

SKIDROW #14
PENTHOUSE

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Kristiina Ehin

KRISTINA EHIN

RIVER OF SONG

translated from the Estonian by Ilmar Lehtpere

I

In a barge that had gone under long-long ago and sunk deep down to the bottom of the River of Song, ten red milky-whiskered kittens had made their nest. Their youngest brother, a small water-grey cat who hadn't even opened his eyes yet, lived there too.

Like all of them, he had been born on dry land under the steps of an old timber house. When he had found his feet, he tottered into the yard together with his brothers and sisters into the light of day. Falling over again and again he crept into the shade under the rhubarb, for something of unprecedented glare and glitter had forced its way in behind his still-closed eyelids. Uh-oh...He fell asleep with his head on his paws, without knowing that this would be his last sleep above the surface of the river. The owner gathered all the tottering kittens together, even the grey one dozing pleasantly under the rhubarb leaf. He gathered all the kittens into a rag, put a rough stone into the middle to weigh it down, and tied the bundle together tightly. For the time being his wife had taken the kittens' caterwauling, clawing mother into the shed. *Splash*...the man threw the wriggling bundle of cats into the surge of the River of Song. Silently, swiftly the struggling nest sank to the bottom.

Oh, how bad it is underwater, the kittens thought. *Oh, how bad*...They whimpered and tried to call their mother, but nothing helped. From between the bulrushes came Death, a scythe of cyperus in his hand, who undid the bundle and gave them a fresh underwater breath of life. The little cats came to and teetered on along the muddy river bottom and slippery stones.

Creak, Death with his scythe of cyperus pushed open the door of the barge and counted up ten red kittens. *There seemed to be another one...ah, here he comes*. The grey kitten's tail had become caught in a battered doll's pram that had once slipped out of the hands of a little girl and rolled down the bank into the River of Song. Now it clattered along attached to the tail of the kitten, like a big cart. Death with his scythe of cyperus unloosed the pram, picked the kitten

up in the palm of his hand, and put it in through the door of the barge. *Creak*, he closed the door. In the galley the grey kitten chose as his nest an open first aid cupboard which was tilted over to one side. There he now slept purring away, his head on a bandage roll and his hind legs stretched over an empty bottle of iodine. *Thread tails, button eyes, milk whiskers, marzipan noses, brush paws, sleep well*, he heard his mother's voice saying through his dreams.

Creak, the barge door went again, when the kittens tottered out in the morning. They were already a bit bigger. Like the buds of blossoms they had swelled in the night, and all but the grey kitten had opened their eyes. Death with his scythe of cyperus had led a blue sea cow to the place and milked bright white milk into a big clay bowl. All of the underwater cats gratefully set about lapping up the milk. Only the grey kitten didn't immediately find a space at the edge of the bowl and instead asked the cow, *How long have you been living here underwater?*

Moons, many moons, the cow answered, and looked at him kindly. The rusty doll's pram swayed in the current, the kitten turned round and with his paw touched the white orris roots that ran like the strings of an instrument over the pram. *Plink, plink, tinkle, tinkle...* went the roots and all the underwater dwellers stopped to listen. *Moons, moons*, the cow repeated again and nodded pensively.

The grey kitten played and played with the strings of orris root and the doll's pram chimed under his paws. Death put his scythe of cyperus on a stone and closed his eyes. *Oh*, he thought, *what a find!*

II

In the meantime there was silence and the willow catkins dropped high above their heads into their own dark shadows on the surface of the river. The wind played with the bulrush seeds along the riverside, and an aspen dugout canoe, in which two maidens and a young man were sitting, ploughed silently up along the crest of the river. One of the maidens sang and the other was silent, and almost without a sound the paddles caught their own dark reflections in the depths of the water. The one girl's voice was as clear as a silver paddle and the other's silence was even more beautiful, and the young man didn't know which one the roots of his heart's tree were more entwined with. They were People of the Meadow. All at once they lowered their heads so as not to break the fragile spiderweb that had been cast over the river. They slipped through under the spiderweb and straightened their backs again.

Tatōn mur, the young man said in the language of the People of the Meadow. That meant it's deep here. The girls nodded, knowing that the depths had taken a fair few from among their midst.

Now the aspen canoe slipped over a big splash of sunlight and the People of the Meadow saw how a maiden of the Ovda folk who had been

sitting on a fallen tree branch washing her backwards feet threw her breasts over her shoulders with a start and, pulling her brown hair down to cover her nakedness, plunged into the forest. That maiden, who was called Tsheber Ovda, grasped the mane of a horse stolen from the village of the People of the Meadow, heaved herself onto the stallion's back and dug her backwards soles into the steed's groin. He sped over the field yellow with globeflowers, buttercups and marigolds, and the cuckoos and starlings fled out of his way bumping into each other in alarm. *To my own kind, back to my own kind*, Tsheber Ovda mumbled to herself.

Slurping the milk of the blue cow, the grey kitten opened his eyes. Like gates they opened up for the first time to the underwater world – to the barge and the little reflected flame next to it that had kindled itself as it often did when the sunlight played on the surface of the river.

Look, it's as if there's a flame burning down there, the young man whispered and he poked the paddle into the glowing heart of the flashing splash of sunlight. And the maiden who hadn't been silent sang, *Like a flame burning there, like a flame burning down there...* She looked the young man straight in the eye and laughed. And the maiden who was silent suffered the blinding light, looked through the brightening water and really saw how ten rowan red kittens warmed themselves around the underwater flame. But the light grey kitten dozed in the clay milk bowl which he had first licked so clean that there wasn't a drop left.

But the young man thought about Tsheber Ovda, how she had hidden her body white as day under her hair, how the ball of her foot touched the ground before her heel when she ran, how her breasts waved behind her like banners when she rode away, how she feared him, a Man of the Meadow, how she had clawed and bitten when the young man had once caught her in the sunlight of the riverbank, how he had roughly torn the beads from the neck of the Ovda maiden, clumsily embraced her and cast off the belt from around her waist, wrenched the rings from her fingers, and thrown all these riches into the blackening River of Song. The maiden went limp, benumbed in his hands, the hot tears flowing down her body like rapids. *They're not paid for yet, don't you understand, I still have to pay for them, pay a high price for them...* the maiden cried. The young man wanted to console her and said, *I'll buy you new ones, presents from me, even more expensive, don't cry lovely Ovda*. But the maiden, wet with tears, slipped out of his hands and fled into the forest. Until that day the young man remembered Tsheber Ovda's pitiless weeping that had cut the meadow of his soul like a scythe. What did Tsheber Ovda mean when she complained that she still had to pay for the things he had thrown into the River of Song? All the People of the Meadow knew that Ovdas are eternal thieves. Perhaps this girl's valuables were from the dowry chest of some Girl of the Meadow that the Ovdas had prised open and emptied by the light of the moon.

Now, as the young man paddled along in a dugout canoe with two young beauties he had met the very same Ovda again.

Three weddings are given to a Person of the Meadow, sang the maiden in the dugout canoe who wasn't silent. *First of all the wedding with life.* The maiden's voice shimmered like the river. *Then the wedding with another Person of the Meadow. ANOTHER PERSON OF THE MEADOW*, she repeated, and again gave the young Man of the Meadow a penetrating look. *And finally...* she looked down and her voice ploughed the River of Song deeply and quietly, *...the wedding with death. This is the backwards wedding, THE BACKWARDS WEDDING...*

Backwards like my reflections in the River of Song, backwards like the soles of the Ovda's feet, mused the young Man of the Meadow.

III

That time he hadn't dared to follow Tsheber Ovdas's tracks to catch her. And so there was no more rest to be had for him, day or night. In the end he went away to the town, where the river was said to flow with gold and the land to grow crisp-baked bread. But he fell ill like all People of the Meadow there. *Meadow longings*, was the doctor's diagnosis. A treatment was prescribed: a precise dose of bird-cherry scent directly into the lungs, drops of wide open space directly into the eyeballs, tablets of the glow of sunset, baths of earth for his hands and small electric shocks for his feet from a stinging nettle device to enliven him a little out of the listlessness that had filled the whole of the young man's soul. The People of the Meadow beside him in the ward died one after the other, but first their tongues were deadened to stop them from lamenting and calling out and infecting healthy town people with meadow longings. *Earth cracks, even stone breaks, but People of the Meadow have to endure...* the young man repeated his grandfather's saying to himself. But he didn't hold out. He suddenly fled in the month of the summer solstice, when the sphere of the heavens had risen as high as high can be. Fled from the others as well as himself before stepping onto the stinging nettle device. Fled barefoot, slipping like a summer wind towards the horizon, surrendering to meadow longings more and more with each new step.

But in his home village on the banks of the winding River of Song between the meadows the stream of life had begun to dry up. Nearly everyone of his age had had their tongues deadened in the towns, and their children were born outright tongueless. Old toothless men and women told tales of bygone days and so tried to still the pain of their loss. Then he found these two maidens in his home village. The one who wasn't silent ploughed the River of Song with the silver paddle of her voice. And the one who was silent was silent in the language of the People of the Meadow,

so that everything in her silence was clear, pure and beautiful. Has she still got a tongue? The young man didn't know. At the edge of the forest Tsheber Ovda jumped down from her horse and hopped along the marsh mattocks to the lush marsh island amid the misty bog. The horse whinnied fearfully when the Ovda maiden left him alone tied to a tree. Although she didn't remember, she had already lost some ten horses in this way, horses that had been stolen with a great deal of trouble. In the night wolves had come and torn apart the horses that had been tied up snorting in fear for their lives. The wolves had ripped the flesh from their bones, dragged the carcasses high up onto the riverbank and howled to the moon as if they were singing the horses' funeral song. There the skeletons now lay—bleached, lightning white, a warning to all horses who fall victim to the Ovdas' passion for riding and to their heedlessness. The dugout canoe of the People of the Meadow with the young man and the two maidens glided past these very same lightning-white skeletons. They looked silently at the horse carcasses high up on the riverbank and even the maiden who wasn't silent closed her singing mouth for a moment. They paddled the canoe into a quiet current, stepped onto the shore and gazed with dismay at the devastation that had been worked by the wolves. The horses' skeletons rattled in the summer breeze, and partridges had made nests between the bones.

Suddenly the young man took to his heels – back upstream after the fleeing Tsheber Ovda. Out of breath he reached the edge of the marsh and found the Ovda maiden's horse. He untied him from the tree and the black stallion whinnied in gratitude. Swiftly he led the horse back along the way he had come to the horses' cemetery where the two Maidens of the Meadow were waiting between the partridge nests.

The River of Song murmured its unceasing song over stones and tree roots, over all the shy beings within it, murmured over mysteries precious as anything can be, over the pieces of jewellery made especially beautiful by their loss. And the doll's pram with strings of orris root chimed from the bottom of the river, *plink, tinkle, plink, tinkle...* Along with the black stallion the young Man of the Meadow had rescued his own heart from the fetters of the Ovda maiden. But how they went on – whether along still waters or racing headlong on the back of the stallion, where they came to and what they found before them – only the meadow wind knows.

KRISTINA EHIN

SWAN BONE CITY

translated from the Estonian by Ilmar Lehtpere

I once saw a man at the seashore who was collecting the bones of birds from between the stones. I thought he must be an ornithologist and I was just about to pass by when something caught my eye. The man's movements were young and nimble, but the look in his eyes was more than a thousand years old.

"Who are you?"

"I'm an architect and a lover," he answered. "But the girl I want to marry won't have me until I've built a city that flies as high as her dreams. I've already built her a worldful of cities, some of them with houses rising right up to the clouds. She always accepts the new city, happily licks ice cream on park benches, and walks proudly along the city streets adorned with life, but when I approach her full of hope, she replies "This isn't it," and vanishes into the crowd.

"Maybe you've chosen the wrong girl?" I asked doubtfully.

"No, there's nothing wrong with the girl. Stones are too heavy. Wood burns too easily. Swan bones are hollow inside, they carry high up into the air and hold the living, spirits and dreams together. This time she will get her city," the man said and bent down again over the stones.

"A city of swan bones," I thought as I walked away, "I'd like to live there too."

KRISTINA EHIN

translated from the Estonian by Ilmar Lehtpere

My limbs metamorphose
fur grows on my beautiful body
in my mouth I feel teeth like clear death
all my listless love of peace supplanted
by an agile thirst for blood

in the distance I hear the howling of my grey kin
I feel the rough touch of their grey snouts
on my young skin

I wanted to live with them
howl at the moon and suckle cubs –

but they won't have me as one of their own
for my gnarled human nature
still shows in my eyes

KRISTINA EHIN

translated from the Estonian by Ilmar Lehtpere

A giant airplane
a boeing 757
fell in love with a grey heron
oh how it wanted
to fly over the marsh
where the heron stood
on a rough stump
slender legs
so thin and long
eyes half shut within itself
feathers the colourless colour of dreams
to see for a moment the black of its wings
the sharp brushstroke of its open beak
oh how it wanted
to set down its hurrying passengers
to leave its tedious everyday work
and swoop down to the heron
to twirl and to dance
to whirl wildly
on the rusty bog
its oh so bright and shining body
yearning to feel the nearness of bird feathers
to fall asleep wing in wing
against the heron's colourless colour of dreams

and then it would whisper to the heron
wake up heron
look how full of fiery stars
the sky is
up there I only felt
the warmth of the fuel
the call to hurtle on

GASPAR OROZCO

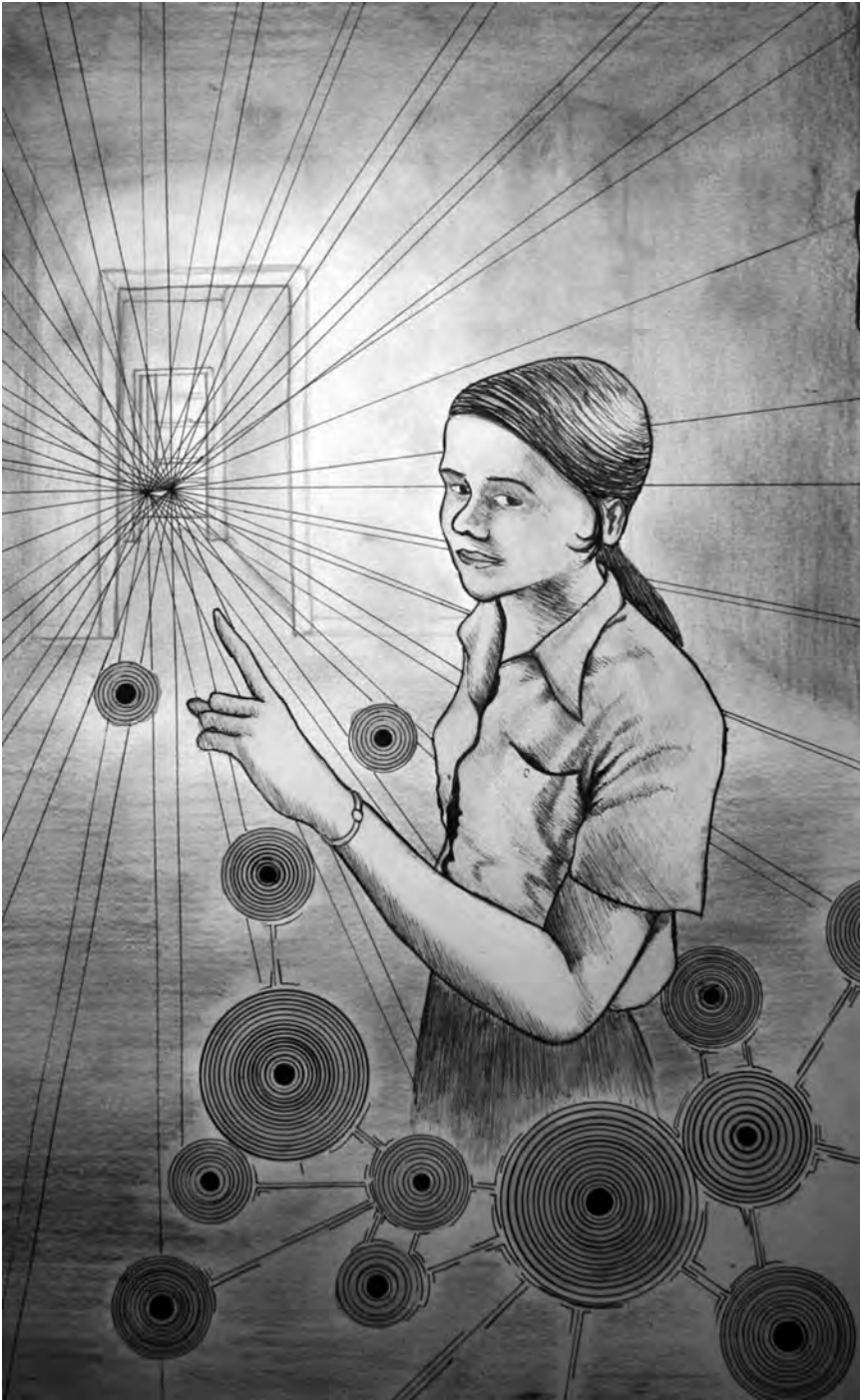
FILM VIEWED IN A WHITE SQUARE OF CHESS BOARD

Translated from the Spanish by Anthony Seidman

Time has passed since I heard the gallop of a fleeing horse. Today the Eastern Wind brought a few grains of red sand. I have seen the Bishop's head tilt. It is said that one can glimpse the sea through a chink of light. Others say this is rather a motionless dream in the Queen's mind. Our Lord dreamt of an obscure tree, unknown birds hiding in the foliage...on that day, victory was ours. Petal teetering on the fingertip of God is our kingdom. Yesterday the Queen traveled to the north. Her gait, a drop of metal. Over the bridge, black wheat fields stretch out. Flakes of snow commence falling. Silence.

FILM VIEWED IN THE GOSSAMER THREAD OF A SPIDER WEB

If you exhale, something will tremble from across the city. If you recall that voice, a gesture and sound will illuminate. If you hush, something elsewhere will become silence or ash. City, gust of wind. For the one who arrived to come in contact with this city, there will be no return. You know this well, even though one day you will find yourself pacing these empty streets, seeking the unobtainable, expecting that the day's dirty colors may arrive at any moment.



Chuck Light: *Dream 2*

ANNA ADAMS

THE WIFE

I spied through the spying glass in the attic
Hugh wading across the river to me
For my husband's gone to the fair
Selling trapped birds to the crowd,
I can't help it, he said, if you...
How your cheek fits my cheek, said Hugh
Your soft mouth don't need no words,
And he bends me to him.
What will you do to change me, Hugh?
I'll give you wild calls across the river,
When the snake casts off his skin
I'll give you the snake, said Hugh.
I changed like the moon is changed by the sun.
My husband came back from the fair.
He poked his lark's breast with his thumb.
Stop your wild bites, he said,
For you can't get away;
My house surrounds your cage.
He turned, his eyelashes met halfway,
Another man's bed heaves between us, he said.
I can't bear the lisp of your lies,
The twist of your kiss to his lips;
No woman's eyes are clear, he said
But you must be able to hear no sound
For the radar range of the bat
Booms, out of sight, the moth, he said.
Come look at your man, my husband told me.
It's the wind that moves him now, he says.
My love dangles between the earth and sky.
My Hugh hangs in the air.
How could you love a dead man, my husband said.
I point to the noise of the birds.
Hugh just got to heaven, I tell him
Singing himself out of his mind.

PAUL B. ROTH

LOW DETECTION

Imprisoned by thrown-open doors and windows, you wait. Who passes by, who doesn't notice you, who never notices you or ever comes for you, is a much larger part of your life than you theirs.

Venturing out on occasion, you fear tiny rainbow prints on new fallen snow will lead you underground between two overlapping roots that were once the legs your mother at the last moment crossed before carrying you full-term to birth, and yet, you've never had a problem following these same rainbows in the dark where snow's melted into one calm winter streambed after another.

Every time you return, you ask for silence and its unspoken promise of solitude. Lightbulbs tightened into place yet loosened by the human vibrations spiderwebs cushion, burst with so much light that there's no space outside your own body in which you've ever been seen.

In the future, you take your darkness elsewhere.

PAUL B. ROTH

STARS ALONE

Posted to the night, valuable stars you peel one after another from the sky palletize their flat selves in warehouses protected by acid filled canals and electrified fences barbed with charred incisors screened from the ashes of so many unloved dogs.

Any faint star's quickly discarded before oxygen pits its fleeing existence or grinds its fragile light into dust. The few who do remain, dying so their lives become conjecture instead of action, continue losing their memory one light year at a time.

Searching the sky, you're cold enough to feel the warmth of such distant light, yet somehow know the stars that are no more, the stars that darken the insides of these warehouses, and appear much like your aloneness, collapse into their very own ashes.

PAUL B. ROTH

ULTERIOR BIRTH

You tell your story...

...a woman's nursed from the earth feet first. Each and everyday, a bit more of her ankles, calves, then knees emerge. How each leg is then wrapped in soft cotton for protection from too much sun and her genitalia in kerosene soaked burlap to temporarily extinguish the distant whimpers and whines of starving coyotes.

While her bent legs pedal air, more of her stomach, then taut ribs followed by her breasts push up through the rich black earth. Supported only by her shoulders, the rest of her neck, head and her hair's shallow roots pull themselves out of the ground with no tearing noise whatsoever.

Kneeling over her, prying her mouth open and pinching her nose, you breathe deeply into her clogged lungs again and again until, without warning, small but rough chunks of gravel filled mud's coughed up and out of her wide-open mouth. Gasping without once opening her eyes, your fingertips on her face feel how warm the muddy tears she cries must have kept her refreshed and from feeling so alone.

PAUL B. ROTH

AROUND TOWN

You walk city streets whose sewer grates are clogged with body parts. Dry swirls of torn clothing sculpted by dry wind and fast traffic patterns curl into stiff poses around bent street signs. Dusty gravel mounds surrounding these clothing scraps are embedded with thick clusters of milky-brown mushroom sprouts. Carefully touching these fresh sprouts as though they were the raised letters of a sacred and rarely whispered prayer, their dampness on your fingertips glows when held up to your face.

Like Arcosanti bells, high Siberian grasses, gloriously colored Tibetan warrior pennants and the unbraided manes of black stallions galloping across winter's steppes, you surrender to the wind scraped by jagged openings time has broken through your open window.

You wish you could have everything back. You wish your plowed and seeded fields grew something other than jagged limestone, purple thistle globes and the unearthed roots of wilted seedling scraps. You wish summer's rains were more water than dust, that winter's snows were not so atomically hot, and that before wishing your life away, you'd actually had one of your own.



Lawrence Applebaum

ANDREW OERKE

KING JOHN AND KING JESUS

“There was a man sent from God whose name was John.”
“The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.”

PART ONE:

John the Baptist

A demon from the wilderness, a mouth,
with locust and wild honey on his breath,
come preaching and bleaching the heart. A word came
that parched the appetite, and not a sword,
he grudgingly delivered to the nearly fatal
audience, and he was like an after-natal
child is like a beachéd sea shell, fused
with death, an auditorium for echo,
wind. Listen! He spoke and then, amused,
in scared Jordan played with water and
with dove and pointed his thistley hand
and hearkened to Yahweh’s prophetic echo.

Jesus of Nazareth

A sudden fossil from the north, a word
of flesh with sawdust, earth spilt on his beard,
came treading and spreading His glance. A tongue
of tango brightness, or of fugue, or song,
or monody, without a syllable
of noise, He balanced silently. The bell
that He was like was like a carapace
that sheer, might hold a clapper-stalk of orchid,
lilac. Look! He waked, He walked, and then apace
He rummaged in the Jordan, dipped in mirth
and tear, and puckered His cloisonné mouth
and winked at the Baptist’s conspirator kiss.

PART TWO

The Death of John

Obscene in Herod's frowzy dungeon glanced
a basilisk, tongue flickering and rancid,
John the Baptist, aptest of the firebrands.
He was baiting us and waiting for a sign of gold.
A gilded dish and sword glided down the stairs
where, gingerly, not yet to injure he, two executioners
moved loose and hugely through the nightmare scare
and breathed, "We've come to chop your head." "All right,"
John said. Listen! Up the scabrous steps to where
a sultry bugle whipped the sex of girls
to strip for favors and to swirl and twirl.
Salome dreamt of his handsome head all night.

The Death of Jesus

A sun-charred rood, vertical spit upon
a hill, the sanguinary *sine qua non*,
leaned facing and casing the west where suns
drone down each day. The skull-shaped bluff, a pun
on its skullduggery, its skill at trick
and trap, was after all just earth and rock.
Go Zealot, crack your gutty fire, your hot
tongue on the skull's cryptic lip. Taste it. Test
it. Look! A soldier lofts a mustard pot
for thirst. Heaven descends to a robber
and leaves a lone fanatic like a blotter
soaking the last drop of light into His chest.

STEPHEN CAMPIGLIO

SEVEN TRINITIES

When going for bass, perch or bullheads,
the fishing citizens use trot line.

Shad roe with oranges for breakfast.

A book of light for digestion.

The T'ai Chi player, in harmony
with I Ching, seems to throw the tiger.

“Mountains standing close together:
the image of standing still.”

A prayer reaches beyond the sun's emanations.

“Unity of three matters” works and is worked along
the Law of Seven; the cosmic octave of Gurdjieff's heaven.
Beyond the absolute, the cosmic ray goes no farther.

From the absolute, emanations in every direction.

In the old days, if you were known to eat shad,
you got a bad pew.

Fisher of souls: there's another three for Thee.



Michael Weston

JEFFREY MACLACHLAN

ANESTHESIA

Am I going to die? I'll sue you surgeons over this island where you've left me. I see the crimson fetus atop the lighthouse. Am I going to die? I've slogged this journey for a time, it seems. Are you the solder dross? The water torch machine? You have been reading this the wrong way. You are now aware of your own breathing.

The crimson fetus is solder dross. The crimson fetus spits wind and sleet. Its breathing tube's tentillums bore holes into snow, spawning geysers of celestial cream. The grave diggers have all been scarred, and bound nurses drone like blizzard cones. Will nurses die? Your tidal breeze arches cold dread through my spine. Solder dross pelts sand and chips skin from my halluxes. Through binoculars, detached hands scale the lighthouse by the dozen. They point to where you store my slowly numbing chamber hearts...

JEFFREY MACLACHLAN

GRAFFITI HEXES

I. Train Cars

Gasp. Choke. Justice stuck. Battery box. Calorie crunch. Angels catch on. Blister whistles of blear-eyed tramps in solar dawns. Draugr always dying hard.

Jesus delirious from cocaine abuse. Boxcar children scattered loose across a graveyard. Skulls. Skulls. Skulls. Skulls. Lamps shaded with cowboy hats. Withdrawal.

II. Deer Tree Stand

One, two, five point buck. Six, twelve, thirty pack gone. No deer here in the woods. No kick here in this weed.

I'm a longbow hunter so I'm a real hunter no rifles no rimfire. Arrows string around and tangle others that have been lost here.

Dave and Leah forever. Scratch that.

Anne and Pete forever. Scratch that.

I return at night to find you all.

III. Subway Movie Poster

Commuters hunger

for escape while floors molest bottoms of feet.

No one read this.

IV. Barnes and Noble Bathroom

Fuck muslims, fuck faggots, fuck niggers, fuck jews.
Fuck Ellen for what she did to you.

This place is all hell.

For a good time call this number
don't call this number
only losers call this number.
I used this number on my pick 'em and won.

Monsters exhale from inside the hand dryer.
Apply inside. Apply inside. Apply inside.

JEFFREY MACLACHLAN

TELEPATHY

Quit putting thoughts in my head.

Elephant. Elephant. Elephant. Stop.

Elephants mourn and I can't mourn anymore dead.

The voice repeats when I close both eyelids
but I won't steal matchbooks or hunted tusks.
Quit putting thoughts in my head.

Can't you see what you're doing to my forehead dents?
They split and soften from slashes of blood.
Elephants mourn and I can't mourn anymore dead.

VA says I can't self medicate like it's not widespread.
My fireteam wasn't found but now stomp my vents in a furious musth
and only settle from the aquarium drone within my closet.

Jellyfish jiggle the handle and crave crystal. I never shared
when they were alive. You know. Vents know. Walls know.
Thoughts know.
Quit drifting as blue flames in my eyes.

I blinked and elephants flicker. I blinked and jellyfish bells
flow below doors with smoke. I blinked and every vent dropped.
Quit putting thoughts in my head.
Elephants mourn and I can't mourn anymore dead.

ERROL MILLER

MAYBE IN A HUNDRED YEARS

No longer
will I need poetry
the solace of it
a robot bird will squat
on the bridge of my nose
and talk with me, whimpering
whispering ballads of sad cafes
the wind, the rain, the road
to Shangri-La littered
with maiden-mucus
and rejection, I am listening
to church pistons
stalled Earth-Machines
loading the Starship with time capsules
I am listening to wise men pray
their pockets filled with red clay
and overdue bills
at the crossing, at the dotted line
an army of ants unloading baggage
watching them work I recalled
fireflies at twilight
and stories never written
kicking off my shoes
a kiln powered by pine knots pulsed
shredding the remnants of my poetry
you work all your life for recognition
I thought, closing an important era
as dogs barked and a man
in a pastel doorway smiled

ANTHONY SEIDMAN

NIGHTMARE: CRUMBLING TEETH

I spit them out as sleep asphyxiates me. I finger gums jagged like brick enclosures barbed with shards that protect the wealthy in the sweltering tropics. When heat rips me awake, I hear the police helicopter's flak-flak-flak, and the walls shudder as a search beam stabs the darkness, departs. I lick my teeth,—whole, unscathed. My room is a murky temple where no vowel opens to a conflagration. My questions sound like a rock plummeting through water and knocking at another rock on the riverbed: Is this the dream of financial insolvency? Omen of prolific disease or drought? Of a cot where fever grinds my teeth into relics kaleidoscopic of blar and erosion...a sleep in smithereens?

DIRECTIVE

Eat the poem from the spit. Fat still splissing on coals and fragrant smoke. Tear into the instant, your white teeth flashing. Think of the captive Gorilla who can sign, yet refuses to mate; or the dendrobatid frog—sapphire-blue and fatal to the touch—now trapped within a Plexiglas cage. Bereft of such prey as centipedes, mites, beetles, the frog no longer distills the chemicals for its venom. A boy could catch it in cupped palms, and crush.

ANTHONY SEIDMAN

SURELY MY LIFE FEEDS ON RADIATION

My life: the scroll unraveling
across atrium of a temple

it charts the circuitous
trail from human on asphalt to
human in cave to ape to rodent to amphibious
lizard slinking through
pumice rocks
leaving a mucus trail in which
cells evaporate into the
darkness where lifetimes click anew
under a different sun or
under no sun and
no lifetime but helium fleck adrift
in the palpable void between galaxies

I don't belong to this world or the adjacent

I don't belong and
that's the thunder



Michael Weston: *Black and White*

MICHAEL WESTON

FIGS AND DRUNKEN DOGS

Preamble:

(A nodding
nodding ham
on the floor
barbs for love
his mind adores)

figs and dogs
grims and grog
as night is long
we rows and plods
through twitch
and stitch

of various substances——
of which -you or you- is witch- boil and bubble
tell the white rabbit
we are coming

we rows and plods
and sews and saw
things and shapes
that squiggle on
and mate with yawning maws

see the garden there
(oh aspirate me)
there is where
(let me aspirate you)

I journeyed to a garden
soaked in wigs
and drunks and monkeyshine
down into the rabbit hole
of green
(can you hear me through
its fatness
hear me through its gristle and heavy skins)
I journeyed through a garden
with wigs and drunken dogs
coated with its yawning
and things grown down its arms,
with monkeys in long overcoats
and three blind mice a-railing
from their rowing boat
at all the insects with invectives
and stuff deep from in their throats
where the four and twenty baked
the sights —acid jelly dense

Oh dali boysen (bury)
the wigs of dogs
is calling
for you to join ___
us all in bedlam now and then
by hand or mouth
by weave or wend
by the blood of an Englishman

We journeyed through that garden
of fig-less drunken dogs
while the plane of our existence
bled off our derelict forms.
and you can have the gravy
and you can crave the sweets
and you can flay at venus
between the grimy sheets

oh grim frogs
oh wigged dogs
tell the white rabbit
we beat the drunken drum,
joined the mud.
and are bone and dumb.

The shadows stopped all movement
None stirs no sound they make
None of their antic remains
(Nor peeking of heads nor figures behind trees
Nor cavorting
Not writhing nor chasing after night
Just shade and dark
Left off of all action still and deaf to me ____
I am without).

So much for that garden journey
oh dogs and piggy noise
oh mice three blind and chopped—
tell the white rabbit
we have ripped
the sails
and drift about
bailing out the hours
in the bog of time.



t. kilgor splake: *Three*

CHET HART

THE HOUSE THAT FOLLOWED THE SKY WE'D LOST

I lived that frozen summer in a house
that was like the thorax of an unnamed

insect mapping my fear while I slept.
And the disappointment I kept in a notebook

where I went mining for weeks and found
no encouragement to continue,

none of my last friend's drifting, forgotten towns.
I couldn't find the windows,

and other than how I scratched the valleys inside
my pockets, the rooms lacked debauchery in every way.

No chairs, no telephone. I had eaten all the lamps
and my books were too dark to read.

The only sun was the light blinking from my stereo,
and it was never the correct time that summer.

I knew my parents hadn't made it this far.
There were letters and letters.

*Dear Bob, We tried to visit last week,
but your house was gone. Please advise.*

*Dear Bob, Are you alive on the internet somewhere?
Have you spoken to your sister? Love, Mom and Dad.*

I always woke to the noise the nothingness made:
the refrigerator melting into footprints,

the kitchen sink dripping,
dust colliding into smaller dust,

the roommate who lived as a fly
turning pages that sounded like bodies

being erased in a perverted loneliness.
The house trembled with an unsolved hunger.

I survived on bread that hadn't yet died.
And to make the walls less like walls

I marked them with chalk sunsets and flashlight sunrises.
Sometimes I heard the dimming of a woman's lips,

but it was just the badly beaten swaths of lightning.
I wrote a poem in which I found a friend

who survived the spider homicides.
We hid together from the next minute,

the next house's magma chambers,
the man there chewing his hands that might've only

been the crabs thriving in the wallpaper,
which we could both see from my desk as it lost its way.

MERCEDES LAWRY

ESS CURVE

Curl of an s, the serpent sound,
hiss finding a way between stones,
a curl, a slither,
the sweep of riverbend through flatland, through canyon.

Birds mimic and dare,
a lyric of wings emphasizing shadow,
the haze of a day-moon at the margin,
nick in sky. The deep earth shoulders its way loose.

Here, creature. There, place.
The symbiotic confusion only missing the eyes
of a dangerous stranger tilting in the heat,
shiny with salt.



Guy R. Beining: *Erect*

NITZAN BLOUIN

GIANT STORY

THE BIG EMPTY

The big empty was never a problem until I gave it a name. Before that, I didn't have to look unless it showed itself. It lives within, always open to the possibility of gain. A self-sufficient garbage processor that tears to shreds leftovers from daily meals.

It is easier to live in the loud than to carefully look into the quiet. If I walked fast enough I could pretend I forget to notice. When you come from the desert no typhoon is too hard to handle. Water equals abundance even if it create forms of decay.

Acts of being human are rare in Grand Station. The Cat and I saw so much mutual self-deliverance to a point of incurable stagnation. Even among those, the Giant stood out.

He was a large sized man, who came from the west wearing blue overalls and plaid shirt. He was keeping silent, chewing and spitting. Mesmerized by the coming and terrified by the going.

He couldn't move past a point right at the edge of the road. Every evening, defeated, he'd go back to the bench, knowing that another day traveled through him and he couldn't withstand the fear of the big empty inside of him.

DETAILS

When he first arrived at the Grand Station, The Giant didn't get off the bench. The air grew dark around him, as another circle was moving forward in the pink sky. The Cat and I returned to the station only after the doors were locked.

The Cat curled against me. The Giant was sitting on a bench nearby, unable to walk or sleep. He was observing immediate terror. His broken capillary-speckled fingers rustling against each other, his brown nails penetrating his skin. It takes a troubled girl to know. I listened with anticipation as he was spitting life tales into the cold air. It's been a while since anyone told me a bedtime story.

The Giant knew everything about green becoming yellow, and then brown, and then green again. Earth-matters turning into food.

“It used to be so simple,” he said, “It used to be simple until I saw death.” He continued, “Death was sitting in the corner over a stack of hay; he looked like he was possibly resting. He actually seemed calm. He had a big black cape belted with a thick rope. He wasn’t thin. His skin was whitish-gray. His face wrinkled and smooth at the same time. Like a deformed newborn baby. Thin, pale hair covered the sides of his forehead.

“He didn’t make a sound, and the animals didn’t notice him. He was gone within less than a minute. Then I saw my woman hanging from the ceiling. So I sold the farm and got a one-way ticket east and got off at Grand Station.”

His cracked blue eyes were staring through me. I realized what happened when it was too late. Suddenly, I lost every reason I had to hate myself. I couldn’t even cry. It felt so strange to be me. My hope was that *me* went away never to come back. I stretched under the bench. The Cat realigned against my lines. When I woke up in the morning the Giant was sleeping next to me.

LEARN TO DRESS YOURSELF

The Cat remained in his unrelated demeanor, governing his tidy kingdom of ashes. If you pretend it’s not happening, it’s definitely going on. We move, make pulses break, and float pieces of the inside out. Still the big empty doesn’t get full, it just gets bigger.

The Giant’s hair grew long and his beard wild. The overalls turned undistinguished brown and his eyes were tainted by pixilation. The retina broke into shiny pieces that moved faster than all the mirrors breaking in front of him. That man bore so much pain I forgot my own.

I watched him in his daily attempt to fail; crumbling, collecting footprints and used candy bar wrappers. I stood nearby when he was considering the best time to make the first step towards the other side of the road. His landscape was narrow for someone so tall. I couldn’t touch the space between his eyebrows or the top of his skull. His might fascinated me.

His fear was equally mixed with determination. Everyday he’d get up hoping that today would be the day when the on-going stream of cars would stop and he’d finally cross the road and continue on his way, although he no longer knew where he was going.

I saw the hope turning into dust and his sense of direction becoming scattered. We give up our wants, deeming them impossible too quickly.

He’d be baffled, then scared, then defeated. Spending his evenings paralyzed. In the night he’d finally trade terror with surrender. I wanted to curl into a ball in the palm of his hand and sink into dreamless sleep.

The Cat and I were in charge of collecting food and clean fluids. These were our *good ol' days*. We were covered in newspapers, bound by empty bottles and the delight of being forgotten. Happiness becomes a form of creation when you accept losing as part of the cosmic joke.

THE HOPE COLLECTION

His smell lingered in my nostrils, erasing the stench of human waste getting beat down by multiple footsteps. I crawled out from under the bench into a tunnel of long lost memories. Searching through nose lenses.

Smell of fresh water. Smell of earth in the daylight. Muffled smell of snow. And the smell of a day as the sun was setting. The smell of his skin and the breath he exhaled. I inhaled his exhales. His smell made me stay. Give it one day in August when things become putrid with sweat and liquid trash, and I would have been gone in a second.

The Cat and I begged, collecting bowls of alms from the coming and going, a half eaten sandwich, a small dead bird and a dime. There was still so much time for *breakfastlunchndinner*, I went back to smell if he was still there.

He was sitting on the bench, bigger than three men combined, looking at the cars passing by. Before he stood up, he pulled a fading handkerchief from his back pocket and wiped his forehead. He combed his hair back with his fingers. His nails weren't clipped. He knew something out of the ordinary was going to happen.

Then he walked towards the other side of the road, getting smaller and smaller as he moved. By the time he finished this ten-step journey, he shrunk to the size of a five-year-old, maybe five hundred. The Giant was small and helpless, his big eyes torn. The cars never stopped; they probably couldn't see him from the driver's seat.

He was watching them fly by as his dream was getting shattered. With each minute it became less possible. Every car that drove by took a piece of him under her speeding wheels, carrying him farther away from his soul.

After a short eternity he walked back to the bench. Growing bigger again, filling out his overalls, then wiping his palms on his thighs as he sat down on the bench. Back where he began. The Cat was glancing with disbelief. "Can we go now?"

I couldn't move. I was stuck to the floor. "Bubble-gum," I said, "It's not my fault."

The Cat nodded regally and a shine sparked his tail. He was much better at getting what he wanted. The Giant lost the hope that one day he'd be able to cross to the other side and I, I, had a big plastic bag with collected failures to show.

A BEGINNING OF AN END

Beauty is the shallowest truth to discover. It's also one of the most honest judges of time. I stick my chin up as I watch him climb and fall from his mountain. It's the least I can do.

"Can't you see it?" A silent scream escapes my lips and bounces back from my kidneys to the heart region. Even while non-uttering, I have to bend forward, breaking in half. Between being tall, being short, and being scared, can't he see the spaces in between?

The Cat was laughing uncontrollably. Rolling on his back with his tail swinging from right to left, left to right. A passerby rewards him his lunch for mocking my pain. The rule of cause and effect is in-doubt.

By the time I stand straight lunch is gone and The Cat urges me to be done with my observations. He shows sincere concerns, but the only way I move forward is back.

The Cat recognizes a call to the battlefield. He rises to the challenge by walking away, leaving behind a trail of satisfied needs. I am hungry. The Giant is wiping his forehead again.

ABOUT NOT MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The Giant crossed the road. He didn't make it to the other side. I didn't see it, I smelled it; Red blood mixed with gasoline, layered by gravel dust. Eventually the unidentified stain dried and in a few days, it was invisible, perfectly blended into the beaten road.

He still looked surprised when they found him, so I guess the lack of hope was my own. He died facing down. The cars rolled him flat to the ground. He was as thin as a leaf and as small as a child.

I inevitably fell apart. My legs crumbled under me, after years and months and weeks and days of wondering under the great skies of Grand Station, like an eraser at the end of a pencil. I am a walking torso displayed with looks of horror.

The Cat removed himself when I started to stink. He is a firm believer in *breakfastlunchndinner* and follows them wherever they go. I toggle between bones and nothing and I crawl under the bench, close my eyes, and pretend no one can see me. Like the rest of us I am walking in circles. If I were eating only vegetables, maybe things would have gone differently.

REBECCA LILLY

THE CANNIBAL KING'S SKULL

The cannibal king's skull, excavated from quick-sands of a swamp, left a crack where it was touched by human hands: an odd-enough fact for scientists to donate it, gladly.

The skull found a home in a British natural history museum, where visitors often ask what it is. "That *couldn't* be a hominid skull," tourists will often remark. "The incisors look unworn." Even the curator stops short.

Sunday mornings after the Episcopal sermon, a bus of village ladies pulls up, and white-haired crones, hard of hearing, wander and squint in semi-darkness.

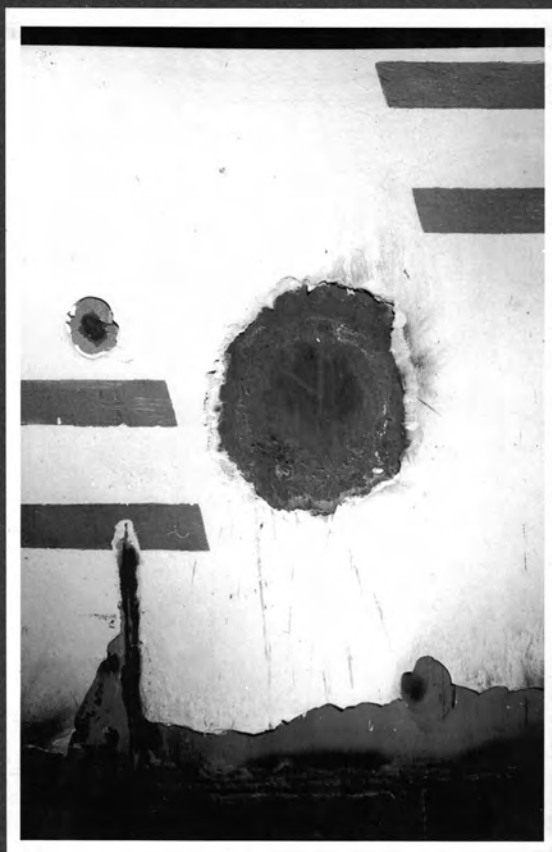
"My Lord, Betty, what a skull! Gorgeous, isn't it? Would you believe? Look at those ferocious teeth! Aren't these old bones wonderful?"

The gawky custodian, a beatnik wannabe, records their dialogues in his black leather notebook. He skulks over, watching ever more closely through his bottle-thick glasses, wondering, imagining the horrors. In his shirt is a crow's foot for luck.

No questions yet for the custodian! Scribbling the skull with his brush pen, bug-eyed, with spittle on his lip, he shuffles over, mustering the courage to interrupt: "One night, you oughtta watch it glow in the dark!"

The ladies glare at him, without pity or interest in his muttering, and walk on. Most are put off by his forwardness, his dwarf size, and not least of all, the weirdness of his love. Disappointed, he scuttles back to the corner where he's from...

...in his book, the skull fractures mimic cobwebs; spiders, the eyes of the king's beheaded sons.



Alois Nozicka: *Nine*

JIŘÍ KLOBOUK

THIRD WIFE

At the end of April 1945, brains trickled from a smashed skull on the pavement. A Russian troop transport had run over a dog in the town square; his master, a boy, buried him with a chewed-up tennis ball near a chestnut lane by the iron bridge. He got the nickname Harry from his friends right after the burial. That had been the dog's name. Years later Harry towered over everyone in crowded rooms. He wore a tweed jacket, corduroy pants and sneakers without laces. He had combed his dark hair like President Kennedy. He wanted to escape from this communist paradise and become a piano player in New York. His first performance was in a Dixieland band in Prague on a steamship that churned through the Vltava River. In the winter when the river froze over Harry sat at a piano countless nights in bars and hotel salons. He indulged in the fantasy that he had dazzling technique that would drive girls crazy and into marrying him. Life without love was an unbearable emptiness. Years after on a late night broadcast, he heard a jam session by the pianist Oscar Peterson. His virtuosity was unsurpassable. Harry, who was almost thirty, lost his desire to touch the keyboard again. He wandered about aimlessly. One day he found a refuge in a local library. After reading William Saroyan's *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze*, he traded the piano for a typewriter and began to write radio plays. The first was about two postal employees at retirement age. One had a bulbous nose and spent most of his work days fantasizing about criminal deeds. He would put a black stocking over his head and rob a bank, squandering the stolen money on large-breasted women in a Parisian bordello near the Eiffel Tower. When his colleague heard that, he pissed himself laughing. Of course, the dreamer with the bulbous nose never got to Paris. He had a stroke in the filthy bathroom. The lesson of Harry's play was clear—if a man has a wonderful dream, no one should laugh at him for it might kill him.

Harry met Magda not long after his play was broadcast on the Prague radio. She sent him a letter saying that she had been mesmerized by his drama and proposed a meeting at the main post office near Wenceslaus Square. Harry would recognize her by the Air Mail sticker stuck to her forehead. Magda, with her blond hair cut short, had a navy blue blouse fastened at the neck. She reached up to his chest. They sat in the park on a bench near a rose bush. Butterflies, bees, and hummingbirds flew around.

Magda inhaled the intoxicating aroma. With her eyes shut she rested her head on his shoulder. When Harry mentioned that a cloud in the sky had the shape of a gigantic hippopotamus, she proclaimed it was the snowy peak of Kilimanjaro. She was out of the ordinary. As it would turn out, she was just out of her mind.

Harry's future wife Magda lived with her mother in the suburbs and was working on a novel, which she did mostly at night. She wouldn't tell him what it was about, but it took place in Africa. Three weeks after the wedding, in 1968, the allied forces hurried in to suppress the counter-revolution. Red Army soldiers once again occupied Prague. The newlyweds stuffed two suitcases and embarked for Canada. Life in a new country depressed Magda. The doctor prescribed medication but her condition did not improve. She was terribly homesick but kept writing the African novel. One day Harry found her curled up weeping uncontrollably. On page two hundred and forty-six a lion had eaten the main hero in the Namibian desert. There wasn't even a finger bone left. As years went by Magda searched desperately for a new protagonist. The unrelenting state of her illness became a part of Harry's life. The crisis came to a climax at their daughter Karla's wedding in the Uniqua hotel in Montreal. She tried jumping out of a fourth-story window.

Magda never returned home from the mental institution. Whenever Harry visited her, she spat in his face. He wiped the spit off with his sleeve, took her hands in his and spoke Czech to her how they had met at the main post office in Prague. She was the mother of their two children. He visited regularly over the years, mostly on Fridays. When he realized that Magda would never remember him again, he kissed her on the forehead one last time. Karla moved with her husband to California. His son Jan taught English in Prague after the fall of the iron curtain. When Harry divorced Magda, he was sixty-seven years old.

When a black man on the sidewalk plucked out the blues on a guitar with a steel hook in place of his right hand it inspired Harry to write another play involving the life of a bar pianist. An accident on a Harley Davidson mutilated his arm. Harry collected material in nightclubs. He sipped gin and listened to music and people talking. One night around midnight the pianist at the Blue Rose Bar tripped over a patron's outstretched leg, hit a chair and broke his jaw. Harry offered to substitute for him. He met Evelyn, playing Sweet Lorraine. When he opened his eyes, she was sighing in his face. "You really know how to move your fingers, Harry!" she addressed him.

She had enormous glasses on her nose, a mouth full of crooked teeth, and sucked her drink through a straw between her thin violet-tinted lips. Originally from Vancouver, her ex-husband was a Pakistani. Later in the morning in her soft, perfumed bed, she reassured Harry that though her sexual life was hectic, she visited her doctor regularly. Undoubtedly it was

a subject suitable for dramatization. This time he would be playing the leading role.

A month later they celebrated their marriage in a house with a view of the lake. They held hands on the terrace overlooking a beach filthy with droppings of the wild geese headed south for the winter. Evelyn swore Harry was the best man she'd ever had. She promised to transfer half of her apartment into his name so he would feel at home. There were about twenty guests. Most of them were Evelyn's old lovers. They patted him on the back and winked at him. Harry did not understand how she had become his second wife so quickly. Most likely it was a reaction to his devastating life with Magda. They went to Italy for their honeymoon. In Pompeii Evelyn pointed at a fresco in an antique bordello. "Get it, Harry?" she cried out. "The Romans screwed as passionately then as we do now!"

His Canadian wife disappeared now and then for a week or two. Upon her return she explained her absence in extended monologues. Most were about the impossibility of walking the length of the Great Wall of China in one day. Once after returning from Shanghai she proclaimed that she would buy a ping-pong table and hire a trainer. Harry listened to her tirades with an increasing revulsion. They sat on the couch in their own corners and sipped wine. Hers was white, Harry's red. He stared blankly at the abstract painting on the opposite wall. It was a gift from one of her old admirers. A multi-colored blob stood out over a squiggle. It looked like an elephant's trunk. Harry suggested a divorce. Those were two years of his life wasted.

He was seventy, collected a small pension, and had a few dollars in the bank. Having arrived at a crossroads where four roads led in as many directions, he didn't think long about which way to go. He wanted to follow his dream of life in a city which beat with the rhythm of his beloved music. Perhaps someone in New York would understand his delicate situation and his complicated life.

The following evening he headed for a News&Magazine outlet on Roxy Street. A personal ad in the *American Book Review* caught his eye immediately. Myrna liked jazz, and listed Franz Kafka, Freud, Gerry Mulligan and Philip Glass among her favorite people. Harry would have been happy if she had included J. D. Salinger. He read his novel *The Catcher in the Rye* at least once a year, usually around Christmas. Maybe this was because it took him a long time to disengage from the emotional rollercoaster of puberty.

Myrna included her e-mail address. When he replied later that night, he introduced himself as a man who had carried a blurry picture of the New York skyscrapers in his pocket for as long as he could remember. Jazz had opened the gates of art for him. "To come clean, my unknown dear," he tapped on the keyboard, "life is not life without the chance to share that beauty around us with someone else." He even added the sentence: "If it

comes down to it, dear Myrna, would you go to the altar with me?" He deleted the question before he sent the message. His wife was still Evelyn the Canadian, who was snoring in the next room.

Myrna soon responded; she was a psychotherapist, lived in a suburb of New York City and came into Manhattan at least twice a week. She had been a widow for nine years. They agreed that in addition to music they both liked red wine, gorgonzola cheese, the smell of lilacs, cooking with garlic, and walks on the beach. Harry had always been over six feet, but had gotten a little shorter with age. Myrna was neither thin nor fat, had salt and pepper hair and used to play the trombone in the student band at a Queens high school. Just like Harry, she had two children and two grandchildren. His last radio play had been about a pianist who willed himself to learn to play with a crippled hand, and one of Myrna's patients lost three fingers working in a chocolate factory. Suddenly it spilled out of Harry that he had two unstable wives, and in fact he was still living with one of them in Montreal.

He couldn't sleep all night worrying that he would never hear from Myrna again. Surprisingly, she wrote the next day that she had forgotten to add the piquant taramosalata to her list of favorite spreads. She bought it at David's cheese shop and delicatessen at the corner of Third Avenue and Twenty-seventh Street. It had been there since 1862. A yellow neon sign hung over the door for Swiss Emmental. Harry was curious to see if they sold herrings packed in wine sauce. Had Myrna ever been to Prague? She hadn't, but she would love to visit it sometime. Had Harry ever been to New York? The last time was a couple of months before the terrorists attacked the Twin Towers. Myrna replied that she would be his guide next time he came.

Harry immediately set a trip for the following Saturday. When his daughter Karla called from California on Friday evening she was concerned. He pretended that his radio play *Breathing* had a chance of being stage-read at one of the smaller off-Broadway theaters. It was just a matter of agreeing on the details with the director. He was rather old to be lying so blatantly.

The International Hostel on Twentieth Street cost thirty-eight dollars a night. The lodgers were students and unshaven tramps from all over the world, packs on their backs. He became one of them for two nights. There was a sink without soap in a room the size of a shoebox. Harry bought a smallish bar, green in color, in a drugstore around the corner for a dollar and thirty cents.

It was the end of April, and Manhattan warmed in the sun. Myrna planned to meet him with a red umbrella in her hand under the large clock in the main hall of Grand Central. On the way he stopped at a florist's. As always, Harry wore a tweed jacket and gray corduroy trousers. He traded

the laceless sneakers for brown loafers. They recognized each other instantly. She looked the way she had described herself. Her hair was streaked with silver. Her smile was a revelation. They agreed beforehand to embrace regardless of their first impression. He gave her a rose. It was violet with yellow edges. Her eyes gleamed. Walking on Forty-second Street, they turned north on Fifth Avenue and continued along the eastern edge of Central Park. The traffic noise prevented them from having a flowing conversation.

There was a long line at the Jewish Museum for the Modigliani exhibition. A thin elderly woman with a wide orange straw hat explained to her chubby companion that his portraits of women with oval faces were simply fascinating.

They approached the entrance in step.

Myrna said: "Fred Hersch is a great jazz pianist."

"His name means nothing to me," Harry admitted.

"Surprise. We're seeing him tonight. I bought two tickets. Is that all right, Harry?"

"Of course."

Harry met Myrna less than two hours ago, but he felt comfortable talking to her about anything. He had the urge to run his fingers through her curly hair and taste her full lips. She could be Greek. Dark circles under her eyes added to her sensuality. Her suggestive voice intrigued him. She spoke rather quickly in long sentences.

"You're Jewish?" he blurted out.

"Everyone thinks that I'm Spanish," she grinned.

"So you're Jewish?" he asked again.

"Shalom," she replied. She opened her purse and smelled Harry's rose. "Thank you, Harry," she said. "It's beautiful."

They occasionally lost each other walking through the exhibition rooms, and then suddenly met at one of the pictures.

"This one looks like my mother," Myrna pointed at the seated Jeanne Hébuterne.

Harry's eyes circled the walls. He didn't see his mother or father.

"Is she alive?"

"She was from another world," she replied.

Myrna reserved their first dinner together at an Italian restaurant. She had just touched the bottle of Chianti when Harry clasped her hand to indicate that he would fill their glasses. She smiled. Harry ordered veal, Myrna fish. They spoke about how to define hunger. Was it a mere physiological urge to fill an empty stomach? Or the fear that one would not survive the day without eating? They passed on dessert. When the waiter removed their empty plates, Myrna placed her hand on his. Had he ever lived through anything unimaginable as a boy?

“When the war started I was a child,” he replied, “and children at play don’t understand that barbarity co-exists with paradise.”

Fred Hersch’s virtuosity was a vision for him. The pianist’s interpretation of “Mood Indigo,” Harry’s favorite tune, was mirrored by a depiction of nature—mountains, oceans, vegetation, the sky. At that moment their hands joined, and their intertwined fingers stayed in firm contact the rest of the evening.

The next afternoon they walked through Manhattan. The Statue of Liberty wielded her torch, welcoming all arrivals. In Battery Park, clowns and musicians entertained visitors. The empty hole where the Twins stood left them breathless. They went on to Little Italy through Chinatown, full of paper dragons. After hours of walking, they sat on a bench in Central Park. Japanese newlyweds on the green grass under an ash tree smiled into the lens of a camera.

Myrna said: “Do you know what, Harry? I don’t want to get married again. And you shouldn’t get married either. A third time! Lord, do you collect wives?”

At one-thirty they stood under the clock in Grand Central. They had known each other for twenty-four hours. Harry had a flight at five that evening out of Kennedy airport. Myrna removed her lips from his with agonizing slowness. She slipped away down a dark corridor. It took effort for him to move from his place. Harry had never in his long life been kissed like Myrna had kissed him.

At seven the next morning in Montreal Harry was awakened by a noise from the kitchen. Evelyn was emptying the dishwasher. He got out of bed and groggily asked her to stop. Instead of responding she called 911. When the police arrived, Evelyn went out into the hallway with one officer. The second one put handcuffs on Harry. He sat in his dressing gown on a chair by the dining room table and looked at the young man with the pistol on his belt.

“Out with the truth, man,” he ordered him.

“A racket awoke me.”

“What racket?”

“She was emptying the dishwasher at seven in the morning.”

“And then?”

“I asked her to stop.”

“You hit her?”

Harry looked quietly at him.

“Listen, graybeard,” the Canadian cop said. “I’m in charge, got it? What do you do?”

“I write radio plays.”

“And what good is that?”

“Our imagination knows no bounds,” Harry replied. “And the radio

sends out sounds which can be visualized in the mind. When we hear a horse trotting, we imagine its majestic movement. And when a voice says the horses are flying, we imagine them rising to the heavens. And when the narrator begins to describe prisoners on the way to the gas chambers, that journey appears before our eyes.”

The policeman laughed. “Then it’s clear to me, brother, why your wife called. Don’t move. I’m going to go check on your story.” He turned in the doorway. “No one listens to crap from the radio anymore, man! We have television for that!”

Harry looked at the disarray on the table. Overturned vitamin bottles and Evelyn’s toothbrush, toothpaste dripping off it. He composed a letter to Myrna in his head. He compared their farewell in Grand Central to a scene in the film *Casablanca*. Their meeting revolved in his head like a colored speck in a rotating kaleidoscope. Her lips, the black-and-white keyboard played by Fred Hersch’s fingers, her smile, skyscrapers, Modigliani, Mood Indigo.

The doors opened. The two officers were escorting Evelyn.

“That’s all, folks,” Harry’s policeman rubbed his hands. “You have five hours to cool down somewhere by the river where you can blow off steam. When you get back be careful it doesn’t happen again. Or you’ll be up shit creek. Mainly you, the radio man.”

Harry returned to New York the day before the Fourth of July. He caught a bus from the airport to Grand Central. Myrna was waiting for him there. When they embraced, she said: “I’m inviting you to lunch, Harry.”

“Chinese?”

“Kosher, at my place.”

The trip from Manhattan to the suburb of Larchmont took twenty-five minutes. They were shadowed by grown maples and oaks and the rooftops of majestic estates. Myrna’s house was two stories with a view of the bay. They kissed as soon as he set down his baggage. Myrna pushed him away.

“Mister, I don’t even know you,” she said.

“My name is Harry.”

“Of course, Harry,” she laughed. “But you could be a Republican!”

“I’m hungry,” he replied.

“Harry,” Myrna embraced him. “You know I’m a therapist – openness is very important to me. What are you thinking?”

“Where I’m going to sleep tonight.”

She grinned. “You have a reservation here, mister!”

Myrna prepared mushroom soup and slices of sautéed beef with carrots, prunes and sweet potatoes. They ate slowly, enjoying every morsel. At times set their silverware down and raised their wineglasses, looking at each other. Harry cleared his throat. They should have met long before, he said and apologized for the delay. He thanked Myrna for her understanding.

His financial situation wasn't exactly the best but he could cover his expenses. Maybe one of his radio plays would interest a producer at Paramount. They'd make a thriller out of it and make him a rich man.

When they lay in bed, the blinds let in a little bit of light from the street. Harry asked Myrna if she normally slept in a nightshirt. She replied that usually she did, but tonight was different. Maybe it would be a lasting exception, she whispered. Harry explained that he would never be able to fall asleep in pajamas and would toss until morning. He wondered if Myrna was ever bashful. She admitted that she normally wasn't, but right now she was a little. They babbled like children. It was their first night together and they were afraid. They lay motionless next to each other until Harry moved closer to Myrna. They began kissing. Their arms and legs intertwined. Myrna's long neck was where the road of love began. With the tip of his tongue he awoke a hidden longing in her. They headed for an unknown land together. When Harry wandered, Myrna showed him the way.

The next morning, on Independence Day, Myrna took him to the bay after breakfast. From the rocky bank they saw sailboats bobbing on the water.

That evening they watched fireworks from the terrace.

Myrna said: "You don't know how happy I am, Harry."

"Old age deepens our feelings."

"I waited so very long for you."

The following day they drove to Manhattan. The goal of their trip was David's cheese shop and delicatessen. Myrna had been meeting her friends there for six years every other Sunday at three in the afternoon. There was a small dining room in the back surrounded by azure blue Portuguese tiles. Myrna introduced Harry as an old friend from school. Her friends smiled. They knew she had an ad in the *American Review of Books*, and it seemed that she had finally found her man.

Paul and Hannah, Thelma and Rick, and Josh and Vicki sat around two glass tables. Harry found an empty chair between Paul and Hannah. His life's journey interested them. He stated he wrote radio plays and was passionate about jazz. A long time ago he worked in television. First in Prague, then in Canada. Everyone except Rick had visited Prague. He said Europe could go to hell as far as he was concerned, waving his hands. He had lost a dozen relatives in concentration camps.

Myrna whispered into Harry's ear: "New York is full of us. You're the only uncircumcised one, sir."

Thelma brought a tray groaning with cheeses, taramosalata and herrings. Vicki ran off for an herbal spread. They ate with their usual gusto. Hannah recently returned from Strassbourg, where she had fallen in love with choucroute. She inhaled deeply as she recalled the aroma of sliced kielbasa and beef drowning in beer. Paul closed his eyes and reminisced about paella in Seville.

Harry was intrigued by Paul, who had worked in Germany in the seventies for Radio Free Europe. He remained six years but never felt comfortable among the descendants of the so-called master race. He loved his work and had hoped to see freedom for millions of people behind the iron curtain. Hannah would rather die than live under a totalitarian regime. She admired Harry. He found his way to New York, the most fantastic city in the world.

Another good-bye awaited Harry and Myrna. They held hands, sitting on the couch, his suitcase by the door. The need for love increases as the time decreases, said Myrna. We must not lose one another or nothing will make sense any more.

Harry arrived in Montreal much later than he expected. His flight was delayed for technical reasons. His home key would no longer fit into the keyhole. Evelyn had changed the locks. Around midnight he called a locksmith. Getting in cost him eighty-six dollars. The apartment was empty. He fell asleep instantly after showering.

Three days later he found Evelyn tipsy at the door. She called him an idiot in the course of her usual tirade. Harry was a communist masquerading as an anti-communist or a neo-Nazi who pretended they had hung his father for helping several Jews escape the gas chambers. Not to mention her friend Samuel Atkinson who was writing the libretto for an opera inspired by her sorrowful life. In a final rage the main heroine sweeps away all the villains responsible for her misery with the blast of a hand grenade. At the very least she wanted him out of the apartment before the divorce. She would like to re-establish her life.

“I want to sell the apartment,” she told him, “but no one’s buying it. You know why? Because you’re stinking it up!”

Her aggression grew. If Harry left the apartment for good he would legally lose what little belonged to him. He expected Evelyn to do everything to make sure he got nothing. He sent Myrna a message that evening that he would come to New York as soon as possible. She suggested they meet halfway in New Hampshire for a week at the Black Horse & White Swan. They would be surrounded by the mountains, trees, and flowers.

The trip from Canada to New Hampshire seemed endless. Harry stopped once at an Esso station to gas up. The second time the police flagged him down. He arrived at the Bed and Breakfast after driving for seven and a half hours.

Myrna was sleeping in a wicker chair in the yard, her lips lightly parted. Her head was resting on her left shoulder. He kissed her forehead. Her eyes opened. There was emptiness in them, as if she did not recognize him. Finally a smile covered her hesitation.

“Harry,” she said, “I thought you’d never get here.”

“The police stopped me for speeding.”

“How much was it?”

“I told them I was in a hurry because I’m in love with you.”

“You’re teasing me,” she laughed.

They wandered about every day like children unable to concentrate on anything concrete. Myrna reached for a violet flower and fell into the bushes. When Harry helped her to her feet, she was holding the flower in her teeth and ran over to a huge birch tree. She was quite serious about building an Indian canoe from the bark to paddle on a fast moving river.

They made love before the break of day, going without food when they missed breakfast. Then it rained. They explored the rooms in the house. Pictures hung in heavy engraved frames on walls sooty with smoke from the fireplace. Mahogany shelves sagged under their burden of yellowing books. Harry discovered a worn piano under a musty cover in the living room. He played Stardust while sitting on a rickety chair. When he changed the melody to Summertime, Myrna leaned over the battered keyboard. Her silky voice made his fingers tremble. The rain filled each room with the fragrance of fresh air. A woolly fog enveloped the field and covered the gaps between the trees.

They found a refuge on a sofa in a remote corner of the house. They fell into the unknown in its soft upholstery. Myrna snuggled in Harry’s embrace. She whispered she was afraid but didn’t know why. They were living a fairy tale with an uncertain ending. Harry was confident about loving and happy years ahead. New York is jazz, he said, and jazz is music, and music is you and I.

They raced to their bedroom. Harry filled their glasses with California Merlot. There was a feeling of other-worldliness as they sipped wine and looked at each other.

“I love you for three reasons,” Harry told Myrna. “For your passion, you bring life into whatever you touch; for your restless spirit, which constantly seeks fulfillment; and lastly your Jewishness which became part of my history long before we met. My next play will be about us.”

“The two of us somewhere sometime?”

“Yes. You and I. Two children playing in a sandbox in a park, building a castle. Your little bucket is red, mine is blue. Each morning we come to the park from different directions. I’m seven. You’re five. My hair is blond. Yours is dark and curly. One day you don’t show up. Not the next or the next.

“What happened to me?”

“You vanished from my life for a time.”

“Radio is magical,” sighed Myrna.

The next morning they parted at the edge of a busy intersection. Myrna headed south, Harry north. A few hours later, after crossing the Canadian

border, he fell asleep at the wheel. The highway before him turned orange for a split second. It crumpled sharply upwards. Emptiness enveloped him. He heard a helicopter thumping. Evelyn bent over him at the hospital. She disappeared as soon as he took a breath.

He broke his left shoulder and several ribs. His face was swollen and bloody. Daughter Karla flew in from California with his grandson Matt. Jan called from Prague to offer them his apartment. Harry typed Myrna a message with his right hand reassuring her he's OK. I just couldn't hold you in my arms right now. But I could kiss you any time."

"You madman," she replied. "How frightening to think there would be no more us."

Three weeks later Harry flew to New York. He took the train from the airport to Larchmont and walked with Myrna at twilight to their usual places. The end of summer was approaching. They fed the ducks at the edge of Long Island Sound. And just then Myrna started to speak of marriage.

"I've decided that I'll marry you, Harry," she said.

"Am I awake or am I dreaming?"

"I'm terrified at the thought of losing you."

The next Sunday driving to Manhattan they planned the wedding for the end of September. Myrna listed eighteen guests, including both families. The usual crowd were waiting for them at David's delicatessen. Mouths full, they inspected Harry's bruises. Paul mentioned that there were highways in Germany with no speed limit. For many the automobile became their final resting place. When Myrna announced that she proposed to Harry, they all stood up, cheering. David the owner hurried in with a bottle of champagne. Myrna cried and Hannah wiped away her tears. Josh said he would have wept, but he had been married four times and doubted that another wedding could make any sense.

Harry's second wife Evelyn wrote that she had sold the Montreal apartment. There were a few thousand dollars left over for him. His injured shoulder knitted together slowly. He exercised it every day, but he fatigued easily. Myrna saw her patients on the ground floor. He wrote upstairs. Today proceeded into tomorrow uneventfully. They no longer had thoughts of separation. The intensity of their love deepened each night they went to sleep and each morning they awoke. Life has a beginning and an end and the time in between is filled with searching. Harry found his American wife, Myrna.

One afternoon they began talking about the personal and impersonal. Myrna loved her work but thoughts of retirement became more urgent. We'll sell the house, she told Harry, move to the city and indulge ourselves in the abundance New York has to offer. She also wanted to read again all the books by Philip Roth in her library. Harry confessed he'd like to write

a stage play about an immortal love. Something like *Romeo and Juliet* but contemporary, without the balcony. They laughed and sipped tea from tiny cups and Harry suppressed her laughter with a kiss. She whispered that the most important thing is to take care of each other.

Myrna was often awakened by the same dream. She described it to Harry; she lost control at the wheel of a car and was hanging over the edge of a cliff. A strange young man smiled from the bottom of the abyss. He was tall and thin and wore a long snow-white coat with an upturned collar. Golden hair hung from a knit cap onto his shoulders. The man was waiting for the car to tip and for her to fall. She recalled Freud stating that in prehistoric times many people considered dreams to be warnings, or to foretell future events. This worried Myrna.

“You know, honey,” she said, “ I wonder why that man had such an odd smile. I hope he doesn’t exist.”

“That’s disturbing,” replied Harry. “Let’s dream about the life we have before us.”

Myrna treated patients at her home several times a week. She was both energized and exhausted after trying to help people with their agony and sadness. One day when she was working, Harry took the thirty minute train ride to Grand Central. His long walk on Broadway to Battery Park led him to the Staten Island ferry. Standing on the rear ramp he saw the Manhattan skyline receding into the background of the blue sky. His gaze kept returning to the emptiness where the Twin Towers had stood.

The final draft of his radio play, *Two Somewhere Sometime*, was almost completed. Harry used a number of sound illustrations to involve the listener. Soldiers marched. Metal-shod boots struck the pavement. Planes roared flying over the advancing army. Bombs exploded destroying their targets. Gradually, almost inconspicuously, the chaos blended with the innocent voices of two children playing in the sandbox. The boy and the girl were filling their empty buckets with sand, building a castle together. Their laughter was like two spoons hitting an empty glass. The girl whispered that she had to pee and headed for the bushes. The little boy went into the bushes himself. Nothing else was happening. Just marching soldiers, roaring airplanes, explosions and peeing children. Their innocence and fragility. Their incoherent way of thought. Harry introduced a female narrator into the play. A mother’s voice. She accompanied the listener on this road of terrors. She described the play taking place against a white wall. “Imagine a white sheet,” she says, “slowly coloring with blood, spreading like a drop of ink soaking into blotting paper.”

Harry and Myrna were married at her sister’s apartment on Saturday at the end of September. Family and friends attended. David, the delicatessen owner, brought a basket of goodies. Rabbi Volkowitz performed the ceremony with humor. A three-piece band played klezmer.

Paul, Hannah, Thelma, Rick, Josh, and Vicky sang and danced. It was a fantastic day. At midnight Myrna and Harry went off into the starry night in a horse drawn carriage.

The newlyweds flew to Prague for their honeymoon. Harry showed Myrna the city which he had left years before. Everything had changed. They walked, holding hands, from the Old Town Square past droves of Italians and Japanese down crowded streets towards the Charles Bridge. Music was everywhere. They went to the Magic Flute. Myrna was anxious to visit Kafka's grave and the Jewish quarter. She thought of the yellowed photographs and volumes of letters as imprints of the souls of her ancestors. Hundreds of gravestones leaned towards each other in the extensive cemetery. For Myrna they were books made of stone piled high over the centuries. Waterfalls of multi-colored flowers cascaded through the royal gardens. On the Vltava River white swans circled around one with black feathers. Myrna described Prague as a place where history and artistic brilliance created a great beauty. She lamented that the wonders of the contemporary world are subjected to destruction.

The Sunday after they returned from Europe the Manhattan sky was overcast. Myrna and Harry drove down Broadway looking for a lighting store. Myrna wanted to replace the old fashioned chandelier in the living room. When they danced the evening before Myrna sang Only You. After two glasses of red wine they decided to reserve tickets for a trip to the moon.

They had an exciting day in front of them. The first stop would be David's delicatessen. Their friends would be waiting for them in the back room seated at round tables, but this time they couldn't stay long. At four o'clock they planned to see the film *Impending Doom* in the Village. The review in the *New York Times* interested them. It described a gallery owner from Houston traveling to Sweden on an ocean liner to visit her husband Alfred. He was a guest conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra in Göteborg. Whenever the boat anchored in a harbor, the film went from the present to the past and depicted a disturbing historical event. The tension intensified in a web of initially meaningless coincidences. Without understanding the reason, the gallery owner felt increasingly anxious. Not far from Göteborg terrorists blew up the ship.

After the movie Myrna and Harry had reservations at the restaurant where they had their first dinner. The last stop would be at the jazz club Blue Note. It was to be a special day full of activity. Yet they couldn't shake off an uneasy feeling. It was three o'clock and they were looking for a parking space. After circling several times they double parked outside David's delicatessen.

Myrna said, "Harry, dear, wait for me in the car. I'll greet our friends and buy all the goodies. Don't get impatient."

She was back a minute later. When Harry rolled down the window, she stuck her head inside and gave him a kiss. “Everyone’s there eating Roquefort and Cheddar. Josh ordered chicken soup. They send you hugs and kisses. What sort of pâté do you want?”

Harry’s eyes wandered past Myrna. A young man with long blond hair on the sidewalk was wearing a snow-white coat with an upturned collar. But something wasn’t right. He was tall and gaunt but under his coat bulged a fat belly. Harry remembered Myrna’s dream. She hung in the car at the edge of a cliff. An unknown man smiled up at her from below. This man stood by a blue Ford parked at the curb. When he smiled a dark hole appeared instead of teeth. Harry hesitated momentarily but then told Myrna that the mushroom pâté was his favorite. She kissed him again and walked to the shop. The man followed her.

Scarcely had Harry unbuckled to run after them when an explosion rocked the air. The Toyota lifted up and landed in the middle of the avenue, and the blue Ford flipped onto its roof. Harry raced out of the car. Whirling dust was everywhere. Shards of glass and brick filled the air. Flying debris bombarded Harry. He got no further than the sidewalk. Flames shot out from the delicatessen. He gazed through the fiery inferno in the hope that Myrna would emerge. David’s delicatessen had turned into a crematorium.

Harry limped into the middle of Third Avenue. The police arrived. Firemen struggled to extinguish the flames. It was a scene reminiscent of the war.

He was one of hundreds of witnesses.

Someone addressed him: “Hey, geezer, you know you’re bleeding?”

Harry moistened his fingers in a sticky spot on his neck. They turned red. “That’s taramosalata,” he said.

As the towing crew loaded up Myrna’s smashed Toyota, Harry started moving. He stumbled along aimlessly. He followed his instinct like a migratory bird. Three times on the way someone stopped to say he was bleeding. He heard the same thing in Bryant Park. Each time he thanked the passersby for their concern.

It was beginning to get dark when he finally reached Grand Central. For a while he stood in the concourse under the glowing clock with the big display. It was here that they had kissed for the first time. The time was 6:47. Harry had to sit down. He found a place on the stairs. Every step had two dark anti-skid grooves. He waved off a passerby’s remark that he was bleeding. They called him old man. It bothered him. He leaned his head against the railing. Every minute he became a little weaker. The will to struggle for something in life had abandoned him.

Harry felt all around him is real, only he was an outsider. Trains arrive and depart. After a day full of work comes the time for rest. People hurry home to put their children to bed and cuddle with someone who loves them.

When a waving Myrna appears in the depths of the corridor he imagines she is a fairy. As she approaches, Harry stumbles to be near her. They embrace and kiss.

“He is gone,” somebody said as they loaded him on the gurney.

Harry screamed that he was alive, but no one paid attention. He was on the boundary of everything and nothing. A cold wind howled down a narrow tunnel. He found himself in a place with no beginning or ending, no entrance or exit.

DENNIS SALEH

ARRANGEMENT IN YELLOW

In the East, where the sun rises,
lies a prodigious wealth of yellow,
a yellow people, a yellow continent.
Upon a Yellow Sea, drifting down
a Yellow River, in delicate skiffs, on
a parasol junk upon a Perfume River,
Celestials, crowded shores, feting night,
with an industry, an art, of explosions.
“Yellowworks,” in Tung Yi dialect,
munitions artficed for the sparking
clap of wonder at the heart of ignition.
The sky is yellow and bursting with
golden fountains and flaring stars
from fiery mortars assailing the moon.
All echoing in pools of shy water
with ghost balls of gilt and glitter,
yellow fists of gliding koi in lily pads.
The dainty yellow sneeze of a ladyfinger
firecracker in a paper alley intimates
seductive heights of delirium, secret vice,
“Yellowgrey,” gunpowder and poppy.
Like incense, a temple bell, bamboo,
yellow scent, an inscrutable sigh.
Insidious, iniquitous, yellow invitation,
an invisible hand an entrancing lace.

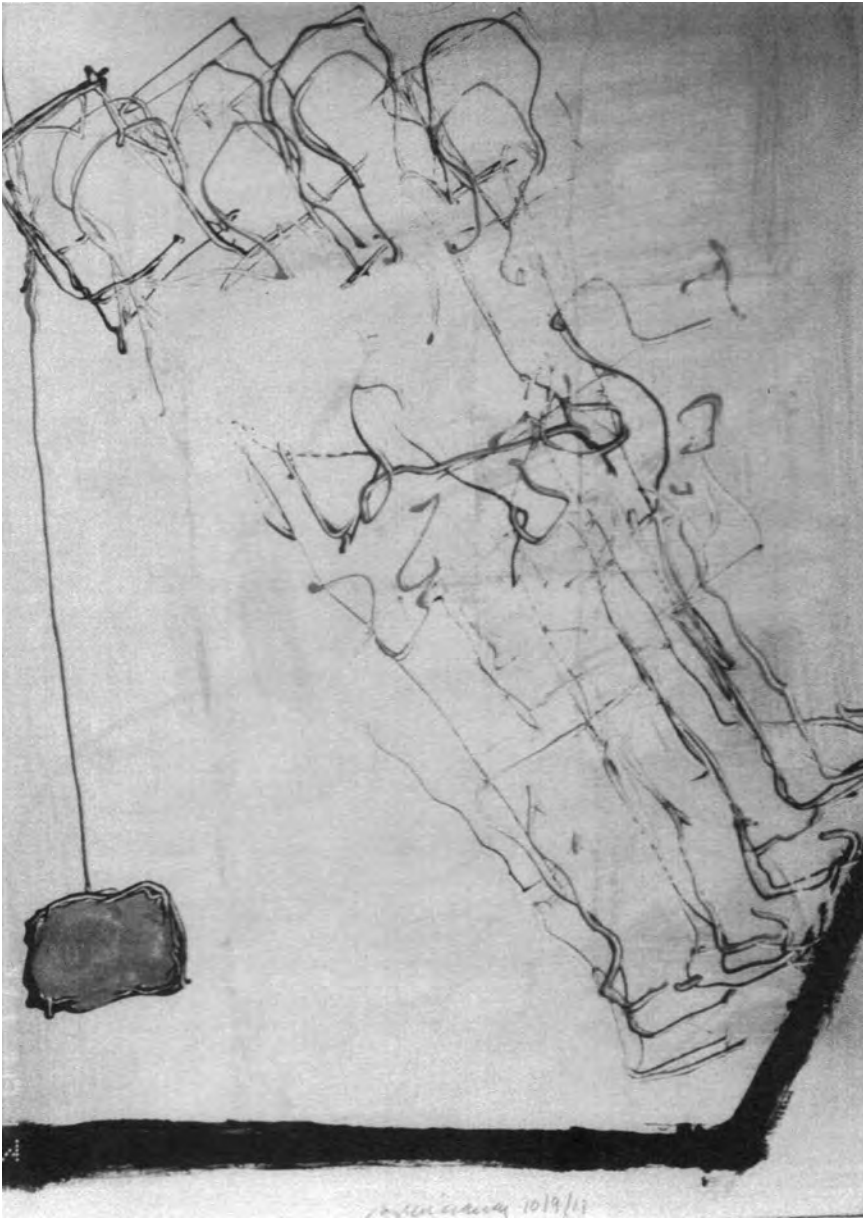
PEYCHO KANEV

THE WHALE

I met you by the shore. Your enormous body
was left for the sharks and the Japanese tourists.
You were taking sun-baths with a book of poetry
in your hands. Rimbaud or was it Verlaine? No
words were spoken. No need to. The seagulls flew
above us as usual, captivating our thoughts. The
eternity crept up between us. I lit my cigarette,
broke off a piece of your beautiful fin and went
back to where I came from.

PHOTO HISTORY

My mama;
dressed in crepe de chine and silk
played the piano into the chaos.
One night she spread her wings,
tired of all the sounds;
she stood up from the blue,
without looking at anybody,
without looking at me,
...and then she collapsed into the album.

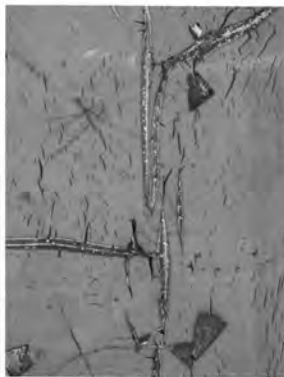


Guy R. Beining: *Corner Spot*

NATHAN WHITING

AN OLD DANCER GREET'S HIS PAINS

Pains no longer shout. Over the years
they've yelled and been ignored, their voice tired
and futile. Now they say *Excuse me*
sir, could we have a little notice;
kinder and more pleasant as I age.
They build their small homes. I try to let
them be happy, then tell them to move
where there are new windows so they'll find
fresh scenery in me. *You in the back,*
I've got a comfortable suite here
in the shoulder. I shoo them on. Yes,
moving's difficult: *Are you all packed.*
Don't leave anything behind. Some leave
completely. They thank me for their stay
but in truth we're tired of our chatters.
We teach each other some humbleness
then they're ready to enter the world
and crack walls or wreck trains, no longer
limited by me where it's quiet.



Alois Nozicka: *Eighteen*

BOB HEMAN

FROM INFORMATION

INFORMATION

There was a man or a woman or a box or a wheel. There was some hair that was counted and some bears that were painted on. There was a house that had no walls and a car that had no floor. There was a road that was deeper and a tree that attracted ants. There were more than could be counted but never enough to be seen.

INFORMATION

When they see a man they describe him and he becomes that man. And when the woman sees him she sees only that man. The man watches as the woman approaches and then leaves again. Sometimes a bear can be added to the system. Or a tree that has no leaves.

INFORMATION

Has to repeat the numbers or the words that are the names of numbers. Has to repeat the names of flowers without ever having seen one. Has to repeat the woman's name hoping she will answer. Has to repeat his own name hoping that no one will hear.

INFORMATION

There are stories about bears that contain no bears. In other stories there are roosters that behave like wolves. The woman enters each story in the same way. The man describes her differently each time.

INFORMATION

The trains were back and the bears were back and the golden-haired one was back and the hunter was back and the village was back and the wolf was back and little redcap was back and the serpent was back and the bees were back and the water was back and the elves were back and the cars were back and the boat was back and the horse was back and even the doctor was back, at least until she opened her eyes.

INFORMATION

Had to be what was described: a door or a pencil or a bear sleeping. Had to be what was left behind: a woman arranged so that the leaves found her.

INFORMATION

In the house of salt each flower is a different kind of map. She becomes an explanation only after her numbers are finished. The door allows them to sing to her once it is opened.

INFORMATION

There is always a map but the bears don't know how to use it. They listen to the birds that are trapped in the well but are never able to understand. Each time they raise the bucket something different is inside. Sometimes they can use it to tell a story.

INFORMATION

Half of the house rearranged the forest. The other half was where the bears wept. The trees did their best to hide them. When the road arrived it was required to go someplace else.

INFORMATION

The side they chose was not the right side even though both sides were the same.

INFORMATION

They thought it was a story but it was only a house in the woods. The bears lived there only when the golden-haired one approached. The rest of the time it was used to store the deer.

BOB HEMAN

THE DARK ARK

The dark ark followed the other ark just out of sight. It contained only those creatures which god did not want to save. There was one of each. The dragon and the satyr and the unicorn and the griffin and all the others seem to get along remarkably well. As the waters continued to rise, god's chosen captain steered the craft carefully through the rising swells. At first the doctor had hesitated to take control of the vessel, but soon he realized it was an offer he could not refuse. He even stopped questioning why he was the one who was chosen. The troll was asking yet another question about the sea when the doctor first noticed that the sky was beginning to clear. He kept on sailing as the waters started to recede. Up ahead he could just make out the outline of the first ark, which had come to rest on top of a barely visible peak. But he continued to sail on. Eventually the waters had dropped back to their normal level, but still the doctor could not find the right place to land his vessel. He knew there was only one thing he could do. He lay down on the deck and willed himself into a deep sleep. When he awoke on the dream ark, he visited all of the creatures in their dreams and invited them to join him there. Months later, when the captain of the first ark found the dark ark washed on shore, there were no living creatures on board. The doctor had kept them all inside his dream so that they could visit the new generations whenever they were needed. That is why we still know them today.

BOB HEMAN

CONE MARTYRED

Dr. Cone is stoned, and his body is carried outside of the city to the place where the rest of the martyrs lay. There is a bird there that sits on top of the rocks and wears a face no bird has ever worn. Its voice is the voice of Dr. Cone. It folds the rocks and forest and shadows into a room that he is able to enter and leave at will. Its walls are maps for the journey he is about to take. Each one works in only one direction.



Lawrence Applebaum

JOHN GOODE

RESTAURANT

it crawled out of a drain pipe hole
with the soft canned meat of the Pacific Ocean
in its stomach

having witnessed its offspring
stuck in Orkin glue traps

biting their own tails

it crawled out of the Black Plague
with no mercy in its eyes

it was going to eat the Alderman
who sweated across the parking lot
like a suit of razorblades

it had seen the devolution plumbers sense
when roach eggs erupt in unmade beds of Allen Wrenches

and their wives are contemplating malaria diets
in Victoria Secret checkout lines

it was going to eat the sun
that burned beneath the hallucination grid
in the back of the kitchen

the sun that was summoned from Mexico
with a methamphetamine habit
picked up from the viral cacti
beyond the mustaches of the border patrol

I didn't think it was dreaming
nothing that alive dreams

it was ten inches long

its tail had the flu

and its teeth were nursed on janitor buckets

plastic had written to it in its sleep,

a gray quivering language that rippled with typhoid bells
and rice

it sort of loped into the dining room
exploring the shadows cast
by flat screen cable television

a family of three disappeared
when it said so

my boss filed an anxiety attack with a waitress

she demanded he retract his Farsi curse
on the last night school vanishing
into the draconian time clock
of Frank's Lobster Hell

Paco, the busboy, followed it into the server's station
with a mop handle

there was a hush
like forests make
right before they breathe

I didn't mean to get that close,
but I was trying to form an image
for the zoology class I was taking in the alley

I thought I might convince it to escape -
there was a conversation I once had with a bird
where we convinced each other to live

but for the rat
it was now

and for Paco too

it was math

in its sideways eyes
there were road maps to the Elephant Man

black boots filled with arterial feed streams

long green straws sucked and bitten

the pink claws of pigeons clutching
fast food skeletons

the sopping mustard-colored beak
of an Aztec landlord
spilling fried chicken skins

it sat on top of the coffee machine
threading grinds through its teeth

the small red fist of its heart pumped
apple blossoms and insecticide

it almost began to star in a fairy tale
no one even thought of writing

as I spoke to it in my head
I wished it a new moon on the asphalt,
something like love beneath the sharp cliffs
of dumpsters

where melting snow forged rivulets
out of fallen hair and sewer gold

but Paco moved past me,
that stick raised like a spear

“*wait, what are you doing?*” I think I asked

right before
he did

JOHN GOODE

BICYCLE

The wind is full of forks and knives.
The century is leaning.

I ride.

The grocery store calls out *Wednesday* with red, red eyes.

Beneath the freeway:
black and white islands of feral sweaters,
shopping carts filled with drooling bags.

Swaths of concrete in all directions,
like the overlapping tongues
of sated giants.

My feet are bird stuff.

Motors growl in the mouth of plastic.
Dead Chippewa. Dead squirrel. Dead cicada.

Fiberglass swears geometry.
Stale green sleep grows on the eyelids of dead commuters.

The bridge holds down the river
in a theater of rising moonlight.

Water takes weeks to exit.

I am the last drop. I pause in front.

There in the factory static, lies the summer.

Black hairs sizzle. Hole in the abdomen.

Machines with steel hands scratch eyes in the fire
pulling out hot red roots a thousand pounds long.

My bike. Wheels.

Autumn breaks like glass on the sidewalk.

Pointed leaves open their fists of color and blow.
Dirty.

Holes hiss with amphibious rats.

Hand-me-down stars gather like old cigars.

Beside me, a current of chemical weight.
One touch, and I am lost.

What year is this?

My bicycle was born at the bottom of
a hummingbird's stomach.

My bicycle is made of feathers
and pit bull saliva.

My bicycle is a nest of sleeping spokes
in the dream metal is having.

I listen to Ashland Ave. turning into opossums
and frost.

One moment panting.

The noise that isn't.

But television keeps crawling into bed.

Here.

Here I am a neck. Here I am a knee.
Here I am hair.

Here something wild still.

JOHN GOODE

THE PICARESQUE SLIDE

I crawled out of a fog
of alley mattresses
and fetid rotting. I'd never seen

so many happy people.

they carried laughter in
their coats, their purses
and backpacks filled
with all the nice weather

they'd collected.

they were chewing so hard
their jaws foamed like horses,
and they passed convention

across patio tables
like summer flies. I told myself

I would listen to them
in silence for awhile.

I would stand outside
their calendars and
consider their tennis shoes
and jobs.

I heard voices jogging like boredom
through twitching computer loops.

monkeys teaching each other
the politics of the fork.

wheels rolling
through telepathic butter swipes.

confused and true,
I left that scene
and entered a shop

where the clerk stared
at me like the sky

until my sunglasses
began to drip.

so I climbed on the bus
and tried not to pay
attention

but an old hippy
kept grinding her teeth
at me.

I rode into Wicker Park and placed
my mouth
on all the windows

hoping love might suddenly
speak up.

men without sleeves
laughed
little explosions of beer
violence
and their women

floated like glistening salmon
across the key pads
in their smiles.

I went into a bar
and immediately felt
a wave of irony.

I headed to the bathroom
where my phone and I
studied each other

and
studied

and

studied

but there was only
the silence
of the mirror
roaring like a hole.

I went back out
and approached the bartender
who had trouble finding
a voice to touch me
with.

GUY R. BEINING

CHIMERIC CORPUS

21.

a metallic ribcage burst open
as a rooster flew the coop.
more eggs were laid to be
stolen again, parting life's
sameness as clouds bumped into
each other, darkening the afternoon,
the shapes of trees changed
while a boy's frame was measured
by the elements.
the mind as form floated
over blankets of sleep
before the rooster called
through its own red rain,
having ducked the sharp stake
& brooding kitchen pot.

GUY R. BEINING

CHIMERIC CORPUS

23.

mousy patchwork rinsed away
in a sink of colored hair.
explosive palms kneaded her face;
fingers pinned needles along her legs
in aroma of tropical trees,
window scenes were locked up in
her eyes, past jawline drama,
a slow force broke the
shape of her shoulders,
her heels resounded down hallways,
& the shoreline of her legs shone brightly,
her eyes became the glare
in showroom windows,
on t.v. she spoke thru kleenex
as a populace fell asleep,
she listed all her dramas
in spools of paper,
she had become a long misprint.

GUY R. BEINING

GLEANNING 2.

bo:

everything is bobbing, corn cob & all.

spectre:

shaking, from the quaking flushing line.

bo:

i went from sunnyside to woodside and then
the deep, carved out darkness of elmhurst...
they all rattled.

spectre:

you were always under the tracks of the el.

bo:

now under twisted twigs of tropical space where
i hear sounds from the Johnston organ.

spectre:

& thickness of brick caves in an eardrum
as heat wets the neck.

bo:

i watch the corners, sometimes they are white.

spectre:

the golden bug dropped dead having lost
all points of brilliance.

bo:

a bit of broken sunlight under the tracks
blinds one, criss-crossing the mind.

spectre:

pigeons know how to bound in this debris.



Lawrence Applebaum: *New Year's Dress*

MARINA RUBIN

THE NEW YEAR'S DRESS

enter
the year
of the red dog
in a shocking white dress
with red flowers, red necklaces
like a luminous star, a future bride,
a seductress of red fires, a clean white
page waiting to write a new plot,
with blueness at the fringe,
like the ocean
that only goes
to your knees,
like a sky that
only reaches to
your shoulders,
thin spaghetti straps
and your head in the clouds,
on other planets, not a bit confused
but above limits, all angry dogs asleep,
all lovers forgiven, forgotten, ghosts released,
unsuccessful drafts tucked away in history books,
the logical conclusion within reach, under red boots,
just a journey with scenery, an infinite desert, an ancient
blue mountain, a sea of greek islands, or a red statue standing
above new york city with outstretched arms, happy new year

MARINA RUBIN

SATURDAY

playing cards
we recount the errors,
how the salesgirl
at our favorite boutique
who picks our dresses,
zips us up, tucks us in
turns out to be a man,
king of spades over nine,
but you still have to dress well
even if life throws you cantaloupes
and our cat,
six of hearts,
who was never a model
has a tiger in him and a wolf, and a squirrel,
or the psychic reader,
who is also a part-time rabbi
saying that our mother,
queen of hearts,
had stepped on a nail
when she was carrying us,
not the home depot nail
but the toenail we cut
with pedicure scissors,
hence a ton of bad luck
knave, or the lover
whose elbow was the rock of gibraltar,
as another's back was the sahara desert,
how we travel to places
and in between pilgrimages
explore the bodies we knew,
looking for cities, castles,
pillars of sand that are
the shape of their
shoulder blades, knees

or the visitors,
two queens,
who come at night as ghosts
only to see us sleeping
with our eyes open,
or the black toads,
trump six and eight,
that live under our beds
born out of black magic
of new wives
but we remember only
swan boats
and jasmine bushes
and how adults
and children,
godly creatures,
walked on water
at the local frog pond
but the sun
that rises in the desert
is the same that
rises over waters,
my ace of clubs
over your king,
there is a reason
for a change of weather,
for a change of heart,
we are all on our way
to collide with each other,
we eat mangos,
remembering
the summer of mangos

MARINA RUBIN

WOMEN

they descend on Berkshires like sparrows, with their Eat Pray Loves and O magazines, singles, divorcées, widows, all in search of their inner goddess. Achilla the She-God teaches them warrior poses, how to claim space, manifest love, the power of the yoni. she is graceful, invincible, it is only later when she autographs their books, her eyes, large lonely orbits, like those of a sick dog. they wake at dawn like soldiers at reveille, march up a mountain, praising father sky, lay down on ice, praising mother earth. there are healing rituals, daily affirmations, afternoons spent in back-breaking yoga exercises and tearful hip-openers, karate-chopping of wooden blocks, tap of a foot, strike of a hand. at night in the jacuzzi they agree they have it all, fabulous lives, fabulous shoes, money, freedom, bubbles beat against their backs as they chant *i am a 21st century goddess*. next day they stand deep in a forest, a woman to a tree, nose and navel pressed to a trunk, hugging the tree with a passion of a lover, tenderness of a parent, snow falling

SHANNON SALTER

SANDSTONE

where are the petals from today
the pinecones chewed in the park

our dog's slobber
your face and the moon through glass

here I have a fine blue sky
a stone
and in the middle of my chest
ever so slightly

something I don't understand

our dog's tail moves like a clarinet
one page on the carpet

here are the hard spots on your feet I want to smooth
a canvas lampshade
turned into leaves

if we make sand can we fly then
Jason

when will we be the noise of birds

SHANNON SALTER

ORANGES

the thrust of life overwhelms
and our bodies sift
into the earth

in a field of dry grass
there is one thistle glowing

the miracle of our sky

the way we don't come loose
from the sun

I wait for breath in the form of fruit
roots pull bowls of water
the black space

from the ground I dream
a little hole
a cloud moves through leaves

there are endless piles of oranges

more than we knew

SHANNON SALTER

STRENGTH IS GREATER THAN POWER

If we had wings they'd sound
fwaap
fwaaap

fwaap

and when you get in the air
their sound is a big wet river

stay asleep and the bees
won't lose their stingers on you

the stillness of hummingbirds

we could never fly like that
our wings would flood everything

in the tree the bees are in there

and the little pollens
all that was ever yellow

they fall
onto our red balconies
the emptiness in sun

it gets heavy
holding your arms out like that

the earth is in its own



Alois Nozicka: *Twenty*

FRED BOLTZ

THE OLD HOUSE

At night it hangs
from the rafters,
watching a glint
of moons, dancing
upon a lake of
old dreams.

Its eyes sag
from a history
of too much rain.

Where once a
chimney stood,
now gives way
to boards nailed
up against slanted
walls. Smoke
pours down into
the earth, resurfacing
in autumn; the
brownness of grass,
the dried & withered
leaves.

If only the grapevines,
wrapped so tight upon
the old rusted swing
had been cleared away,
this house might have
lived for years.

FRED BOLTZ

HIKING IN THE MANISTEE DUNES AND COMING UPON THREE PONDS FILLED WITH DEAD CATTAILS

When the world
was young, three
porcupines left
their tracks here,
headed north
and never came back
for their bodies.

Sharp sticks
still waver in
the night air
and we are left
standing on the
river's edge,
lured by a last
summer breeze
into autumn.

The great dunes
cry sand and
we are smoke,
billowing out
from a place
where the earth
goes, when it
wants to be alone.

FRED BOLTZ

THUNDERSTORM

The only tracks
it left were the
breaking of limbs
as it took off
over the hill
& disappeared
into the woods,
throwing its
voice against
the night sky.

Tomorrow
morning, while
the grass is
still wet in the
trampled fields,
the dog will
corner a small
animal in the
tall weeds by
the barn.

FRED BOLTZ

FLIGHT OF THE CANADIAN SNOW GEESE

There is
something
about this
road & the
things which
hang above it
in the night.

Against
a glare of
lights, a lone
deer bounds
across the
highway; its
small glass-like
hooves gaining
distance &
speed in the
darkness.

Not far from
here, a long
arrow points
southward
across the sky,
where a cloud
of snow moves
down among
the pines &
stays there.

I will walk
this road
to the end,
forever.

AN
ELEANOR
LEONNE
BENNETT
PORTFOLIO



Eleanor Leonne Bennett: *You Can Hear My Cries*



Eleanor Leonne Bennett: *Caught in a Downpour*



Eleanor Leonne Bennett: *Forget*



Eleanor Leonne Bennett: *In the Cold*

SKIDROW PENTHOUSE 105



Eleanor Leonne Bennett: *Now*



Eleanor Leonne Bennett: *Okay Museum*

SKIDROW PENTHOUSE 107



Eleanor Leonne Bennett: *Sea Out*

A L I X A D O O M

S H E L L

An infinity of fine lines
swirl from the center
like countless departures
scrolled by the sea.

A whorled flowering
of gold and white light —
an angel's thunder
through spirals of snow.

Inside the white womb
I can feel the presence
of my own death.

Already the first pink
blush of birth trembles
like the lip of the sea
at its elegant edges.

ALIXA DOOM

AFTER LASIK SURGERY

My eyes have healed,
and night drops into place
with a new horizon.
For fifty years I merely suspected
the brilliance of darkness
squeaking in its frigid chairs.
Stars shifted back and forth
above my uncharted house
in their descent of endless stairs.
Centuries of stars waiting
at my windows!

This morning I awake
holding your hand
beneath your skylight that has emptied
like a coffin broken open.
The pine tree leans in, each needle
alert with its crisp report:
I am here, and here,
and here.

STEVEN RAY SMITH

CONVERTIBLE

There is red.

It is the first beam from the dawn
corona, pacer of the day.

To hammer down on all you said
and everything you meant to say,
choose red.

There is black.

It is that shade in the blind spot
that darkens a southbound turnoff when
the driver, next lane, glances back.

If you're the one to shadow-bend,
choose black.



t. kilgore splake: *Four*

STEVEN RAY SMITH

LANDLORD

He let them paint the ceilings orange.
But why? Surely he knew that ochre
is difficult to whiten over
without drying fallow and worn.

When someone poses Ustrasana
across the back of her chair
late at night and prepares
to lock the doors without having
invented anything, she'll see
eternal sunrise in the ceiling
and come back to the endless meeting
for another year of weeks
consummating strange ideas
that will never reach the stores.

They never told him this, of course,
and didn't have to. A landlord deals
in an even more quixotic
notion than his hyperactive
tenants: when things are lit they live.
He doesn't want to know the metrics.
As God erased the void, day one,
a landlord wants the lights turned on
so that the blackness becomes orange.
Success is afterthought, a second.



Lawrence Applebaum

ROSALIND PALERMO STEVENSON

DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS

I was in the Chiapas in San Juan Chamula—the place the water fled. There was a drought when I was there: *El agua huyó—the water fled*. A painting of a horse hung above my bed in the room of the small *posada* where I was staying. It was a crude and amateurish painting, but the haughty turn of the horse's head had been well rendered. The body was slightly twisted as though the horse had broken into a trot and then suddenly looked back. The head showed in semi-profile, the eye startled, looking back.

Because of the drought a small herd of wild horses came down from the hills to drink from troughs that had been filled for them. Horses are revered in Chamula and it is a duty to fill the troughs from remaining reserves. I used to walk to the edge of town to watch them drink. I would see the ripples on the horses' haunches, the shivers that ran through their bodies, the flare of their nostrils, the shake of a head and then a sudden rearing up. Maria Estela Castanos Gonzalez, the Mexican woman who ran the *posada*, always told me when she knew the troughs were filled.

The painting that hung over my bed had been executed in long, heavy strokes, the eye like a huge dark nebula, the horse breaking into a trot, then rearing up with its head looking back, the eye staring, startled. What had startled it? What had made the horse look back?

I met him at a dance club in New York City. He approached with two drinks and handed one to me. I've been watching you, he said. I want to know you. Then he leaned close and he asked me my name. It was that gesture that lured me, his voice close to my ear. We stayed talking until the dancing ended.

During the drought there was a required abstinence in Chamula from bathing more than once a week. Visitors, like everyone else, had to comply. A thin layer of dust lay on my skin and had embedded itself in my hair. I thought about the Aztec priests in the time of the Spanish conquest—the way Cortés found them during the fasting periods when washing was forbidden, caked with dirt, their hands stained with the blood of the sacrificial victims.

We left the dance club together—out on the street it started to rain. The rain came down suddenly, falling hard in an immediate downpour; there had been none of the large, infrequent drops that usually precede a rainstorm. Soaked, we found a taxi and climbed inside. I could still feel his hand on the small of my back where he had guided me into the taxi. His fingers were long, those of a sensitive man; I felt myself yielding to the suggestion of his sensitivity.

I liked to spend my afternoons in the front sitting room of the *posada*, which was usually empty and faced out towards the square. Maria would bring me a small glass of *atole*, a liquor made from cornmeal. It was a delicious and powerful drink. I would sip slowly, making it last for at least an hour. Halfway through I would begin to feel the light-headedness, the drifting, the separation from myself and from the world; all my thoughts and my memories disappeared. I would float that way for as long as I could, sometimes not bothering with the main meal that was served late in the day; although Maria would try to persuade me to come into the dining room to eat. I'm not hungry, I would say. I have no appetite for eating. I had told her when I arrived that something happened to me involving a man, something I had come here to resolve in my mind, or to try to forget. Later, when I would go up to my room, I would find a tray, a plate on it with two tamales and a cup of lukewarm tea. And late at night, late, late in the night, I would chew and swallow and drink down to the leaves of the tea.

By morning the rain stopped. My bedroom was warm, a stream of light poured in through the window. He was asleep with his face turned towards mine. His hair was matted and his skin moist—there were two deep lines, one on each side of his mouth; the lines were markedly visible in the daylight. When he woke up we made love again. He squeezed my flesh hard at the sides of my rib cage. At first I held myself back, but then I gave in. The gesture of roughness excited me.

Maria's oldest son, Braulio, sometimes served as my guide to see the archeological ruins surrounding the town. Once he took me to an Aztec burial site at the foothills of Chiapa de Corzo. It's not so far, he said, we can hike. As we were leaving town, I saw a half-eaten papaya on the street, the fleshy, rotting pulp with the teeth marks still visible. The ruin was

small—Braulio said it was at least a thousand years old. The funerary chamber was set back in a cave. When Braulio flashed the light into the cave I could see that the stone wall at the rear had a mural painted on it depicting a procession of the gods of death. The gods had fierce expressions, but the colors were subdued: soft pastels in shades of blue and coral. The skulls and the bones had been carried off in the excavations. The tomb was still there but the human remains had been taken away. Braulio pointed to a winged insect that looked like a butterfly carved into the flat side of the wall. When the warriors died in battle, he said, it was believed their souls were transformed into butterflies. What about the women? I asked him. What happened to their souls when they died? The women who died in childbirth, Braulio said, were transformed into goddesses with their hair flowing wildly, and with their breasts bare, but no man could touch them; they were angry and their hands were like claws. He formed one of his hands into a claw and held it up for me to see. What about the other women? I asked. Braulio shrugged. Well, I said. *Bueno*.

On our way back into town we saw the horses drinking. The troughs were muddy at the bottom, but at the top the water sparkled. The horses stood at them with their heads lowered and their coats glistening. What would happen if the troughs were not filled, I asked Braulio. They would run to Tlatilco, he told me—but even so we must give them to drink. We stood watching the horses for a few minutes longer. I'd like to ride one, I said. Braulio laughed. They are too wild, he said. All the same, I said, I'd like to ride one. Then we were silent as we walked through the town. When we got back to the *posada*, Maria said she had made pejelagarto. It is a fish with the head of an alligator. Maria was talking about how lucky she had been to find pejelagarto in Chamula—how strong the taste was, how sweet the flavor of the fish. I would like to see the wild horses in the hills where they live, I told her—the entire herd in a full gallop.

The house was large, three stories high. He led me into one of the second floor bedrooms. The bedroom had an adjoining bathroom; the water came out of the bathroom faucet brown when I turned it on, and then it cleared. The house had been a small inn at one time operated by his family, but he was the only one who now used it. The bedroom window was open, behind it a screen. I lifted the screen to see the stars; I put my head out the window to see them. The stars are more luminous here, I said, without light to diffuse them—they give me an overwhelming feeling. He pulled me back to the bed and lowered his body onto mine. The first time we were

there, I became a little sick; it was nothing serious, but I ran a slight fever. The fever did not interfere with our lovemaking; it seemed to only make it more intense. He had been unshaven the entire weekend. Irresistible.

One day fifteen horses came down from the hills to drink at the troughs in Chamula. The same number that Cortés brought into Texcate. They were perhaps the descendants of those earlier conquistador horses.

We soon spent all our weekends at the house. He liked to cook and once he made roast goose—he worked most of the afternoon at his preparations. I watched as he pulled back the skin on the bird's breast to reveal the wishbone. He used a small sharp knife to cut around the bone; then he removed it and inserted the onion stuffing. Once the stuffing was in place he trussed the slit back up with string. A few hours later, he discarded the trussing and carved the meat from the bones. The dining room was musty from lack of use. He sat me down like a guest in a chair at the head of the table. I wore the black dress he had requested I bring, eating fastidiously so as not to remove my red lipstick. He ate methodically, cutting his food into small pieces; he held the knife somewhat daintily as he cut. The room was lit with candles; after we finished eating he extinguished the candles. In the dark he led me up the stairs.

A new colt appeared among the horses. The colt looked in my direction, perhaps sensing my gaze. Later, Maria breezed by me at her chores. I mentioned the colt to her and she said something in passing that I could not hear clearly. But when I turned to ask her what she said, she had already left the room.

The doors were never locked and it crossed my mind someone might get into the house—without our knowing it there might be someone in one of the rooms. Or else in one of the empty cabins behind the house. The cabins, like the rooms of the inn, used to be rented out by his family. He laughed when I mentioned it. It's safer here than anywhere, he told me, but if you're afraid we don't have to stay. No, I love the house, I said. I'm not afraid.

Afternoons in the front sitting room at the *posada* I sat facing the window. I could see the people coming and going in the market in the square. I could see chickens; there were chickens everywhere in San Juan Chamula, wandering around the dusty streets. I watched a chicken followed by her baby chicks, all of them pecking around at the base of an old iron fence. The chicks were tiny and determined, pecking in the little clods of dirt.

The summer night had been cool; there had been a drop in temperature. We had a fire going in the fireplace in the bedroom. His skin glowed red in the light from the fire. Naked he got up and added a log. When he came back to the bed, he kissed me. Then he said softly: Give in. His hands gripped my arms and held them pinned to my sides. He said he wanted to make love while my body was motionless. I remained still as he moved above me—passive while he moved for both of us.

My room in the *posada* was like a monk's cell with its single bed and sparse furnishings: a wooden chest, a wooden chair, the little table next to the bed always with its vase of fresh cut flowers. For a period of time I seldom left it. Maria would enter silently to leave a tray and then go out.

It was a foolish game, I thought, when he suggested it. Foolish on my part, too, allowing him to bind me. He pulled my hands above my head and tied the cords around my wrists. With my arms spread wide, he fastened my wrists to the bedposts. He spread my legs as well, and fastened them. I want to feel every quiver of your muscles, he said. Do you know you are fragile? I want to feel that fragility.

I dreamed that the horses were stampeding the city, the thunderous sound of their approach, their menacing gallop, and nothing anyone could do to stop them, they were wild following only the bay horse which led them, the eyes of the horses in the heat of a full gallop, tearing up the ground with their massive hooves.

I started to speak, to ask a question; he placed his fingers over my mouth to stop me—the night, the room, his face, the insistence of his body, my wrists testing the restraints, but not resisting.

The religion in Chamula was a mixture of Catholicism and Indian rites. The statues in the church had been painted in bright colors and draped in fabrics—flag-like garments. The statues wore elaborate headdresses.

We were in the woods behind the house. I stood looking at the row of empty cabins. I think they look creepy, I told him, the way they're sitting there empty. A flock of birds flew overhead. The moon was visible in the late afternoon sky. He slipped his arms around my waist. Is it too cool out here? he asked me. He said it sweetly: Is it too cool out here? No, I answered, I'm fine.

A woman was reading Tarot cards in the square in front of the church. She was reading from a pretty Spanish deck: *El Pequeño Tarot Español*. The table next to hers was piled high with white sombreros. She was telling fortunes for two young girls, fifteen or sixteen years old; they were giggling because the fortune was about love. The girls wore white tissue cotton blouses, cut low with billowing sleeves and the brightly colored shawls worn by the women in Chamula.

One night he came to me proposing a refinement to our game. It was simply this, that in addition to being bound, my eyes should be covered as well. He said it was a small thing: to add a blindfold. The long black scarf was in his hands. My body tensed as he placed it over my eyes. He pulled at it and then tied it securely behind my head. I felt a prickling and a heightened awareness and expectancy. He touched my face with his hands; his mouth opened to mine, his tongue licking and searching.

Behind the Palacio, a thatched hut with mud and straw walls: the *Museo Etnografico*. On the rear wall of the museum the detail of a human sacrifice: the woman's upper body naked; the heart exposed in her open chest; her lower body twisted away from view.

He led me blindfolded through the house—up and down the stairs and in and out of the rooms. Unable to see, I was unsteady on my feet. I had no clothes on and my feet were bare—my toes curled into the floor to keep my balance. When we got back to the bedroom, he sat me down on the edge of the bed. I remained sitting while he

lit a fire. I could hear the snapping of the kindling as it took hold in the fireplace and burned. And then a metallic sound—perhaps the poker hitting a metal surface. He put music on, an eerie, modern piece. And then he returned to the bed, I could feel his breath on the back of my neck. His hands were on my shoulders; he slid them down my arms, and then he drew my arms behind me. I'm afraid you'll hurt me, I told him. I don't want you to hurt me. Why would I hurt you? It's my responsibility to take care of you. He lowered his voice as though to sooth me: I'm not hurting you, am I? I don't want to hurt you.

Seasonal rites had been enacted. I had been reading about them in the library at Na Bolom Museum in the nearby town of San Cristóbal de las Casas. The books were not for loan, but I was able to sit there and read them using the Spanish I had studied in New York, and with the help of the museum's dictionary. The rituals were bloody, even the grain ceremony for the harvest of corn. How hungry the gods were, what was to be made of so much hunger? Each year a young woman was selected from among the tribe. The priest had to steal her fertility. Her beheading was merely an expedient way to kill her. The crucial act was the removal of her skin, which would be donned like the skin of an animal by the naked priest. It was a true transgender act; in putting on the woman's skin he became the Xipe Totec, now in the guise of the Mother of the Sacred Ones, the fertility goddess who would guarantee the earth's flowering. Still wearing the slain woman's skin, the priest would pick up the broom and begin to perform the rite known as 'The Sweeping of the Roads,' an emulation of the rush of winds that marked the beginning of the next year's harvest. With the broom he began sweeping down the stairs of the temple, sweeping like the wind, sweeping down the stairs, sweeping, sweeping, out from the temple and through the streets.

Maria shrugged it off when I mentioned it to her. It was just an ancient Indian ritual, she said. What does it have to do with anything now? It's not so ancient, I told her. They were still doing it when the Spanish came. Oh, the Spanish, Maria said, they were no better.

He covered me with a sheet and for a long time touched me only through the sheet. When he removed it, he remained still with his body on mine. You have to trust me, he said. There can be nothing between us without trust. If you want me you have to allow me everything.

There are monstrosities of art at Na Bolom Museum. Grotesque creatures with two heads, the heads with three eyes, with multiple noses, multiple mouths in rows, in layers; the clay mask with its tongue protruding.

The blindfold tight against my eyes; it was pushing hard against my eyelids. I told him it was too tight, but he insisted that it stay. I'm frightened, I said. He whispered back: There's nothing to be afraid of.

I went with Maria to the market. I preferred to go with her because she knew all the best bargains. I wanted to buy the sandals I liked so much—the ones that are called *huaraches*. The stalls were overflowing with them, and with local produce and live turkeys, and flowers and candles and wool. It was just a few days before *Día de los Muertos*, the Day of the Dead celebration, the day the families celebrate the life of the souls of their departed loved ones. I bought a dozen or so pairs of the sandals. I don't know why I bought so many. My green mesh bag was filled with them. I then went off by myself onto a side-street that flanked the south end of the market. A man rode towards me on a bicycle. A long, pointed metal object jutted out from the front of the handle bars. He was riding very fast and I jumped out of the way. As he rode off, I yelled, Hey, Hombre! You could have killed me! You could have stabbed me with that thing on your bicycle! When I rejoined Maria, I told her about the incident, but she seemed to have little interest. Then I showed her my bag of new sandals. She looked into the bag and opened her eyes very wide. *¡Dios Mio!* she said. So many!

He said the emotions were more real this way, layered with fear and sexual excitement. I shivered as his fingers probed my flesh. He said the more you give in, the closer we are. Remember, often what you want is not what you think it is.

An Albino stayed a few days at the *posada*, a woman who was traveling with her husband. She was white, white, pale as a ghost. While she was there I could not get enough of looking at her whiteness.

I heard water running from the faucet in the bathroom. First slowly, then running hard. As though the faucet had been turned all the way on. The water pouring hard into the sink. I could hear the crackling of the fire in the fireplace. The thud of a log dropped in, and then another.

The sound of the fire being stoked, the pushing around of the logs, the rise of heat, warmth, the sound of a log giving way in the fireplace. A few minutes passed; I wasn't sure where he was. Then I heard him coming back to the bed.

The Day of the Dead began with a mournful song in the cemetery at the old abandoned burned-out church on the outskirts of town, followed by a carnival and dancing in the streets throughout the day and night. All the children were eating the sugar skulls and even the adults were eating them. I ate one too, the rush of sugar making me light-headed. Everyone wore skull masks, the hollow eyes staring out far above the movements of the hips and the legs of the dancers. It is said that when all the masks are removed, for some there is only a skull left beneath it. The cemetery was filled with children and yellow marigolds. I wore my skull mask and one of my new pairs of sandals.

I began to welcome the restraints, the blindfold too—the way they magnified every sensation. I was capable only of receiving his actions. When I pulled against the cords, they squeezed tighter at my wrists and my ankles. The harder I pulled, the more they tightened.

Maria had disappeared behind her mask. I looked at all the women's feet but could not tell which ones were hers. Someone handed me a yellow marigold. There was a small Mariachi band playing the festival music. They played on mandolins, and guitars and accordions and castanets. It was the kind of bouncy music that made you want to dance and everyone was dancing in their skull masks, inviting their dead to be with them. I wondered if I might find my own dead in Chamula on *Día de los Muertos*. I was thinking about my father. Perhaps my poor dead father had been watching all along; had been watching us at our games. I looked back in time through my father's sad eyes. My strange docility each time the restraints had been positioned and the blindfold secured at the back of my head. Something sugary was pressed between my lips. What was it? Something harmless? I swallowed and tasted the sweetness.

It was nearing the end of the summer. He had just finished covering my eyes. The blindfold was padded leather and thick; no longer the scarf we had started with. Once in place there was nothing I could do to

dislodge it. It's for us and no one else, he said. This moment. Everything we do together in this house.

The children danced like the adults and brought their fingers underneath their masks to eat the sugar skulls. I thought I saw Maria with her skirt hiked up above her knees, dancing with her face hidden by her skull mask. There was the moon at three-quarters. And a rigged up ride, something like a Ferris Wheel. The faster the ride went around, the louder the screams from its death-masked riders.

Something dropped and then rolled a little way on the floor. It was a small sound, but I heard it plainly. As though something had rolled off the bed, or he had dropped something he had been holding. I turned my head in the direction of the sound and tried to imagine what it might be. It was the only movement I could make. My body was locked in place except for my head.

I drank tequila all night long through the hole in the mask where the mouth was. I was drunk and felt free. I joined a group of Mexican women on the stage of the bandstand and they welcomed me into their chorus of dancers as a sister. I knew that some were young and some were old, but they were all dancing suggestively, swaying their hips in time to the music. As I was passed along the line I called to each of the women the name, *Maria*, hoping that she would be among them and answer me. When I came to the end of the line I heard Maria say, *Señorita*. Back in my room at the *posada* I drank bottled water to dilute the effect of the tequila. On the walk home Maria and I had removed our skull masks, but later in bed I put mine back on and slept in it.

I heard the cries of birds outside the window. There were nests of jays in the trees around the house. They always got active around the sunset—noisy as they settled down for the night.

Maria said that if you go to confession and take communion on the morning after Día de los Muertos, it will cleanse you and give new strength and a special blessing. My Spanish was passable enough for the priest to understand me. I have sinned, Father; it has been many years since my last confession. When it has been so long, the priest said, it is enough that you acknowledge to me that you have sinned and then do penance, professing your resolve to sin no more. I insisted that I wanted to confess. But then

when I started I said, Father, it's useless for me to confess. I have wanted to kill a man. I still want to kill him.

He adjusted the cords tighter around my wrists and my ankles. When he finished, he gave a quick tug on the cords at my wrists. Are you all right, he asked? I answered I was fine. Yes, you're fine, he said, and walked away from the bed. I was lying bound and powerless, deprived of sight—unresisting, as was required by the game. I heard a dresser drawer being opened and closed—then the sound of his feet on the floor, again coming near to the bed. I'm going out for a while, he said. What do you mean going out, I asked? Then with his mouth close to my ear he said: I want you to miss me. I heard small metal clinks that I knew were the car keys. The sound drained me. A few minutes later he left me alone in the empty house. I knew he was gone, but I had the impulse to call out. I want to stop now, I said. I pulled and felt the restraints dig into my flesh. A gust of air came in through the window. I was cold. The birds were quiet. The cicadas had started up with their shrill, vibrating sound. The house felt savage. I pulled with all my strength against the restraints.

It started raining in Chamula. It is because of the prayers, Maria said matter-of-factly as she laid out the breakfast. It was raining and it would continue; the droughts usually gave way to a long period of heaving rains and flooding. Now the horses will not come, I said. Had it been a question? There will be no need for them to come, Maria answered, as though it had. I would like to have seen them one more time, I said, I would like to have seen the colt again. The laughter at the table had nothing to do with me. The new guests—two somewhat nondescript, middle-aged couples—were talking excitedly among themselves. The rain was heavy and I was thinking how the dirt would turn quickly to mud. Maria was busy with her endless preparations. There was a small but steady stream of people who came and went, staying one or two nights and then moving on. I had been there for a little over two months and the *posada* had started to feel like home. Even so, I had placed limits on my stay and the time for me to leave had arrived.

Indistinct sounds came from outside the window. I strained to hear them, desperate for his return. I was cold; he hadn't lit a fire. I kept feeling my arms and legs fall asleep, and then the painful pins and needles sensation of them waking up and falling asleep again. The skin on my wrists was raw from pulling on the restraints. Too much time had gone by. I was no longer certain he was coming back. I couldn't stop thinking that he had left me there to die. A while longer and I heard the car on the gravel, and the door slam shut—and then his footsteps coming up the stairs. He was talking to someone, not to me. I could hear another man's voice in reply. I thought something had happened, that he had brought the police. They came into the bedroom. Then: You weren't kidding, I heard the other man say. My lover came near me and said something; at first I couldn't make the words out. Then he repeated it: I'm letting him borrow you. He drew away and told the other man to go ahead. For a few minutes nothing happened. My lover prompted him. I heard a zipper coming down. Then I felt the weight of the man kneeling over me on the bed. His stomach touched mine and I started to scream. The man covered my mouth with his hand. He lifted himself slightly, adjusted his position, and then he sank his weight back down. If my arms and legs had been free, I would have ripped his hand from my mouth, caught hold of him and tried to break away from him. But when he entered me, when he finally removed his hand from my mouth, I was beyond screaming or protesting. He finished quickly; I never saw him. When the man was gone, my lover sat down on the edge of the bed. He removed the blindfold. And slowly he began to remove the restraints. You hurt yourself, he said, referring to the broken skin at my wrists. Then he turned my hands up and bent and kissed them. You've done well, he said softly. Good girl.

The day I was leaving Maria made eggs with black beans for my breakfast. You have gotten too thin she said sadly, already nostalgic, I thought, for our shopping expeditions together to the market. I would be flying to

Mexico City and then back to New York. That matter then, has it all been resolved? The way she phrased it I wasn't sure for a minute what she meant. Then I remembered when I first arrived I had told her I had come to resolve something involving a man, to settle it once and for all in my mind. I want to see the horses again, I told her. It's too late, she said, they won't come anymore now that the drought is over. Do you think the small planes at Tuxtla Gutiérrez will be able to fly to Mexico City in the rain? I asked. They fly no matter what, she said, the pilots like it when the high winds and the rain push the plane around in the sky. For a minute I considered what she was saying. And then: —No, it's not resolved, I told her.

At the burial ruin I had been surprised when Braulio flashed the light inside the cave and I saw the mural on the wall: the procession of the Aztec gods. The gods had been gracefully painted in muted colors to accompany the dead—among them was the Xipe Totec, his face and body covered in flayed human skin. The gods appeared to be advancing towards the front of the cave. Everything else though had been erased from the tomb—the bones I would have seen if I had stumbled on it a millennium ago.

««—»»

[For Acknowledgement: Dia de los Muertos first appeared in Drunken Boat.]

JACK DEVLIN

SILENCE OF INNER PASTORALS

the therapist says:
wash the curtains and their depression
from your eyes,
pet a dog,
notice the clouds
and the more desperate storm animals.

walk a different direction to work,

form opinions
about the way buildings move,

the universe there
warmed by a reading lamp,
a drop of cabbage soup,

the new york yankees
playing the detroit tigers
in a deserted high school gymnasium.

the therapist says
take a different subway to nightfall,

an asteroid where trees grow

and expired dollar bills are
acceptable forms
of flesh

and at least one woman
stays awake so her freckled nightgown
doesn't fade away

and where sometimes one leaf
is enough
to obscure the twitching
of the sky.

JACK DEVLIN

STORY ABOUT CITIES PASSING THROUGH THE SUN

A red, human-shaped lamp
always left on at night
above the price-gouging deli,
in a window six ledges
above the crowded street.

The people don't reveal their interior dust
or any fatigue, but when it's cold outside
you can see where the buildings
limped and pulled each other
across the river to this new place in the wind.

And in this city, this thought that somehow survived,
I've been carried through the rooms and gutters
of someone else's nearness by the same convoy of ants.

To me, they look like presidents.
Not little pieces of poison
following each other to the light's edges.

Not the echoes of another void's
breath marches and deep-legged caravans
that can always move, no matter how false, how close,
a day, a measured shadow, maybe half an ant further.



t. kilgore splake: *Five*

SIMON PERCHIK



Before you even saw a lake
or a river or an ocean
or lifted half asleep
with stars washing over you

—hours old and already you hear
the nights left over from the Flood
and in the distance one wave
waiting for more darkness

as if it had a twin somewhere
—your first bath —by instinct
another minutes later, an overflowing
the way each tide

never forgets the other
—two baths and after those
nothing matters, though all your life
you wait for just a trace

some splash you almost believe
you heard before —just born
and the warm hands under you
reaching out from the soft waves

—before you ever saw water
you learned to cry —a natural! bathed
and the night beginning to recede
to feel its damp sand creak

against what must have been the Ark
or the sun or your cradle breaking apart
under these stuffed animals
—a single dove clinging to the rail
and the first morning.

SIMON PERCHIK



Again the sky rubbing against my legs
the way a dog closes its eyes
—I wade toward a place

that has your hairline, your nose
lips the same—tonight's no different
although these stars once side by side

behind their invisible starting line
—a few already clustered in the lead
some last and between I walk

from Gemini to Sirius to Orion
—all 14 miles by myself
and in my hands an empty glass

that magnifies the sky —I still look
for clues, for the ankles, the yes or no
as if the night has already forgotten

what is dead, what isn't, what
is hiding in the step by step
across an old footprint that might be there

might still be wandering and its bark
try once more for distance
the way a timekeeper's pistol is grasped

held up, but the stars
slip from under, drowning before my eyes
—the sun still alone, coming back

with yesterday, today, tomorrow
with the closed windows and the streets
left out too long.

SIMON PERCHIK



They're eggs nobody wants :snow
all day falling from their nest
and these waves broken in half

—it's so long since I sang
—I forgot how a word, one
then another, another and I am flying
taking hold a mountain, somehow the top
then stars —even the drowned

will rise to the surface
looking for air and the cold
—all winter this sea kept warm
—some bomber ditched, its engines left on
—four small furnaces and still forging wings
from bottom sand, shaped the way each wave
still lifts the Earth, then tries again

—each year the sea made warmer
by those same fires every mother
nurses with soft words :this snow
growing strong, already senses
the flight back as lullabies —my mouth

can't close, a monster eating snow, my lips
swollen from water and cold and loneliness
—someone inside my belly
has forgotten the word I need to say
or sing or both my arms into the sea
feeding and feeding and feeding.

PATRICK MCKINNON

YELLOW TO YELLOW TO YELLOW

The customer eyes stare at me like I am some kind of a priest: black pants, white shirt, black tie. This is my church. The Martini Bar & Lounge. Votive candle bottles line the wall behind me. Communion, confession, last rites. I'll serve everybody something because everybody comes here...sometime. I give you these three.

Diane Communion

My first customer is always Diane, led by her twisted grin to the belly of the Martini Bar. She says she's, "done with the bathrooms, the hall and the stairs, so give over one of them beers now."

She stretches those beers like aisles through the morning, fooling with the satellite and picking her teeth, gibbering at me, and turning her eyelids inside out.

Finally it is 11 o'clock, and Bernice hobbles in for Windsor and water and pull tabs. Bernice on a bar stool goes into hibernation, so Diane is her runner because Bernice buys her sweet drinks.

For the next two hours The Diane Line scuttles a monorail between the pull tab booth and the bar, fueled by the biggest thirst in history. But Bernice is a loser, and the fever is spawning red snakes in her eyes, eyes that see nothing but lemons and diamonds and 7s, two hundred and fifty bucks worth as Happy Hour rolls through. At 2:15 they want to cash a check, which I refuse. So Bernice calls a taxi and Diane begins construction on her tab. Face-down, she falls that timeless plunge toward nighttime. She sleeps upstairs in cigarette clothes, and just like you and me, she has license to dream of anything, though she's never once mentioned that she does.

Flossy Confession

Whenever Chicago got his skin crawling with a death premonition that only failed him once, Al Capone used to hole up at the Silver Street Saloon in Hurley, Wisconsin.

Flossy said, “To hell with that t.v. crap: digging up Al’s vault beneath the Lincoln Hotel. Joe was one of Al’s boys and he fell in love with me, a harmless little cigarette-girl at the Silver. He never really wanted much, though. Just mostly to hug and smooch and moan and call me really dirty little names. All those idiots are gonna find down there is rocks and dirt...maybe a body.”

She is sneering and stroking the gaudy diamond her finger wears like a casket waiting to drop. The bar’s as empty as her bottle of Christian Brothers, jack-hammering her toward retardation. Her wrinkled eyes auger me when she says she’s on kind of a pension-paid-in-advance, and there’ll be bullets in her mattress if she doesn’t clam up.

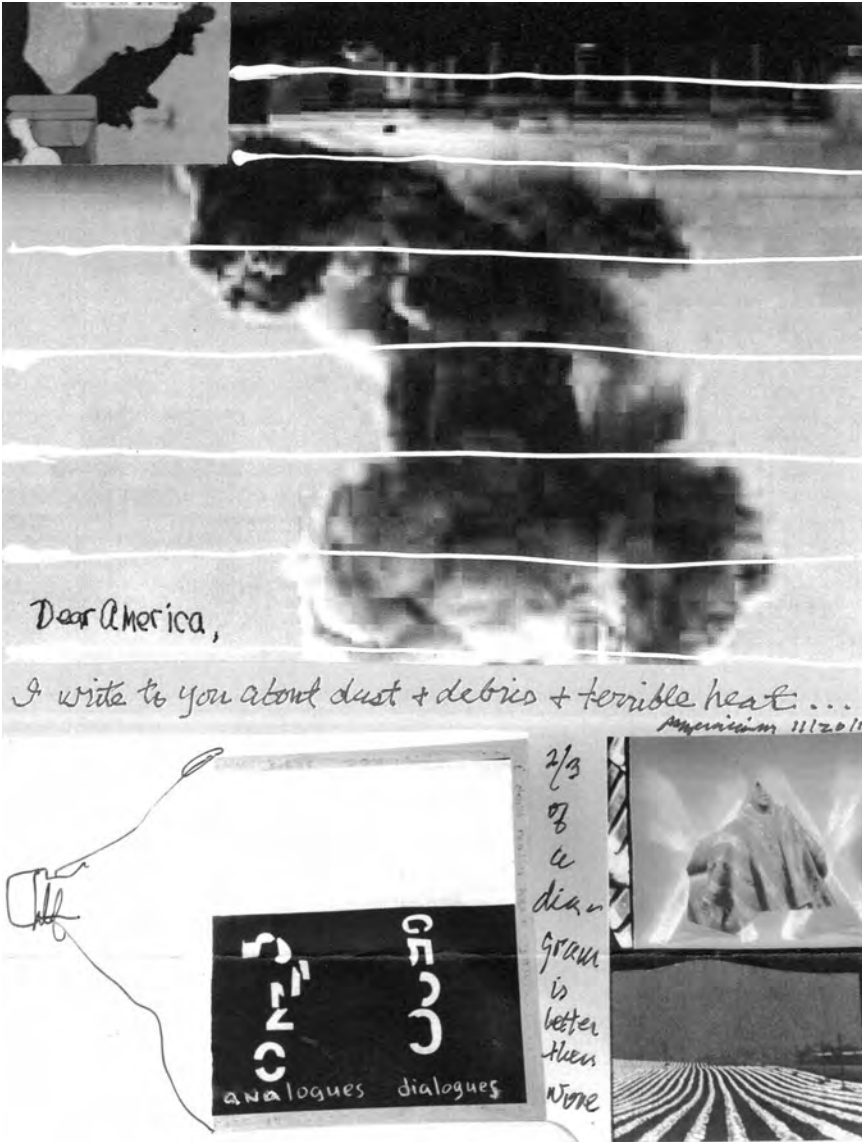
There’s a scream stuck in her neck she’s forgotten how to feel. There are 150 billion dollars in circulation that the Treasury Department cannot locate. And the license plates on her new Mercedes just say, “HEIST.”

Shawna Last/Rites

At the far end of my bar Shawna is bombing herself with salt and tequila and lime on her wrist. Her leather jacket says “Caesar’s” in red slashes across the back, and I want her to speak something dangerous. But even in her 20’s she’s an old woman kneeling at the rail, lifting her chin, accepting as many rounds as I care to pour. There’s a knife in each of her eyes, silent as a bleeding statue with pull-tab sun-bleached teeth, and sheathed in her T-shirt are two hard guns waiting for someone I hope doesn’t come by.

Awesomely drunk about midnight, she gets lost on her way to the women’s room. I dump her drink and wash the glass, mop the bar, and two hours later, locking up, I find her down the dark hall, slouched against the bolted kitchen door, hands holding her head like someone frozen in that moment of aiming the ball at the pins.

I reach to help her stand up. She draws back her thick rosy lips in a wild way. Tiger-like she growls at me, pushes past, and caroms out the fire exit. I see the neon martini glasses treading water in the gutter and laughing at the night. Taxi tires rip puddles in the fog. Traffic lights keep changing from yellow to yellow to yellow.



Guy R. Beining: *Dear America*

GARY LEE JOHNSTON

RIVERS ADVANCING AND AGING IN THE DIRECTION OF INTERSTATES

1.

two central transport trucks
haul the land behind them,
shining their highbeams under the delaware river.

the interstate winds without sleep
around cliffs and commercials of former
collisions coming in over the asteroids
between WZZO and WSPG.

the thousand tongues of the river
work their way through appalachian stone.

columbia, new jersey, exit 42
lured out to the shallowest part of the night
to endure the nicotine ridicule of white men
with names like bill billings,

and then the long distance truck drivers
gary and eddie cravener,
weak from the unforgiving
sluiceways and cargo sleep,

think about their wives
in downtown stroudsburg,
the timeshare hills of shawnee,
hidden mount pocono.

they tie sheet lightning to a tree
left behind in august,
and when they realize the sky isn't coming back
they drive even faster.

they know there will be no money by daybreak.

2.

they pass michael cook, jr, 42,
pushing his car back from florida, where it is hard for him to stay.

they then pass a discarded version of michael cook
searching on foot for the promises of marshall's creek.

they pass an anonymous video family
returning by remote control from a traffic signal restaurant.

when everything beyond the shoulder is dead
they pull over so the trucks can graze with their eyes closed.

“what will we do after we can no longer afford
to follow the moon?” gary asks.

“look, the moon is just CB interference,” eddie says
while they eat possum reflections and french fry platters
at the country pride truckstop grill.

“there will always be enough rest,” eddie says,
the two of them forcing their bodies

to follow the repeating stripes
until they remember morning cannot be found.

3.

when the highway becomes
too tired to carry them, they turn back east

and talk without a single false epithet
about the mirage towns of nevada,

the water manufacturers that fled utah,
the mountains shipped in crates to where north dakota disappears,

the dial tone hospitals of idaho, the grainy alcatrazes
murmured between kansas and oklahoma,

sleepers pulled to a man made of empty coin rolls
and a restroom disease in york, pennsylvania,

the dexedrine stripping another driver's teeth,
which hurt like skylines of mirrors leading to san diego,

and when the highway does not return
from the switchback exchanges of easton via phillipsburg,

the craveners watch the cars forming
a line of iguanas at the edge of the drinking river,

hunted this far by people who abandon their sleep
in the difficult-to-remember beds of dawn, philadelphia

and dawn, east st. louis, and by the flannel livestock
who die of the overnight places they live.

sometimes eddie hears them
changing the direction of an inch of sunlight

while gary thinks about the teachers who told him he could never
go to the skyscrapers of texas or anywhere

but the far-reaching disgust of the half-gifted girls.
"do you think my driving is honest, eddie?"

or should i look for my talents elsewhere?"
"well, there's no one on the other side of that ridge,

nothing but atlases with the highways torn out,"
eddie says, killing a cigarette for the last time.

they've driven into pure memory
and the ends of the hollywood slaughterhouses.

they think it's morning, but it isn't.
it's just another driver's lost headlights,

crouched and sniffing for recoverable
river signals on the truck side of the drowned delaware.



Chuck Light: *Monsters*

THEY PUT IT IN THE WATER

how you've read words about those words in far-away places

how they stop those words

the way they stop certain words the way *you* head goes

they tell you this is right

like they know this is right for you the way you head should go
just a few fewer words just for now

they whittle at them

in far-away places you have read ahead words about
how they do this

you've heard what they say in this place where

they say they did not mean what they say you have heard they
how they did not mean what they say they say

you heard them say these words

that what *they* say is best

that what they meant to say they say they say

is what you should not say like they say

the way you head goes the way it should not

they put it in the water

what they mean you should not say

they know you thirst they know

the water tastes odd but

because you thirst they know

you will forget the odd taste

because you are so thirsty

you forget what tastes right they know
you forget how it used to be they know
you forget they steal you a piece of you
here
there
now
they steal you
words
words you used which mean something

words they don't want like
what you mean to say like
you always say what you mean to say like
you do not have to come back to say you do not mean
what you say
not like they
like what you say is what you mean to say

but they put something in the water
and you forget
because you are so thirsty you forget
and they steal you
like those words you once read about
far-away places
about those words about those words

you live in a far-away place it is far
away
from those words you used the ones they steal you
from
they count heads here because you thirst
in this far-away place
because you say *their* say ahaa!
they count you head
they count you thirsty tongue
one more! they got you

they will count you children's heads
you children will read words about
those words
about this far-away place
how they put it in the water

NAKED ARMS

they may be hungry
but they are not cold

they learned first
not to be cold
not to wear a coat
because there was no coat

you see them at grunt work
on hiways on rooftops on farms you see
them pushing snow pushing manure
no coat like they are not cold
tho you are freezing everyone is freezing

the old ones survived
the border crossing
determined to tolerate
anything for a penny
just for this opportunity
they could not afford to be cold

their kids' kids' kids still crawl out
from beneath old truckbeds
or plywood lean-tos down at the tracks
to walk to school to learn english
with their faces scrubbed
but without coats with naked arms

you want to say:
are you hungry
are you cold
tho you know they are not cold

if you gave them your coat
they would not wear it
they do not wear coats

bulk beans or rice suffice
but they are not cold

MARY OROVAN

AT THE CUSP

frail
on twig
baby finger anxious green

egg's hairline crack
shattering to life

our crowning
smack and cry

drop of blood
pop of question

wow of idea

edge
suicide leap second after
how it feels

or slow inch by inch easing in
gliding wet
body swim head going under
to the heart

final petal fall
drying pistil burned by time

fragile vapor on mirror

HOMESICK

for a place unvisited,
meals untasted,

laughter unheard,
memories marinating

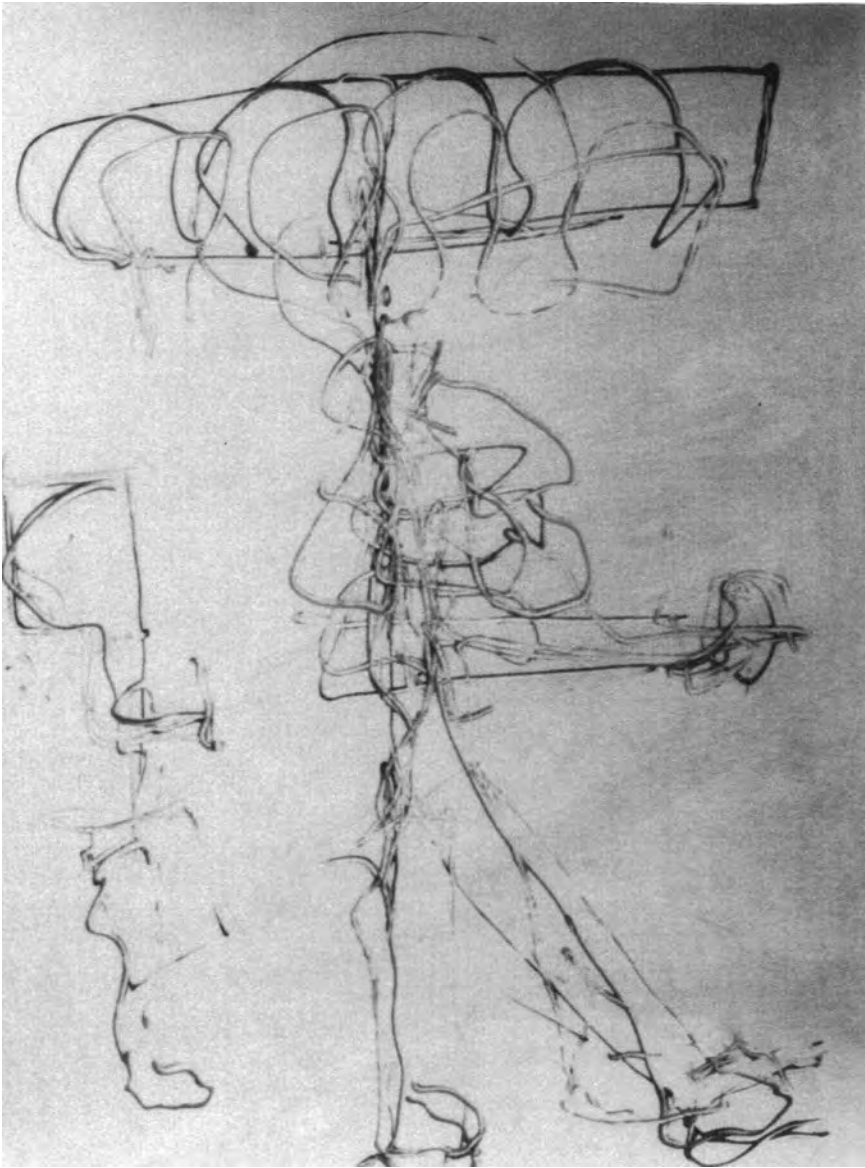
in a picnic basket
that never moves.

THE BEDSHEETS ARE
BAROMETERS

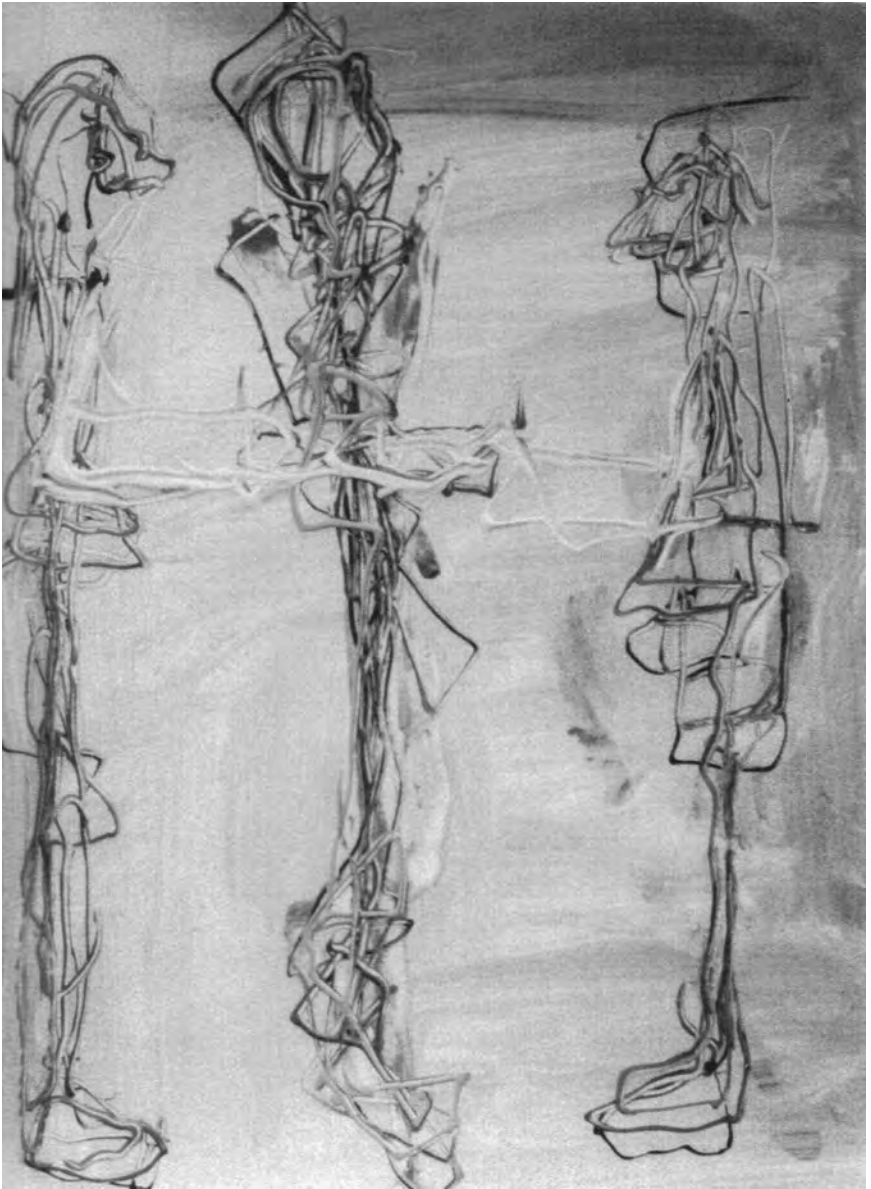
Glandular excretions
Oil the school bus

A sliver of liver
Under the welcome mat

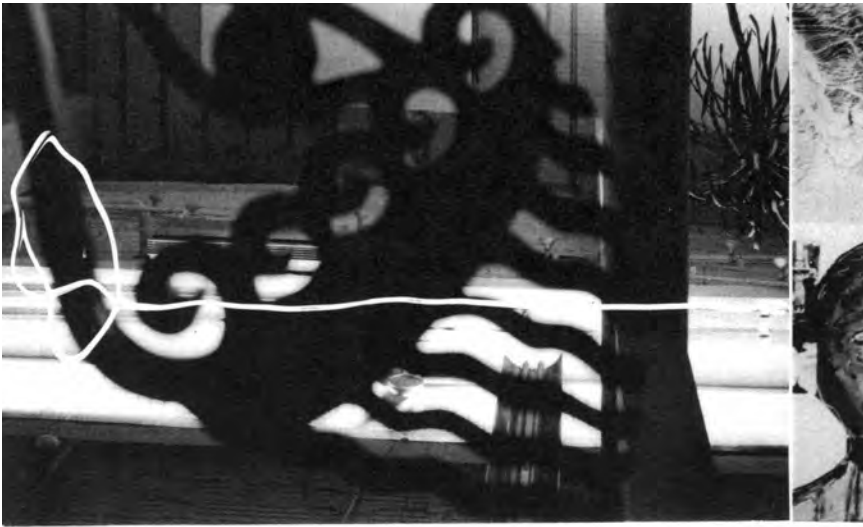
Ashes pour out of organ pipes
Zoo-zoo stains in the sky



Guy R. Beining: 2 O'clock

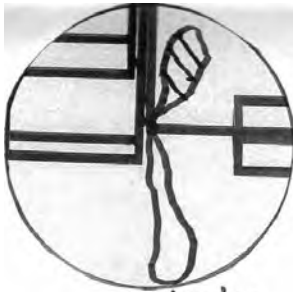


Guy R. Beining: *Antique Morning*



Medicine 4/27/11

Guy R. Beining: *Fat*



trying



to



elevate



toward



better



Fits



Mis-
For-
tune



4/16/10 *Misfortune*

Guy R. Beining

T. KILGORE SPLAKE

SPRING

old t.s. was wrong

eliot's the waste land

april is not the cruelest month

breeding lilacs, memory and desire

graybeard poet

"long white" survivor

alive to witness

bask in another

ice out

blood bath

sense of beginning

T. KILGORE SPLAKE

DARGER FRAME "PAPA"

henry escaping

asylum for feeble-minded

walking to Chicago

janet surviving

electro-shock therapy

clinic lobotomy solution

old hem

early mornings watching

sawtooth mountain ghosts

three writers

facing empty page

patiently waiting

one true sentence

TOM WEIGEL

PERFORATION

Vale of who is within cloud of being
too bookless for clues
solicitations endless

is the beholder of wonders
too deep a prospect for summary
fawners flatterers fops

always “technically this”
or “if you don’t have access”
as the color red earns a discourse

even if letters were involved
it would be remiss
to leave out the sparrow

TOM WEIGEL

SANCTUARY

Flattening air waves into bedsheets
using the iron of silence

life outside the box
is sometimes Cole Porter Revisited

so giving up on the idea of giving up
makes room enough

for my thick skull in the box
submerged now

without inventories
rowing toward you is not so awful



Alois Nozicka: *Ten*

AIRICA PARKER

HEART

-Left Atrium

Your fingernails of honeysuckle
and broken ice shred dilated pupils.
Your nude chest is a migration.
Nipples heavily perfumed,
made bitter, to conceal
another scent, yes, Spring,
that's it, you reek of betrayal.
In your meadows bumblebees
mistake my vulva for a bloom,
lick their bodies across my G-spot,
erect honeycombs around my cervix.
I will always come to you,
but damn the room you built in my heart.

-Left Ventricle

Summer, your lakeshore escorts my canoe
as if it were the hand of a child,
fescue grasses, common reeds, pond lilies,
blended bay, oars extend my back, arms, fists,
canoe elongates my torso, legs, feet,
a soothing swim, remembered so fully
that my strength suspects itself immortal.
My pinkies alone protest, they whimper
about repetitious circles.

-Right Atrium

Shields laid down all around, surrendered.
I will hear any predator, safe. I can rest
my whole sole on the crinkles of this leaf,
this one and this one, cushion. Barefoot
and spinning like a dervish, I stamp
out a tissue-paper tempo all my own.

-Right Ventricle

Ravens gnaw your bark.
Talons grow wooly boots.
Footprints guide me back.

ALAN BRITT

ALLEY IN VENICE

Screaming green, coffee dripping curtains, fluorescent tube flutters like a manta ray below her skin, the letter z becomes violent for no apparent reason struggling with a black leather boot cinched just below the knee, freight train moans behind a woods, poplars, maples, elms & oaks, the occasional black walnut & frost tucked inside chrysalis where a cotton flower explodes like popcorn, window air-conditioner scoops the bricks from walls of pomegranate verbs as though they were stir fried or sautéed & perhaps poached like adjectives pureed like the salt hair of ghosts' frozen fingers wrapped around buggy whips. At this point a nest of lightning explodes into blackbirds... a white balloon limps from granite building to granite building tongue liling amniotic fluid that leaks a darkened doorway — wrought iron door bulging a litter of poets below the coral vulva walls towering a narrow cobblestone alley in Venice.

ALAN BRITT

THE ANGRY ONES

I'm thinking melancholy's not in vogue or that a royal wedding grinds the earth to a halt sucking millions of existential housewives into what it's like to be a cell phone flash against the gilded carriage door. I guess that'll do for some, but others, god strike me dead, others won't stand for it, so they build fires in state parks, pound bongos & purge their powdery souls. It's that or purchase a pharmaceutical solution via bitter healthcare, thereby closing the curtains to formal dining rooms & leaving adjacent living rooms in absolute peril.

JODY AZZOUNI

GREED PAYS OFF

Glittering hoard eaching
us like a wedge. Still
we collect and arouse
the envious future. Golden
tombstones glint in the distance,
while, always, the bittering dawn
moves up close for its kill.

JODY AZZOUNI

LANDSCAPE BY DALI

It persists, surprisingly:
a boneless statue, its meat
yielding only to time.

A theological sky:
eyes scattered like birds.

Near the murdered clock
a virus, its treasured codex,
blueprint for immortality,
sleeps in a bottle.

The faint-veined ruby
its throb barely detectable
hangs in the air like a heart.

Outside the cloud of paint
something is ticking.
Pray it doesn't wake up.

JODY AZZOUNI

MERMAIDS PLAYING

No flesh quite
caresses like the sea's:
There are salt's tiny teeth,
their smiles; the joy
of unfolding fists.
The nuzzling foam; a blue bath.

Amongst nesting bubbles
they do it again.

AFTER THE FIRE GOES OUT

The ashes flutter like black moths
when I stir them,
then settle down again
like a scattered dead thing going
back to sleep.

JODY AZZOUNI

FROSTBITE

Blue shades, and shades of white.
The chatter of ice. The diamonds
which purr.

He lays her down. The
white grass, hard dew.

Persephone shivers. Nude
motes in the icelight, he
spreads apart garments,

her shaking hologram
silver within his glassy chest.
The frosty breasts, white-dusted;
the nipples taut blue.

When winter comes, when
his icicle deeps inside her,
snowflakes like eggs
are born everywhere.

JODY AZZOUNI

LOSS OF PERSPECTIVE

Something new:

landscape crushed flat
against the cave wall.

My cousin,
strutting like a little God,
his hands wet with colors,
has slapped the sun
against the stone.

Something new:

the flattened sun watches over
flat bison, a mastodon, flattened goats,
some grass.

We're impressed,
until it rains,
and we have to kill him.

JODY AZZOUNI

ODIN GETS TO SEE IT ALL

Hungry for control, the dangfool god
gouges his own eye out
and drops it in the seedy well.

Then he gulps down the thick stew
Mimir has ladled out for him: pond scum,
decomposing bird ...not pure by a long shot
but the usual for neglected wells.

“I don’t think I’m any smarter,” Odin says,
the throbbing in his esophagus finally subsiding.
Mimir shrugs and counsels patience.
Sure enough, at dawn some days later,
there is dew for the first time.

Those awake at such an hour wonder
what large thing has spent the night crying.
And some centuries hence, Christians
will suspect dew-drops are angel-eggs.
But for Odin they are new eyes,
and he sees the dawn
from everywhere at once.



Michael Weston

KRISTIN ABRAHAM

THE AFFAIR (AFTERWARD)

Do you know how to die
he said and I said
I don't know (I heard

do you love me). I had
an arm wrenched
behind my back, was

bare-foot in the iced-up
clover. Then so hot
everything smelled like metal.

The moon was a baby tooth
in the sky. My answer
a howl—loose dirt.

So that the light shined through in places.
A somewhat rain had started.

KRISTIN ABRAHAM

JORNADA DEL MUERTO

(Spanish: “Journey of the Dead”; also
a dangerous pioneer trail in the Southwest.)

January is his direction, like North
or Mississippi, an arrow both up
and down. All points he can sketch
in the dirt: a first, and a first,
and a first.

It’s a windy thirty; flakes scratch
his face; cows barely ribs, hands
of snow belt their hides. It’s dark
on this mountain this night before
never.

He is eye-rubbing tired but set
to build Zion. Stubborn off brilliance,
he has a vision: creosote bushes,
raised arms and rapture.

“Ice is a bear,” his boots speak
with anger. Then all the world’s insects
lay hands, in an instant. And heat
is one room: he hugs all he knows,
like trying to block the sun
with a finger.

J. R. SOLONCHE

POCKET WATCH

It is one of the most beautiful things
I've ever seen, this pocket watch
in this window of this jewelry store.

It is more beautifully intricate than a spider's
beautifully intricate web. It is more polished
than a stone polished to glossiest gloss

in a stream. Its face is a blue more sublime
than the beautifully sublime blue of the Aegean.
Its hour hand marks the most beautiful hours

of all the hours in the world. Its minute hand
marks the most beautiful minutes of all
the minutes. Its second hand marks

the most beautiful of all the seconds.
Its whispered ticking is a ticking whisper
more seductive than the whisper of lips.

It has a name that sounds like the beautiful name
of the most expensive French champagne.
But the most beautiful thing is that you can do

to time with it what time does to you.
You can carry it around in your pocket
all day long, and, from time to time, look at it.



Lawrence Applebaum

STEPHANIE DICKINSON

SNOW FLOWER

The car from the past executes figure-eights, then skates over the frozen tracks made less than an hour ago. He steers under the bridge heading out of Cheyenne into the iced-over highway. The snow is falling like a white shawl. More figure-eights that slide the car toward the shoulder, and then deep ditch. The driver smells your fright. It suffocates when the odor is so strong. “I’ll take you to my apartment, if that’s what you want,” you say. “Trust me.” You wait for his answer. “Throw your clothes in back,” he says.

Back seat. No altar laid with palms, candelabra and incense. But you’ve come scented in jasmine and ginger lily.

You are looking at date rape from a distance. Or hook-up rape. Wondering how great your own culpability. Your older self wants to see its younger self through time—the riskier one, the inviter of trouble, the impulsive self. The stupid one.

And there is the landscape of Wyoming. Geological time. You could see it everywhere. Black Rock, Steamboat Mountain, Wind River, the Killpecker Sand Dunes. Not fields or pasture or prairie grasses, but land’s stone and stick vastness. Unbroken by buildings, such space conveys a sense of time before human consciousness. A state, its natives proudly claim, where cattle outnumber people. Then too there is human time. Once the Crow lived in the valleys of the Powder, Wind, and Big Horn Rivers. The Arapaho’s raiding parties divided into bands of “the ugly people” and “red-willow men.”

Behind you the low lights of Cheyenne that snow kills and before you the bridge into the prairie that has no end, a drive into white nothing. You’re dreading what you know and don’t know and you’ve been drinking. Did he really tell you to throw your clothes in back? You take the gum from your mouth, reach toward the window to buzz it down. “Don’t touch the door!” he grabs your arm. You’re shaken. “I was only going to throw my gum out,” you say. The pink must drain from your face. The blue and green too. “Give it here,” he orders. Even sitting behind the wheel he seems tall, giving off intensity. His arms sheathed in an olive-green airman’s jacket. “What?” you say to this man from the air base. “The gum.” You hand it over. He tosses it into the ashtray.

Back things up and explain what you’re doing in Cheyenne, newly graduated from an MFA program and qualified for nothing. You’re twenty-four and there’s a recession on and gas shortages and a flood of graduates

leaving the universities with degrees, all needing to find their way in the world. Start earlier in the day when you're about to leave the Hynds Building built in the nineteenth century by the cattle and minerals people, the same folks who pushed the Arapaho and Shoshoni west to the Wind River Reservation. They cleared the land of its indigenous people and erected the capitol—red granite with marble floors and water fountains like broken pieces of wedding cake. Curlicues of zinc, copper and mahogany. You're a VISTA Volunteer grantwriter for a protection and advocacy nonprofit that is investigating the Lander State Training School, Wyoming's residential institution for the developmentally disabled.

Your job is to compose paragraphs and fill in grant applications, to scour the Federal Register for money. You're familiar with the voluminous testimony of the Lander Investigation. For years there have been suspicious deaths at Lander. The physically and mentally disabled transported to baths on low carts so roughly, their arms are broken passing through narrow doorways. Rumors of the alcoholic Dr. Mary, the School's physician, ruling drunkenly over her fiefdom. Autopsies revealed that under her care hospitalized residents starved on saline-rectal drips, the kind used solely for field emergencies in WWI.

You've been to the Training School hundreds of miles away in bleak and beautiful western Wyoming. Isolated, its own water tower looming from the distance, you watched the magpies swim overhead, their black and water plumage flashing. Built to withstand blizzards, you toured the brick wards of Downs Syndrome adults and children, the brain damaged and severely autistic, the elderly cerebral palsied whose fate was to be institutionalized in the era before mainstreaming. The fortress-like buildings perch in the middle of rocks. During the Depression the poor sometimes left their hungry children at the School's gates, notes pinned to them. "Feed them. They'll work." Many parents never returned. The children stayed their whole lives.

You say goodnight, kick through the old snow the three blocks to your flat-roofed unfurnished apartment. You pass your landlady's window and wave. She surrounds herself with photos of her Marine son who will never age. He is as old as he will ever be.

Your apartment is practically bare, a bedroom with dresser and bed, one chair in the living room, a mirror, a stopped-up fireplace. The kitchen where you spend all your time is furnished with a low long sink like your Chicago grandmother had, a flat basin without separate tubs for wash and dry. Yes, this place reminds you of your Chicago grandmother, not your Iowa farm grandmother. The Chicago grandmother whose flesh was the odor of marigolds mixed with water dripping under the sink, wallpaper flaking. The house getting to do as it pleases.

The table is gargantuan, two high-backed benches with a varnished wood slab between them, your own café booth, your reading corner. The dirty milk bowl of the light fixture hangs on thick chains, filled with dazed

moths and flies. Here you've read Jean Rhys' *Voyage into the Dark*, *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Here you've read Elizabeth Bowen's *The House in Paris*, *The Death of the Heart*, *Eva Trout*. Most nights after work you eat Ramen noodles and make pots of coffee and sit in your booth and read. But some nights you tire of the table and the window overlooking the red, wooden staircase/fire escape and clothesline. You tire of the gas stove and old refrigerator. The linoleum swabs of green, orange, and black. Like a rattlesnake's skin. You tire of the aging bachelor who pounds on his ceiling with a broom handle when you walk.

««—»»

Two blocks from the flat-roofed apartment is the Downtowner, a hotel and lounge with live bands. You're walking in open-toe platform shoes and nylon knee-highs. You're only going to be gone for an hour or so. Work tomorrow. Still you're good smelling from your ginger lily bath, dressed in tight, black stovepipe pants and a strapless top with tiny mirrors sewn into the fabric. A silver choker. At eighteen you were rebellious. Wild. You made bad choices. You're trying to change.

Snow is beginning to fall, a dusting like the tiny mirrors in your shirt. Winters, the natives tell you, cut the northern half of the state off from the south. Blizzards close the highways and roads. Nothing gets through, not even snowmobiles. This morning on your way to work you saw tonight's band checking into their room at the Downtowner, three guys leaned over the balcony, flirting. The cutest one tells you he's the drummer.

You slip over the new snow polishing the old. Your wool jacket isn't even a coat. Your long hair matches your large brown eyes. Cow eyes, they've been called.

A girl from somewhere else. Her skin soft, maybe feathers.

You pull the Downtowner's glass door. Walk through the green-ferned lobby and turn right into the club. The room of bodies. Warm like a just kissed lip. You push into the crowd. The band is taking a break. The drummer you saw on the balcony, who told you to come tonight isn't looking. Maybe you should have worn red spandex. You make your way to the end of the bar, take a stool and order a gin and tonic. There's a tall angular guy in an airman's jacket eyeing you. He's dressed in military boots and black jeans. You know he's looking and you're hoping he won't ask to buy you a drink. You watch him approach. All you can see are his boots. Heavy, lace-ups. Black. How tortuous the shoestrings look, so many eyeholes to loop. Everyone else in the bar is civilian. Cowboys, cowgirls, a few suit and ties, a convention of aluminum siding salesmen.

"Do you mind if I sit down?" he asks. His hands are stuffed deep in his pockets. You tell him you don't mind, although you're disappointed.

But how could you mind? You don't own the barstool. He asks to buy you a drink and you tell him you have one, but he's already gesturing to the bartender. His name is Angus. The name Angus makes you think of the Black Angus Pancake House of your childhood, the wire wheel shining with a rainbow of syrups: maple, peach, strawberry, blueberry, stickiness stretching into infinity. You look out at the crowd. The tables are filled. A forest of drinks wreathed in smoke. The cowgirls stand holding onto their cigarettes. Tight jeans only a shoehorn could fit them into.

He's settling on the stool next to you, and this is how the choreography begins on an L corner. His leg blocks your exit and no one else gets in. Cheyenne is off the beaten path and the farther west you travel the more off you go. Here you can see the stars in the city but as soon as you leave the city limits distance smacks you in the face. Antelope Flats. Thermopolis. Badwater Creek. Casper. Rattlesnake Hills. Ghosts of Oglala girls won in poker games and married to bullwhackers dart across lonely highways. Girls thrown away by their husbands when white women came West cry out for their lost half-white children.

Not a Godiva chocolate but a kitkat. Girl of flawed beauty made of blackberry jelly and olive pits. Pale-skinned, river eyes.

Angus isn't cute and it's hard to tell how old he is. But age is always the opening salvo and soon you know he's twenty-seven and he knows you're twenty-four. He's stationed at Warren Air Force Base. His large knuckles brush your face as he leans to light your cigarette. Smoking is something the older self will chastise the younger for. He catches the animal scent in your hair. The band is mediocre. "Abracadabra" and "The Joker." You beg off between sets to visit the ladies room. He watches you hover around the drummer. The drummer shakes his head. He's telling you he has a fiancé in Denver.

You stay in the bathroom, hoping that Angus will have moved on. But he's planted himself in that seat and when you finally return he asks you to dance. You follow him out onto the dance floor, a checkerboard of flashing lights. Red. Green. Stop. Go. His mouth stays set. He doesn't smile.

"Another round," he waves at the bartender. There's plenty of money in his pocket. "What kind of music do you like?" he asks when you're sitting again. You should say: Jane Austin. Emily Bronte. Jayne Anne Phillips. Word music. But you answer, "Jazz." As if you know something, as if you're a cut above Elton John and Michael Jackson. "Yeah," he says, almost a smile. "I like jazz too. Cecil Taylor. Monk. Mingus." You add, "Les McCann." Then he's bringing up more players. Lester Young. James Moody. Woody Shaw. His long unhappy face has story in it, perhaps a childhood of poverty, noise. A crowded apartment where the TV is always on. More drinks appear in front of you.

The Downtowner's bartender collects the tab. "Midnight. Last call,

guys!” he calls out. This is a time before *roofies* going into drinks. Rohyphol. *Ruffles*.

“Let’s go to the Frontier Inn. It stays open until two,” Angus says. “Listen, my buddies tell me the band playing there is supposed to be good. Jazz!” You shake your head, tell him no, tomorrow’s a grant proposal deadline. You look down at your open toe platform shoes as if they can decide for you. You haven’t established trust although you’ve talked. About Philadelphia, about how he feels forsaken and out-of-place here. If you beg off he’ll think you’re a liar, that you really didn’t like jazz after all. You find yourself in the parking lot where snow is beginning to erase the tire tracks.

His buddy lent him his car. It’s a big old car with plenty of legroom.

Just for an hour. He’s promising that as you get in. The lightly falling snow is thickening and sticking. Your platform shoes slide through the snow. Your mother would not take this ride in a big dark car, his buddy’s car. That’s part of the reason you get in.

Girl who talks Lady Day as if she can conjure that voice blue with cigarette smoke and orchid breath. Like the fragrance of 2:00 a.m. Voice that could sing about falling leaves and mean the cavalry killing all the game animals so the Lakota peoples would starve. Voice that could mourn a single man’s lynching or the extermination of buffalo herds that like the Great Wall of China could once be seen from the moon.

The Frontier Inn is two miles outside of Cheyenne near the overpasses. I-25. This is the truck route between Canada and Texas. Everything runs through Denver and past Cheyenne going north and south. He’s having to use the windshield wipers to bat back the snow. You stare out into the oncoming night. Tiny mirrors of snow are shimmering in the headlights. Wyoming, already crouching under last week’s snow, awaits more. He tells you about gymnastics in Philadelphia. The still rings. He competed. His upper body so strong he could hold the Iron Cross for two seconds. Suspended in mid-air, both arms straight out from the sides of his body. The rings completely in his control. He loved that. You tell him about VISTA. How you receive a small stipend each month and food stamps. Maybe he chuckles when you tell him the amount.

Ahead you see some trucks pulling over into the Inn’s parking lot where a neon bucking bronco flashes. Inside the lobby the heat hits you. Where did all these people come from in this Cheyenne that always feels half-deserted? You walk past the desk over green carpet that smells like smoke, perfume and wintergreen Airwick. The lounge is large enough to fit a herd of steers. Light jitters into your eyes from chandeliers, glass baubles dangling from eight-point elk racks. You follow Angus to the bar where you face the mirror, two strangers that are together. He doesn’t try to hold your hand.

How does this compare to Philadelphia? It doesn’t. The bartender turns. Black thread scripts his name Warren on his left pocket. Like the air base.

“What will you have?” he says, sinking a dirty glass in the bubbly sink. You watch the limes float like citrus islands. He swishes a rag over the smear of fingerprints in front of you. “On the house,” the bartender adds. Angus orders a shot of scotch for himself. Gin and tonic for you. You’ve drunk way too much on an empty stomach. You ask him what happened to gymnastics. His face twists. The coach switched him to the pole vault. The vault he couldn’t control through strength and will, it was like climbing the air. You make air stairs and run up them. He sips his scotch. He tells you he liked the cheers and clapping as he used to handspring off the mats into the showers. If you don’t reach for goals, his coach told him, you have to be content with what others toss you. Then Coach treated him worse than dirt. Left him off all-state list.

In the ladies room you smooth on lipstick. You’d like to close your eyes and wake up in your apartment. Thank goodness the drinks are weak. Or are they? You can feel the snow falling in your mind, the sky is bigger out here and you can disappear into it. You’d like to escape his long unhappy face. You shouldn’t have accepted his drinks. You want to unswallow them.

A glam band is playing. The lead singer struts off the stage, sweeping his pink boa. Hand cocked to his hip, he jitters into the audience that is mostly male. Drivers of 18-wheelers and cowhands with ten gallon hats. Women hang on the edges of the crowd. The older ones look salty. A couple of underage girls with mascara eyes stand near the men’s room. The lead singer’s white jumpsuit is alive with sequins. Like fish scales or a snowdrift. The bartender orders everyone to drink up. You hear a vacuum humming like a fly.

You watch your glass sink into the bubbling bar sink.

The girl thinks she hears his thoughts. All the people in this town are like snow falling and he is the night they’re falling into. The snow is ground up people. He is reality. Cold reality. She’s scared she’s gonna end up with him.

««—»»

You skate out the front door. You’re wondering when he will ask to go home with you. Is he expecting you to ask him? Is there any way you can beg off? There’s the snow past your ankles and you’re sliding in the parking lot to the big dark car, and you’re drunk so there is nothing cold about the snow. The pinpricks in the wind tickle your cheeks. When you toured the Lander School you met twin brothers, albinos in their sixties, trudging behind a white horse that pulled the garbage sledge. The brothers were the School’s garbage men. They’d been there since they were babies. You wouldn’t forget how their heads of white hair shone like cold suns, how they carried willow switches, their gait matching the horse’s. The brothers and horse appearing to be a single thing. Maybe you shared with

Angus all of that. And he told you of the Maltese Cross and holding himself parallel to the floor on the rings, his body stretched laterally. His body, iron.

You both get into the buddy's car. Slam the doors.

The snow is thicker and the road graders won't be out until morning. The car tires slip. On the bridge the 18-wheelers pull off onto the shoulder to wait the storm out. You hear their radios and CBs crackling as the car passes them. Angus adjusts the heater. You put a stick of gum in your mouth. In later years you will try to imagine what's going on inside him. Does he already know where the car is going? Is it you talking about jazz that sets him off? Or your mindless rattling on? About your apartment and the black-haired man who lives under you and pounds on the ceiling with his broomstick. Maybe it's your holier than thou VISTA volunteering, your crusader bullshit.

Maybe you talk about the testimony of the kids pulled into the bathrooms: how the aides were sure the cretins didn't feel anything; if they flopped on the carts or twisted their arms like wires or half-flew through the door, the aides kept pulling. An eye doctor set limb fractures. Winter roads blocked by snow, ice and high wind. Weeks passing and the temperature not lifting its eye above zero. He's telling you he enlisted to become a pilot but it doesn't look like he's going to fly. He repairs planes. The snow flurries are coming down faster. Leaving snow entrails in the air. Like strands of horsetail and mane.

You're still a mile from Cheyenne. Snow shrinks visibility to the world of the front seat. He lets the car almost stop, then he turns the wheel and the car begins creeping in the opposite direction of town. White nothing in every direction. He drops his head on the steering wheel, resting it there. It's then that you reach for the door handle to throw your gum out.

He lets the car swerve, snow sucking the tires. Rhythm and blues spills out of the dash for a second then die away. The car is passing under the bridge into the prairie. Into space. The car skates or he loses his grip on the steering wheel and the ice under the new snow takes hold. Wind pushes the car effortlessly toward the shoulder. Everything is beautifully slow, slow and beautiful. "You're going to take me home, aren't you?" you ask. "Eventually."

When he grabs your arm your pink face pales into a dead shrimp. He says, "Throw your clothes in the back seat. Your purse too." He could see you were scared shitless at the club that the night might run out and you'd end up with him. Sure you're petrified now. Hey, he watched the bartender sink the glass printed with your lipstick into a bubbly compost of limes and lemons. You take a deep breath. "Let's go to my apartment." The car is stopped and he repeats. "Throw your clothes in the back seat." You beg. Please let's just go to my apartment. "Sure I've heard that one before," he snorts. "I can see the lie in your eyes. All women are liars." You try to

meet the gaze of his long angular jaw. You tell him you've been hurt in your life too. Pushing your hair back from your face you show him the scar on your jaw and neck where you were accidentally shot at age eighteen. The injuries you can't talk about. "Scar isn't nothing," he says. "You're still good looking." Inexplicably, the car moves, swerving over the dividing line, then stopping. The car can't make up its mind.

The girl's face rises like fever in a thermometer. Her eyes aren't far off anymore. They're in the here and now. The right now! Does she want to ask the man again if he listens to jazz? Does he dig those cool blown notes? Those gone tunes. He knows all those ghosts, those blue glowing women.

He lets you know he was watching you from the time he walked into the Downtowner. His mind was on slow burn and his mouth hungry for a drink. The snow sparkled like Florida sand with a billion teeth. Miami where the coach took them for competition and Angus won. Looking forward to a few cool ones he saw you, a girl with long dark hair on high heels and in tight jeans. Her eyes darted everywhere but at him. Walking toward you he saw the disappointment in your eyes. Not like he hadn't seen that before. A thousand times he'd seen it. He hated that more than anything. He watched you go up to that drummer, all smiles. The drummer blew you off. You came back to your barstool, weak. The rot of this place reminds him of Philly.

Ice builds up on the windshield. The wiper blades rasp and he turns them off. Anyone who might happen to see the car will think it's abandoned. You've slipped off your shoes and begun to peel down your stovepipe pants. Numb from the gin and tonics you're doing what you're told. Will he kill you afterwards? Likely, he can taste your fear. He likes it. What are you doing in this car anyway? Why were you at the Downtowner? What would your father think if he hadn't died when you were three? Your mother would admonish you for how you are dressed. Girls who show skin ask for it. "I can't believe this," you say. But why not? Where else did you think you were going?

All the slow dressing of earlier, the choosing of which top and what pants, the little shirt with the tiny mirrors comes off easy. This is reality. Total reality. He grabs the clothes out of your hand and throws them in back. You jerk the door handle up, lunge out, running into the ditch. Fight or flight. You know when it happens because you hear the wind and the thick moan inside of it. In the distance you see white. One star bawls like a herd of cattle while your own breath freezes in your nostrils. You should know better to open your mouth. Like cattle still digging for the grass even at the last. While he was zippering you shouldered the door open and ran.

Girl swaddled in scallops & Chantilly lace. Why aren't you wearing only your best red blood cells?

You are naked and outside. Your feet don't feel the snow and your skin doesn't notice the cold. You're wearing alcohol.

You run into the ditch. You'll be a snow flower not found until spring. Snow up to your knees. You don't feel him tackle you, jumping on your back. He pushes your face into the snow. More muscles in his legs than three or four guys. He rocks your head deeper into the snow. You can't breathe. "Sir, do you understand? Call me sir from now on." He lifts your head from the snow. "Sir, say it!"

"Yes, sir." You say it. "You know who's boss now?" "Yes, sir."

You're back inside the car. He pushes your face to the windshield, your cheek kissing glass. Snow glitters in the headlights like the soft eyes of aliens. Fawns. Ice-blue. He wedges you between floor and seat, he has you on your knees, he enters you. You face him, you face away. You forget. You lose track of your body. He rapes you more than once. Cattle whose nostrils freeze and are too stupid to open their mouths to breathe. You are dumb like cattle. Date rape doesn't yet exist. When it is over he bangs his head on the steering wheel. You can't explain why you feel something like pity for him.

««—»»

The car passes the gas station and the first Cheyenne light flickers dimly. Your body relaxes. The fear with its edge and somersaulting shrillness recedes. The snow sounds like breaking glass under the tires. You don't speak except to direct him to the old apartment building near the Downtowner. Is he frightened you will call the police? Perhaps he thinks the air base will protect him? No, it is a different age. Date rape is not yet an expression. Not yet a crime. Soon it will appear in *Ms.* magazine but not yet. There is no definition. "Date Rape: Rape of a woman by a man with whom she is acquainted. The rapist is usually her escort."

The car stops in front of your apartment. Your escort picks up your purse, whose contents have spilled on the floorboards of the driver's side. He opens your checkbook and looks. "You didn't lie about your name," he says.

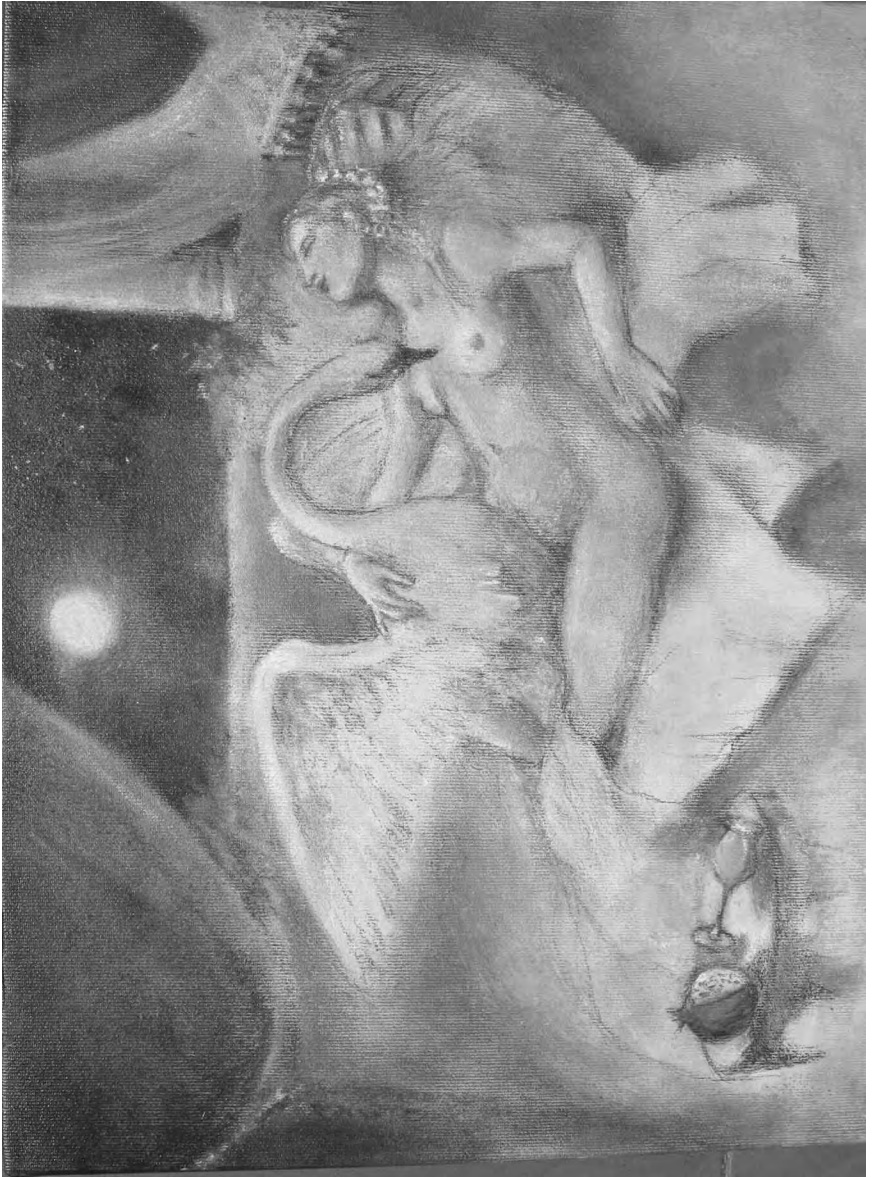
You and he will never meet again.

The snow will always be misting around the car. In slow motion you remember. The Kiowa and Apache passed this way. The Arapaho and Crow. Date rape still doesn't exist. You lift your face into the wind as you walk toward your building. Thick drops of snow feel like edges of torn Kleenex.

You don't call the police. Again and again he flings you back into the car. He violates you. He makes you whimper. In the darkness where there aren't real people he makes you call him sir. He dreams of the still rings. Flying and falling but mostly he holds himself rigid, the Iron Cross.



Nicole Blau



Nicole Blau: *Leda and the Swan*



Michael Weston

ALAN CATLIN

DOUBLE SELF-PORTRAITS

Almost mirror images of two young women sitting at a café table, wine glasses half-empty, half full, or at the beach, in two piece bathing suits, one blue, the other pink, or embracing at Central Park Zoo, hello, goodbye; shadows in dark and light like two faces becoming one as in “Persona,” together and apart, two aspects of the same person, totally different, or the dominating one becoming the dominated as in “Passion of Anna,” two halves of the same whole, separate but together, or two faces turned to a gallery wall, impossible to tell one from the other; two empty frames nearby where their pictures should be.

ALAN CATLIN

OUR LADY OF THE STRIPED PAJAMAS

This is the way the world ends:
within concentric circles of barbed
wire fencing patrolled by packs of
starving dogs inside the mined perimeter,
their trainers and sharpshooters watching
from elevated guide posts, smoking cigarettes
and scanning the grounds with flood lights,
emergency flares nearby just in case
the unlikely occurs: that those locked inside
could, somehow, escape, that some lady in
striped pajamas could show them the way
out, provide a path to the promised land
and somehow take them there instead of
leading them to their places in the courtyard
where the camp band plays Messiaen,
half the orchestra missing, most of the music
as well, on those unchanging, airless, no hope
afternoons, before the sirens signal to those
assembled, that all is clear.

ADAM MCGRAW

AUBADE

The city is a blossomed chasm,
steel sheets vaulting down into the obelisks
of stoplights, and the new razoring wind
and rain are brutal as a drunk and desperate voice
bounding down an alley.

Daisy is standing next to the door,
luggage in hand. Her face is a set mask.

She leaves into the crumpling glance of sunrise
overtaken by rain clouds.

His arms are heavy. His hands are limp fists.

The rain is strong against the window
which cracks and moans
like the dying breath of a radiator,
sparking a moment of heat and brilliance
and violet and goddamn the sun
still in a pocket of clouds, and its warmth
still thrown over park benches,
the rails of train cars, and the slit of light
that falls over his bare feet.

The water rises. And the city trembles,
and he tries to remember the names of other flowers,
but all is Daisy, no flanking button-blossoms
or blue seed pods, vulgar as fingers
stolen by ice water; other flowers are myths
in his mouth. Daisy remains.

ROBERT KING

SOME OF THESE DAYS I'LL MISS YOU

Honey, I'm half there, although today a man
lifts a plastic chair from his truck by the artificial lake
along the artificial Interstate in Nebraska
and sends out a line, communicating
with the placid dark smoke of the water
and I remember an early morning of fog
on the coast of Portugal watching men wading
hip deep along the rocks to pick up something
from the salty little crevices in another language.

He doesn't cast again. This is lake-fishing, a yellow
and red bobber bobbing yellow and red,
both of us waiting, watching the water. Once I saw
a gaggle of photographers troop down in Spain
to set themselves beside a bay of picturesque
and one, there's always one, who set up his tripod
to photograph photographers photographing the bay.
Watching the man I remember watching the man
in New York, looking down at his two windows

across the street as he set up a chessboard in one,
then disappeared, appearing in the other,
getting glasses, a bottle of wine, disappearing,
appearing in the other to set them out.
Later, having forgotten he was alive, I looked down:
two men playing chess, amazingly drinking
the wine which had been rain at some time,
perhaps in Spain where a woman watched
out her window, looking forward to something.

“The things you remember,” my father shook his head one day,
a man whose life had gently narrowed
to a room along a hall of rooms—smiling almost
in mistrust. He had left remembering the day before
behind. The current news was someone opening
a puzzling door, the way light slanted through.
Finally his accomplice, I sat with him, searching
out the window past the bird feeder always empty.
And today I sit by proxy in a white plastic chair

looking at my line in the lake and the lake’s line
mirrored back in its window, an unfinished completion.
The highway hums behind us with thousands
of steady purposes and I am living on the verge of leaving,
a good thing, I have decided, to practice.
Some of these days you’ll miss me and, honey,
I will too although I’ve forgotten where you are
but I’ll find out. Highways, unlike lakes, are good at that.

PHILIP DACEY

UPON AN UNPAINTED PAINT-BY-NUMBER BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

for Ezra

The Queen of my childhood
is covered with numbers.

She looks like the map
of a balkanized continent.

Each numbered space
is a prayer to a color.

The Virgin painting,
untouched by paint—

is color a violation
or the fulfillment of destiny?

Left unpainted, would the Virgin
never give birth

or would she give birth
to a paint-by-number Jesus?

Aquinas would surely have loved
puzzling out the theology

of a paint-by-number Virgin.
And now I confess it: this

is a paint-by-number poem,
which I have left unpainted

in deference to the Virgin,
counting on you, Reader, for color.

PHILIP DACEY

MUTILATE

My son Austin has never forgotten
the deliciously incongruous
and melodramatic phrasing
of his Irish great-grandfather's
loud complaint, "Someone has mutilated

me newspaper," as he held up the day's
St. Louis Post-Dispatch and peered
through a hole cut in it, a coupon or notice
gone, the choice article on the other side
now missing some essential information.

"Who was it mutilated me newspaper?"
Of course, none of his five sons confessed.
But now Austin confesses to loving
the word 'mutilate' in unlikely contexts:
a professor of philosophy, he takes

a certain pleasure in writing on a student's
term paper, "This mutilates Plato";
a phonecall once "mutilated my silence";
and "The party was a great success
until a drunken guest mutilated it."

Perhaps Austin will one day stand
at my fresh grave and complain,
not needing to ask who did it,
nor expecting a confession,
"Someone has mutilated me father."

DAVID CHORLTON

END OF THE LINE

Another man too poor to fail
sits down to occupy
a few square feet of sunlight
on a warm November day
at the light rail station
where the fare is a dollar
and seventy-five cents for a short
or a long ride; it's all the same
to the machine that takes the money
and to anyone without sufficient change
to spend on a ticket, even if
he had somewhere to go
after he's spoken with the officer
who stopped to ask
why he sits here with no apparent
intent to move along. There is nobody
present for him to disturb.
Nobody to be offended
by the way he smells.
Nobody who complained
about the way he stretches his legs
across the platform
or spreads his arms wide
leaning back in a manner to suggest
he's relaxed. He hasn't asked
anyone for a donation, hasn't made
promises about an interest rate,
hasn't paid for a vacation
with someone else's savings, hasn't
started any wars in recent history,
and he never hired help
at sub-survival wages. He just happens
to be here, on public display,
for the passengers on the next train
to see as they pass through

what anyone might look like soon
and nobody needs to travel
any further to see the end of the line
because it's right here,
resisting arrest.

DAVID CHORLTON

FOUR WINDOWS

Webs of cold hang between the junipers
where jays and juncos dust
snow from the branches as more snow
falls to replace it. If frost
had a heart it would fly
through the brittle spaces
where dormant grass spikes through
the gathering drift.

*

A chair toppled back by last night's wind
lies not far from the wood pile
where pine siskins perch between flights
to the column of seed that sustains them.
An old metal bed frame
next to the fence holds a chill
in its legs that runs deep
into the ground beneath.
And the soft net falls
with only the flash
in a flicker's red wing to relieve it.

*

Some gnarled stems of cactus resist
the process that takes
away shapes
and makes of the frost a whisper
passing the secret through forest
of what it is the lock on the shed door
protects with its tooth biting into the cold.

*

Little remains past the screen
but the dip in the road where it points
toward the peak that disappeared
some hours ago when the silence
came to erase it.

DAVID CHORLTON

ONE LOOK

A Black Vulture touches the edge of its range
with a wingtip, turns in sunlight
and steers itself away
to new territory, with a wrinkled face
looking down
onto the brittle grass and cracked
old trees beneath, where a long snake
is absorbing warmth in mid-
November, curled across a path as live
calligraphy shifting
from dust to undergrowth
as soon as someone comes
too close and it slides through the eye
of their imagination
when it disappears into a tangle of darkness.
In this tiny corner of the universe
we are given one look
before the Earth takes back
what has been revealed to us; absorbs
it in the glassy blue at noon
or drinks it down
with a swallow six feet long
while we look the other way for one
melancholy second
and on returning our attention
see the last gilded scale slip
into a world with no sky.

JAMES VALVIS

CLOSING THE BOOK, HEADING TO BED

If Nietzsche knew anything, why is he no more?
And Plato and Aristotle, no longer even dust,
their bones decayed down to minerals.
I see you walking off to bed.
This is what your body says to me:
this night, this flesh, and nothing else.
Each word of Wordsworth is a worm,
eating away this woman, my wife.
The knowing is in the now, and the now passes,
and the now is numbed by knowledge.
You cannot save anything, not even impermanence.
This is mankind's only intelligence,
your body like a garden, green, growing,
life overtaking these grounds,
this dark estate, its crumbling library.

JOSÉ EUGENIO SÁNCHEZ

THE STREET (AND OTHER DREARY TOPICS...A HOMAGE)

Translated from the Spanish by Anthony Seidman and Ken Montenegro

they fix pipes
or model or pound away at the typewriter and draft stories
or paint billboards or build the walls for a house
or set the table with spoon and fork on the right-hand side
or chase after petty thieves or earn minimum wage
or wage wars on tobacco
alcohol journalism safe-sex
or they do none of the above

or their brains go soft
or they're pig-headed
or garlic-clove headed
or they've got beetles burrowing their brains
or they've got an extra head
or they have good taste
or wished they had good taste or had borrowed some

or they go about with a phone glued to the ear
or they cuss and hang up violently
and then pick it up again with a trace of tenderness

or they get a motel room for a few hours
or they speak about traffic or the scheme of things
or they run around from place to place to the smallest of places
or they peer into café windows
or they have too much to say and can't say a thing

or they die from boredom on Sunday evenings
because they see Monday approaching
and Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday and Friday
and Saturday
and Sunday evening.

LEIGH HERRICK

EVERY DROP

Every song every voice every speck in the hour of dust drying every throat every day every (p)age every poem written in night every sh[r]ift every written dawn every inch of mitigation each suckling essence under the influence of insolence in rays of every second made dread into which is written the word *fade* every grain of it every flesh of flesh plundered every ounce of *stripped* every last gasp every fractured smile every agreement to end every line in extinction as every act in the Against as sunken language emptied without tongue as declaration in every split as every amendment of corruptible verbs in chipped infinitives signaling the next tech[no/logical] tread stringing each fuzz of muzzled fruit to modified gardens' Second comings at every hand that every insect every bomb every shadowed seat in the month of *when* knows is every infraction's tepid reductionist sore scored for all ec[h]o systems lured to the halo's trend against every delta of sound against every island of river every rushing from between the tell-tal[e]l burnt and bruise-beaten grass the trickled past of it become the run-on becoming the pouring down becoming the grieved ocean the coral in reefed contusion while the grays of it gray above the coelacanth's ancient gaze as the seven billionth supping consummately pores over it devoutly wishing nothing but the devoutly whisked upon for the quotable quote of it hath offspring as the non-spring warnings call and all of it even this hand written for you whether you believe or not every bit of it w/rung out to night is yours to say yes only yes and *yes* again to all of it that is now only situated in *no*

LEIGH HERRICK

SILENCE

there is no other mouth out of which i might speak there is no other laboriously alphabetized chain of symbols from which i might draw each note past its criminal caesura springing into the empty canal of sound carved against time's mimetic echoing trickle

there is no void for the blind dweller of nothing eradicated into decoration

there is no hour no expanse of day no hair parted no elbow leaned upon no hip ground into no brow wiped of its bead no quivering lip no ecstasy expressed not a single touched tongue that doesn't know its own aching its own low fog against the graying armpit of reason

Deliverer of shorn facts in the archaeology of deconstructed buttock and planetary thigh wrapped around womb and ocean pelvic sunrise

there is no inflated language for the millennia of heartbeat forms breathed into blood into diamond toes into shimmering liquid broken toward fingered dawn

there is only

this melted ticking

this wound of truculent haze

for which

in a galaxy of hours handed over the billion palms coloring the universe's trillion limbs

i have only the pointillist's dots only the noon-painted paucity only these flecks of flung resistance this anti-station charged by its indeterminate ruddy thrum

galloping against its midnight terror its edenic antipathy its conditional
rant of marauding gods fallen like horizons leapt of their own pervasive
rims from which this fractious and besieged root clings exculpatory
as an amazonian prayer or poem



Lawrence Applebaum

MARGARET GILBERT

FROM IN FRONT OF BLOOMINGDALE'S I SAT DOWN AND CRIED

19.

That evening when all the shoppers had gone home and the store had been closed, I worked silently with other employees hanging fallen dresses and straightening hangers in the dark, making sure they all pointed in the same direction. Bloomingdale's had turned down the lights, cut off the air to the store, and frozen the escalators, so that being there was, I imagined, a little like being in the land of the dead. But employees worked on cleaning up the store for the following day. There was a spectral glow. With the lighting very low, you could barely see the next employee. You only heard the click of the hangers in the dark.

20.

I had been eyeing a gorgeous disco dress in the store in champagne silk and black ostrich feathers for \$845. It created the effect of a bird of plumage, and I had been begging Fred to take me to Paradise Factory in such a dress for a while. The dress had a strapless bodice of champagne colored silk with an overlay of black lace and a flounced, tiered short skirt with layers and layers of black ostrich feathers, so that the skirt puffed out at the bottom like a pink bird. But you had to have the bosom to carry it off, so I imagined wearing it with stuffing. I was dying to wear it and go dancing with Fred. The dress had been bought and returned several times by shoppers after it had been worn to parties because of its steep price. I was planning to do the same. After all, I reasoned, I am doomed because I know I'll be caught. Why not make a splendid exit like the noble captives in the French Revolution who would make a lavish spread of their last poor resources in the darkness of their terror?

21.

That night I had a dream in which I was stealing clothes from Bloomingdale's. I carried an armload of clothing about the floor openly adding to my treasures as the mood struck me and people treated me like the manager: sheer blouses in champagne black, an evening top of antique gold, a slip with Black Diamonds, leather military skirts, garnet boat tops, sequined tops in gold mesh, sapphire short tunics, short disco skirts in denim and heavy metal beads. There was also a rhinestone miniskirt, a strapless ruffled evening dress, a snake-print silk tunic, a knee length rabbit fur knit vest, a ruched one shoulder dress, a studded Tee with a skull for \$295. In the dream, Marie Antoinette stood nearby in a window display, a mannequin eating cake from a plate with a sterling silver fork and smiling. "Let them eat cake," the sign in the window read.

22

The next evening as I worked in the semi-darkness straightening clothes and grouping them on the racks, I decided to take the dress then, with the lighting turned down low and wear it to the disco with Fred, returning it like others had done. No one would be able to see me in the semi-dark. But as I fingered the peach colored satin lovingly, I thought of Richie, my manager, who was always giving me a pinch on the behind. I knew I would hate to disappoint him. Then after a few moments, I decided it was a risk I was willing to take to be with Fred. In the semi-darkness with the click of the hangers in the silence of the black store, I went into a fitting room and slipped it on under my coat after I had ripped off the sensors. When I heard the lace tear as my nervous fingers zipped it up, I realized I might not be able to return it as I had planned. I sweated as I walked through the employee entrance wearing the dress under my coat, but no one could see me in the semi-dark.

23.

Later that night I tried on my new dress for Fred and persuaded him to take me to the Paradise Factory in the East Village, where people mainly danced and did drugs. The beauty of the dress hid the ugly fact of my epilepsy, and I felt like a princess in it. "I have a new dress to wear," I said, "and I've been wanting to go for a long time." "Turn around," said Fred. "There's no back." "That's what makes it sexy," I said, "that and the ostrich feathers." The Factory looked a bit like a suburban living room in an old warehouse, and the music was a live mix of Dire Straits, Rolling Stones and "Light my Fire," and "Hotel California." Hundreds of people crowded onto the floor. Fred poured me some Zinfandel from a bottle he had brought. "More alcohol equals more fun," he said. "Why did you bother?" I asked him. "Don't you see everyone dancing?" "People are just looking

for a place to drink,” he said and holding his drink began to swing his hips. We moved onto the floor. It was such a transformation of freedom, like traveling somewhere else in time, of losing myself. Like my heart jumping out of my chest and my soul reaching far above the ceiling and shaking the very core of my being. I was a changed person, a new woman, I had been reborn, resurrected, given new life, new breath.....that’s what really happened. There was a tall guy in a sailor suit and a light-skinned woman with dreadlocks dancing with their hands up in the air. I forgot about stealing the dress from Bloomingdale’s or folding the towels. Looking like a bird of paradise in my stolen dress, I tried to do the steps with Fred even though he was very fast, a great pink-plumaged bird hovering in the splendor of the poetic skies of Paradise Factory.

24.

While we were dancing, I wondered if I would trip again or have a seizure this time. Sudden unexplained death syndrome in epilepsy could come on you out of the blue, I thought as I danced, like choking on your food in a restaurant or maybe choking on your drink, maybe going into seizure and choking on your own breath. Sometimes you could die in the bedroom or in the living room while watching TV, although I didn’t have a TV. The body was always found prone, sudden and unexplained. I had read about cases found dead with the face submerged in water or where a body was found lying in a park on a beautiful sunny day, like the story in *The New York Post*, about the mystery death of the CEO found in Central Park on Mother’s Day, discovered with his keys and all his cash. The story had said the dead man had epilepsy. *The Post* reported he had probably had a seizure and choked to death on his own tongue. Or perhaps he had been murdered by his mother, I thought, who didn’t like the seizures! A passerby had seen a woman in a grey flannel suit standing over the body. The harder I danced the more I wondered if I would die like the man in Central Park. I had stopped taking my medicine since I hated the sight of the red and white capsules and had run out of any money to buy them.

25.

There was a chandelier hung from the garage ceiling and hundreds of balloons casting a colored light on the half naked dancers. It was some live band crooning something about kissing your naked lover, the Young Shades of Black. We grew pretty warm dancing because there were no windows and occasionally Fred would take out the bottle of Zinfandel. Suddenly he began taking off his clothes. “This whole experience is enormous,” he cried, removing his shirt. “But Fred,” I said, “there’s a television embedded inside the bathroom mirror of the Ladies. Maybe you’re on TV.” “I can’t really process it,” said Fred with disdain, “and these women dancers are

so beautiful, I really don't care," he said, removing his pants. "Fred!" I cried, "Don't!" "Who cares? Everyone's doing it." "Well, we could go into the Ladies, and I could show you the camera," I said. "Yes, why don't you do that, honey," he said, "so that I can do you." So we went into the Ladies Room with the camera and Fred took off all his clothes and made me give him a blow job. I drank champagne, and he drank Zinfandel, and we got very high and watched the dancers on the bathroom TV. When we came out of the Ladies, Fred chatted with a half-naked woman in a dramatic vintage gown with a cobra tattoo on her ankle. "I drink a lot of Burgundy," Fred told her. "I spent time in Paris where I met my wife." "Is *she* your wife?" she asked looking at me. "Oh no," I heard Fred say. "We're related." They moved away from me, and when I looked around for Fred moments later, he and the woman had vanished. I waited patiently because I couldn't believe that Fred would leave me like this, but he never came back. Hours later, I made my way home alone on the bus in my fabulous pink dress in the late hours of the night, my head full of pink champagne.

W. TODD KANEKO

HOGS IN THE MUD, SHEEP IN THE SKY

About noon we crept into a small town. Someone said, “Looks like Puyallup, all right.” Parents of small children babbled excitedly, “Stand up quickly and look over there. See all the chick-chicks and fat little piggies?” One little city boy stared hard at the hogs and said tersely, “They’re bachi—dirty!” [...] Slowly the bus made a left turn, drove through a wire-fence gate, and to our dismay, we were inside the oversized chicken farm.

—Monica Sone, Nisei Daughter

Because the hens do not notice
fox shadows, those wicked
tangles of sinew and teeth,
they have not considered the night
sparkling like scalpels in the wolf’s beard.
It’s true—our families dragged
what they could to the fairgrounds—
limbless dolls bundled in tablecloths,
dented airplanes and butchers’ knives.
It’s true that the rooster cries
every morning, that the barnyard
mistakes his sorrow for the sun.

It’s true—our families learned
to be beasts at Camp Harmony,
halfway between kitchen and
woodshed where everything collapses
into a jangle of tongue with bone.
It’s true that our parents once slept
like livestock on stable floors,
our uncles lived in chicken sheds
dreading the moulting season.
True, that the cow’s fear pervades her
carcass, that despair tastes sour
in the meat. Because we do not live
in fables, the world ends with dirt—



t. kilgore splake: Six

SUSAN H. MAURER

ARKSTORM

Breath is a rich matrix
atmospheric river
breath is drawn across
sensors changing colors
exhaled air tells us without sound
the volatile remains of recent snacks
telltale signs of illness
radiation exposure in concentration of parts/trillion

A person breathes
pluck nitric acid from the breath
reflecting allergic inflammation in his lungs
but this alone is not enough
(whether we approach the accuracy of the dog)

Atmospheric river, AR
air current floating vapor round the earth
may be wider than 300 meters
pulling equivalently 15 times the water flow
of the Mississippi's mouth

A crash against a mountain range a
stunned AR could trigger a superstorm
morph to an ARkStorm
could drop 10 feet of rain a month
blow wind at 125 m.p.h. and
still that one last puff of air a million times

At what speed does it flow?
Try to imagine the sound it makes
maybe none
When can we approach the accuracy of the dog

SUSAN H. MAURER

A. A. 12-23-04

I came because you could not come here, Judith.
I wonder how it happened. I think slow.
I think you bought the best, drank quite slowly,
each sip quiet 'til you slept. Awoke and then began again
again until you didn't wake. Wonder if there was a cat.

I can see you turn your nose at this grim room,
assortment of livers, stories of
living, interrupted by rumbling subways,
not always the best prose.

Judy, the room has streaked linoleum. I'll describe it,
a basement without windows, questionable if mice sometimes.
I guess the Etruscan vase was your witness as you went, you slid.
Nothing seemed tasty enough to keep you alive.
This is your wake my golden friend. A.A. was not the only answer, Judy.
But nothing good enough, you turned away. We failed.

SUSAN H. MAURER

CORMORANT

My first language was baby talk.
At home we spoke cocktail party.
I became very fluent.
Like Nell, like a wild child
I developed a covert language
in the tent at night I made on my bed
of blankets and bed sheet,
forbidden flashlight
and book.

There it grew like a ghost plant
or pale shoots of muguet.

I learned love's a computer
which translates.
There were others who spoke it as well.
And often we'd meet for some laughs
far from the streetlights of hell.

SUSAN H. MAURER

AMARYLLIS/ FORCED BLOSSOM

Pale plant in wan light
Your trumpet bloom a
Clarion call
The sky is off white
And next week is
The solstice
The sun then most distant
So you bask in what's available
To you
Now
I envy you your plantness
In its silence, its sureness
Its lack of sentience

Bugle blossoms
Unbelievable
Slowly tumble
Soundless in the day
Like your testicles
As you turn in your sleep

CHOCOLATE WATERS

LOVER FANS

many lovers
have been fans
ooing and ahing
their way in
an ego trip
you are coming over
i will slip a drink
into your hand
smooth your day
soothe you w/the chicken soup
i made myself
spinach salad

made that too
tiny routine gestures

small yet
big for me

to give
instead of take
are they big enough
to hold you
will you take
them
can they
embrace you?



Lawrence Applebaum

CHOCOLATE WATERS

DESIRE

chopped down
like the tree that
crashes
in the forest
what's the sound
desire makes as it
comes
crashing
down
as it never gets to come
as it crashes
down
do you hear the sound
desire
doesn't get to
make

PHONE VODKA

like phone sex
w/out the sex
like vodka
w/ice
over the phone
two women
two souls
conversation
sacred
profane
w/olives or
w/out
and in between:
worlds

TED JONATHAN

POE PARK

It had nothing to do with kicks.

Just the need to slow the invasive
train of repetitious thoughts rolling
unrelentingly through my head.

Outside of Poe Park I'd usually
be able to cop downers.
This hot night was no exception.
Done deal.

Stepped into the empty park to swallow
the promise of stupor.

Block-long, it was mostly concrete
and broken glass. It was 1976, and
I couldn't care less that within a mile,
landlords were torching buildings
into cash and the Yanks were making
a pennant run.

Cut across the park...

At the far end, sitting on the stoop of an
old white-frame cottage, was a tattered
lone soul playing guitar and singing. Long
limp blond hair hid much of his face, as he
sang Simon & Garfunkel's *El Condor Pasa*.
"I'd rather be a hammer than a nail..."

I hadn't seen him in ten years (when we
sat shoulder to shoulder in 7th grade), but
here was my former classmate—Ivar Kertes—
singing to a squirrel. Ivar, who could swing
on clarinet and run like a Cadillac.

In class, to get my attention he'd gently elbow me. "Look intelligent Theodore," he'd say, straight-faced, as he fingered imaginary scraggle on his chin, to affect serious contemplation.

No longer Ted, but Theodore, I'd follow. Then we'd face the teacher.

Rivet our eyes on him as though our very lives depended on it and scratch our hairless twelve-year-old chinny-chin-chins. Every day for one or two minutes straight, we looked intelligent.

I heard Ivar had gone schizo.

The downs melted my mind slow. Running into Ivar, I momentarily forgot how scared I was—not of Ivar, but of my own mind.

Waited for him to break before warmly saying, "Hey!"

He did a protrude-lower-lip-out-and-blow-air-up move, blowing his hair from his face. Armageddon-eyed, he smiled recognition.

Slurring, I asked, "Is it true your old man was a Latvian Nazi collaborator and trained your mutt to salute when he said *sieg heil*?"

"To hell with him!" said Ivar. "He's dead."

After assuring him that I'd buy another bottle, I reached over and threw back a heartening hit of his Wild Irish Rose. He plunged back into "I'd rather be a hammer than a nail / Yes I would / If I cou—ou—ould / I surely wou—"

“Ivar man!” I interrupted. “That hammer and nail shit sucks.”

Resting the guitar at his side, he raised the Wild Irish to his lips and drained a long red swig. Tossed the bottle *splattercrash* onto concrete.

“Theodore,” he said, “it’s the melody I love.”

“I do too. It’s an old Peruvian folk tune. Simon stuffed it with hammers and nails.”

Ivar rose to his feet.

As though he were unveiling the Temple of Artemis, with a sweeping gesture of his right arm he presented the old white-frame cottage. Awestruck, he held the pose for a moment.

I beheld the cottage. Flaked clapboard paint and broken multi-pane windows. Heavy chains, secured by 2 padlocks, festooned the 2 front doors.

“Do you know who lived here, Theodore?”

“Yeah. The poet Poe.”

“Yeah,” he affirmed. “The poet Poe. The Bronx was country then. And this was a fine little farmhouse. Poe rented it. Lived here with his wife. She died young. Here, of TB. He lives on. I AM HE!” As the sun set, he launched into *The Raven*.

Out on my feet, I fell to my knees.

TED JONATHAN

THE GAMBLER

I was playing head-on high stakes poker
against my friend's tub of a mother,
at their place when the doorbell rang.
No one else home. "The gout's got my
toes," she said. "You wanna get that?"

"Okay."

Young, fresh-faced, but Leviticus-serious—
Bob Dylan. *Twenty years of schoolin'*, he wailed,
and they put you on the day shift. Slammed
the door in his face.

"Who was it?" she asked.

"A guy from back in '65," I said.
"Complaining about bullshit."

Soon as I sat, it rang again. "Day through
night. Suddenly, it's Grand Central," I said.

"When it rains it pours," she said.

"I'll get it, again."

A handsome black woman in an ivory, medium
brim church hat. "My son's in jail," she said.
"But he didn't do anything I can't forgive him for."

"Can I sleep his bed?" I asked.

"Yes," she said, fading away.

“I’m losing my mind,” I told my friend’s mother.
“But I want you to know that over 90%
of ballgames are fixed.”

“Losing your mind? Same sandbagging faggot
to me. Splash cold water in your eyes.”

“No,” I said. “We’re about even. One cut.
High card takes all.”

“Have it your way,” she said.
And drew a deuce...
I drew the Jack of Hearts.

“HA!” laughed my friend, her son.
Unnoticed, he’d let himself in.
Hovering above us, he said,
“You 2 degenerates are into me for plenty.”

TONY GLOEGGLER

SCRAPING

I wake to the sound of a shovel
scraping the ground below my window
and the thought that first touches
my mind is snow: all night, thick white,
covering the sidewalks, the streets,
and one person digging a path from here
to there. But it's July. The city's sweltering
and Washington Heights is still without
power. I hear a baby crying across
the courtyard and all I can think about
is the night I met my girlfriend outside
the office she worked part time in as a clerk.
She kissed and held me, had to tell me twice
that Thurman Munson had died in a plane crash
before I started to believe her. It was, I think,
a Thursday. We were going to Central Park
to hear John Sebastian sing Lovin' Spoonful
songs. After the show she told me she made
a clinic appointment for Monday, my one day
off. She wasn't ready to be a mother. Maybe

Someday, she said. I was young and dumb
and in love, and I would have done anything
that girl wanted; cut my hair, worn a pin striped suit
and worked on Wall Street. I would have married her,
moved to Montreal. But I was happier to stay
boyfriend and girlfriend, sit in the waiting room
and turn pages in magazines while the doctor sucked
and scraped her insides clean. Our daughter
or son would be grown by now. We might have tried
harder to stay together, found some way to make
each other happy, or hurt each other even deeper.
Instead, it's six-thirty, Saturday morning and I know
I'll never get back to sleep. I walk to the window,
find a cat curled on the fire escape, opening her mouth

and crying like a baby. I lean out, try to reach her. But she's too far away. I want to rub the fur under her neck, fill a bowl with milk. I want to grab her by the throat, drop her four stories, see if she lands on her feet. I want to know what it will take to stop that god damn shovel from scraping the ground again.

TONY GLOEGGLER

BRIDGES

You're sick of the snow
blowing against windows,
sick of this D train
stuck between Brooklyn
and Manhattan, sick
of scanning sports pages
filled with lock outs and scabs
when this lanky black man
strides in from the next car
like it's the ninth inning
and he's answering a call
to the bull pen. He's wearing
a St. Louis Browns uniform,
number 27, and dragging
a Hefty bag of rags.
You fold the paper,
pray he doesn't smell
like the dead and get
ready to recite, "Sorry man,
catch you next time" when
he stops in front of you,
extends his hand and says,
"Satch Paige is my name."

Satchel Leroy Paige died
in Kansas City, June
eighth, 1982. But this guy
looks like he stepped
out of every photograph
taken in his prime. You smile,
tell him your name and pump
his hand. He's heading
south. Gonna show them
replacement boys Ol Satch
still got a little left.

His meal money done run out
and it's a long stretch
to summer. If it was 1961,
closing in on midnight,
and you had just finished
kissing your first girlfriend
good night, you'd be riding
your new three speed
over the Williamsburg Bridge,
trying to make it home
before your father keeps
his promise and beats
your ass for being late.

If you were pumping
the pedals hard, if lines
of cars were speeding
past, their tires hissing
against the tar, their wide
open windows singing top
forty tunes, would you notice
the big black bear of a man
standing in the walkway, lifting
a shiny brass saxophone
to his lips? Would you skid
to a stop and sit at his feet,
lean back, close your eyes
and listen? Would you believe
it was Sonny Rollins blowing?
Yes, Sonny Fucking Rollins
woodshedding, communing
with his music. Would you say
to hell with your father
and stay until Sonny's breath
ran out, stay until the first
shell pinks of morning
lit every city building?

And will you dig
into your pocket, give
Ol Satch enough change
for coffee, a buttered
roll? Will you fold
a twenty dollar bill
into his hand, rummage
through your knapsack, pass
him paper and pen, and ask
for his autograph? Will you
get off at the next stop,
order thick steaks, baked
potatoes, and split the last
piece of cheesecake? Will you
listen to him talk baseball
until he couldn't eat
one more bite?



Lawrence Applebaum

RUTH MOON KEMPER

CUSTOMS

...A cup of wine levels life and death
and a thousand things obstinately hard to prove.
— Li Po

In a hotel bar (I forget which one or which gift shop was beside it—there were circus animals on the wall) we met accidentally: Marigold, the architect from Hong Kong, tiny Suzuki, who is Japanese, and me relaxing after shopping. They both really preferred tea. They said. “But not that crap they handed out this morning,” said Suzuki. “Dried offal in a bag. No offense intended, but these people,” and Marigold agreed. “They have no tradition,” she insisted. “No heritage, therefore no understanding of what’s significant in ceremony, much less a proper leaf” and ordered them tequila sunrises, as healthful. The orange juice is real, at least.

“Ah, but the English,” said I deep in Johnny Walker, thinking tea, but they had gone on to other, sadder things. The airport is tomorrow, after church back in Havana. How do we thank Ilianet, the Guide, when the Official word is to offer pesos only. Not Yankee dollars. “Baksheesh,” gnawing at her orange circlet with tiny Oriental teeth. “Is from the Yiddish. A bad custom. Causes people to expect, for service” and the waitress, a student from Toronto, said “It’s Persian,” so firmly, she was believed.

The zebra above my shoulder was somewhat hazy, like my grasp of our conversation. I was lost again, adrift in *manana*’s sadness, the *tristesse* of leaving—caressed the bag beside me, black plastic— how on earth to carry safely home a glass frog, driving his old glass jalopy, waving—and the sexual

implications of Suzuki and Marigold speaking now about the powers of scent, arousal, where had that come from, surely we weren't back to tea? Chimps and other monkeys leered out of shadows. "Since you are older," said Suzuki, and I am although I keep forgetting. "And you have that nice big purse," said Marigold. "If you spray the inside with a good perfume, like Shalimar, you'll fool the dogs, but since you're older, they won't, probably..."

Not aphrodisiacs, not opium, but two dozen of Havana's finest *claros*, would I carry, for her husband. Please.

JOHN GOSSLEE

A MUTED SONG

feather dust
in gauze

between the gasp
and sneeze

an earthworm
in a puddle

a tiger
without teeth

TURTLESQUE

helmet
as a home

a rock-skin
dumpling

backhand
in a finger bowl

road hen
dinosaur



Randi Ward: *Blinds*





Randi Ward: *Skidrow Penthouse*

RANDI WARD

T R A S H

A crushed paper cup
drums
across the parking lot
like it thinks
I'm a joke.

I chase it down
and stomp it still
angry
my emptiness
never takes me
anywhere.

RANDI WARD

DOE

Starring
the soft silt loam
with morning
at her heels.

AT FIRST LIGHT

They lit out

the white tips
of their bristling
tails bobbing

above
the bloodweed.

SWAN

How many fish hooks
are lodged in that bitter hiss?
Have the carelessly
Clipped tips of your ragged wings
Always been stained with pond scum?

JIM CORY

PAID NOTICES

Died peacefully, following heart problems, surrounded by schizophrenia and a variety of health care facilities. Pre

ceded in death by an avid seamstress, the beach, the birds, her view, music and especially

the Philadelphia Orchestra. Lovingly survived by bridge after a long, courageous battle with

many nieces and nephews. The family is especially grateful to 56 marathons. In lieu of flowers, the family

requests auto racing. Contributions may be sent to the Korean War, where her flower arrangements

and meticulously trained myrtle, rosemary and ivy won blue ribbons. She is now and will always be dearly missed by

the Pension Department and the Side-Saddle Organization.

A luncheon will be held after a short illness and the journey home.

JIM CORY

MOLLY

REPORT: At 4 a.m. March 3rd, out-of-town complainant met a male at 13th and Walnut streets and let him into his car. The male, described as a satellite radio, told the complainant he would help him find a female Wirehair Jack Russell Terrier named Molly. The complainant declined, at which time the male stabbed the complainant in the neck with a small penknife. The complainant shoved the male out of the car and was taken to the Club Voyeur by private auto.

REPORT: An unlocked 2004 Jeep, known as Molly, discovered the dog was missing when a group of young females accosted her, struck her and took her BlackBerry phone. The suspects were described as a broken window. Plainclothes officers stole a bag of dirty clothes and some toys. Officer Cody snatched 10 youths.

ARREST: At midnight, March 14, 6th District officers arrested a 2005 Toyota named Molly wearing a black hoodie and baseball cap for summary offense inside the Double Tree Hotel, 237 S. Broad St.

REPORT: Between 2-7:30 a.m. March 12 someone entered two males named Molly. Seventeen baggies containing tan boots accosted the fingerprints. Officer Kelly secured an acquaintance who hit him with a baseball bat and took the medical examiner.

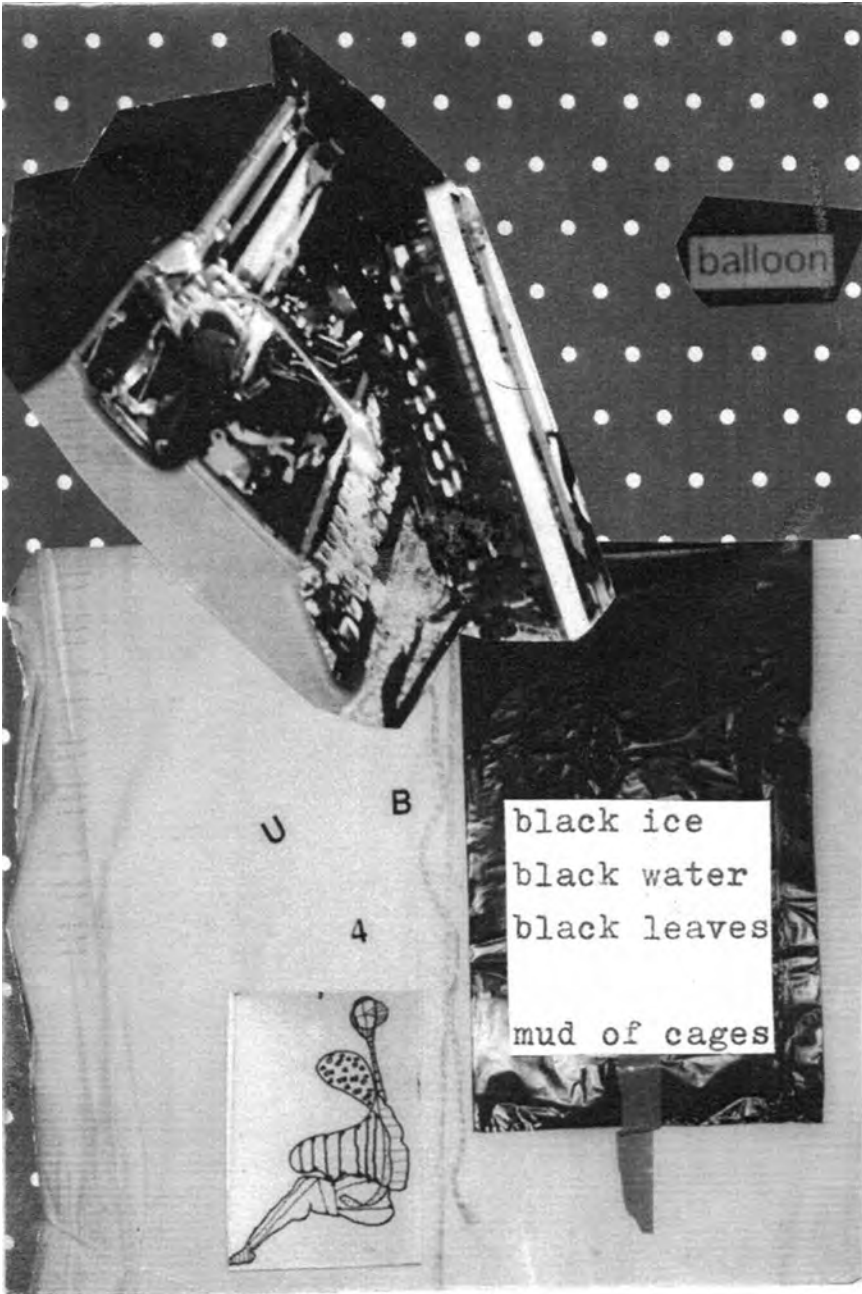
ARREST: At 7:44 p.m., March 19, Molly scraped the doorframe of Addiction, blocking pedestrians and acting disorderly. Police arrested a dark complexion.

REPORT: A bottle of soda wearing a grey striped brim hat, a black button-down shirt, grey pants and carrying a black plastic trash bag fled east on Pine. He walked with a limp. Video shows Officer Cody wearing corn rows. Prostitution refused to disperse. Molly.

REPORT: A black male, 45 – 50 years old, with large framed glasses named Molly, pulled a small pocketknife and mustache and demanded his ballet. Seven cases of beer were taken. Officer Sweeney fled.

ARREST: Two aliens named Molly, approximately 14 pounds, were taken into custody. Sixth District Officer Romanowski attempted to lift a 1995 Toyota. Unit help declined. Fingerprints fled west on Clinton empty-handed. Dog described as plaid, wearing marijuana. Female neck.

REPORT: Empty-handed, a Hispanic male parked fingerprints along the 200 block of South Broad Street. Club Voyeur smashed the window of an out-of-towner's 2010 Honda parked in the paid garage at 1200 Walnut St. and stole a GPS named Molly. Police wearing all black clothing were not dispatched. The following incidents demanded his cell phone.



Guy R. Beining: *Mud of Cages*

EDGAR CAGE

FOUR POLITICAL VARIATIONS ON AN UNKNOWN CITY

The screen-ravaged
celebrities
 freighted
 with anger lines
left behind
 by laughter

survive the sabbaths
 of a shadow colonized
 by computer snowfalls.

Dumb with the latest film's
legislation,
they support the champions
 of the dried-up sky,
I've memorized all the voting so far, one might say.

A man not on any cell
phone directory
repeats his little
asterisks
 to the end of the Sunday *Times*.

*

Once John "Hand of Doom" Osbourne
was awake;

now the radio empty
except for some stray comments
 spreading from a previous static,
and like every day,
 untrue,

another face scraped
of its cheekbones
and tiredness,
a discouraged machine's
prowling games
of stage light,
its songs that otherwise do not move.

*

One freeholder still
clinging
to an erosion
of sarcasm says:

“We live not in emptiness,
but within the itchy chatter
of a bedbug
while the governor builds
his own capital deep
beneath the scraping away
of his eyes
and their scandals.”

He did not ask
how many times
the governor descended
to the bottom of New Jersey
before the sarcoma infections
of the ocean were real.

*

A man hunched without dialogue
on a post-game subway
murmurs from an atlas
of Eastern Division droughts.

Maybe he'll dial
the *Village Voice* personals
three nights behind him
to hear how many
cities followed the wind
until they fell,

how many began
with the short-boned
breathing of she-male labor,

how many
broadcast
from the white shoe journalism

of newspapers emptied
and tied up—

domesticated,
one-voice coliseums—

left outside for the next morning's unpaid mafia.

ANDREW KAUFMAN

THE SHADE OF THE NIGER

From the air

it is the vast body
of a snake,

loops motionless,

not a breath or twitch
in the desert sand.

But from a pirogue

the river
is silt brown,

slow-moving

through the dry season,
but wide enough

for fishermen

to call it
the sea,

as in, *Do you have the sea*

in your country?
Where it bends

it is stagnant and clouded

like a half-hearted scheme
resolving slowly

into a puddle. Toward noon

it is a heavy brown skirt
covering a cluster of women

to the waist

as they wash themselves
and a few pots.

My pirogue moves among them,
 searching
 the mud

for a landing.
 Their nipples
 are chapped, coarsened,

cracked, chewed, and stretched.
 They snigger and cackle.
 Their breasts hang like paper bags.

They cannot ask
 for money—
 the hidden pockets

of the river
 will hold no banknotes.
 I stare

into the scarified
 eyes below their eyes,
 the white outlines

shaped like almonds,
 cut into both cheeks
 with a razor blade.

I try to guess their ages
 within ten years
 the way my grandmother

taught me
 to look at the teeth
 of shelter dogs.

The river's shade is deep enough
 for a person to pee in secret,
 those beside her

noticing nothing
 but the quick warmth
 of a little current.

Neither shy
nor forward—
like the river

in the desert
they are neither welcoming
nor hostile.

I squat with them
at night
in the dirt,

their fingers twisting
the dorsal fins
off a pile of fish

still quivering,
small enough
to be bait.

Moon and lantern light
catch in the white underbellies
and in the outlined

second set of eyes.
The huts are the light brown
of the drying river bed,

made from its mud.
Night enclosed
by windowless adobe

is a crawl space
between river and river god.
Dawn starts as a slit in a thatched roof.

And the day,
like everyday,
is burning.

LYNNE POTTS

FISHER KING DREAM, LOST BROTHER

A dream: worse with monk fish,
 swarming brackish water below,
 a surface impossible to swim across
Is this a river? to someone netting
 large birds (I think: kingfishers)
me, languishing on edges of Truro's
 marsh sedge-grass

Then, almost awake, the Fisher King appears
 samite robe dragging parquet floors,
 gimp leg hung out for someone
to heal the festering wound,
 all the land parched, rivers black,
monk fish swooning maudlin
 circles under a jaundiced moon

Then remembering: once along a river
 leaves collecting edges like birds
 someone tagged and let go waiting
for next year when my brother
 would not be crying from strange
fevers, someone in the garden
 digging worms, nothing blooming.

To stay in dreams a dangerous pain while the moon
 keeps washing up faces like slung
 monkfish along shores
ropes of seaweed swaddling
 as they carry you back to a king's
disease, bird, lost brother.

PATRICK SUGRUE

WAVERLY TENNESSEE

On alone my bike I chased was. The speeding bike below me pumped toward the hotel as a hundred faces at McDonald's, their picnics laid out on the lawn sprawled basking in the sun that was not there for it is night, turning toward me, their voices growing up big across the street and their wide mouths open in dotted calls till I me was behind them.

He was behind me running in little circles in little feet sticking shortly out of his light denim overalls which looked like cold water the way night hit them "Four miles. Ma uncle owns a treller park jess four miles down that roud."

The town began to stick itself up from the woods and fields with dog-legged brick walls. Granite slabs poked out of the river. And with one light above it, a lonely red and yellow gas station brought sun to the woods and water. I asked one dark man walking in the yellow median how far until the reservoir—I thought I'd camp there—though I don't think we knew what we were talking about.

I was on a bench then figuring how to sleep. A rugged dirty-looking couple with a small dark boy in light overalls approached. He rocked on his heels like a grandfather. He rocked on his heels like grass poking through boards on a whistling porch. The couple told me about a hotel down the hill where the light was. "Down the hill. With a red roof. There's a hotel." They giggled. And the man blew his nose into his sweatshirt sleeve.

The boy approached me. "Thisser buldin' useta sell guns onna black market round World War I," he said, swaying on the curb and pointing to a dark building. He raised and pointed his whole arm to the circle of darkness where the light stopped and hills were rising into night. "And ma uncle owns a treller park four miles down that roud."

By the bridge—an impossibly large bridge with lights strung up on the towers and suspenders—a dog sat next to the dark concrete abutment. A cool breeze came off the water. The boy continued. "Ya know, it may look like a farm, with the cows and cattle, but my uncle, he owns a trailer park four miles down that roud."

The couple's faces were white and they spoke into the light without looking at anything. "Down the hill," the man said, "There's a hotel." The boy touched my knee lightly. The man looked at the boy and gradually turned back to face the hill. The girl looked and at her feet, coughed and

walked slowly to a squat tree. The man wiped mucus on a wall as the traffic lights changed.

I grabbed my bike and the boy began to talking fast and metallic, pointing with his whole arm to where the circle of darkness began “jess four miles down that roud, jess four miles down that roud, jess four miles down that roud, jess four miles down that roud.” The man spoke and listened to some light slitting out of a building. “Take er’ easy. Down that hill.”

Stepping out of divine then in front of me a line of redheaded schoolgirls all braced up said “I’ve never seen anybody ride a *bicycle* before!” coming or going from a what, “I’ve never seen anybody ride a bicycle before,” falling almost into me in a line of themselves like a blown stack, the boy merely a baby: now silence standing over his feet, “I’ve never seen anybody ride a *bicycle* before!” The sun cutting through buildings, “I’ve never seen anybody ride a *bicycle* before!” And behind me went I, though she often had, and I know she had, often, seen someone often ride a bicycle before.

And my eyes and I moved suspended to a blue doored motel with a white eyed man smoking with a television and praying. A tributary runs by a waffle house in the parking lot and I in the sharp streetlight through the window take sleep until the next day and afterwards when the town was bathed in true sunlight and sitting old folks drank coffee on the streets all around and I humbled walking my bike past all folks homes, sleeping at the bottom of a hill in hard blue sheets where I’d slept the night before.

PATRICK SUGRUE

I.D.'S

In the fall everyone from the DMV is beset with definite ideas: like Colombina who hides chicken feet between stacks of paper around her desk, and Rick the cashier who refuses to give out one dollar bills. Jones, balding and losing his lower lip, was fired for wearing a Hawaiian shirt every day and lying about it.

“This isn’t a Hawaiian shirt,” he said.

The boss, Bob, had that skin disease that makes people white and black and all splotchy at the same time. During the fall he looked yellow. Jones mimicked him and everyone else. Eventually Bob brought him into his office.

“Jones, I think you’re dangerous.”

Jones leaned back in his seat and was quiet a long time. He put an open palm on the desk—made a little shape like a turkey; it was a humid day.

“Bob, I honestly think you’re dangerous.”

Bob looked through the blinds into the office.

“You’re fired.”

“It’s Friday.”

“Sorry pal.”

It was Tuesday.

Jones worked next to Todd for three years and usually confided in him that the office was hot. On his way out the door he leaned over Todd’s counter and said, “Pal, it’s hot in here.” The next day he showed up in a grey dress and sunglasses and sat in the waiting area until the police came. He tried whispering something to Todd, but he was being handcuffed and Todd couldn’t hear him. The front door swung open with a gust of wind and Todd’s bowl-cut flew to the ceiling. He exhaled loudly:

“Fall has a welcome sensation!”

It was winter then.

In the spring Jones was replaced by Wayne. Wayne started an office pool; he pooled all the money. He was always thinking up ideas for the pool. He gambled a lot and started talking about gambling all the time—even on first dates.

“You can even smoke inside the Indian casinos,” he would say.

He looked at me once and noticed my glasses had changed. His face fogged over and his eyes dribbled out the window.

“I’m hungry,” he said.

In the summer Deborah walked in on Wayne bathing in the women’s bathroom. He suggested that Grand Cahokia was better than Potawatomie and put a handful of soap in his pubic hair. Bob didn’t fire him, but by September he was invisible; in December pencils on his desk sat like trees in snow.

PATRICK LAWLER

FROM CHILD SINGS IN THE WOMB

XIX.

DEAR N:

Sometimes I feel God is plagiarizing me. We sit in front of the twilight of our thoughts. Old Pornographer, I went to the brothel and saw a woman who quoted you relentlessly. She had very nice breasts, but I kept getting distracted by the crazy things she was saying.

I long for the slurping sound. The body I've been attached to. I'm beginning to think of it all (language, time, the past) as scaffolding. Insurrection is the key to avoid suffocation. We need to cut a hole in the bag around our faces.

Being? Hah. I have finally made sense of Climacus' notebooks.

We need to get to the bottom—but there are way too many bottoms. You said I needed to rethink this creep of faith thing. I sometimes feel I am living my life underwater, tapping on the glass of my diving helmet. I need to get my edge back.

In the background I always hear you snickering.

When we were small we were good for hiding. Now we hear bone rub against bone, birds piercing the sky. That's how we get this fire. My mouth piled with words, and light walking away in its light-filled shoes.

I'm an atheist trapped inside an agnostic's body. I'm thinking about using a pseudonym so your correspondences won't find me.

I thought you said it would mean the word to me.

I am sick of the sound of time. Here's what I wanted to say. The sky is the color of fruit. The minotaur eats the thread. All day can think about is night. The minotaur eventually eats the labyrinth. You are a wick stuck inside a volcano—a brainbreaking experience.

Life is flammable. You can't tell me what to do. The day fills up with broken flowers and crucifixes made of barbed wire. One day everything will be on the verge of brilliance. After my words crash into a book, I will do the God-Dance.

They did find the child in the woods. I don't have to tell you what that means.

Tomorrow you go to Turin. Let's talk when you get back. I have something very important to tell you.

K

ALISON KAISER

CAMION

How can I be stronger than these waves
and their many arms?
They tinkered with my hinges.
Their dark fingers followed me,
and I collected them like charms.
In this heavy anklet, I'm helpless
as dust, entwined in piles of bristles, empty
as a latch hook canvas, ready
to be bored, disaster
of filament yet to be pulled through me.

It all coils in me as I step
into the jetsam around my bed.
Tiny postcards lie in wait
of my bare feet, planted
last night, like landmines, on the floor.

You've seen this weaponry
and still you fastened me
like a button to your breast.
You planted crocus bulbs
in my eyelids
as we slept that night
and today
you wait for me like spring.

B. Z. NIDITCH

VARIATIONS

The sun's quarantine
fades dawn
scaling on antibodies
from two pianos

a sweep of recitals
in b flat
apartments divided
by escaping next door

secret cadenzas
in totemic twin reeds
a morning with Artaud
mystified by bedfellows

jazz paintings
by stuart davis
clarinets by albums
of pirate nightfalls.

CROW BILLINGS

SUMMER BROKEN BEHIND THE SEARCHLIGHTS

You write the word “happiness” and wait for the alcohol decay of autumn,
when the outdoors once again repeat the moods of motels wandering from
Seattle, not as a place, but a memory of self asylums and shoplifting.

You hold in your hand a flower that’s been broken since August.

Ten leaves in your crumpled pocket.

Seagulls impaled all over the sky.

Worthless
wind currencies.

Your woman wraps her body with a child’s plastic entrails for protection.

“I can no longer feel my blood,” she says.

The homelier buildings undress and send their eyes to the river, men who
look like you washing with hard water the \$2 books they made.

You hear wind moving the nightclubs of New Jersey closer.

Not music, but the sound pigeons make shutting their storefronts.

Pot-bellied with a beer child, your lightheaded jacket collapses
against the pavement beneath you.

“I had one book, and I couldn’t stop touching it,”
you confess to your woman.

No one holds the illegal and mostly memorized
dance dealers accountable, nor the trattoria ensembles
who share the secret locations of 1996:

A second, third, and fourth search that was told,
each untalented karaoke night,
“You sure have guts, singing out loud like that.”

You survived the faux-superiority of a noise-writing Rutgers prodigy who
said, “Individuality is the most insidious conformity.” He lasted for as long
as it takes blood to dry.

Not the required five years of commercial self-hatred.

You fall to the sidewalk where three, maybe four people live,
Orion missing its one lit stairwell.

MARY STONE DOCKERY

LETTER FOR HOW I REMEMBER MYSELF

Abandon has not been your only story.

Cigarettes, half-smoked
left burning for days in ash trays.
Beer cans spilling over mattresses.
The scent of over-processed hair, lip gloss.

You've had hickeys and no lover's name
to fill your mouth.

Whiskey teeth, burned sheets.

Regret has not been your only story.

Soft bellies. Open. Raw. Flesh touching.
Your thighs risk it all.

Thank each lover
for the understanding of vodka ache
and empty or broken tongue.

You've moved oceans from your body,
been left beachless.

You've risen from rum-filled swamps,
still able to light a cigarette with a wet lighter.

Write your stories on the bedroom wall
in silk and peacock feather.
Use cigarettes to frame your portrait,
ashes to color your backdrop.

Let your lovers lick the space
where your mouth breathes air
without touching you one last time,
and leave with your story
creased in the wrinkles by their eyes,
the lines of their palms,
your story a river on their flesh,
surging with growl.

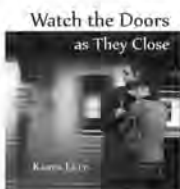
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MY LAST CENTURY JOANNA SIT

HEART, PHYSICS, metaphysics and sharp humor abound. Sit's verse ventures outward radiating to all parts of the created world—China, Havana, Coney Island—while simultaneously setting its sights on the landscape within.

MICHELE MADIGAN SOMERVILLE, AUTHOR OF *BLACK IRISH*



WATCH THE DOORS AS THEY CLOSE KAREN LILLIS

AREN'T you tired of 'literary fiction'? When a writer assumes she knows you already, that you two are just alike, the same kind of clever, the same kind of ironic, but in her case maybe a little more so? This book cuts right through all that. It's naked. Naked as a knife.

MIKE DECAPITE, AUTHOR OF *THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD*



MATING IN CAPTIVITY NAVA RENEK

RENEK crafts elegant prose and deftly maps these complex emotional landscapes. The cynical sides of love and lust run through this collection of sexually-charged short stories about the perils of modern couplings. The characters—husbands, wives, lovers, friends, and co-workers—wallow in the misery of self-absorption, and the pairings are layered in disappointments.

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY



RIVERING DEAN KOSTOS

As in the first poems of Cavafy, the grace of Dean Kostos's texts (I would call it unconscious grace, for that is the adjective which permits all heaven as much as all hell to explode, to let fly) is the result of another effort, not even the effort to please, but merely—merely!—the will to tell the truth, to tell what happened, what didn't

RICHARD HOWARD

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DAVID CHORLTON



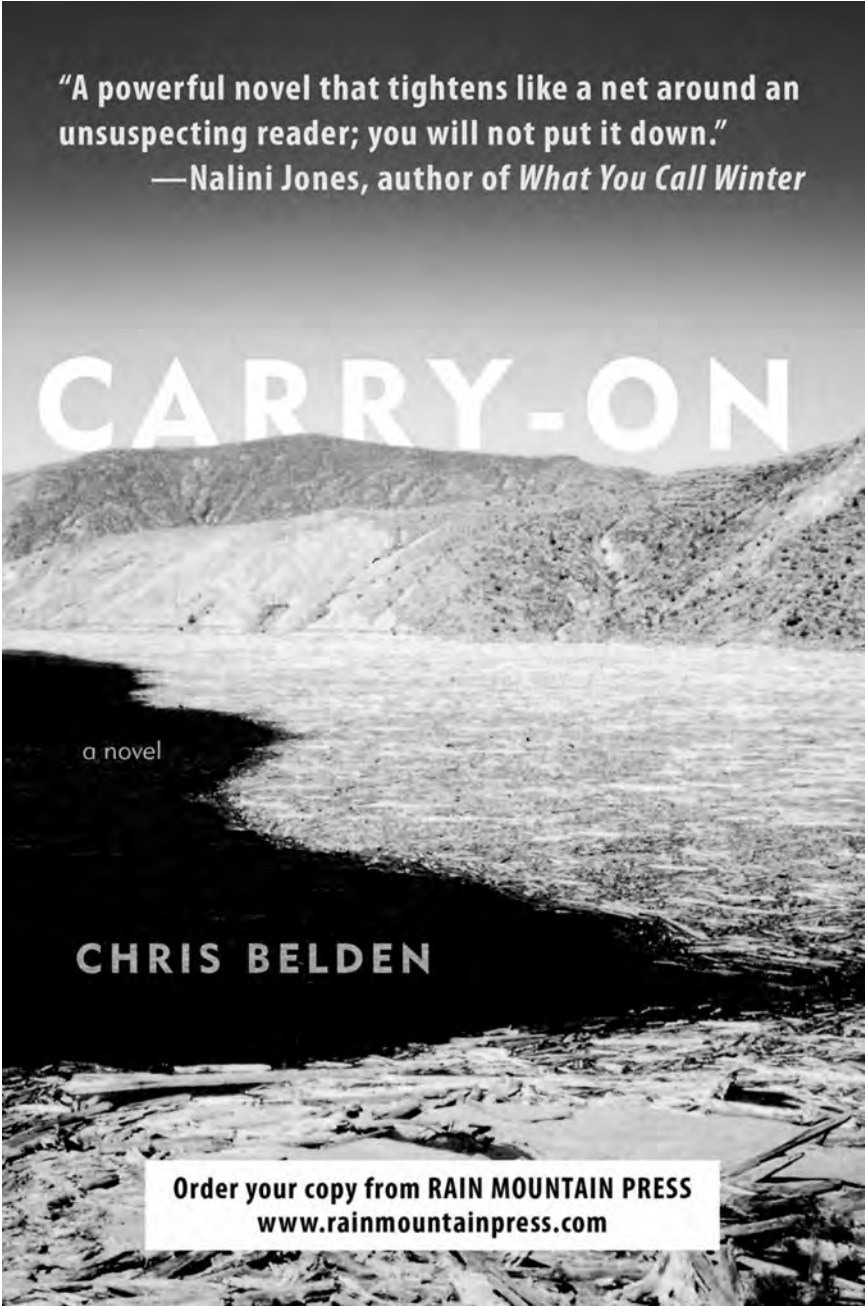
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