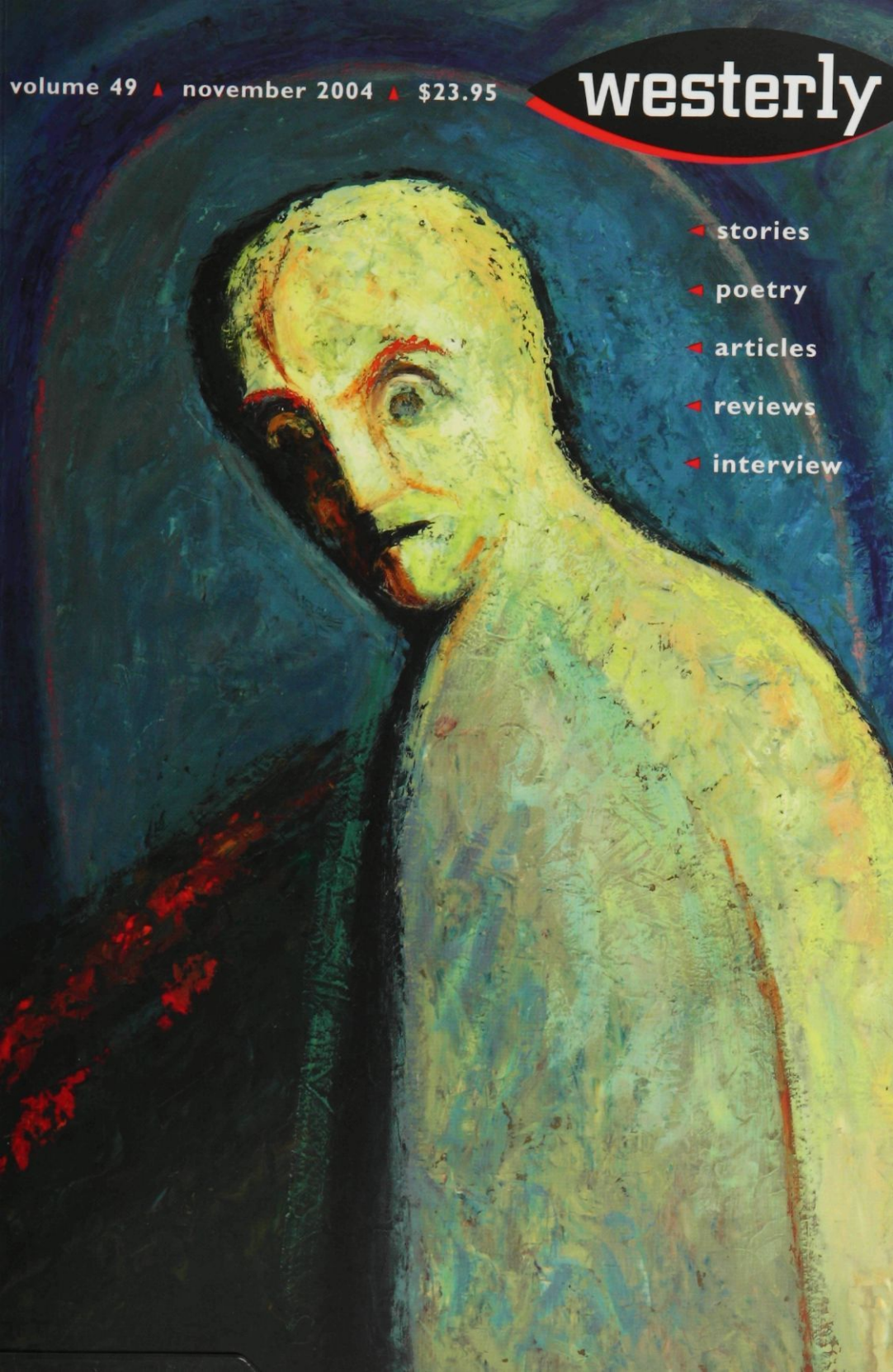


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westerly

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YOU'RE MEMORY

Look out, the grass is green! The earth pulls at your flesh. The pain in your chest insists. The lawnmower stutters. Summer. 1973? You sit in the backyard, stripping copper wire. The scavenged copper pays for Bett's anniversary present. Your twin brother Dick looks nothing like you. You leave behind the silver birches, leave behind the still lake; the shaft of a nickel mine swallows you up each day. How close the lawn is. The foreign beach is bullets and gore, is machines, and gobbets and limbs – and somehow you climb the cliff, you climb the cliff, and marry, and marry again, your first child is born, and when she sees that movie, she says, she knows it doesn't capture the time you never speak about. The green grass is closer. Shelley's hair flashes strawberry in the sun as you pull her into your arms – “Not lost, not lost” – the search party hangs back awkwardly; the tears run down your face. You build a house. You build another. Your initials are traced in the sidewalk. The hammer is balanced; you choose a nail punch to fit. A gravid woman who is not yet your wife stands beside you. You have two children. Your brother Dick looks just like you. The grass is too green. You go to England. You leave England. The ocean bears you out and home. The ocean bears you. Waves thirty metres high wash over the destroyer's deck, and wash away the chest of Bermudan cedar you have made for your bride. You make another. The grass is closer now. You work. You smoke too much. You stop too late. You start again. On long car trips, you sing a song about a man who left a lobster in a chamber pot, to the great delight of your daughters. The green grass is sweet. When you wreck the Hudson, Bett forgives you. Dick and you and your little brother Les

take the wagon down to the Grand and fish. From the plans for the house in Halifax, you build a scale model for your daughter. She chalks your name on its slate roof. Its slate roof makes a good chalkboard. You wake, put on your overalls, take the bus. The sun rises. You make a coffee and check the chemicals in the boiler. You wake, put on your overalls, take the bus. You play scrabble with your sister. Sometimes you win. You jounce Shelley on your knee. Shrapnel makes it ache. Outside Bett's hospital room, the doctors say she will die. You gather your young daughters. You wait. You are patient. And frightened. The grass is so green now. Your daughters become women. You do not approve or disapprove of their choice of mates. Bett struggles to walk again. Your daughters borrow your tools. You lend them your hands. Bear them up. Must this earth call so insistently? Must this grass be so green? You braze two pipes and solder the fitting. You tilt the baby bottle into your first child's mouth. She squirms in your cradle of sinew and brawn. The lawnmower stutters and almost dies. You've drunk too much rum, and argue a little. And sing. Around you, no one ever fights. Your eyes are serious brown. Here is the grass now, and now you are gone.



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