

## FrameWork 2/20

Rhiannon Vogl on Rhonda Weppler and Trevor Mahovsky

February 13  
Minus 20.

At least the sun is shining...that's what they say. Crocheted afghan on my lap, a knitted coil of lavender, pearl and lime wrapped twice around myself, tucked in deep to the seams of the Lazy Boy. Sipping tea, cradling the cup, trying to keep my hands warm. The winter. It gets into my bones. Deep and damp, it makes my marrow ache. My knuckles are gargled, my skin is getting thinner. In this light, the structure that makes my fingers has become visible – a web of veins and fascia below the surface, sinew and skeleton draped in a ruddy veil. I'm starting to worry there isn't much left under there – my wrist is barely stronger than the handle of the mug; it's held together by a copper bracelet and two-ply tissue. I'm supposed to keep it moving, but it's just too damn cold.

Instead, I'm sitting at the window studying, with too much attention, the ways the desiccated hanging plants on my neighbour's back porch quiver in the wind. They're a nice couple. Older. Quiet. They painted their cinderblock garage an overly optimistic shade of periwinkle blue a few months ago, after some kids decided it would be a great surface for them to tag. Personally, I didn't mind the extra splash of colour, but I guess for some, lewd language, regardless of how lavishly painted, is not a desirable decoration. The outlines of the letters are still slightly visible underneath the new layer of gummy, aqua tint. It now covers the stone, the mortar, the trim, like the whole building wants to disappear into the space of the sky beyond. Its non-descript enough though, inoffensive. And nice not to be staring at a brick wall.

It's what they've built on top that I find both fascinating and infuriating. Puce, purple and mauve. Tin roof, iron columns, arched porticos. It extends over the entire garage, turning the rooftop into something that is not quite inside and not quite out. It must hold the summer heat – when summer ever comes – there's a wicker-and-wood ceiling fan installed in the rafters, spinning at random when the wind gets rowdy enough. Pieces of white metal furniture buttress against one another below it, a bungeed ensemble forced together like the members of extended family who escape out here on the weekends to smoke cigarettes. Corroding lethargically, they're indifferent to the elements. They, being the chairs and table, of course...but the smokers don't seem to mind the cold either.

A blue bin, a BBQ and bar fridge lean against the bricks of the house and a flannel rag is flapping around their feet, tangling and untangling itself like it can't quite decide if it wants to be free. The door leading inside is still dressed in Christmas décor, plastic holy berries and fir protected in a cage of screened glass and aluminum. And those hanging plants. Flimsy plastic pots, once smooth and white are now chapped and cracking, dryer than the skin on my elbow that I'm trying not to pick, dangle from the roof in each arched opening. They were probably geraniums a few months ago, with emerald and ivory variegated leaves, silky crimson petals. But that was a time before I lived here. Now it is only their stems that remain, thin, browning, brittle. Maybe they will come back in the spring, but then I'm not so sure.



I'm not great at keeping plants alive.

The ones scattered inside with me – money plant, spider plant, aloe plant – are somehow still standing, but that isn't my doing. I didn't bring them here. I dust them more than water them, which even now I am falling behind on. My neighbour and I have the same green thumb – I wonder if she's a better housekeeper than me. Do her windowsills have houseflies too?

I fumble around every once and a while with my own flannel kerchief, moving things here and there on the shelves, wiping their shadows away. It's really the only exercise I get these days, pushing dust around. This stuff just accumulates. Around me, on me, in me. My hands used to be so much more capable, I used to bring things to life out of nothing – water, egg, flour; yarn, wire, string; now I just sit, and watch plants grow, plants breathe, plants waste away.

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My neighbour's son is visiting – he's come out to the porch, sunglasses on, bulky jacket, stripped in green, red and purple. He's staring at the hanging baskets too, sucking on an electric cigarette. He looks up at them puffing away. In this light his vapoury breath is turning into clouds of strangely coloured carcinogens. I bet it's the cherry flavour. Maybe I'm the only one who sees this. I don't think he has much of a job, because he's over there a lot, in the middle of the day. Not really doing anything, never really touching anything, he seems satisfied letting entropy take its course.

When did I become such a lurker?

These darn houseflies! Another one lands softly on my hand, and I'm close to catching it, but I don't. I sit instead, letting it live. It's not my place – as bored as I am of being, who am I to say that is also is.

Outside the screen door slams, the son's gone in, the sun's gone down. Tea's gone cold; fly's just gone. I'm back to myself, long sigh, silent shell. I can still make the hanging plants out in the sodium glow of the streetlights. They're waving, flopping, floating. I'm fading. I should go to bed, but instead I'll just sleep here. It's easier. It's all just easier here, now. Even though it should never have been, it just is.