenda had been insisting on her dentist’s courting  
and subtle advances  
for more than fourteen years,  
and further  
that Brenda had had at least four different dentists in that time,  
three male, one female,  
and all things considered,  
the girlfriends would then have passed a motion  
that one of them,  
probably Zoltana,  
should, on the next occasion, break the news to Brenda  
that her girlfriends  
with all the love and respect that they had for her  
and knowing full well that Brenda was not a person who has *idées fixes*  
or delusional preoccupations  
— normally —  
would have to tell her that her dentist’s  
gentleness, special care and affection for her and only her  
most probably existed only in her head  
and that the dentist’s  
winks, gestures and bum shakes  
if they existed at all  
were almost certainly misinterpreted by her.

But

Isbel never brought it up  
and they never put their pieces of the puzzle together  
and no conversation containing the term 'delusional preoccupation'  
ever ensued,  
probably for the better.

Zoltana

who by all accounts was "the weird one" among Brenda's girlfriends,  
herself holding several beliefs with little connection to the  
commonly shared reality,  
had heard Brenda mention her dentist's trifling only once  
and had smiled about it, immediately assuming that  
Brenda was aware of having made it up  
as a coping mechanism, keeping it in a state of quarter-belief.  
She thought it's probably nifty to have something vaguely uplifting  
to think about  
when you are tied to a chair  
with several expensive devices operating in your mouth,  
and you have to make a hand gesture to ask for permission to swallow,  
one of the most undignified positions a first-world person can get  
themselves into.

And Zoltana actually tried to tell herself the same thing  
at *her* next dentist appointment  
looking for delicate signs of tenderness in her dentist's demeanour  
and it worked for a while but utterly imploded  
at the moment when her dentist,  
with that subtle-accusation-dentist-voice, said  
"Hmm, your gums are bleeding...?"  
to which Zoltana replied  
"Yeah, because you just stabbed them with that metal hook!  
I guess if I rammed that thing into your eyeball, we'd see some  
bloodshed there as well."

But she did not actually say that;  
instead, she lied about her flossing habits  
and made the consciously false promise to intensify them  
like any normal kind of person would.

# Brenda Craigdarroch and the Last Piece of Art

The last piece of art which Brenda Craigdarroch remembered  
as having a lasting and profound impact on her  
was  
the last five pages of a story  
in a pulp magazine she had read  
when she was very, very bored  
at a friend's friend's open house party.

That is what she said  
when her fifth boyfriend once asked her  
what works of art had made  
a profound and lasting impact on her.  
And she was serious,  
because that story,  
or the last five pages of the story,  
in which somehow  
a rotten oak leaf  
played an important role,  
truly had stuck in her memory.

But she was happy that this answer was also  
a gentle rebuff to his question.  
Brenda liked art,  
but she did not like to talk about art,  
mostly because she really did not know what to say.  
Especially if the work of art was good:

She would just say

“That’s good”

but find herself unable to elaborate on that,  
just as she felt unable to contribute  
when people talked about art  
or about music  
or about books.

Brenda, rather, talked about her life  
and her job  
and people  
and food  
and memories  
and beaches  
and prophecies  
and the right time to prune lilac.

But when people talked about what a certain arthouse film  
meant to them  
or how a certain famous painting shows  
that the artist overcame an early period of their work,  
Brenda got annoyed  
and tried to steer the conversation away from that  
and towards masturbation techniques.

She found that instead of talking about a sculpture  
and which sculpting style it belongs to,  
people would be much happier if they shared  
little hidden sorrows, and talked about  
things all of us secretly have, but are afraid to talk about:  
Like silverfish  
or the occasional feeling of being an impostor.

And instead of talking about a symphony or violin concerto  
or an exhibition inspired by a symphony or violin concerto  
or a videogame inspired by an exhibition about a symphony  
or violin concerto,  
people should rather open up a bit amongst their friends  
and talk about the things all of us want to have:

Like good sex  
and opinions.

The worst kind of talk about art, in Brenda's eyes,  
were the little explanatory cards next to paintings  
in art galleries and museums  
on which somebody who needs to show off that they went to school  
talks about an artist and their art,  
but which never  
had the least thing to do with any sensation Brenda had  
when *she* looked at the paintings.  
They were not even wrong, they just seemed to talk  
about something that was *way off*.  
They might as well have contained descriptions of the geysers on Triton  
or instructions to use a VCR —  
in any case, something extremely alien to what Brenda thought and felt  
when she was walking through a gallery and looking at paintings.  
Actually, Brenda rarely thought anything that could be  
expressed in sentences  
whilst walking through a gallery and looking at paintings.  
She liked many of the paintings,  
she appreciated a lot of the art,  
some of it even had a profound and lasting impact on her,  
but did not set her mind to dancing;  
rather,  
every time Brenda walked through an art gallery  
and looked at paintings  
it made her want to sing.  
And every time Brenda was in a concert,  
she felt like she wanted to sculpt,  
and every time Brenda saw sculptures,  
she wanted to knit something or work with felt,  
and every time Brenda saw craft,  
she wanted to own a huge park and spend every day there,  
landscaping:  
putting in rocks  
planning streams  
planting trees

(Asian, Alpine, olive trees, ginkgos)  
a greenhouse full of lemons  
meadows with wildflowers  
etc. —

that's what Brenda fantasized about when she was at a craft fair.  
But whenever Brenda walked in an actual park,  
she just wanted to mix cocktails.

She had mixed a good Basil Smash  
for her boyfriend and herself that night when,  
after watching a documentary about gannets and boobies,  
somehow their conversation had moved on to art  
and he had asked her what works of art had had  
a lasting and profound impact on her.  
Brenda had said those five pages from the pulp magazine  
of which she mostly remembered something about a rotten oak leaf,  
and her boyfriend began talking about some comedy records  
from the '50s  
which had had a lasting and profound impact on him  
until he realized he should just keep her company silently.  
Brenda, in her head, remembered that story from the pulp magazine  
or its last pages  
wherein the main character and her partner  
set out for an expedition in some kind of fog  
which lifted after a while, when they heard the sound of water  
and found a stream which they then followed for many kilometres,  
first across rocky terrain  
then between trees  
eventually encountering houses, then paved roads,  
sidewalks interspersed with oak trees,  
then the outskirts of some city,  
and the story got a bit weird from there  
and the main thing which Brenda remembered was  
that there was something about a rotten oak leaf  
which the two characters had seen on the pavement —  
the rest was blurry and she was not sure if it had been part of that story,  
or of another story,  
or some film she had seen...

*Torsten Schoeneberg*

well, there was a part where the two of them were fighting an army  
of 580 androids  
who all looked like Doug Ford  
and there was more changing of the weather:  
the fog got thicker and thinner again.  
But through all of that, the one thing of importance  
was that rotten oak leaf,  
and maybe something about the way it lay there in the dirt  
and how the light fell on it  
or how it smelled  
— that brown, rotten oak leaf —  
somehow the writer had given meaning to that rotten oak leaf  
between all the other things that were going on in those five pages,  
some climactic action occurred,  
something about the relation between the friends was revealed,  
but through it all,  
the one thing that Brenda remembered  
clearly, but vaguely, but clearly,  
was that rotten oak leaf.





# Brenda Craigdarroch and the Dead Robin in the Gutter

The day Brenda Craigdarroch saw a dead robin in the gutter and, beside it, a half-eaten pear was one of the most eventful days Brenda had had in a while.

The morning of that day was not that eventful, — it was quite ordinary actually — with some computer issues at the office job she was working then, but filled with unusual excitement because Brenda was going to meet her sister for the first time since the previous April. Her sister had told her the day before that she would be in town and they had agreed to meet during Brenda's lunch break at a Kalmykian restaurant.

It was on the walk over to the Kalmykian restaurant that Brenda saw the dead robin in the gutter and, beside it, the half-eaten pear. Two blocks further she met her sister in front of the restaurant. They hugged each other, more cordially than the last few times, and had a nice lunch at the Kalmykian restaurant. Her sister told Brenda that her husband had switched jobs which was quite a surprise, and showed Brenda pictures of their dog which were quite cute.

Brenda showed her sister the new rain jacket she had bought  
(her sister liked it),  
and pictures of the weekend trip to Cowichan Lake  
where she had gone with her neighbour-friend  
and at some point Brenda mentioned  
the dead robin in the gutter  
and, beside it, the half-eaten pear  
which she had seen on her walk over,  
and her sister said  
“That’s a still life!”

Later, during dessert, Brenda and her sister played a game they had  
started when they were teenagers,  
where each of them had to come up with something they would do if  
they were incredibly rich.  
When they were teenagers, they had come up with things like:  
ordering a 50-inch TV set,  
ordering an axe,  
smashing the TV set with the axe,  
putting the debris in a box, sending it back to the retailer,  
complaining about a malfunction  
and asking for a refund  
to see how they would react.

They were more grown-up now.  
So Brenda said she would buy a golf course —  
then, have eighteen slides  
in eighteen different colours  
put on the greens,  
have vines planted besides the slides,  
further, hire eighteen security guards  
who all had to be friendly single moms  
whose only job it was to make sure the vines were not being damaged,  
so the slides would be free to use for anyone  
until one day the vines had overgrown them.

Brenda’s sister said she would drive her car into a shopping mall  
leaving it up for grabs in the smashed glass front,

then buy some minor items from the shops,  
before just buying the entire mall  
and turning the ground level into a play area,  
the second level into a research centre  
of which three-quarters would investigate cancer  
but one quarter was set aside to investigate  
the most efficient way to grow  
shaggy cap mushrooms on the rooftop of a former mall building.  
And the rooftop, she would turn into  
a shaggy cap mushroom plantation.

They agreed that Brenda's sister had won this one  
for the cancer research and for the detail of  
first buying minor items before taking over the mall,  
but Brenda got extra points for a project  
which showed its beauty in the long run  
and for paying single mothers.  
And then they concluded, as always,  
by fretting about *actual* rich people  
who die of drugs, boredom, loneliness,  
and the inescapable void in their souls.

Next, right after saying goodbye to her sister  
(more cordially than the last time),  
Brenda got a text message that her employer's IT department  
had had to shut down their entire system  
and she would be off work for the afternoon.  
And just as she was reading that  
on the walk back from the Kalmykian restaurant,  
she bumped into Cassidy,  
her roommate from six years ago.  
She told her what had just happened and that she was free all afternoon,  
and Cassidy said she was also free for the next half-hour,  
so they went into the next coffee shop and chatted.

Cassidy was the only person Brenda knew  
besides herself  
who would blow-dry her toes.

Brenda had seen that once when Cassidy had left  
the bathroom door ajar  
and when they laughed and talked about it  
they both felt the strange sensation that you feel  
when you have a certain habit  
about which you're not sure how common it is  
and you never bring it up because  
it's halfway between potentially embarrassing and too unimportant,  
plus, it does not connect well to anything  
you would normally have a conversation about  
but now, naturally by accident,  
you notice someone else has the same habit.

So they actually talked about that over coffee now.  
They also wondered what is the correct past tense of 'blow-dry'.  
And Cassidy mentioned her new purse.  
And Brenda mentioned the dead robin she had seen in the gutter  
and, beside it, the half-eaten pear.  
And Cassidy said  
"That's so sad!"  
And Brenda disagreed  
but did not say that.

At that moment, there was a sudden noise,  
so loud that several people went outside to inquire;  
apparently, at a construction site at the other end of the block  
there had been an explosion, with metal parts flying around,  
but by a very lucky coincidence, nobody had been injured.

When the situation had calmed down, Cassidy said she had to go now,  
but mentioned  
that their old mutual friend Marc was hosting an open house party  
tonight  
and that she could not attend, but maybe Brenda wanted to go.  
And Brenda said  
"Yeah, why not?"  
And Cassidy replied  
"Yeah, why not?"

(The “Why not?” had been a thing between Brenda and Cassidy when they were roomies.)

So after Cassidy had to leave,  
Brenda remembered Marc, the host of the party:  
When Brenda had first met him  
six years ago  
he told her that he would soon go to Tibet  
to find enlightenment;  
he would just have to finish a few important projects first.  
And Brenda had found that quite fascinating  
and spent some time with him  
and tried to connect with him  
but it somehow did not really work out  
and also, Brenda had fallen in love with her fifth boyfriend at that time.

Getting back to the present, Brenda called her then-boyfriend  
(the sixth one) and negotiated about going to that party later.  
He was a bit reluctant  
but finally agreed that they would go  
under the premise that he was allowed to drink and she would drive.  
Brenda agreed  
and told him about the dead robin in the gutter  
and, beside it, the half-eaten pear  
and he said  
“That’s a good symbol.  
I just don’t know what for.”

At the party  
Brenda chatted with Marc the host for a while  
who seemed just as nice and smart as she remembered him  
and she thought that she wanted to connect with him  
and wondered why she had not done so years ago.

Later, Brenda ended up talking mostly to a slender old man  
with long hair  
who could not even convincingly explain to her  
what he was doing at the party

and how he was connected to Marc the host  
because every time he tried, he got into telling a story  
that went off on a tangent  
and then a tangent's tangent  
and ended up talking about something else  
which was or was not interesting in its own right  
but could not satisfactorily explain his very presence  
and at some point he looked Brenda in the eyes and said  
that the hardest thing he had to face in life  
was seeing the traces of his younger life disappear.  
Brenda didn't know what to say to that  
so she instead told him that today she had seen  
a dead robin in the gutter  
and, beside it, a half-eaten pear  
and the old man said  
"Hm."

Then, after getting a last non-alcoholic drink,  
Brenda located her boyfriend in the crowd  
who seemed to need her help to get away from a guy  
that had insisted that the moon landing was a hoax  
and linked that to other conspiracy theories  
whereupon Brenda's boyfriend insisted that recently,  
the guy who fixes his e-bike  
shared a story with him, in person and via email,  
about that e-bike dealer's cousin, who is an astronaut,  
and how a few months ago, in real life, she'd been launched to the  
International Space Station  
and some of her family members,  
including her cousin, the e-bike dealer,  
had been invited to travel  
to the actual Russian rocket launch station  
near the actual Kazakh city of Baikonur  
where they could actually see  
the actual astronaut cousin of the e-bike dealer walking to her rocket  
and that rocket being shot into space.  
Brenda's boyfriend was now getting out his phone  
to find that email from his e-bike dealer

with the pictures of his e-bike dealer's astronaut cousin  
and to open a site where you could track the ISS  
on which she, the actual astronaut cousin of his actual e-bike dealer, was  
at this very moment,  
and Brenda's boyfriend was just coming to his big argument  
and was about to bluntly ask the conspiracy theorist  
whether he believes  
that all these people in all the space programs  
in the US and Russia and worldwide  
and the engineers and physicists and proud parents in these pictures  
and the mathematicians who compute the flight curves  
and his e-bike dealer and his e-bike dealer's astronaut cousin  
were all part of a big conspiracy and cover-up for the moon landing  
having been filmed in some film studio in Hollywood,  
but at that point,  
Marc the host of the party started a big speech  
about his life and his friends and how grateful he was  
and how sorry that some day soon  
he would have to leave them all  
because he would go to Tibet  
and find enlightenment,  
some time soon,  
after finishing just a few more projects he was working on right now.  
Brenda pulled her boyfriend away  
and into the car  
where on the way home, he continued to agitate  
against conspiracy theories  
calling them  
"a contagious form of mind cancer  
which is spreading in our society"  
and Brenda just nodded until he finally calmed down  
and thanked her for getting him out,  
saying he'd have to work early tomorrow  
and asked Brenda how her day was,  
and she told him that it had been quite eventful.

And later, after he had gone to bed, Brenda took out her diary,  
whereinto she had not written anything in four months,



*Brenda Craigdarroch Doesn't Care If You Read This Book*

and although in her head she did a quick recap of  
all the events, meetings and conversations, and explosions,  
which had happened that day,  
the one thing Brenda wrote down in her diary  
was that today, she had seen  
a dead robin in the gutter  
and, beside it, a half-eaten pear.

# Brenda Craigdarroch

## Tried Hard To Forget Things

Brenda Craigdarroch tried hard to forget things.  
For sure, she occasionally tried hard to remember something,  
but she also tried to develop the skill of  
focussing on one thing to forget, like  
the PIN to her old bank card which she kept mixing up  
with the new one  
or that time she had blanked on an exam  
which made her unnecessarily nervous it could happen again  
or her mother's one-time rant about Brenda's grandfather,  
on one of the long drives home from his house years ago,  
which had been born of unfair momentary rage,  
as her mother herself conceded later.

To forget specific things like those  
was a subtle undertaking, because naturally if someone  
who is not skilled in the art of forgetting  
focusses on something  
they just end up engraving it deeper into their memory.  
Instead, you have to somehow  
deliberately *not* focus on something  
but not by coincidental distraction or ignorance, rather  
permanently, sort of  
mindfully not paying attention,  
smoothly making it smaller,  
making it  
go away,

which was a very delicate process  
with many setbacks.

Brenda sometimes found that unfair, considering how easily  
she could forget, say, where the hell she put the mug  
which she'd taken out of the cupboard twenty seconds ago.

She wanted to forget her first boyfriend entirely,  
she wanted to forget some bad things about her third boyfriend  
because they were bad,  
and she wanted to forget some good things about her fifth boyfriend  
because remembering those good things made her miss him.

By the very nature of forgetting  
Brenda did not know exactly what she had successfully forgotten;  
she was certain it was a lot  
because, when she tried to remember events or people  
a lot seemed to be missing;  
for example,  
she remembered  
the last time she had seen her grandfather,  
last August,  
but looking at, say, the second half of last September,  
she was quite sure that she'd gone to work during weekdays,  
but beyond that, there was just a blank.  
There were holes in her memory  
sometimes with a vague feeling  
that there had been something  
but it was no longer there.  
Sometimes she tried to forget even these blurry holes  
and was happy when  
her mind achieved  
just a blank stare  
on the bus  
where instead of revisiting tatters of memory,  
she saw some of the houses along the road for the first time,  
or the trees.

Later, she wondered if this was really the first time she'd seen them

or if she had seen them many times before  
and then deliberately forgotten them  
to get back the sensation of seeing them for the first time.

Although that was impossible for some of the houses  
Brenda thought  
because they looked newly-built,  
so at best she had managed to forget the construction site  
that had been there before  
or maybe trees which had been there before that.  
But why would she have forgotten those?  
She tried to not forget trees, only man-made buildings,  
edifices and equipments,  
only fleeting things that come and go.  
Which is weird  
Brenda thought  
because wouldn't you remember the fleeting things that come and go,  
as opposed to things that stay around anyway?  
Memory is only good for the fleeting things that come and go  
Brenda thought  
but the trees are of a third kind, she thought:  
they only go  
now,  
they never come  
have always been there  
even if in some distant past they maybe were not there yet  
but they *have* been there as long as we have been there  
seem permanent  
continuous, immutable  
steady  
constant  
there every time you sit on the bus  
until one day  
you sit on the bus and they are no longer there.  
Like her grandfather.

Brenda remembered  
her grandfather used to say

that the problem with most people is  
that they have nothing they *really wanna do*.  
He said,  
if you have something you *really wanna do*,  
then you get rid of all the things you have to do  
so that you can do what you *really wanna do*;  
but if you have *nothing* you really wanna do,  
then you just stare at all the things you *have* to do  
and never finish them or, if you finish them,  
you look for more things you have to do  
and spend a lot of time talking about what you *have* to do  
and you do this and that  
and buy this and that which pretends to save time  
but you know damn well it doesn't  
like fancy coffee machines or automatic garage doors  
they pretend to make life easier,  
but you know damn well you will end up with  
more you *have* to do.  
But if there is something you *really wanna do*,  
you will just quickly  
and without much talk  
get over all things that are in the way  
so that you are free for  
that one thing  
you really wanna do.

For Brenda's grandfather, that thing was gardening.  
And he was always willing to do other things if they *needed* to be done,  
but then he would get them done  
simply  
silently  
so that he would be able to work in his garden again.

But he said it can be anything,  
the thing you really want to do.  
It can be cooking.  
It can be skating.  
It can be painting.

*Torsten Schoeneberg*

It can be playing chess.  
It can be chasing pigeons in the park.  
It can be making up new constellations in the night sky.  
For him, it was gardening.

That, Brenda did not want to forget.  
Nor the long drives home from her grandparents' in the dark  
with her mother driving  
and herself, a girl in the backseat,  
breathing against the car window  
looking over her condensed breath  
out into the night sky  
and seeing the same constellations  
that they had made up in her grandparents' garden  
unchanged behind the trees and poles flashing by.  
And the same moon,  
weirdly, still in the same direction.  
And herself just looking out  
and drawing little figures and smiley faces on the steamed car window.



# Brenda Craigdarroch's Correct Opinions

One day in her late 20s, Brenda Craigdarroch realized that she was the only person who on all matters of real importance had the exact right opinion.

There were many issues she did not care about and many whereabout she admitted having insufficient insight. It's not like she would get into a debate about what food might improve one's weather resistance.

But

about the couple of things that she did care about like climate change

or had studied with some passion

like the writings of Gogol

and the pros and cons of flossing

or had as hobbies, like do-it-yourself home improvement, she was consistently right.

Of course she was, for why would she uphold a wrong belief on a topic that she deeply cared about *and* had researched?!?

Notwithstanding vague views she might have on things of secondary importance

where she relied on a mix of high school knowledge, common sense and her filter bubble,

her views on a few issues dear to her heart were well-informed and balanced,



carefully measuring evidence against counterevidence and altogether forming a coherent network of mutually reinforcing viewpoints, which, after all, were shared by most of her friends.

That is how Brenda *knew* she was right.

As for each of the issues,

practically everyone she knew had the same view.

Everyone agreed with her stance on abortion

(except her brother-in-law, who had been raised on a farm though).

Everyone agreed that advertisements should be banned

except that weird lady from the other office in her job in 2008

and Zoltana,

although with Zoltana you never knew if she was being ironic.

Everyone agreed that the death penalty is wrong

except her second boyfriend, but he was a jerk, she knew now,

and notwithstanding the sad state of the debate on capital punishment

wherein some people, like her neighbour-friend,

although they ultimately agreed with Brenda,

did so for the wrong reasons.

Be that as it may, for each viewpoint Brenda had,

the people who agreed with her were in the overwhelming majority,

she was part of a broad consensus of sensible people on all issues.

But

the truly striking part of that revelation Brenda had

one day in her late 20s

was not that *she* got things right on a variety of important topics;

she just had never thought that would make her special in any way.

She had expected that many people were like her, were with her,

that there would be a big chunk of people

who, like her, had the big questions fathomed,

notwithstanding that for a few isolated issues there would be

a few isolated people who were a bit nuts.

What dawned on her now,

surprisingly and momentarily frightening,

was that there was no one who agreed with the correct view

(that happened to be Brenda's view)

on *all* issues.

Although on each single subject matter more than 90% were with her, the intersection of those sets contained only Brenda.

Even the most right-minded, sane, balanced people seemed to have one little quirk

where they disagreed with what almost everyone, including Brenda, thought.

For example, even her grandfather

who was one of the most rational people on Earth

had strange views as soon as physical health and medicine were involved;

one time he claimed that there's too many vaccinations these days,

and he never boarded an airplane, on the grounds that flying would kill thousands each year by thrombosis.

Or, her fourth and current boyfriend,

who could not stop mocking her for her vegetarianism.

Which was not a big deal,

she mocked him back and they still got along,

but sometimes when Brenda was by herself, she found it a bit weird

that such a smart and knowledgeable person would,

on this one issue, hold a view which she could

tolerate

but which, ultimately, would be disproven by history

because it was wrong.

She thought, the only reasonable explanation is that

he's not well-informed enough

and she could forgive him for that

although she felt he had sort of an obligation to educate himself better,

thereby coming to the right conclusion,

namely, to not eat meat, in a convinced but not preachy way,

doing this one little thing for oneself, because it's right,

notwithstanding that it was not automatically healthier, rather

seeing it as an opportunity to eat healthier anyway;

in short: to just settle on the exact same approach that Brenda had.

Brenda could not get over that, ever. She felt love for him anyway.

One night, he ate a hearty dinner,

*Brenda Craigdarroch Doesn't Care If You Read This Book*

while Brenda, on the couch, was trying to find at least  
one person in history  
who, like her, had it basically figured out.

And when he had finished his mashed potatoes, onion rings,  
cabbage rolls and calf liver,

he asked her what she was thinking  
and she replied,

“How does this sound:

Buddha, Muhammad, Jesus, Spinoza, Brenda Craigdarroch?”

And he replied

“Know what? It's a non-sequitur but

I'd really, really enjoy walking through a rain shower right now.”

## Brenda Craigdarroch's Preferred Zodiac Sign

Whenever somebody wanted to create a horoscope  
for Brenda Craigdarroch  
she would say that she *was* born in early September,  
but did not identify as a Virgo;  
her preferred zodiac sign was Capricorn.  
She believed that in a society  
that has come so far as to acknowledge  
that your identity is not predetermined  
by the genitals you are born with,  
equally little, or less,  
is it predetermined by a random image  
somebody decided to see in the stars that happen to be aligned with the  
sun on your birthday.  
And she would not have anything about her personality  
inferred from those stars by anyone  
who, Brenda suspected, would not be able to actually identify any of the  
zodiac constellations in the night sky,  
nor accurately explain why the sun appears to move through them  
in the course of a year.

The truth is, though, that nobody ever asked Brenda Craigdarroch  
about her zodiac sign,  
at least not since she had carefully drafted this reply a few years ago.  
It was just a situation she imagined,  
to prove something to herself,  
like her sixth boyfriend for a time imagined

being invited to the White House  
so that he could ostentatiously turn down that invitation.

When they were having cake at Brenda's favourite cake place  
the one run by a German immigrant  
full of spite and great recipes,  
known as the cake nazi,  
Brenda told her boyfriend that  
his phantasies about turning down an invitation by Trump  
or resigning from Trudeau's cabinet in solidarity  
with Philpott and Wilson-Raybould  
were a typical sublimation of guilt by straight white men  
which were not harmful in themselves, but not actually helpful either.  
And in this way they became harmful,  
because they gave those men the feeling of being right  
without doing anything at all.  
Her boyfriend admitted that seemed true  
but added that  
having the feeling of being right without actually doing anything  
seemed to be the entire purpose of having opinions.  
Brenda admitted that seemed true  
and they concluded that having opinions should be regarded with  
much more skepticism than it usually is,  
and that they should act against the overabundance of opinions  
in their daily lives.

Her boyfriend then,  
whilst indulging in the last bits of his Frankfurter Kranz cake,  
mentioned that a friend of his had been active on  
various internet forums  
with two accounts, one with a male and one with a female username,  
and reported that his female alter-ego  
on engineering and programming forums  
got a lot more upvotes and thumbs up and comments full of nice  
condescending praise,  
on the other hand, she frequently received sexual harassment  
on a chess website  
where his male version got insulted at most three times a year,

and then only with non-sexually charged insults  
like “make a move, asshole” or “I’ll block you, fucking cheating idiot.”

Brenda,  
taking a large sip of her coffee,  
got a bit angry and said: well, good for your friend,  
but he could have just listened to women who told him that  
and believed *them* and report *that*.  
But you have to hear it from a straight white man to believe it?  
That’s like those journalists who tried out waterboarding for themselves  
as if that makes them and their audience understand  
what it’s like to be tortured.

Her boyfriend said that saying “all straight white men do this”  
was not better than saying “all Sagittarii do this,”  
noting that twenty minutes ago Brenda had ranted that  
even if you could show  
that Sagittarii statistically are more proactive  
or Librae are more balanced,  
then that would be like saying that men are born fighters  
and women like ponies and the colour pink:  
It’s just that for centuries they have been brought up that way,  
and maybe people have mentioned supposed character traits of  
Sagittarii just three times to a Sagittarius child  
which quickly internalized them;  
just like there’s no surer way to turn someone into a scoundrel than  
telling them they’ll be a scoundrel  
starting from an early age.

And wouldn’t Brenda agree, her boyfriend continued,  
just as the cake nazi had come to their table to take their dishes,  
wouldn’t she agree with his dream of a world where people would just  
be seen for their character and skills,  
and not whether they identify as white or black or cis or trans  
or Leo or Gemini?

And before Brenda could retort with another well-crafted  
stock reply of hers

which stated that it's not so easy to imagine a clean canvas  
when history has happened and injustice has already been done  
and further  
that the values of such an ostensibly colour-blind, gender-neutral utopia  
oftentimes were surprisingly well-tailored to favour those who've  
internalized being straight white dudes,  
and all in all she'd rather be a Capricorn,  
a horned goat,  
than a straight white dude,  
the cake nazi  
who was infamous for intruding on his patrons' conversations  
said that

“You young folks do realize zat  
you are now frree to be trruns  
and veear leggings  
or give yourself a spirichwal name  
but only as long as you still spend fifty hours a veek  
producing worsless shit nobody needs  
so viz ze money, you can vaste the rest of ze veek  
consuming worsless shit made by uzzers,  
do you?”

And Brenda said

“Err... Can I have another piece of the chocolate cake?”  
partly because the chocolate cake was really good  
and partly because she did not want the cake nazi to have the last word.

# Brenda Craigdarroch and the Monolingual People

Brenda Craigdarroch could not help being biased  
against monolingual people  
by which, in deviation from standard language,  
she did not mean her fellow Canadians who  
in an officially bilingual country somehow had managed to go through  
eight years of French in school  
and still barely understand  
the dual labels in the supermarket,  
since Brenda was more or less one of them;  
the only foreign language she spoke was vacational Spanish.

Also, it was not like she was fond  
of those people she occasionally met,  
especially in academic circles,  
who apparently spoke three, four, five languages  
and still had nothing interesting to say.

Her third boyfriend however  
had known Java, C++, Python, R, html and, as a joke, BASIC,  
and whenever asked about his language skills, casually remarked that he  
spoke nine,  
namely the aforementioned  
plus English plus Punjabi plus math.

About that time, Brenda started to consider herself multilingual too,  
whereby she meant the ability to understand



and make herself understood in  
the languages of several cultures, milieus and peer groups.

From her upbringing, she was quite fluent in *liberal*;  
in her 20s, she learned a decent *progressive* in an environmentalist  
dialect, although she never got the socialist accent right;  
and on visits to her sister and brother-in-law  
she learned a few scraps of *conservative*.

Skills in all these languages were very handy  
especially at family gatherings,  
at strata council meetings,  
or when being introduced to a new boyfriend's parents.

She also had a good command of Hardware Store Jargon  
and Sex Talk  
and was eager to learn a few more languages  
or try to get rid of the accent she still must have had  
in Rural  
or Family Gossiping  
whose native speakers invariably looked askance at her  
when she tried to fit in with a funny remark.

Sometimes late at night while sitting all by the internet  
with a glass of wine  
she practised some of the old languages  
and polished her Late Night Comedic  
or Holistic Healthish,  
two languages that were often spoken during coffee breaks at her job.

Regardless of the varying success of her own endeavours,  
she was more and more annoyed by people  
who seemed to be willfully monolingual  
although she did believe that greatness can only be achieved  
by focussing.

But in almost all cases she saw, monolinguals kept a *very* narrow focus  
and *nothing* great ever came out of the fact that they  
would *only* and *at all times*

speak Christian  
or News-ish  
or that obnoxious jocular dialect of Business Talk.

Then there was the extreme case of her friend Rob from high school  
who went on to study engineering  
and whose only interest besides engineering was knitting.  
Many former friends found that over the years  
it became increasingly difficult to communicate with Rob the engineer,  
and several eventually cut contact with him,  
exasperated, annoyed,  
saying he only talked rubbish now.  
Brenda realized Rob did not talk rubbish:  
he talked Robbish.  
One mistook what he spoke for English and got irritated  
because it was not English,  
it just imitated the vocabulary and grammar of English;  
but it was Robbish,  
a private language if ever there was one,  
everything in it made sense only through Rob and for Rob  
and in his, Rob's, perspective;  
it became impossible to translate  
and impossible to communicate with him.

Their common high school friend Andrea  
who did crocheting as a hobby  
still kept up contact with Rob,  
but finally gave up too,  
not excluding him actively,  
but putting up a passive resistance.

And when put on the spot by Brenda  
who assumed  
“knitting and crocheting, there must be common ground!”  
Andrea said  
“Oh, no.  
It seems like it,  
but it's like German and Dutch

or math and physics

or Protestants and Catholics:

For outsiders it sounds very much like the same hogwash,

but they really don't get each other

and there's a lot of mutual resentment.

That's how it is between knitters and crocheters.

But his knitting *looks nice*."

Andrea added this last part quickly

and Brenda acknowledged that

and they both expressed hope that Rob's engineering

was going well too.

That evening, Brenda watched an old TV debate about sci-fi and

religion she had on VHS

because lately, her vocabulary in those fields

had been getting a bit rusty.

# Brenda Craigdarroch

## Felt It

Brenda Craigdarroch felt it when she saw her toothpaste spit disappear  
with the cold water in the sink.  
She felt it when she heard the fridge go to sleep.  
She felt it when she noticed the phone blinking at night.

She felt it when someone talked over the end credits of a movie.  
She felt it when she saw printers  
and dog sheds on sale  
and tarps over cars.

She felt it once at an intersection  
when she tried to see a raven, or just a crow,  
landing on a tree in the distance,  
but could not see it right because the traffic lights  
and the electricity lines were in the way  
and she was distracted by a good-looking guy in the car next to her.

There had been a time when she felt it when she saw Halloween  
or Christmas decorations  
in front yards  
but that had passed — there were too many of those  
and she did not feel it anymore when she saw them.

It was not that something was wrong  
that you are angry and want to do something  
like in politics

or that you are sad and blame someone  
like in history.

It was not even that something was wrong —  
rather, something was off.

It's like you're close to knowing something  
but then something is in the way.

Brenda thought  
it's like there's an obstacle which from one side looks like a signpost  
but that's not quite it.

Brenda thought  
it's like a revelation that you have no revelations  
but that's not quite it.

One time she felt it when she looked out of a bus  
and spotted that in one window  
in one of the sixty or so houses that the bus passed on that street,  
somebody had put up a picture of a lighthouse  
and she wondered why anyone would put up a picture of a lighthouse  
in their window  
facing outwards  
for whomever to see.

Then she vaguely remembered there was a picture  
in her childhood room  
(that must have been in the apartment, before her parents moved  
so she must have been less than four)  
there was a picture of some radio tower on an island  
and it emitted waves,  
and she did not try to make a connection to that lighthouse,  
she just thought: *waves*.  
Brenda did not even imagine waves,  
she just repeated the word to herself:  
*Waves*.

Brenda felt it when she found bread in the cupboard  
that had turned into rock.

And she felt it one night  
when she walked home alone from a party, slightly intoxicated  
and by chance passed by her old high school  
and saw that part of the building had been replaced  
renovated  
and all of it had been painted in different colours —  
she felt it strongly then.

The only person she ever confided in  
about feeling it  
was her father.

She somehow suspected that he felt something similar  
and at her next visit tried to describe it  
and describe some situations where she felt it  
and she saw he was welcoming that  
and she got more confident and opened up about it  
and then he said that he's not entirely sure if it's the exact same thing  
but yes, he had felt it strongly  
in his younger years actually.  
Then for some decades, he said,  
he had not felt it.

“That was basically when we had you and while you grew up,  
Brenda,”

he said.

But he felt it again later  
and now feels it quite often  
ever since he lived alone, he said.

And Brenda asked

“How would you describe it?”

And her father said

“Well, at first I would say  
it's like seeing a seagull when you expect an eagle  
but that's not quite it.  
That's definitely not it  
but one can start from there  
and try to refine it, because it's not quite it.  
If somebody asked you

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'Did you really expect an eagle?'  
you'd have to honestly say no,  
I had not actually expected an eagle.  
Rather: Only after I saw the seagull  
afterwards  
in hindsight  
a part of me thinks that I should have expected an eagle  
...  
But that's still not exactly it."

And Brenda said

"That's close  
but it's still not it."

And they looked at each other  
and they both felt it  
right then  
together.

# Brenda Craigdarroch and the Wasps

Imagine a country where it's normal to kick dogs.  
Nobody in that country owns dogs,  
but there are many stray dogs.  
They are considered a pest  
and it's socially acceptable to kick and beat them.

People sit in parks and have barbecues  
— nice people,  
normal people —  
but when they see a dog from afar  
they jump up and run after it  
and try to kick it  
or beat it with sticks.

Of course, the dogs don't like that.  
Many of them just stay away from people,  
but many fight and get ever more aggressive.

People love their food in that country  
so in the summer they walk around  
carrying sausages and steaks  
and sticks — in case dogs come.

Some people say  
maybe if you did not kick the dogs  
they wouldn't be so aggressive,



maybe if you even gave them a piece of sausage  
they would be happy and leave you alone.

But then everyone says that's crazy  
and

“Don't do that!

These fuckers will just come back for more  
and even if *I* don't kick them  
probably somebody else gave them a good beating this morning  
so they will still be aggressive  
and by the way it's scientifically proven  
that dogs are aggressive by nature.”

You say maybe some breeds  
and they go

“Yeah, whaddayawant?

How'm I supposed to know what breed this fucker is?  
Sorry, there's children around here.  
We have to protect them —  
I know someone who was once bitten  
by a dog that had rabies.”

And a dog comes, and they jump up and try to kick it.

And sometimes you hear an old lady  
sitting in the park eating her hamburger,  
and when a dog comes near, she fiddles with her walking stick  
and yells

“Oh, how I hate you darn *cats!*”

Imagine that country.

This is what Brenda Craigdarroch thought  
every July and August  
when she saw otherwise rational and mentally sane people  
dealing with wasps.

In particular, that one day she sat on the patio  
of her favourite café and cake place  
and overheard an old lady at another table saying

“Oh, those darn bees!  
The restaurant should do something about them.”

Brenda had a good imagination  
but could not imagine how you can live 80 years  
and not be able to distinguish bees from wasps  
or cats from dogs.  
She could just imagine that, if she approached her,  
the lady would say

“Oh, whatever. How would I know  
what four-legged furry creature that is?  
They both have teeth and claws, don't they?  
My friend got scratched by one of those dogs or cats recently —  
I don't want any of them near me.”

Brenda always got angry in the summer.  
and one day she discussed it with her friend, Manu  
and figured out why she was angry.  
It was not about the wasps.

“Who gives a fuck about wasps?”

Brenda said.

It was about people being self-harmingly irrational  
*on cue.*

You can be self-harmingly irrational by habit  
due to some trauma  
due to being tricked by commercials  
due to fucked-up circumstances  
but in this case people had just unconsciously learned to act weirdly  
because everyone has always done it that way.  
It just gets passed on from generation to generation:  
little children see their parents running after dogs and kicking them  
and think that's normal.  
And everyone does it, the smart and the dumb —  
suddenly they're all alike.

“Sometimes that can be good,”

Manu said.

“That's what makes society work.”

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If it just got unconsciously passed on from generation to generation  
that you don't cheat  
that you don't shoot,  
if everyone knew that  
if even the dumb and spiteful people somehow did that on cue  
that would be great."

And Brenda just stared at him and said

"I don't want to reform society,  
I just want people to stop being weird.  
No, I don't even want that anymore.  
I just want to be left in peace  
like the dogs  
or the wasps.  
It's not about the dogs.  
It's not about the wasps.  
Who gives a fuck about wasps?"

And then Brenda's voice dropped to a whisper.

"It's about people doing it wrong  
and you just sit there and can do nothing about it  
and you'd given up trying to talk any of them out of it  
many a summer ago  
because you always got the same responses  
and so you've just accepted that you're  
one person in the park who is not  
hysterically waving and running and screaming.  
You just sit there  
in your black-and-yellow striped dress  
enjoying a summer day  
eating around the wasp on your apple  
silently watching  
and sometimes, some days, spotting someone else who is like you  
someone who quietly eats their sandwich and reads their book  
and with slow movements  
almost unconsciously  
avoids  
or carefully removes insects  
and if you notice each other, you just nod  
and hope for someday."

# Brenda Craigdarroch and the Glove

On one of her biweekly bicycle rides  
from one side of town to the other  
to stay overnight with her fourth boyfriend,  
Brenda Craigdarroch lost one of her gloves.

She had been in a rush  
and was already standing in the driveway  
with her bike and her gloves when she realized  
that this Sunday was the first warm day of spring,  
so instead of putting her gloves on her hands,  
she crammed them into the front pocket of her sweater.

After about twenty minutes  
of riding through annoying traffic,  
there was a fast curve leading onto the trail  
and when she leaned in there,  
she heard what sounded like  
a wet dishcloth hitting the counter,  
looked around and saw one of her gloves had fallen out.  
She stopped  
and anxiously reached for her front pocket:  
there was no other glove in there.  
She knew the other one must have fallen out a while ago  
and she felt bad.  
She was late already and there was no point in turning back  
and while she automatically picked up at least the one she saw now,

for a moment she considered  
just leaving this one there on the street as well.

She had foreseen this when she had crammed them into her sweater:  
She had foreseen that they would fall out.

Of course she had not actually foreseen it,  
more like one of the three times a day when you think to yourself

“This won’t go well”

as a strange kind of psychological insurance  
where, if things do turn out badly, you want to at least have the feeling  
that you saw it coming,

then in 80% of all cases, all goes well and you forget about it,  
but in the remaining 20% you can say to yourself,

“Fuck, I *knew* this would happen.”

“Fuck! I *knew* this would happen,”

Brenda shouted, to the surprise of some pedestrians,  
and stuffed the one saved glove into her backpack.

The worst thing was that just a few months ago  
she had already lost a glove.

And the silliness of losing *one* glove,  
turning the remaining glove into an utterly useless utensil  
which just serves to remind you of your stupidity  
and whose incompleteness becomes a symbol for  
the incompleteness of your life  
and everything you’re missing  
and everything you have lost due to your own carelessness.

She could not tell her boyfriend about it.

She felt shame. She knew he would not actually care,  
but *she* cared. It would be a nasty symbol: not for him, for her.  
She did not want to share this.

She spent the rest of her bike ride partly telling herself  
to not even try to come up with some silly excuse to ride back home at  
some point in the evening  
and partly drafting and cross-checking such silly excuses.  
But when she arrived,

her boyfriend was in an encompassingly good mood.  
He had prepared a tofu risotto with white wine and capers,  
which was delicious,  
and afterwards he insisted on reading her a complete short story  
by Katherine Mansfield,  
which was very tender,  
and then they fooled around and had sex,  
which was very tender,  
and Brenda almost forgot about the glove in the course of  
all these activities.

The thought of it came back when she was lying awake after,  
and then she almost told him about it,  
but did not. She still wanted to keep it to herself, thinking,  
“That may be somewhat childish, but very natural.”

The next morning, he drove her to her work, then went to his work,  
and in the evening would pick her up again, like every Monday.  
Luckily, the drive did not go along any of the roads where she had  
possibly lost the glove  
so she was not tempted to stare through the window  
or to ask him to drive slower or stop.

That Monday, Brenda finished work early  
and walked back to her place.  
Then she started to retrace her steps (or rather, her pedallings)  
along the streets  
all the while bracing for the likely possibility the glove would be lost  
as kind of a weird psychological insurance.  
It was another warm day  
and Brenda was not even sure what exact roads were between  
the suburban blocks she had taken.  
She felt a bit desperate when she started walking up a hill  
next to a busy street whose bike lane she definitely had taken,  
knowing that after this hill, it would be only two more corners until the  
place she dropped the second glove,  
and told herself again to brace for the possibility  
the first one would be lost,

thinking, it would be just a few bucks to get new gloves,  
and now that it was getting warm  
she would not need gloves for some months anyway,  
when she saw something black and small on the bike lane on the street.  
She did not allow herself to start running,  
but kept walking up the hill slowly,  
reasoning that most likely it was a piece of a tire  
or another dead bird.  
Coming closer, it looked like a glove.  
It *was* a glove.  
It was *her* glove.  
It had been lying there on the asphalt, on the edge between the street  
and the bike lane for almost 24 hours.  
She did resist taking a picture with her phone;  
she extra-carefully walked onto the bike lane, checking for cars too,  
and picked it up.  
It seemed to have some more scratches  
but it was her glove.  
She put it in her backpack with the other one,  
walked home and texted her boyfriend  
to pick her up there in half an hour.

# Notes

BRENDA CRAIGDARROCH

NEVER BELIEVED THEM

- “just a little too long”

cf. John Prine’s first introduction to “The Other Side of Town” in a 2005 show as seen and heard on YouTube, and to be spoken the exact same way.

- “It is all not true!”

cf. A refrain of Nestroy’s, “Und’s is alles nicht wahr!”, and what Karl Kraus refused to write about it.

BRENDA CRAIGDARROCH

ONCE GAVE A JIGSAW PUZZLE

- “the tree was cut down in a spiritual ceremony”

cf. “The Rebuilding of the Ise Shrine” in László Krasznahorkai’s *Seiobo There Below*, called a novel in English, but a collection of stories in the German. The Hungarian original may defy description.

BRENDA CRAIGDARROCH

AND THE PHILOSOPHERS

- “a taxonomic standard work of the same title, / but without definite article”

*Mealybugs of California. With Taxonomy, Biology, and Control of North American Species (Homoptera, Coccoidea, Pseudococcidae)* by Howard Lester McKenzie, University of California Press, 1967.

BRENDA CRAIGDARROCH

WOULD NOT STOP SMOKING

- “stuffed eggplant”

Μελιτζάνες παπουτσάκια.

- “gooseberry cream cake”

Stachelbeertorte.

- “Hagenbuch”

...through this author, has admitted now that these stories are strongly influenced by Hanns Dieter Hüsch’s “Hagenbuch” stories, which in turn were heavily influenced by Thomas Bernhard’s work, and where Bernhard got his ideas from, the devil knows.

This specific piece, however, would not exist were it not for a poem performed by Rachel McBride.

BRENDA CRAIGDARROCH’S KEYS

This story originated from crossing a recurring dream of the author’s with a silly idea he had when looking at an office key with a very visible “Do Not Duplicate” on it. He still has the key, and the recurring dreams.

BRENDA CRAIGDARROCH

IN BUENOS AIRES

- “does snow have corners”
- “the abstract concept of golf”

cf. Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* as well as Stewart Lee’s stand-up routine “Office World Man”.

BRENDA CRAIGDARROCH

AND THE DISHWASHER

- “give it a playful punch”

cf. The Dubliners’ song “The Button Pusher” and Rick Mercer’s breakthrough play *Show Me the Button, I’ll Push It*.

BRENDA CRAIGDARROCH

AND SOCIAL MEDIA

- “Top 10 Cartoon Shows from the 1970s Which Do Not Feature Dragons”

Apparently excluding *Grisù*, the



admirable dragon child who wants to become a firefighter.

BRENDA CRAIGDARROCH  
AND RELIGIONS

- “temple, mosque, synagogue, church”

When reading this piece to a group of friends, it is advised to add the place where you usually meet them to the end of this list, like “or coffeehouse / football stadium / sacrificial centre”. It will make them feel less lonely.

BRENDA CRAIGDARROCH  
AND THE BIOCAPACITATOR

- “biocapacitor”

A thorough Google search turns up *BioCapacitors — a novel category of biosensor*, described in vol. 24, issue 7 (March 2009), pp. 1837–1842 of the journal *Biosensors and Bioelectronics*; as well as *Biosupercapacitors*, described in vol. 5, issue 1 (2017), pp. 226–233 of the journal *Current Opinion in Electrochemistry*.

Whereas in the biocapacitor, “a biocatalyst, acting as a biological recognition element, oxidizes or reduces the analyte to generate electric power, which is then charged into a capacitor via a charge pump circuit (switched capacitor regulator) until the capacitors attains full capacity”, whereas, “[i]n conventional biosupercapacitors the biomaterial serves as the pseudocapacitive component, while in self-charging biodevices the biocomponent also functions as the biocatalyst.”

It is unclear to the author whether those two are related to each other. In any case, none of them is the device mentioned here.

BRENDA CRAIGDARROCH’S  
FAMOUS RAISIN COOKIES

- “famous raisin cookies”
  - 1 cup raisins
  - ½ cup water
  - ½ tsp baking soda
  - 1 cup sugar
  - ½ cup butter
  - ½ tsp vanilla
  - 1 large egg
  - 2 cups flour
  - ½ tsp baking powder
  - ¼ tsp salt
  - ⅛ tsp nutmeg

Add hot water to raisins and cook briskly for five minutes. Cool, stir in soda. Let stand.

Cream butter and sugar until light. Add vanilla, beaten egg, cooled raisins and their liquid. Add flour with sifted spices. Stir.

Drop by spoonful on cookie sheet, leaving space for expansion. Bake 12 to 15 minutes at 175°C (347°F). Bake at 350°F at your own peril.

- “Death could stop Gogol and Dostoevsky from ruining sequels and writing shitty new *X-Files* episodes”

In a less upset state of mind, Brenda would concede that death is not the only thing which stopped Gogol and Dostoevsky from ever writing a single *X-Files* episode. Among the things which held them back, it features quite prominently though, especially in the case of Gogol.

- “obsessive footnotes”
  - ...

BRENDA CRAIGDARROCH  
AND HER DENTIST

- “because you just stabbed them with a metal hook”

The author heard something along the lines of this line first from his friend Mark (unrelated to Brenda’s acquaintance Marc in another story) and laughed out loud because he’s had similar thoughts during dentist appointments for a while.

When preparing this story, he found that this joke has been turned into various memes for various years already (Google “dentist humour metal gums”), but he believes that the next line, about the eyeballs, is entirely owed to his own imagination.

BRENDA CRAIGDARROCH  
AND THE LAST PIECE OF ART

- “who all looked like Doug Ford”

An abridged version of this story was first printed in the anthology *The Last Piece of Art* (HuHuHu Press, Berlin 2019), for whose international audience “Doug Ford” was changed to “Donald Trump”.

The author apologizes to all Canadians for thinking that few people outside of Canada would know who Doug Ford is, but he also thinks Canadians should be grateful for that.

BRENDA CRAIGDARROCH AND THE  
DEAD ROBIN IN THE GUTTER

- “shaggy cap mushroom plantation”

*Coprinus comatus*, the shaggy ink cap, lawyer’s wig, or shaggy mane, is an edible mushroom which is never found in markets or shops because it’s impossible to store: within hours after foraging, it turns into a disgusting

ink-like liquid. Its flavour is not that outstanding either.

Such a plantation would be nonsensical from a purely economic point of view, like many other plantations.

- “that his e-bike dealer’s cousin, who is an astronaut”

This story was related to the author by his friend Josh Vines, whose actual e-bike dealer’s cousin is an actual astronaut, with photos of the rocket launch in Baikonur and the proud families and all. But not as an argument against conspiracy theories, just as a nice story. We tracked the ISS for a while too.

BRENDA CRAIGDARROCH  
TRIED HARD TO FORGET THINGS

- “It can be chasing pigeons in the park.”

Not *poisoning* pigeons in the park, which would be plagiarism of a Tom Lehrer song. Only Georg Kreisler is allowed to plagiarize Tom Lehrer.

BRENDA CRAIGDARROCH’S  
CORRECT OPINIONS

- “and calf liver”

There is a niche on the internet where men who give advice on ‘health’, by which they mean white teeth and a bodybuilder physique, propagate liver as a ‘superfood’. Weirdly, they eat it in the form of expensive, specially-ordered capsules, and not with onions.

BRENDA CRAIGDARROCH’S  
PREFERRED ZODIAC SIGN

The beginning of this piece wrote itself when Julia Day Flagg, friend of the author and ardent supporter of all

things Brenda, shared a post on social media about how prescribing people a certain gender because of their sexual organs is not better than prescribing them a certain personality because of their birthdate.

- “...like those journalists who tried out waterboarding for themselves as if that makes them and their audience understand...”

cf. Köthe, Sebastian: “‘Believe Me, It’s Torture.’ Reenactments von ‘Waterboarding’” in *ffk Journal* (2019), Nr. 4, S. 85–97. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/3707>

BRENDA CRAIGDARROCH

AND THE MONOLINGUAL PEOPLE

- “an old TV debate about Sci-Fi and religion she had on VHS”

In 1999, the Bavarian regional cultural TV station BR-alpha recorded a discussion between Linus Hauser, professor of theology, and Wolfgang Jeschke, one of the central figures in the German Sci-Fi scene, on this topic. The discussion was split into four episodes occasionally broadcast in the program’s midnight–3 a.m. slot, between episodes of *The Joy of Painting with Bob Ross* and space footage set to ambient music.

At the end of each of the discussion fragments, the “Tears in Rain” closing theme from Vangelis’ *Blade Runner* (the soundtrack to the film) was played, in a version without Roy’s monologue, which became commercially available only a few years later on the 25th anniversary 3-CD box edition of said soundtrack. When they aired two of the episodes, they also played “Science-Fiction/Double Feature” from the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*.

It is totally unclear to the author how Brenda would have gotten wind of any of this.

BRENDA CRAIGDARROCH

FELT IT

- “it’s like a revelation that you have no revelations”

This is close to Borges’ description of “el hecho estético” (“esta inminencia de una revelación, que no se produce”, from his essay “La muralla y los libros”), but that’s not quite it. Indeed, by an ultimately irrelevant causality chain, this text would not have been written without the 2019 CUPE strike in the Saanich School District SD63, and in spite of an odd nod to Virginia Woolf, it is the most accurate recording of sensations and thoughts on a long bike ride the author ever managed to put down in writing.

BRENDA CRAIGDARROCH

AND THE WASPS

- “Manu”

Pronounced with stress on the first syllable, because it’s the short form of Immanuel.

BRENDA CRAIGDARROCH

AND THE GLOVE

- “Katherine Mansfield”
- “somewhat childish, but very natural”: Katherine Mansfield’s story “Something Childish But Very Natural” was first published in 1924 in the (posthumous) collection *Something Childish and Other Stories*. However, the story which Brenda’s boyfriend read to her was either “Sun and Moon” or “Feuille d’Album” from the collection *Bliss and Other Stories*, first published in 1920.

# About the Author



Born and raised in Germany, TORSTEN SCHOENEBERG published short stories there before immigrating to Victoria, BC in 2016, where he now teaches math at Camosun College and works at Russell Books.

Torsten keeps active in the regional poetry and literature scene of Vancouver Island, including as co-organizer of an open mic series, and has published poems in local publications such as *Oratorealis*.

Torsten lives in Victoria with his wife and daughter.

