

# The Capilano Review



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*Bad Feelings*

# Faith Paré / Selections from *tabula rasa*

Content Warning: Discussions of death and anti-Black violence. Please see page 112 for resources.

The ceiling apathetically solid. If there was any justice it would've caved in. Something dropped down stories upon stories in my chest. *A Black girl died here. Didn't you know?*

There are clauses that should cover their faces in shame.

*Didn't you know?* Played dumb. Of course I felt a dead thing dragging behind me. But I was too busy, too late for office hours after oversleeping, too flustered by the minus next to the grade I desired, to stare into the face of what was caught on my ankle. *Died here.*

*A Black girl.* What a way for us to become acquainted. I imagine you extending your hand to shake only to find it belongs to a corpse. That you are meant to be the corpse. Enchanté. *Didn't you*

*know?* What I knew is that it is a mistake to wait for the elevators, more haggard than the post-midterm morale. I knew which floors to never put your backpack down onto linoleum perpetually sticky with coffee. I knew by which hour the campus café runs out of pastries, the fluorescent stink of the washrooms' industrial pink soap, which lecture hall assignments mean I will not see sunlight the entire semester. Now I know my life as split into the before and after of knowing. *A Black girl died*

*here.* No longer could I merge with the rush hour horde. I squinted at each brutalist column, the granite tile, notches in wood accents for evidence. The number nine held a new, tilted resonance, that floor's threshold now a different kind of threshold. Its corridors never again unseen. How they widen and narrow like the squeeze of a python's esophagus. Look again. They are just walls. Guiltless blank

eyes of the windows across the façade repeat and repeat and repeat. Edifice draped in white disappearing into the flurries whipping through downtown.

*Didn't you know?* This building a sugar cube, dissolving on the tongue of a force bigger than our selves.

Violence happens on minefields far away. Violence happens in resource-rich jungles we learn to become numb to on tv. Violence happens when they learn which neighbourhood I am from, newsreel indulgences of shattered windshield glass and summers of the gun. Violence happens in the islands we are from, so backward and discombobulated, runny-nosed children in raggedy t-shirts scampering down dirt roads as if fleeing into the past. Violence happens in long-gone sacks of cities, bronze gods toppled as women gather scraps of their mauled dresses, in black-and-white film of English boys hobbling on blown-off limbs, stretching, sightless, into mustard gas and mushroom-cloud modernity. Violence even happens in the textbooks, they'd concede. The tyranny of passive voice, the side-step substitution in vocabulary. How lucky we are, to hunch over splayed pages, ballpoint carving through textual tendon. We can read through double-speak, through absence, rhetorical trimmings, digging to reach the thing in itself, pure and unmistakable. Violence happens in the campus bookstore, where my receipt is scrutinized and my bag rifled through three times over. We do not talk about that. Violence happens in the atrium where safety bars were quietly installed during exams because engineering students couldn't stop jumping. Violence happens when I mentally note how high I hold my chin, whether I stick the code-switch. Violence happens when it is plainly announced a student walked into the art building and never left. Classes resumed in the afternoon. The floors bleached before anyone could guess what happened. And on the ninth floor, I pressed my ear to concrete. I waited every day for what happened to you to leak from behind the remodelled walls. Only to hear the blood in my own head.

Something happened here. Like static electricity, its trace prickled my skin despite the callousness of concrete and steel. I scurried to the library for refuge, and first encountered not walls of shelves but a security guard. The toll flimsy plastic with a number preceding my name to prove my entitlement to these theses and datasets. Allowed to get my grubby Black hands on the pristine white pages. I took secret delight in constellating my favourite books, the one campus copy of *Scenes of Subjection*, stars and underlines and dog-eared the best pages. I'm a villain for this, making them irreparably mine. Before they were too indistinct, despondent, barcoded and shrink-wrapped. Knowledge2Go, to gorge yourself on and dust the crumbs off while driving in the car. I tried listening past the light fixtures' hum for the ragged breath of a Black girl flattened into an appendix or wriggling beneath a hefty volume's spine. During a late night, cramming, after an ill-advised coffee at 11 p.m., the sans serif before me swirls into the floundering arms of Black girls. I cringe for a scream, but the central heating whirls without a care. Can't live with that kind of quiet, how in that photograph it could be my great-great-grandfather, or yours. Maybe that's a long-lost aunt, or our original village before the scattering sea. Maybe somewhere in that illegible bloodline we cross over (that's ridiculous) (but maybe we do).

And we have no way to know. There's no way to know. There's always a limit to what we can know.

(Except for the white eye

It will cut till it can  
invent something to  
know)