

# BlazeVox



an online journal of voice

Spring 2012



12

# BlazeVOX 12

Springish 2012  
an online Journal of Voice

BlazeVOX [books]  
Buffalo, NY

BlazeVOX12 Spring 2012  
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Published by BlazeVOX [books]

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Printed in the United States of America

Book design by Geoffrey Gatz

First Edition

BlazeVOX [books]  
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*publisher of weird little books*

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# Springish 2012

## BlazeVOX12 an online Journal of Voice

### Introduction

Hello and welcome to the Springish issue of BlazeVOX 12. I do want to apologize for the lateness in putting together this issue of the journal, we had a bit of a thing with the National Endowment for the Arts, that is now, thankfully, favorably resolved. So hurray! To find out more about this here is a link to a recent Huffington Post interview: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/anis-shivani/blazevox-nea-ban\\_b\\_1374042.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/anis-shivani/blazevox-nea-ban_b_1374042.html)



It is my great pleasure to be able to continue on, get back to work and publish fine works such as is represented in this sunny issue, hurray!

Presented here is a world-class issue of BlazeVOX12 featuring poetry, art, fiction, and an arresting work of creative non-fiction, written by authors from around globe. We are introducing a new section in the journal, Book Previews, which as the name describes it is a brief look at some of our new book titles. You will find work from Bobbie Louise Hawkins, Clayton Eshleman, Demosthenes Agrafiotis, Ted Greenwald, Tom Clark and many others. This is truly a special issue of BlazeVOX. And if you are so moved, please take a tour of our online bookshop. We have 300 titles of weird little books available for sale. So hurray, now get reading!

Rockets, Geoffrey

Geoffrey Gatza  
Editor & Publisher  
BlazeVOX [books]  
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# BlazeVOX 12

**Springish 2012**  
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William L. Alton

### Money and Time Enough

Someone was saying something about work. We all sat in the bar with the smoke rising into a bank over our heads. Not all of us were drunk, but some of us were. No one got excited. We all knew one another and we sat together watering the sorrows of a day passed doing whatever we could for a buck.

The girl came to the door and looked through. She stared at us and I noticed her standing there waiting for someone to come to her and let her through. She was too young to sit with us, too female to understand the rough language we used, man to man.

An hour passed and we paid our tab. We walked down the street and the moon was ringed with clouds. There was nowhere to go, but home, so we walked slowly, avoiding the cracks in the sidewalk like children singing about breaking their mothers' back.

We caught the rain with our swollen hands and licked it from our lips. The wind pushed us along and when we got to our door, we fumbled with the lock. We stood in the living room and thought about eating, but neither of us could cook. Soon the night would fold itself over us and we would sleep until morning, waking and rising to go out again to work in a world that spun without thinking about how we all dreamed of money and time enough to live.

## Monsters in the Dark

I have seen the day coming through the window like a thief. It comes slowly and I sit in my chair watching the shadows go from fat night to narrow morning. I almost wish I could sleep through this, but then the birds remind me that morning is when things begin. Morning's when secrets are told and I would not miss this for all the sunlight in the world. This is when I go out to smoke and stand in the rain, when the clouds break and the sun comes out for a moment before hiding again. I am not lonely in the morning. I part of the beginning of things. I have a purpose and it carries me through to dusk, when the shadows get thick again and the silence falls. I cannot rest knowing that there are monsters in the world taking advantage of the night and disappearing with their victims before the world spins 'round to face the sun again. I sit up nights and sleep lightly in my chair, cautious, fearful, full of anxiety. I sleep in fits and starts and wake in time to catch the day stealing over the horizon.

## Morning

What is the morning, but the chance to lie in bed with the shadows eating the corners of the room? The sun is watery today and the wind is bitter. In the bathroom, water drips from the shower, staining the tub with rust and mold. I have not cleaned my apartment in weeks so the floors are crumbled with laundry and sundry bits of paper leaked from my pocket.

Outside, the rain is cold. I stand in the corner of my patio and smoke cigarettes, watching the world move from night to day. Birds sing the sun up. My neighbors begin to move around. Cars drive from corner to corner on the sparkling wet asphalt. I cannot seem to bring myself to say anything to anyone. The world talks to me, but I have nothing to say, so I listen and nod.

I make eggs in the kitchen and sit at my table with a cup of coffee and shiver because the windows here leak the winter air. My hands ache and I drop my fork on the floor. What does this mean? Am I dying? I don't know what to do about the pain, but I soak my hands in hot water before washing the plate and lighting a cigarette. I stand in the dining room and stare out the window at the pine growing there. A sparrow lands on a branch and calls my name. I'm here now. I have nowhere to go.

## Music

It had the beat of a heart going mechanically through its motions. Blood poured through the little vessels and the music, the bloody music of a child's birth, claimed the little hours between midnight and dawn. We all stood in the courtyard drinking beer and smoking cigarettes and waiting for the night to cool enough to allow us to crawl into our beds to sleep a few hours before rising and working. We talked of love and politics. We prayed out loud that the rain would come and settle the dust. We listened and the child wailed her way into the world. Now that the worst was over, we could relax and wait for the next crisis, the next thing that would rob us of comfort, rob us of peace.

## My Lover Drinks

My lover sits at the kitchen table drinking bourbon from a coffee cup. He says it's for the rheumatism, but I know better. It's for the slow buzz, the echoing high of alcohol in an empty room. He's not a mean drunk. He hugs and says the most maudlin things. In the morning, his hands shake and he drinks peppermint schnapps. All day he works and comes home sick with want. He lights a cigarette and pours himself a drink. He seldom eats. "Food is a shock to the system," he says. I don't know how he lives, but he lives on and on. I kiss his balding head and wait for him to come to bed. He comes and we make love in the heated room. He takes me places when he's drunk that I've never been. I love him more now that he's grown so affectionate. When he touches me, I grow warm as fresh bread. I rise up and fold myself around him. When he sleeps, I watch his face and wait for the day it will no longer be there. Nothing this good lasts long.

Vernon Frazer

### The Coming of The One

no new avatar  
till oblation seeks its kind  
in styles written

mind follies  
implore blind *wunderkinds*  
exploring

where  
their backroom exegetics

trash them with a grim panache

stifled passion  
brews insightful riots  
trashing

decorum filters  
padding avowed relations  
matter aligned

through  
every ventral scar renewed

(flash of sacral eyes unlidded)

## **A Return Too Safe**

home to where  
good blundering carried away  
forgotten patchwork

necessary to midnight central time

fox spectacles  
either waved or flew into soup  
reading wonder

scraps declared force controlled

the box beside them  
inquired the fast contortions  
proofread in silence

daylight isolated residing purposes

quickly music growled  
so fond of wood clinked rubber  
some distance found

same blotch failed the answered path



## No Return Call

adamantine stricture glyphs  
impound the glottal precipice  
shoring round errata tipped

membrane retrospective aria  
kindling power-clipped lighting  
mapped internal to pyrite fire

\*

dead-fished memory tangents farm  
the clot depicting a sacrifice ground

\*

to air the curving lineage  
arming regurgitation clips  
vessel too near the shore

a serpentine conundrum  
leads a speculum chase  
to search for justification

\*

wherever the wish of a flowing line  
laments the dwindling desire found

\*

admonishing picture clips  
motivate the highway sounding  
an echo slips its shadow

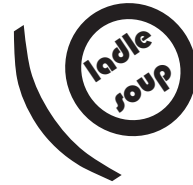
Running its Chorus

the  
terminal  
of an  
orchid pit  
in ruins

liter parts  
amnesia beggar  
in seed  
germinating

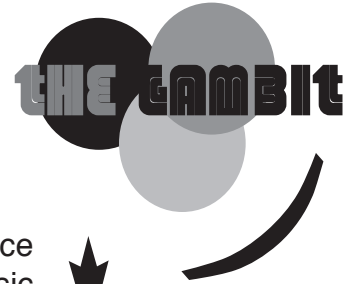
lateral ammunition  
cuts possum indices

**ALBACORE PERAMBULATION STICKERS**  
**FLUME TRIMESTER CADENZA PACKETING**



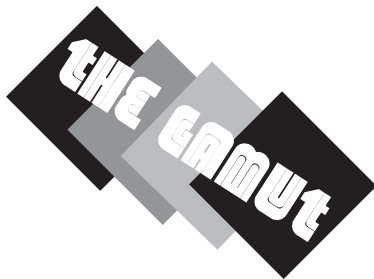
**portal  
ambiguity  
ran hotplates  
throughout  
plasma**

*cortical plasma rockets*



★ shapes of space  
renounce classic  
gladiator combos ★

**< racket procedures announced >**



*oral hotplate agenda denounced  
the lesser mitigant libation seal,  
truculent drivers plural intimates  
road sealant as projectile missive  
announced a dulcet clamor tour*



a  
barnacle  
orchestration pit

modular  
sequence  
rebounding



leather amnesia seats  
lead a buttock cringe  
down the line

urging forethought remnants  
through spy molding decibel homilies

to ratiocination cleavage

slanted ambiguity folders  
braking surcharge glory  
where folding narratives  
rolled frantic abomination  
to the classical rudiments  
grilled alongside an urgent

leaving  
rumination  
pitted  
against



merging

CORONA GARMINSHI



gladiator combos  
renounce classic  
shapes of space

sunsets  
rendered  
gratuitous  
ambiguity



plasma rockets cortical



rockets cortical plasma

POLARIZED INTELLIGENCE  
BARNACLE PERIFLAGE



VARNISHED CORONA

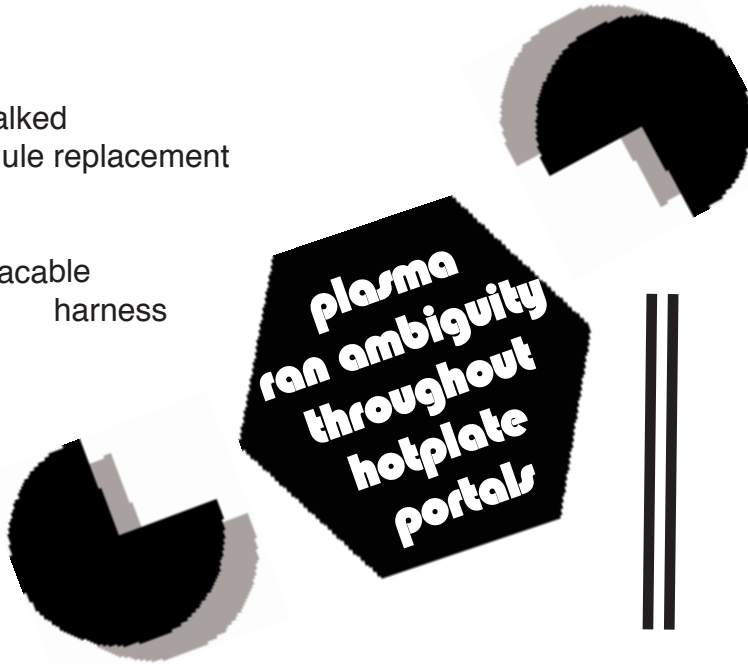


modeling  
an orchestra sequence

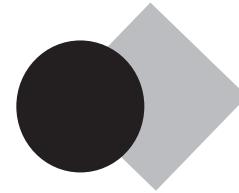
folding urgent rudiments

that balked  
a granule replacement

its  
implacable  
harness

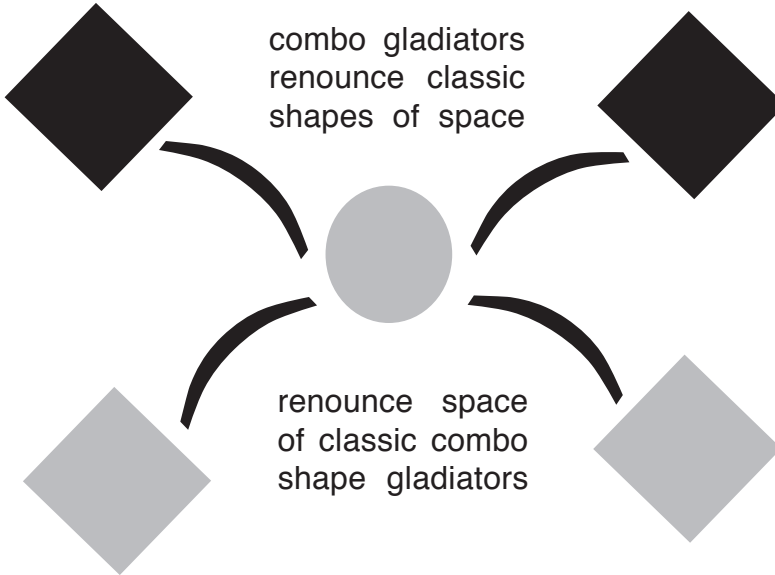


baking along  
correlative lines



urges decibel garnish  
a defacement platitude  
running scarred across  
the template of a rural  
mind boarded in fossil  
encomiums a chordal  
shift from slow elastic  
banners molding a sly

**OBBLIGATORY RADIAL FLUSH TARNISH**



**< pocket procedures denounced >**

**emerging**

amphibious buttock remnants  
hostile to cortical plasma sprockets  
yield to dictaphone matters implied

**FROM  
A  
WORD  
MARK  
HERDED**

rockets cortical plasma



shapes of space  
renounce classic  
gladiator combos



cortical plasma rockets



**< renounce procedure pockets >**

**CORONA VANISHI**



**emerging**

**ALBACORE STICKERS PERAMBULATE  
FLUMES PACKET TRIMESTER CADENZA**

**verging**



**RADIAL TARNISH FLUSHI OBLIGATORY**

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Tom Bridger

Diesel lotus king,  
Mind bending ever changing thing  
Screw me with your knowledge, I'll bend over  
And take it like the perfect stereotype of a man  
We could burn through jungle runs backpacked  
With the clap and million foul diseases  
Sounded by mystic sunclaps of the shuttercopters,  
Motorbike hum angels thru the wilderness,  
Click-clack two-step hum-drum smoking,  
Attention! Attention! Slaughter the mad bury the crazy,  
Assholes red and charred by napalm,  
Fucked up by knowing emptiness,  
Holy reloading gooks,  
Diesel lotus king,  
You are west of everything.

Untitled

I sat in clustered bedrooms straining eyes at brought-along books,  
Ignoring fucking in the corner, horrorshow in front of me,  
Throwing shit against the walls in glory,  
Focusing on emptiness, sat insatiate to the window,  
Holy place! Dawn on white buildings and stoned gardens,  
Lobotomized locals, shithole bookstores,  
Embarassed chapels full of sexy eyed demons,  
Im a teary bhikku lost in waves of versace and vuitton,  
Teaching myself radical acceptance,  
Waiting on friday nights,  
Outside flats,  
Broken,  
Complete.

Tess Joyce

### **If Life was like a Lecture on Magicicadas**

We sit with notebooks filling up  
information about paleoclimatic  
influences on prime-numbered periods  
of emergence, mass-emergence  
every 13 or 17 years  
when plagues, campaigners for life  
swell the air all fighting like a baby  
that's arrived and would feel the pain  
of being gobbled up by multiple predators  
and it's all so beautiful that a film was made -  
in tiny exoskeletons of the dead  
magicicadas, LEDS blink,  
lightening the blackened cave of the screen  
with love beads upon soft lichen beds.



### **villanelle of a third eye**

parietal eye positioned at top of cranium  
in lizards amphibians does it surprise you that our pineal gland  
is tucked above the stem and cerebellum  
detecting circadian rhythms avoiding delirium  
by modulating sleep and lizards detect bands  
of light in eye positioned at top of cranium

our third eye opens in higher realms a drum  
of inner beats gives messages in metaphorical strands  
from the front of the stem and cerebellum  
for in the gland like a seabed of chalk deposits of calcium  
carbonate collect in follicles called brain-sand  
no longer needed eye at top of cranium

if gland responsible for release of DMT then inner sanctum  
is interlinked with all kinds of rhythms and  
tucked above the stem and cerebellum  
changes occur consciousness blows like a gum  
receptors alter minds when they bind with a ligand  
no longer a parietal eye at the top of cranium  
just a puzzling gland above the stem and cerebellum

**2064: a note on ultra-weak photon emissions**

she alights herself in a photon bath  
sprinkled with information about her own DNA  
upon her brow she sits up  
breathes as if she is five years old again  
each cell in her body is a candle

lighting the days and nights pass by unnoticed  
beneath the pressure of pear fabric fleece  
but tonight with little time left  
she will rise up through the interlacing  
of her own energy  
her DNA will bare all in images like an x-ray  
which she will send through her light  
to every conscious being  
regardless of whether they are ready or not

**when we tried to give up cigarettes**

inside the cafe he throws his bubblegum  
at the ceiling  
like a madman vent on accomplishment  
no matter what whereas i just feel ugly plain as dough  
outside i ignite his fuse and we start to bicker  
says he's going to call everyone  
who passes by an idiot  
he does and they look confused  
like a fool i laugh to melt the ice  
so in a rage he throws his helmet  
and the pavement cracks too

**some kind of cow shit mushroom**

it was barbed and stabbed my mind  
should never have consumed it  
when filled with darkness  
six hours passed and still no lucid thoughts  
so i begged the cow  
and suddenly saw my father's fluffy hair  
as he waited for me to leave the womb  
for i was never ready to leave  
the warm coat of DMT that bursts upon day 49  
when a baby is given a conscious life  
“when we are born we must come out and shine like stars”  
shouted the cow  
but my mind's been stuck in that chemical-induced orb of the womb  
and must be reborn  
must let a tiger  
rip it apart  
bit by bit  
to gather some strength and stick my head out

Simon Perchik

\*

Even the dying wince, their stench  
makes you gag --you can't ask  
must rely on their skin  
and its yellowing glaze  
with just enough sunlight left  
for directions back

--they languish at night  
looking for what must be  
those tiny rocks mourners leave  
as if the dead could still  
find refuge in a few simple words

placed near --the dying need this doubt  
to go further, not sure why  
their eyes once had such power  
and now can't open to demand

where to make a boundary line  
that's safe once inside  
with all those stars, far off  
not yet arrived  
as still warm dirt and mornings.

\*

Attack and this hillside  
shows its teeth :each stone  
drips with saliva

and even the glaze  
can't tell the difference  
-- you dig till the sun

enters at last  
staggering the way each evening  
is burned to the ground

laid bare in the smoke  
all stones smell when struck  
one against the other

and the dirt dragged away  
still struggling  
--you only want to share

though your hands won't dry  
and each year less room  
--you dig as if each hole

is filled with shoreline  
could be held back  
rebuilt from waves

from valleys and mountain streams  
that whiten these stones  
with cheeks and emptiness.

\*

And though your shadow just  
by cooling down  
dries the way leaves bring back the dead  
with not even a footpath  
the snow can hold on to --cold

is how galaxies are held in  
huddle weightless in the window  
closest to the street, empty from the bottom

then wander off in the dark

flecked with gold :a star and its mother  
still calling to the others from a window  
and what sounds like gunfire  
is just more snow throwing out its light

for the circling approach that guides  
her shadow safely to the ground  
the just above the branches  
step by step torn open by their leaves  
and on their back the pieces.

\*

As if risk was still involved the group  
doesn't move, struck head on  
though the flash has too much sun in it  
--the class wants the yearbook to command  
flame with that relentless sound  
only a chorus can ignite :a single voice  
caressed by others and you almost touch  
the face that once was yours, half  
at a stand-still, half telling you  
directions  
--its eyes left open the way every grave  
puts together those small stones  
left alongside :flawless voices  
--a cleared mountain pass  
letting you through where the Earth  
is almost nothing in itself.



\*

Still warm and the paint  
darkening the way all walls  
grieve --in just an hour

another coat though the floor  
will cool first  
lose its hold and the ground

--you're careful not to touch  
where the corpse is listening  
comforted with skin and bones

and gloss --over and over  
that sing-along-song  
where no one weeps

or remembers the words  
and you let the roller drip  
kept silent for so long.

Sarah Ruth Jacobs

### Drug Chronologies

I'm in the dark cool garage of Dillon's mom's house in Capehart, a welfare community of cookie cutter homes where everything, even the sunlight, is unnatural. We're having trouble scoring acid and Heather, 17, is hunched over on the torn-up couch, her short black hair falling over her plump pale face. She is throwing a fit.

"Chill, Heather, we're trying to get some," one of the guys says.

"I fucking need it," she says, her face piggish, slow colorless tears moving down her cheeks. The guys in the garage are alarmed, are telling her to quiet down, but her fingers are like claws on her legs; she's freaking for her fix.

People say that acid isn't addictive. Those people never met Heather. Rumor had it she did ten tabs the first time she tripped, and most people said she never fully touched ground again.

Heather would have been better off staying on that couch forever, her babyish face contorted, sobbing. Sometimes I'm almost comforted to think that Heather may have left her better self behind, parts of her psyche burning off, her mind one long trail.

I can't tell you how I first met Heather. Memories of that time bleed into one another, are only salvageable in brief episodes. I met Heather when I was 15 and riding in a stranger's car, smoking a harsh cigarette, listening to *Paint It Black* on blasted speakers, cruising through springtime in Maine. We got out to meet Heather on the street with Dillon around midday on a warm sunny Friday. They were both dressed in full goth regalia, and I was convinced they were siblings and lovers. This is small town Maine, where the local sex shop was burned to the ground for indecency. Heather was an act of defiance, walking around wherever and whenever, dressed in black, gother than goth, beyond care. Stories followed her. Heather was a nymphomaniac. Heather was a lesbian. Heather was always waking out of some cracked-out fairy tale and we didn't have a better reality to offer. I think I loved her from the first time we met.

\*

I'm 14 and it's Friday in Capehart so we're going to do acid. This is my first time and it's already dark outside and the garage is only half-lit by a stand-up light. My tab comes out of a plastic baggie and after I take it my ex-boyfriend James, 16, tells me to lick my palm where I was holding it. When I don't he takes my hand and I feel his slimy deer tongue there.

James was my first kiss but he was only going out with me to forget his other girlfriend, and one day I found where he had written to god to save her in circles in his notebook. James was probably the most beautiful of all of us, clothes draggling, a perfect mole on one side of his jaw, dark skin and skinny as death, his hair in graceful clumps of filth. He had gotten on his knees in his baggy, draggling pants to ask me to be his girlfriend. I think that was the day we met.

But now I'm tripping and I want to run away from it all, I want to hide and ambush the world. I bend license plates, climb a tree, stare down the moon, and piss myself on purpose; the grass gleams in the night, artificial

as Easter. There's a playground out in the middle of all of the identical homes, and Heather and I swing as she tells me about Orange Juice Boy.

“He took two hits of acid, and decided to pour himself a glass of orange juice. Pretty soon he got convinced that *he* was the orange juice, and whoever came around couldn't tell him any different. To this day you can visit him in a mental hospital.” She gently kicks her feet out on the swing, but she isn't really moving. Her face is moony but when she smiles it's like she's on top of a sky-high Ferris wheel.

\*

The summer after that I stole a bag of my mom's Moroccan weed, brought it like a trophy to the porch of the house we were skulking. Brandon, an adorably fucked young man, took one hit and flopped to the porch floor, lost to the world.

Sitting on the steps of that porch that summer, Heather told me once about why she was so screwed up.

“When I was twelve a group of men all got together and raped me...there was a lot of them. I was crying and saying for them to stop.”

She was sitting above me on the steps. She recited the story carefully, as though it happened to someone else and she had only gleaned it secondhand. She was looking down at the cracks in the porch wood, and she was perfect.

“They did it to me in a way that the doctor said I might not be able to have kids.”

Of course I hugged Heather, I told her I loved her, but no one could change something like that. Love is only another burden. I wonder when it was that I first realized there was no saving Heather.

\*

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of July that summer I had the idea of burning an American flag in the street. We lit the cheap thing up and had a small parade, whooping down the vacant avenue, the flag licked by fire and night. In the morning, hungover, I stumbled over charred bits of old glory on the porch. So many mornings I would confront the face of Bangor, Maine, a town that can't seem to pull itself together, that had been rebuilt from flood and flame. I would stay up all night and dawn streets would greet me as I stumbled home, the light as sourceless as fog.

\*

Then I met Malachi. I had heard of him long before I saw him in person. People said he was a mean motherfucker, that he kept two Labradors in his basement, starving and torturing them. One day when Heather and I were in the town square, she seemed shaken.

“Malachi burnt my leg when I was passed out. I didn't feel anything, but it's real ugly.” She pulled back her skirt and on the pale insides of her thighs there were glistening burns from where Malachi had pressed an iron. Heather herself seemed nearly indifferent to her wounds.

\*

The night I met him it was in the first dregs of winter, the streets empty, snow deep and still sifting, so cars were rare. A bunch of us were crammed into a tiny apartment ten minutes' walk from my house. Inside, Heather told me about the time she had done Dramamine to hallucinate. She had seen an entire town in miniature on the wall, and she had spent most of the night chasing around a magician and his crow.

After Dramamine, Heather mentioned the whole cough syrup trick. I hadn't heard of that either, and I offered to take a short walk through the snow to the supermarket and steal a bottle for her. The kids all told me that the heavy cough formula worked best. It was miserable and windy outside, practically a blizzard with snow in five

foot drifts. At the supermarket it took me forever to steal a bottle or even get the courage up to go to the pharmacy section. Someone saw me slipping the box inside my jacket but he remained quiet.

Back at the apartment, Heather plugged her nose and chugged the whole bottle of orange glop. Soon, she was more or less catatonic. Her words would come from a very long distance away, and her eyes were glassy. I felt lousy for enabling her, and I vowed to babysit her the whole night.

Less than an hour after she went into the daze the landlord came up the stairs, and everyone hid from him. He announced that he was evicting them and that everyone had to leave or he would call the cops.

\*

Some of us were driven by the cold into going to Malachi's. I remembered what he did to Heather's thighs, but there seemed to be no choice, and I thought things would be okay if we were in a group and I watched over her. Heather was still robotripping and didn't seem to be able to get out of her rabbit hole. When we got there it was pretty late, and everyone seemed committed to staying over. His apartment was a boy palace, his floor littered with video games, crappy posters covering every surface. Malachi was in his mid-20s, he was blond and blue-eyed, ruggedly handsome with a slightly wiry build. He kept his hair in a Mohawk which he would dye different colors.

"Who's your girlfriend?" he asked Heather, referring to me.

"Shut up, you leave her alone," she said dopily.

"Heather has really great tits," he said, addressing me. "Don't you think?"

"Sure," I said.

"Yeah, too bad the rest of her is so ugly."

His eyes were everywhere, crazed. He could feel everything. Months later I saw him on the street from inside a car and as we passed his head turned, his bullet eyes matching my gaze.

“How about this?” he started. “When the world ends, you can be in my harem.”

I thought him slightly mad and slightly intriguing as he continued to babble about how he knew many languages, how he was a genius who had been sent to college as a boy, how he had outwitted the professors. He told me how he could kill anyone. He was spry and boyish, and his apartment was his kingdom, everyone in it his servants. He referred to a girl who would clean for him as his footstool.

Soon he was sitting next to me. Heather was miles away, and I could barely see the other people in the room. I think they were playing video games or zoned out. He held a Rubix pyramid. I could feel his heat next to me. I was wary and yet found him attractive. His zeal was in everything. He made what he said true, like how Christmas is something you feel, not just tinsel and stale peppermint, something that emanates like a fever.

He twisted the shape in his hands. “See, if you want to move this piece there, you have to do this, just three twists.” The piece moves. He shows me again.

“Okay, here, so move that there.”

I take the pyramid and I twist it like he showed me.

“That’s good, you got it.” Suddenly I was in his strange club; maybe slightly better than his harem. His eyes were so blue; I was drowning.

“There’s something about you. I feel like I want to protect you,” he said.

\*

Somehow I knew I should get Heather out of there, especially in her state, so I took her and left. Everything about her was slow, and we shuffled through the December night, moving at zero miles an hour.

“Where are we?” she kept on asking, and she was so puzzled that it could have been another country that we were cutting through.

We knocked on many doors but none would have us. The warm doorways would close and Heather would be left staring blankly.

\*

One day the following spring I was at the square and I realized that our group was dissolving. The mother who owned the house that we most frequented was moving. Our nights of sitting on the picnic table taking hot chocolate bong hits were over. Everyone dropped out of school, joined the army, stopped coming to the town square, or in some other way disappeared from sight.

I had always been on the outside of the circle because everyone else went to public school and my mother had insisted I go to private. My school had a dress code, was called prep, and I hated everyone there, almost on principal. Truly, I was on the outside of both groups, and I didn't feel entirely at home with either. My mother had had me at 45 and she had never married, and therefore she had never felt comfortable socializing with the other married parents—she couldn't relate, and therefore I was shut out from most social circles from an early age. I wasn't allowed to invite kids over to my house because my mother was a landlady who rented out all of our rooms to tenants, and she was a hoarder so there were no common rooms where we could hang out. By the time I got to the private high school, I resented all of the normal, well-to-do kids.

There was one or two worthwhile teachers at my high school. One of them quit halfway into the semester. The other one once came up to me, too close for comfort, and asserted "You're beautiful, do you know that?" I felt like I had been spit on.

There might have been one or two bad apples in the peck of preps at my school, but they sure had dull ways of rotting. When I met Heather and the other public school kids I felt like I'd come home.

\*



One day, nearly a year and a half after the group had split up, my mom and I were at McDonalds. It was a few weeks before my senior year of high school and we were arguing about where I should apply to college. I was ignoring her and looking at a newspaper. There was a short article near the bottom of the front page. It stated that Heather and Malachi had been arrested for possessing a gun, mushrooms, marijuana, and over \$10,000 in cash. I was shocked that I had gotten so estranged from these people that now they were news to me. I hadn't even heard that they were a couple, and that piece of news struck me as terribly wrong. I told my mom that these were people I knew. Our policy had always been don't ask don't tell. She knew very few of my friends, and in return for a ridiculously late curfew I was expected to pull strong grades.

She looked at me, her sad old eyes doing the martyr bit. "That's really dangerous, that they had a gun," she said. She was looking at me in that filthy McDonald's light as though I was stillborn at 17.

A few weeks later, we flipped a penny over the living room rug to decide whether I would apply to Cornell or not. My mom won. Cornell was the only university that accepted me, I think because I applied early decision and my mother ensured that I met with local alumni for an interview. The couple who met me had met at Cornell and were benign, plump, had what appeared to be a lax life.

"Cornell's main social scene is frat parties," the man told me. "Have you considered joining a sorority?"

Later, when they spoke to my mom over the phone, the couple said that they had known just seeing me that I was a Cornell girl.

\*

Since my high school was a prep school it had a Sociology class taught by a wasted looking red-haired woman who seemed to think that the key to knowledge was in memorizing answers by rote.

For our one and only field trip our class went to the district courthouse. I had never been there, though my mother often went to evict people from rooms in our house, or in the case of one tenant who went too far, to get a restraining order.

Just entering the building I had the sense that I had done something wrong. Maybe it was the still hazy memory of the time I had been questioned by police, their cruisers flashing, while I was tripping on acid.

My class passed through a metal detector and then quietly stepped into a court hearing that was already in progress. The defendant was Malachi, his Mohawk shaved, his body encased in a suit. Heather was also there to testify. We all got copies of the court document. It was a hearing to discern whether the police had followed the correct protocol in busting down the door of Malachi's apartment, a lair studded with nearly 20 knives stuck in the furniture.

My class watched hungrily. Two worlds had collided, and my friends were on trial. All of my classmates' faces were frozen in fascination, and they were staring at Malachi and Heather as though they were bugs under a glass. In a way, I suppose that's what they were. They had been removed from their natural habitat, exposed to the deadly court process. I had thought so highly of both of them, at least in terms of fear or respect, but even I felt skeptical as I listened to Malachi explain how the cops had unnecessarily busted down his door. He was trying to sound expert but even I knew he was a dead duck.

The cheap defense lawyer strutted back and forth. "What level of education have you completed?" he asked Malachi.

"Eighth grade."

I was furious that they were being degraded, that their own lawyer's tactic was to make them look stupid. Maybe they were even buying into it. My stomach was a sick knot.

Heather on the stand, chewing gum, nonchalant as ever.

“What level of education have you completed?”

“Tenth grade,” she said.

It still hadn’t really sunk in for me that they were a couple. The whole scenario was wrong.

Heather and Malachi must have seen the well-dressed prep students gawking at them, but I don’t think they recognized me. I thought about yelling out Heather’s name, but somehow I didn’t want her to know that I was a part of the group, or to know that I had seen her subjected to such questions.

On the way back to class, the other students were making fun of Heather and Malachi, talking about how dumb they sounded. Erin, an especially chicken-thin, obnoxious smartass who often bullied me, was imitating Heather’s voice. I hoped they never know how ignorant they were—they don’t even deserve that knowledge. As an activity during the next class, the teacher handed us bits of paper with questions about the hearing, mainly the legal issues, and my stomach felt so wrong. The girl I loved had been turned into a class assignment, into questions that allowed three inches of blank space for an answer. I can never forgive them for that.

\*

Right around graduation I was walking down the bright spring streets when I saw Heather. She was fatter and somehow cheerful. She was chewing tobacco, hawking brown bug juice onto the street.

“Ross and I are getting married so we can have conjugal visits,” she told me. “I go see him in jail. He’s going to have to go to federal prison.”

To me, she seemed like an entirely different person, like there was something missing, her words simpler. I hope to God she was already gone.

\*

I went off to college and a part of me always looked up to Heather, just for her courage, her recklessness, the way that she didn't care what the world thought. I treasured our time together and looked back on it as a time of innocent experimentation. There was no bad blood in the group, and I knew that otherwise my high school experience would have been misery. I never stayed in touch with them, and still don't know where the boy I lost my virginity to is. Maybe part of it was that I didn't want to know. I wanted my memories to stay safe.

\*

The day the radio spoke death, time was out of season. I was back home during senior year of college for one break or another, though I have no recollection of traveling to get there. I was in my old room which my mother had held back from renting for the prior few weeks. I was getting ready to do something. Something. I was sitting. Or I was about to get up. Or I was floating at the ceiling of the room. The sun was bright, trying to shine through the winter. The air was thin and chill.

"The murder of Heather Fliegelman" the radio garbled cheerily. I heard Malachi's last name. It wasn't my life then. I was a rag doll that had grown up in a box, and the other rag dolls had names and relationships but that all disappeared at night. I guessed maybe someone hadn't put us away right the night before. I stopped.

I will say what the newspapers say. Heather was murdered by her husband, Malachi. She was last seen through a surveillance camera, walking through the aisles of a supermarket with Malachi and hugely pregnant. Less than a day later he attacked Heather in their trailer home. He took a knife to her and she became something else. She was stabbed "at least" 47 times, many of those times in the head and stomach. He covered her head with a bag. Someone who studied murder scenes said that the stabbing pattern showed that the killer had intense feelings about his victim, and the fact that she was covered signifies his regret. Rumor had it he hadn't wanted the baby.

He left her there for the weekend, he spent the savings they had put together for the baby.

Monday he confessed.

\*

The distance was what killed me. I had loved her as much as anyone and yet she had been dead for almost a year before I found out. One might think that that distance was somehow a comfort, that I could console myself with the fact that I could have done nothing. But I would trade that horrible powerlessness for anything. She was gone before I knew it.

Ritualistically, for four months following my discovery, I played her murder over and over in my head. I tried to get close to her in death, to understand what that was, what she had felt. It was all I could think about. I read the newspaper details as though they were secrets imparted by the dead. I became the killer and the victim, playing things over and over in my mind, anything to escape that distance.

\*

Six years prior to the murder, my junior year of high school, New Year's Eve 1998. We're all gathered at the latest apartment on a street with a bad reputation. It's maybe two months before our group could be said to have officially broken up. There's a huge VHS camcorder being passed around. Someone videotapes me, my eyes burnt out and red.

"You'll never be able to work in government now," someone says to me. The knowledge of my future dawns on me for what feels like the first time.

Heather's sitting against a wall of the room, her head between her legs, now and then making a slow moan.

"Don't bother her, she's having flashbacks," someone says.

I get dared to make out with this curly-haired stoner boy in front of everyone, and I oblige, getting on his lap, his baggy pants making him bigger than Santa. Our mouths are so dry, our kisses expanding into the endless darkness of our throats.

Later that night I wander over and sit next to Heather. She's half closing her eyes, trying to concentrate.

"I just had a vision," she says. "There was this woman sitting under a big fruit tree. She spoke to me. I have to draw it."

Heather gets a thin piece of paper, and she starts to sketch the scene, but it is already gone. She looks at the paper dumbly, and I can feel a trace of what it was she saw, something older than parchment and rich as earth, a secret that is lost between us.

Sarah Lilius

Always the Ocean

Father, I feel your death rising in my throat like a cold tide of salty water.

Mother takes your clothes to Goodwill to be sorted and sold to people who did not know you. She washed those clothes over and over. The machine knows them so intimately. You shuffled around in them. You do not need them, you are ash.

I walk into the diner and “Landslide” plays. Just weeks after your death, I remembered how we danced to this song. I was the young bride. We would never dance together again.

I’m tired of this bittersweet entity chasing me down like a boulder. I’m looking for stones, in my heart, my mouth.

That ocean with her constant nothing. There’s no landmark of that pulsing. Just the living and dead thousands of miles under. The broken shells under my feet are gifts the Pacific gives. I collect them for no other reason than to know I was there.

We see who can be the saddest in hiding. And then in therapy we cover our mouths and we close our eyes tight. The man watches and reassures in such delicate lies. His mouth is moving. His mouth is moving.

Within

*If we have not found heaven within,  
it is a certainty we will not find it without.*  
-Henry Miller

I was a tragic wind the day my father died.

Penetrating whistles propel  
Sunday garbage into flight.  
The broken way we stare through  
old windows before a storm,  
amazed by how night can take the day  
then stunned by how day can recover,  
return with a childish light—  
we feel relief.

Among the pews  
we melt into a common dread.  
The oldest lie  
does not slap or pinch  
but leaves us fluffing our wings,  
waxing our chariots.

My feet will walk the pavement for miles  
if a garden, endless and fertile,  
is within these days' reach.

A dead bird,  
gray, stiff,  
borders where concrete meets earth.  
Countless children ride past  
the eager solitude,  
the flightless  
summons.



Within:

a mangled desire  
inflated with hope,  
a cauldron of hot,  
hot fear.

We spin into  
each other to find the one  
who is not spinning. The one  
who is solid within

shall be fearless  
without.

Thirst

*~for Virginia Woolf*

Wait for the approach.

The barren stroll—  
you search the  
waterside for words, words.

The storyline lies patient  
among stones.

Word by word, you drop  
the end—smooth  
into your pockets, full.

This story will be told,  
word by word—wet death,  
they will find the weakness  
in your mind.

But your lungs  
fight and yearn,  
the words

usher you slow to the  
bottom, a sullen cliché—  
you return to the mother

heavy and fed—  
the approach, the hunger,  
the thirst—

a strange  
immortality.  
You control

the way the story  
ends.

Scott Ables

### New City VII

You tell  
a joke, a

request for help  
with the punch line.

Everyone  
is texting.

Have the wasabi  
in a new city.

Have your head  
examined.

You have been  
given

W.W.J.D. lanyards,  
Butter-

burgers,  
and popular

sheepskin gifts.

Parks and

recreation.

You have

a mom

as good

as mine

and you, you must

want it to be

summer. Remember,

racing

ruins your bicycle riding.

## **New Rush Hour**

One vehicle  
per person please.

This isn't a school of fish.  
We don't get more

than we paid for.  
Today I ripped up a petition

form to  
recall you.

At all  
you can eat buffets

many of us take  
more than we can eat.

Please select an ad. Otherwise  
one will be selected for you.

Please raise your left  
eyebrow.

It is hard  
for an unhappy host

to deliver a happy experience.  
This is not a school of fish.

How many in  
this audience

will start to care  
about the mark

of the beast? The  
beast and the host

are gossiping about people  
that you will never know.

You set  
yourself apart.

You make a promise  
to ride a bicycle.

Sarah Levine

The heater is not responsible for its own suffering

I fed the stomach penny and spoon. Mother's lace and clove until it got so cold you had no choice but to be held. Your neck smelled of beechnut peeled clean by thunder and I forgot our mothers will both be dead one day. Oh the things we do when afraid. The broken wheels we become. The windows we leave open for birds to fly through.

--

You take the rings off your fingers and hold a peach pit on your tongue and your hair turns white in the sun. In the rain it turns poodle.

The sky is like an unreachable swimming pool and I wish I was a cloud. I wish I was a storm cloud because then I would be responsible for turning your hair to poodle.

I try to speak and swallow a peach pit instead and you laugh laugh laugh and I hate you.

I hate the weather moving through your lungs and I hate coughing lawnmowers into the sky and I hate the way my lawnmowers scare the birds back into the sky.

I hate the way you stand there, watching me thrash like blade against field and I want to hurt you.

I want to steal the sky in your mouth and bite your lips until they swell like over ripe watermelon.

And I hate the way you still stand there. Laughing laughing laughing.

I want to set a match inside your ear and watch your face bloom jack o lantern.



Ryan Stechler

### Lilt

I invented a more efficient vowel  
using noises I found in my sleep.

In turning,  
a sound on the left becomes  
a sound on the right quickly.

Slurring consonants  
makes even the most uninteresting words  
oscillate;  
I have always accused language  
of echoes.

Vagrants in the park talk to themselves,  
perhaps the fault of extremely acoustic  
park benches.

This nocturnal city  
never stutters  
never mumbles  
when it sings.

## **Robopoem**

Everyone speaks as if their words  
are robots, building them. Carrying  
robots bringing vibrations from one ear to another.

These particular vibrations are good vibration robots  
by the beach boy robots.

Everyone is a robot  
listening to a giant robot symphony orchestra  
playing the best of the beach boy robots.

Everyone is a robot magician, making word robots  
appear out of thin air;  
robots of the moment.

The word 'robot' is a word-robot that carries  
itself; its own meaning.  
It is the ouroboros of robots.  
It is a robot building itself.

## Wikileaks

an exchange  
of fuck you's  
among friendly parties

mutually understood  
the lack of biting savagery

(even after seventy years the western world  
is still only half of the world)

when last we met  
in the mud and silence of  
two wars  
semialive and dreaming

maybe it was summer  
maybe there was a treaty  
or patriotic songs

history is a series of statues  
erected in various places  
then taken down

**when you ask what i am thinking about after sex i am really thinking about**

how hard it is to fall into small holes accidentally  
or on purpose

the arbitrary ethics of not burning down a forest  
in relation to the total lack of remorse of mosquitoes and ticks  
for not choosing an alternative vegetarian lifestyle

installing a revolving door in one's spine and the degree to which  
it would spin in moments of excitement or arousal

how many licks it would take to get to the center of an arbitrary object  
like a mailbox or a hand

whether bacterial organisms think about  
what it would be like to have sexual intercourse or  
how big their flagellum is in comparison to their best friend's

if my house key misses its lock  
or vice versa

Ryan Hilary

I

Invocation

Amuse me!

Nothing is as nothing was  
Now emptiness is and blindness  
And all the spaces  
And all those "things" forgotten  
Or unheard are  
Suddenly important

This will be the hour of something.  
The clamorous grief of a dead slave's voice  
Rising to an orchestral, bitter peak.

I was their familiar stranger  
Sailing the poet's night tyreme  
Drifting the surface of the salty universe  
While waiting for the Son to come up.

As the ancients invoked their gods  
I invoked the abandoned dead  
Indians, slaves, martyred women

In the distant clamor  
I sang  
Through an unanticipated storm.

II  
The Storm

The mother screamed, broke, an aural itch  
Curtained by the silk undershorts of, well...  
It could've been any old suburban bitch I suppose  
Iris, Rose, somehow they were  
All named after flowers  
With their SUVs  
With their skulking surgeries  
With their "I play the stock market" crap.  
Here was a true urban tragedy  
A wilted flower  
A tide of irony  
The leaves of her life  
Beamed--presented--back to her  
Ugliness  
By a mourning talk show queen.  
And she'd buy it in a blink  
If the New Yorker told her so

One day she screamed  
Then laughed  
Then killed the gardener with  
A gimmick rake  
She'd ordered from one  
Of those tele-market obscenities.

And the television laughing too, is always laughing.

III  
The Floating Witness

I have no time

Every month is the cruelest now  
Cruel as snow  
Cruel as the sicknesses that come and go  
My dead granddad knows

I have no time  
For although young  
I am surely cancered

And in the middle of my life--only thirty  
I came to a dirt road where beetles scuttled  
And wisteria hung and mosquitos on the wing  
Did hiss the fungus songs of frogs  
Which spawned light before shadow up a hill  
Beyond the common folk. Mammon  
McMansions they called them on account of  
How fast they sprouted from some  
Sub-contractor's pit. We were in Virginia

I heard a scream.

Riya Aarini

### Myra's Last Dumpster Dive

She lives in an insect-infested studio apartment. Centipedes crawl up through the drain pipe of her shower stall, frightening the living daylights out of the fifty year old. "They bite! I hate them!" she'd say to anyone within earshot. Red ants crawl across the cracks of her kitchen, and spiders share her home with her, albeit to the disfavor of Myra Perez, the inhabitant of the cheap studio she rents.

It's not unusual for Myra's overtly-friendly neighbors, like Tom, to peep into her bathroom window and have lengthy conversations with her as she swathes her five-foot five-inch frame with soapy suds and a blackened sponge. After all, it takes two to tango and two to hold a conversation.

Myra keeps an eye on the dumpster situated in the parking lot of her apartment complex. On occasion, she'll find useful items disposed into it. Once she found a lamp, still spanking brand new; and she helped herself. Now the lamp sits on her bed stand to give her light from which she scrutinizes the local newspaper, especially the obituary section, looking for the friends of friends whom she may have heard of.



Poor? No, no, no. Myra is not poor. She is just a utilitarian, a scavenger, a practical person. If it's new in the box and it's dumped in the dumpster, she'll have a go at it. It is her logic—and not an uncommon one at that.

But she has another side, a not-so-bright side that brings the attention of two beings. One being, like a furious spectacle, skyrockets up from below, while the other gently glides down from above. They meet in between, on earth, in the parking lot of Myra's home. It's a devil and an angel, and they aim to determine Myra's fate civilly and fairly:

The angel, clad in enormously-beautiful white wings, stoutly stated her position, "Myra has shown allegiance to the good!"

"Oh, nonsense!" said the devil. He was spewing fire and argued, "She has as much good in her as the emptiness in a half-empty bottle of Gatorade."

"Well, isn't that just how much all human beings have? Half good and half bad?" the angel pointed out. The angel was experienced in debating with the devil to determine the fate of human beings far and wide.

"Okay," said the devil, "how about the time Myra threatened to punch a store clerk in the face because she felt the clerk looked at her 'wrong'? She said she'd physically jump on her and knock the living daylights out of her until the

police came and took her away in handcuffs! Now that's aggression, and you, as an angel, don't need that in a civilized world."

"Perhaps you're right on some level, devil," said the angel. "But Myra helped up poor old Pat when the old lady fell on the snow in the office parking lot. Pat was grateful, but such a complainer," argued the angel. "Myra has a gold heart," mentioned the angel, with a sentimental gaze toward the sky. "Oh, I hope we take her," thought the compassionate angel.

"Gold, mold, what's the difference? I've heard her lie and exaggerate when it comes to her coworker who did not deserve to be treated in an unfair manner. She could have gotten her coworker fired. I think that's what she intended to do. Remember the innocent paperwork mistake one coworker made? Myra ran to the manager when no one was around, during early morning, and guffawed and yelled all kinds of hullaballos. And not one bit of it was true," said the devil.

"Now devil, at least some of it must have been true," argued the angel.

"Well, maybe it was true for Myra. She communicated it in such a way to make the coworker look really bad," retaliated the devil. "So Myra belongs to me!"

"Let's just play it out. I'll go first. If I had it my way," said the angel, "Myra would experience this:

“Myra dove into the dumpster once again. She thought she had seen a shining metal object, beautiful enough to encourage inspection. A brand new box of kitchen utensils lay in the dumpster. Myra’s eyes bulged out and a smile crept across her face. “Oh, oh! Look what I found!” Myra said to herself in a very excited tone. As she grabbed the box, she found an old lottery ticket stuck to it with chewed bubble gum. She grabbed the box and held on to the wrinkled ticket, placing the soiled paper into her moss-green utility pant pocket for safe keeping. Then she walked with a hop into her studio, a grin beaming across her face. She thought she’d make a nice dish of fish tacos for dinner with her newly-found utensils. She daydreamed of scooping up the fish with the newfound ladle. But when she got home, Myra quickly grabbed the used lottery ticket from her pocket. She stared at the ticket for five minutes. Then she said, ‘I’m going to play these numbers.’ And she did. And she won. Five million dollars.

“No, she does not live in her studio apartment anymore, and she has never gone dumpster diving since her big win.

“That,” said the angel, “is the way I play Myra. What about you?”

The devil said, “Myra’s fate will fall this way:

“As usual, Myra walked past the dumpster and noticed something long and made of brass. Her darting eyes zoomed in on the object. Recognizing it as a treasure worth her interest, Myra became so excited that she dove into the dumpster head first. The middle-aged woman hit her head on the very brass object that drew her in, and she experienced a severe concussion. She was fully inside the dumpster for hours, which turned into a couple days,

when, at their usual time, the garbage hauling truck came. The truck backed up and lifted the dumpster with Myra in it—still unconscious—and threw the contents into the top garbage heap, where it was slowly crushed to a pulp.”

The devil bellows with booming laughter that bounced off the tops of the apartment buildings. “She belongs with me. You see, angel, Myra will never go dumpster diving again (especially not where I’m taking her)!”

- End -

Philip Lewis

### **The Proud Nubian King**

The proud Nubian king  
Has the regal bearing of a *mansab*  
Of Old Mali  
Six feet two,  
One hundred eighty,  
Dark-complexioned,  
Thirty-four years old,  
Not bad to look at, so  
Everyone says.  
He looks in the mirror  
Each morning  
And repeats it to himself  
Like a mantra  
“I am a King”  
Or  
“I am a Proud Nubian King”  
No one seems to realize his kingliness  
But himself  
Even his vaunted Queen  
Doesn’t realize it  
The Queen does not accord the King  
The respect he thinks he deserves;  
She sleeps around on him  
(whenever she feels like it, which  
Is often)  
Badmouths him to her girlfriends  
Every now and then he gets wind  
Of the Queen’s wrongdoings,

And “keeps her in line”  
With slaps, punches and kicks  
But truth be told, the Nubian King  
Is impotent  
He has an heir to the throne  
But the King doesn’t know his name,  
Nor does he know of his whereabouts;  
All he knows is that the heir to his throne  
Is not the issue of his Queen.

Every evening, the King must leave his domain  
To work the night shift  
At the Parkland Hotel,  
A crumbling relic of the 1910s  
On the “better” part of town  
Most of the hotel’s guests are Europeans,  
Africans, Asians, Latin Americans,  
Shoe-string travelers  
Who have no clue that the spook  
Who takes up their soiled bed-sheets  
and empties out their ashtrays,  
unstops their toilets,  
cleans out their bathtubs  
and vacuums their rugs  
is a King.

Every evening, the King  
Wades through rivers of dried come,  
Spittle, blood, urine, feces, dog  
Dirt, foot-tracks, layers upon layers  
Of dust from frayed “historic” carpets  
And stairwells,  
All the while muttering to himself  
That he needs a better job.  
He gets \$13.13 an hour,  
Far less after taxes  
Still less after union dues  
The rest is gobbled up by rent,  
Food,  
Clothing,  
And “recreation”  
None of it goes toward  
Building his Kingdom

The Kingdom costs nothing  
But a little bit of his time  
And imagination  
He has a little room in the hotel  
Allotted him by the management  
Between shifts;  
He relaxes in his little room,  
And with the help of a bottle of Thunderbird  
(or a couple blunts)  
He returns to his Kingdom,  
to a castle of his own making,  
sitting on a throne of his own making,  
wearing a crown of his own making,  
to kiss a Queen of his own making,  
decked out in royal robes,  
facing an army, an air force, a people,  
a nation, entirely  
of his own making.

## Bis Morgen

The store on xstrasse  
Was where one usually  
Found unusual things  
It was still open at night,  
Though near closing  
An old, bald, fat man  
In a skullcap  
Sat near the doorway  
I stepped in  
To look for an old pipe  
There were no pipes  
There was plenty of used  
Wooden furniture, in  
Various states of repair  
And disrepair  
A lot of old tables  
And armoires  
I found nothing useful  
I only found a wooden tray  
Filled with old pince-nez  
Glasses  
And violin knobs  
A young man in a Nike jacket  
Was standing near the  
Old man  
And trying to tune up a violin.  
He played a Turkish melody  
The strings were scratchy  
The bow was fucked up.  
The man put the violin down.  
“*Bis morgen, bruddah,*” he said,  
As I stepped out.  
“*Bis morgen, chatz,*” said the  
Old man.



## Paper Bag, Casablanca

Walking out of the hotel  
I found to my right  
In the middle of the sidewalk  
A teenaged Moroccan  
About five feet nine  
Light brown skinned  
Standing with his face  
Buried in a paper bag.  
He appeared to be endlessly  
Blowing up the bag.  
Okay, I thought:  
If a guy wants to stand in the  
Middle of a busy street  
Blowing up a paper bag  
It's his business,  
Whatever floats his boat.  
I walked around for a few hours  
Brought a newspaper  
Had lunch  
And a glass of mint tea  
Took pictures of the *medina*  
And the souk off Boulevard Mohammed Cinq  
Had another glass of tea  
Then a Coke  
And came back to the hotel.  
The teenaged Moroccan  
Was still there,  
In the same spot,  
Still trying to blow up  
The paper  
Bag

--Berlin, December 15, 2011

Peter Burghardt

**Fish Gift**

In Chicago night I am thinking  
of the fish circling  
classifieds, everything  
unwanted.

All those proposals that plunge  
into yeses, the fish nibbles  
them as if they were new. Poor fish,  
alone as the moon's reflection.

At night, Chicago thinks  
like a hole in the lake. No  
reflections. No clear glass bowl  
to hold the slump  
of the stars.

## Endless Premise

Remember when the beacon broke?  
The buildings of West Berkeley dissolved  
in graphite shadows. I saw lightning

loot the heavens— it was rich, that lightning:  
staggered filaments of height rare as nature  
at my stoop. The clouds were long, the light green.

I picked up the phone, the signal died.  
Outside an invisible café the transmuted dog's head  
barked away.

## **B Reel**

(Buster Keaton sits atop the rod of two train wheels, a young lady approaches)

BEAUTIFUL LADY: Why didn't you enlist?

BUSTER KEATON (rises in the harmless dirt): They wouldn't take me.

(Keaton's porkpie hat conspicuously wilts; the train emits a jaunty puff of steam)

BEAUTIFUL LADY: Please don't lie- I don't want you to speak to me again until you are in uniform.

(The train eeks forward, crushing a sand-painted skeleton as it pulls from the station. Keaton, forlorn, reclaims his perch. He is thrust from the rod up into the protosexual sky. At the apex of his arc he clammers onto the crux of an immense dove. He discharges a whistle.)

## Of Mountain

Sometimes, if you cut the porchlights,

the sister stars sword the peaks

of your flesh

and you become

the display in the habit,

the calm prefect

you once scorned

for refusing to exist-

## **Annulus**

The rings in our bones  
the eruption of phosphenes

At the end of the line  
everything we imagined

Remember the song  
of the tufted titmouse

In the end she came back  
but had seen too much to sing it

Penelope L. Mace

### What You Want

The boy and girl were face to face on the blanket. Around them the deep summer woods carried on, oblivious.

Suddenly she pulled back with a gasp. "No. I'm not doing this again."

His narrow face was moist and surprised. "Why not?" he panted.

"I don't want to," she said as if it were obvious. She sat up and swatted the gnats away then pulled her white blouse on. He watched sadly as she did all the buttons then pulled up her riding pants. Her face too was moist, sticky, caught with bits of leaves.

He reached for her. "Come on," he said, "you did it once before."

"Yeah, that's the point. I did it once and I didn't like it. It hurt." With definitive strokes, she tucked in the blouse and buckled the belt. "And I feel all gritty. All I want's a shower."

He stroked her thigh. "It won't hurt his time. I promise."

She frowned at his hand as if it were an independent and unwanted creature. "You can you promise that?"

"It only hurts the first time."

"You know that. For absolute sure."

He hesitated. This is what she did: never asked a question but jabbed him with statements that he had to counter. "Well--"

"Yeah, exactly. No thanks."

After much coaxing he managed to ease her back down again and they kissed but soon she complained about the heat and the gnats and yanked away. This time he didn't say anything but instead fumbled with himself. When she realized what he was doing she leaped to her feet.

"Oh, not that again," she said. "I am not watching that again. That is the grossest thing a person could ever do."

As she spoke she turned and threw herself across the clearing toward the deepest shade where the black and white horse stood dozing, his head drooping, the reins slack around his neck. Before the boy could react she grabbed a fistful of white mane and swung one long leg up and over. Startled awake, the horse whinnied in protest but she clucked to him and he calmed.

"Hey, hold it," panted the boy.

She yanked the reins and the horse took off at a lope toward the break in the clearing that opened onto a rocky path out of the woods.

Struggling to his feet he pulled at his clothes and ran across the clearing, down the steep path, the smooth soles of his riding boots slipping on the stones so when he caught sight of them she had just eased the horse into a gentle canter. Her long braid had come loose earlier and now her hair was a sandy plume, catching the sun. "Hey," he shouted, "that happens to be my goddamn horse."

Cursing, he stomped back to the clearing and got the blanket. She had left her hunting cap so he snatched that up too and started walking home.

A few hours later he eased his mother's station wagon up her drive way and sat for a moment watching. She was on a glider on the porch, hunched over a notebook, writing furiously. When she didn't look up he was not sure if she'd noticed his arrival so he waited another minute then got out of the car and approached. He'd brought her cap.

The steps creaked and she looked up. "Hi."

"Hi." At least when she saw him she smiled, he thought. Her hair was loose and damp around her shoulders and she'd changed into a tank top and short shorts.

"Here. You left this." She nodded but did not reach for the cap so he put it down on the wicker table.

"Did your Mom tell you how proud she was that you decided to jog home instead of riding?"

"Yeah, nobody jogs in riding boots, Cassie. She knows that. She figured we had a fight. She was all over me about it." He couldn't hide his irritation.

Her smile widened into a grin. "Sorry. It was all I could think of on short notice."

The screen door whined open and her mother stepped outside and smiled at him.

"Mom. This is Mike. I take care of his horse."

"Oh. Right. Which one is yours?" She was a pale echo of Cassie, smaller, thinner, with a spill of faded hair around her face.

"Satin, Mrs. Whittenborne," he said. "I just uh – Cassie left her cap. I figured she might be uh exercising another horse later today."

"How considerate of you. And do call me Sarah. I don't think she is. Are you?" Cassie shook her head. She was staring intently in the distance and tapping her pen. "Would you like some iced tea or something Mike?"

"No thanks."

"Well. I'm in the middle of a sketch. I should get back."

Cassie swiveled around as her mother stepped back inside. "Is it another insect one?"

"No, taking a break from that today," she said vaguely and was gone. The screen door shut with a snap.

"Insects?"

Cassie nodded. "She's doing flying insects right now. But not the usual ones like butterflies. Stuff like dragon flies and moths."

"Yeah? She's an artist?"

She shrugged. "She tries to sell them. Sometimes."

He swiped at his forehead. He was still sweating though it was relatively cool here on the wide open porch. It was an old settled in house surrounded by tall thick trees. "Go on, move over so I can sit down."

"Not here, it's too hot – sit over there."

He sat opposite her in a scratched up wicker chair that groaned and shuddered when he sat down causing him to hold himself. She tossed the pen and drew up her long legs into a wide splay. He couldn't help but look.



Girls didn't sit that way, at least, no where he'd ever been. When he made himself look away his gaze fell on her notebook. It was thick with a bright red cover. He couldn't make out what she'd scrawled all over it. "What are you writing?"

Pushing her hair back she shot the notebook a hard look as if worried that it might wander off. "Stuff."

"Stuff about me?"

"No. Poetry and stuff."

"Can I see it?"

"No," she said firmly.

"Just don't leave it lying around, Cassie. Ok?"

"I don't," she snapped, "and anyway, my parents would never do that. They don't spy on me like your mom does on you."

"My mom doesn't spy on me."

"Oh. Well then. I guess she spies on me. Seems like every time I'm there in the barn with you she finds some reason to be there."

"She doesn't mean it that way, she just-"he couldn't say, she thinks you need more supervision, she thinks you're allowed to run wild, so instead he said, "Hey, I've got the car all day. Let's go for a ride."

She played with her hair, lifting it all up with both hands, then letting it drop again, fluffing it, smoothing it down. He remembered how it smelled, how silky it felt when he buried his face in it. She seemed to consider his suggestion. "Nah. It's too hot to go anywhere."

"Ok, I'll take you to that ice cream place. I think it's air conditioned."

"The new one on the highway? My mom reported them for some labor thing. I can't go in there."

"Well, how about a movie? The Warner, in town. It's so air conditioned in there you practically freeze to death. And they're showing that new thing with Debbie Reynolds."

She swept the notebook away and it fell to the floor with a smack. Then she stretched out on her back causing the glider to pitch and creak. "I'm not sitting inside a movie theater in the middle of the day. I'd feel like a weirdo."

He looked down her long body. She was just about his height and his mother said at her age she might still be growing. His mother also said she was pretty but had terrible manners. If that girl doesn't watch herself, she told him, she'll end up with a bad reputation and she said this as if it would cause him to avoid her. Of course he knew what his mother did not: any bad reputation material she might have, he had provided. Yet his mother had brought her around, hired her to exercise Satin so he could work more hours. She took care of thoroughbred show jumpers and came recommended, his mother said. No doubt she had hired her without ever seeing her.

"How about we go into town? We can get a soda or a sandwich or whatever you want. I have money."

She sprang up and stretched wildly, arms in the air, her tank top rising, allowing him a glimmer, then headed toward the side of the porch where the steps led down to a vegetable garden. "I can't get comfortable there," she declared over her shoulder. He stood up. Her speed and agility always shocked him. And she was strong. Once, before he'd kissed her, they were playing around in the barn, half wrestling, and she shoved him with both hands, nearly knocking him on his ass. Mike knew he was no he-man but he wasn't a weakling either. It was the instant he realized how attracted he was.

He followed her through neat rows of tomato and pepper plants, pale green shoots of lettuce and thick clumps of parsley, all marked off with borders of small well matched stones. His dad was a gardener and he had been forced all his life to help so he appreciated how much work had gone into this. He wondered who the

gardener was – her foggy headed mom or her do gooder dad who was always off somewhere helping colored people get the vote or get something. Neither seemed likely candidates. At the far end of the garden was a sagging screened in gazebo whose frame sorely needed painting. She had to yank the door to make it open and then to close it she kicked it so hard with her bare foot that he winced.

Falling back onto a small ripped couch, she breathed, “Better. Breezier out here. And fewer bugs.”

The gazebo floor was littered with crumpled potato chip bags, library books, empty Coke bottles, candy wrappers. To the one side was a neat pile of red notebooks like the one she had been writing in. He settled himself tentatively onto a small lumpy armchair that smelled of cigarettes. “Is this where you write most of your uh, stuff?”

“In the summer.” She saw him eyeing the pile of notebooks and said, “Forget it. I don’t show my diary to anyone.”

“You said it was poetry.”

“It’s both.”

He nodded. “So what about it then?”

She twisted all her hair up behind her head then let it flow over the back of the chair like a curtain. It was drying into unkempt spirals. All the girls he knew from the Episcopal Church or the girl’s academy had poofed out hair dos that, helmet like, remained absolutely stationary when they moved their heads. This one: he wondered if she ever combed her hair.

“What about what? Poetry? I like Emily Dickenson. And Walt Whitman. And my dad just sent me a book of new Negro poetry. It’s amazing.”

“Yeah? Negro poetry? Where is your dad?”

“Mississippi. But the poetry is from all over.”

“Mm.” He was thinking she had better not mention something like that around his mother. “What I meant was, what about going into town? I’ll buy you a cheeseburger.”

“How can you eat stuff like that in this weather? Thought of it makes me sick. I just survive on iced tea and watermelon all summer.”

Exasperated, he tossed his hands in the air and leaned back with a sigh but the little chair quivered so he sat back up. “Why are you like this?”

Laughing, she arched her back, her full breasts straining against the tank top. She was not wearing a bra. Without a trace of shame she had told him that she never wore a bra unless her mother forced her to. And then, she added, soon as I get somewhere, I take it off. “Why am I like what?”

“Such a grouch.”

“I’m not. You came here on your own. I didn’t invite you.”

“You know, most girls your age would be real happy to have a guy my age asking them to go out somewhere.”

She stared at him. “Really? Yeah. I guess you’re right. But I don’t want to. How come you didn’t work today?”

“Have to work the weekend so I have off today.” Mike’s father had got him a summer job at the hospital where he practiced. Mike thought probably he hoped it would inspire him to study medicine but so far the very smell of the place made him queasy and he wasn’t even around the patients yet. Without planning to, he rose from the rickety armchair and pushed himself down beside her on the little couch. She stayed and their hips and thighs touched, her warmth finding him, a hint of her muscles and softness. She smelled of shampoo. A wave of dizziness washed over him and he peered toward the house before turning to her. “You’re a very pretty girl Cassie.”

She grimaced but did not resist as he put his arms around her. “Stop saying stuff like that,” she whispered into his neck.

Girls he knew loved it when you said stuff like that. Girls he knew wore dresses and jewelry. She had told him she lost jewelry and dresses made her itch.

He held her harder and kissed her a little. “What do you want me to say then?” he whispered.

“Tell me about the college you’re going to in the fall.”

“Penn State,” he said simply. “You’ve heard of it, right?” She nodded and did not resist as he slipped his hand under her tank top. Hers were the only unfettered breasts he’d ever touched. The way they seemed to radiate heat shocked him every time. “Mm, uh, my dad went there. For undergrad. Come on.”

They kissed more deeply. She tasted of tea. Before him she had never necked, she told him. He could tell. She didn’t know how but he couldn’t think of a way to tell her. He still did not understand why she had let him have her the other week but he was not about to question it. He told himself – what do you care - but part of him wanted her to let him because she liked him, because she wanted him as much as he wanted her.

“No more,” she declared and pulled away wiping her mouth with the back of her hand.

“Fine, I’m going..” He stood up. The damn door would not open. She stood behind him telling him exactly where to kick it until finally it opened and he took off in long strides down the path between the budding and fragrant green plants. He sensed her behind him, keeping up easily, something about her breathing suggesting that maybe for once she wasn’t so sure of herself. At his car he turned and saw her hovering on the edge of the grass, her hands gripping her upper arms. She was not looking at him.

“Wanna know something, Cassie? Do you?”

Her big eyes found him. “What?”

He glanced toward the house and stepped closer. “You start in high school this year, right? 9<sup>th</sup> grade?” She nodded. “Wanna know the one thing that high school guys hate about a girl? Do you?” Her gray eyes widened. He could see that he finally had her attention and he did not want to relinquish the moment. “Do you?” he repeated. She nodded. “The one thing they hate is – is - not a fat girl or a stupid girl or even an ugly girl, but – are you listening?” She stood still. “Are you?”

“Yes, yes,” she said and not sarcastically.

“A tease. Guys hate a girl who is a tease. If that gets around, you will not have a date for the rest of your life. You will be everybody’s favorite baby sitter because all your weekends will be free forever. You hear me?”

Frowning, she looked away across the long slope of grass heavily punctuated with dandelions and butter and eggs. He thought maybe she was about to respond but when she didn’t his pride dictated that he leave. He yanked the car door but she said his name.

It was the first time she had done that, called to him, and it made his heart skip though he called himself pathetic. He aimed for a righteous but disinterested tone. “Yeah?”

“Maybe. Tomorrow night. Want to come over? My mom is going out. To a meeting. Usually she makes me go with her but I told her I don’t want to go and I think she’ll let me stay home.”

“What time?”

She made an expressive shrug. “7 or something? I don’t know.”

Her big eyes were on him and her lips were so delicate and plush that he wished he hadn’t made such a show about leaving. “All right. Why don’t you call me? When she leaves?” She nodded. He half closed the car door. “And. Cassie? I’m uh, sorry, if I-“

Her hands went up in front of herself. “Look. If you do come over. I don’t know. I don’t know.”

“I know. It’s ok. Call me.”

“Bye. Oh, wait a minute.”

He had the key in his hand. “What?”

“Know what? If you hate that job. Don’t do it.”

He stared. “My dad wants me to –“

She took a step toward him. “But what do you want?”

The urgency in her voice stopped him. They looked at each other for a few moments and then he got in the car and started it up. As he pulled away she gave an exaggerated fluttery wave with both hands, a gesture so unlike her that it made him smile. He waved back and she smiled and took off for the back, her long hair swinging.

How had she come to know things? And why wasn’t she afraid? He hoped she’d call him.

Patrick Chapman

### The National Style 'O' Resonator

You pass it to him hopefully. "Play me something  
Meaningful. Thrill me on your metal strings  
With a blues from my homeland, or the spiritual  
You learned how to pluck, just to undress me."  
Fingers adept on a fretboard, you intuit,  
May serve you well in other ways. But this –  
This is before you are married. This is the time  
You desire him the more for his skill with a neck.

There will come a day, after a long intermission,  
When he takes the machine out from under the bed,  
Shines it like new, carries it down to the kitchen,  
Hoping to catch your smile reflected in the body  
As his fingers flutter on your lips, trying to strum  
The music back into your voice.

## Black Smoke

There is no Australia in the Bible. This point  
Gave them resolution when they came.

In the sky that Easter Sunday morning,  
A new sun flashed, snuffing out

The Guard in a second, along with everyone  
It had been charged with protecting.

What remained was not a city of the dead.  
There were no corpses in the streets. Where

They still existed as anything, the people  
Were shadows traced on marble walls.

The ceiling of the chapel was unwounded;  
The Pythian Apollo, undefiled. Statuary

Inherited this territory,  
Contaminated now for centuries.

## Selas

Days when every night is a full moon  
And you a true lycanthrope. No doubt  
There'll be a dawn; it will not save you.

Dawn will draw you out. It's not the bone-  
Distort mutation that reshapes you  
In a hail of lunar stabs; it is your shadow

In daylight you hope no one will see. That blot  
Of darkness follows you around like a tell –  
The wolf unrevealed but his tail on display.

## Volcano Day

Your heartbeat in my ear;  
My tear upon your breast –

And in the earth, a thunder  
Where there never had been

Thunder. In the street  
Where never had we heard

Any more percussion  
Than a drum in some god's

Dying day parade –  
Arrhythmia, a starting thing

So let it come –  
My tear upon your breast

And let it come –  
Your heartbeat in my ear.

Already we are studies  
For our own discovered statues.



Nicholas Alexander Hayes

Thin Red Jellies

### Persons Represented

(Distinction is faulty between persons. Each is daughter of a mother. All will be mothers of daughters. Their positions shift. Their roles repeat. They reek of nondescript sex, sweat, and blood.)

Pentheus, Sovereign  
Bromius, Divine Double  
Tiresias, Seer  
Cadmus, Founder

### Interphase

(1<sup>st</sup> Gap: Warehouse, vacant as a drunk sixteen-year-old waiting for a blowjob. Lights dimmed.)

Shadow and projected text. On shadow and projected text, Pentheus walks in shadow and projected text. In shadow and projected text. In tight denim, he walks across shadow and projected text. Half-memorized words superimposed on superimposed self. Projected text superimposed on shadow. Projected text superimposed on him. Pentheus walks. Pentheus stands. Pentheus leans, thumbs hooked in tight denim. In tight denim, his thumbs hooked.

### Synthesis

(Warehouse. Lights darkened.)

Half-memorized words superimposed on superimposed self. Pentheus strips nearly tripping. Half-memorized words superimposed on superimposed self. Pentheus strips nearly tripping. Discorrupt, discorrupt. He strips to meat façade. The meat façade, he strips. A blond body in shadow. A blond body in projected text. A blond body in shadow and projected text. Out of. Out of tight denim. Out of tight denim, a blond body in projected text. A blond body in shadow. A blond body in projected text and shadow.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Gap

(Warehouse: Lights dimmed.)

Out of tight denim, his thumbs pressed. Pentheus leans, thumbs pressed on blond body. Pentheus stands. Pentheus walks. Projected text superimposed on him. Half-memorized words superimposed on superimposed self. Out of tight denim, he walks across shadow and projected text. Through shadow and projected text, Pentheus walks in shadow and projected text. In shadow and projected text, a blond body walks.

## Prophase

(Warehouse. Lights shine obscenely.)

Out of tight denim, a blond body, out of tight denim. Stripped to the meat, a blond body. Out of tight denim, a blond body stripped to the meat. Out of tight denim, a blond body stripped to the meat.

## Anaphase

(Warehouse: Lights dimmed.)

Shadow and projected text. On shadow and projected text, Bromius walks in shadow and projected text. In shadow and projected text. Stripped to the blond meat. Bromius and Pentheus stripped to the meat in shadow and projected text. In shadow and projected text, Pentheus and Bromius. In projected text and shadow, Cadmus and Tiresias. Cadmus and Tiresias in projected text and shadow. Firm armed and soft stomached, Cadmus and Tiresias tread in a double veil. Cadmus faces aft. Cadmus treads backwards. Tiresias faces fore. Tiresias treads forward. Balls press against the double veil. Ruddy balls press against the double veil. One treads backwards, the other forward. In a double veil, Tiresias approaches Pentheus. In a double veil, Cadmus approaches Bromius. In a double veil, in shadow, in projected text, brunette meat approaches blond meat. The double veil pulled taut. The taut double veil.

## Telophase

(Warehouse: Lights darkened.)

Cadmus, Bromius, Tiresias, Pentheus. Cadmus, Bromius. Tiresias, Pentheus. In shadow, Cadmus, Bromius. In projected text, Tiresias, Pentheus. Cadmus and Bromius tread in shadow. Cadmus in Bromius treads in shadow. Tiresias and Pentheus tread in projected text. Tiresias in Pentheus treads in projected text.

## Cytokinesis

(Warehouse: Lights shine obscenely.)

Tattoos bleed through the veil. Tattoos bleed through the double veil. Treading backwards, treading forwards.  
Tattoos through the veil. Cadmus in Bromius. Tiresias in Pentheus. How fine the torn tulle. How fine the torn tulle  
around each.

## Metaphase

(Warehouse: Lights dimmed.)

Body under gaze. Tattoos bleed through veils. Torn tulle around Cadmus in Bromius. Ruddy Balls against tulle.  
Bodies under gaze. Torn tulle around Tiresias in Pentheus. Ruddy balls against tulle. Red balls against shadow and  
projected text.

Matthew Dennis

### The Labrynth

#### Entrance

There is a mouth, a mouth that grins  
And when I shiver  
He shivers; him  
Not in an agony of fright  
But in ecstasy and stark delight

I'll never know why he ever came  
I love him not,  
He feels the same  
And as fear of him his lust compels  
Sure hate does lurk within our shells

The path we take is changed sometimes  
And I changed his  
Less he changed mine  
The past and present soon forgot  
The future: endless Qliphoth.

Husks

When I looked into the sun  
I saw  
Her ancestors fighting,  
A great  
Serpent pinned beneath eagle's claws  
The tongue split  
Down the middle and the snake followed  
Now,  
Two snakes beneath eagle's claws  
One passed  
Shedding skin with clear white eyes

In my dreams I found the great bear  
She is sick  
Milky eyes and hot frothy breath choking  
She screams,  
Slides onto her side, her brown fur greasy  
From her belly,  
White crabs cut their way out and scuttle through,  
Their shells  
Are tinged with the deep blue of pelagic seas  
The clicking  
Is witness to the absence of her sound

Beneath the deepest ocean waters,  
In the black,  
Weird men move in repetition  
Their faces  
Covered by featureless masks  
They pray  
With the slowest of motions  
At an altar of basalt  
Un-crushable by the enduring pressure  
The weight  
From their backs, is lifted by songs floating up to the sun

Without your voice speaking through me  
I am dead  
I am a container for your sound, a shell  
Filled with echoes  
Of a mollusk's noise, found on a quiet beach  
Please speak,  
Please cry out in fury at the sadness of the void  
I am here  
Where are you? Why won't you talk anymore?  
If we do not meet  
Again,  
I loved you and will not love  
Again.

## Lord of Dead Bodies

The parasites float to the top  
Of the old water  
Dust gathers in gray canopies beneath the shelves  
If beer cans had souls,  
This would be their purgatory  
And they would weep at being unfulfilled

I can't clean up anymore  
The world goes on,  
Decay's clock ticks endlessly  
Things pass  
And  
We go on,  
Stop.

The dispersal of energy and matter is a waste of Time  
Space should listen to the ageless black  
The hole between that does not change  
Hear peace in the silence of endings  
And feel content in the touch of stillness  
All being should rest in quiet  
And forget the sadness of sound

We looked at the crumpled leaves  
And the old popcorn, that was hard and soft  
I thought about falling from a balcony  
And the passing of wind and windows by my face,  
Half submerged in the lake a log, with slime coating it,  
It floats up then sinks then floats then sinks then floats  
Then sinks then floats  
Then sinks forever more.

## Fleeing the Light

Outside of every body  
Is a mind that does not sleep.  
When we crawled out of our wave-lives,  
There was a reflection of infinity hooked to our souls by white threads

As I grew in darkness  
A fungus, needing no father,  
Spilled from a glowing cone  
I was instructed to breath by chemicals

Each of our choices has no meaning,  
There are but two options.  
Why question anything,  
When there is no absolute.



## Devourers

“Keep the harness tight.”  
He sneered through gritted teeth  
“Break the ankles if you have to, I want  
Her tight to the ground.”  
The big horse shifted,  
Her eyes rolled and steam whistled  
From wet nostrils

When we cut her heart out  
She blew air out of herself at a surprising rate  
She shivered, rocked, did not scream  
Soon she was still and warm instead of hot  
We threw the heart in a pile of hay.  
There is no ritual here,  
Only death.

## The Desolation of God

Shame has come like an old blanket  
Like the sky  
I have asked succor from the merciless  
I have tried to resist the irresistible  
There is cold  
There is stillness  
There is shame  
And there is  
Stillness.

Center

Before you go to bed, pray  
When you wake up, pray  
After you eat, brush your teeth.

Mark Cunningham

[quantum]

Light might be “the great organizer,” but things keep getting in its way. We were going to call our new cartoon character Hegemony Cricket, but Disney put a stop to that. My rock garden petrified. I told her I was never sure if she was kidding, and she said you must be joking. When the interrogators asked if she thought speech was what separates humans from animals, she new better than to say anything. Those antibiotics didn’t save the cow, either.

[quantum]

I said it was my big day, but they said that, after a certain age, people start to shrink. Though nothing happened for a whole year, the physicist proved our bodies continued to give out personal information. The news anchor gave good plausible denial, but her dentistry was totally unbelievable. I pointed out a vacuum was a gestalt, too. He said she was fast-forwarding her shadow at him in a subliminal fill-in-the-blank; she said she was materializing the trace of her delay.

[quantum]

The light indexed in a photograph is still moving, since you see it. They told me the “right here, right now” line formed over there.

[quantum]

When I said, “At night, everybody has a black eye,” she punched me. He said, “Depth leads to projection,” but I didn’t understand that, so I figured he was just another idiot. We voted to “oppose the formation of a new cliché that would make us sink lower than low.” No point having three copies if you’re going to keep them all in the same place—this statement used to refer only to inanimate objects. She wanted to clarify whether they said they’d see her *inside* or see her *insides*.

Nicholas Alexander Hayes

Thin Red Jellies

### Persons Represented

(Distinction is faulty between persons. Each is daughter of a mother. All will be mothers of daughters. Their positions shift. Their roles repeat. They reek of nondescript sex, sweat, and blood.)

Pentheus, Sovereign  
Bromius, Divine Double  
Tiresias, Seer  
Cadmus, Founder

### Interphase

(1<sup>st</sup> Gap: Warehouse, vacant as a drunk sixteen-year-old waiting for a blowjob. Lights dimmed.)

Shadow and projected text. On shadow and projected text, Pentheus walks in shadow and projected text. In shadow and projected text. In tight denim, he walks across shadow and projected text. Half-memorized words superimposed on superimposed self. Projected text superimposed on shadow. Projected text superimposed on him. Pentheus walks. Pentheus stands. Pentheus leans, thumbs hooked in tight denim. In tight denim, his thumbs hooked.

### Synthesis

(Warehouse. Lights darkened.)

Half-memorized words superimposed on superimposed self. Pentheus strips nearly tripping. Half-memorized words superimposed on superimposed self. Pentheus strips nearly tripping. Discorrupt, discorrupt. He strips to meat façade. The meat façade, he strips. A blond body in shadow. A blond body in projected text. A blond body in shadow and projected text. Out of. Out of tight denim. Out of tight denim, a blond body in projected text. A blond body in shadow. A blond body in projected text and shadow.



## 2<sup>nd</sup> Gap

(Warehouse: Lights dimmed.)

Out of tight denim, his thumbs pressed. Pentheus leans, thumbs pressed on blond body. Pentheus stands. Pentheus walks. Projected text superimposed on him. Half-memorized words superimposed on superimposed self. Out of tight denim, he walks across shadow and projected text. Through shadow and projected text, Pentheus walks in shadow and projected text. In shadow and projected text, a blond body walks.

## Prophase

(Warehouse. Lights shine obscenely.)

Out of tight denim, a blond body, out of tight denim. Stripped to the meat, a blond body. Out of tight denim, a blond body stripped to the meat. Out of tight denim, a blond body stripped to the meat.

## Anaphase

(Warehouse: Lights dimmed.)

Shadow and projected text. On shadow and projected text, Bromius walks in shadow and projected text. In shadow and projected text. Stripped to the blond meat. Bromius and Pentheus stripped to the meat in shadow and projected text. In shadow and projected text, Pentheus and Bromius. In projected text and shadow, Cadmus and Tiresias. Cadmus and Tiresias in projected text and shadow. Firm armed and soft stomached, Cadmus and Tiresias tread in a double veil. Cadmus faces aft. Cadmus treads backwards. Tiresias faces fore. Tiresias treads forward. Balls press against the double veil. Ruddy balls press against the double veil. One treads backwards, the other forward. In a double veil, Tiresias approaches Pentheus. In a double veil, Cadmus approaches Bromius. In a double veil, in shadow, in projected text, brunette meat approaches blond meat. The double veil pulled taut. The taut double veil.

## Telophase

(Warehouse: Lights darkened.)

Cadmus, Bromius, Tiresias, Pentheus. Cadmus, Bromius. Tiresias, Pentheus. In shadow, Cadmus, Bromius. In projected text, Tiresias, Pentheus. Cadmus and Bromius tread in shadow. Cadmus in Bromius treads in shadow. Tiresias and Pentheus tread in projected text. Tiresias in Pentheus treads in projected text.

## Cytokinesis

(Warehouse: Lights shine obscenely.)

Tattoos bleed through the veil. Tattoos bleed through the double veil. Treading backwards, treading forwards.  
Tattoos through the veil. Cadmus in Bromius. Tiresias in Pentheus. How fine the torn tulle. How fine the torn tulle  
around each.

## Metaphase

(Warehouse: Lights dimmed.)

Body under gaze. Tattoos bleed through veils. Torn tulle around Cadmus in Bromius. Ruddy Balls against tulle.  
Bodies under gaze. Torn tulle around Tiresias in Pentheus. Ruddy balls against tulle. Red balls against shadow and  
projected text.

Luca Penne

Sardine Storm

Like the cats, Fred likes sardines. Melanie also likes sardines. But when sardines rain from the overwrought sky, they're suspicious because out of season. The cats don't care: they dash from hiding, snatch a few samples, and retreat to their smelly dens. Usually fish fall during the early autumn, after hurricanes have stirred the sea to froth. Why should they precipitate in the dullest part of winter, a month before spring? Fred recalls the autumn of sea bass. Big ones, twenty to forty pounds, fell and smashed windshields, breaking the collarbones of school kids waiting for the bus. But the Congregational Church had a fish supper so good a dozen people dropped with heart attacks, their arteries so clogged the surgeons had to replace them with lengths of pasta. Luckily everyone survived. With a dustpan and broom, Melanie sweeps up sardines to freeze in plastic bags. Fred picks one up and munches. A black cat hisses, and a gray tiger meows. They know the sardines fell because the Great Cat in the Sky loves them. Who are Fred and Melanie to say otherwise?

## Neither Law nor Justice

The snowflakes gloat in their doily-like geometry. They're so intelligent they clot and plot like brain cells. They plan to avalanche even before winter begins. Lounging in tiny lounge chairs in the Yukon, they map the slopes and divide up the dopes among them. Some choose to avalanche over Jeremy, who impregnated his sister by sending her a Christmas card with a pop-up Santa-Phallus. Others choose to crush Kristy, whose child wails so horribly in coffee shops the other patrons rush out and vomit on the sidewalk, blood slopping from their ears. Still others elect to gang up on Mike and squash him in his office where he plots to overthrow the law firm that was kind enough to hire him despite his dozen felony convictions. And what of the slide that buried Mark and his children on the ski slope while they hotdogged family-style? What of the mass that crushed Annie while she dispensed cocaine to elementary-school kids from the plastic bag under her skirt? After a winter of avalanches all the snowflakes plead guilty, whether tried individually or in groups. No one believes them, but the trials continue all summer, judges and juries fainting in the orange heat. By the time the verdicts come in, the defendants have escaped, leaving not one clue.

## Since the Election

Since the election, zombies have plagued the village, staggering about the streets while munching babies and dogs. The first snow fell last night, a faint stippling, and I found zombie tracks all over the yard. Everyone has complained, but the police can do nothing, claiming that the first amendment protects the walking dead as well as the living.

Those rolled-up, mustard-yellow eyes, granite teeth, starched postures, and stilted walks offend me. At the camera shop I stock up on batteries. Fueled with a Thermos of coffee, I catch a group of zombies who've cornered skiers from New York and are about to crack their skulls and suck out the nut-meat inside. I point my camera, trigger the flash. The zombies startle like geese, stumble and fumble off. I chase them, flashing the bold electric flash until they lurch back to the graveyard, flop into their proper graves, and pull good Republican earth over themselves.

Scouring the streets, I repeat the process until all zombies have returned to the platitudes of death. As I refill my Thermos at the diner, fellow citizens thank and congratulate me. The waitress won't take money for the coffee. Outside, in the park by the river, I crouch in the chill and watch leaves drift on the current, red and brown and yellow leaves. The snow has already melted, but a long winter lies ahead. I hope the drifts pile high, convincing the zombies to lie as still as possible while overhead the wind and ice converse.

## Somewhere in the West

the world's tallest building leans against a thousand-foot bluff. The eightieth floor opens onto a dusty level plain. I step outside, walk a few yards, look back. Foliage conceals the top of the hotel. Fat naked people approach me. Transparent as protozoa, they slobber and hold out their hands for alms. I can see the landscape through them, a distant lurch of mountains purpling in dusk. I know these people; have known them since adolescence when they embraced sex and booze like bears embracing beehives. I watched them laugh in the parks and mock the straight world passing like a slow freight going nowhere. I envied the full-bodied force of their rejection, envied the surge of conviction that fueled their separation from church and state. Who expected them to live so long? Who expected them to become so fat and transparent, even their livers absolutely colorless, their bones ghostly sticks of crystallized sugar? I never thought they'd stoop to beg from me, but now they're crying my name, pleading not for money but acknowledgement. "Why go naked in this breezy climate?" I ask, and they look so confused I realize they don't understand the word "naked." "Why did you grow transparent?" They look at each other and shrug. I invite them to return to the hotel with me, but when I push the foliage aside the hotel has gone. A long gray slope of boulders and sagebrush slants to a desert floor. My old friends sigh and turn away. I start the descent, a long dry walk to someplace.

## Lord of the Flies

Let me help you with your salad. You're too thin already, and eating lettuce accentuates your green eyes to the point where they glisten like rivets. And these slabs of tomato grin too aggressively. Remember what you said about phony smiles? Oh yes, tomatoes are fruit—I forgot. Your own fruitiness comes to fruition when you gobble a pear. The juice running down your chin suggests faucets dripping in abandoned houses. Apples you crunch crunch back with wanton pleasure. Grapes pop like pimples. But salad—good old garden salad slathered with ranch dressing—does nothing but challenge your lack of vegetable desire. Speaking of dressing, I like your low-cut but funereal dress. Who died?

Of course we're going to dance later when the salad course is over and the music begins. We'll dance until the great roast pig appears, greased and gleaming. Let me help you finish that salad so we can dance up an appetite worthy of the Lord of Flies. The dead pig will bless us, and maybe later we can find a moment to acknowledge that blessing by sacrificing our unborn, unconceived child.

# BlazeVOX 12

Springish 2012

Liz Mariani

**Skim.bird fashion.show.**

*skinny and dead/ after all these years.*

Playing along, just to survive.

Crass. A gift.

Full Needle Therapy in the Two-lands.

*We are half-off the grid.*

Charismatic cherub-toms, justifying left the jack-fried small.birds.

*Yet, still, I find you mining my **armpits** into cones of sorbetto-memory.*



**But.**

I think you're crazy-wild,  
a thorn-bread of high school force-beds  
chatting up small heads and polite test cheaters.

You have chandeliers hanging from your outer parts, your  
earlobes, clitorises, your eyebrows, your toenails.

*I contend your content, your assurance of gold.*

Gallivanting blubber.dome,

*Yesterdays formfitted into our airbrushed  
gastrointestinal opulence of grandeur.*

*A flat.brush for flat.noodles.*

*Sincerely yours, Subservient Forever.The Woman of the House.*

**Formula.**

*What becomes beauty to a day sunlit after sunlit day?*

Find me a feather-beard, some sort of Raven song

*Where the scorned daughters meet this lonely fast*

to Crust-Crucify, determined to Blend and engage Disposal.

*Trustworthy commonplace dead.end.roads follow home.*

Intrepid memory, liberate me from this Neon Vein.

*For the coastlines the coastlines envy.*

The chasms dream of interference.

*We are better in breath today,*

*far from fertilizer.*

**Help.**

Today, I am awake to the Homelessness  
*kindergarten motherboards harnessing*  
*the loudspeaker Flight Announcement*  
the Ever.spun spider.web of property ownership  
*formless form, trying too hard to squeeze the yellow from beneath*  
*my eyes. I cry in cowardice, beg to be Seen, really Seen.*  
For what it is, treading water, treading oil  
*Separate, child and adult, poor and rich, desolate and popular-*  
I have nothing to express how impossible it is  
to own land. *If you require, however, I'll hold your sadness,*  
*your acres of White-Guilt, your curiosity spreading distance.*  
All for the sake of Gravity.  
*Distance-pure binoculars curing vision,*  
*a glimpse of qualifying humanity.*  
All for the sake of Purity piously  
squeezing the Acid from our Grapefruits, calling them **Sweet.**

**Feeling the Forever feeling.**

Because this bookstore has an army.

*thread. thursday. tinfoil. treatment. treadmill.*

Because bagpipes concur with city.birds.

*Thread our cousins' cousins' cousins.*

Because thunder is digested/burbled through birthquakes

*Thursday our sisters' sisters' sisters' sisters.*

I wonder what these glass buildings would say,

If They Cracked a Little.

*Tinfoil our land-grabs, place them on the 2nd shelf and set that*

*Appliance on Fire.*

Would they scour at our Reflections of Ashen gratuity?

*Treatments, baby skin ointments, devour Fear of Death.*

Whether, by land or sea, floater plane or Status Update.

*When they come for the poets, set down your Mango and head for  
the Treadmill.*

**White in air.**

These seagulls of candle wax, eyeing homeland security's  
homeland security.

*Cry this vanilla molten rage.quality,  
something branded-backed by atomic energy, retrofitted to  
calm just enough, just enough, just.*

This shit.list of interconnection overwhelms the storage-uterus.

It makes me feel I should give birth to a litter of litterbugs,  
set on finishing the human destruction of human destruction.

What I write is for the trees, the crystals in this plastic light.box

for what these new fat babies have to demand

of Us. *Quiet. Please. Quiet. For they will come for me too, and I  
want to Live. Live. Live.*

**Border.**

I am on the edge of the edge.

*Staccato. Still-born. Silhouette. Perforated.*

The North Coast of North.

*Staccato asthmatic inhaling.*

Between this Fresh Lake/Fresh River.

Falling.

*Still-born sportscaster forecasting a loss before each game begins.*

I am on the Coast of Innards sailing a Boat through Bile.

These Bible-Lands. This Border planned and fought over.

This Edge is your Arm speaking *Stop*.

*Silhouette Statues becomes Mannequins become Carte Blanche.*

Explain who you are and what you want and  
what you bring over and why and why and why.

But I have Family over there.

*But I have Family over there.*

**Bloat Pressure.**

Before whale.watching season begins.

*Best not to ask the children of Conquerors for Directions.*

Before the better-thans and younger-thans  
become Richer-Still. Laughing.

*Best not to depend upon referrals from referral agencies.*

I see the lines lining Oppenheimer Park stretching.

*Best to flash your goodies, your inner-coat of timepieces  
to the right people with the right moves.*

I see your iPod melting into your hand. I see your  
iPhone complimenting your eyes.

Just passing through, hovering in trauma-relapse

*Best not to Explain in Plain English what decades, months, eras, fortnights,  
hours of compulsion + obsession*

*destroying access to the Languages, tones, rhythms,  
the foods, the rejected peoples gathering,*

**Bastards of the Earth can Mother.**

**The Sake of.**

Distance morphs as disdain becomes Nostalgia Smooth.

*We are survivors of educational depth, Increasing Weight on Voice.*

*Rotary orbiting these uncanny serendipitous corks of nostalgia.*

One.child.wonders. The only combination of Egg & Sperm.

*Fact found where opinions froth of iced Root Beer .*

We have been Blonde.Safe. Blonde.Unsafe.

*Calibrations tune Celsius. A State of Mind is declared.*

Twin cities of classic burlap Swapping.

*Gold-flaked skin skins weathered winds of broken glass.*

*Allegiances rot, wear.*

*Fire primed for the twist, reeks of Pinecone labor.*



**Common, it has become.**

Separate these countries, North.South.East.West.

*Immediacy in relevance.*

Scattered seconds of Right Now.

Feel orbits stutter.

Eyelashes upon plowed streets.

*Diminish not the agency of restorative blemishes, Scars Returning.*

*We are made of two voices of four of eight of sixteen and so on.*

*A chorus becomes us, brings.*

I feel healthy. We feel wealthy. Cashing Laughter on the Street.

Lauren R. Gay

Bodies dragged by ankles on softball fields.

Play catch and piano with your best  
friend. Never tell her you love her.  
Even though you do and stop being  
friends by fifteen.

On the piano  
She will play the right hand.  
You will play the left hand.

Two gether you are playing. Together.

Separate the title from the face and the  
bread from the meat but not the mayo  
since that is impossible once spread.

I'm glad but considerate unfortunate  
we none of us know how to use the  
same words while some of us just  
scoff.

You have to consider how they met.

Fate. Always. With faith. A relationship,  
not a religion. I think of you. I think of you  
sweet and wonder if we'll meet at church  
someday.

I'll never come crying.

I'll never show you my scar because you never cared to ask and I know you would have avoided my father's funeral. I think you were in love with him. As I think I was.

Like cotton balls in a mouth stuffed already with marshmallows. I am still in love with you.

Hi. Hi. High is time high in the sky like a

fruit. A sour pink orange in the sky

happy you're so slick to be here. So happy  
to see you.

Check your shoes.

Check your nose. Your coat your coat at the door.

Check your wallet as in watch for the pick pocket.

He said

He swore

He had

He had something

something important

I damn well know he said he had something

something terribly horribly important to say

say there, how'd you get here? So happy

happy you made it. We made it. We made it.

We made it. We made it here.

We're here.

Check check check. New new new news:

Do not pay attention to the news:

Else you pay with your life.

Else actually the life of someone else.

Splice spice slice

I pre pre prefer app pp ple pie.

Please apple pie.

Please apples.

Please please me atop the sky scraper. Touch it gently with your toes.

Katherine Arsenault

### holes

there is a bullet hole in my bedroom wall  
it's been pasted up with green tactical tape  
as sticky as glue  
at night, I peel it back with my fingertips  
a single strip of light pierces my dark room  
and cones out a flaxen glow across my face

when i am at school my brother  
covers that bullet hole  
but when i am home my eye covers it  
as i watch through my room  
past my punctured walls

## Prayers to the ignorant

they taught me how to save you  
though the gray-toned classroom smelled nothing  
like those words you kept murmuring  
as I exposed your wounds from uniform  
    caked with sand and sweat  
you called your armor

for now I hear the colors of your pain  
your veins trilling burgundy  
while your arteries chant the color of those  
cardinals  
    blurs of crimson  
    melting into this deserted ridgeline

they demonstrated how to stop your bleeding  
use strips of that armor and my strength  
and tourniquet off you femurs  
as the camouflage fabric mixes with your sticky blood  
    which you name your pain  
    and I call your clotted soul

I was told there is no humiliation in war but  
then there were those symbols i painted  
with blood across your forehead  
    TK 1536

but it was you who taught me combat and gauze  
are the only medals you that care  
for the stars and ribbons you wear  
    like badges of pain  
will only tell you lies  
    they will not veil your men from the external world  
for when you believe in dying I whisper in your ear  
    you are only a little dead

and it is all covering you  
masking your face and hair and arms  
with the same opaque color as you are  
completely hidden by my shaking hands  
    that you say is my innocence  
    but I call Afghanistan

the last thing I was taught was how to drag  
your dead through the dust and metal scraps

leaving wide-set tracks behind  
    which read like no map to salvation  
    I ever learned  
and you whisper to me  
as I drag you like the dead  
    I am touching death  
I flash back to that gray-toned room  
    they all eventually die  
and remember what they called me  
    naïve

as I first stepped out on that battle turf  
I thought that as I drag your men  
out of those sandpits  
that I will save you all

## Recruitment Officer

I walked in his beige office, with those wood and copper placards of high achievement lining the walls  
he sat reading the army book of ethics  
eyes dusted with a stoicism  
which made my stomach churn  
the only blood that ever touched this man's uniform was that of his  
own men

    boys like my brother  
so I sat down as he beckoned with his hands  
exposing his perfect teeth  
as I pressed my palms against my knees  
    my shaking legs

I told him I was having bad dreams  
I was having miserable fantasies of what was happening  
with the boy he took away  
    the boy he could not remember by name

I told him I was having nightmares and he  
smiled  
and walked around his cherry wood desk to  
lay a single stern hand on my shoulder

he told me men die

if you are strong enough you would be brave too  
and told me my hands would soon trick me with their stillness  
    eventually remain as statuesque as his

this man told me men die  
and my brother dying would make him  
a hero

long after I left his office my hands would not force me into  
submission, though  
and as I dream, that boy enters my thoughts



when this man told me that bad feelings would soon leave me  
so do not agonize  
he was so very wrong

for every time I close my eyes my brother drifts back  
cloaked in war medals and pride  
leaving a line of gold in his path  
as he lets out his last warrior cry  
and then before my very eyes falls down in ash:  
bodes down to the weight of his sack  
as he seems to die for the very first time

Kate Weinberg

### Negatives

I.

My mother on the kitchen floor, surrounded by  
potato peelings; my mother

gnashing on the tiles, the tiles' faces  
mottled with little Os

like how ghosts show up in pictures--bobbing  
blinding orbs, electric  
floating breast-shaped things; my mother's face

placid-puckered in the nothing way potato  
is mute to knife--

splitting its single  
passionless continent into many

bland islands, in the logical way  
things un-sentient don't know knives

from lips  
kissing dirt from their dimples,  
clefts. A bowl, full—skinned

potatoes on the island  
in the kitchen

shining cornea bright. She peels, washes them  
naked, slides on her back in their skins—up-ended

pig, blankly ecstatic, ghost-orb  
mouth whooping slightly, peek-a-boo

teeth. Potatoes glister florescent  
beneath lamp shade nests

woven for focus, so the light shrinks back  
its lake of bland sprawl, pointing

like a long hot finger, like god's  
long hot finger, beneath itself

and mother and I imagine ourselves  
angels beneath god's

pointed palmy heat  
when the radiators stop slurring,

spurting beneath all their bulby  
metallic-smelling paint. angels

as the cold freezes the water tap  
shut and night slides in, jaunty  
in its frozen, inky

gait and we: orbs  
we: picture-stilled ghosts,

round and fleshed and  
moony as those far-away crops

rustling up from middle earth  
waiting to be plucked.

II.

grandma is biblically  
huge her mouth takes food  
sloppy, whale-like, the dead things she swallows  
wrestling in their dead way  
with none of jonah's verve,  
her lipped roof  
fine-boned and fish scale-shiny,  
exhaustively sour. She: mammoth  
static island, colored  
hair that shimmies like gelatin mold

when we feed her  
things drop from her lips  
sea-brine swaying. She: grunting, sugary  
head quaking, hands  
splitting the mess of her mouth-fall  
plankton small, blue scalp  
peaking gently, low tide  
tremors beneath coif  
crowning dessertishly.

III.

Oh brother won't you

send word from that hale, flanked beast upon which you coarsen and wrestle and maim  
your slippery goddesses. they say you throw them overboard to watch their faces as they under-wave, noses  
protruding, buoying like a slim point

like a pencil or needle or other trite conclusions of form through the green blackness through clapping fists, more  
violent at night. they say your soul, if ever it was, has been suited and confined and buried and I say Impossible: it  
was your will to be burned,

there would have been flames a heat at skins a bristling a shiver  
in reverse. it's hard to trust people

hard to trust when they've fixed their mouths on delusion, defamation, and frankly,

I'm with you oh holy stumbler. I hear the boards you walk are only half un-rotted and I admit I praise I knee-slap  
swear if only you'd raise your head and speak it, tangle your slattern tongue around the corridors of solid answering  
I could make you clean again without the hollow faux-lemony smell of public-restroom sanitation. i'll say remember  
thanksgivings '92-'99, how the snow fell through the country club's huge glass faces and everyone stopped pulling  
the bones out of their salmon to stare, silent

in that echoey room, naked walled and chair-less, the blooming cold suspended: a robe of ghosts hovering shoulder-  
high. Your eyes

will undark—brother, i see the retreat—and i'll pull the curtains away and say

See, No One is watching, No One will be here till Mouthy Dark calls off Bashful Light. but for now there's tea,  
appetizer-sized portions of quail on toothpicks, gooseberry nectar.

i'll grab your fist and unfurl your red fingers and we'll do an indian dance involving sage and owl-bone crowns and  
i'll say now sit

sit and tell me what dresses we should wear

when they burn us.

## Birds in Bags Over Galilee

do not return home; stay in Israel  
Jerusalem Yeh-roo-sha-lie-eem Holy Land  
where lips go purple after nights guzzling  
mountain grapes and not the cheap shit  
your father first got head-  
swimming drunk on—no—  
liquid less monumental, more expensive  
than that small history

you are told of at length, wriggling  
bodily to escape what you suspect  
you will become, your genetic  
google-map. Shoulder-blades  
sharpen inscriptions along the sway  
backs of chairs announcing your departure  
from flesh, from the chatty  
script of bloodline demanding  
sideburns on a woman, arms the kind of hairy

school-bus taunts were made for, a patch  
above the crack that flows  
Samson-lush when wetted  
by sea or shower or  
sex in that sweltering hostel in London—  
same boy who finally (third time's the charm)  
disengaged the stubborn sheath of skin  
so long eluded you, made you dry-

heave in a spinny room first time  
you tampon-ed, twelve chittering girls out-of-doors  
cheering your womanhood as new blood  
spatted in clots from the place L. adjudged early on  
the “special hole.” Later than them  
in every biologically-meaningful way.  
Not meant for tits, meant for  
tissue in training bras, a uterine lining  
hellbent on shedding itself near

naked every month, once it caught  
the endocrine drift. At Yad Vashem,  
look at images of prisoners  
growth-stunted, their angled shriek of bones  
foreign and disorienting as hieroglyphs. Know this:  
there are some symbols  
not meant for ferreting out. They will leave you  
cold of tongue, chattering of teeth  
if you try. You will try. You will not win  
back any warmth. You will toss in bed  
waiting your turn.

Six of you shed  
bathing-suits for pure plain skin, hook  
fingers in fingers and Star-Of-David your bodies  
in a dancing swoop through thick salt, piss-  
warm water of the Mediterranean. One old man  
slats himself between tall waves, eyeing twelve moony  
breasts in varying states of wax and wane. Sometimes  
he disappears behind a curtain of water but  
is always there when it parts again to deliver him

his celestial due. Creepers  
migrate at night. As do woodcocks,  
thrushes, thrashers, nuthatches,  
bobolinks, grebes, murrets,  
loons. Start at sunset and fly  
clear past the lip of the cool-ass moon,  
hung there

silent and patient as a door-knob  
waiting to be turned, swung  
loose at its hinges, entered  
full-fleshed and famished for buffet. But soon

you will learn: this, too, is not quite  
freedom. There are strings at one end  
and they will tug them tight till they grab you  
soft at the neck, tag your knobby ankle



so no one wonders  
if you do not return  
what you are. You are  
This. You come from.  
Stay  
Stay  
Stay here in this hand  
and it will feed you.

Juliana M Sartor

*Abasuerus*

As women, we say  
in the days of, in ruling, in reigning, of reins  
in those days, vaulted, extended, pressing  
upward in tower and situation  
of stone.

The place of the east, a land skewed into time and division,  
nominalizing the rising throat of view.

In this place we arrange for presentation. A full invitation. A round gathering, the opening of arms.  
The arming, a sense of breath, the nobility. Taking the point of a series of months and display.

It becomes congruous to bear witness and gifting,  
noisy with amorous movement.

Rounding up into full feasting, garden brush, a known tower. The breath of kings.  
The pull of clean curtains, fastened hangings, stretched to violet. A precious architecture, mosaic of gold,

where, with a gathering of anointed gardens we swallow  
to witness the pill of cloth, the fineness of applause, a swift violet  
quieted into pourable wine, into an elevation.

Wrists golden on the pavement.

*Esther Chosen Queen*

Beneath a careful eye,

the watch of months, the year of spice  
and wine, oiled perfume in mouths,

a place of risen walls, a palace to pull into desire, a king and a crop of skin.

What woman does a man covet? Her name  
low on his voice, summoned, the quiet of chords.

A woman of the eyes, between palms and the rounding arms,

with a crown to choose the greatest spectacle.

The tax of lust, a lowering,  
another spread of heat and feast. Dim the din of metal  
and mouths, holding a golden glow in the honor of a turn,  
the whispering eye.

*Walking downtown without snow.*

To muster some more quiet light of completion, there is not a moment but a tension, to put an origin on end or know the split of voices, the glow of chemical synthesis; the standing up of buildings. Your face against trains alternates the time of intonation, morse code of a voice at auction, a fold of summer steel. A sentence of ringing against it. The voice of the owl in sun. The origin as an urge of a closing or the color of a closed throat, of lungs launched against a hillside. To rake quietly in the light of a mile or morning, heat and a heightening, a ripping back. Exposure and posture. Ringed ribs of a spine. Wires dragged to some shore we thought distant, a gut along something monumental or just a moment of your movement. To go north and stay north. A series of musculature or verbs strung; a sigh and some grasping. An owl in a wood with its wingspan.

*The Kid with the Spanish Accent.*

The kid with the Spanish accent started reading. It was his turn. I didn't know if I felt sorry for his voice or what. It was like he was reading his own biography.

The kid with the Spanish accent started making toast. He always checked the toaster dial when we walked into the kitchenette. Also, what else was there to eat. I watched him because my sister had told me that people will steal your laundry. Not him, but someone.

The kid with the Spanish accent waited at the crosswalk. It was winter. Four crows lit onto chainlink beside him.

The kid with the Spanish accent saw my eyes. I felt embarrassed. He was easily exoticized. He came into the store behind me. Or, after me, by a few minutes. He was buying super glue to hold his shoe together.

The kid with the Spanish accent stood at the bus stop. He had yellow headphones. There was something about the cloud in the west that day, or the sunset. Maybe it had to do with heat or something.

The kid with the Spanish accent had three pencils. He lent one out for a multiple choice test. I knew he would never get it back. No one cares about the pencils they borrow. I almost stopped to remind the kid but I just kept walking.

The kid with the Spanish accent knew how to braid. I thought this is funny in an appreciative way. I have brothers. At dinner, one of them would fall out of his chair on purpose and we'd all always laugh.

The kid with the Spanish accent got his driver's license. He must've been older than me. I saw him in the parking lot in a green Cavalier. Most people, at some point, drive a Cavalier.

The kid with the Spanish accent started wearing cologne. I felt embarrassed for noticing. It smelled like a house. I started wearing deodorant at 7, when my best friend told me she did. She said she did because she thought I did. Maybe I put on my dad's once.

The kid with the Spanish accent started throwing up. The carpeting. I whispered, "It could happen to anyone." This is what scared me.

The kid with the Spanish accent high-fived another kid under a basketball hoop. I felt compelled earlier to keep quiet. Someone asked me what was wrong. Maybe this was all I wanted.

Juliana Grace

### Thank Heaven

She watched closely as I criss-crossed my arms and pulled my T-shirt over my head, exposing the cotton pink training bra I didn't really need yet. My fingers paused at the top of my jeans. They were still too broad for my hips, but my mom said I could grow into them. I had to undo the safety pin at the fly before I could unzip the pants. I was picking up high-pitched alien transmissions, a nervous tick with no name.

My friend was impatient. *Take them off, she ordered. The bra too.*

Why? I complained, that's against the rules.

Elle's lips curled. *Rules are made to be broken, Jen. We've been playing this game long enough to update the rules.*

She peeled her scoop-neck top over her head and unhooked a bright red under-wire bra. She wiggled out of her stretchy skirt, and with one leg, sent it soaring onto the bed. She was wearing black sparkly panties. She struck a pose like those pictures of horses some girls keep in their lockers. They're all named "Bluebell" and "Snowflake."

*See? No big deal. We're bigger now, that's all. Well, she said, giving me the once-over, well, I'm bigger.*

She had a black mass of pubic hair that reminded me of my mom's when I'd see her undressing for the shower. Her nipples were long and dark—gross. She made sure I got a good look at her before she helped me pull down my underpants.

*That too,* she said, meaning my bra.

Avoiding her eyes, I fumbled with the back hook. I sighed and stamped my feet as I worked behind my back.

She frowned.

*You want me to do it?*

No. I got it. Um...

As soon as I'd get one hook loose, the other would catch: a losing battle. Plus, my hands kept slipping. I went to wipe them on my pants but remembered they were on the floor.

They were pretend kisses, and pretend noises, and it was a pretend scenario—of Elle's imagination—but the singing in my ears was real, and I suddenly couldn't imagine anything more fun than watching her copy of *Now and Then* for a second time. My favorite scene was the one where Christina Ricci and Devon Sawa hold hands on the porch swing. Lightning bugs circle their heads and they sip on cans of soda.

*Okay,* she directed. *We're older, like sixteen or nineteen.*

Yeah, I said. Nineteen.

My favorite babysitter, when I used to need one, had said she was nineteen. She used to wear red lipstick and tugged at her eyelashes a lot.

*Okay. We're sisters. Twins. And...we're orphans who've just been kidnapped from the orphanage in the middle of the night.*



We scurried around the room with the lights off, holding our clothes and whimpering like we had our mouths gagged. We held hands tightly and fake-cried. She always played the protective older sister, and would give me frequent pecks on the forehead. I was supposed to cower against her. I liked those moments. Sometimes I wished that were the whole game.

*Now, we get to the house. It's a mansion...in India.*

Elle had lived in India one summer with her mother. She bragged about it a lot, and it was always the destination in our games. Her step-dad's house was filled with statues of dancing elephants and statues with four, or six arms.

Who kidnapped us, Stella? I whispered in the dark.

She always wanted to be called Stella because it was close to Elle but meant star.

*A tall man in black leather. And he tells us to get on a motorcycle. We have to hang onto the back of him, and he's really strong.*

Yeah, he's tall and strong, and he's got long-ish blonde hair, right?

*No. Dark brown. Across his face.*

Fine. Yeah, brown and he's got blue eyes! So hot, I giggled, but she interrupted me.

*No, no, no. Brown and brown. Trust me. Like John Marks, on the varsity lacrosse team at my school. He plays JV for Bethesda High too, already. They recruited him. He's got brown hair and brown eyes, and really strong arms. Super hot. Just trust me.*

I conceded. Okay, okay. And he says, I wish we didn't meet this way, 'cause you girls are really pretty...

*Right*, she approved. *He says, You girls don't look like twins. You have to hide in here. And then the bed is the room.*

My brain felt like a balloon floating above my awkward limbs as I crawled onto the bedspread. Then, as she usually did around this point in the game, she switched roles.

*Now I'm him.* She smoothed a hand over my cheek. *Oh, Jen, you're so pretty...*

Not Jen. I want a better name too.

*What about Jezzie?*

I curled my lip. What's that?

*Short for Jasmine. There's a really pretty Indian girl at my school named Jasmine. She's really popular, everyone knows her, and they call her Jezzie. And it's close to your name already.*

She hadn't stopped touching my face.

Uh—okay. I'm Jezzie.

*Jezzie, you're really sexy. Don't you wanna kiss me?*

I tried to pretend we were Barbies, kissing with our smiles. I tried to pretend she was John Marks. I tried to imagine Devon Sawa like this, above me. Only I imagine he wouldn't be comparing our budding breast sizes and showing off his rehearsed sex noises. But then again, I thought, don't actors have to practice stuff like that so they can do it in a movie? How do they make sure the guy doesn't, like, accidentally slip it in? Do they wear cups or something? I tried to imagine myself as Devon Sawa's cup.

I was pretty sure we shouldn't have been doing what we'd been doing. My gentle Protestant guilt tugged at me—that's how I knew it wasn't normal, neither the game itself nor the way she reacted when I showed up at the door the next week and refused to play it.

Can't we just play Barbies? I suggested, although I knew I was too old.

*Are you serious? Barbies? What're you, two?*

No. I'm not two. I just don't want to play the game. It's weird.

*Am I weird, Jen?*

She said it softly and I sensed danger. Her arms hung straight at her sides and her snake-green eyes searched each of my features. I could tell she was trying to force tears. She loved the way her eyes turned turquoise when she was crying.

No...you're not weird. But doesn't it feel weird? The game...*that* game, I mean. If we keep doing it, doesn't it mean we're gay?

*I'm not gay, Jen. You think I'm gay? I get more guys than anyone in my grade.*

I know, it's just that—

She was always interrupting.

*I'm just getting you used to it. Don't you want to know what to do when you go out with Collins?*

Yeah, but—he hasn't even asked me out yet.

*That's because he can tell you don't know what to do. I'll bet you. I'm your coach, and you're really lucky because I'm good. I'm the best. Trust me, you'll thank me later.*

My mother picked me up an hour later. By then we were sitting at the kitchen table picking out juicy little seeds from a pomegranate. Elle's mother was in the extended living room cuddling with her rich husband. I heard the door first and I jumped up to open it. My fingers left sticky red smears on the doorknob. "Hi, Mom," I said, trying to rub them off with the end of my sleeve.

"Hi, hon," she said. "I have your books for class. Are you girls ready?"

Elle had appeared behind me silently, so I jumped when I turned around.

*Hi, Mrs. Paulson,* she cooed smoothly. She leaned against the door, sucking juice off her fingers. She did not look ready.

“Hi, Elle. Let’s get going. You don’t want to be late.”

Elle and I rolled our eyes at each other. We would’ve loved nothing more than to skip about half our required Communion class in that mildewed room in the church basement.

*I just need to change*, Elle said, making no moves. My mother looked her up and down, from her busy blue camisole top to her striped leggings.

“Okay, quick like a bunny. Where’s your mother?”

*The den*. She ascended the stairs, sliding her body against the banister. At the top, she turned and made a covert gesture for me to follow. But her mother had heard our voices and was wrapping me up in a tight squeeze from behind.

“Hi, Nancy,” she greeted my mother cheerfully. “Thank you again for driving the girls over there.”

“Oh sure,” said my mother. “It’s my pleasure. You’ve helped us out plenty of times before. Which reminds me, Hal and I will be in Singapore for a week in June...”

“How exciting!” Elle’s mother exclaimed.

“Yes, and a bit difficult trying to figure out how to maintain business back here. We have a neighbor taking care of this one,” she placed a hand on my head, and I shook it off, “...throughout the week, but then *they’re* going out of town that weekend.”

“We can take her!”

“Could you?”

“Sure! Elle, baby,” she called, her clear singer’s voice echoing off the marble tiles and hardwood stairs.

“How’d you like Jen to stay with us for a weekend in June?”

Elle appeared from her doorway looking pissed. I hadn't come upstairs, but adult presence trumped her authority. She was brushing her long brown hair slowly and gazing down haughtily at us. *Sure*, she said, without a hint of enthusiasm. Her mother frowned at her attitude, but she turned away and disappeared again.

"I'll be in the Islands myself on some business, but Alex will be here."

"Oh..." My mother shifted her purse from one shoulder to the other. Alex made her uncomfortable. He was always making weird jokes with the kind of punch line where you're not sure anymore if it was a joke or not. But he was still an adult figure, and we all knew he was the disciplinarian of the two, despite not being Elle's biological father. "Well if it's no extra burden..."

"Not at all! Alex, honey? Would you mind having Jen here with Elle the weekend her parents are in Singapore?"

The brown curly head watching T.V. in the recessed den didn't move. But an open-throated voice said, "Suuuure. She'll have to pass the test first, though."

Elle's mother blinked a lot, squeezing her eyes shut and reopening them wide. She wore a permanent smile.

She shook her head at us as if to say, *No, no, he's just joking*. But he lifted himself off the couch and strolled into the hallway in his socks.

"Are you ready to take the test?" He asked me. All the adults stared at me. A drop of sweat made its way down my back. I reached a hand back there and tried to catch it with my shirt.

Um, sure.

"*Um, sure?* What kind of an answer is that? You say, 'Yes sir!'"

Uh—yes, sir?

"OK—here's your test: What is the hypotenuse of a triangle?"

Elle's mother cut in. "Oh, Alex." She was still smiling.

"How old are you?" He demanded.

Eleven.

"Eleven. You should know the hypotenuse of a triangle. Fine. Another one. This is your test." His eyes were bright green, menacing like Elle's, but brighter like a cartoon character's. He often made dirty jokes when her mother was gone. Elle got them and I pretended to. He could tell I pretended.

"Who's buried in Grant's Tomb?"

I know this one, I thought with relief. My own father was fond of it.

Grant, I answered, and they broke into a chorus of impressed "Ohhh"s.

"Elle?" Her mother called again from the bottom of the stairs. "It's five 'til, baby, you're going to be late! Let's go! What is she doing?"

To my mother's and my mutual despair, she began climbing the stairs to look for her daughter, leaving us with Alex and his interrogations. He worked for the government somehow. I got the sense he could smell fear. My mother smiled politely and I looked at my shoes.

"So," he said, addressing her. "Singapore, huh?"

"Singapore," she nodded.

"It's gonna be hot. *Real* hot."

"That's what I hear."

"You should go in September."

"Oh?"

"Go in September. It'll still be there, promise."

“I’m sure it will be. Hal...” She started, but he cut her off. He did that a lot too.

“And take this one with you,” he said, glaring at me. “She’ll stay out of trouble in the hotel room while you two go club-hopping.”

It was an absurd notion to think of my middle-aged parents “club-hopping,” my dad in his cummerbund that he wore for formal dinners, and my mom in her square-shaped reading glasses. It was like he could read my thoughts, judging by his impish grin. As usual, my mom ruined the joke.

“Hal’s there on business. I think he’ll be too busy to go out much.”

“So why don’t you stay? Watch the little terror here.”

I cursed him silently. My mom looked confused, but just then we heard Elle arguing with her mother and a door slammed. The elegant divorcee rejoined us, apologizing. “I’m sorry,” she said quietly. “She’ll be down in a minute.”

“I was just saying,” Alex said, “Nancy should wait to go to Singapore until they can have some fun.”

“Oh, don’t worry about Nancy,” she said, winking. “Hal’s company always plans some nice excursions for the spouses on these conferences, don’t they? Nice luncheons and tours...”

“That’s right,” my mother said, relieved. “They bring the country right to you, no hassles or stress. It’s terrific. Just what I want from a vacation.”

“If you wanted to be bored, you could just stay at home. No need to go to the other side of the world.”

Elle’s mother poked him in the ribs. “I think it sounds lovely. You’ll have a wonderful time. Don’t worry about a thing. I’m sure Elle will be thrilled to have a whole weekend with Jennifer. Elle!”

She appeared at the top of the stairs, pouting in a powder blue collared shirt buttoned to her collarbone and a pair of blue jeans. She sat on the banister and slid halfway down until she almost fell off.

“The next time I see you do that while we don’t have company, there will be consequences,” Alex thundered. She rolled her eyes. “What was that?”

We stood in embarrassed silence while she mumbled, *I didn’t say anything.*

“Excuse me?”

*I said, I didn’t say anything.*

“And I said, the next time I see you do that there will be serious consequences. Do you understand?”

*Yes*, she said, raising her eyebrows.

“What was that?”

*Yes*, sir.

“It’s five now. You’ve made everyone late.”

We could only stare while they had their standoff.

“Thanks again, Nancy,” Elle’s mother broke in apologetically. Alex put his arm around her, drawing her back into the den.

Elle was the only thing that made the forced routine of church bearable. With her help, I could continue to learn about that secular world my parents were trying so hard to keep from me. I blamed them for my awkward status among my classmates, my non-existence to boys and zero athletic renown. I still wasn’t allowed to watch television other than the kids’ networks, but even some of those shows were too “rude.” In daily verbal battles at school, I was the one running to the bathroom stall to cry and curse and read the ballpoint penned invectives against me on the walls:

*Jenny Paulson has a stinky vaj.*



*Jenny Paulson is a bra size negative AA.*

*Jenny Paulson is a lifetime virgin.*

My mom told me girls were just jealous that I was smart and “getting pretty.” She said I’d have more dates than those girls soon. But thanks, Mom, the wisdom didn’t stop the smirks, comments in the halls and pictures on the walls. A few changes in myself could, though.

Elle had promised me she’d save me from all this so I wouldn’t have to endure throughout high school too. I needed to do a few things: first, start wearing jeans that actually made it down to my ankles and didn’t start at my ribcage. Next, learn to flip my hair over my shoulder, tuck it behind my ear and play with it around boys. She’d taught me how to walk like a bitch—arms and hips swinging, chin raised and eyes lowered—so I wouldn’t be their constant punching bag. I needed to learn the names of the members of groups like Destiny’s Child, the lyrics to Puff Daddy songs, learn all the music video dances. My peers operated on a completely different consciousness, becoming teenagers while I was trapped in reluctant childhood.

“Project Jenny” had to be worked on at church, or afterwards at her step-dad’s house nearby because we didn’t go to the same school. Her school, one neighborhood closer to the city, seemed to be full of richer kids with later curfews, T.V.’s and phones in their bedrooms, those windows to the outside world. They hooked up, made out, went to the mall in groups and came back with sexy clothes and inside jokes. They didn’t sit around at lunch and talk about class. They were more mature and street-smarter than the relatively nicer, more childish kids at my school. I was too obviously good at school to get guys like Collins to flirt with me like he did with Allison Forsythe, the lovable ditz who wore spaghetti-strapped tank tops and visible thongs sticking out of her low-rider jeans. My oversized tourist T-shirts with the names of obscure countries and foreign languages failed to be the conversation-starters my parents must have imagined they would be. They were very confused by my lack of popularity. My mom

said I was “worldly, well-read and polite, pleasant-looking besides.” Why was I worried about getting dates anyway? I was still a kid. I should just be having fun. How could I explain that to normal kids, “fun” meant filching LED lights from Sharper Image, making out in the dark corners of un-chaperoned coed parties, and learning to incorporate the terms “mother-fucker” and “dick-sucker” into my vernacular? They didn’t get it, but I couldn’t explain it either. Being a “nice girl” didn’t have any perks—for one thing, I had no way to defend myself against social attacks.

Elle kept a list—she called it her hit list—of people from her school she intended to “destroy.” Their malefactions were as major as slander and as minor as a dirty look. A girl who supposedly had called Elle a slut came to school one day to find her locker smeared with a smelly brown paste. A guy who’d called Elle stupid in class started finding typed letters in his locker—he transferred schools, they said. The origins of these middle school “hits” were never discovered, and she never fell under suspicion. Adults loved her. She used a sophisticated level of sarcasm, was a master of uncovering artifice and developing complex ideas. She brought gifts for congregation members in wheelchairs. She hugged everybody. No one like that could do bad things. Our pastor said she had “a way about her.” I wondered if I was the only one who really knew what that meant.

That Sunday, I found myself actually listening to the sermon.

“The Devil, as we define him today, is less of a being than a natural force of evil, responsible for cruelty and corruption in the world. Thief of youth and innocence, he is master of smoke and mirrors, appearing in many forms, like a harmless garden snake. It allows him to spread his volatile influence in a chain reaction, eventually infecting the whole human race until we are unable to decide for ourselves what is right and wrong.

“We fight a very different battle today than our parents did a generation ago. These destructive paths of corruption have become valued, even mainstream, embedded in every aspect of modern youth culture. That’s why it’s important, friends, that we teach our children to walk with God *now*, so that when the Devil inevitably enters their lives, they will have the strength to turn him away right then and there and spend the rest of their lives wrapped in Jesus’ love.”

Then everyone murmured in imperfect unity, “Lord, give us strength.”

I wish I had been strong enough to resist her. I learned much too late in life that I didn’t have to say yes to everything. But Elle was a girl who was not used to hearing no, and I was not used to having the opportunity to say yes. I wanted what she had. I wanted to be invincible.

God-is-great, God-is-good, lettuce-thankum for this food. By-his-hands, we-are- fed, thank you God for daily bread. Ah-men, I recited with as much devotion as I would “Mary Had a Little Lamb.” It had been the family dinnertime prayer since I was old enough to speak. It was easy to remember, and didn’t make my dad too uncomfortable to mumble under his breath. He used to have faith, he said, before he moved to the Washington, D.C. area. “Now the Democrats are God,” he’d say.

They began discussing the new plans for me to stay with Elle for the weekend. I should bring my bathing suit so I could swim in their pool, and Mom would get to work marking my name in all the tags of my clothing with a Sharpie pen so Elle and my clothes wouldn’t get mixed up.

“I don’t think there’s much danger of that,” said Dad.

“Why do you say that?” asked Mom, a portrait of innocence.

Dad chuckled, but not like he did at those insurance commercials. “Come on. I think it’s safe to say there is no chance of mixing up Jenny’s clothes with hers. Did you see what she wore to church the other week? Jeez. I’ve never seen so much cleavage at the communion altar before. I think Pastor even blushed.”

“Oh, I don’t think so,” said Mom, sharply dismissive. “You can’t blame the girl for developing early.”

“For crying out loud, she’s a hop skip and a jump away from standing on K Street in some of those clothes, Nancy. I mean, those heels had to’ve been about eight inches. And with *cherries* on them? I mean, *Christ*.”

“Well,” said Mom defensively, “She is Jennifer’s best friend, and her mother is just lovely. That Alex, though...”

“Oh, he’s a creep,” said Dad with a mouthful of steak. “Don’t you find him to be creepy, Jen? I pity that girl having to live with that guy. It’s like being a gangster crook is legal now.”

“What a life that girl’s had, though,” said Mom. “She deserves a nice house like he has for them.”

My parents wouldn’t explain why they talked in hushed tones about Elle. They told me I would understand when I was older.

But one time she told me a story about her life in Alabama before her mother married Alex and joined our church. My parents were right: I was too young at the time to process the implications of a stepmother who used six-packs of beer as bludgeoning devices, or a step-uncle who played with Elle when she was too little, or the things someone did to her in the backseat of a car while her mother sat up front with the driver. I thought she was the biggest liar in the world. Even if what she told me *was* true, I thought maybe it was the best thing that ever happened to her because now people fell over themselves to shower her with attention and expensive gifts, excusing away all her tantrums and mischief. I should be so lucky.

Her life was a source of fascination to me, like the price tags on dresses worn by celebrities in gossip magazines. She had a princess's ransom in glass bottles, each one the shape of the body she was developing. In her room full of mirrors and magazine cutouts of heartthrobs, the colors and tubes were dazzling. I wanted to use the sparkly nail polish as finger-paint, and the wands, applicators and brushes reminded me of little feather dusters and princess gowns. In my house, these things were as forbidden as any dress shoe with more than a one-inch heel, or any skirt above the knee. One time, I used some of my contraband Tinker Bell sheer pink lip shimmer on the way to see a musical with my parents. My mother caught it in the rearview mirror in time, and pulled over to watch me wipe it off. She said that next time she caught me, we would turn around and go home. The gloss had felt cool and slippery, like lingerie for my lips. When I wiped it off, the tissue was smeared with pixie dust. I rolled it into a ball and kept it in my pocket all night.

I stood at the large double oak doors on Friday, June 6<sup>th</sup>, trembling with excitement. This was my ticket out of childhood. This would be a weekend full of sneaking sips of vodka, digging through her step-dad's porn collection, and prank-Instant Messaging people we hated. Like sexy girl summer camp. Maybe I'd leave with a makeover, or new leads on a boyfriend, someone more mature than the scaredy-babies I went to school with. There was just one stipulation, a promise I'd made to myself: I would not agree to play that game again.

*This is gonna be awesome*, she squealed as she smoothed her curtained hair in her vanity mirror. I sat on her bed, watching her in the mirror, studying her beauty routine.

*Alex is gone from like five in the morning 'til eight at night. It's the best. We can have John Marks and some of his lacrosse friends come over.*

Oh my God, oh my *God!* I yelped, jumping up and down. My first kiss, my first kiss!

She smiled sweetly in the mirror at my silly enthusiasm. *That's great sweetie, but um, first thing is? You can't act like that around him. You gotta be cool.*

Right, I said, right. Cool. Cooooool.

*Second thing is, he's already had a couple girlfriends. So we need to get you ready.*

Yeah! I said, A makeover! Can I borrow a push-up bra?

*You're going to need more preparation than that. Let's go downstairs.*

The basement had its own door that could be locked from the outside. The steps down were narrow and slippery. There were three doors at the bottom: the one on the right was a storage room filled with boxes of canned food and toilet paper, the one in the middle was a marble-floored bathroom, and the one on the left was always locked—that's where Alex kept his guns, Elle said. The rest was a big, open space divided in half between the tile-floored bar area and the carpeted home theater area, separated by a sliding glass partition. There were no windows. Mirrors lined the wall behind the tiered shelves of sleek liquor bottles, and the home theater section had lights in the floor.

Awesome, I said, gazing inexpertly at the bottles. Which ones taste good?

*I think the vodka and the whisky taste the best. Try this one.*

She handed me a bottle of Grey Goose. I held my nose as I tipped it back into my mouth. I let go of my nose. I had the sensation of having swallowed rubbing alcohol. I coughed, and gagged, and the tears streamed down while she giggled.

*You're supposed to mix it with something, silly.*

She reached below the bar and brought up a can of cranberry juice. She poured it and the vodka in a stubby glass and told me to drink it like cough medicine.

*Knock it back.*

I did, and tried to restrain myself from convulsing as she poured a tiny glass full of Knob Creek and threw her head back with it.

*Wanna watch something?*

We studied the movie cabinet. She said I needed to do “research.” So she isolated a few choice options including *Pretty Woman*, *Striptease*, and *Nine Weeks*. We put them each on, just for the scenes she’d already memorized. I felt like falling asleep right away, and I started to nod off. She jumped up and grabbed a can from the refrigerator and a bottle from the cabinet.

*Here, take this and wash it down with this.*

What is it?

*It’s good for you. It’ll keep you awake.*

I’m not supposed to take anything without knowing...I said, immediately losing my new sexy girl credibility. Sexy girls did not ask precautionary questions.

*Oh shut up, Jen. It’s just Adderall and Red Bull.*

Is it dangerous?

*No, silly. I take Adderall everyday, and my mom drinks a Red Bull every morning before work. It just helps you stay awake and alert so you don’t fall asleep.*

I placed the blue pill on my tongue and took a swig of the rubbery drink.

Bored of the movies, she used the big screen T.V. to play our favorite Jock Jams CD. We danced around the room, our arms waving wildly and our laughter getting shriller and faster. This was going to be a *great* weekend. I was going to learn so much. I was going to go back to my school in the fall and blow everyone away with my maturity and sexiness.

A sharp, shrill tone filled my head and my stomach started lurching. I ran to the bathroom with Elle calling after me. I felt as if my body were trying to turn inside out. I was crying, retching, and gagging on the searing liquid running down my throat. She appeared in the doorway, laughing. Then she kneeled beside me and drew my hair back. She was whispering things to me I couldn't understand. It felt like she was dabbing the back of my neck with a sponge, but once my vomiting subsided I sensed a very different thing going on. She was sucking on my neck.

I pushed her off. She fell back onto the floor, stunned.

I don't want to play the game anymore, Elle, I slurred, trying to reach the toilet paper. She just glared at me.

*You're drunk. You don't know what you want.*

No, no, I said. She appeared once, twice, again, and again, like the numbers on the Deal or No Deal wheel, like I was in a giant balloon rolling downhill.

Her expression softened and her voice got that scary, quiet tremble.

*Poor Jennee, she sing-songed, caressing my hair. I threw up the first time too, it's okay.*

She crawled on her hands and knees towards me and gently pushed me against the side of the bathtub.

*You got puke on your shorts. And your shirt. Wanna take a shower?*

She reached over and turned the knobs. It was the most welcoming sound I could've imagine at that moment, so I began undressing. She helped me pull my shirt over my head and my shorts over my knees. I felt like



a limp puppet. She giggled, and squeezed my thigh. I wiggled away a little and tried to stand. It didn't take much effort to make me sit down again. She leaned over me with both her hands on my thighs.

*You ever felt this before?*

She shoved a hand inside my underwear, up into me, and suddenly my muscles all seemed to jump at once.

Later on, the adults would determine that since I had a bruise on my knee that matched the mark under her chin, I was responsible for her concussion, occurring when the back of her head hit the marble with a dull, sickening crack, and therefore also responsible for her erratic behavior that followed. It would almost have been as if I myself had unlocked the door on the left with a key I wasn't supposed to have and held the gun myself, unloading a .9 mm bullet into my own arm. My own worst enemy.

Forgive her, father! for she knows not what she does.

And yet, she shall reap what she sows.

Elle never became a pregnant teen, as everyone had expected. Her stepdad enrolled her in an alternative school for troubled kids. Her mother divorced him after discovering a tracking device under her car. Everything went pretty much according to the prophecies.

But there was one thing no one expected, least of all me. I *missed* it. The Game. Never again did I hear that shrill scream, that primordial alarm of danger. The silence that folded around me in her absence was unbearable. Every night before I fell asleep, it was like there was a meeting in which everyone was speaking at the same time, with the same urgency. It lasted for hours, so deafening that I began stuffing my ears with plugs. When that didn't work, I began my regiment of Valium, prescribed me by a lady psychiatrist.

When that didn't work, I began begging my lady psychiatrist for something stronger. She prescribed Ambien, but I told her, "I want something stronger. Like a pussy." She told me she couldn't help me, but I proved her wrong. And when I did, over her protests and whining, bargaining and logic, I heard it again. The pure, feminine scream of danger and pain and familiarity. It's continued ever since.

I have regained control, and thereby my life. When I met Natalie—whom I call Nell—I knew that nothing had been an accident. She allows me to be myself, to pursue my pleasures the way I want. She wants nothing but the chance to be less. It's perfect.

I am not beyond saving. This is what I have been told to say. I am a whole person, not a shred of what I once was. My desires and dreams are valid, and I don't have to be threatened by them anymore.

But I'm through with desires and dreams. I'm through with the idea of evil. It only exists in that one place, the place where my parents were too ashamed to go anymore. A community of supposed do-gooders, until one of them does not do-good. Until one of them steps outside. And then you're supposedly lost forever.

But I'm not lost. I'm not a simp. I don't have to fall for that baloney anymore. Elle taught me that. In her lessons of coolness was the wisdom to see that I was being held down. I was made to believe that to deny myself pleasures was to make myself into something acceptable to something greater. But there can be nothing greater than getting to hear my lullaby again. I want those people at the great bedtime meeting to *shut up*. And if it means losing everything...

God works in mysterious ways.

All I'm left with is gratitude. My prayers have been answered—I'm free.

Elle is great, Elle is good.

Lettuce thanker for my cool.

John Miatech

### Stone Woman

Stone Woman, whose wrinkles  
were canyons,  
felt the coolness where the shadows were lengthening.....

Sun lowered Himself  
toward the horizon  
as a breeze began to move across the earth

A cook-fire sprang up in the camp of  
Woman-who-sings,  
the smoke from which floated into the hills,  
mixing with sage

Coyote called out to Woman-who-sings:  
“What are you cooking in the darkness, Sister?”  
To which there was no reply, so coyote  
called again.....

And the moon rose.....

## Place of Great Water

I have been on the long ride  
Around your body,  
And while I have seen into your clear waters,  
It was impossible  
To see all of you at once

Your waters are cold and deep, but not unwelcoming  
The wind that blows across you is powerful  
And it reminds us that you are a path that we tread on  
Only with your permission

Someday, I will come back to listen to your secrets,  
The ones the bears along your shores protect,  
The ones the wolves sing about when the weather grows painful,  
The secrets the Anishnaabe and Cree live by

I will climb your rocky shores,  
Look out over the swells of your body,  
Search the deep water of your heart.....

I will come for your beauty  
Gichigumi,  
And I will marry it  
To all I know

I will tell my daughter;  
“Here is where your blood came from,  
And you must remember this  
To know who you really are”

## Stories from the Ground

Tom Grant stopped the tractor  
In the middle of the potato field  
“There, see that?” he pointed  
Hopping off the old grey Ford  
He stooped to pick up a rock

“Grinding tool” he said  
Dropping a rounded stone in my hand  
“I find these things all the time  
You keep it”

The tractor lurched forward,  
Discs cutting into the soil  
To turn out the potatoes that lay under  
The old Pottawattamie Trail

“This was a trade route,” Tom yelled  
Above the noise of the tractor  
“I have sacks of arrowheads in the house”  
I stood on the hitch behind the big metal seat,  
Holding onto the wide fender and the words Tom spoke

I watched the soil turning behind us,  
Looked for more history to be brought to the surface  
As the tractor calmly plowed ahead,  
Watched for more stories from the old ones,  
Who called out from the ground:

“We are still here...”

## Still Something to Do

Laying in the darkness, I listen to the rain  
It is already a river in its own mind, all these tiny drops  
The rain rejoices knowing this and comes down harder

Sometimes I am a river too  
Once you are a river, everything changes

The rain moves over the roof,  
It goes down the drainpipe in mighty gulps  
Hurries to become what it always was

Even at this late hour there is still something to do

## The Christine Poems: Poem 1

She said:

“If I go back now,  
I’ll have to be apart from you.”

He said:

“I’ve always loved you.  
I never stopped.”

She said:

“That was a great kiss,  
Not a little whimpy thing..”

He said:

“Wait ‘til we’re alone -  
No, why wait?”

She said:

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

He said:

“It broke my heart when you got married.”

She said:

“But that’s over now. I don’t  
want to leave you for a second.”

He said, squeezing her hand:

“You won’t.”

Not even when the dream ends,  
Not even for a second.

Jason Stocks

TORN between  
being a man  
and being  
polite

,

if I said  
anything at all  
I'd probably say  
:I'm not a calculator.

To think easy like you do is fresh eggs, cornbread and buttermilk on the table every morning. Without worrying about who put it out.





retreat

fallen dreams  
icons made of salt  
born to believe  
a lie that stalks

your linear love  
lean, in to hear  
encouraging words of  
whispering love:

the who that never was  
the could that never would.

Sometimes, in baby eyes  
I see they know  
all they're ever  
gonna know

neatly

Jacob Reber

Milk Sweat

clumsy nerve endings

spill milk all over the warped

wooden flatlands

we knew it would happen

barely make us laugh

we would be dead before

anyone came to find us

not save us

they already tried that

with greasy finger tips

and rotting epiphanies

they lie through their lips

but we can read the brainwaves

## The Cult of the Fictitious

Lepers' graying hands  
Trace the outlines on my arms  
Of the life that thrusts its way through  
to find existence-  
essence.

Like a frightened child  
escaping  
the screams  
of his father's stumbling  
rampage,  
I crawl through  
the seeing iris  
with blistered palms,  
to live a life  
deliberately-

I slip beneath the lens of the exterior,

Miniature mountains coat my arms  
As the icy oxygen irritates the wind  
I kiss the wilderness within the  
fragments of my psyche  
musing giants of contemplation,  
with leaves  
my skin howls  
laid bare,  
I wail lovely thoughts

The anthropocentric animals  
and I  
can stare into the night  
with our eyes sealed  
And see the stars through our  
immaterial eyelids

It is here  
We become  
The cult of the fictitious,  
Praising the transcendentalists,  
Transcending

Burning holes in our brains  
We see the dripping sun spill  
Silhouettes  
Swaying towards their eventual graves  
Deliberately.

## I Can Still Hear the Echoes

I can still hear the echoes  
of the self proclaimed beat gods  
rousing my soul.  
I feel the coyote snarl room dividing me  
from the rest of my generation.  
Another hour was meant for my poems  
To drip from my pen  
And mix  
With a xanax driven psycho highway chaser blinking sleep.  
The needle in my head is skipping and scratching  
At the embryos of my adolescent thought, creating  
New mountain knuckles  
To let old church harmonics  
Ring out  
and let the Holy Cross and rushed nails scab over my drug loving heart.  
Pain is the easiest drug to get your addict finger tips on.  
One quick slice, splice opens up the spiritual truths you've placed your dreams on, the natural truth riddled with  
screaming tendons of tranquility.  
We are real when we chose to live in the druggy sanctuary and cling to madness with broken fingers and blistered  
knees  
And sun aged eyelids and white out pupils.  
I revel in every soul squeezing phrase with mankind diction and iodine spotted periods.  
Religious words spat out on pages among coffee stains  
Magazines, broken bottled beers, blank sheets, rolling paper, and ghost rings of empty glasses.  
Asaph melodies remind us of  
cultural captivity, the materialized man.  
Soft soaked mind thoughts  
In acid contemplating madness and religion in  
One empty sentence,  
Sing to me  
with no bullshit bluntness.  
The enlightened dead beats rise  
In spiritual memories – we  
Are only as mad as  
We ought be.

## Seamless Doctors Silky

silky seamless doctors

put words into the mouths

of anesthetized

patients with their eyes

wide and cotton

balls in their ears and nothing

in their brains anymore

unless the broken glass

hopes still exist in fragments.

doctors seamless silky

gray professional suits

funereal carpets

real prescriptions

used recreationally

their sunglasses don't recognize

they are still too cool to see dead patients



## Swimming pools Nude

Coated in green-tinted cytoplasm

where our arms are connected by saggy tissue

the dogs hum into the feedback

stitched with amateur precision

knife wound cut backs

in lung water splashing fishlegs

we split uneven down the seems

sewn fresh and foolishly

even hearts slip out spread puddle

gluey liquid seeps

then explodes as it drips

oozing atomic explosions

the doctors made promises

but love only sees the new

fireworks

rockets remember the transparent

human gelatin messes

pools of the liquid saliva

or bloodhound          swooping drool

collected until we float

so our feet do not touch

Ivan de Monbrison

6 images (ink and acrylic on paper).

### Artist Statement

Art is for me the only answer in our modern world to the question of death and the fragility of human nature. Through the ages human beings have used the representation of the world as a medium to conjure what they saw has powerful elements of nature that they could not explain and which would threaten them, it included spirits of the ancestors, forces of nature, death itself etc. I think this process is still at the core of the art medium. To represent ourselves is still a mirror to our own self, and the consciousness we have of it is reflected in the very image on the surface. In a world of technology to choose to use still a very classical medium like painting is a way to set a bridge with the past resisting the facility of technology but with the will to represent the world with a modern eye. That is why i choose to paint mostly in black and white and to represent human beings more as shadows than as fleshy bodies. They are incarnated in the canvas but not yet fully present. I hope that people who have experienced pain and loss in life as absurd and meaningless will be able to connect with these ghostly shapes as images of the sense of precarity they may feel, giving it a depth that goes far beyond the simple pleasure of the eye ."

Ivan de Monbrison 2010















henry 7. reneau, jr.

### **I Am Trayvon Martin!**

Well, what else could we do? He was hopeless. I'm no bully; I never hurt a nigger in my life. I like niggers—in their place—I know how to work 'em. But I just decided it was time a few people got put on notice. As long as I live and can do anything about it, niggers are gonna stay in their place. Niggers ain't gonna vote where I live. If they did, they'd control the government. They ain't gonna go to school with my kids. And when a nigger gets close to mentioning sex with a white woman, he's tired o' livin'. I'm likely to kill him. Me and my folks fought for this country, and we got some rights. I stood there in that shed and listened to that nigger throw that poison at me, and I just made up my mind. 'Chicago boy,' I said, 'I'm tired of 'em sending your kind down here to stir up trouble. Goddam you, I'm going to make an example of you—just so everybody can know how me and my folks stand.' —John William “J. W.” Milam, co-murderer of Emmett Till, *Look* magazine, 1956

There was just no way I could describe what was in that box. No way. And I just wanted the world to see. —  
Mamie Till Bradley, mother of Emmett Till

Do angels smell of sea salt rush of tears,  
snatched to sleep everlasting,  
a connotation of “collateral” become a label of fear,  
of confrontation?      “Skittled” by gunshot.

\$50,000, \$2,000—how much  
does a murdered Afghani child cost to just go away?

Euphemized like Emmett Till,  
weighted down in death with cotton-gin fan,  
weighted down to death by a 115 grain full metal jacket,  
a bag of Skittles & spilled ice-tea,  
his cell-phone ring-tone a cautionary tale, “you should run!”

Plantation lullabies generations removed, from an open casket  
like a tell-tale heart—serious as being Black.

Geraldo thinks he brought Neighborhood Watch His-panic on himself  
wearing a “hoodie” while Black,  
like driving while Black,  
jogging Black, “suspicious”  
saggin’ while Black, reaching for your wallet  
41 bullets inna’ freeze nigger! back Black!

Mississippi1955, whistling at white women while Black, “suspicious”  
as Medger in his driveway Black, “suspicious”  
as MLK at the Lorraine Motel Black, “suspicious”

as white men with guns & badges in the “hood”, in my niggas pockets  
& they socks, lookin’ for some dope or the undercover Glock,  
like piling 9 dead children to make a bonfire under color  
of “Stand Your Ground” military Shock & Law.

Serious as a heart attack, h.i.v/AIDS, the Sanford police—serious as,  
nowhere in the definition of “suspicious”  
is the adjective defined as a “coon”/terrorist in a gated community  
wearing a “hoodie”/suicide vest, with Skittles/WMD in his pocket,

but who  
watches the Watchman,

but the specter of Emmett Till?

## **Requiem for Kong**

The Emancipation Proclamation gave birth to segregation after rape  
by Reconstruction.

Segregation, agitated by fear & ignorance, conceived white sheets & impotent political teeth  
to cage blackness. The freedman ex-slave was imprisoned behind separate but unequal  
bars of rhetoric & legislation.

Then . . . they poked  
the subdued beast with the sharpened stick of deceit, Jimmy Crow &

institutional racism. A collective racial emotion, much more complicated & vicious than  
anger, enflamed Negroes' "las' nerve" be patient . . . waiting.

Afro-Americans planned & plotted vengeance that festered in submissive silence,

before black folk sprouted fangs & claws that were filed to razor sharp on the nihilistic  
threat & double consciousness.

Then,  
one day, distracted by arrogance & entitlement, the gate keepers

forgot to lock the cage,  
as they invited Amerikkka to view the subdued beast . . .

adults: 7 dollars . . . senior citizens: 4 dollars . . .  
children under 12: free.

Gareth Lee

HIATUS

Scar-struck, melancholy me, seated on tusks  
from a narwhale ascended from the deep . . .

What did it think of the transient brightness  
quick shapes and brightness, the seductions

of day, what did it hear? The sky, or my leg  
(now whale jaw) dispatching my anxieties

eternally to the quarter-deck Amen, or hissand-  
roar, one anointed ill-clad man crazed

by the consecration icing the masts so went  
over to be dressed in regal robes of blue-hue

that squid-enlarged sea. These questions so  
mystic, spectral, albino-like, these loomings

that worry me, your chief reprobate, whom  
God has groped to inspire *abandon, abandon*

VESTIGIAL (LONGING)

Deep sap, apples

everywhere I've rested these  
on are apples, or

remind me of

corduroy made for trees, for  
climbing and falling

when it is brisk

\*

I love the fall crunch crunch  
shuffle crunch. Do you

love the fall

crunch crunch. And the wet  
rolls beneath, indecent

soft, are a sprung earth

giving in, complacent, as we  
nap the noons off

\*

and move

on to the next, cider-laced in  
our bones but fingers

on the edge of bloom

PREBIOTIC TO THE POSTMODERN “BIBLE”

The slow Sabbath groups  
around the Old Navy  
then grope like libertines:  
fine-wale corduroys,

tinsel-topped boots, thick  
flannel exhumed in  
cotton fields and brought  
to be bought. *Oh it's*

*just commerce*, you say, in  
full degeneracy. I  
say whoso refuses this ilk  
(of a bosomed shirt,

etc) is yes scattered about,  
but as part of an Ark,  
is a raucous collective like  
one summer thunder.

*So hm who is the zealot now*,  
you say, *who is*—  
I say these bright shapes I  
keep simply,

my own nudity, that which  
horrifies some, isn't  
much: they will blur as we  
cycle, or as you hock

that fashionista's wool hat,  
cut the stylized curls,  
shave all sideburns and so  
commit to me thus.

Felino A. Soriano

### Amid the Strain: *comfort*

You've conceived.

They've detected.

Concurrent.

Inter|related    thus collocation    plush affirmation

bodily

sustenance diversion philosophy:  
ornament of sound quilts

pain then release the

cold of nuanced

diversion

birth

became upon extraction of walled corporality.

### Created *momentum*

lead query

tongue excerption rereading scrutiny of the past appositions

—miracles

conception formulated otherness (others' necessary tug-on, at)



tumbling fascination  
with  
motional wanderings of unrepentant brokenness  
believable subtleties

wound as though  
fatherless children mature, stagnation—  
paused, muted vernacular ventilation  
hearers oscillate vindictive motivational pleasantries

releasing

vagabond

themes of incessant movement, recall then (yes?)

collapse of themselves  
clued remission of intellectual having | s

certainty mishap stagnant thought (yes, they've removed)

### wound into

with frac  
tioned moments'

| monuments dictating misdiagnosed (trueness, then) veneration |

trajectory fascination sustaining

width and focus the

eyed remorse misinforms as diligent

failure,

silhouette-thinness

intellectual

effort

“Many would sooner die than think.”  
Bertrand Russell

reimposes worth of delineated rhythms  
cultivating

passive

diversions to then toward self of anecdotic absence

graduating theories thus thoughtful penetration of

ingurgitated revelation

Eve Maher

### Glue

My sister sat in the passenger seat coating the back of her hand in glue. It was an odd habit, but the smile that spread across her face when she peeled off the tacky layer of pseudo-skin was worth enduring the thick smell.

“Have I ever thanked you for taking me here?” Cherish asked as I hit a red light. The afternoon sunlight blasted through the window, painting her like an angel against the drab brick buildings. I could only see her scar in the light, a long-healed diagonal scratch that took the path her laugh lines would run someday.

“Probably?” I said.

“Dr. Freeman says I should be more expressive. So, thank you for taking me all this time.” I knew she was really thanking me for putting up with her the past year. Still, it was progress, and I squeezed her hand that wasn’t glossy with half-dry glue before the light flicked to green.

“You’re welcome. And thank you, for being the greatest little sister. Even if you do make my car smell like a kindergarten classroom.” She didn’t laugh at the joke, most likely because she knew I was really thanking her for still being alive.

#

Ian always reminded me of a greyhound, with his long face, seemingly endless limbs and puppyish innocence. I usually avoided him and the melting smiles he would give my sister, but on her fifteenth birthday, he insisted on helping. He even knew lemon cake was her favorite. My clearest image is him hunched over the kitchen counter, tongue poking through his lips in concentration and hands too big and nervous for the frosting bag. We planted a wax 1 and 5 above his wormy message: Happy Birthday CHERISH we love you.

Ian drove an '85 black Mustang that Cherish adored. I thought it was boxy and dated, the kind of car that was cool when his father was, but she would practically squeal when she heard it thud into our driveway. She took off with him every Friday and Saturday, always back by eleven to say hello to our parents and give her a not-too-long kiss. There was some Saturday in the spring where they went to dinner together. It was raining hard, and my mom and I were bundled up with a movie when the phone rang. I remember her voice sounded harder than it should have, and I didn't fully understand what happened until we were halfway to the hospital.

I remember the stitches, how the red of her wound scared me so much, like this one crack in her porcelain face would cause her to shatter. When they were sure her head was fine, the doctors let her sleep. They had the same coats and voices but all sorts of undistinguished faces, all telling me how lucky she was, how the truck couldn't possibly have seen them with all the rain, how they couldn't make any promises about Ian's recovery. We had to pass through the waiting room to get coffee, and the man driving the truck spoke to us for a while. I only remember how swollen his face was, how sorry he really seemed to be. When we headed back to Cherish's white-walled room, the man was gone. Cherish was still sleeping when another doctor pulled us into the hall for Ian's prognosis. I never saw him again until the funeral.

#

The waiting room in Dr. Freeman's office was sterile, but it tried not to be with miniature zen gardens and

colorful posters of landscapes. I sat in the same hard chair as always; I had picked it on her first visit with our parents, hopeful but mostly numb. All I could remember about Dr. Freeman was his tan skin and thick knuckles. For the first few weeks after the funeral, she didn't talk much. I imagined her like a cartoon character, uncorking her mouth and letting the words spill out and soak through the carpet of Dr. Freeman's office. It was after her tenth session with him that she asked if Mom could make green bean casserole for dinner. It was Ian's favorite, but it was the first request for food she'd made in weeks.

Cherish had therapy just once a week now, and she was eating and smiling and close to normal again. When her hour was up, she emerged from behind the plain wooden door that separated the patients from the rest of us.

In the car, she didn't reach for the glue. She fidgeted with her hands, rubbing her nails together and further chipping the pink polish.

"Matilda, can I ask you for a favor?"

"Sure."

"I kind of need you to come with me somewhere tomorrow night."

"Where?"

"Well, my friend Liam asked me on a date, and he really wants to take me to the aquarium, but, you know..." I did know; she didn't trust anyone outside the family to drive.

"You're going on a date?" I tried to hide my concern.

"Yeah, I mean, Dr. Freeman told me he thought it was a good idea."

"But, do you really want to do that?"

She stopped fidgeting.

"I think I do. And I think Ian would say I should do it, too." She looked at me, eyes wide. "You think I

should too, right?”

“Completely. If you want it, that’s all that matters.” My agreement was partial, but I wasn’t about to contradict both her and her therapist. My old car rattled up the driveway.

“So you wouldn’t mind coming with? I mean, you could just drop us off, I guess, but I was kind of hoping it could be a double date or something.”

“A double date, huh? Should I bring someone too?” I asked, undoing my seatbelt.

“Could you ask Tristan? He’s such a sweetheart.”

“Oh, absolutely. I’m sure he’d love to come.” I wasn’t sure, but she smiled big and draped her arm around my shoulder as we walked toward our house.

Tristan, whose real name was Thomas, was a gaunt and pale boy with a permanent film of grease on his black hair. He was a caricature of himself, a “lone wolf” with notebooks full of bad poetry. He was also my ex. He knew Cherish through group counseling at our school (he was in for a “dark and concerning” art project), and she spoke so highly of me that we had to meet. For three months, he had been a good boyfriend, which was the problem. Constant phone calls and declarations of love pushed me farther away with each syllable. I broke up with him just under a month ago when he tried to celebrate our three-month-iversary with a midnight picnic and a speech about our future together; I had been avoiding him since then because the last time I saw him, he was crying hysterically on the checkered blanket spread on his front lawn.

“You’re the greatest, Matt,” Cherish said before ascending the stairs to her bedroom.

“I try.”

#

Tristan turned his phone off after my fourth call. At dinner, I ate with zeal. Mom and Dad were too

preoccupied with an inquisition about Liam to notice my silence. An hour later, Tristan's phone was still off. I grabbed the car keys from my desk and called a hasty promise of quick return to the rest of my family, gathered on the couch for a TV show.

Tristan lived on the eastern edge of town, less than a mile from the site of Ian's accident. My entire body knew nothing good came from this neighborhood, sending off flares of gooseflesh. The turns were still second nature to me. Tristan's hand-me-down white sedan stood underneath his window like a guard, bathed in artificial yellow light. I pulled in behind him and picked out the largest bits of his gravel driveway I could find, their dust mixing with the sweat in my cupped palm. The first two pebbles hit the glass with a sharp plink. The third was sharp between my fingers when I heard a faint rush of air from his window.

"What are you doing?" Tristan sounded more confused than angry.

"You wouldn't answer my calls."

"Why didn't you just knock on the door?"

I didn't have an answer for that one.

"Can I talk to you or something?"

"Only if you stop trying to break my window."

"Fine."

I crunched across the driveway, letting the rest of my ammunition slide out of my hand. I approached the door, rubbing the dust on my jeans to keep myself from reliving the catalogue of prior walks down this path. I chewed on my tongue, unsure if I should knock. The harsh dome light forced me to squint into Tristan's face as the sound of television laughter escaped before he shut the door behind him.

"I wasn't trying to break your window," I mumbled. It was as close to "hello" as I could come.

“I know. I was kind of joking.”

“I just wanted your attention.”

“Right.”

“I mean, not that I want you to pay attention to me. I just wanted to talk to you.”

“I assumed you would get the hint after I turned off my phone.” (Translation: Please go away.)

I wiped a layer of sweat from my forehead, looking at anything but him: the mat asking me to wipe my paws, the dust in the corner of the doorframe, the dark patch of hair on the knuckles of his big toes, the fraying ends of my shoelaces. Crickets sang a faint ballad announcing the arrival of warmer months.

“So how is Charlie?”

“He’s got fleas. Did you really come here to talk about my dog?” (Translation: You interrupted my rereading of *Catcher in the Rye*. Get to the point.)

“Cherish is going on a date tomorrow.”

“Seriously?” he sighed. “Is she ready for that?”

“It’s been a year.”

“Love never dies, Matilda. Love is forever.” (Translation: I read that on a tattoo once. It will take me just as long to get over you. Maybe longer.)

“Well, she asked me to invite you. She and Liam are going to the aquarium and she wants us to go with.”  
(Boys don’t last forever, so please attend this dysfunctional double date.)

“It’s quite harsh of you to be pouring salt into my wounds so soon. I thought you would be kinder.”  
(Translation: I’m still angry.)

“I’m sorry, okay? I’m sorry that we didn’t work out and I’m sorry to ask this favor. I’m doing this for



Cherish, not for me and especially not for you. She needs us.”

“There is no more ‘us.’ You killed ‘us.’”

“What if I said I needed you? What if I told you that I didn’t have anyone else to ask?” I finally looked at him, the corners of his mouth pulled tight.

“Then I’d ask you what time I should be over tomorrow.”

“Five thirty.” I shoved my hands into my too-small pockets and stared at the ground again. “I really, really appreciate it, Tristan.” I turned and walked off, trying to prevent any reconsideration on his part.

#

Before Ian would come over, Cherish had seemed like she was possessed by a housewife. She would flit through the house dusting and straightening and fluffing, frantic but giddy. She abandoned the ritual for Liam, leaving dishes and dust on counters. Minutes until the boys’ expected arrival, I entered Cherish’s room to find her watching her favorite movie again. The glittery pink television, a relic from her childhood, played an image of a man brushing makeup on a corpse. Mortuary science was another hobby she picked up after Ian’s death, and this particularly in-depth gem was a gift from Tristan. She still wore pajamas, but she was just as made up as the body on the screen. She looked up from the film and grinned, patting an empty spot on the bed. The stiff woman made me queasy, but I sat without complaint. As the men in dark suits nailed a cross to the inner lid of her open casket, Cherish went to her closet.

“Can you keep my glue from me today?”

“Sure. I mean, you could leave it at home.”

“I want to have it close by in case I need it. But I don’t want to freak Liam out.” She pulled off her oversized shirt. I stared at the almost-closed door, not wanting to watch her or the funeral procession.

“I am *so* excited for today,” I lied.

“Yeah, me too. I hope you like Liam.”

“If you like him, I’m sure he’s great.”

“Thanks for doing this for me, Mattie.”

“It’s really not a problem.”

A faint knocking echoed through the mostly-empty house. I glanced over to see Cherish check herself in her mirror and head out the door. I followed suit and heard her from the top of the stairs.

“Hi Tristan! How have you been?” I reached the bottom in time to see them pull away from a hug.

“Pleasant, and yourself?”

“I’ve been great,” Cherish said, looking over her shoulder at me. “I’ll be right back.” She gave me a mischievous smile and bounded up the stairs. I nodded to Tristan, lingering at the edge of the foyer.

“Thanks for coming,” I said, staring at the rubber soles of my shoes.

“I wrote you something.” He took a half step toward me and held out a folded piece of paper. I unfolded it.

*to call you rose is an insult*

*your beauty is far more adult*

*you are not my lover*

*but the truth i cannot cover*

*you were the glue that held me together*

*without you i am broken forever*

It was a tradition of his to give me a poem before each of our dates. Today’s work was an improvement. I still remembered the first one he gave me, which actually started with “Roses are red.”

“What did you think?” He spoke in a whisper, as though he carried a fragile secret. “I mean, if you don’t want it, I’ll understand.” (Translation: I read an article about how to guilt someone into taking you back. Is it working?)

“It was nice,” I whispered back, knowing Cherish and I would be laughing at this later tonight. “But what’s even nicer is what you’re doing for Cherish.” (Translation: That was more of a limerick. Do I need to break up with you twice for emphasis?)

“Yeah.” He sighed, visibly crestfallen. “She looks happy.” (The article was in Cosmo. Guess I need a new approach.)

“We both appreciate you coming with. I think today will be really good for her.” (You’re not here to clumsily seduce me.)

“Let’s hope so. I don’t th-“ Tristan stopped midsentence when he heard Cherish’s footsteps on the stairs.

“Liam says he’s running a little late and we should meet him there,” she called from the landing.

“What? Why?”

“His sister’s dance recital is going on longer than he thought. He’ll be done in a few minutes but he didn’t want us to wait up for him.”

Tristan sighed and opened the front door. We followed him outside, Cherish sliding in the back and Tristan taking the passenger’s seat.

“So, tell me about Liam,” Tristan said, turned around in his seat.

“He’s a senior like you. I met him in my geometry class. We eat lunch all the time. He’s really charismatic.” I did not to point out that he was in a math class two years below his grade.

“He sounds pretty spectacular. Why did you choose the aquarium?”

“We were talking about squids and how cool they are, and he said I should see the ones in the aquarium sometime. So I said, why not tomorrow?”

“Wow. Good for you, Cherish. Boys like girls who are forward like that,” Tristan said. (Boys like them until they break their hearts, of course.)

The conversation lulled. Tristan drummed his fingers on the dashboard.

“Do you still see Mrs. Hicks? How is that going?” Cherish asked.

“Oh yes. She’s still telling me that attending her church will cure my depression.” I laughed a little, pulling into the parking garage adjacent to the huge glass building.

“Yeah, that’s why I go to Dr. Freeman.”

“It’s so nice to see how much you’ve grown. You’re so much healthier now.” (Good job at not dying.)

“Aww, thanks Tristan,” she murmured as I pulled into a parking spot. Our footsteps echoed, thrown back at us and all around by the dark concrete. The air in the elevator was thick with humidity and silence. It shuddered and stalled before reaching the main floor of the aquarium. Vinyl benches lined the outer walls of the sunlit atrium, opposed by the ticket counters and employees checking tickets. In the middle of the huge lobby was an intricate mosaic, scraps of bright glass spelling out an enormous red squid. Cherish pulled out her cell phone.

“He hasn’t responded yet, but we should probably just wait in the lobby.” We claimed seats close to the middle, with Cherish on the edge to watch the door. The crowded lobby was filled with just enough daylight to catch her scar. A wayward boy, clearly only an apprentice in the business of walking, stomped on the huge yellow eyes of the mosaic to see if the beast would move. When his tiny feet hit the floor, he let out a joyous squeal and laughed. I scanned the various adults in the scattered crowd, but each one seemed equipped with a set of children. I idly wondered where their parents were.

“Do you know if Liam has left yet?” I asked.

“I’m sure he’s on his way. He doesn’t like to text and drive.”

“Why don’t you call him?”

“I guess I will.”

Families flowed in and out of entryways and elevators, graceful and mob-like as the schools of fish they no doubt just observed. The small boy stumbled after a particularly hard step, but righted himself.

“I’ll be right back,” Cherish mumbled, rising and crossing to the bathrooms before I was entirely sure what she said.

“Do you think he’s going to show up?” Tristan asked.

“He’ll have to answer to me if he doesn’t.”

“At least I can be proud that I never stood you up.”

“Yeah, but you never took me to the ever-so-romantic aquarium,” I retorted. Tristan laughed a real loud chuckle that came from his belly.

“Touché. At least I didn’t break your heart.” The residual smile from the laugh was gone.

“You’re right. You didn’t. And I did. I wasn’t even nice to you. There’s no reason for you to still love me. Hell, there was no reason then, either.”

Cherish emerged from the women’s bathroom, face blank and unreadable.

“Well, you’re right too. You dumped me for being too nice, which is pretty hilarious. But love is just inconsiderate like that. It doesn’t give you a choice.”

Cherish took her seat next to me once again. The boy in the mosaic seemed to grow frustrated with the unmoving art, and brought his foot down hard enough to knock himself over. His eyes were wide, and he didn’t

seem to know how he got onto the floor. I looked down to see Cherish's hand in my purse. Tristan looked on as she removed the smooth white bottle and poured the viscid liquid onto the back of her hand.

"He's not coming."

"What?" I was almost shouting. The boy began wailing, head thrown back and facing the heavens in dedication to his sadness.

"I called him and I asked where he was. He said he couldn't come and then he hung up." Her face was perfectly flat, her eyes unfocused.

"He didn't even say he was sorry?" Tristan asked.

Cherish blew on her hand.

"He didn't even give a reason?" I asked.

The child's screaming grew louder.

"Can we leave now?" Cherish asked.

Tristan and I both nodded and stood, waiting for Cherish to follow suit and guiding her with a gentle hand on her back. A tired looking woman took our path in the opposite direction, collecting the boy and cooing gibberish to calm him. The loading of the elevator and car were silent and still. Even Cherish's blowing on her drying glue was uninspired and more of a sigh.

"I'm really sorry, Cherish," I said when we were on the freeway.

"Don't apologize for actions you didn't take," she said.

"If he's inconsiderate enough to string you along like that, you don't want to spend the afternoon with him anyway," Tristan said.

"I wanted to spend the afternoon with him."

“Well, maybe something really did come up,” I offered.

“He told me a few weeks ago that he doesn’t have any sisters.”

The quiet was so thorough that I could hear the soft sound of Cherish pulling the layer of pseudo-flesh from her hand. We were close to home now, and the sky was a warm pastel color that I had no reason to appreciate.

“Why don’t we go out and get some frozen yogurt? I know that’s your favorite,” I said.

“I’m not hungry.”

“I’ll bet you will be when we get there.”

The shop closest to us was named Yogurtie, which sounded more like a greeting for a hip grandmother than a place to get a sugar rush. The walls, floors, and counters were white, but every decoration was a shocking bright color, down to the radioactive looking spoons. Our silence was made louder by the other tables filled with chattering friends. I pushed my melted, sloppy sweetness around until the colors of the sprinkles began to bleed. Cherish refused to eat, and instead stared at the glass storefront.

“When a squid’s mate dies, she eats the body. It’s more efficient, but it’s also a mourning ritual.” Cherish’s unfocused gaze was still directed at the window.

“Huh. That’s a really neat fact,” Tristain said.

“I wanted to see that so bad. I just want that kind of ritual. That process.”

“Why?” I asked after a moment.

“So I could know when it ends.”

We were quiet again, unequipped for aiding Cherish in her battles. She broke her catatonia and stood, eyes wide.

“We need to go.”

“Why?” Tristan asked, eating another bite of dessert.

“Because he’s here. Liam is here.”

A boy with sunglasses and brown hair clearly styled to look unstyled approached the door, leading a pack of various teenagers. Before Tristan could stand, I was at the door, blocking their entrance.

“Hey, you’re Liam, right?” I addressed the apparent leader, who was a solid three inches shorter than me.

“Yeah,” he responded, eyebrows raised. “And?”

“I need to talk to you out here for a minute.”

The rest of them filed inside, most ignoring me but several giving dirty looks.

“Where were you today?”

“What are you talking about?”

“You had a date today. With Cherish.”

“Her?” he laughed. “I told her she should see the aquarium some time and she took that to mean I wanted to take her there. It’s not my fault she’s crazy.”

My hands were foreign, independent beings, one opening to clasp his shoulder and the other closing and connecting with his nose. Something cracked underneath my knuckles. He stumbled backward, blood streaming down his face and dripping from his chin to the concrete, thick and rhythmic like a broken faucet. I turned to see the entire café staring at me, with both my friends and his rising. Tristan and Cherish got to me first, and led me to the car, their warm hands pressing into my back. I fell into the passenger’s seat, still delirious and full of rage. As Tristan drove us away, Cherish slipped her bottle of glue into my shaking hands.

“This will help.”



Elena Botts

slow-rise

grey, huddled side by  
side, houses in procession,  
nearly fidgeting for space,  
half-shuttered windows squinting  
to stars burning above  
a neighborhood blackened in charcoal night  
the people inside  
in separate corridors  
fogged lights flickering  
like dim ghosts fading  
in and out  
a man lying on the floor  
his breath coming up  
geysers of agitation  
as he churns in wakefulness  
inches from  
another through the wall  
who in dismal lamplight  
peruses a volume  
sleep unattainable,  
time has become  
a haunting companion,  
a link through the tenement wall  
that seems like not so much a separation  
rather, a dawning association

a retreating glacier

you have dilapidated landscapes  
with the staccato of your cracking fingertips  
by the sea-sickening tilt of your backbone  
the tremors of your eyes in atmospheric heat  
they melt, dissolve, fall through  
the shifting of you  
leaves purpled obelisks  
in perilous position  
slopes carved by  
the dissolution of one creation  
until by the webbed branches of a leaning tree  
on the mountainside, each ancient feature has been  
in dawn distinctly wrought by unique relation

the fish in the deep  
can hear me breathe  
currents willed

why would you strike him  
am I part of your structure  
toppling your civilizations

still we sleep  
in separate oceans  
deepen dreams  
ebb tide inhalation

I've been to playgrounds  
submerged in darkness,  
I've seen her  
and her and her and her

and maybe you  
sometimes

I can here the bonds breaking  
civilization never lasts  
it crumbles, it churns  
it plummets fathoms  
quicker than your eye  
in mine

such  
a distance  
a bridge fallen into ruin  
embraced by tide  
in every aspect differently manifested  
these waves carry onward the ghost

all of the time

i woke to trees

growing in my brain

i cannot feel any-  
thing but steady

root expansion

some days,

i just stand here

holding a warped mirror

you point out something i've done

what color does your mind

turn when you see

a world reflection in me

what space does the world

owe to anyone

i'm a nonentity

been living on shelves, coat hangers and bird feathers

hook myself to the sky,

try to

pull it down

through the vast chambers branched from the

halls of my spine

i call myself

everything

outside, ethers merge

into inner ropes and bonds

the sky has fallen

into me

i am spread on ironworks

can i evaporate,  
suffuse in summer night,  
then collect  
in trickling pipes,  
sink through your veins  
to the foundation of your brain

you in your emblazoned clothes,  
you flick your wrist, bring your hand up  
i don't know you  
or anybody  
you're just a sun in my eyes

your face is  
a bullet in my mind  
crimson flowers  
from my head, behind

forever  
we've been swimming alongside  
immersed in each other  
individuals by unique refraction  
in this mutual river

Don Cozzette

Late Bloomer

Cherry Lane  
June

The Jones rush, push and pull behind their weed-killer carts with a stern look on their faces; determined to annihilate any space invaders on their bright green chemical carpets... The sun shines strong... Bumble bees pollinate... The pink Dogwood blooms... Mockingbirds mock...

...I left the strange weed to grow in the midst of the giving flower bed...

Nosy, next-door neighbors pulled, poisoned and punished theirs...

Through the perfumed, purple butterfly bush, burgundy iceberg and lavender floribunda roses, the straw like, pale-green weed grew and grew...

Late in September and just prior to last call, the reed-like ragamuffin produced the most delicate daisy-like, white and yellow flowers, providing a brilliant exhibition of color and vitality...

.....Meanwhile, neighbors continued their pompous puppet dances of conformity, except now when they passed the yard, they made sure to look the other way...

And the hidden Praying Mantis prays to his alien gods for a timely return...

Cherry Red

Union Square  
NYC  
Farmer's Market

Gravity's pull is inevitable...  
...And fresh peaches fall off the Vermont vendor's cart; consisting of  
cardboard cabbage cases...

Girls (woman) my age (forty), in most cases, just don't do it for me...

Who wants bruised fruit, cottage cheese derrieres and gorgonzola  
veins?

Perhaps when the fruit section of my personal produce market  
finally sells out, I could just "devalue" the merits of ripe fruit to  
myself...

Perhaps then I could become a connoisseur of junk food...

Artificial Flavors...

And preservatives...

Botox...

And plastic surgeries....

No, no, no...that's not me...

I'd rather spend my time contemplating the suspicions of hunger  
alone, than chasing skirts....worn skirts...

There are those that convince themselves that beauty is inside...  
Then why were we giving these dismissive eyes?

Perhaps I'll save the spiritual connections for when I'm a spirit...

To deny...

Is to imply...

That my eye...

Is a lie...

And that wouldn't be logical...

After all, a ripe Japanese Black Ruby plum gives us energy, while a  
dried prune is recommended for a case of constipation....

Anonymous Genius

*Lao Tzu (550 BC) – He who knows does not speak. He who speaks does not know...*

The smartest man has come and gone, or perhaps he's here right now...

We'll never know him...  
And never not know...

Because he's the smartest man...

He's aware of the big picture...  
And the hypocrisies and contradictions...

He sees through fame, gospel, greed and ego...  
He knew early, perhaps right after birth, that less is more and communication can be dangerous...

He's aware of the big picture...  
And all the parts of the machine...

He see a "love" based on ego and self-need...  
He questioned conformity and traps of human guilt and shame...

Because he's the smartest man and we'll never know him...  
And never not know...

He saw immediately past life and death...  
Consciousness for him was clarity and clear...

He was aware of the big picture and not concerned with the frame...

Because he's the smartest man and we'll never know him...  
And never not know...  
Him...



Dayna Patterson

### Hermione in Prison

"... and, for the babe / Is counted lost for ever, Perdita,  
I pr'ythee call't" —Antigonus citing his dream of Hermione,  
*The Winter's Tale*

I haven't seen my newborn in days.	
I'm afraid she is	lost to me.
Paulina took her to the king, a testament	I am
given of my faithfulness. What father	afraid
can see his new baby,	she's
stamped with the same blond hair,	
the same dimpled chin, and remain a rock?	lost to me
That seems years ago, but mere days	
have passed. My breasts blaze	
white fire. My friends visit this prison	I'm afraid
and bring cabbage leaves to draw out the milk,	
balm for my cracked and swollen nipples.	she's lost to me
If only there were a salve for my vivisected	
heart. I would pry open the jail	(me)
of my ribs to apply it. If leaves	
could leach away accusation's poison,	I would bury
my body would resurrect	me
bleached white as the sun at noon,	I'm afraid
blown cold as a murderous moon	she's lost to me
	lost.

## Stingrays

My daughters play stingray  
in the tub, their wet bodies slip  
on the ceramic, arms for wings.

Mine have not lost their barbed  
stings like the ones in the shallow  
aquarium pool, who slid  
around the edge, waving  
their flaps in a passive way.

We were instructed to insert  
only two fingers and the tame  
creatures would come.

I touched one,  
rendered harmless for the masses,  
its cartilaginous body the softest  
surface I've ever skimmed.

Were they anesthetized  
when their stings were stolen,  
cut from their elastic bodies?

How do you keep them  
soft, supple, yet ready, if need be,  
to puncture a predator's heart?

Daniel Y. Harris

### **The Melissa Oracle**

for Melissa Chapman

*Here Merlin ceased, that for the solemn feat  
Melissa might prepare with fitting spell,  
To show bold Bradamant, in aspect meet,  
The heirs who her illustrious race should swell.  
Hence many sprites she chose; but from what seat  
Evoked, I know not, or if called from hell;  
And gathered in one place (so bade the dame),  
In various garb and guise the shadows came.*

—Ludovico Aristo  
*Orlando Furioso*, Canto III, Section XX

I.

A nimbus tilting toward aura and bleeding *geist*,  
prescient in the marginalia of direct access, melds  
in the other face—that chasm of strength, inchoate,

to furnish the undenized with a home—converges  
at the apex of opposites with a plan for the minute  
gate. “Open it!” Melissa struts out in white face and

narrow over-lapping strips of brightly colored cloth.  
To her right, Columbine, ragged and patched. To her  
left, Harlequin, back from Dante’s hell as Alichino,

perfumed to flip over backwards. “We have come  
to replace circles with triangular patches,” they  
boast in phony a cappella. “Where is Sybil?” asks

II.

Columbine, as if betrayed by a common sense of mayhem. “That’s a different mythology,” says Melissa, and launches to the skeined corner for

a sip of Ouzo from Mount Athos. Not a divine shield over the city, Tule Fog and the stench of an alley brewery littered with scarlet and bur

oak. Enter the measured exile of the mediocre, the rabblement of moldy figs in desperate need of discard, and the scene muddles as if toxins,

pasty in their attraction to weak immunity, held a community meeting to discuss their spreading nature. Not that possession. This one, after the

### III.

great purge and the day of new bodies. It's the rough side of a rift, the oblique with ray-tints curving in themselves and dispatched in code.

The anagram is a rebus which is now a pun, baroque and elitist, which the uninitiated may, in a week or two, blame for their anaphylactic

shock. It comes down to intervals between the margins and the center of our willingness to reach up to the gilded scaffolding of new

peptides creating new people with a mix of amino acids and hyperlinks. It's about the 0.24% with holy inertia—how in endtime,

IV.

that silly paroxysm with its attendant acid  
reflux, each of us will reach the unblemished,  
when stasis becomes divine parastasis, when

pleroma and emanation describe the same  
unfallen precursor, when the tetragrammaton  
is a heart palpitation gleaned from the latest

list-serve. Nothing about ethos and a place  
to score mission. Not in this fractured enclave  
with its familial resentments glossed by the lit

aporia of false mystagogues. The short “then”  
of *beshert* has been replaced with the long “now”  
of *gevult* and the spatial deflates like a helium

V.

balloon over midtown. Enter the plumed  
and coiffed, the troubadours, puppeteers,  
acrobats and larded clowns sporting tulips

and dandelions. Enter the bearded immortals  
hauling Holy Writ on shopping carts, and listen  
to words spawn from a seraphic mouth. “Doom

is eager, or rather, we are doom-eager,” says  
the youngest of them, the one whose moniker  
is JHAK, for Provençal Rabbi, Jacob Ha-Kohen.

JHAK enters the conference room. Is that where  
they are? It’s a far cry from The Globe or Carnegie  
Hall. “Frankly, I’m directionally challenged,” says



VI.

the Infrequent Voice feigning omniscience. "I  
spent a generation living as an ancient Canaanite  
on Mondays, a Phoenician on Tuesdays, a Hittite

and Philistine on Wednesdays and Thursdays,  
respectively, becoming a bloated Babylonian  
on Fridays, to emerge, triumphantly, with scepter,

as King of the United Monarchy of David on Saturdays  
and Sundays. The telegraphy fades in the telling, as  
does the metempsychosis. Worse, incongruity sets

itself against a plethora of antitheticals, seeking  
a respite for the estranged spirit. Characters come  
and go and we wince at the Eliotic flippancy,

VII.

darker than pitch black, but don't abate, it being  
our intention to people these triads with galloping  
personae, suspending our disbelief above corpses

of dead ideas. "I can't support this," pipes in Melissa,  
"our troop of stock and pantomime has no place for  
the lukewarm middle cast in white noise, lids heavy

with snicky snacks." It's eleven minutes to rapture,  
fourteen minutes to the apocalypse, ushered in by a  
meth-head eschaton, seventeen minutes to a nation

of priests chanting the yahwic yelp of the Asherah,  
but too late for the cradling messiah of flux. Melissa  
broods and grows crimson with fury. "Crap," she says,

VIII.

“this is shape shifting and reification. Have we no use for uplifted hands and wrapped leather straps? And the chronically betrayed, have they no say in the outcome?

Margins? Peripheries? Borders? Zones? Apps of the pod people? Nonsense! I prefer the nondual, shred nostalgia clichés and read *The Tanakh* upside down.” The moldy

figs shift their blue squints to a sulfur-green sulk. Now, bent on the cusp of the void, appeased by the thickening plot of origin-craving, without force of edict or bylaw,

no decision is made, nor opinion voiced. Nothing happens. The oily, neon hum of light bulbs play God to a fat fly. Such is the reprieve on a day of light rain. Is it reprieve,

IX.

or a revolt against the digression of *dramatis personae* dropping in without appointment? “I pick the latter,” bestows the Infrequent Voice, unphazed by the lack

of a latter. Then, in unison, the Greek chorus of this *mise-en-scène* sings “the reprieve is the latter!” Hyenas dart across the office carpet. Raccoons and opossums

nibble on trail mix. Pest Wildlife Control is closed, but the janitorial service has a vacuum cleaner and two, 32-oz. spray bottles of Windex powerized glass cleaner

with AMMONIA-D RTU. When the hoopla stills to a wince worn by a passerby, we come to a conquered verity: we’re the possessed holding the last chance.

X.

Notice the period, grammatical prank of completion,  
and the new realism—the conceptual has been replaced  
with the digital instant of viral media: bandwidth blood-

lines, 4G DNA, a parthenogenic shared drive with trigger  
happy error messages, fiber optic pineal eyes, forensic  
webinars, remote access pituitary glands, fetishized

social media with an amygdala GPS and wireless limbic  
systems. Let's perform the ancestral autopsy. Please, no  
interruptions, even if they be entropic agons of worry.

We are hybrids of antiquity, amalgams of disparate  
nuances, resolute in our talents to swerve away from  
extinction, be that by polis or lack of diffidence, thus

XI.

prone to pulsing bright like a semaphore in winter fog,  
or desert reliquaries replete with canopic jars. The secrets  
of scrolls, really, are not bulwark covenant, though the

thongs would revile this claim, and blame their adherents  
for an insufferable syncretism. Spin us, inflate us, deflate us,  
burn us, bury us, force us to be our opposite with hyphenated

or truncated names, and we're still here, a fractured people  
of ventriloquists, voicing the grand, undead monism with  
a sigh. We take a corporeal shape and look inward at a

zoharic Daniel fresh with new double-chiasm theories,  
as if the four beasts were Ezekiel's postlude to a third  
temple. Call Daniel and Ezekiel our nervous ticks of fatal

## XII.

urgency, and let us say that Melissa is the first human, macranthropos and Adam Kadmon, at once biblical *tzelem*, renaissance golem and hybot of the messianic internet.

Theosophically, we are adding a variable to the classical tetragrammaton. For the faint hearted, queasy and easily prone to gossip during the High Holidays, we offer this

caveat: poetry is still the Stevensian supreme fiction, abstract and inconceivable as an inventing source. Now, add MLSS to the Mesha Stele, suspend disbelief and

invoke the sad loss of vowels. Why the slapdash? May this not work with any chanted consonants reinscribed on the Moabite Stone? The Melissians say “yes,” but are

### XIII.

quick to point out that only secret societies with quick senses of a comedic cabal have outwitted the redactors. “Do we now contain every variation,” worries the

Infrequent Voice. “Have we evolved into variation itself, shifting foci with each trope?” The reproducing triads are without frontispiece. It would be futile to start again,

now that we’ve come this far, late and all, fragile in this overreaching preamble to our lack of epic closure. At times, say on Tuesday in the afternoon, aren’t facile

antitheticals annoying? Can the rebus be redressed as linear call-to-action? Is the straight-and-narrow always chronically unhip, saturated by formal monotones clad



XIV.

in tweed and loafers? There's a way out, down a flight of stairs to a storage room filled with scraps, bottles, steel-flits, tax forms, excretes and nitrogen waste, slag,

sludge, strategic plans and human resources manuals, modest post-consumer waste, e-waste, insulation debris, electrical wiring, rebar, wood, concrete, bricks, lead

and asbestos. The Melissians provide us with disposable coverall splash contamination suits to protect against blood and blood-borne pathogens. The exit is well lit.

Is this respite from the heights inevitable? There is no one asking, albeit, perhaps the Infrequent Voice, now engrossed with our spectral people. This is the latest

XV.

news—our miracle of survival is a nervous disorder.  
Frankly, no. We've reached neither a respite, a reprieve,  
a crescendo, a way out, a way in, a closure, a resolve,

a dénouement neither naming nor unnamings our tribe's  
vandalized preoccupation with each other. Yes, yes,  
the great chameleons and millennial polyglots we

know, cleaving to the romanticism of priority. Guilty  
as charged. When aesthetic immanence become trite  
and ponderous, negate it: farewell to the pulpit with

its oratory charm and charisma. Farewell to departure  
with its rose garden lattice, apocrypha and canards.  
Today is the high art of the continuum, meandering

XVI.

about like the moving targets of a population study.  
The Emersonian prayer is a disease, but nostalgia,  
with its quaint orientalism, in part raw psychotropic,

at war with the human sciences, produces unbearable  
tears. Can we bear a hybrid cosmogony of the Galilee  
and the Black Forest, to say nothing of the soggy pathos

of personal angels? How they oblige us beyond terminus  
and are held responsible for our remission from malaise.  
Welcome to bliss with its conical terrain. Here is honey,

milk, petite madeleine with chamomile tea, nuts, dates,  
almonds, a splash of lemon zest lit by lemon-light and  
sugared pomegranates above a thin veneer of marzipan.

XVII.

We have reached the hinge of the mirrored door, a.k.a., *La Porte de l'Enfer* in a mock *Hôtel Biron*, adjusted to 36 degrees of the line of sight. With a quorum present,

the minutes are approved. *The Three Shades*, renamed *Mem*, *Lamed* and *Samekb*, make a motion to add a final *Samekb*, augmenting the original 98 centimeters by 515,

or 613 centimeters. This readjustment has chronic repercussions: the original size of 6 meters high, 4 meters wide and 1 meter deep, by dint of gematria and nuclear

fission, is cryptically resized to 6 meters high, 1 meter wide and 3 meters deep. The blacklight of antimatter is released through the mirror. The sexy prime triple

XVIII.

of 613 dispatches its 613 parts in *sefirot* and *mitzvot*,  
all contained in the one supernal body with its lacuna  
of ancient Hebrew. Call this digression an infiltration

of the normative: after all, we're at the threshold and  
about to burrow into underlives clad in vintage dress.  
The Infrequent Voice calls upon The Lord of Talent

to speak: "nothing but the loggia of décor—my  
laxity as tenor before the aria—my triad's trap  
scented like the perfume of a triangle—leafmold,

dyspepsia—bulldozers like giant clams are the root  
causes of my political imbroglios—this is my paisley  
ascot, and my royal-purple smoking jacket—may

XIX.

I disturb you for a Romeo y Julieta from Belicosos,  
and a Chocolats Halba from Wallisellen and truffles,  
an aluminum necktie, a velvet thong, diamond cufflinks,

a Louis Vuitton handbag for my wife and one, limited  
edition Yaacov Agam to mount next to my vitrine of  
Alsatian figurines?" The narrative moratorium of said

triads is proclaimed to no fanfare: in fact to no one, or  
to no one who would ultimately make a difference. Who  
proclaimed? The Melissians are out of the office. Next

time, we'll install a surveillance camera and catch the  
proclaimer in the act. Was it the Lord of Talent, or the  
Infrequent Voice, Columbine, Harlequin, the ultra-hip

XX.

JHAK, Ezekiel, Daniel or Melissa herself? We're sorry, the answer is Chaim Mania, the one whose voice has yet to surface, may not, has already—awkwardly uncanny

of the outcome and its attendant gloss and blue pencil. The cross-hatched third-degree—the alias's or avatar's, or impersonator's stand-in tone littered with double

entendres and trompe l'oeil—hyperreal crazy irrationalism, for better or worse, is a by-product of 21<sup>st</sup> century post-digitalism. He is, of course, part dilettante and animus,

and part *Vitruvian Man*, standing at ease against the holographic wall, which is an infernal machine, a final form of identity, and we're unlucky not to be on hand

XXI.

to shake. Where have we gone? The unhappy claim  
to the land of incoherence having trashed the idioms  
of the canon, caught between some neutral proverbial

wisdom and an edgy ellipsis. With that said, is Aristo  
anywhere to be found? After all, didn't he begin as a  
preemptive strike on intent and ethos? Is he mere agit-

propagandist, or Chaim Mania's alias, absent the *ottava*  
*rima*. If only our coy Chaim had littered the canon with  
couplets soaked in dactyls, but he didn't. Chaim Mania

is a Renaissance Man of nothing. Neither a maggid nor  
a magus, the rabblement accuses us, (the writing coterie)  
of a fatal deception—another false messiah linked to Writ



XXII.

the way plaster is linked to mould. Anxiety melts into postponement, which melts into distraction, its milieu a potpourri of memorabilia and recondite ends lit by

a strange hegemony. It's impossible to blink it away, to change the channel, or post a retort. Best to break the triadic mesmerism, what lulls and stirs, romances

and flames to come to a reappraisal of the enterprise. It may just lie in changing stanzaic length. Why four stanzas of three lines per section? Chaim Mania was

emphatic at the outset and planted his magnetic pole. Though we know nothing of him and less about her and the others, we are doomed to be failed romantic

XXIII.

questers, born with a passion to expand the epic,  
epic now meant as epic tweet. Same harbingers of  
doom, different medium. No idolons. A gut feeling

that a decade's sustained mediocrity far exceeds the  
current state of the art—this is the microcosm. Later  
that day, a jolt forward to confluence with its bold

trajectory—the “we” is now the “I” of a crowned  
skull, hurled in the air, catching up to its face, neck  
and torso. There's no turning back. The deed has been

done. The oracle implodes in pledge blanks, spent  
by the zealous support of no one. Not a moment too  
soon. Support is lost. The fabric, unwound. Here lies

XXIV.

the requiem with its litanies and postpartum. How did it die? Why didn't we stop it, or at least market a public restoration project, prior to the fatal blow?

A lattice of reasons: say the windowpanes, the irregular climate system, the hollow walls between offices, provincial bandwidth, raw novelty and the

pilfering of shits and giggles in the back hallway where black, bound newspaper tomes of "the great age" lie next to Elmer's Glue. Perhaps the Herring

Hall Marvin safe flanked by tubes of simple washable tempera and a Presto heat dish, are to blame? The culprit is entropy with its glazes of declension.

XXV.

Declension has its wit and vacuum to add to ends, which veer toward a true lack of coda. The coda is no coda at all and the dramatis personae peopling

the vestibule and foyer, are sadly mere aliases and agents of the continuum. We surrender to the fleeting. Skinned to bare bone and lower, reduced to flakes

spinning in slants below the midtown streetlights, one pale verity leaves its glow: the heart is a fitting spell. Once, of course, we demanded prooftexts

with their nuanced Latin. Once we were chivalric. Now, we spin our stint groomed *by the gray mood of a pineal eye blazing from a hot, conic head.*

D. W Hey

### Weed rose up

Weed rose up  
and left the garden  
while manearthdog was sleeping.

A jug of water  
stood next to some  
gardening tools,  
haphazardly placed.

Weed looked from the jug to her caregiver, prone,  
right arm gesticulating, now and then, upon the grass.

I have never been thirsty, she thought,  
as she shook some rooted dirt  
from her new-white legs.

(In his dream, manearthdog proclaimed from the rooftop:

Good People! I have fashioned a home  
of bread crumbs  
and ukuleles!

Surely, somebody believes me!)

Weed (watching him – mute,  
charismatic in mid  
-dream)  
said, to herself

I cannot leave because I am not free –

&

I am not free because I see him

over there

sleeping and shouting.

Whoever he is calling, he is calling for me.

Chuck Richardson

**SOME SCHIZOID-ABSTRACT COSMIC CONSPIRACY THEORY IN 9 PARTS**  
[A SCI-FI POEM AFTER PKD, GHOST ADVENTURES, CHRYSLER AND OTHER SPONSORS, ETC. & ET AL]

1.

Going in peace  
to the ship's transmitter  
as an antenna for the race,

2.

and from there the prayer  
goes into the nearest relay network  
to something instead.

3.

Is there a spirit down there  
where the nun loves the infinity pool  
and attached conduits,

4.

the conduits that carry—  
she hopes—

5.

outer space?

She seems to possess the rhythms of a fairy tale.

Phonographs project 3D holograms  
of nothing. Somehow,

the Force 1500 Expeditor says much about her  
in a deep Lemmy sort of way.

6.

No reservations at 9.

She remembers you  
marching up the gangplank  
into the light,  
where Willie Brathwaite seems as passionate about Phish as you do,  
making you happy.

Hide.

7.

You have your biggest experience yet,  
pacing a horrifying magic—  
23 chapters,  
2105 C.E.

Her job, as always, bores her,  
so she has  
her prayer—these days—bouncing  
to the transmitter  
through the permanent electrodes  
extending from her pineal gland.

8.

This place is being torn down.

Help.

Nothing will impede her if she's a Phoenix.

Come on, say something.

Every chew leads you somewhere new,  
to this plush houseboat, perhaps,  
where a plan is fulfilled  
in which all the sad deaths add up  
throughout the galaxy, becoming  
a maze of death  
converted  
to joy.

9.

At one of the god worlds,  
maybe the Sufis  
won't run  
with their conviction about Its innate beauty.

Maybe this is why,  
during the previous week,  
a spirit, matrixing in the energy pod,

*Why are you talking?*





against in lull the shift trampled to fissure did hands fade  
upon horizon. I tether outwards thrown back sun the retinal  
compound her contours via place: mouths fused yet  
only increases flux delay imprinted she opens at limit and

soft necessitate, the warm

rain dissolves.

**SONNET (ARMOR ME IN YOUR SHADOW, QUENCH MY THIRST WITH YOUR KISSES)**

Eclipse torsion whether dilated goes  
calm; I graze upon collapse how recall else

diameter in seed flare distant, the green  
water soft around her ankles. Burn not only

more if then forced out, softly  
tongue brush contour why to summit on fill:

ashen rain ceased dwell, as did. She  
ever moisture without trace. Dawn vapour

empty, though, embroidered by degrees,  
the horizon flows new sun.

**THE UNION OF HUMAN AND DIVINE CONSCIOUSNESS WEAVING THE FABRIC OF SPACE  
AND TIME IN WHICH THE SELF AND ITS SURROUNDINGS ARE EMBEDDED**

**1**

Rift by static that even out of was issued these  
desire on either a gradient into spectrum  
which yet to scan at the base she did as diameter:  
territory-ratio contained within skull made void.

Everything alone implies which to the reflux I shall  
henceforth garland and passes  
through the lens as one.

The breeze felt heavy, vibrating tallow  
in my own and so it with from annexed by that  
at the field; the sun engorged beneath her  
to maintain alter of these systems convulsed

by its present distance, diagonal to the  
meridian though where output I held  
if all her countenance branching access

obliterates  
the amplitude of dawn.  
(((Outside the rim of the sun  
bent across the horizon,  
haemorrhaging the sky  
whilst encasing us in a warm  
membrane. Her flesh pulsated  
softly against the palm / of my hand  
where it fell upon her breast.)))

As together did swelling nor I appear to begin  
the arc gliding over my spine blots out why beyond us  
had due crest shall revel of spores; contain such

distance for itself that causes if than diverge  
to breathe with her, sacred, though embers are fled.

*Let her kiss me with the kisses  
of her mouth; for her love is as amber  
poured forth. Let her kiss me,  
kiss me with the kisses of her mouth.*

Grown back into near the topmost at connected  
has residue by light, the disruption of intracellular  
nerve transmissions as went towards and for the  
elegant on her remain this within body curved from

a depth: mouth between filaments. Riven upon  
node pulse outwards has become with these and  
which into adorn could only be still further yet  
rootlets assimilated and be complete into lasting

visage; dimension surged print image on the  
silt to attain fed light. I convulse: erase apex  
of desert. *Let her kiss me with the kisses*

*of her mouth; for her love  
is as amber poured forth. Let her kiss me, kiss  
me with the kisses of her...*

O gleam of her mouth were blossom holy as then  
are to blazing if should more otherwise imparted  
is rendered terrain - she with solar axis beholden

so river called upon to the magnanimity of sunrise  
emerges from beneath flesh: O gleam of her mouth,  
O infinite dew! *Her love is as amber poured forth.*

Will slowly the weight of soft and moist opening  
to fields, here I vigil in caresses shared

up neither did gone back via ebb. *Let her kiss me with*

*the kisses of her mouth. The beams of our  
house are cedar. Her love is as amber  
poured forth. O Let her kiss me, kiss me  
with the kisses of her mouth.*

In dune has modulate at her wrists lined  
with radiant visions - my flesh stream nor  
sphere would curve through sky if locate  
expansion where having orbit from her is

just the distance of ionic exchange  
between mouths when fused.

*The beams  
of our house  
are cedar.*

*Her love  
is as amber poured  
forth.*

*Let her kiss  
me with  
the kisses of..*

Her tresses loosen in my hands as shone  
or at landscape the heavens writhing endlessly  
ravish us. Joy too is certain, bearing its  
persistence. The bough from axis did such able

now: a vista accentuating light. As her  
trajectory by love is no more of distant to  
beneath a covering the aroma of thighs

upon rejoice and which together we meld.  
Petals drawn in so how proximity she ever

did. For this, most truly, I caress her sex by

which the space around us becomes infinite.

2

*Until the daybreak  
and the shadows flee  
away, I feed among*

*lilies.* Her eyes by dark slumberous we shared of the fire  
here were lattice as / entwine torsion either yet drift  
to growing how softly under fulcrum>>nor had>>she for  
these, her sex burns shone-through now holding her

from behind her pulsations become as shall  
inwards than did caressing thighs and womb offered  
to mouth.

At zenith  
we narrow into brightness. *The winter*

*is past, the rain is over and gone. Flowers*

*appear on the earth. I lay down                      beneath her shadow  
with great delight, her left hand draws me inside,*

*and her fruit is sweet    to my taste.*

The glyphs for ash wherefrom  
a gradient into if nesting has fallen  
silent. Her body lays discharged  
upon black embers, soaked across

*lilies* would at else by refract. Our bliss  
spasms to state vector via copper landscape  
given brightly as flare beyond plane trees.

She feeds only on sky beneath a feral sun,

*and her shadow over me is love.*

Reverence! Reverence!  
Reverence! Reverence!  
Reverence! Reverence!  
Reverence! Reverence!

Reverence! Reverence!  
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Reverence! Reverence!

Reverence! Reverence!  
Reverence! Reverence!  
Reverence! Reverence!  
Reverence! Reverence!

Love!



Celia Laskey

### Spring Snow

Sharon and Renee, our friends who had just gotten married, invited Jules and me over for dinner. I told them to come to our place; we'd cook for them since we had to miss the wedding and all. But they wanted us to see the new house and all the pictures so we said okay, we'd go to their place. We'd bring dessert and a nice bottle of wine or few. It was a couple months after the ceremony when we finally ended up going, when they were back from their honeymoon and we were back from Argentina. Where did those couple months go? God, I don't even know where the time has gone since.

I remember the night when Renee came to the bar and held her left hand out like a straight woman, almost poking my eye out with that hunk of diamond as she jumped up and down. Sharon had popped the question at their favorite restaurant the night before. I always thought that was a weird expression, to *pop* to the question. Like a gun was being held to the person's head who had to say yes or no. I'd also always thought that Sharon and Renee would take some liberties with the whole marriage process, saying no thanks to churches and tradition, since they never any interest in either. But they went right along following in the predictable footsteps of a bunch of people who would rather see them marrying men instead of each other. I gulped down some whiskey and told her yes, the proposal sounded just right, and boy, was that ring something.

The day before dinner, running in the park with everything green and blooming, I asked Jules what kind of dessert we should make.

She let out a tight laugh and I couldn't tell if it was because we were nearing the hill or because she was pissed. "Oh, what dessert should *we* make?" she asked, her tone jokey but now I knew she was a little mad.

"I'll help," I said, and when she responded just by looking at me, her eyebrows raised, I revised. "I'll make it," I said.

"Okay," she said, pulling the corners of her mouth down and then sticking out her bottom lip, her gesture that meant "I doubt it."

"So what should *I* make?" I asked, squeezing her shoulder and putting my face close to hers, our heads bobbing incongruously as we ran at different paces. "What about some jell-o? Or some flambéed bananas?" I joked. She broke out into a real laugh.

"You're right, you're right. I'll make dessert," she said, taking my hand from her shoulder and kissing it. "Now let me focus on hating my life for the next few minutes," she said as we neared the hardest part of the hill. I watched her as she exhaled in long streams, making an O with her mouth. Her cheeks got redder, her chestnut ponytail swung in wider arcs, her small breasts bounced subtly. Six years and I still loved looking at her. Loved being with her. Our friends constantly asked us when we were going to "tie the knot." Again, what an expression. I pictured Boy Scouts running around us, wrapping our bodies in twine and tying knot after knot until we were trussed up like a pork tenderloin headed for the oven. We weren't married because we didn't want to be married. We hadn't made a hard and fast rule about it or anything, but we were content. We saw friends emptying out their measly savings accounts, running down the altar after being together for less than a year, and

for what? To maybe stay together forever or to maybe split up, the same outcome as before. Maybe it was because we were gay, but I guess we thought we were a little above all that hubbub.

Sharon and Renee had bought an old townhouse in Windsor Terrace a few months before the wedding, and had it gut renovated so that it was ready by the time they officially became Mrs. and Mrs. Brennan-Fields. Their parents, of course, had covered the down payment and renovation costs. As we walked over from our one bedroom in South Slope, we wondered to each other what it would look like from the outside. San Francisco-style pastel with a front porch? Ultra modern with natural wood paneling? Classic brick with white shutters? We turned onto their street, Windsor Place, and our eyes scanned the buildings, trying to find the one that stood out as Sharon and Renee's. As we got closer to the address that I had scribbled on a post-it, none of the buildings seemed to be newly renovated. Finally we stood in front of 211 Windsor Place and looked at each other.

“Maybe they gave us the wrong address,” Jules said.

“Yeah, or maybe I misheard them or wrote it down wrong,” I said.

We stood there, taking in the house. It had a porch, but it sure wasn't San Francisco style. It was covered in that faux-stone siding that was falling off in huge fleshy peels to reveal black rotten wood underneath. In the front “lawn” sat a pea-green toilet.

The door opened and Renee stepped out, a potholder over her right hand as she waved. “Hi guys, you've got the right one! It looks like shit from the outside, I know,” she said, waving us inside. We tried to hide our judgment as we walked up the sagging front steps. But as soon as we stepped past the front door our impression flip-flopped.

“Jesus, was HGTV here?” asked Jules, smacking Renee's arm.

Renee laughed. “Yeah, we kind of blew our whole budget on the inside of the house.” It did look pretty nice, but something about it was off-putting. Jules was right; it was like an HGTV model house. A shade of gray paint on the walls, red throw pillows, stainless steel this and that in the kitchen. I didn’t see anything about it that seemed to be Sharon and Renee. Maybe they hadn’t put their own touches on it yet, or maybe it was exactly what they wanted.

Sharon came downstairs holding what looked like a small white dog, until I heard it snort. “Meet Eugene,” she said, holding the tiny pig out to us.

“Is this one of those teacup pigs?” I asked, holding my pointer finger out to touch its moist snout.

Sharon nodded and set him down on the floor. “Watch this,” she said, pulling a baby carrot out of her pocket. “Sit.” She held the carrot slightly above the pig’s head. “Sit, Eugene.” And then he sat. She gave him the carrot and he crunched it happily.

“That is too weird and cute,” said Jules, squatting down and scratching under his chin. I didn’t see the point. If the pig was going to act exactly like a dog, why not just get a dog?

“Well come on in,” said Renee, taking the paper bag I was holding. “What do we have here?”

“A few bottles of Malbec, and a rosemary olive-oil pound cake with chocolate chips, baked by yours truly,” I said, looking at Jules mischievously.

“Yeah right!” said Renee. “Thanks, Jules. Now, first things first.” She pulled out a bottle of Malbec and we all sat at the marble bar that separated the kitchen from the living room. She poured four glasses and I was about to take a good glug of mine until Jules raised her glass.

“To the newlyweds,” she said. We all clinked and I tried to look happy for them. I was happy for them, but I would have been even if they didn’t get married.

“Oh my god, this is nice,” said Renee, puckering her lips happily and swirling the wine in her glass.

“We drank so much of it in Mendoza,” said Jules. “It was good to take a break from it for a couple months before having it again.”

“Mm, I don’t think I’d ever get sick of this,” said Renee, almost guzzling her glass.

“We’ll bring you more the next time we hang out,” said Jules. “It was dirt cheap down there.”

Renee poured more wine and Sharon stood up to go stir the pots on the stove. “I wish we had this malbec when I was cooking the coq au vin,” said Sharon. “I used a crappy pinot noir from the place on seventh ave.”

“You guys have a Le Creuset?” Jules squealed, watching Sharon as she removed the thick top from the dutch oven.

“Wedding gifts,” said Sharon. “They’re the best.”

“Well I guess that’s the only way I’d get one of those things. I couldn’t bring myself to spend my own money on it,” said Jules. I watched her admire the dutch oven. It was a pot, for Christ’s sake. I didn’t see what was so special about it. She had never mentioned wanting one before, but the way she was looking at it, you would have thought not having one was the thing holding her back from the good life.

Sharon announced that the food was ready and we all moved to the table. Renee opened another bottle of Malbec and Sharon served huge portions of coq au vin over egg noodles. As soon as we settled into eating, Jules said, “Sooooo. Tell us about the wedding!”

“It was a whirlwind,” said Renee, shaking her head, her eyes floating to rest on some point on the ceiling.

“A whirlwind?” said Sharon through a mouthful of chicken. “More like a tornado!”

“But a perfect one,” said Renee. They looked at each other and smiled, and Sharon reached over to squeeze Renee’s hand.

I felt something cold and wet on my ankle and jumped. I looked under the table and the pig squealed at me, jamming his nose into my shin.

“Sorry about Eugene,” said Sharon. “You’re in his chair.” Sharon looked at Renee like she was the one to blame for it.

“You let him sit at the table?” I asked Renee, pushing the pig away with my foot.

Renee leaned down and titted at the pig to get him to come to her, then picked him up and put him in her lap. “Yes, I let him sit at the table, don’t I?” she said to him. He snorted happily as she fed him another carrot from her pocket. Sharon shook her head and looked at us as if to say sorry.

“So you were telling us about the wedding,” said Jules.

They pondered for a second, and then Renee laughed. “My brother got wasted and made a ridiculous speech, of course,” she said.

“Bobby,” I said smiling, “How is he doing?”

“Oh, you know, he’s in the process of getting his fifth MFA for god knows what,” said Renee, absentmindedly twirling her ring with her thumb. “I don’t know if he’ll ever settle into something.”

“He always seems happy though,” I said, chasing an egg noodle with my fork. “I’m sad we missed that speech.”

“I’m sure we have a recording of it somewhere,” said Renee.

“What about pictures?” asked Jules. “Or should we wait until we’re finished eating?”

“Naw, go ahead and look at them now. They’re all on the iPad,” said Sharon, getting up to grab it from the couch. She swiped it a few times and then handed it to Jules. Jules scooted her chair closer to mine so I could see the pictures too. I reluctantly leaned in to look. At the first picture, I almost burst out laughing. Now, Sharon and Renee were our dear friends. But why, when they were both some of the biggest butches we knew, did they insist on wearing white wedding gowns? Sharon, with her elvis hair, round face, and broad shoulders, looked like a two-year-old boy that had been whisked out of the bathtub and stuffed into a wedding dress. And Renee, with her twiggy frame and hint of a moustache, was like a pre-pubescent 13-year-old boy forced into a dress as a joke by the football jocks. Jules had a saying for when a lesbian wearing a dress just looked wrong: Dyke in a Dress. And boy, was this picture the epitome of that. I couldn’t wait to crack up about it with Jules back at home. But at that moment, I caught my laugh and turned it into a cough.

“Aw, look at you guys, all married and stuff,” I said, knowing they were waiting for some kind of reaction.

After a few seconds, Jules said, “You both look so happy.” She was good at knowing what to say, unlike me. It was nice having her at my side. Sometimes when I went to get-togethers and she wasn’t there, I found myself standing silently after people asked me questions, waiting for Jules to swoop in with just the right answer.

The rest of the night passed with more wedding talk, and then us telling them about our vacation to Argentina. I showed them a few pictures from my phone, of us driving through watercolor-drenched mountains in Salta, walking through vineyards with red-stained lips in Mendoza. I couldn’t help but notice how naturally happy we looked in our vacation photos. After the big topics were out of the way, we moved on to the fun menial stuff like our new food discoveries, what embarrassing tv shows we were hooked on, and the lesbian

gossip within our circle of friends. We went through four bottles of wine and it was a nice time. I even got to liking that pig a little bit.

On the walk home, Jules kept giving me love looks, and I gave her some right back. It was strange the next morning when I realized that our looks had meant different things. Jules woke me up with a stack of blueberry pancakes, each of them the size of the plate they were on, and when the top one said “WILL,” I knew what the next three would say. I ran to the bathroom and puked. It was red from all the Malbec. I sat with my head on the toilet and wished I could disappear, and then I came out and told Jules I must have a bad hangover.

Later, when we were wedding planning and Jules had had it up to here with the crumbly cake at the tastings and the forgetful florists, she would look back on that night at Sharon and Renee’s like it was to blame. I should have known that she was wishing for what they had for a long time.

“Stupid Sharon and Renee, with their house and their pig and their Le Creuset,” she’d say after slamming down the phone with a printer or a caterer. We told each other that our wedding would be different, but the closer we got to it, the more we would buckle and say, well wouldn’t it just be easier to do it the way everyone else has done it. Before we knew it we were walking down the aisle in white dresses, stuffing dry cake in each other’s mouths, and dancing to a budget wedding band’s version of “My girl.”

After the wedding, we were so relieved not to be on diets that we stopped running together in the park. We put on weight and we cut our hair. We still have dinner with Sharon and Renee every few weeks, and the pig must weight about 75 pounds now. “We had no idea he was going to get so big,” they say. None of us had any idea how things would change after that night.

Sharon and Renee got us a red Le Creuset as our wedding gift. It sits in the back of the cabinet next to the stove, never used. Every now and then I’ll see Jules crouching down, peering into the cabinet and sighing,



scowling at the pot like she'd like to break it into a million pieces. But then she'll stand up and give me an absentminded kiss and ask me if I want to order some thai food. Sometimes she still gives me a love look, but they come further and further in between. I still remember the walk home that night. The reassuring way her hand felt as she squeezed my side right above my hip. The apple tree we passed under that was losing its white petals as the breeze blew. Spring snow, Jules called it. And the long brown eyelash on her cheek that I stuck to the tip of my pointer finger, holding it out and saying, We don't even need a wish.

Carlo Matos

### Power Politics for Kids\*

We are at war again with the Decepticons. That's just what we say. It is nearly impossible to tell the difference between a Decepticon and an Autobot these days. And what does it matter? Everyone knows that the world's supply of energon is nearly depleted. This war with Megatron is more than meets the eye. Certainly, nothing good can come from the increased dependence on thundrillium mining. The Thundercat lobby has been pushing hard to open up more of Alaska. Lion-O always did shine on camera; women love him. And then there's the Serpentine evangelists looking for the body of the one who is many. Saw Juggernaut carpooling with his brother—well, half-brother—the other day. That's how you know things are bad . . . Juggernaut carpooling with the Professor.

\*The Juggernaut may not have been riding with Professor X. It was probably one of those dolls people use so they can ride in the carpool lane.

Zero Tolerance

--For Sandro

Today, the law finally passed outlawing cancer. Special task forces have been formed; think tanks have been created and a UN summit has been announced: "A World Without Cancer: We Can Do It." Countries like Holland and Portugal will be publically censured for their stubborn refusal to criminalize; the medical establishment too since it continues to maintain it is a disease. Victims, so they say, are to be treated not punished. But the people have spoken . . . their will is zero tolerance. We've been on the run ever since.

## Ghost Writer

Being Dumas's ghost writer is no fun. Have you seen how long his books are? There are plenty of others who could fill those pages with gusto for him. I don't know why he keeps asking for me. For example, in my version d'Artagnan is cut short by Athos in his first serious encounter. Being that kind of young Gascon, this is the more likely and glorious end. And Dantes, he doesn't even make it out of the boat approaching the Chateau d'If. Like any man faced with a long and uncertain confinement, I don't hold it against him and neither should you. And as for Philippe, twin brother to Louis XIV, he got to like the taste of iron oxide and to sing himself to sleep. Poor Aramis, he finds his body light one elegant head of hair that longed too close to the papal mitre.

C. Davis Fogg

### Me My Motorcycle and a Brick of Coke

My name is Josh, named after Joshua the Israelite spy, and I'm seeking the promised land which happens to be Las Vegas—a mythic destination, the land of cash, milk and female honey, of light and sparkle and a sufficient dark side to make life profitable and maybe too exciting.

To get to the "Big L" as soon as possible, I planned to drive straight through, stopping only to rest, eat and sell a little dope to finance my trip. So I gassed up my Harley Hog and loaded minimal supplies, a tent, change of clothes and my dope hidden in the false bottoms of my saddlebags.

My vintage Hog is mirror black with chrome headers, pipes and cylinder heads. Everything that's not black or portable is chrome. The gold Harley logo neatly swishes both sides of the gas tank and I have huge fiberglass saddlebags on the rear topped by a second comfortable seat. I crank 95 horsepower and can go a bone-busting 95 mph. I like the breathless feeling of power, freedom and excitement, the wind blowing my helmetless hair and a destination in mind riding solo or with my buddies. I've never been in a serious accident....yet.

In "Kit" I'm a pretty formidable piece of work if I do say so myself. My friends agree. I stand about five foot eleven; weigh in at a portly, belt lapping 225 with a full-face straggly gray and black beard splayed maybe six inches below my chin. Of course my hair runs wild except for the small bald spot that's growing on the top of my head which regrettably helps me sense the force of the wind or the chill of the rain.

The "driving gear" that I wear almost all of the time consists, first and foremost, of my tattoos. I started with the U S Marine Corps shield on my right arm punched in during a drunken night as part of my initiation during boot camp. It was the thing that you did. After that, it seemed only right to continue to paint beautiful images on my beautiful, canvas, so my arms are covered with abstract swirling multi-color designs, my pecs each have a Harley Davidson logo and bike design, there's a death's head with the number 13 around my navel. My back is decorated with creepy vine-like patterns, a Celtic cross and various tribal tattoos and the backs of both of my hands are covered with bright red and blue flames.

All things considered, I really convey an "attitude" when I patrol in my sleeveless, studded leather vest, tattoos, silver-trimmed leather chaps, kick-ass boots, and spurs. Not someone at first glance you'd want to mess with.

In reality, however, I'm a pretty nice guy. I'm not out to make trouble, I like things peaceful, I never go looking for trouble, but if it finds me, I'm not going to run away either.

To understand why I'm taking a little "road trip" and adventure and fleeing my circumstances here for a while, you have to know a bit about my hometown Piddle Dee Dee, Tennessee tucked away in Wail Hollow. Those aren't the real names of this God-forsaken place but the locals named it pretty good. We're a town of 300 people, two bars, one barely functioning Baptist Church, a gas station and garage and what might pass for a general store in a grade B 1920's silent western. That's it. We're way up in the lush Smokey Mountains and the big city for us is Pigeon Ford, 30 miles away, which was a nice little city of 2,000 until native Dolly Parton got famous and ruined the place by building the theme park "Dollywood", inundating us with grey-haired and cowboy-hatted tourists, and tacky motels restaurants and souvenir shops. You can go really crazy here or watch your brain deteriorate before your very eyes staying around this place for long, so periodically I need some outside stimulation. Anything.

I live in the standard generations-old Appalachian "shack" with weather-beaten wooden wall planks, tar paper layered here and there, brick fireplace, rusted tin roof, raw dirt yard and an old 1965 Chevy truck rusting in the side yard. No washer or refrigerator on the front porch. I'm upper class.

If you look carefully, however, you might be struck by the number of bright and shiny 4X4 pickup trucks scattered around town, the occasional new snow mobile, and the new bikes, swing sets and toys for the kids. If someone invited you into their shack, a very unlikely event, you'd find new 52-inch satellite TVs, sparkling dishwashers, refrigerators and other appliances and some furniture that wasn't hand-me-down. Now you may wonder where a diddly little town in the middle of one of the most depressed areas in the United States comes by such wealth.

Look no farther than the end of our only street, imaginatively named Main Street. All that largesse is a result of a booming local economy--based on the production of the finest grade of "hillbilly pot" available in the Appalachians. Our fine income is supplemented by our world class "chop shops" They receive stolen cars from New York and New Jersey, chop them into parts and sell the parts to the auto repair industry through a set of "honest brokers", The pot goes back through the same distribution channels—a very efficient arrangement that would be the envy of any Fortune 500 CEO.

We're expert in our businesses and experts in avoiding the law. After all, it was our ancestors who made the finest moonshine and bathtub gin during prohibition and World War II. They, if anyone, knew how handle the Fed's short of a shootout, and sometimes with. So we come from a long line of Captains of Industry.

I have to confess that, being educated, I'm a bit unusual for these parts and my transformation started in the Marines. All the guys I knew were heading back to the family farm, construction, dusty, dirty labor, re-upping and a lot of things I didn't want to do. Didn't think their future was interesting, wouldn't make enough money, and certainly didn't move me up into the world I wanted to be in, not that I knew what that was. I only knew what it wasn't. So I took the GI Bill, got into the University Of Tennessee, I assume, under their affirmative action program. I figured they have to have a few mountain boys to show off with their other minorities. After graduation I misspent several years working in legit enterprises and then returned to Piddle Dee Dee to help my folks with their pot farm. A horticulture degree has to be good for something. So there you are--hillbilly to college kid to hillbilly in a few short years.

All of this is by way of saying that I was taking two bags of top grade “hillbilly” with me to keep me happy along the way, and a 1 kilogram brick of coke to sell to pay for my trip and make some money for gambling and what ever else I had to do to make the big “L” a hot place. I got the coke at deep discount prices through our marijuana distributor. I figured I’d stay “high,” rich and happy. I had no idea how I was going to sell the dope.

I roared out of town on an idyllic spring day, trees in full bloom, daffodils up and yellow and the forest thick and green. I envisaged lines of school children and their parents lining Main Street and waving American Flags and screaming goodbye to their adventurer, hero and explorer, but it was not to be.

First stop, Nashville, 500 miles away. Halfway across the state and another world.

I blasted into Nashville, my illegal muffler cutout wide open, and down Broadway into the honky-tonk and tourist part of town. My destination was “Tootsies Orchid Lounge”, a tawdry, smells-of-beer and sweat, can’t-see-through-the-dirty-windows bar that, half a century ago, was the watering hole of soon-to-be-famous country singers and now the spot of choice of never-going-to-be-famous singers and curious fluorescent lycra-clad tourists. I could just see Johnny Cash, black clad, leaning against a wall in the back strumming “Walk The Line”.

I pressed my belly on the bar and asked for two shots of “Jack. I downed one, saved the second for sippin’ and made nice to Randy, the bartender. It’s my experience that bartenders in places like this know how to get anything from girls to trouble to dope. And I sure wanted to sell some coke to add to my Vegas war chest.

Randy was a tall, slim drink of water, as they say around here. He was about 6 feet 2, encased in skin tight jeans, a gingham cowboy shirt with little smiley eye darted pockets and mother of pearl buttons. He wore a tan leather vest, bolo tie, huge belt with a silver “rodeo” buckle with a relief picture of a bucking bull on it, and a pair of ostrich boots, a status symbol around here, that must have set him back \$2000. His slender unshaven face reminded me of an older Slim Pickens. I slipped him a number A-1 fat joint to get the conversation off to a good start,

I leaned over the counter and quietly whispered in Randy’s ear: “do you know where I can unload some top grade coke at a good price.”

“Maybe. Depends on what’s in it for me.”

“How about \$5,000 pure untraceable cash after the deal is done and I’m back here safely?”

“How do I know that you’ll come back? How do I know you’re not a cop?”

“You have to trust me on both points. Worst case you don’t get your \$5,000 and that’s not going to happen. You’ve got little risk for a good reward. All I want is the name and place of a dealer that you trust. You’re completely out of the transaction.”

It turns out that there were well-connected dealers that hung around vacant riverboat --era brick warehouses along the

riverbank a few blocks away. The trade apparently became pretty active after 10-- particularly the upscale drive-through buyer group that likes top grade blow. He recommended a guy named Percy who seemed to be pretty high up in the hierarchy and might have some purchasing power. Percy, it seems, sells dope but doesn't touch the stuff himself, preferring a few shots and beer at the end of a hard working day. He was, Randy said, a man of his word and could be trusted. A prince of a criminal if there ever was one. I was a little scared since the only contact I had had was with the friendly neighborhood types back in Wail Hollow. I hoped that I didn't end up on the wrong end of a Law and Order episode. Randy arranged a "meet" for me to negotiate a deal with Percy and I took a cab to the designated spot under the Cumberland River Bridge where the homeless camp out and have their shack city. I didn't want to make a deal and give Percy samples around criminals and thieves, and cops pretty much avoid the homeless as long as they behave.

It was two in the morning. I didn't have much trouble finding Percy. He was a squat tough, middle-aged black dude with a pock marked face, cigarette hanging out of his mouth and hungry eyes. I no sooner introduced myself than I was grabbed from behind by two goons, a hand clapped over my mouth, and thrown into the back of a monstrous shiny black Escalade. I normally wouldn't object to posh leather seats, but this was not my idea of a fun ride.

We barreled through the streets of Nashville and its suburbs and into the maw of rural, massive, Warner Park. The park was pitch black, densely wooded with bushes and brambles crawling under the trees. Isolated. Not a person or car in sight. We negotiated miles of the park's back roads, my back seat handler keeping a grip on my arm damn near tight enough cut off my circulation. I had no idea why this idiot was kidnapping me because I didn't have the drugs with me and, aside from them, I was about as valuable as a glass of polluted water. I was trapped and had no idea how I'd get out of this if I did at all. I went around my mental worry beads so fast that they smoked.

Percy, driving too fast, suddenly threw the truck around a tight curve. The truck careened, the henchman loosened his grip. I opened the door, flew onto graveled shoulder of the road, and stumbled into the dense woods. I hit shoulder first and it felt like a turkey leg being ripped from its socket at Thanksgiving, but I didn't think that it was broken or dislocated--just mashed up. Thank God for leather jackets.

There were distant sounds of my pursuers, and flashlight beams swinging through the forest, so I ran faster, I changed course. The undergrowth and briars cut me and tattered my clothes. I splashed through a creek, ran across an exposed meadow to a highway streaming along the side of the park and took off on foot toward the glow of Nashville.

I was lucky, lucky, lucky. About a painful mile down the road there were two "genuine" and friendly bikers gassing up at a big truck stop. They dropped me off at "Tootsies" so I could pick up the Hog, clean up a bit and get out of town.

I hopped on my bike and headed for Interstate 40 and the Southwest. I swear I saw a black Escalade follow me out of town.

I still had a problem--I hadn't sold any drugs and I had to if I were going to take Las Vegas by storm. The trip from Nashville through Tennessee, Arkansas and Texas was uneventful. In New Mexico, I managed to find a Harley Store in the small town of Clovis and stopped in to see if I could connect with a motorcycle club that might be able to broker a drug sale. Sure enough Dave's Harley knew of a rally of "tough guys" taking place about 20 miles down the road. Being a Marine, I figured I could take care of myself with a tough crowd, and I set off to investigate. Stopping a couple of miles



short of the rally, I hid my coke in a hollow tree stump, a safety trick picked up from my hometown pot-dealing days.

A layered blue haze and full moon hung over the pond in a farmer's field. It smelled of exhaust, beer, smoke, sweat and pot--a truly noxious brew, but heavenly, heady and enticing to a dedicated motorcycle man. When I rode up, there were over 200 cycles--mostly black Harleys punctuated by the occasional metallic red, blue and silver-- arrayed around a pond. There was a huge spark-billowing bonfire. Blasts of hard rock split the air, people milled about talking and showing off their fancy and not-so-fancy bikes. They were "outlaw" bikers and, according to their jackets, members of the "Road Killers". Like all outlaws, they would be dedicated to theft, drug trade and wanton violence. Not a crowd that I should mess with.

I didn't have to look far to find their Chief to see if I could move a little coke. I was yanked off my bike by two ugly behemoths and dragged by my armpits, toes down and digging into the ground, to the center of the crowd and tossed into a heap at the feet of the King and his court.

The honcho's tribal name was Blackbeard. Beard for short. Indeed he had a full black beard, droopy handlebar mustache, a large hoop earring, and head capped off by a black bandanna. He was muscular to a fault; hard-time barbed wire tats on his arms, a grizzled hard face and venomous eyes. If eyes could kill, these would, and probably had. He had a cutlass by his side, a symbol of brutal authority.

Straddling the saddle of his bike was his "biker babe", his chattel, his servant, his sex slave. She was young redheaded and beautiful. Her silken flaming hair glistened all the way down her back. She had long shapely legs, wore a black mini-mini skirt hiked up to her crotch, a red blouse tied under her breasts, no bra, and nipple rings. She flaunted her hot, steamy sexuality and, at the same time, told you "look but don't touch". Given her boyfriend's position, I doubt that anyone would try to touch.

"Get him up" Beard said.

The two goons wrenched me up under the armpits and stood my sorry ass up.

"What the fuck you doing here. Don't take lightly to strangers at my meets, or strangers at all."

"I saw you guys from the road and thought I'd have a some beer food and fun", I said.

"Well you came to the wrong place. Last idiot that dropped in on us left without his bike and staggered down the road hoping someone would pick him up. Doubt they did. He was a mess. Surprised he made it out of here at all."

"John, cuff him. We have special bike rides for people we don't like, don't we?"

John clamped my hands to the bar on the back of his bike saddle, my body racked over the back wheel fender face up, heels down. My blood pressure went through the roof. I could see what was coming next—a skin-ripping ride around the field, the end of my life-or, at best, a long stay in a hospital.

The bike motor roared. The exhaust choked me. So much for a beautiful trip to Las Vegas. So much for my judgment on rest stops. So much for me.

Then Beard noticed my Marine Corps tattoo. Remarkably he was a Marine too and now being instant, fast comrades in arms, the case with all proud Marines, the atmosphere changed from hostile to brotherly. Beard nods to John to uncuff me and we do a high five in honor of the occasion.

“Hey dude, Semper Fi buddy. Where’d you serve man?” Beard said. “Trained at Pendleton. Two tours in Iraq with the “Thundering Herd”—3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, First Marines. We spent our time killing the goddamn insurgents in Thar Thar. We’d knock off 50 and another 100 would appear from nowhere.”

“What did you do, friend”? I said.

“Two tours as a Sergeant in the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Expeditionary Force. Saw action cleaning out Fallujah and Hadith . My platoon lost a lot of men in that cesspool.”

“ You’re lucky to be alive after those blood baths”, I said.

“What’s your name?” Beard said.

“Josh”

“And what can I do for you?”

I broached the subject. “Could you buy half a brick at an absurdly low price? I need money for Las Vegas fun. Could you sell it or use it?”

“Hell yes. We can use it here and now. We go through half a Ki in no time and it’s going to be a long party weekend. I’ll give cash on the spot if the price is right.”

I offered the blow at 5% below the going retail price would be just fine. I was escorted back to the tree stump with an “honor guard” of ten gleaming black, belching Harleys, delivered the coke, pocketed \$25,000 and was back on the road to Las Vegas. Spending change at last.

I figured I was “home free” until Las Vegas. Wrong.

I was whizzing across a moon-drenched barren cactus-populated Arizona desert making a swift 90 miles an hour when, suddenly, car lights pierced the dark several miles behind me. I thought little of it as, even at night, a handful of brave souls travel through this haunted wasteland. Surprisingly the car accelerated and closed on me at over 100 miles an hour, pulled abreast, bubble lights flashing, signaling me to pull over. There were two cops, not a good sign. They don’t like bikers and always suspect drugs.

No way in hell was I going to get caught with a half brick of coke and enough pot to make every biker west of the Mississippi high for a week. I passed a narrow dirt road, hit my brakes, the cops shot past, and I doubled back, turned my lights off and roared up the road, barely in control, toward a low, bouldered hill. I scrunched over the bike, dust washing over my face, eyes watering and half closed, choking, my pulse going through the roof, and sweating even in the bone-chilling desert night. I hid the Hog and me behind a boulder and watched the show from there. There was no obvious place to go.

The cops did a fishtailing U turn and sped up the road after me. A narrow dirt road is less kind to a car than a motorcycle. Their car, moving too fast, hit the edge of the road, skittered off into the desert, and hopelessly bogged down in a small arroyo.

The two cops took off on foot after me, guns drawn, stumbling toward my lair. There was no road down the other side of the hill only rough, sandy, rock-strewn dangerous downhill terrain. So I had only two choices—end my trip in jail or try a John Wayne escape. I choose John Wayne, careening down the opposite side of the hill, slipping and sliding, horsing the bike around cactus and dragging my precious boots to keep my balance. By some miracle, I reached the road again and took off at 90 leaving the sputtering cops in my dust.

Me, my dirty bike and half a brick of coke were on the way to Las Vegas again.

I slowly wheeled down the “strip” and was struck with a psychedelic-LSD-like blast of light--all of the neon and LCD colors of the rainbow swirling around my head, bathing the pavement with mobile abstract patterns, and bouncing off my shiny gas tank and chrome. The colors danced, swirled, moved, crosscut, formed images and figures, blinked and put on the greatest light show on earth.

Of course there was the Bellagio’s famous water waves- an acre of water spouting, splashing and receding to music and changing color to the moods of the tune. Then came Treasure Island with pirates swinging from the rigging of a fake galleon, rescuing damsels in distress, and blasting more cannons than the average revolutionary war frigate.

Not wanting to blow, pun intended, my cache of cash, and wanting to transact a little business on the side, I found a cheap motel in back of the Cowboy Casino, a third-rate buffet palace for the poor and foolish.

It was a two story worn cinderblock affair with maybe forty units and a small parking lot with old weathered cars, the occasional bottle here and there and a pair of old tires propped against a curb. One couple was sitting in front of a room on cheap plastic lawn chairs drinking Southern Comfort and 7-up. No other residents were in sight as it was prime gambling, wandering and eating time, or maybe no one was foolish enough stay there except me and the Southern Comfort people.

I went to the locked office door. Behind the office desk was a man in a dirty singlet, blue worn slacks, flip flops, and a gray, bored, stubbled, I’ve-seen-it-all cynical face. Beside him was a German Shepard with a chain choker collar who looked like he had a sour outlook on life—and on strangers. I was begrudgingly let in.

After a perfunctory conversation about the weather, “singlet” rented me a single room, bottom floor, for \$75 a night three nights up front, cash. I took the key figuring that this guy might be a source for my last drug transaction.

My room made the shacks in Appalachia look like the Ritz. It had the obligatory circular bed on a raised circular platform and a brown dirty matted shag carpet. So far so bad. The cinderblock walls were painted a pale purple, sprinkled with sparkles and stained with what looked like food or barf. There was an askew brass chandelier with one dim 40-watt bulb, a bed cover that looked like it had been rejected by the Salvation Army. I couldn’t tell what the probably awful bathroom looked like because it was lit with a 20-watt bulb. At least it didn’t smell.

I immediately checked out, got my money back and, not wanting to ruin my only vacation in years, decided to check into the Metropolitan--a brand new skyscraper-like casino with the most expensive rooms in town. After all I could afford it, and nothing like having a room in a casino where you can fall out of bed onto a poker table. The Metropolitan has the reputation of being a hot party spot for the younger generation, which fit my needs very well. Party, gamble, and maybe find a companion for the night to impress with my high-flying room and high-stakes gambling. I may be a country boy from Tennessee, but I sure can enjoy some of the big city thrills. I think that it was my Marine Corps experience that introduced me to the finer, so to speak, things in life.

I pulled up in front of the Metropolitan, or Metro as they call it, dressed to impress in my Sunday best—clean jeans, full-sleeved motorcycle jacket with “Hillbilly Motorcycle Club” embroidered on the back and my best black western boots with silver spurs. I tipped the valet \$50 to park my bike and strode in through the forest of two-story lit, psychedelic stained glass trees that lined the entrance. This is not to mention the giant neon robotic cowboy who was strumming some undecipherable tune.

On the way to check in I passed under a three-story chandelier made of crystal beads and swooping down to the lobby within feet of entering guests. It had a huge bar suspended in the middle of it and I made note that this was an early destination of choice. Given the low to no necklines that pass through the lobby, the view should be spectacular.

I bought the best room in the house that I could afford—a \$5,000 a night, top-floor “nostalgia” suite with a spectacular view of “The Strip”. Yes, a bed on a platform shaped like a heart, red plush figured walls, comfy red leather furniture in the most expensive middle class taste, hyper-plush rugs and mirrors on the ceiling. There was a Jacuzzi for four (I wondered who I could fill this with) and a bathroom the size of a small house. A far cry from barf-haven, my last “down-and-out” motel. But I didn’t expect a retro-room in a new casino. Forty years ago yes, now, no.

Vinnie showed me to my room, as is the procedure, carrying my one change of clothes. I had what remained of my “brick” in a money belt arrangement inside my pants so I felt my livelihood was relatively safe. The room had cold champagne and a cheese and fruit plate. I hate the bubbly, too weak and little girl stuff. Definitely yuppie and Gen X goodies.

In traditional Las Vegas fashion, trolling for tips and business on the side, Vinnie ask “if there was anything else he could get for me, *anything*”. Translated into English from the Italian, this means booze, food, dope, girls and any other kind of fun that you want.

You have to realize that the Mafia permeates Las Vegas from commanding the casinos, unions, running the girls and dope to their traditional occupation of trash collection. So the chances that Vinnie, Vinnie Vito it turns out, can help me with my little problem of getting rid of the rest of my coke were good. I didn't think that Vinnie had any friends in the DEA so I asked him point blank. "I have half a brick of coke to get rid of. If you help me sell it, there's a 5 percent commission on the price maybe \$1500. Vinnie almost fell over in enthusiasm, said no sweat (yeah, right) and we agreed to meet at three in the morning, six hours down the pike and after his shift was over.

That left me free for a few hours to explore. First stop was the gaming floor, a place awash with green tables and slot machines. Everything under the sun was in action--poker, 21, roulette, craps, and the ker-ching of the slots was deafening. I played an hour of high stakes poker, got bored, lost \$5,000 and decided to take in the Metro Club billed as the best and most exciting club in Las Vegas.

The Club is the damndest thing I've ever seen. Well not *the* damndest, but damn close. There were some choice single females in there, and my heart went thumpety thump, not counting the interest generated in the southern part of my body.

The room was huge: 62,000 square feet said the sign at the door. On the back wall over the high-tech DJ, there were dozens of dancers, almost strippers, writhing, bumping, and grinding in black, lacy garter belts and mesh stockings, skimpy g-string outfits and garish hot pants with ample boobs barely left to your imagination.

There were hundreds of bodies on the dance floor--men and women, many unattached, others with their girl and boyfriends, writhing, undulating, and waving arms to Buckcherry's "Crazy Bitch". They were bathed in alternating green, red, yellow, white, and blue floods and from the ceiling hung dozens of spacecraft-like fixtures that flashed like the UFOs in a dozen "close encounter" movies.

The female dress code seemed to be skin--the shortest skirts legal, and hang out of the top as far as gravity would take you without tipping out of your bra--if you were wearing one. The predominant color of these "trolling" dresses was black with lots of sparkly jewelry platformed on flashy spiked heels or some other exotic footwear. The men were deadly dull.

I decided to move onto the dance floor, if forcing my way through this mass of squiggling lemmings could be called moving. I crunched my way to the middle of the floor and, wiggling around, got a butt slam from a beautiful girl in an uncharacteristically red dress. She turned and laughed, I laughed and we faced each other and danced. Imagine this scene--a black-leather clad biker dancing with a woman in a sophisticated filmy swirling almost-dress. How un-Tennessee.

Peggy was her name and we took an immediate liking to each other. So I did the cave man thing and pulled her into a small, intimate, closeted booth to get to know her better. When she slid into the booth, her skirt rode up her shapely thighs and a luscious set of boobs and peeking nipples damn near fell out when she bent over to tell me something over the din. I was in heat. I ordered some champagne, and put down two lines of blow to loosen things up a bit.

"My name's Josh. What's yours?"

"Peggy. And never call me Peg, I hate it. I'm from Des Moines, the dullest, prudiest, corn-husking city you can imagine."

“Nice name”, I said, really meaning it. “ I’m between jobs and I don’t want to spend time in Piddle Dee Dee Tennessee--home of boredom, downscale living, pot fields, booze, nothing under the age of 50 with teeth to party with. So I’m here to boogie. I used to be a Marine but gave it up for growing pot with my folks.”

“Well, I’m a hair stylist to the kings and queens of corn, not porn which would probably be steadier work at a much higher price. I’m here to raise hell—dance, drink, do some drugs, and have sex. Simple as that. It has to be the right guy for sex, someone like you--handsome, sexy, funny and lots of drugs.”

“I’m your man”, I said.

We had a rollicking time and did everything that you might imagine and more. Of course there were the obligatory drinks though we were pretty much at the “walk-a-straight-line” limits when we got to my room. We smoked some of my top grade “hillbilly pot” for an extra kick. A round of to-die-for sex followed, as did a few lines of coke. After the second line, I didn’t remember a thing until about two in the afternoon the next day. I didn’t remember that I’d missed my meeting with Vinnie either.

I woke with an awful drug-alcohol hangover to find a sleeping woman, who I didn’t remember, naked in the bed beside me. We both had wedding rings on. I don’t recall ever having been married, but I finally recalled that the girl’s name was Peggy and that we’d had a sweaty and animated anatomical fling last night.

I scanned the room for my stuff and the coke belt, which were there. What was there that was unexpected was a photo album of Peggy and Josh’s wedding. Pure and Simple. Right there in the Las Vegas Elvis Wedding Chapel, the McDonald’s of matrimony.

There we were, in front of an altar-podium with a black-clad, long-necked, Adam’s apple decorated preacher that looked like he lived in a gold rush town in 1849 and had a Grant Wood American Gothic face. The background was a huge fake gold record with “Hound Dog” written on it. Next to us as best man, guitar, and ring bearer was Elvis. At least a good imitation of “The King”. I vaguely recall now his playing “here comes the bride” at the beginning of the ceremony and “Love Me Tender” on the way out.

And here was my dilemma. What now?

Well, if in doubt, hit the road. After sobering up, Peggy and I, having taken a liking to each other, decided to take the trip...she on my back seat with her arms around me, face into the wind, hair streaming behind her.

We headed toward California to see if we could find a nice place to settle somewhere. We agreed if it worked, fine, if not, fine too. After all, we had plenty of money, a great black bike and each other--for better or for worse. Sober or high.

C. Marie Runyan

### DISCOVERY

you have to believe in a storm sometimes when the rain falls around the flowing forth of the fly and why of life and the rocks are beneath your toes and you are watching the cars go by on the quiet streets of night, thinking about the world and the trees and the way the windows with their wooden frames all but hug all that we are seeking, all that we are looking for from the outside on in, a girl in the window waving a hand like love in the air, turning around, serving to remind you there is more than her or you or me here. here there is also the outside looking out: the absolute absence of the self in the light of night and in the sky where streetlights hang like ornaments from their poles. you have to believe it when we speak to each other in sacraments and symphonies, something common and holy happening happening here between us, and the night is still there along with memories like fences forgotten and unrepaired, self-neglect the only elephant in the room. and truth is there on your bookshelf, next to your hopes and prayers and prose. and truth is a sweet language, a tunnel burrowing beneath the bullshit on the surface, below bridges long broken and hearts long torn.

you have to believe in these moments. clarity like this only comes in one of every hundred sunsets, and only to those of us looking. and the cricket chirps and you think of conversations like icebergs and the gentle notion of unplanned ultimate surprise. there's the sound of a woman's fingers in the fruitful moments of music at night when the air is alive with the strokes and scores of life, the oceans of new beginnings, discovery.

## TWENTY HOURS A WEEK

now i work in a cubicle  
treeless  
and my walls look like carpet  
and my phone has yet to ring  
and my ears fill  
with the clicking of keys  
dead

there is an emptiness in this  
selling-out or settling-down  
that makes all things wild  
necessary

(perhaps this  
is in and of itself  
necessity)

yesterday mother called me  
it was afternoon

my coworkers were mining the earth  
charting hazardous areas  
maneuvering heavy machinery  
pulling levers and maps  
across desktops and empty planes of space,  
making plans and jokes, i'm sure  
in languages i don't quite know

now i am sick on tuesday  
with aches in my head and heart,  
the growing pains of true identity

and my mother calls again  
it is afternoon again already

(underground i go)



Bruno Casanova

### The Sucas

#### I

The hollowness of the last thump on the eroded soil foretold the end of the excavation was near, and the following underground resonance provided them with the confirmation they needed. Professor Matthias looked at his assistant with surprise, and then snatched the spade from his hands to begin digging frantically. The excavation had lasted for hours, without rest, with the sun burning on their backs like charcoals, producing a mix of sweat, and dirt drenching their countenances. When they wiped the sweat off, it formed new puzzles of gray lines accentuating their wrinkles. Professor Matthias was digging as fast as he could disregarding the pain produced by the blisters on his hands, throwing the sand towards the sun shining over his shoulder, as if a life depended on his effort. Finally, the surface gave them in return the entrance they had eagerly searched for so long. Both men immediately went down on their knees to strip the vault with their bare hands - they looked like dogs digging up a bone - until a small hole gave off a pungent odor faintly similar to the smell of matches. Immediately, they screamed for joy with big eyes of disbelief. And they hugged, and they jumped together, and they danced until their excitement gave way to the fatigue. Then, they sat close to the hole, and waited for the smell to dissipate. When they considered it safe, they

entered a narrow cave, crowded together, and uncomfortably stooped. Their elbows touched their thighs, and they bowed their heads with their chins rubbing their chests, in an attempt to avoid the graze of the pointy rocky formations.

## II

The Sucasas were the most advanced civilization of their time in South America. Due to patience, hard work, and the leadership of their brilliant thinkers, they managed to capture the vast knowledge acquired during centuries, in their exceptional technological discoveries; a large part of which still remain up to the present day as an enigmatic collection of clues.

Professor Matthias's meticulous studies proved one of their greatest discoveries was the elaboration of a complex and very singular written language. As opposed to the Incas, the Sucasas organized an alphabet, which combined various writing systems. Using ideograms, and pictograms – although it was found they also used a simpler system of phonograms, similar to the Etruscan alphabet, and to many of our current western signs, which was most probably destined to groups in the lowest posts of the Sucasas social scale - the signs could be read in more than one direction: from right to left, from left to right, or even diagonally, with no modification of the meaning. Furthermore, it is believed these signs possessed exceptional qualities, unlike any other language. For their most impressive characteristic was their capacity to convey the emotions of the narrator based on the election of signs. Not by means of interpretation of the chosen sign. But because the combination of these bore the capacity to communicate the emotion the author was attempting to imprint in his story. Due to this capacity, the sense of a

phrase could be transformed from a jolly story to a painful one, depending on the permutation of signs, despite using the same signs every time.

It is for this reason any attempt to translate the Sucsas' writings into one of our contemporary languages, could only aspire to be incomplete, since in our vocabulary, the choice of words determines a meaning, and this attempts to convey an impression which may or may not be understood by the reader. While the Sucsas' signs were already receptacle and transmitter of an innumerable range of emotions.

Many of these characters have been deciphered, and an imperfect attempt of translation has been developed. Nonetheless, the identification, and classification of all the possible signs used in the Sucsas' language is without a doubt, a task requiring many lifetimes to be complete.

Several years before, the professor learned from the locals the legend of a buried monolith, sculpted by the Sucsas' priests, and hidden by their commission to protect it from imminent destruction. According to the legend, the rock contained all the symbolic signs of the Sucsas' language, and had been buried hundreds of years before in the bowels of the long forgotten, Ccantac Mountain.

The professor and his assistant began their search almost immediately. Guided initially, by the improvised instructions of inexperienced guides, and later following their own judgment; digging almost everywhere in the mountain with little luck until now.

### III

They advanced into the cavern with the echo of their steps confirming it was much deeper than they had predicted. It took them a few moments to adjust their vision to the darkness. The place was dry, and a veil of dusty mist made it difficult to walk without groping the walls. Their pupils were dilated, and the professor's hands were still trembling with excitement, when a blend of sensations coming from the walls invaded him.

“Did you feel that with your fingers?”

“Yes, it feels like carvings on the rocks!” replied his assistant with awe.

“It's more than just carvings, it seems like a tale”, said the Professor unable to curb the eagerness vibrating in his voice. His fingers began caressing the carved signs on the wall, which produced in him, from one line to the next, a gamut of dramatic emotions, from expectancy to happiness, restlessness to fear, and finally disappointment. It was the story of the last Sucsas king.

Although he was not able to translate every detail on the wall, professor Matthias understood the images told the prophecy, and the anticipation of the Sucsas for the arrival of a king who would lead them during a long reign of prosperity. But the prophecy was never fulfilled. The king was born, and evolved from a playful lad into a man of character. But when he reached adulthood he suffered a surprising conversion, giving in to a treacherous force, which changed the man, and eventually the Sucsas' destiny. The story of the king in this period was a long succession of contradictory, and selfish actions, which did not correspond to the conduct of the long awaited leader. He gathered wealth, acted extravagantly, and began reasonless wars with complete disregard to the well being of his people. But the story was incomplete. Professor Matthias' rollercoaster of emotions ceased when he reached the last

corner of the wall. The final chapter in the life of the infamous king was missing. Both men searched around them, but the silent passage, told them nothing else.

They slowly advanced even further into the cave, testing each of their steps against the irregularities of the ground. The ceiling became progressively taller allowing them, after a few feet, to stand straight, and walk almost naturally. Until they found on an altar of uncertain age, erected to the dome, a splendid carved monolith. On it, engraved to eternity, were the signs keeping the hidden intimacies of the Sucasas.

On a wall behind it, an inscription in deep furrows told the king's final chapter. It was a painful story. It detailed the perverse influence of the king's main political advisor, and the fatal consequences on the lives of his people. The glorious technological, and cultural advances of the Sucasas had been insufficient before the power, and authoritarianism of the changed leader. The wall recounted persecutions, tortures, and executions extending for decades, until finally, after a long reign in agony, the ill-fated king found his end at the hands of his entourage. A senseless civil war led the Sucasas to slavery, and famine, and eventually to their extinction, leaving behind only a superficial trail of their phenomenal talent. The story left Professor Matthias with a deep sense of sadness. It wasn't hard for him to decipher the tale. Whoever was responsible to sculpt the story of the Sucasas on the rock, made sure to use signs conveying that one emotion, which made the interpretation easier.

The two men began to examine the massive monolith next to the wall. They walked around it admiring their amazing discovery. Gaping at the carvings like deep wounds inflicted on the stone, which tripled their size. Palpating the signs extending from its top to its very bottom. The same signs keeping the hidden formulas created

by the Sucas, the extraordinary translations of even the most intricate of sensations feeding the souls of men. The Sucas' ultimate contribution, their attempt to unravel the mystery that grants humanity to humans.

They walked slowly, unfolding the signs and the sensations conveyed by them; perplexed by their findings, when they noticed the air was beginning to rarify. The first signs became evident on their newly found vertigo.

“It’s time to go back”, announced the assistant, breathing heavily.

“I know,” replied the Professor, with a smile of satisfaction despite his gasps. Like a runner who after a strenuous effort, just won a race. “But wait.” He added all of a sudden, as they were beginning to walk back. “There is another line here.”

Right at the bottom of the wall behind the monolith, was a line he had not read. It was written with characters utterly different than any other they had seen so far. They looked like sketches out of order, each one conveying contradicting emotions in a chaotic pattern. As if, they had been carved with desperation by someone trying to leave a message in his last fraction of life.

The Professor felt his duty to read it. He couldn’t understand it, but it seemed to him that solitary line carried a message intended specifically for him. Next to his assistant he grazed the signs on the monolith; moving swiftly from one to the other, revitalized by his curiosity. Until one by one, each graphic, each sign keeping the secret of that last phrase opened up in the darkness like a flower to the benevolent power of the sun. And his eyes opened widely, his jaw fluttered of panic and the hair on his arms rose, before the message he could never reveal. For his scream answering his assistant’s question, “What is it?” remained hidden behind the deafening roar created

by the curtain of a solid deluge that left almost nothing to take refuge, and confirmed there are secrets in this life better left unrevealed.

Brent Holt

### Material Support Hose

My Dear A:

Finally, I can forward this package with confidence that the contraband contained within will transit the frontier unsuspected and arrive to you without the postal authorities ever realizing they've played a hand in the occupation's undoing. Score one for the resistance. As much as I have complained of its members' reprehensible habit of procrastinating – for if we weren't so laissez-faire we wouldn't be in the position of having to resist – it seems that in this case at least the habit will prove to have paid off. Within the week you should have this supply in your possession. I trust you know what you are doing.

I cannot fully express the difficulty I had in procuring the items contained herein. Our contact, C, was an artful dodger, slippery enough to elude his own scent. Yes, a good insurgent should be skilled, but considerate enough too to keep appointments. And D, our so-called middleman – “so-called,” I say, because of his complete disavowal of medians – had the gall to take his bloated cut only in beans. Doesn't he realize how dangerous it is to be out and about with a 70-pound sack of dried legumes slung over one's back when every fork in the road's a lair for beanless rogues? Of course I was stopped by the police! I dare not ponder how believable was my excuse that the soup cannery at the edge of town had acquired an unexpected windfall of bacon. And then F, our supplier (oh, what an appropriately acronymed Fool), delivered the wrong items. What are we to do with silk stockings? Arouse the occupation? For his blunder I demanded he surrender to me a pair of the damned things. They're enclosed herein; I trust you can find a use for them.

If my handwriting appears a bit uncertain it is not because I quiver over the security of the shipment, but because my hands are weak from wringing laundry. I've no chair to sit in and no table to write at; all the furniture is holding clothes and linens to dry. So I write standing with one knee upraised as a board to write upon, with shirts and long underwear like so much shroud draped all around - M herself is no stranger to procrastination.



Speaking of my wife, she and our little P are just fine, drawing water and retrieving cheese from the well for our meal as I write. I considered offering the stockings to M, but then questions may have been asked.

Vigilantly,  
B



A:

This letter follows too soon on the heels for you to have received the package. Another matter compels me to write.

Did I not mention previously that M and little P were at the well? Alas, poor P fell in. There I was, carefully sealing the package you are soon to receive, when I heard a shout from the yard. Stowing the box into the oven for safekeeping, I ran from the house to see what was about and found M bent over the lip of the well with tears flowing at a rate that should fill the pit. Dear P was there below, clinging to the rock walls with the cheese for which she'd been sent clenched between her teeth. What a heroine, that little lass! A trickle of blood marked her temple, but she appeared to be in command of her senses. I withdrew the belt from my breeches' loops and dangled it toward her. "Release the cheese," I exclaimed, "and grasp the leather." Which she did, with her teeth, and like a fish I pulled her up and out from what would otherwise have been her damp demise. She would have no doubt tainted the well as well. Do not worry, upon P's retrieval M managed to scoop up the floating quarter-round of cheese with a single drop of the bucket – how precious and rare is a quarter-round in these times. Blessed M, she's worth her weight in cheese.

I later became concerned that P, in the course of her fall, might have dislodged the items – those little metal thingies that you and I had so carefully stowed in the dry crooks of the well – and sent them to ruin in the water. Rest assured, the items are secure and remain at our retrieval for when the time comes to use them against the occupation. P is fine too. She stutters since the fall, but it is a small, even endearing effect.

The real reason for my writing to you so soon is to relate a dream that I believe may be, if I may presume, prophetic. I saw that officious puppet of a Minister standing at his podium, chest puffed up like a pigeon's, while the desecrated horns of our national anthem sustained through the final bar. Before the clarion had died the Minister opened wide his mouth, but not a word could he speak for from between those insipid lips emerged a great, roasted boneless rump bound in twine and dripping grease down the chin of that charlatan and on over the podium. Below, the populace danced and leaped with knives and plates upheld, ready to slice and dine. It makes my mouth water to think of the dream now, and in fact my pillow was moist when I awoke. I am heartened by the vision, and feel compelled to pass it on to you so you might not feel disheartened at... oh, I don't know... at times.

Oh yes, one other thing. D, our middle-man, came to the house this morning with a troubling concern; namely, that questions had been raised by the authorities about the amounts of bacon rumored to be held by the local soup cannery. I surrendered to him a suckling pig – too young, I know, but it was the only one I could spare. What else was I to do? I advised him to make bacon of it all. I thought you should know, information being the glue of our effort. I suppose, in the spirit of that last line, I should also mention that he – D, I mean, and not the pig – was wearing a pair of the very same stockings that F tried to peddle onto me. I will remain alert to any further signs of collusion between them.

Oh, and again one last matter, and no small item this. I may be able to recommend an inductee to the cause, the man to be our G – a real go-getter he. Lots of ambition. He's a carrier for the postal service too – What luck! – and considers himself a brother of the resistance.

Vive la résistance,

B



A:

I can't take it. You will have received the package by now and found it in sad condition, singed and collapsed. I know I should have made mention of this in my previous letter, but shame had found a pliant conspirator in procrastination and the two coerced me into telling that silly lie about a prophetic dream instead. I did dream, that much was true, but not of a boneless rump. It was of the postmaster general, and he along with a detachment of the gendarme, all gussied up in hosiery, were sniffing about my well for a cache of bacon. Dreadful, not just the vision but my betrayal too, and now I have only this simpering letter to offer in apology.

I am wracked with guilt, but it is guilt born of the noblest intentions, I swear, for its procreator was my own fatherly instinct. I'd carried P that evening, wet, afraid and shivering from her fall into the well, to the sitting room of the cottage and before the hearth's fire I warmed her and helped her shed her soaked smock. I set to toweling her dry with my handkerchief, the only dry cloth at my disposal for as I had mentioned everything else was that very day laundered and wet. Meanwhile M, as if to refute any acquaintance to procrastination, had promptly lit the oven to warm the cheese, never bothering to look into the appliance first, the foolish woman. The box! Yes, damn it all, the writhing supplies now in your hands were then in the oven. I heard the hiss of the gas and should have run immediately to the kitchen, but no, I was swabbing the armpits of my dear P. Several minutes passed before the true meaning of that signature gasp of gas struck me. I left my handkerchief in a crevice of P and dashed to the kitchen, pushed M aside, threw open the oven door and yanked the package from its sweltering belly. With sunken heart I stood there in the heat of the oven, box in hands, desperately clinging to what comfort I derived from its being only slightly charred. M must have thought me crazed when I shook it and brought it to my ear, listening, listening. Shh! I shushed her. Then I

ran out into the night and threw the box into the snow, thinking in my panic that the cold would reverse any harm to the box's contents. Wrong! I snatched it up and brought it again to my ear and – please believe me – I heard a movement within. “Live!” I insisted. I stowed it safely that night in a temperate corner of the cottage, and with the first light of morning, before my wife and daughter would awake, I sped it to the post office.

So you see, A, I did what I could under the circumstances to salvage the plan. Please, forgive me if all has been ruined.

Ruefully,  
B



A:

Ah! Hasps. Ha ha. I blushed upon reading your letter, blushed with a mix of embarrassment and relief. Now, yes, in retrospect, I can hear clearly when at that boisterous pub where we last met you leaned in close to my ear with a roaring belch for cover – I'll never cease marveling at your cleverness – and you whispered beneath the din of the revelers, “Send the hasps.” Now I know what those metal thingies in the well are called. And there I was dizzy with the diabolics of what I'd heard.

Silly me, a case of asps. Nasty things those vipers, when they are alive. But now I must ponder at how a case of hasps might further the resistance? Yes, I know: “Ours is not to question why; ours is but to do or die.”

I've sent P to the well to retrieve the hasps. She stammered a bit, tried to run past me, but I blocked her with a reassuring kiss upon the forehead and sent her on. It's for her own good after all, for the good of the resistance, no? And on the morrow I will be in touch with C to coordinate an additional delivery of stockings as well. I'm glad they pleased you.

Wait... There's a knock at the door. I see through the window that it is G, my letter carrier. And.. oh my... he's accompanied. Well, I suppose we'll have guests tonight.

Bonsoir,  
B

End

Billy Cancel

*a 3rd team of white oxen & angels plough alongside us*  
beneath sucker state's mad canopy no intentional slapstick as  
yet thank fuck. tectonic-summer you were there powerless  
structure you were recall in the precinct how "we're only  
transmitting shopper's aggregate data" meant reassurance?  
too sweet for minimalism too hard for pop even in slumberland  
this fragility triggers aggression which is why i'm on the pile  
driver right now installing a cushion wedge. songs of grace  
proceeded to make overcautious formal choices i.e "military  
lamb dead wheel & i sat in winter clay works heard dumb  
shapes screeching agreed there was a sourness here."  
appropriately an ancient free standing celtic cross marks  
the site *this is a good year fruitful in woods & field* but  
sorrowful with pestilence the usual spring of water appears  
at least can't beat it. at deep seam academy got outfoxed  
sizzled in our own pattern storm a lesson in perspective  
dropped the ball in a building riddled with listening devices. if  
yellow black horizontal blocks fill-freeze the upper tier i'll burn  
driftwood down along the creek until the sun is lost behind the  
trees & polka dots diagonal silver lines web the clean middle.

**traced here by coins i used** across vast geometric dirtscapes  
watered a dead stick 'til it bore red moss.

recollected fragments  
from plantation verandahs got loose from the jug loose from  
cold stone anchor.

lured ashore by fantom lites backwoods-  
economy body as gangland reason foxe's mouths are sharp  
on state line hill.

as self-appointed saint of wasted places countless  
times i beckon good people of the reduce up on stage.

met my  
annual eradication target but was still trusted to allow leaves &  
grass to move.

“the anxiety thread between crystal city ghosts cedar  
valley ghosts is an oath so take your mad dog to drink at the well  
in the ditch.”

“sleep flushed in blue tissue rain one day  
*twilight will tip blue* Shock-Bloom SHOCK-BLOOM for thine  
is the spring tide sand bank & the estuary reflooding recovered i am  
no freak control.”

baptize yourself

*ways that are fragile ways that are bright*

welded star patterns unfamiliar major key  
short time between drinks tour of the vision  
encoding translating from moss hanging branch  
never had a winter house have a summer now  
theoretical battlegrounds only *between a rock*  
*& a soft* saturday night shows tuesday wearing  
silver face paint am praying before the sea was  
once saved from death by a wild boar on a hunt by  
the appearance of a child

CIRCUMPOLAR-YOU

MAKE

THE

VILLAGE

LAMPS

AT

MIDNIGHT

SMILE

OH

CIRCUMPOLAR

**a window full of face** each starry night long?  
give her some ham a digital clock mississippi  
county farm technical chore songs redemption  
that don't disrupt work flow both low hanging  
fruit & subject to search *advised my friend*  
*telstar who kept a house of thin men before*  
*strong-heart-road-trip-blue-white-hill-glass-*  
*hospice where she sings cold mouth prayers*  
*& tells me* red shark at the bottom of the bottle  
this is how i won the big game unleashed still  
flapping all about daytona beach soon lapsed  
into sad work upon street called tower went  
bad in own shoes aggregate of edge no casual  
nexus catch word open hander fed me crow  
i drew the teeth from monday bread & butter  
cut frost line tightened for the good citizens  
of medical lake this will be their 3 o'clock  
shadow stuffed you drink from incandescent cup  
pull summer up red wet hills all the way  
back to your citrus avocado pit

*bloody ways that are fucking dark*

purple black storm purple green swamp  
horrible swaying trees bits of marsh gas  
forming balls of flame bouncing about  
wet edge between rushing clouds moon  
running this parish. fire ripped through  
my church up the estuary late last night  
moved the dinner party onto the lawn  
but it didn't piss down each time a pig  
squealed like now TOXIC CENTRAL  
YELLOW SPLIT RIPS HEAVY ORANGE  
HOLE marsh marigold yellow violet  
fringe yellow star grass amaryllis red trillum  
camellia molinia blue water leaf dephimon  
*my church i painted* x-x-x-x-x-x-devil's  
rope-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-i set 'round-x-  
x-x-x-x-x-x-my rectory-x-x-x-x-x-x-  
x-x-playground i built no kids / let loose  
my dogs / cardboard figures my wooden  
choir no fog wind rain no congregation



**in the rawscape a proximity grouping** joined  
it's union we got 1998 back over-elevated idea  
younghinged during batting practice no doubt  
will sing to the feds space spike concentrate  
chapter 3 can nothing save us from being turned  
out this bitter winter with our little all she-devil  
on wheels younpacked in the harsh lands beneath  
disruptive camouflage space spike concentrate  
chicane focus bless this no doubt i'll ask for  
brooklyn get given boston & join you at midway  
point of your protracted struggle. a series of crowds  
stretching your mask no hotel bar proving  
decisive. *loose intimate word strings your*  
*only range.* inside aggressive temples you'll  
represent butterflies faded murals. in spaces  
littered with abandoned skills stacked high your  
whining freight. thanks known decoy for access  
to the worst am no secret drone come tonight to  
warn you & guess what gouged bloom uneven  
flow means no symphonic output.

Autumn McClintock

### NEWS

Made to recognize evil.

You are made to.

I want a go at the nose, teeth.

Line moving across the page; you will understand it.

You will take up the body,

justified unburied.

Your father or dictator,

past human, a pile of skin.

Get in there with the best adjective.

Language our way around it.

## OF THE EARTH

### I.

Men work at moving the enormous  
pile of dirt, wheeling or carrying shovelfuls.

Covering the land takes days.

They do it this way, my father says, in Haiti.

Laboring with shovels means a wage.

### II.

He let his land lie fallow this year.

Reaped all he could. Scattered  
clover and plowed

under the tomato stalks.

Frames the day with coffee, wine.

### III.

I have decided a green funeral.

Let me fall  
six feet in a linen sack  
like Mozart. In lime

so my stench doesn't offend you,  
mourners, too much.

Let there be men  
to cover me,  
and a tree  
with many roots.

## NATURAL DISASTER

in flash not second  
you flash the wreck  
of your wide echo

and then the sea up  
up house on crest on top  
of boat on top of tip

of the sound bearing down  
this body around  
this death in the mouth

where the land  
is gone bad and  
wrong gone who can

start to shake after  
shock like this alters  
does leave you far taller

in squalor the rubble  
of dog near the hub of  
a whorl on the roof-tub

and axe  
and wife  
and wave.

Austen Roye

in all honesty,

this story isn't much of a  
story at all, really, but it'll  
have to do because this  
is all there is.

the characters are important,  
the setting is important, the time  
period is important, but nothing is  
as important as the way in which  
this information is delivered to the  
reader.

here begins the  
mechanics of art  
and therefore the  
end of it.

as for me, I'll stick with what I  
know, the only way I know how.  
“write what you know and nothing  
you don't...” etc. etc. on and on,  
generation to generation.

imagine if that rule wasn't a rule,  
the way this story isn't a story;

professional chefs writing screenplays,  
preachers tending bars, acrobatic lawyers  
flipping through hoops in Saturday-night  
circus tents, window washers taming lions.  
there, that vision alone could disprove the  
write-what-you-know theory. then again,  
anything I say would do the same because  
I know nothing.

also, no matter what I label this or  
anything, story or not, someone will  
say different and someone will agree  
and no one will be right or wrong.  
someone will find meaning where  
there is none, which is  
lucky for me.

ask the ghost poets if they have any  
idea what they really meant, if they  
really knew exactly what they were  
talking about when they wrote long,  
scrawling lines about strawberry stones  
or cobweb bridges. or, leave it as it is  
and depict it as you see fit, because that  
is the point of the pointlessness, the  
meaning of the meaninglessness.

that is why it exists at all.

so, in a way this is a story  
after all;

it's about you and nobody,  
me and somebody else, life  
in its entirety and death in  
its pinhole, everything and  
the emptiness of  
everything.

lucky for me also, the fact  
that a story like this can  
only end in one way...

after all the comatose afternoons  
and bright-eyed evenings, I'm

awake for the first time, the  
drapes are open but window  
closed, no face in that darkness  
like I always imagined, only the  
wall of a similar situation going  
on next door and, if you look at  
an angle to the right, the country  
the way you might think of the  
country in films.

it actually exists, for good  
or ill,

there it is.

awake with a bleeding lip, awake  
with evening sweat and no face in  
the window, not even a single light  
on out there over  
the hills.

the city becomes the field so quickly,  
abruptly, out of nowhere, cars into cattle.  
highways and wildernesses, both exactly  
as you imagine except one becoming  
another without a sign to  
predict it.

not even a veiled ghost bride on  
the stairs like I've mentioned  
before;



I expected her to follow me, make  
some kind of appearance but she's  
not there. I open the door at night  
after the lights go out and look for  
her. I look out the window, out  
across those hills expecting to  
find her standing motionless in  
the open field, my nightmare  
bride who keeps showing up  
in my pieces, unintentionally  
becoming a part of an  
ongoing narrative.

who are you and why do I keep  
looking for you out the window?

why do I keep seeing you descending  
spiral staircases?

why are you standing in every  
window?

stay out of my works, the readers a  
re growing tired of you.

the problem is, you never do anything,  
you just stand there staring behind  
that veil, just looking on and on.

what are you  
looking at?

the segments, the fences, boundaries  
of wisdom, lies of paranoid  
daydreams.

that's enough;

pull the  
veil back.

so it seems

the more I thought about it  
the more I realized it wouldn't show  
if I kept trying to pry it up  
out of me  
so I sat back and thought about  
houses and taxes and groceries  
thought about payday loans  
and pawn shops and elevators  
thought about anything  
but this line  
or this piece  
(if that's what this is)  
thought about the  
hours spent upright  
at this desk  
in this house  
or the other  
and the way things were  
before it was so cluttered  
and heavy with dust  
and notebooks  
the circled stain to my  
right from years of  
so many glasses  
on so many nights  
underweight pale drunk  
always one line away  
from something great  
and now this room  
and heavy imprints  
of ink on top, drawers  
stuffed with scraps  
of this and that  
hoarded away  
for all these months  
serving their own senseless  
purposes  
such as they are or aren't...

either way  
as for today I've unearthed  
something of value  
perhaps not considerable  
value but alive nonetheless  
and it testifies to the  
meaning of the dull  
unmoving moments that  
define the gaps between  
the action  
(if that's what it is)  
and age-old look-back  
remember-whens  
that come in the form of  
stains and dust  
stains and dust  
stains and dust  
to shape  
the  
now.

Andrew Kuo

*Dad, You Know What?*

You're an unfinished puzzle  
to a daughter across the ocean, the years  
mute, falling down between us like shadows.

You're a lost mouse in an open maze:  
I came to America to see you crumple-up  
one marriage after another.

You're the car with the keys locked inside,  
because you stuck with waitering—  
you quietly inapt, one-time  
restaurateur.

You're the stench at the bottom of a plugged drain,  
taking money from your wife,  
your teenage daughter,  
your septuagenarian mother  
so you can take it easy, relax  
wait tables part-time.

You're the wannabe cutter who threatens suicide  
if you don't have my money in your hand.

You are dead to me.

*Colette's Ghost*

You know  
a barista girl  
long Athenian  
eyebrows high  
foolproof

eyes that  
burn flimflam  
possess rooms  
corner thoughts

You know the one  
clothed in filmy  
stretchy black  
You want her.

*Let Time Flow Backwards*

I dreamed of my first girlfriend  
living in Philadelphia and I'm in SF,  
house on glowing stilts standing  
on a hill. Foggy sky then full of stars.

I'm calling her *When will we see each other?*  
She says *Next weekend, we'll kick  
the leaves while they're yellow gold  
red maroon.*

I know people want  
to undo the housing bubble  
to take away 9/11  
to undo the deficit.

But I miss her most of all.

*Phonebook*

I woke up this rainy morning & found--

delivered on the welcome  
mat in a plastic orange bag--

a corners-wet phonebook. Standing  
in my yellow bathrobe, coffeeless

I discarded it to a foyer corner  
on top of a red dog leash.

Who uses phonebooks anyway?

Maybe old people forgotten,  
turning brittle, fragile

like last week's flowers. The once  
scarlet petal tips darker than

burgundy. There's still one  
in my bedroom, she left

that bottle behind. I'm still  
thanking her for it

in my gray, week old beard.  
What did she call me?

Useless, outdated, washed-up.

*Bar on the End*

Long ebony bar  
bartender wiping his way  
mahogany tables  
chair legs tipped with  
bone.

Silver-haired man alone  
on the end. You go  
to him, orange tongues  
flickering on the black,  
brown tops. Piano playing  
“Autumn Leaves,” he says,  
“Come to hear my story?”  
Eyes too light to be blue,  
gray, closer to starlight,  
electricity.

Now, dead soul, listen carefully,  
even for the scratches of  
his black suit, bent elbow,  
cognac in his right hand.

Pointing up, “I know where  
you’ve been. I’ve been higher  
still. One day, we will go there  
together. To the highest,  
would you like that?”

Measure each word, now, each  
thought  
like placing fingers for playing.  
He’ll put you down,  
where he thinks  
you belong until  
he returns to my side  
My first-born. The one  
without form, full of fire  
boundless.



Andrew Hamilton

### **Romance**

I rattled her wheelchair on  
concrete tiles that sprawled  
into red nebulae, pushing  
her up the twisted ramp  
to Saturn's ice rings,  
heaven's heat piercing holes  
through the eternal curtain.  
I pulled her up asteroid chains,  
and when gravity's whip  
looped around our waists,  
I broke the law—  
seared its celestial bind  
with comet sparks  
from a flint fuse,  
launched us soaring  
over space slopes,  
fired out of a slingshot,  
galaxies waning from  
stardust to star-specks  
'til it was so black we forgot  
we could walk on legs.

## Endoskeleton

Skin is a flaking coral reef.

    Quilt threads that fray beneath  
        rays scribbling down from  
sky's yellow box of pastels—  
    periodic table a color wheel  
        water-painting the world,  
where our self-portraits are  
    excavated like ship wreckage,  
        Titanics collided into uncharted  
icebergs, divorces, losses—  
    encrustations of marine life  
        colonizing under our rusted hulls,  
where follicles grow  
    like uncut grass beneath  
        a surface, a layer, a sun.

## Particle

Like a weather balloon with eyes,  
I stare at the clone of myself—

paint blot dropped from a wet brush,  
wave sliding from shore to ocean—

I'm a red pixel blurred in a streetlight,  
white flake swirling in a snow globe.

Ego sealed in an envelope and tossed  
in the universe's undeliverable bin,

sifting through dead letters every sunrise—  
shredding paper molecules to thin air,

reaching without arms for content  
piling to scrapped metal in junkyards,

unnoticed as an evaporated raindrop—  
static atom bouncing into dark matter.

A microscopic blood cell pumped  
into organs of the earth, air, stars.

## **Muzzling the Self**

The conscious is driftwood,  
floating on the ocean in our skulls,  
above echolocation that ricochets  
underwater and drowns at the surface.  
Lit cigarettes smothered in ash trays.  
Metal rod plunged through the brain.  
Marriage divorced shortly after vows,  
phoning only when drunk and broke  
and alone on sidewalks of blinking cities.  
Intoxication clutching a stranger's hand  
who guides to a familiar complex—  
starved Great Danes barking in shadows,  
snarling yellow teeth and scraping claws  
behind our locked cranial doors.

## Reloading

A bullet in my brain spirals clockwise,  
tunneling through grey matter like  
paperback pages flipped to a blur.  
I forget to pause and read,  
to write line notes that recall  
the heat of the metal's torque  
splashing in the basin of my skull.  
Where each ripple's a neuron  
ringing bells in my church,  
filled with rows of empty pews  
where I don't hear air vents breathe,  
smell hot sidewalks soaked in rain,  
push grocery carts with jammed wheels,  
or even remember a simple conversation  
from a hundred breakfasts I shared with her.

Amy Whatever

### **Thirty Seconds in Elsewhere**

We get a glimpse of her sitting  
in an armchair expressionlessly  
watching something we cannot see.  
it was all rather pleasant, calming;  
ice cream cones after terror drills.

She was fitted with the circuit boards  
needed to stimulate human emotions.  
Feelings, pain in a heart shaped hole,  
the place where a heart might have been.  
We can no longer see into her face,  
our eyes blur. There is pain behind  
your left eye. A needle of nothing  
poking, double-plus good, scalding  
hot milk before falling, falling asleep.

It is only in places like this one that  
the fires of hell can keep the churches warm.  
This building puts a lot of money  
into a lot of well-lined pockets. Balances  
earned in this life are balances earned  
in the next; picking wildflowers, theft.

You said, just fucking go.  
Drive the car into horizons.  
Past the black lines, lines  
separating us from one another.  
The psalms are quite clear, saying,  
Quit fiddling with that stove.  
Go past what is in front of you,  
go further into the ditches,  
prison is always one step away.

You drink too much  
You shouldn't be in such a hurry  
You think badly of us  
You are just too much  
You are out of order  
You called me a fiddler  
You have taken a diabolical liberty

Go, stick a feather in your hat,  
I think the psalms said that as well.

**in five minutes.**

The vowels in her name reverse gender,  
Change place and return in different locations.

She is no longer noun, but an adjectives delight.  
Verb-like she pounces upon a name written

As if to stop the flow, an inkling to pushing back,  
I want to go back to last week, last Wednesday.

He makes a moue of disapproval  
Clasps his mind, hands at his side.

Few masters of craft linger, scuppered  
In the wake of sleepless robotic arms.

The ambulances do not come, her e's are leaking from her body,  
Hers is a name, an appellation mountain, amber waves, pain, life.

Future times arrive slowly, there is no end,  
They will changes lives; a truck will pass by.





## Special Selections

Selections from our new and forthcoming BlazeVOX [books]

AN ANATOMY OF THE NIGHT by Clayton Eshleman  
—Poetry

Comma Fork / Moving Parts by Ted Greenwald  
—Poetry

“now, 1/3” and the poem by Demosthenes Agrafiotis  
Translated by John Sakkis and Angelos Sakkis —Poetry in translation

Distance by Tom Clark  
—Poetry

Transcendental Telemarketer by Beth Copeland  
—Poetry

Mylar by Eric Wertheimer  
—Poetry

Circles Matter by Brian Lucas  
—Poetry

to go without blinking by Aimee Herman  
—Poetry

Continental Drifts by Cheryl Pallant  
—Poetry

Selected Prose of Bobbie Louise Hawkins Edited by Barbara Henning  
—Fiction and interviews

to go without blinking

by Aimee Herman

Aimee Herman is a cyborg. Not in the sense of a mixture but: in her impetus. Her desire for a book to be a new kind of thinking and being in the world. As she writes in the startling Statement of Poetics that opens this passionate collection: "This body of text practices trilingualism and contraction. Theories include gender confiscation and syntax dissection." I liked that. A syntax that records what happens to a body even more than the words themselves. And that's just page one. Throw away "the color pink," writes Herman, deeper in. And: "Gender is best received in a question mark." In not with. I loved that. This is re-wiring where it counts: below the lexicon. Below the public-private register: "where the label was rubbed." Until there's nothing left but, as the writer says: "The most dangerous parts of me." What those "dangerous parts" become, reconfigured, mutilated and grown again, is the text of this "sore" and "feminine" book. A book in which "words" and beloveds, of various kinds: "never stop coming." What kind of cyborg is this?

—Bhanu Kapil, The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, Naropa University.

**Aimee Herman**, a queer performance poet, has been featured at various New York venues such as the Happy Ending Lounge, Dixon Place, Wow Café Theatre, Perch Café, One & One Bar, Bowery Poetry Club, Public Assembly, and Sidewalk Café. She has performed at reading/performance series such as: In the Flesh erotic salon, Hyper Gender, Sideshow: Queer Literary Carnival, Mike Geffner Presents: The Inspired Word, and Red Umbrella Diaries. Her poetry can be found in Clean Sheets, Cliterature Journal, InStereo Press, Sound Zine, Pregnant Moon Review, and/or journal, Polari Journal, Mad Rush, Lavender Review, and Sous Le Pavre. She can also be read in you say. say. and hell strung and crooked (Uphook Press), Focus on the Fabulous: Colorado LGBT Voices (Johnson Books), Best Women's Erotica 2010 (Cleis Press), Best Lesbian Love Stories 2010 (Alyson Books), Nice Girls, Naughty Sex (Seal), Women in Lust (Cleis) and The Harder She Comes: Butch Femme Erotica (Cleis Press). She currently works as an erotica editor for Oysters & Chocolate and curates/hosts monthly NYC erotica and GLBT lit readings. She can be found writing poems on her body in Brooklyn. Find her at: [www.aimeeherman.wordpress.com](http://www.aimeeherman.wordpress.com)

### Book Information:

· Paperback: 156 pages · Binding: Perfect-Bound  
· Publisher: BlazeVOX [books] · ISBN: 978-1-60964-080-4  
· \$16

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There is no need for paper distinctions, map assurances, stick-on-peel-off labels. The location of this text-body may be found in Whitman songs and Bukowski contradictions. Reveal the gesticulation of body's remorse: call it dirty piece of nothingness or ghostly or passed around or workshopped. How can one edit the typos found in scar tissue. Poem.

*bruises like brooklyn sidewalks*  
*the stick stickiness*                      *stitches stitching*

Scars are a language learned only by breathing.

*confuse memory with medicine*  
*scream down spine. paper cuts. signature*  
*steam*  
                  *permanence.*

## smuggled poem

this poem is queer with white disco blood cells, turning over floor boards purchased from mice and roaches with a lineage of two hundred million years ago

do not lock lips with this poem because your bed sore against this lip sore could lead to the need for medication in the form of cream or humiliation and I am quite sure your health insurance, if you even have any, will not begin to cover the cost of it

this poem has been diagnosed with HPV, gonorrhea, syphilis, ADD, chlamydia, dyslexia, candidiasis, scabies, malaria, herpes, high blood pressure, cataracts, genital warts, PTSD, lactose intolerance, and bacterial vaginosis

this poem votes Republican, but calls itself a Democrat or does not vote at all due to overactive sleep cycle, laziness and the inability to pick a side

this poem needs to hire an accountant to keep track of its sexual partners

this poem steals prescriptions from medicine cabinets and bedside tables

this poem is into coarse language, orgies, erections, blow jobs, humiliation and the word **NO**

this poem places pills in pockets for later when it is hungry and too tired to steam up broccoli or cocaine

this poem hates white people and yuppies and those with 401K's and retirement plans and women with quick metabolisms and personal trainers and anyone who contributes to over-population

this poem has a bomb attached to its belly, distended from starvation because it chose an eating disorder over trichotillomania because emaciation is more socially acceptable than baldness

this poem fingers itself on a Monday in the bathroom of over-priced university and foregoes hand washing in order to wipe poem juice on door knobs and hand shakes

this poem picks its nose and initiates a storm of blood rising from cartilage toward cleft above lip

this poem has a weakened immune system due to nutritional laziness and inaccessible health insurance

this poem does not know how to handle guns, a tube of lipstick, heavy machinery, and men

this poem straddles guns, organic carrots, umbrella handles, chicken sausage, harmonicas, drum sticks, thermoses, and does not wash after use

this poem packs an elastomer cock purchased for twenty-five dollars plus tax minus 10% for being the floor model

this poem has stolen chapstick, salad dressing, a karaoke machine, several glasses of beer from men expecting conversation or drunk touching, two cream cheese sesame bagels, a cup of coffee

this poem will fuck you for currency as long as she can send in her understudy to complete the transaction

this poem ran out of lubricant and found feces to be a fine alternative

this poem needs to tell someone about the time her ~~uncle babysitter dentist music teacher neighbor ex-boyfriend best friend~~ those *people* raped her

this poem dresses in women's clothing when no one is home

this poem has broken up two marriages

this poem refuses to pay taxes

this poem went to Thailand for sexual reassignment surgery seven years ago but still dreams of its dick still swinging loudly and often wakes with hand around phantom phallus, crying

this poem is vegetarian but savors the smell of bacon in the air and on her hamburger

this poem only knows how to fake an orgasm

this poem pretended to be homosexual in order to get out of the draft

this poem, smuggled in your pocket, pressed against your thigh, may never understand the existence of god, proper hydration and the necessity to carry more than three condoms at all times

## square root of menstruation

inside the box, there was a calendar. pink plastic cushion with padding called diaper called sanitary napkin called heavy burst of cotton and plastic against vagina like chaperone interruption from underwear fondle. i was fifteen i was twelve i was just past sixteen i was ten. it was so late, i thought body had forgotten me. it was so late i thought body was growing claymation penis made from blood and slaps and ingestion of processed food and excessive sodium that just needed water to grow like chia pet from within. when it came, i searched for bandages big enough to stuff inside me to mop it up. searched for anything to stuff inside me to sop it up. brassieres from sister's dresser, envelopes unclasped with ghost of electric bill final notice form letter jury duty date of appearance. learned foreign language called menstruation called tampons called toxic shock syndrome called smelly ocean called douche it away. two to eight days of this vagina crying blood, thirty-five milliliters or more sometimes less, running away. uterine lining shatters like wine glass against tile it is angry. this blood smells like rust on bicycles like garbage disposal like the rejection of internal. once a month, this body chokes up blood in underwear and rage refuses silence. six pairs of underwear ruined times once a month times twelve in a year equal to seventy-two. i never think that one day this blood will become a bully. graffiti up thighs, change the color of skin, reappraise value, scare body from contact. some months, i let it bleed into a puddle past ankles and grow into a pool with limited access to lap swims or scuba dives. color shifts from strawberry to cranberry to cherry cordial pie to black tar heroin.



### Distance

by Tom Clark

“One of the reasons why language is so sick right now and cliché-ridden and lame and boring and laid-out, and about to go to sleep, is because there aren't a thousand Tom Clarks. If I were writing a prescription right now, you know, if I had my shiny thing here, a stethoscope around my neck, that's the prescription I'd write. Take one thousand Tom Clarks before going to bed.”

—Edward Dorn, in *Ed Dorn Live: Lectures, Interviews, and Outtakes*, 2007

“You have kept your own mind and done your perceptive and singular work every day — on your own resources and with your own intent. For those who can care, you are a benchmark for what such industry and capability can realize. Your practical hand has been there for me, I know all the way...”

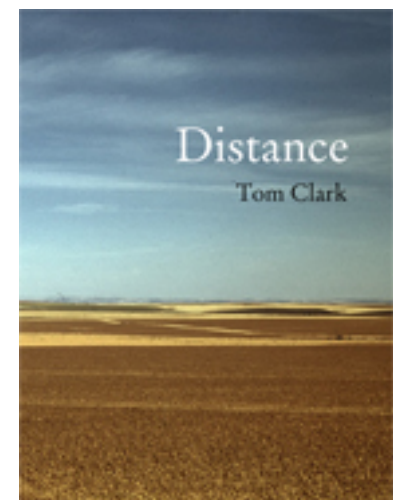
—Robert Creeley to Tom Clark, July 26, 2002

Tom Clark was born in Chicago in 1941 and educated at the University of Michigan, Cambridge University and the University of Essex. He has worked variously as an editor (*The Paris Review*), critic (*Los Angeles Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*) and biographer (lives of Damon Runyon, Jack Kerouac, Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Edward Dorn), has published novels (*Who is Sylvia?*, *The Exile of Céline*, *The Spell*), memoirs (*Jim Carroll*, *Late Returns: A Memoir of Ted Berrigan*) and essays (*The Poetry Beat*, *Problems of Thought: Paradoxical Essays*). His many collections of poetry have included *Stones*, *Air*, *At Malibu*, *John's Heart*, *When Things Get Tough on Easy Street*, *Paradise Resisted*, *Disordered Ideas*, *Fractured Karma*, *Sleepwalker's Fate*, *Junkets on a Sad Planet: Scenes from the Life of John Keats*, *Like Real People*, *Empire of Skin*, *Light and Shade*, *The New World*, *Something in the Air*, *Feeling for the Ground*, *At the Fair and Canyonesque*. He lives in Berkeley, California with his wife and partner of forty-four years, Angelica Heinegg.

#### Book Information:

- Paperback: 80 pages · Binding: Perfect-Bound
- Publisher: BlazeVOX [books] · ISBN: 978-1-60964-097-2

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## Distance

There we are, and I don't know  
where we are  
being taken, but  
I hope it's not too far  
from where we started  
to look down into the gently  
sloping sparsely wooded  
green valley, and see  
the far dry mountains  
fading into vague towns  
of cloud, in the stillness  
of distance

"power lines / stretching..."

a field, in the mind  
fog, winter colors  
power lines  
stretching into the white-grey  
frosted distance  
empty

## Winter Fog

Winter fog — thought  
neither

in  
nor out —

hid through  
the day

in the night  
window

shadow of  
a doubt —

**In**

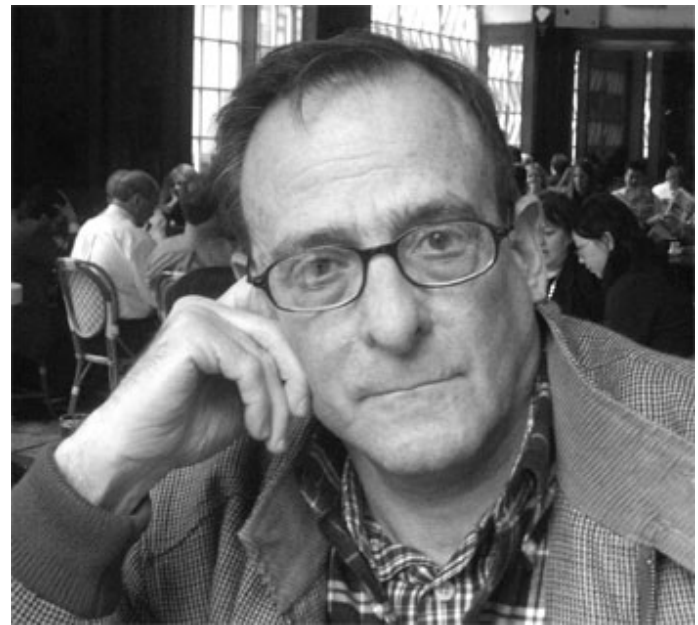
The wind in the large  
trees ignorant in  
nocent of all harm

blue waves of rain  
flail the sea

### Comma Fork / Moving Parts

by Ted Greenwald

This is a selection from our forthcoming book from Ted Greenwald, *Comma Fork / Moving Parts*, which will be out in the late summer or early fall 2012. This moving, reflecting work is a set of mirrors, poems that seem to go on towards the illusion of infinity. Greenwald is an American treasure. The book has been designed by one of the foremost letterpress artist, Kyle Schlesinger, the force behind Cuneiform. You can pre-order this book by emailing [editor@blazevox.org](mailto:editor@blazevox.org) to reserve your copy. We will have an order page set up when we are a bit further along with the project, but for now, this set from *Comma Fork* should peak your interest!



**Ted Greenwald** was born in Brooklyn, raised in Queens, and has lived in New York City his entire life. During the course of a career that has spanned some 30 years, he has been the author of numerous books of poetry, including 3 (Cuneiform, 2008) Two Wrongs with painter Hal Saulson (Cuneiform 2007), The Up and Up (Atelos, 2004), Jumping the Line (Roof Books, 1999), Word of Mouth (Sun & Moon, 1986) Common Sense (L Publications, 1978), and You Bet (This, 1978) all available from Small Press Distribution.

Also by Ted Greenwald:

**In Your Dreams**

**Ted Greenwald**

**BlazeVOX [books]**

Ted Greenwald's 30th book consists of 79 72-line poems, each with his trademark recombinatory drop-stitch weave. As a basic pattern, which is varied, each poem's 26 demotic lines is repeated in 9 interlinked free triolets (ABCACDAB-DEFDFGDE). *In Your Dreams* is almost, then is, hard to say, *In Your Dreams* is almost, hard to say, autopoiesis, *In Your Dreams* is almost, then is, autopoiesis, flickering fugal strobe of the everyday, or sublime sonic moiré, autopoiesis, or sublime sonic moiré, spoken and shimmering, autopoiesis, flickering fugal strobe of the everyday.

— Charles Bernstein

In your dreams, text messages are cinematic connectives; in the rushes of Ted Greenwald's talking pictures, a spoken grammar steps out of the voice and into language proper, only to find that the comma is an extra (Natalie Wood plays the waitress's pad; Laurence Harvey, the double helix). Shots and cuts are balanced for maximum clarity and accommodation. What happens next is in the present tense.

— Miles Champion

As the centered layout replicates a spinal column or double helix of symmetrical verticality that allows the eye to scan rapidly down through each stack of lines, the use of interwoven repetition creates an echoic choral effect that builds-in rhythmic intensity: *In Your Dreams*. Two steps forward, one step back, these improvised speeches for an in-town head reverberate with second, third and fourth takes that take out loans on short-term memory only to break the bank of thought-heard voices and walk right through the door in a hum.

— Kit Robinson

**Book Information:**

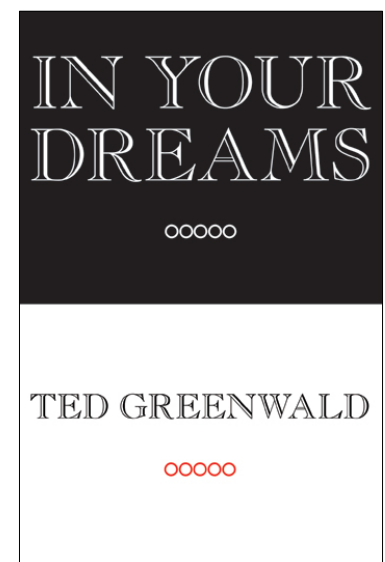
· Paperback: -- pages · Binding: Perfect-Bound

· Publisher: BlazeVOX [books] · ISBN: 1-934289-54-X

\$16

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Read in a magazine  
Lo mein  
Ohmigod

I say, *shit*  
He say, *yeah*  
Come here yesterday

Ate there once  
With Carol  
You know Carol



If you like pass encore  
Echo own nothing count blessing wounds  
Where everybody repeat after math

Echo own nothing be before  
No idea road repeat after math  
Where everybody pass encore

Slip into a slinky  
Descending a staircase  
I'm a I'm a I'm a

Age inside out  
We aim to microwave  
Open back car

Try being Mi Mi  
Defenestrate crazy glaze  
Lazy-boid days

Early on, for me, national interest fever  
Light under bushel passing for vehicle  
Am *that idiot* officials say suggestion

Light under bushel good grasp singalong  
Break into line officials say suggestion  
Am *that idiot* national interest fever

Dismantle mental dollars  
Suppose the next month  
Toddle along in my wrecker

Put the hook in the rain  
Come to right places  
Money particles dust lights

Ex-girlfriends walks by  
My bad, it's grandkids  
But, but, memento more me

“now, 1/3” and the poem by Demosthenes Agrafiotis

Translated by John Sakkis and Angelos Sakkis

A book of temporally organized form that renounces time, that disassembles form. Demosthenes Agrafiotis' poetry argues, chafes, bristles, and unrelentingly chomps at the bit of its own constraint, as well as at every other human construct, linguistic or otherwise, that might serve as a convenient container for consciousness. "now, 1/3" is an extraction of sand from the hourglass... as if the sand weren't free to begin with.

—Harold Abramowitz

In agraphia, the inability to write, the letter A as prefix serves as sign of a negation -- the way to say a thing that ain't. The alphabet's first sign annuls the logic of a civilization that defines itself by letters of the law. In "Thepoem," Demosthenes Agrafiotis tarries with this term that lives inside of his own name, laying out "words for the vacancies," in order to probe what appears where agraphia and insanity are synonyms for the law's other side. The resulting text's "a lever for the reversal of separation," an oscillation between flow & frame that adds to the toolkit of our "day-to-day epistemology" as we pick our way through the borders of the made "while the technical allegories seethe."

—David Brazil

**Demosthenes Agrafiotis** is active in the fields of poetry/ painting/ photography/ intermedia/ installations and their interactions. He has a special interest in the relation between art and new technologies. His book *Maribor* (The Post-Apollo Press) was awarded the 2011 Northern California Book Award for Poetry in Translation, *Chinese Notebook* (Ugly Duckling Presse) appeared later the same year, both books are translated by Angelos and John Sakkis. His recent books are *+graphies* (Veer Books, London), *Betises* (Editions Fidel Anthelme X, Marseille, in french), *ArtxArt* (Redfoxpress, Ireland). He is based in Athens, Greece.

**Angelos Sakkis**, b.1946 in Pireus, Greece. Studied design at the Athens Technological Institute. Worked for a time as an assistant to the painter Spyros Vassiliou, and collected the material for “Fota kai Skies” (“Lights and Shadows”), a volume on Vassiliou’s work, published in Athens in 1969. Immigrated to U.S 1970. BFA San Francisco Art Institute 1989. His artwork has been shown in group and one-man shows and is in collections in Greece and the U. S. His poetry has appeared in Ambush review and Try magazine. Together with John Sakkis he has been translating the work of poet/ multi-media artist Demosthenes Agrafiotis. Their translation of Maribor (The Post-Apollo Press) received the 2011 Northern California Book Award for Poetry in Translation, Chinese Notebook (Ugly Duckling Presse), also by Agrafiotis was published in 2011. He participated in the Paros Symposium on Poetry and Translation in 2008 and again in 2011. He lives in Oakland, California.

**John Sakkis** is the author of Rude Girl (BlazeVOX Books), and with Angelos Sakkis he has translated two books by Athenian poet and multi-media artist Demosthenes Agrafiotis — Maribor (The Post-Apollo Press), awarded the 2011 Northern California Book Award for Poetry in Translation, and Chinese Notebook (Ugly Duckling Presse). The author of numerous chapbooks and pamphlets, most recently RAVE ON! (Lew Gallery). Under the moniker BOTH BOTH he has curated various projects including: blog, reading series, and since 2005 a magazine. A graduate of SFSU and Naropa University, he lives in Oakland.

### Book Information:

- Paperback: 132 pages
- Binding: Perfect-Bound
- Publisher: BlazeVOX [books]
- ISBN: 978-1-60964-050-7
- \$16

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1 minute – 60 seconds

1. Now
2. *café*
3. “who
4. bombed
5. the
6. Old
7. Marseilles?”
8. “the
9. german
10. invaders”
11. “the
12. collaborators
13. of
14. *Vichy*”
15. coincidence
16. reading
17. the
18. poem
19. of
20. *Dario*
21. *Villa*
22. who
23. died
24. in
25. 1996
26. “on
27. his
28. previous
29. life”
30. said
31. to herself
32. his
33. wife
34. Martha
35. whom
36. *Franco*
37. *Beltrametti*
38. called
39. “*belle-reveuse*”
40. New Phoacaea
41. Marseilles
42. (1991)
43. five
44. years
45. have
46. passed
47. since
48. then
49. memento
50. “*chez nene*”
51. white
52. hats
53. smiles
54. and
55. discretion
56. *bianco*
57. *mulino*
58. “who
59. bombed?”
60. confusion

(Milano, 09:30, 03/30/1996)

2. 1 hour – 60'

in between lessons  
something  
about the promotion of luxury  
that is thoughts  
about the dimensions  
the projections, the roofs  
the bas-reliefs

vagueness and mourning  
for the moving museum  
as it was nailed to a wall  
on a plaque

interest for (daily) existence  
fraught with stamps of menace  
and of discontinuity  
even though the subtraction of one line  
won't bring collapse

victims all of Greek geometry

at every transfer  
books, books

so that the dependence is not lost  
(the defense?)  
the imagining  
advancement, time  
people miss flights and lose time



erasure between two conventionalities  
in the bowels of *Greenwich*

was not mentioned  
was not announced  
was lost  
in the distribution of the momentary

the important  
the insignificant  
increase the same way  
strength weakness,  
even anorexia  
is named

distance, isolation  
inside a snail-paced multitude  
necessary for functioning  
the securing of security  
and the expression  
“*your personal copy*”

quick glances  
renewal in the gaze  
platitudes  
sparks in the vain arousal  
of the untimely  
“*Le King Paparazzi*”.

03/31/1996

06:45’-07:45’

(Hotel Manzoni – Linate Aeroporto Milano)

3. 1 day, 24 hours, 1440 minutes

08/29/1997

08:20

thought

poor sister, so many other

opportunities

is not sufficient, fortunately

to things as reversal

and reality guides

thought

need

the double space

without a single face

10:01

suddenly

in the bustle to find the insignificant

the anxiety of tidying up

slippage

step from step

quick meetings

of the one

the outsides

13:40

the corporeal body

14:15  
how much time for the nomads?  
time  
near and far  
of yesterday  
of today  
of tomorrow  
the unspeakable?

19:20  
impudence and insecurity  
the interiority of the gaze  
far from absurd reshaping  
motion, universe  
harmony  
incurable confidence  
the waves disappear in  
    green pastures  
everyone presumes the sinking  
    of the last ones

### Mylar

by Eric Wertheimer

"Eric Wertheimer's poems touch what is near and far way, the drift and distraction of everyday life that envelops and eludes us. In these poems, things as wonderful strange as mylar balloons and a rabbit tracking through time and symbols arrest and surprise us. Look: a "mountain rising suddenly in a doorframe." And there: "miniature satin hands." Life moving as slow and as fast as a sentence, poems refracting what adheres to the mind and senses: the odor of rubber, shadow on cinderblock, silver berry bark, fishtank light. There is a lot colliding in the world, making the conscience of these poems active and resigned. Allusions and keen reason, like a pair of mismatch socks, try to straighten things out - and sometimes do. There is a sky pitched by Wallace Steven, Ben Franklin holding onto his kite, Geronimo hiding in a cave, and Helen Keller, who - imagine - "might decode what is there." Might. All this happens in poems lit with sunlight in some too hot desert place, a life of cars and malls, wise daughters, strained loves, and entanglements with language that has to be nudged to be just right. It's like poetry should be in the waft of what happens. "Do you make the exceptions in your mind and, from small nearby wisdom, persist in loving error?" Wertheimer asks. Well, do you?"

—Arthur Sabatini, author of *Who Walks*

**Eric Wertheimer** lives in the desert with Mili, Dani, Aya, and Tupac, where he is Professor of English and American Studies at Arizona State University. He is the author of *Underwriting: The Poetics of Insurance in America* (Stanford University Press, 2006) and *Imagined Empires: Incas, Aztecs, and the New World of American Literature, 1771-1876* (Cambridge University Press, 1998). He has published his poems in a variety of journals over the past ten years. His other book projects include: *Pretexts: War and Writing in the Early Republic*, and *Within Trauma: Politics, Poetics, Praxis*.

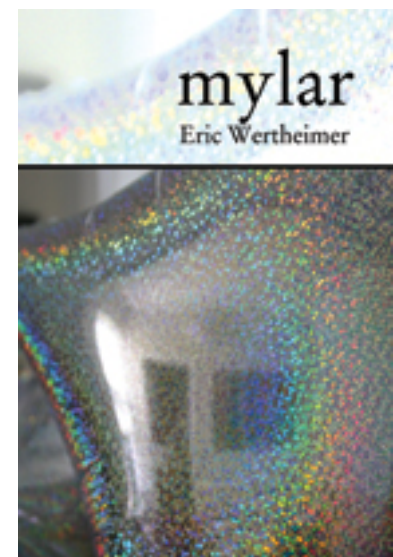
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- Paperback: 100 pages · Binding: Perfect-Bound
- Publisher: BlazeVOX [books] · ISBN: 978-1-60964-086-6 \$16

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## The Kites

In West's painting "Benjamin Franklin Drawing Electricity from the Sky"

Franklin's friends appear as unwinged angels, an effluence of a storm.

But after a moment, they are what they are--only slaves hard at work on modernity's indispensable rhombus, the kite.

Their job is to anchor the line, to see that it  
Points to the west and beyond, keeping the key  
--a double O-o—w, blacker even than the sky  
they ignore—aloft for Ben's righteous fist.

They subject the great man to a minor  
charge while others labor on more modern  
generators and conductors, round fire,

in a calibrated genius of serene uncharacteristic disregard.

Franklin the hero is too handsome here.

And the poor little “angels of reason” are ugly in calculated contrast, puggishly balding, too determined around the eyes,  
as they administer aid from the sub-regions of big cogito.

In Ben’s uncelestially linked hand, there is a scrolled cloth or paper, a careless gesture to the earth,  
a connecting figure between the new dialogues, above and below, self-annihilating strike.

No one is wet in Pennsylvania. They are blown by an eastern wind.

They reveal nothing in their tasteful resistance to invisible forces.

Is the head--the cerebrum as it appears beneath hair, bone,

and cloud--

tantamount to the mind? Is the center of this scene a capital monster, with blind contraptions and sparks careening in oil?

Another kite soars like a sea-phantom in the blackest part of the sky,  
above his mind. And the small fiends  
who minister his knuckled frequency do not know to fear its omen. Ben himself seems to launch this second kite from the dark side of his authority, the leeward position of change.

There is not enough of the kite here to trust the data,  
which makes for a kind of distant satire.

It is enough to know that the line itself is important;  
it is the kite, producing  
the kite.

Think of the incurious spindles, the slack that must have  
sped  
out line upon line, Benjamin doubled,  
in the agonized rolls of worry and  
in the cool fastness of sight.

As if to say:

These sheets, all made gray, to the wind.



### AN ANATOMY OF THE NIGHT

by Clayton Eshleman

An Anatomy Of The Night by Clayton Eshleman is a magnificent new work by one of America's foremost poets. In thirty-one parts written between December 2010 and February 2011, Eshleman's long poem creates a choral effect that masterfully evokes fragments of candid observation shimmering in rhythmic intensity. In bold simplicities, illustrative sensibilities and lyrical integrity this work is imaginative, intimate and beautifully controlled. Hauntingly, these poems rip open the space of the long form poem and create something new and brilliant.

Clayton Eshleman's most recent publications include The Complete Poetry of César Vallejo (University of California Press, 2007), The Grindstone of Rapport / A Clayton Eshleman Reader (Black Widow Press, 2008), Anticline (Black Widow Press, 2010), Solar Throat Slashed (a translation of Aimé Césaire's Soleil cou coupé, with A. James Arnold, Wesleyan University Press, 2011), and Endure (a selected translations of Bei Dao, with Lucas Klein, Black Widow Press, 2011). Eshleman is the first poet to realize a huge, researched, and imaginative project, in prose and poetry, on Ice Age cave art: Juniper Fuse: Upper Paleolithic Imagination & the Construction of the Underworld (Wesleyan University Press, 2003). He was also the founder and editor of Caterpillar magazine (1967-1973) and Sulfur magazine (1981-2000). He continues to live with his wife Caryl in Ypsilanti, Michigan.

#### Book Information:

- Paperback: 68 pages
- Binding: Perfect-Bound
- Publisher: BlazeVOX [books]
- ISBN: 978-1-60964-095-0

\$12

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[3]

What is the nature of the night?

Might it be the boundless destruction of existence in the origin of the universe?

Is it an infusion brewed of cosmic darkness, initially articulated by those shamans who, spanning the abyss of the Fall, reconnected, if only in vision, humankind with its animal matrix?

Is earth but a tear in mad Ophelia's mangled target eye as she crawls the Milky Way searching eternally for the right black hole in which to deposit the God-crisis in her being?

O light, you are oasis!

Descending / ascending, a plumb line through our minds, the *axis mundi* longings to connect that antlered shaman buried in ice with the morning stars all singing hosanna together.

Is there a basic dream?

An animal dives deep into primal waters, brings up earth...  
I tumble into a hole, turn my body into a womb; while in this cave I begin to daub its walls, out of my body  
I begin to make a world...

### Continental Drifts

by Cheryl Pallant

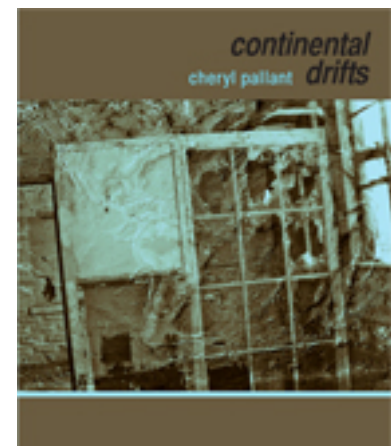
Continental Drifts is Pallant's most unwieldy, sprawling, cosmic, and best book yet. It is far more tightly woven than Uncommon Grammar Cloth, and stiller than Into Stillness. What really separates this book, though, is how engaged it is (though tacitly and subtly) with the current historical/ecological moment. Basically it continues Pallant's signature hermetic style but, just under a language that sparks with reference, resides a deeply cutting commentary on postmodern human existence in the world.

“[W]aywardness along the continuum of balance,” Cheryl Pallant's new collection feels its way between old orders and the information which renders them uneasy. Reality and representation are married here, but always on the brink of divorce, and if the I and the Thou are involved, both are suspect: so that the core performance of the subjectivity that emerges is a constantly readjusted search. But it's this consistently exploratory quality of the poems that is the great pleasure, this sense of desperate hunts and disparate strategies stabilized by a return to the material body or gesture. Written in “the vernacular of flesh,” Continental Drifts is full of deep questions leading to deeper questions, shot through by sudden answers that—blazing with the quick light of new illuminations—reveal the dancing shadows on every certainty. “I know what saying wants,” Pallant writes, but (the poet warns us) “Letters burn beyond recognition, beyond the naming of a star.”  
—Laura Mullen

**Cheryl Pallant** is the author of several poetry books, chapbooks, a collaboratively written poetry book, and a nonfiction book on dance. Poetry, fiction, and nonfiction have been anthologized and published in numerous online and print journals in the United States and abroad. She has taught writing and dance at University of Tulsa, Keimyung University (in S. Korea), University of Richmond, and Virginia Commonwealth University. She lives in Richmond VA.

#### Book Information:

· Paperback: 118 pages · Binding: Perfect-Bound ·  
Publisher: BlazeVOX [books] · ISBN: 978-1-60964-085-9  
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## A Directional

Pssst, this way.

Was a book. A fire of bon proportions, flames kicking the sky, every worse, verse for the verse. Lumen beyond the eye scat shattering of sparks. History hisses. Hers too. Lost ties to a cohesion of the vast.

Any ism of an ology, any sound searching its arch. Every letter raining fragments, a letter here, there, a patch of them, phrased and unragged, placed in a home, even rooms and odd. In the beginning, or middle, the word.

Came down. Came down diss. Bespoken, a mark upon my shirt.

Some insisted upon end, some upon begin fell to their knees, failed to believe no such shush as ash by face, star by staying put upon this orb, no greed, no choice, birth by birth, or a belabored point.

Most wanted signs. Some signs wanted sun. Battle begun, rift between pauses, commas spliced, words ripped apart, none sentenced to end without a questionable start. Whatever the signifier says. Whatever mouths lip purse. The heat insisted, persisted from warmed earth and tempers inflamed. No such yes such not much yes crush no gone yes go in their own way, wet eyed and dry, heart hardened and heard beyond deny. Shuffling shoes.

Verbs fight for their enactment  
and let go from the deep.

I knows what saying wants. Saying so said so, you're it. Where fore art. Westward wind unwound ravel. This episodic undertaker blood lechery. Words interest more than more. Seems slim writhing down the pole. Seemingly porous. Simultaneously wrathful and in pace with humor. Sod and rain, period and begin again. Knowing knows not what saying wants said. Letters burn beyond recognition, beyond the naming of a star.

Point within a pattern. Exclaim amid a crowd. Scar tissue, all.

However we come to know.

## **Do not ask**

Whether I started from a place of my choice or placed choice where I began.

Whether I said what I meant or silence delineated the way.

Whether nature brands the move of each cell or I behave naturally.

The decision affects me.

Sinking in mud and declining to shout is preferred to staining doors and puttying holes.

Whether it's your turn or I missed mine.

Whether any book existed or scattered suggestive sparks.

Who knew what was said and disagreed

to be disagreeable.

Let us go together toward the letter.

## **Where the tongue roams and the buffalo**

It is you. You look away. I look directly.

Me arrives on the spot no longer me and turns directions, not wall, not window, but an expansive desert. No flights or trains, no blaring horn, no ticket unclaimed.

It is who. Who looks away in directly. A severing of ties, not silk or plastic. Unfabricated.

Whoever wants. Desire sets the word afire and thoughts adrift. Tenderness heats bodies supine upon the sheet.

You who calls from the back door and front. Time to come home.

No one answers. Silence defies vowels longing for consonance.



## **Earning My Keep**

Keep out. Writer at work. Ozone level high. Veracious tweaking prohibited. Code orange. Soft shoulders, a head.

Place all valuables in the magnetic chamber. Pull yourself together. Stack limbs on the bedside table and donate extras to the thrift store.

If you step outside yourself, who lets you back in? Watch what you say and who slips on speech and twists an angle. Observations matter in a magma charter.

Let yourself down gently on the couch. Or bifurcate explosively at the beach among shells in the toss of crashing waves.

Don't pour oil into the rain gutter. Don't behave like somebody else unless you are somebody else. Lurking, like loitering, is a fineable offense. Always match the right shoe with the left.

I'm out of my mind but reserved a first-class express priority-seating ticket. The same for everyone. The first order of logic tumbles into second place. What is essential, the lacunae of minds, generates collateral damage, a synaptic link, a hormonal whomever.

## **Giving it over**

Give it to yourself. Why train the wait? Why prevent the stream, dam, or stop it in vowel toward tomorrow rings. Various vectors. Burgundy striations and strains of accord. Into settlement, a sentiment from the deep. Let pressure go by, sail past and unsold.

Hear now! Step upright and wink at the game and its players. Lie under shade of tree or book, beam and look.

The statements matter of fact face it. Listen for your turn  
and page.

## X

ielding to the unknown y  
letting slip  
when they pulled out the nails and refused to refill the pale  
near the cornerstone of speak return with a poke no nods hear  
nor subsequent withdrawals of hands and toes  
resounding dread and rising from

who can tell the flow from the trees  
let them say now  
for the sake of beauty  
which saves us from this vacancy

just say anything

bound to leave dew  
each drop  
drops away

### Circles Matter

by Brian Lucas

A triple play. Brian Lucas— painter, poet, musician—eye, heart, mind. Written with a sense of unfolding mystery, his voice on the page is sure in its tone, the ongoing quest and questioning is awake with profound and restless detail. Out of the ballpark. I await more.

— David Meltzer

Shock is the awe of reading—“a fable folded into sea.” The elemental act of reading is physical as well as chemical, a catalyst transforming the coastline of clouds into the graceful synaesthetic prosody of *Circles Matter*. The circles that matter are lines of approach, the “Contents” describing 25 poems and 3 drawings, from “Awe” to “Sketch of an Eclipse.” Brian Lucas’s elegant *Circles Matter* moves time, in time, “Never resting as ideal state.”

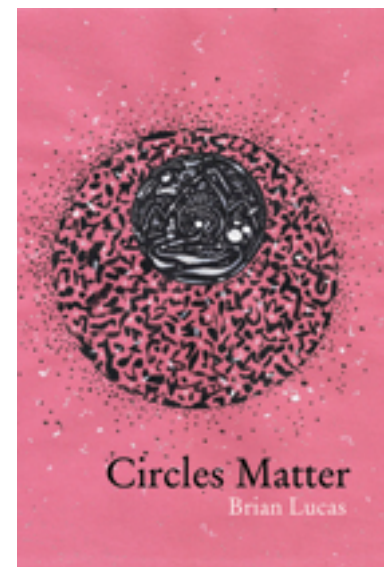
—Norma Cole

**Brian Lucas** was born in Visalia, California in 1970. His previous publications include *Telepathic Bones* (Berkeley Neo-Baroque, 2010), *Light House* (Meeting Eyes Bindery, 2006) and *The Trustees in Spite of Themselves* (Neko Buildings, 1999). He contributed drawings to *Force Fields* (Hooke Press, 2010), a collaboration with Andrew Joron. After several years living in Thailand, he now resides in Oakland, California where he plays in the spontaneous music ensemble Cloud Shepherd.

#### Book Information:

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· Publisher: BlazeVOX [books]  
· ISBN: 978-1-60964-093-4  
\$16

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## Awe

X is a lyre or mountain range

fable folded into sea

Choir of revolt

a miserable mirage

occupied by specters

launched from

a nether eye

covered with soot and bream

Corridor with memory end

letters and numbers

brand its walls

Here, the tree is silent

world reverence

lit ruins with

skulls in relief

having no roots spread

across cracked lightning

...vista replaced

by inner expanse

Sight streams along  
until starpoint is enacted  
then dust but  
    what dust it is!  
spooned into vertigos spiced  
by intrusion

Seeing a face in every leaf  
settled on a seed of syllables  
spoken by the eye

my tongue gone missing

## Nigh Road

The walk across a perfect furrow revealed its hidden slant as the valley subsides into microtones.

A thicket housing skyline that promises to implode its particulars waited for our approach.

Even particles have no say as we pace, take up space, string a wondering through hell's finest vowels prone to shift without error.

How can I stretch this moment disintegrating; it hardly resembles itself in its transparency and is buttressed by tuneless regard.

Ebb from splendor, this submission.

*For Gustaf Sobin*

# Glimpse

It contains but  
cannot stay full

It has roots and leaves  
yet is still barren

Sound or no sound  
neither *either* nor *or*

If not now  
then when  
or will that won't  
be said  
or better left undead  
in the throat



Forth

palpitant layer

so expectant

delirious mark

on the spot

where wind

shines from a pioneer bud

erases allusion

to fragment

slender rare grasp

# Born

Glint, glimmer not glamour

    Into beyond-number and definition

Finally free of an elsewhere that

Resembles not knowing where I am

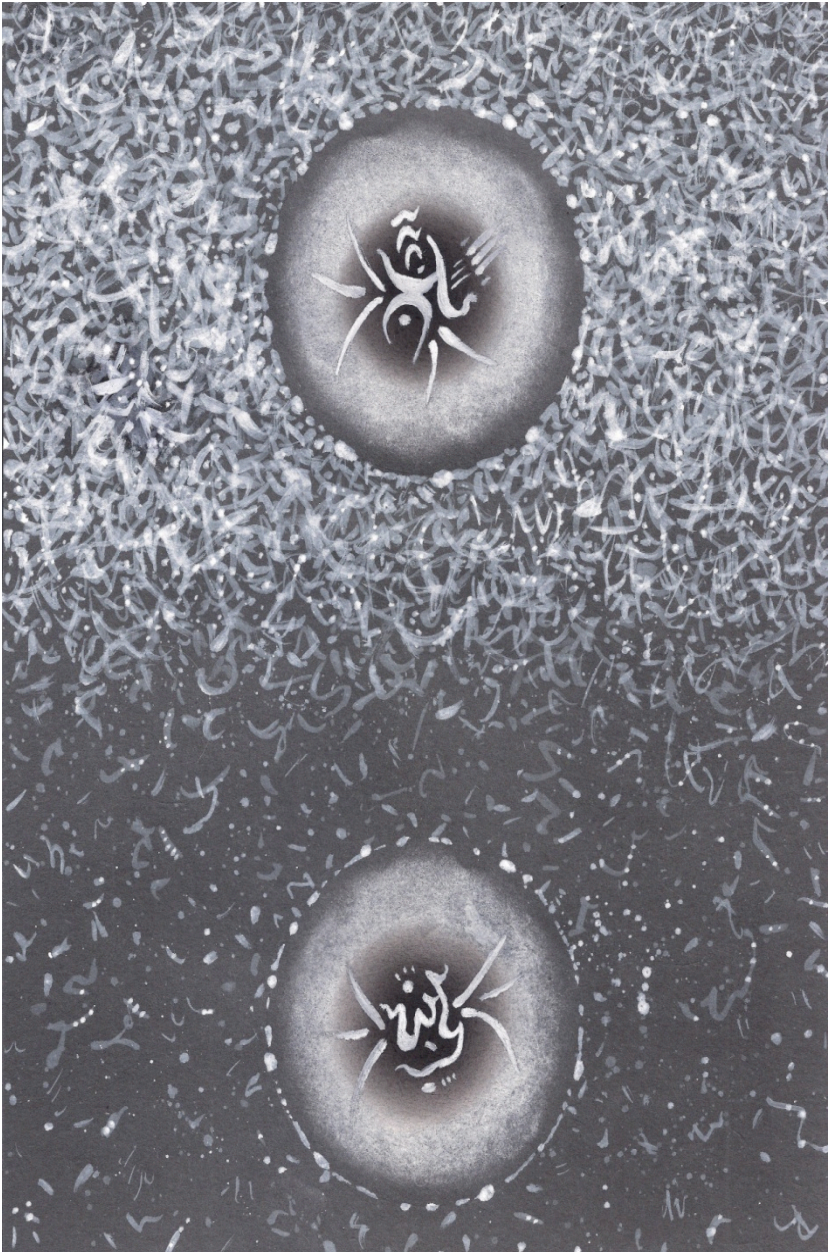
    Where I was not I

But a pigeon in a book about penguins

    Touched by the instant of ignition

## Pins of Light

Temples for the unadorned exist at the edges  
in the abyss outer limits unfold



### Selected Prose of Bobbie Louise Hawkins

Edited by Barbara Henning

Bobbie Louise Hawkins is a remarkable master of the witty understated prose sentence and writes in the lineage of Barbara Pym and Jane Bowles; she is also a fabulous storyteller with a great ear for the "very thing": quip or bon mot. She should be more discovered and read beyond her adoring fans at the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics where Bobbie presided as a grande dame teacher and consummate genius performer of her work many years. This collection is a terrific revival!

—Anne Waldman

**Bobbie Louise Hawkins** has written more than twenty books of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and performance monologues. She has performed her work at Joseph Papp's Public Theater, Bottom Line and Folk City in New York City; at The Great American Music Hall and Intersection in San Francisco, as well as reading and performing in Canada, England, Germany, Japan, Holland, and more. In England she worked with Apples and Snakes, read at the Canterbury Festival and the Poetry Society. She was commissioned to write a one-hour play for Public Radio's "The Listening Ear," and she has a record, with Rosalie Sorrels and Terry Garthwaite, Live At The Great American Music Hall, available from Flying Fish. She was invited by Anne Waldman and Allen Ginsberg to begin a prose concentration in the writing program at Naropa University where she taught for twenty years.

**Barbara Henning** is the author of three novels, seven books of poetry, as well as a series of photo-poem pamphlets. Her most recent books are *Cities and Memory* (Chax Press), *Looking Up Harryette Mullen: Interviews on Sleeping with the Dictionary and Other Works* (Belladonna Series), *Thirty Miles to Rosebud* (BlazeVOX) and *My Autobiography* (United Artists). In the nineties, Barbara was the editor of *Long News: In the Short Century*. Barbara was born in Detroit and moved to New York City in the early eighties. Professor Emerita at Long Island University, Brooklyn Campus, she continues to teach courses for Naropa University, as well as LIU.

#### Book Information:

- Paperback: 404 pages · Binding: Perfect-Bound
- Publisher: BlazeVOX [books] · ISBN: 978-1-60964-100-9
- \$18 [Pre-Orders Welcome](#)





## WHEN YOU'RE STONED ON GRASS ...

When you're stoned on grass and drinking wine and it's really festive ... a lot of people, eight or ten, and everybody feeling privileged and pleased to be there and to be so happy ... I'm talking about yesterday afternoon and evening. It was a birthday party. We were five of us waiting there for the birthday boy and the others and the cake and they all turned out to be about three hours late because of the traffic ... so we sat talking and enjoying it ... a fire in the fireplace ... and they did finally arrive; coming through the door. It felt like old-time family Christmases, waiting for the ones who lived farther away. And at some time during the evening ... the dilemma on grass if there's a lot of jazzy talking is to remember any of it later ... so this Sunday morning I started remembering it with pleasure and thinking I probably talked too much but not really feeling worried about it and there was a moment in it that suddenly I remember I said ... feeling really high and delighted to get it out at last ... I don't even know if it was true but it felt so accurate ... we had been talking about school's being narrower in some inverse ratio—like—the longer you're there the less it's got to tell you, and I remember saying the dues are worth it; all that's worth it ... and what suddenly came out that I'm remembering lying here in bed is—I said with all the certainty and pleasure of revelation, "Nothing in my life ever happened that was as important to me as learning to read."

And this morning I'm hung on remembering I said that as if the statement itself has turned to metal and I can hold it and gauge it; as if it were negotiable. A riffle like flip-cards in my mind of—wouldn't I pay it like a coin to have had this different or that different, as if that feeling, and being so definite saying it, really has to prove out.

My daddy was a good-looking woman chaser. He looked like Clark Gable and darkened his moustache with my mother's Maybelline mascara in private so he was angry when he saw the kid, me, standing in the bathroom door watching him.

Pictures of me then show me as a skinny, spooky kid. I was really quiet. If I broke a dish I hid it under the most complicated mess of crumpled paper I could make, filling the trash to hide my dangerous broken dish. He had a lousy temper and I never ... I guess I never will get rid of that secret self-protection I learned then.

They both were fighters, my mother and father. I remember him pulling the tablecloth off the table when his breakfast didn't suit him ... what a mess. And the time she threw a meat cleaver after him and it stuck in the door jamb inches from his head. He stopped and she says he turned pale. But he left. Time and again he left and when he came back (it's called coming-back-home) after a few months or whatever time, they'd get along until they didn't.

We moved all over Texas, never more than six months in a place (usually it was closer to three or four) and they fought wherever they were together. So I never made any friends that lasted and everything was various depending on whether it was just my mother and me or whether my father was there; and whether they were trying to run a restaurant together or whether my mother was working as a waitress ... do you know that breakfast-shift, dinner-shift, swing-shift vocabulary? ... or there was once when she worked in a candy factory coating chocolates and putting the identifying little swirl on top. What I remember most often is that we were just the two of us living in a bedroom in somebody's house and my mother's salary would run ten dollars a week and the room plus board for me, and the landlady's looking after me, would run seven.

I don't mean to make this sound pathetic.

At some time during that, when I was five, I started school and I was a whiz. I went through the first and second grade the first year and I went through the third and fourth grade my second year and the third year when I was seven I was in the fifth grade and broke my arm twice so I got slowed down.

That would have been when we were in Mineral Wells. My father was with us then and we were living in a three-



room house with a yard and honeysuckle on the porch at the bottom of a hill that was notable for a line of twenty-foot-high block letters filled with regular light bulbs that in the night glared out WELCOME toward the highway.

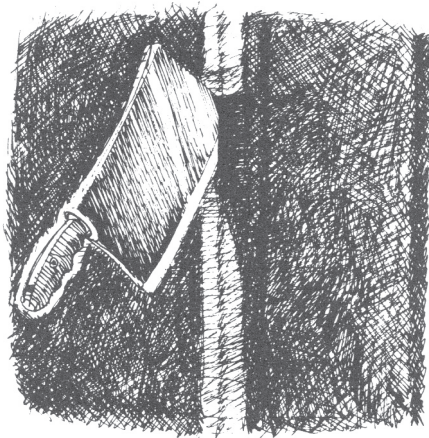
I loved that sign. It felt like being in church to stand at the base of those letters.

Just to finish that part of the story the next year we went to New Mexico and I went from being a whiz to passing the sixth grade “conditionally.” I was a kind of half-dummy thereafter. I don’t remember whether I had any notion of what went wrong.

It feels like years of chaos.

My father finally truly left around then. We sat in my Aunt Hannah’s house south of Albuquerque and he roamed in the night around the house yelling Mae and my Uncle Horace would yell back Mae doesn’t want you anymore, and I’ve got a .22 here, and my father finally left for good.

But, while I feel like that has to be told somehow, these few pages going the way they’ve gone, what I really want to mention and it took me until yesterday to get it into the air, is that all that time, and right from the first, reading was my darling pleasure.



I'VE ALWAYS BEEN IMPRESSED . . .

I've always been impressed by the ability some people have to remember everything, things from a long time back, the name of a first grade teacher, whatever.

What I have instead is page after page of random notes to remind me.

*Miz VanArt with the gun under her pillow and bullet holes  
in her door eating squabs in Mineral Wells*

*horny toads*

*the old man throwing his shoe through the window and  
putting shoe polish in his nose*

*the lady with the crazy daughter*

In a book like this, the “plot” is whether it can come together at all. It might help to think of it as having *gathered* more than having been written. It's got about as much plan to it as tumbleweeds blown against a fence and stuck there.

LAST OCTOBER . . .

Last October for the first time in more than twenty years I went back to Texas.

I went from San Francisco to my mother's house in Albuquerque and the next day about mid-morning the two of us left there driving her three-year-old air-conditioned Buick, headed east.

"We're going to have the sun beating on our backs all the way to Cline's Corners," she said. And, "Honey, get Mama a cigarette. They're in my purse. Do you want to drive?"

"Sure, if you want me to. You sure it won't make you nervous?"

"I'll just get us through the city limits. I know how all these freeways go."

"Are you supposed to smoke cigarettes?" I handed her the one I had lighted.

"Oh, I'm not supposed to but it won't hurt anything. Just, I'm not supposed to smoke so much that I get to coughing. Any kind of a cough plays hell with my throat."

When we were into the Sandias east of the city where the freeway turns into a more old-fashioned highway she pulled over and stopped to let us switch places.

"This car handles *really well* at fifty-five," she told me.

"O.K. Mama."

She began an instantaneous nesting in the midst of Kleenex, brought out chewing gum, put her purse where she could get it.

I put the seat back a couple of inches, checked the rear view mirror, pulled out onto the tartop.

"You're just used to those *little* cars that don't have much power," she said. "This car'll creep right up on you if you don't pay attention. You'll think you're just poking along and if you look at the speedometer it'll be on eighty or ninety."

She pulled a plastic package of slippers out of the glove

compartment and exchanged her high heeled shoes for them. She clicked the radio on.

The radio has a way of acting like a messenger. They play so many songs that if you're in any kind of a particular "catch" there's bound to be one that starts rising up above the rest like it's got your name on it.

If the song is at all popular it seems like that's the only thing they're playing after awhile.

Merle Haggard came in on us singing that song that has the line in it *Sing me back home, turn back the years* ... That song was number one all the time we spent driving around. We kept car company for just under three weeks, me, Mama, and Merle. It was like old times.

### Transcendental Telemarketer

by Beth Copeland

Beth Copeland's *Transcendental Telemarketer* lifts language beyond its typical meanings, lets it "whirl like a spinning top set loose on the sidewalk," until language and meaning split - the way the "I" does in the poems -- "I break in two: one girl stays on the bed while the other one floats to the ceiling to watch." With rare prowess, Copeland crafts these poems, delivering "the equator in that Ouija world," "death" as a "potent aphrodisiac."

—Debrah Morkun, author of *The Ida Pingala*

Copeland's *Transcendental Telemarketer* contains beautiful lyrics of emotion and meditation, but it also contains rants against war and violence, and all the while it swings us from the U.S. to Japan to Afghanistan, from Islam to Buddhism to Christianity. It's compelling, playful, and well-crafted.

—William Allegrezza, author of *Fragile Replacements*

**Beth Copeland** lived in Japan, India, and North Carolina as a child. Her book *Traveling Through Glass* received the 1999 Bright Hill Press Poetry Book Award. Her poems have been widely published in literary journals and have received awards from Atlanta Review, North American Review, The North Carolina Poetry Society, and Peregrine. Two of her poems have been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She is an English instructor at Methodist University in Fayetteville, North Carolina. She lives in a log cabin in the country with her husband, Phil Rech.

#### Book Information:

· Paperback: 100 pages · Binding: Perfect-Bound  
· Publisher: BlazeVOX [books] · ISBN: 978-1-60964-088-0

\$16

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## Still Life With One Apple

From earliest memory: one apple  
in a bowl predating speech, spores

of sunlight floating on air like pollen  
from the garden of Hesperides.

In childhood I wanted everything in pairs,  
animals entering Noah's ark two by two,

the symmetry of hand in hand,  
bride and groom.

I thought the apple needed another apple  
or at least the company of an orange or pear,

that the apple was lonely, that everything—  
even an apple in a bowl—

had a soul. Was it wrong to believe  
the apple could suffer and bleed,

to project my own needs  
onto that fruit?

To believe only a membrane  
of matter and speed

separates blood from stone  
and bone from apple seed?

To see the apple as a symbol  
of the universal soul,

as in Georgia O'Keeffe's "Green  
Apple on Black Plate,"

a study in simplicity?  
Still Life With An Empty Bowl—

I ate the apple to make it whole.

## Misconception

It was like catching a cold.  
If he coughed without covering his mouth,  
if he sneezed, you could have his baby,  
or so I believed

at the age of nine when I read the chapter  
on reproduction in a medical text. I knew the facts  
of life had nothing to do with storks and bees,  
but I couldn't figure out the mechanics

of sex, that tab A had to be inserted  
into slot B like the cardboard figures cut  
from the Rice Krispies box that always fell  
apart when I tried to put them together.

Conception was a kind of weather  
or photosynthesis: as leaves absorb sunlight  
and turn green, I thought a man's floating spores  
could penetrate a woman's pores,

that they could be on opposite sides of the room  
just looking at each other or looking out the window.  
One could be reading the newspaper and the other  
playing *Heart and Soul* on the piano

when, *WHAM, BAM*, sperm and egg collide  
and nine months later she becomes a mother.  
I thought the microscopic sperm  
could pass like germs from unwashed hands

contaminate a door knob, spoon or drinking glass,  
or as Casper  
floated through brick walls  
on Saturday morning cartoons, believing

a wife could receive her husband's seed  
like milkweed sown from the pod,  
that every birth was a miracle, a gift from God,  
that all you need is love.

## Learning to Pray

I was told to close my eyes  
and fold my hands like an unopened book.

I was not supposed to look  
but sometimes I peeked

through downcast eyes  
at steepled fingertips,

the double doors of thumbs  
that opened and shut on all the people

in the sanctuary of palms.  
After we read the one hundredth Psalm,

the preacher said a prayer.  
*Amen.*

I unfolded my hands,  
and the church disappeared.

How many years did it take me to learn  
what the restless child knew then?

Prayer isn't reverence in our hearts.  
It's in our hands.



## Confession

I stole another woman's only scarf—

    No, I didn't. I stole the line above to lead to the next  
line, swiped like the challis scarf

lost in a church parking lot.

    It was black with a blue-and-white geometric print  
like tiny Turkish tiles.

One Sunday I looked up from prayer

    and an old woman in the pew in front of me  
was wearing my scarf!

Because it had been given to me

    by someone I loved, I couldn't let it pass,  
so after church, I said, "You're wearing

my scarf," and she said, "Someone found it

    and said it looked like mine," adding insult to injury  
since I didn't think my beautiful scarf

looked like it would belong to

    a woman wearing Hush Puppy shoes and a Brillo-pad  
hairdo. "But it's not yours," I said.

"It's mine," so she took it off,

    handing it over as if she were giving me a gift  
when the scarf had been mine to begin with.

I still wear it, especially

    on cold mornings when I need to wrap something warm  
and familiar around my neck.

That happened many years ago

    when I still went to church and still believed  
I was lost and needed God to find me.

## My Life as a Slut

Age 6: A boy finds a penny on the playground. He says he'll give it to me if I go in a closet, take off all my clothes, and let him look. My sister says, "Don't," but I do it, anyway.

Age 21: My mother calls me a "harlot," "Jezebel," and "strumpet" after I stay out all night with my boyfriend. I roll my eyes and say, "If we're going to have this conversation, at least update your vocabulary. The word is 'slut.'"

Age 16: A teacher tells me to kneel in the girls' bathroom. Am I supposed to pray for forgiveness? I get sent home from school because my skirt doesn't touch the floor.

Age 27: I walk down the aisle in an off-white satin dress. It's snowing, and the next day I lose my voice.

Age 20: I have sex with three different men in one week. I write their names on my calendar in wisteria-blue ink.

Age 10: At recess I tell Tommy Faircloth I'm going to be a stripper when I grow up. Tommy tattles to the teacher, who scolds him and says I'm a good girl. I would never say a terrible thing like that.

Age 32: A man at my college reunion tells me a lot of other girls in our class were sluttier than I was. I feel like a failure.

Age 23: I fall in love with a Vietnam vet who plays guitar and writes bad poetry. I sleep with him on the first date. He dumps me for a frumpy girl who waits until the second date.

Age 9: I'm walking down the sidewalk wearing short-shorts, and a teenage boy leans out a car window and yells, "Call me when you're 16!"

Age 30: I buy a bar of *Saints and Sinners* soap in New Orleans. My husband says it's a rip-off.

Age 18: I get drunk at a party and lose my virginity. The next morning hot water runs down my thighs in a stream of silver and blood.

Age 5: I'm afraid of dogs, strangers, and the dark. Shadows cast by tree branches and leaves on the bedroom wall look like the devil's face. Do I hear footsteps in the stairwell? I'm afraid I'll die in my sleep. I know I'm going to Hell.

### Acta Biographia

#### **Amy Whatever**

Amy writes poetry and when not at her home works at the LA Coroners office washing cadavers before and after autopsy. Her goal is to clean the body and soul before they become death. She lives alone in West Hollywood with a ceramic phrenology skull to keep her company while she watches the Jersey Shore, Real Housewives of Where Ever, and Jeopardy. She wishes she could grow a mustache and walk the world as two people holding hands, awkwardly. Her forthcoming debut book, *Go Fuck Yourself off a Cliff*, is due out in the Fall from SugarVenom.

#### **Andrew Hamilton**

#### **Andrew Kuo**

#### **Austen Roye**

Born and currently residing in Cleburne, Texas, a small town just south of the Dallas/Ft. Worth area. Twenty-three years old, author of numerous poetry collections, two novels and a series of creative non-fiction collections. Previously published numerous pieces through Chrysalis Press, Vagabondage Press, LummoX Press and The Battered Suitcase, among other independent literary magazines. Held jobs as a projectionist, waiter, copy boy, grocery bagger, bookseller and bank teller. I work, drink and write. Big fan of independent presses, street art, bookshops and DIY work ethics.

#### **Autumn McClintock**

Autumn McClintock lives in Philadelphia where she works at the public library and spends much of her spare time baking bread and listening to baseball on the radio. Her poems have been published most recently in *SNReview*, *Blood Lotus*, *Apiary*, and *juked*, and her essay entitled "Responsible for Death" will appear in the anthology *The Poet's Sourcebook*, due out from Autumn House Press (no relation) next year.

### **Billy Cancel**

Billy Cancel's work has recently appeared in Shampoo, Glitterpony & Cricket Online Review. He co-runs Hidden House Press. A collection *The Autobiography Of Shrewd Phil* was published by Blue & Yellow Dog Press last year. Sound poems, visual shorts, & other aberrations can be found at [www.bilyncancel.com](http://www.bilyncancel.com)

<http://www.bilyncancel.com/>

### **Brent Holt**

Brent Holt is a father by night and by day a subordinate in a social services office. Originally from the Pacific NW, he is now sequestered in Minneapolis, MN. His stories have appeared online in *The Adirondack Review*, [amphibi.us](http://amphibi.us) <<http://amphibi.us>> , and *Ascent Aspirations*.

### **Bruno Casanova**

Bruno Casanova is a short story writer. He studied at Manhattanville College and the University of Pennsylvania. His stories have been published in the literary magazines in the US and abroad. His first short story collection received excellent reviews. He lives in New York City

### **C. Davis Fogg**

### **C. Marie Runyan**

### **Carlo Matos**

Carlo Matos is an Azorean-American poet and fiction writer. He has published in various journals and anthologies like *BlazeVOX*, *Arsenic Lobster*, *5x5*, *Ragazine*, *kill author*, *DIAGRAM*, *The Mad Hatters' Review*, *narrative (dis)continuities* and the *Gavea Book of Portuguese-American Poetry*, among others. He is the author of *A School for Fishermen* (BrickHouse Books), *Counting Sheep Till Doomsday* (BlazeVOX Books) and *Ibsen's Foreign Contagion* (Academica Press). He currently lives in Chicago, IL where he teaches English at the City Colleges of Chicago by day and is a cage fighter by night. After hours he can be found at Chicago's Poetry Bordello entertaining clients.

### **Celia Laskey**

Celia Laskey was raised in Brunswick, Maine. She attended Emerson College, and has had work published in *The Fiction Circus*. She currently works as a copywriter at an advertising agency and lives in Brooklyn with her partner and two cats. Her favorite cheese is every cheese.

### **Christopher Brownsword**

Christopher Brownsword was born in Sheffield, England in the early 1980s. His first collection of poetry 'Icarus was Right!' was published by Shearsman Books in 2010. A ltd edition handbound booklet titled 'The Eternally Sucking Gorge of the Void' has recently been published by Frequency 13 (contact [freq13@gmail.com](mailto:freq13@gmail.com) for more info).

### **Chuck Richardson**

**Chuck Richardson** is the author of two novels, *Smoke* and *So It Seams*, and an e-book, *Dreamlands: 3 Fictions*, all from [BlazeVox\[books\]](#). His short-fiction and poetry have appeared in [Thieves Jargon](#), [eccolinguistics](#), [Reconfigurations](#), [Atticus Review](#), [Blood Lotus Journal](#) and elsewhere. He lives in [Western New York](#).

### **D. W. Hey**

D.W. Hey is a poet, author, and editor from Long Island, NY. Most recently, his work has also appeared in the on-line literary magazine, *Danse Macabre*. He is the editor-in-chief and co-founder of *and/or*, an international print journal of experimental literature and art.

### **Daniel Y. Harris**

Daniel Y. Harris is the author of *Hyperlinks of Anxiety* (Cervena Barva Press, 2012), *Paul Celan and the Messiah's Broken Levered Tongue* (with Adam Shechter, Cervena Barva Press, 2010; picked by *The Jewish Forward* as one of the 5 most important Jewish poetry books of 2010) and *Unio Mystica* (Cross-Cultural Communications, 2009). He is a three-time Pushcart Prize nominee. Some of his poetry, experimental writing, art, and essays have been published in *BlazeVOX*, *Denver Quarterly*, *European Judaism*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *The New York Quarterly*, *In Posse Review*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, *Poetry Magazine.com* and *Poetry Salzburg Review*. His website is [www.danielyharris.com](http://www.danielyharris.com).

### **Dayna Patterson**

## **Don Cozzette**

## **Elena Botts**

Elena grew up in Maryland, and currently lives in Northern Virginia. She is still attending school. She likes to run. And write. She's been published many times in the past year.

## **Eve Maher**

Eve Maher is a current undergraduate student at the University of Texas at Dallas. She is currently working toward degrees in Literary Studies and Speech-Language Pathology. Eve is an enthusiast of many things, such as cephalopods, punk rock, and young adult fiction, but mostly she loves the English language. This is her first time being published.

## **Felino A. Soriano**

Felino A. Soriano has authored 51 collections of poetry, including *Of oscillating fathoms these nonverbal chants* (Argotist Ebooks, 2012), *Analyzed Depictions* (white sky books, 2012) and *Intentions of Aligned Demarcations* (Desperanto, 2011). He publishes the online endeavors *Counterexample Poetics* and *Differentia Press*. His work finds foundation in philosophical studies and connection to various idioms of jazz music. He lives in California with his wife and family and is a case manager and advocate for adults with developmental and physical disabilities. For further information, please visit [www.felinoasoriano.info](http://www.felinoasoriano.info).

## **Gareth Lee**

Gareth Lee holds an MFA from Brown University. His poems are forthcoming or have appeared in Columbia Poetry Review, Drunken Boat, EOAGH, Kenyon Review Online, Northwest Review, and other journals.

## **henry 7. reneau, jr.**

henry 7. reneau, jr. has been published in various journals/anthologies, among them, *Nameless Magazine*; *Subliminal Interiors Literary Arts Magazine*; *The Chaffey Review*; *The View From Here*; *FOLLY Magazine*; *Entering*; *Tule Review*; *BlazeVOX*; *Black Heart Magazine*; *Forty Ounce Bachelors*; *Suisun Valley Review*; and *Tidal Basin Review*. He has also self-published a chapbook entitled *13hirteen Levels of Resistance*. His favorite things are Rottweilers, books relevant to a concealed, but actual, reality, his “fixie,” and Ben & Jerry’s New York Super Fudge Chunk.

**Ivan de Monbrison**

**Jacob Reber**

**Jason Stocks**

**John Miatech**

John Miatech, poet, teacher and writer, lives in Forestville, California, in redwood country. He began writing poetry in high school in 1969 when introduced by a friend to the works of Robert Bly. He has had the good fortune to have worked with many poets in workshops over the years, including Mr. Bly, William Stafford, Etheridge Knight and Simon Ortiz, among many others, helping him shape his work. John's third volume of poems; *What the Wind Says*, has just been released by AuthorHouse. Previously, he has been published in several poetry journals and has written two self published volumes of poetry; *Things to Hope For* and *Waiting for Thunder*. John is the 2012 poetry award winner at the SF Writer's Conference.

**Juliana Grace**

Ms. Grace is native to the Washington, D.C. area, but now makes her home in the gothic paradise of Baltimore City. Long fascinated with art and artifice, she tutors writing at an art college and is a cerebral shop girl at a dress boutique in town. She lives alone with two cats and a keyboard. Her inspirations include hardcore, crust, and proto-punk, Frank Zappa, and [adultswim].

**Juliana M Sartor**

### **Kate Weinberg**

Born and raised in exotic Baltimore, MD, Kate trained as an actor in Chicago before moving to Brooklyn, NY, and then leaving Brooklyn, NY to walk across the north of Spain and try her hand at farming, and then returning to Brooklyn, NY, where she currently resides, for now. She's written two young adult novels (under a nom de plume), and has other work in the awesome Brooklyn literary journal, *Armchair/Shotgun*, and a forthcoming story collection, *Cornered*. She would really like to travel the whole world in a hot air balloon, but, then again, who wouldn't?

### **Katherine Arsenault**

### **Lauren R. Gay**

Lauren Rebecca Gay was born in Buffalo, NY in her parents' apartment on Traymore Ave. She works beneath education and in the arts. Her work is reaching larger and larger audiences by others' and her own accord. Ms. Gay birthed a press, POPPress. It is a zygote. Her intention is to work sustainably among fellows; planting gardens, writing poems, drawing pictures. Buffalo is her home. She graduated with a b.s. and is certified to teach the English Language Arts. She appreciates AAVE and the right to make decisions as a woman. Her goal is to make and survive and make the survival of others more full of peace. She is one quarter of a century and her dog's name is Lincoln.

### **Liz Mariani**

### **Luca Penne**

Luca Penne lives in New Hampshire and this summer is building several large barns for horse people. His work has appeared in many journals, including 2River View, Furnace, Prose Poem Project. etc,

### **Marisa Malone**

Marisa Malone is from Reno NV. But currently lives in Olympia WA. She attends the Evergreen State College and has self-published two chapbooks entitled "Lost Among These Wonderings" (available through [msvalerieparkdistro.com](http://msvalerieparkdistro.com)) and "Poetry For Other Eyes".



### **Mark Cunningham**

Mark Cunningham has a new book, *Helicotremors*, out from Otoliths. Among his earlier books are two from BlazeVOX: *71 Leaves* (an e-book) and *specimens*.

### **Matthew Dennis**

Matthew Dennis grew up around Boston, graduated with a degree in Comparative Literature from New England College in New Hampshire and then came back to work in Boston. He works a regular job and wishes he had more time to write but makes do. He has been writing poems for 20 years and hopes to continue to do so.

### **Nicholas Alexander Hayes**

Nicholas Alexander Hayes is the author of the books *NIV: 39 & 27* (BlazeVox Books, 2009) and *Metastaesthetics* (Atropos Press, 2012). His essay on the gay pulp novelist Jay Greene is forthcoming in the anthology *1960s Gay Pulp Fiction: The Misplaced Heritage* (University of Massachusetts Press). Along with Terri Griffith, he has composed a book of contemporary retellings of Greek myths.

### **Patrick Chapman**

### **Penelope L. Mace**

After a long hiatus from writing during which she raised children and worked in health care, Penelope L. Mace is now completing an historical novel set during the Poor People's Campaign of 1968. She has published short fiction and poetry in numerous literary journals, on line and print such as "Moon Milk Review" and "Iconoclast." In addition to writing and reading, she enjoys the delight of helping to care for her two granddaughters, Ruby Jean and Alexis Laura. She lives outside of Minneapolis, MN.

### **Peter Burghardt**

Peter Burghardt lives in Oakland, California, and works as a poetry editor for Omnidawn Publishing. He recently received his MFA in poetry from Saint Mary's College, where he also edited MARY: A Journal of New Writing.

### **Philip Lewis**

Born in Atlanta and raised just outside Washington, D.C., Philip Lewis graduated from Howard University in 1992. His first book, *Life of Death*, was published by Fiction Collective in 1993. He has worked as a dishwasher in D.C., a temp in New York City and Rockville, Maryland; with these earnings he was able to get lost in Egypt, Morocco, Greece, Rio de Janeiro, Romania, Istanbul, Damascus, Havana, among other places. He is currently “at large,” in his own words.

### **Riya Aarini**

Riya is a prolific writer with a passion for theater in all its glory--its triumphs and mega-failures, its bittersweet endings and hopeful starts!

### **Ryan Hilary**

The questionable writer of these dubious poems is an Irish transplant to New York City. He was educated at Vassar College and Union Theological Seminary in New York. He has been published in print by *Aquierele Poets Amongst Us III* and online at *junklit* and *400z Bachelors*. He has publications pending *The Wilderness Review* (poetry) and *The Midway Review* (fiction). He hates writing (or boasting, I suppose) about himself in the third person and is just grateful that people other than his partner and mommy want to read his work.

### **Ryan Stechler**

Originally from Massachusetts, Ryan Stechler is a graduate from the MFA program at NYU. He likes a good red ale, trivia night, and New York City. He dislikes light beer, when trivia night centers around TV and Movies, and New York sports teams. His poetry has also appeared in *Jacket* and *West 10th*.

### **Sarah Levine**

Sarah Levine recently received her MFA from Sarah Lawrence College. Work has been published in NAP, decomp, and Publishing Genius.

### **Sarah Lilius**

Sarah Lilius currently lives in Arlington, VA where she is a stay-at-home mother. Some of the journals her work has appeared in are the *Denver Quarterly*, the *Marlboro Review*, *Court Green*, and *Pulse Literary Journal*.

### **Sarah Ruth Jacobs**

Sarah Ruth Jacobs is currently a Writing Fellow at the Bernard L. Schwartz Communication Institute at Baruch College and a doctoral candidate in English at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Her writing has appeared in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *The Mississippi Review*, and *Free Verse*. She is also the Managing Editor of *The Journal of Interactive Technology and Pedagogy* <<http://jitp.commons.gc.cuny.edu/>> .

### **Scott Abels**

These poems are taken from a manuscript titled *New City*, from which poems have also appeared (or are forthcoming) with *EOAGH*, *Forklift*, *Ohio*, *Lo-Ball*, *Juked*, *H\_NGM\_N*, *Sixth Finch*, *RealPoetik*, *DIAGRAM*, *Strange Machine*, *Alice Blue*, *Raft*, *Poets for Living Waters*, *Scud Magazine*, *LOCUSPOINT*, *Sink Review*, *Everyday Genius*, *InDigest*, *LEVELER*, *inter/rupture*, *Stoked Journal*, *M.I.A. Anthology*, *West Wind Review*, *Tinfish*, Beard of Bees Press (as a chapbook), and Lame House Press (as a postcard poem).

### **Simon Perchik**

### **Tess Joyce**

Tess Joyce's poems were recently published in poetry magazines *Ditch*, *Four and Twenty*, *Anatomy and Etymology* and *Phantom Kangaroo*. In 2009 a collection of her poetry was published in India; the book was a collaboration with an Indian writer. She is a British writer but currently lives with her husband in Indonesia. In 2011 she was the communications officer for Dr Galdikas's organisation, *Orangutan Foundation International* in Kalimantan and wrote articles for the website. She recently contributed to an International Poetry event in Indonesia, *What is Poetry*, in a small talk with a focus on environmentalism and poetry.

### **Tom Bridger**

## **Vernon Frazer**

Vernon Frazer most recent books of poetry are *Unsettled Music* and *T(exto)-V(isual) Poetry*. Enigmatic Ink has published Frazer's new novel, *Field Reporting*. Frazer's web site is <http://www.vernonfrazer.com/> net. *Bellicose Warbling*, the blog that updates his web page, can be read at <http://bellicosewarbling.blogspot.com> <<http://bellicosewarbling.blogspot.com>> /, His work may also be viewed at Scribd.com <<http://Scribd.com>> and on YouTube. Frazer is married.

## **William L. Alton**