



■ MISHA BOWER

READ THIS

Human sounds

How to capture the songs of emotion

IT'S HARD NOT TO SEE Misha Bower's songs—she's a member of gothic soul act Bruce Peninsula and has collaborated with Timber Timbre and Daniel Romano—in the pages of *Music For Uninvited Guests*, her debut collection of short stories. Mostly, it's because these eight stories, as with her music, value tone over narrative; Bower's less concerned with linear storytelling, more focused on capturing globes of raw, gleaming, human emotion.

Which isn't to say *Guests* is abstract. Quite the opposite, in fact. Each story revolves around a central relationship: A gambling-addicted man and his girlfriend, two brothers who swap pinup postcards via snail mail, a well-intentioned cheater and the women of his life. If they sound like well-worn country-music character archetypes, it's because they are. Yet it's easy to empathize with Bower's characters as she teases the uncut humanity from each, adopting a variety of colloquial voices in the process. (In a particularly virtuoso moment in "Fidelity's Bluff," Bower uses her character's southwest Ontarian dialect to twist the word "shit" into umpteen different meanings. It feels as authentic as it is dopey.)

These stories can be frustratingly truncated—often ending just as we've fallen for their subjects—but it doesn't detract from their effectiveness. Bower's real ability is to capture moments, not paint portraits, and her ability to carve tragedy, humour, and insight into each vignette leaves us wanting more. And that's a good thing. — MARK TEO

MUSIC FOR UNINVITED GUESTS
by Misha Bower
Cringles Publishing, \$20

ENTER THE RACCOON

by Beatriz Hausner
Book Thug, \$18

If you've ever wondered, "where can I find a good interspecies love tale between a human and a prosthetic-pawed raccoon?" look no further; *Enter The Raccoon* by Beatriz Hausner has all your beastly bases covered. In this experimental chapbook, seemingly disparate prose poems are interlaced with italicized human-animal S&M scenes, making for an oddly scintillating piece of surrealist literature. *Enter The Raccoon* challenges current conceptions of love, partnership, and animal-human interaction, asking the reader: How do we define the limits of love and partnership? How does one creatively overcome the boundaries between self and other? Content ranges from the aesthetics of bondage gear and musings on human nomadism to interspecies politics and the passing of Amy Winehouse. Not since Marian Engel's *Bear* has the thirst for CanLit bestiality been so righteously quenched. *Enter The Raccoon* brings the reader into a wild world of otherworldly love with arms—and mechanical paws—wide open.

— CHRIS URQUHART



TANGLED ROOTS:
Dialogues exploring ecological justice, healing, and decolonization

by Matt Soltys
Healing the Earth Press, \$18

Tangled Roots is selfless activism. It epitomizes all that grassroots literature should: it covers the right topics well, and most importantly, it allows the people at the centre of the issues to speak for themselves. *Tangled Roots* is a collection of interviews from between 2005 and 2010, which originally aired on CFRU Radio in Guelph, Ont. "Healing the Earth" was a program that focused on the intersections of environmental activism, radical activist movements, community health, imperialism, prisoner justice, and colonization. The book includes gorgeous illustrations by Philippa Joly. Soltys asks meaningful and well-researched questions, without over-inserting himself into the discussions. He demands that issues are not just glossed over, and challenges activists to question themselves. An editor, though, could have made suggestions on how to embed the how-tos and disclaimers into the material, forced some of the difficult decisions, or could have shortened some titles. The discussions of colonialist language and unusually long explanations make it possible to have a non-academic book that delves so close to the core of these entirely important issues.

— TARA-MICHELLE ZINIUK

