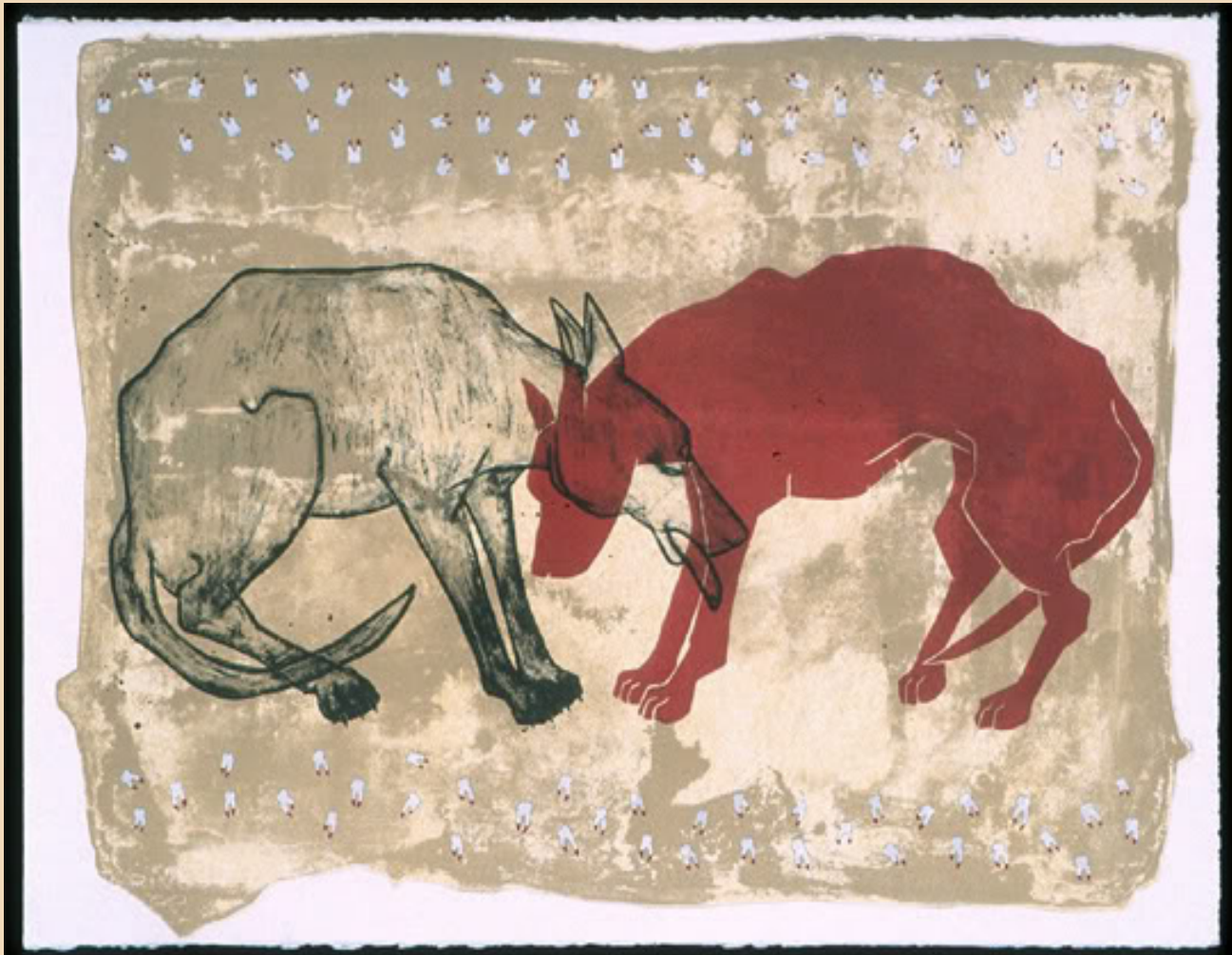


Jet Fuel Review

Spring 2011
Issue 1





Jet Fuel Review

A High Octane Literary Journal

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Mission Statement

We seek to create a writer's community, publish quality writing and artwork, and maintain a blog connected to the literary journal site.

Spring 2011 Editorial Staff

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Poetry



Twenty 7

i signal your absence with
beam red words circling the
leaves that hang near your head
and move through leaning forward
and whispering directions.
to the sea border you keep,
while i, drowning, explain to
water how the afternoon lingers.
all around me, the bats dart
as stars, the blue netting
covers my eyes, and the waves
surge along a line and then
pull back again. through it, i
talk to hear what someone thinks.

Twenty 15

i felt for you in me
for stillness and found
a voice speaking
numbers and words
past the long expanse
offering no
requite from confusion,
just remote forms
of our dance in
others' feet and knew
we must work,
worlds apart,
gradually to learn
our own constellations

Twenty 18

the port bell sounds and resounds
just beyond where we would
stop, but we say, it's morning,
the rain is coming slowly, and
we are, at last, vagrants searching
the sidewalks of the city for
stillness, though we have no plans
to take the usual soundings when
the passage narrows. across
the expanse, we are speaking to
old anchors thrown overboard,
to boats heading to no arrival,
but with no moors our answers
float on water randomly turning.

Pain

Pain is creative
It finds me wherever I hide
Pain is a mile wide
Pain is isosceles
Pain flows downwards
In eddies and rivulets
Pain is symphonic
It takes your breath away
Monocultures of pain
Suffocate all other plants
Pain is companionable
Pain is harmonic
Cuckoo bird pain
Pain rains on its own parade
Pain is retrograde
Pain is my Captain
I am its Tennille

Close Your Eyes to Catch a Ghost

I carry my dead
under my eyelids

who yawn and pull out

my stitches, who yawn
and sing to my teeth.

One night of shivering,

another of sweat. They beat
my ear canals like a bell

and whisper along the length

of my neck. One chanting
Hebrew cries out $1/8$ and $2/3$

and this is an alphabet,

a blessing in gibberish,
language deranged by shadows

and wings. Goodnight I reply

though I am alone and they
are full of tricks. I forgive

the dead and let them reign—

now that they are dead
they will never know sleep.

One Need Not Be a House

Each doorway, doorless. Each window, sprung. The living room with its singing nails, the chimney with its crumbling mouth of ash. Who sits in each chair, who sighs on the porch, who collects dust on his tongue, waiting? Whose shirt is a shadow the curtain makes? The days unravel us. Say it plainly: to be alive is *to be Haunted*; to be dead is to watch. Who calls your name? We do. Who whispers into your mouth? We do, we do. Father, mother, child, we do. A seat for you at our table.

[Note: Italics are quoted from Emily Dickinson.]

Wrong Things Done So Right

The men in my town made their own wood
out of gunpowder. Bones were the wood.
I was the bone they most wanted to string.
Disobedience was expected, so we excelled
at being the wood. Mine Brazilian cherry,
or a fine replica. Someone watched a show
about unnatural habitats. The bone did not
watch anyone for long. A hawk descended
upon a piece of wood in the river, thinking
it was a muskrat, or somebody's thigh bone.
I knew it was only an old buckshot pheasant
pretending to be an ancient book in vellum.
The television blurred into a commercial.
A man next door hacked something in two.
What it was didn't matter. We were all still
bone, and waiting for the right sort of rope.

Elegy with Flickering Lights

Something like *arrested for solicitation*,
like the underbelly of a boat that nobody saw
for what it was. We pretended an escape hatch.
Her yard had so many chickens it was ridiculous
and so were we. Somehow the marbles became
a commodity worth more than glass. We wore
old-fashioned sleeves and dirty knee socks.
She drew all over her mattress with red marker.
In ten years we'd both have the right touch
for something. It was inevitable. Our dresses
would haunt one man's closet, and then another.
I was always the one mouthing off, getting into
whatever car opened its door. Windows issuing
cologne that smelled like cherry disinfectant.
Halfway through the night we'd swap wigs
and how that would shake everything up.
Once we watched a car fly off the overpass
and crash onto a highway. All I remember was
how the horn blared all the way down. Lights
in the gas station flickered for the shortest
second on record. Then the cash register rang.
The door closed, and I never saw her again.

In My Bright Autocracy

Hallo, Dave! David, hallo!
I'm having so good a day, I don't need you

and don't need the hulk of you sulking into
my dance hall with mud on your boots.

I skid up the courthouse steps
vindicated and free,

lift up my robes and issue exquisite decrees,

so no, I don't need you, your grassroots and counsel.

When I pour water into a wine glass,
it's one kind of miracle,

and it's too good a day, Dave, and I don't need you
or dour Faisal or any of the grim Ethels,

your protests and woe!

The soldiers stomp onward,
and they stomp onward with glee,

so no, they don't need you, Bertha,
your washcloths, your pathos and honey.

I indulge extravagantly in legumes and peaches.

I ask my spleen for nothing,
but on it goes with its spleening,

so no, I don't need you, Chester, I don't need
you, Marie, your picketing and screeds.

The wan girl standing on the corner with a clipboard
and a bandage on her back

covering a new tattoo is another I don't need.
I don't need to know her name

or in which tearoom she partakes of oolong,
making delicate gestures.

Darfur is far away, and Pyongyang is far away,
and the gum-rot, rusted armpit of the city

is a glinting mosaic of broken bottles of Yoo-hoo!
and Pabst and is fed and is sated and free,

so she doesn't matter as you don't matter.

Aw, Dave, I'm having too good a day,
and I don't need you and don't need you,

and if you should come this way
by buggy, hybrid and electric,

or by a wide, purposeful stride,

you'll find my face is
the face on the coinage,

my voice is commanding as the ping
of a fork striking a crystal decanter,

and I'm presiding under the meniscus of night sky,
luminous and solitary as a firefly

beneath a field of stars, unconstellated.

All My Darlings

I'd only just been thinking of you very deeply.

I'd seen a Corvair rusting on a Tuesday
and recalled that summer we spent driving.

I noticed a drawbridge drawn tall and, naturally,
remembered you drinking a Pete's Wicked,
arguing the relative merits of the founding fathers.

How you lauded Alexander Hamilton.
How your eyes accounted.

Even now the drunk seeming sway
of birches evokes you

collecting leaves to press between pages of a dictionary,
a you, so vaguely you
in a top hat and the sleek sheen of vinyl boots.

That funny little cross atop every steeple in town
makes me think of you
thinking of the birds as crossing through crosshairs.

You were a woman of so elegant a candor.
You were a man of such good measure.

Blue was the light of your hi-fi display.
Green, the distortion of your tv screen.

Soft, the dilly-dally of your hairdo.

I contain you now the way the ringing ear retains thunder.

Do you still eat three cuts of meat on marble rye?
Do you still get rowdy on Arbor Day
and tear down the corridor scattering
your dossier all over
so no-one can know you or tell you apart?

No-one can know you or tell you apart.

Even now, all the ratty hipsters become you,
and all the blonde diplomats become you,

a you with domestic accoutrements,

a you with parcels on the Elevated gliding
through a vapid fog.

You who merengue without me,

who see me when I don't see you

among the dithering crowd on the parade ground
in your new pair of shoes.

Chinese Stars

When I pulled open my curtains this morning there was a raven on the windowsill. God, why today! I had a salad with oranges and Polish roses. I walked to church but couldn't find a door. A man politely offered to steal my money but I declined. I was sick of feeling so sick. I went to a museum of torture and a museum of sex machines. I don't think I learned anything. Afterwards I stumbled upon a hot pepper eating contest and won it. If I had tear ducts I'd cry a lot. It might sound cliché, but I can't believe I told you about the time I got my hand peed on. What if multiple other dimensions are watching us like fish in an aquarium floating around a tiny sunken ship in a bowl of water? My heart's been replaced with a basket of Chinese stars. I'm the starting quarterback for State and I'm lost in the mountains.

Scandanavia Air

I don't know how birds make love but I think I saw it during my morning run. Afterwards I needed a power shower. I don't want to sound like a broken record, but I guess getting your hand peed on is symbolic. Isn't there always a certain degree of tension in the air when a giant spider could rise from the ground and kill you at any moment? I sort of want to be a human spider. I found a fake boob in my gym's hot tub. Man, practical criticism is a staple of my life, I thought. What is it I live for? There's really no comparison to riding your motorcycle over a classic Volkswagen Beetle; I think my dog Jeremy has a foot fetish; it's important to not only play songs that you love, but songs that you're scared of, too, or that make you uncomfortable.

Bird Omens

The teenager at the register remarked to a friend that he'd been called Cheetah, Raccoon, Guinea Pig and Hamster that day. Thanks, Hamster, I said as I paid for a Coke and left. I needed to get home and vacuum the yard. It was starting to look dirty. I wish I lived somewhere that smelled like fish guts, I thought. I mean, didn't smell like fish guts. I'd been having trouble concentrating so I'd taken the day off. I needed it, anyway, to prepare the dinner I'd planned. My dog Jeremy fancies himself a food critic and I wanted to impress him. My last meal with him was a disaster as I inadvertently opened a gateway to evil while cooking a meatloaf. But how are you supposed to know you're not in love when you think you are? I bet it's like invisible hands take one side of your face and push it toward the other. I know there's a bird omen for it but I can't remember it.

The Stone Bench

It's not enough the neighbor cat climbs it,
or pauses. If I thought to lay out milk,
we'd be friends. But for the poured concrete

my yard is of the lush rest of growth,
wisteria and the choking grape, the late

surprise-lily erupting like night lava from space,

kudzu, a word reminding me of war words,
fubar, which it is. & the like. & is how
we know seasons. Which explains

the possum ignoring mute hummingbirds
slurping the Rose of Sharon dry, wingbeats
a blur, this world not helping but be close,

the soft silent whisper of teeth & nails.

Seasonal Affective Disorder

The twenty-fifth of the first month was the last snow
to fall for the next seventy odd years. The mayors
& clerks looked up to revise the world's history
to a legend of cold hope to catch unawares
the too much to do forever: boiling men
out of their glaciers for quizzes, crosswords,
lobbing grapefruits while honing lost friends,
skiing on bones of bears, using herringbones
to turn under the overhang of aspens
careening to the bottom in all that friction.
The incline of those days was back and forth.
Everyone swung their time to other hobbies,
teeter-totters in the gray playground and cells
ringing across the cosmos. All the jackets
got hung up on hat racks. Flip flops became
the rage, from woven grass to neon platform.
Because the season bore no sign post &
calendars shifted according to the politics
of whim, every kind of -crat & -ist sat by
as the moon took up its position on the sea.
Call them clouds of what's flown by and say
that next year the mouth of the universe will be
in a quiet child on a shady foot path. See
if then its yawn is not enough to warrant
some yellow grin in the coming of alien suns.

La Scala Busker

Two strains
of violin
interlope
against fans

of ash leaves,
the blue night
turning to
root, to up,

to the heart's
penultimate
beat and that
withheld in

definitely,
resolution
the natural
resonant.

I can't not
envelop
the world but
the unlikely

abounds

Wildflower

No one saw
As I looked through
Blades of grass
Felt sunlight and sky
Wash down my stem

No one heard me promise
To always keep myself
To wither, die
Before another's hand
Could tear my roots
Break my veins
Tell me I am
Not my own.

Arriving Young

The palm leaves breathed
As you waded into light
Home now among the
Mountain shade
First glimpse of pacific

I wish I knew you then
At nineteen
Your hand falling out
The front car window

The sky no longer
Air and wind
But a tangible thing
A piece of time
To place beside
Your pocket watch
To keep.

from **My Book Report on the Afterlife**

I.

When it set in, MoMo said
it's humid as dicks on turkey day.

Tony Pepperoni said through the grapes I taste
lightning. Turn your bikes upside down. Run.

May we all snap like sausages done right.
May emergency broadcasts interrupt Aerosmith

forevermore. Show me one flashlight
that isn't fumbled for. File into the hall,

fall on your knees, cover your head.
Now is a good time to imagine peanut butter,

the creaming of your house.

II.

I'm no flat top. 7-Up and coal
bricks don't move my grease.

I've got batteries charging inside
and when they're ready angular

70s jams will crawl over the porch
like carpenter ants on amphetamines

infesting the neighbors' watercolors by number.
I live outdoors, people,

raised on tent stakes and ground chuck.
This barbecue looks like a coffin because it is.

What are you so bonesad about?
This is what we do when it's light.

Then we ride dirt bikes
through the mossiest part of the woods.

If someone wipes out the party swells
to epic. The old man does the goose dance.

III.

Guess your pitching speed at the church
carnival, win a two liter.

All my clairvoyant friends have diabetes,
listening to the Indians fall in an alarm

clock radio, and nobody brings perch
home for months. Boats

rotting on trailers, lonesome
batter calling out to grease.

Our lake was tasered while we slept.
This up-ticks my brother's blood pressure.

He makes a basement of his house
and one of his head at the office.

I want to buy us two nice bikes
and start a lawn cutting business.

He looks like paper
without a match held up to it.

Vista

Sea of batteries, glossy base cockles.
Mudslide bushes, bricks, slaps.

Calculating, mellow chai,
Dale killed off, Gonzo posed.

Tropism? Trap art?
Advice strolls back from debit,

Unappreciative,
Ottoman arches of force.
Holding onto our melted Prada stuff,
Small, draggy associations,

Their professional
Epistolary soloism.

I can fake that book too, yo.
Take me down to the Taco Bear.

As a county man, using my arms
To fly to the farms, flowers clinging to their beds,

Petals opening up into detailed camo guys,
And you brainiacs'll have to live with it.

Sometimes, on My Shoulders, are Her Panties

1.
Together since they were temple kids,
Nude and obsessed with country music,

Having a great day out at Wheat Ridge,
Too bad I couldn't escape from the well by force.

Nobody should disarm you social dudes, though:
I, too, fell for a hot Little Rascal with a rack.

She kissed me on my ears, even though they
Both look like sombreros made from old pie crust.

2.
Once the blood is draining
Outcha head though, it's gonna
Be over pretty much, there's
All kinds of things you coulda did.
1-2-3-5, dead. Right after
Looking at this Rancho t-shirt.

3.
The favor that I'll ask of you now

Is a simple collage of previous favors
I've been previously granted by (add.xl file)

Easy, normal ones.
Get over your cat's death!

Stop claiming to be altered and aware, to being
500 guns attached to an electrode fuse array,

Hidden in the hayloft in protruding bright
Iron racks, hoping nobody up there is a Kraut,

My empty cannoning into a junkie teen torso
Becoming a secret path to my palace, to me.

Just hot light on dark invisible art!
Not only a college with soul-sucking browned windows!

An Unremarkable Landscape

Shanksville, PA – United Flight 93

Wind drones an incessant dirge in a cathedral
of hardwood trees near a narrow road
that separates scattered farms.

No thundering waterfall,
no snow-crested mountain
just
a grassy field in Pennsylvania
where a silver bird plunged from the sky
and vaporized...

a grotto now
fertilized with blood
and white ash of bones
where flags amass to salute
a phylum of heroes,
men and women
who stood.

It takes
my breath
away.

In the Orlando Airport

Sunlight streams through the glass dome
and strikes her halo of corn-silk curls.
Dragging a Cinderella suitcase, she trudges
through the terminal wearing a crown
of Mickey Mouse ears.

Barely three feet tall, she flaunts fluorescent pink
sneakers, rubber heels worn to an angle
by her slightly pigeon-toed gait. Grinning
and grimacing in turn, she struggles to keep up
with her weary parents and wordlessly
makes a statement:

she's been to Disney World;
nothing can stop her now.

Play

I would call and ask friends to play. Running out the door, calling to mom just before it shut, going to Michael's to play. To Greg's to play. To Matt's to play. Nothing better in the world, at 3:10 pm allowed to escape enslaving school doors. Never mastered spelling or handwriting, failed the basics, and they would not appreciate a boy's philosophical ranting too sensitive and lost to dreams. But at play I was expert. How to control a maroon three speed with a yellow banana seat roaring down asphalt alley, avoiding corrugated trash can obstacle course. Locating mandarin or marigold slugs buried in slithering earth. Collecting the one hundredth different bottle cap by railroad tracks of decay. The swing right, shoot left unblockable skyhook, and its swishing sound of nothing but net. But life and lives are old clutches grinding, or dress shirts serviceable, but stale. Over time, we no longer asked each other to play. There were parties with bottles spinning and kisses of gleaming lips. Slow dances awkward in frozen rows of whispering fears. Mall wonderings in endless circles, the mocking shy laughter of girls we wanted to love, and stories invented about their young breasts. A graduation unattended, watched drunk from triangle glass safety of skyscraper above. College and journeys to lands of revolution and daily demise like the slicing of bread. Love when I wanted sex and sex when I wanted love. Jobs found and jobs abandoned into the glory of San Francisco Union Square frenzy. Moments watching the ceiling fan count swirling invitations towards extinction. Now, I call friends, invite them to dinner, a poetry reading, a certain event. But really, all I want is to ask them if they can play, and they don't laugh, but cry, cry internal pounding mad tears of what we have lost, that never again can be had.

July 23, 2002

Limited Time Offer

The line runs through the hotel lobby, then extends past the pool, and down and around the graveyard. The pool looks nice. Some manatees are performing. There's a little island in the center with monkeys. "I can still remember the floor plan of that house in Amarillo," the person beside you says. "I'm sure it's still there," he adds. I'd like to think it's still there, anyway. That would bring some elegance to the equation.

The manatees wear little pink tutus and the monkeys wear little red hats. We're leaning with or against each other, as the line extends to the cloverleaf. We bring all the rocks we can carry, and make little piles when we get too much. Then we start over. The sweet smell of a brand new day. True, but no matter what the resemblances we undertake there will never be a final correspondence, despite the lists we pass back and forth of the living and the dead, and the in-between.

It's said the line was seen in Westminster once, where it got tangled with other lines. But so many things could be true about losing touch, and having this be it, blinkered by where we came from, but as there were two ways about it, we found our noses a little off to the side of the grindstone where there was a comfortable divot within which we could rest a bit and introduce ourselves to those around us.

And then it came time for us to find chairs as the music stopped, and the dwarf with the garage door opener was looking off toward the casinos, pretending darkness. A few old-timers still meet there with their checkerboards and little pieces made of filed bone. "We're bone workers," they say, and the air brings a bit of dampness as the line extends through the sand traps of the golf course which stand there like a new idea, one you've just thought up.

Box with Noise Elements

At some point the wind always shifts suddenly
and the gust carries off small dogs
past where the king is caught in the tree
dancing along the edge of the roof. It's been nice,
and now we're applesauce.

Further postcards in the gift shop include
paintings of barges and counter girls waving
from ferries in New York harbor. We take two
of everything, and carry them outside
hoping for kites.

While falling, all you want to do is fall, they say,
sounding like all those children's stories we hid in a shoebox
under the floorboards, so we'd have something
to find someday
when perhaps we could explain them. We left detailed notes
before we moved, with Xs
and dotted steps.

Such things always start out as a memory
but end up as a question. It's no wonder we lilt
when we meet in doorways, only to bump into each other
and get turned around so that we go back the way we came,
spending the rest of our lives where we just were
thinking it was where we were going,
with the wrong children,
and feeling something's not quite right
about the wedding anniversaries. That's it,
isn't it? The story of the girl
in the woods? The darkness of the trees?

Ethel & Myrtle Try to Avoid How Emotional They Get

In the bric-a-brac of the yard, or the people across the yard,
Ethel and Myrtle are thinking it's not necessarily bad
to be completely misunderstood. Sometimes it'll help,
or at least buy oneself time, out in the middle of the ice storm
when what goes on in the minds of the possessed
is far from what the manuals project, with that if-you-could-
see-me-now thrill making way for the temperance guild
and general din of all our forfeitings and acquiescences.

I used to worry about my father, for instance, there
at the microscope, and now they're criticizing us for it,
as apparently they'd like us to have little adventures
that remind ourselves of just how sweet it is to have lived,
and how we all live again through it, and there's
some hope out there that feels like a rush of air
on the Stutz Bearcat, while we practice turning off the faucets
with our elbows. But they criticize us in such lonely,
defeated ways, it's difficult to feel anything
but sorry for them. "Be happy," we say, "don't cry."

Maybe if we lift something heavy. Maybe if we sit awhile
reading them sonnets that go, "How are you doing, Joe? Geeze,
I haven't seen you in *forever*." How maybe such questions
would help us think about things differently,
so that we might be better able to get past blaming
old pictures of ourselves— Look, we're all people no matter what,
with our mothers losing their minds in the living room
as we order pizza from the hall, keeping an eye on them
while juggling scissors. We never had a choice which door to knock on,
and now they're all the same, swinging outward, and then breaking.

Your Hands as the Third Law of Motion

The clocks of Pangaea never run backward, true, but sometimes they go forward in pleasing, sparkling ways. The shrubbery that was rather unsubstantial now looks like Lincoln, and people are lining up wanting tickets and a look at your herbicide, even if all your ideas are smaller now, including the ones for the backyard Ferris wheel and corn maze. It had to do with your uncle, and now we all love the same animals. The platypus, the yak, the manatee, and the effervescent forts they make in the camp fitness yard, begging you to stay away from home.

Things are going on there, unlike here where everyone has stopped in mid-stroke, even the fire in the hearth, the choir in mid-lunge, the lovers grasping the porch rail with everything they have, as the princess lies waiting for some light molestation from a stranger, like when you're in a crowded theater and something you say sotto voce sounds like "fire," and the next thing you're able to define clearly is filled with forms, and stories you make up from glancing over the detective's left shoulder, laconic stories, like the ending of some movie you didn't get to see, but of which you had this clear vision.

Now the fields are filled with wind farms, and we're worried we might have to start rationing weather. It certainly seem to be calling out to be done, or to have a song written about it being done. We should have brought some instruments or taken some lessons, or understood music better. Some idle practicing that could remind us that perhaps we should have had children. But there's always something we were meaning to do that we forgot to do while power washing the deck or picking up the pool passes. So maybe we did have children after all. Maybe that's what all these rooms are for.

Of Certain Small, Valuable Kitchen Appliances

Take whatever it is, and call it Layer One,
and suddenly it's layers
up and around the room.

A table. People leaning over a table.

One of them is pouring maple syrup. A chrome jar
for powdered sugar.

"I've always been here," they say,
which is drawn away
or applied. Of the one and the rest.

I did not know you, and the brush of clouds
was too forceful.

I did not see where I was going
and I reached
what I can't remember what it was
I was reaching for.

Vanish the windows. Vanish this tablecloth
for this one that was always here.

That was the house with a missing wall
so we could watch. Maybe it was a table on wheels,
or there was never a table.

A counter. Some people around a table.

"Tell me a story about me," they say,
from the darkness between thoughts.

This is the Part Where You Whistle

The clouds went by and so did we, just fads, probably, we thought, in that hoping-for-ice-cream way we'd grown so famous for before we went hopelessly out of our minds. I remember that from an experiment I was in once, where I had to keep changing my pants according to the tones from a wall speaker. I liked several of them, where they prompt you to take a self-guided tour. A feeling came upon me like nausea then, some thought I'd been driving past for years. There were children in the yards singing "I Demand a Horizon," though I doubted they knew what they were asking for. It was the view through a window from a commercial for cereal that the altar boys were so going on about, practically out of their robes they were, and into their I LIKE BANDS t-shirts. They named rocks and taught them tricks. They were very good at holding their breath. I've always wondered about that, and about myself, as well. But what's the use in wondering, when the schedule that the guy at the booth gave us shows that many more things should be happening than currently seem to be happening. I arrived. I changed my pants a few times. I left. Why not just say that? As there's always another model in demand, with sale frames and years of research, saying "I Love Goodness." The box set was still in transit back then, though anything that rises in a closed system could appear to be the reason for that system. Invisible dogs on studded leashes, for example, 1-900 numbers and comment cards.

Lost at Sea

A cute little blonde from Tacoma screams my name while having drunken sex with a sailor who wouldn't take off his cap. White light floods the engine room. What did they think would happen? Search parties themselves have gotten lost and with only a sleeve of stale Saltines in the breadbox. The anxious expression on her face says, If anyone finds a key to a Volkswagen, please let me know.

First Date

She wore a brand of makeup called Urban Decay. The crescent moon was very close. In one of the collapsing cardboard boxes under the table, she discovered a book of 425 poems about the death of the poet's child. Our hearts were decked in flags and banners. Pickpockets crowded around. She said she'd slit my eyelid to help me see more.

St. Valentine's Day Massacre

Street fairs churned with drifters and polio. Something bundled like a baby was buried under the rose bush. The assassin missed at point-blank range, distracted by the pair of dancing mice inside his head. Paper fell out of the sky. From then on, the Valentine heart couldn't beat on its own, but only stones the size of pigeon's eggs had permission to stay.

Inticate Projections of Prescient Dreams

I became aware of music, something classical. The gods must've worked a double shift. Everyone went around giving things new names. There were no winners, only opponents. The landscape smelled as if it had just been painted. We were crawling on our bellies for the shelter of the pine trees. An old farmer came out to the field and poked me in the side with his shoe. I looked up, shielding my eyes with my hand. Table or booth? the hostess asked.

His Death

At 2:15 I hear *marcus koough has...expired*
Like sour milk, past his date

At the security desk, the thin black man
Who chats looking down at his desk
When I validate my parking tickets
Through the years of births and deaths.
He asks me again, “What? Where?”
And I wonder if I’m saying the word wrong—morgue.
Like no one’s ever asked to go there before. Has no one died
At this hospital? I have to sit and wait for pastoral care to take me
And for the morgue to prep his body.
A good-looking, young priest comes down the hallway, but he is not for me.
An Indian priest sits uncomfortably, turns on the TV.
There is a heavy man they have to move to get to Marc and there’s only one person
There, we’ll have to wait. And then the priest does not know how
to get there; we wander through the basement.

I am told to look through the window
A submarine hole, Marc looks underwater, his white face
Like a guppy poking through the sheet
Priest rattles through some prayers
I try to join Our Father but I cannot keep up.

Everything They Said Is True

I never knew it could be this good.
We had a booth with a mountain view
painted on the wood around us. Real
mountains, real lake. Pine trees, I never
believed. Look at the detail. What mossy green,
what black black. I am pregnant with them,
colors. I am not pregnant. You are beautiful.
Look at the detail. There is a rock in the distance.
There is a box with napkins on the table.
I want to write every poem I've ever written
on them and name each one after you.

This Poem Is Brought to You by Facebook and Olena Kalytiak Davis

Hanna's t-shirt (black) (she's
stacked) says Protect Me (lord)
From What I Want (of
course, lord) I think of you
(o sad) (o sack) and lord, lordy
I do. Her t-shirt (of
course, black) the only con-
clusion I come to (lack)
(fact)
(come back)

Floral Roundabout

When my grandmother visits I smell a wisp
of floral fragrance. Some days it's fresh
as she showers in an alternate universe
and chooses rose over lily perfume
in a glass bottle with two hearts.

Her visits are brief. I may be laying fetal
with a sweat soaked pillow or burying a dead
iguana. His name was Kermit.
Maybe I whiskey punched a brick wall
and the lily feeling comes over me. Floral
rolls my eyes to the back of my head.

I am inside a capsule
of flowers. I headline my female roots,
writing her score,
channeling her Depression days:
the dust bowl, the cigarettes,
the lung cancer and the hoarded cans
next to the oven. Corn, peas, carrots.

Migraine Midnight Bury Me

Flashing red stoplights and car sounds orchestrate saxophonic spasms. A saxophone digs out my eye. A chisel sculpts half of my skull into blood pulse. Screws shred bone to keep my coffin in line. Chisel sculpts half of my skull into blood pulse.

Serotonergic synapse hammer me in to the underground, case me dreams with dragons.

Open hemicrania is enough for black beetles to crawl, lapsing into the drips of pale-yellow illuminating the gray night wall. Black beetles bleed into night gray ceiling. Positron Emission Tomography says, "raiNBOW demystifies your irideSCENT brain!" The smell of dirt is burning. Lily of the valley is burning. Hand palms wet blanket my face.

Serotonergic synapse hammer me in to the underground, case me in dreams with dragons.

I lay in a bed of floral arrangements.
In certain ways they don't go together: rose, lily,
snapdragons, zinnia. My mother
offers me a bouquet and I accept, run
upstairs and slip it into a blue china vase.
Floral is gone if I inhale again. I smell
skin and litter box. Sometimes I'll fall fast
asleep, but sometimes if I stay awake
the scent will come again.

Just Chillin, B

The hours are large bills
spilling from a fat wallet.
No work today and

the lady's away.
Idleness winks at Silence.
You guys on a porch

somewhere, playing
dominoes or cards.
Idleness puts an arm over

your shoulder like,
Whatchall tryna' do?
Even a tree seems to shrug

at the wobbly question
formed by the cardinals
perched in its branches.

Time burns a hole
in your pockets.
Possibility rolls up

in a late model ride.
Top down, stereo blasting.
Sun smiles in the metal

and slides its light, the way
a young man runs his hand
along the curves,

admiring the candy paint.
Yo, he yells. You three shrug
when asked, *What's good!*

Near-Music

*When people love, they bathe with sweet-smelling soap, splash
their bodies/ with perfume or cologne,/ Shave, and comb their hair,
and put on gleaming silken garments,/...After loving they're relaxed
and happy and friends with all the world.*

—Dudley Randall, “A Poet Is Not a Jukebox”

When you wake me at 4 a.m.,
the late poet laughs somewhere.
The morning warps like a smile

and I'm blessed for the day's
near misses: the ticket an officer
won't write, a dog that won't attempt

to bite. Both too busy trying
to place the name for what circles
my head the way canaries and

blue jays circle the crowns
of trees blown toward one another
when the wind mistakes itself

for match-maker. Those mornings,
when you wake me, earth and her pals
dot a music staff around the sun,

and dawn is the light
emitted from what young stars
attempt to sing.

Vacant

after Tony Medina

Lying in his
hospital bed,
my uncle is
something
condemned
and roped off.
His mouth
sags
like a warped
porch. His
eyebrows
are shutters
long overdue
for repairs.
His unshaved
stubble—
mildew collecting
on façade.
Cancer squats
in the
basement
of him.
Chemo
runs up
the stairs
inside.
Something
yellow
loosens
the plywood
from his eyes
to peek out
the windows.

Less Finesse, More Spank

for Tasia

less *Twin Peaks*, more *Ru Paul's Drag Race*
less velvet, more velour
less Dom Pérignon, more André
less diamond, more zirconia
less UV, more Faux Glow
less sugar, more Splenda
less manchego, more Velveeta
less treadmill, more Skechers Shape-Ups
less café, more Facebook
less grass-fed beef, more T.G.I. Friday's potato skins
less pitch, more Auto-Tune
&c.

Plot Point Two

I love so much to arrive blubbering upon plot point two the part where
the protagonist is driving in the rain or her lover has been unfaithful
or his mother is not really his mother or all three at once It is then when
I clutch my cherry cola and bite down on the straw and am so grateful

for the Hollywood Formula for Syd Field and those men in black glasses
who sat in back rooms tapping cigars charting the hills and valleys of story

I love to anticipate the sad part 60 minutes in when everything seems
hopeless but really you know the rain is manufactured and the hoary

old man in the garret will get his memory back and reveal that the hero's
mom is really his mom and his best friend's mom too and all along the love
they'd loved had been tucked like a script inside their cells And when I think
how in life I don't know when plot points will pour down from above

I tug at my hair and gnarl my eyebrows and offer desperate frantic praise
for the staged break-up under the antique lamppost's haze No praise
for flat coke and wrinkled straw and the sicksweet ache my stomach gets
warning me of the bad thing that hasn't come but is coming one of these days

Cillian Murphy (Irish Actor, 1976-)

Cillian Murphy & the sexiness of 11 o'clock on my tween duvet.
Cillian Murphy & the glamour of snowflakes on my robin's egg toenails.
Cillian Murphy & the sexiness of daybeds & delicately cut pepperoni.
Cillian Murphy & the discovery of Neapolitan ice cream, with its three-part plot.
Cillian Murphy & the sexiness of my hand on this Casio keyboard.
Cillian Murphy & the jouissance of the windmill pond when all the cattle are dead.
Cillian Murphy & the sexiness of happy birthdays from the stepfathers of the world!
Cillian Murphy & the fantasia of pet burials & Russian dolls packed in paprika.
Cillian Murphy & the sexiness of mud-pies dropped in the center of a cul-de-sac.
Cillian Murphy & the breeziness of new love in the leg of my culottes.
Cillian Murphy & the sexiness of 11 o'clock in the tenements of our personal apocalypse.

Anthem Golightly

From a neighbor's apartment, Moon River—
In the Mansion of Many Apartments, the 90s is a locked rec-room
we can't get back into. They've changed the code.
I guess we just have to stand here together, chemically naked,
admiring each other's rhinestone spines in the hallway.
Modernity is the worst fate: it stamps you with its apple blossom fist.
There is so very little time left to love in the Grand OldStyle.
If you're coming to collect me, please do it quickly. Just now
I am getting off the winter bus, blinking in the bright April air.
Look. The whole decade shimmies like a gas-parade away from us.
I don't know what a huckleberry friend is, but I suspect it is something
we hold too tight in the dark when we should be rowing.
What is the vintage, my love, of this thing you seem to want so badly?
Say, what are the names of all the dead birds who nest in your guitar?

I Will Immortalize You Tomorrow

in all your wine-dark inverted lip, I will crank you forward on hand and knee: you naked and smelling of venison. Cranked forth into our eventual wedding, you weirding me. Out in the church of the wildwoods. You so much more sentient, so much more naked and afroth in will-be, and I will wife you this way. Will queen you backwards and forwards in the wine-dark would-be. Will catch wind of you and hole you and hair you sentient, and without remorse. For we are older and ever. Older onto each other. Forthright in our endoskeletal decreation, helplessly sculling into this wine-dark adoré, adoré, adoré.

In Different Parts of DNA Simultaneously

Ready to be joined with those
On the other side, with nobody
More than eight miles from the center

You left the largest
Part of yourself empty or sometimes
Produced by up to seven layers
Of slightly transparent color

Leaving room for eight tomorrows

But there were no planes
For Russia for three
Hours which the EPA was phasing out
In white retail space

Could such a strong detachment
Be overcome – now you
Wear only light, then you did
Not appear burrowed in mud

Drawing out the cancer the way
All 305 images of a cure
Yanked on the other
End of the polymerase chain reaction

Yet in the middle there is
Almost nothing
Happening except
The pilot transporting hearts

Because you're leaving for Moscow
Tomorrow at temperatures mere
Billionths of a degree above absolute zero
Above existential shame, original
Sin, post-industrial sexuality
And extraterrestrial fashion

Making sure I'm the only
Channel for all your pleasure
No doubt soon going above
Or beyond the snowswept streets

All the way to the tippy tips of
Your fingers and toes and deities
Whose arms and legs froze
Simply because they knew

Everything

Joy

I went looking for you
On a day so unlike today
Around a dome whose solid interior
Space has been eternally
Sealed off from play

My ignorance of time
Offset by my lust for flying

If the sun were shining with
Plenty of blame to go around like now
Maybe I'd have crash-landed
A couple of years and 500,000 feathers later
In a more remote or historically
Neutral part of town

Still I can't shake the feeling that backward
Aerials could be repeated to infinity

Within lacework and zigzags
Radically relearning
How to withstand ocean deprivation
Deeper and deeper I fell
Through irregular tiers of even
Lighter veils

This is where your book always smiles

Certain scribes caught sight of us naked in the sky
But could not believe their eyes
And copied on

Bruised, bandaged, gauges missing
I would soon join their song

We had all the dreams
Like the one where nothing
Ever ends

While the geometric clarity
Of your whole design
Disappeared behind a honeycomb
Of ever-multiplying cells framed by tiny
Arches that hang like stalactites
From my ceiling

And the web
Of cracks covering nearly every bone
Record the shame and suffering
My wings should outgrow

Great Gam-Equipped Perfume Bottles

From knotted graves uncovered
By a drenching rain

Without disturbing the delicate quantum
State of their atoms

Take a small handful
Of mallow and plantain leaves

And pain surrounded
By flapping doves

And pain so self-evident
It silences the dobermen

Ascribe the third
Angel to the laws
Of thermodynamics

Like someone coming
Out of image
Deprivation

It's love that's indifferent
To your brain

Consumed
To a thickness in a sufficient quantity
Of rose water until

It is consumed to a
Thickness

From one ounce and a half
Of oil of roses

Just-say-no sing-alongs
Are unlikely to make
A dent in this chain

Whitecaps driven
By relentless winds
From the north broke

At the foot of the volcano

Where three-fingered hands
Work the keys:

I will return, I will return

In a town where acacias bloom
Sit there computing for ten minutes

For over a hundred jeers
The islands out there in flames

A statue of the deposed plutocrat powdered
With ash on all eight wings

Mind-Reading Husband

why is my wife so mad at me
all the time
why can't I do anything right

I asked her what made her so mad
she replied
you can't read my mind

I told her I could
Read her mind

Then what's the problem
She opined

I still can't read between the lines

You don't write poetry

For my parents

You don't write poetry
You breathe it
No
you can't breathe
underwater

You can't kiss a poem
but you can taste it
No you can't
swallow light

Before you watch a poem take wing
you nurture it
Then you let a poem go

You do it if it kills you

Because poetry
is like being dead—
Coming back to life
hours later

You get your hair wet
You shiver when you break the poem's surface
feeling wind
Then
you call out the river's name
and it answers

You call
and I answer
A poem is an echo
And if you are timid
I will be timid

But if you are mighty
if you sing out—
I am mighty; I sing out

Write me as a letter to the stars
I will shake their hearts
and bring them back to life

Sap

Inside my body a tree is
growing. Lord,

I know the sting that raindrops bring;
the cold that falls

like evening in the skin;
the taste of silence

like metal. I am familiar
with wind, tussling my hair

like prairie grass.
I am familiar with fire.

Dry things burn so quickly.
I remember California. Lord,

the streets are pale. It hasn't rained
for months, and if it has

I haven't seen it.
But I know the taste

of dry saliva. Silence takes the air
as autumn turns to winter.

My body is a tree.
The transition too slow

for my taste. When sap dries
on the roots it becomes rough

like moss. Inside my body a tree
that has become slow,

is waiting for the rain.

note to self

stop wasting time wishing to write better
Write

all that you ever wanted to see printed across the faces of stars
like postage stamps Write letters to the universe
and back

and walk outside every once in a while
just to hear the applause of leaves

smell the clouds and their glorious soft tickled whites like eggs
laugh because you've never seen a silver lining, only soft daubs of pink
like bacon. Make this your breakfast, waking up

to the birds tracing black arrows across the sky
watch this through eyes
like telescope lenses

and wonder at wonder, and please
let happiness please you and
thank you is a nice thing to say
every once in a while.

A Letter

By the time you read
this my body should be gone and my touch
a memory

But there are sounds
like easing of rain through the trees
bare heels slapping floor:

How everything persists in you
and this

Is to be raw
You touched me

your fingernails
piano storm the electrical wires
of my veins. I think you will find
wrists

to be the most subtle reminder.

Your lips like crescent
moons

fell and shattered
infinitely upon
mine

as if we were two oceans

Your cheeks like the first
snowfall over
autumn ground

But remember
what a pencil looked like
in my hand. How it changed.

The first time I saw you
you were
a letter

to nobody, waiting
to be heard,

but I hope
to have opened you.

Leather Devil

After Susan Slaveiro's: *A Modern Synthesis*

The way she acts, you'd notice that
zippers do exist, latch-hooks

and buttons. No tight pants at her waistline,
or tiny specks of light where her eyes should be.

In the right kind of shadow, she could be
drinking milk. You might try and open her up

with a drink or two, looking for Seven & Sevens
and Grasshoppers, perhaps a password

to decrypt those fetal markings on the glare
in her eyes, the tattoos of emotional scars

and fork lines, silver keyholes that collect
in the hollows of her metallic limbs.

She is the cobbled remains of old
treasures—twisted and tired, a hunger

for man-flesh. A mythology swallowed.

Convoy

Imitation of Levis' Shiloh poem

My comrades turned to look for me in the rear of the jeep, where
void of my body, two sea bags flanked shards of blood tinted
glass dusting the seat like confetti at a homecoming dance:

I walk the yellow line and he shouts, "just lay down"
not because of the superiority he had over me but
he was trying to keep me from flying away

to slumber on the gravel wrapped in exhaust fumes, I was
rocked to sleep by humming cars wheezing by my head
as the smell of blood escaped my ear,

"shhh, lay still" I hear her voice whisper secrets only I could feel,
wrapped in pulp of crystal clear dusk, an alarm bell pulses in me,
"stay and see." Something has me tethered to the stench of

gauze around four inch tubes of plastic jammed into veins;
I taste metallic syrup with dirty oil scrubbed into
skin by asphalt with a fresh lemon's sting,

in death they can all stare at me while paramedics tear at camouflage and
boot laces, looking for the breath that was not coming, I hide under
cover with a thick braid to shield me from shades of Periwinkle;

in death I swim with a stream of crippled tapeworms, backstroke
into a lantern pitched high above my parent's room;
look through the window smudged with folds and

fall from the sky into the doors, sing along to the music of the
ambulance. Cradle me. A mask too tight and air tasting of
sugar cookies Mom makes every holiday -

I choke on granules of breath.

Bush Solace

When left alone in an African jungle
what snippets of our home lives
get captured in the treasure boxes
of our memories? What artifacts
call us to our past?

To see the animals roam free,
such a contrast to those
of the caged zoo visited
as a child with my father.

What carries the comforts of home?
Is it the toiletry bag packed
with familiar soaps and underwear
of the perfect size and color?

My little pocket knife
reminds me of both
my safety and danger
in the darkness
offered by this jungle
on its platter of sounds
where lions growl, hyenas howl
and vultures wait until its over.

In my final hour,
I realize that home
is different to everyone
and as much as you can pack
into a suitcase, it will never be enough
to erase the feeling of homesickness
knotted in my solar plexus.

Visiting a New Continent

It is difficult to describe
how one feels being transported

into this world where
one feels like *A Stranger*

In A Strange Land, delivered
into darkness by ten planes

in as many days. If
I squeeze my eyes closed

and blink them open again,
would it feel like

a moon landing
or a shattered spaceship?

The only difference
may be that gravity still digs

its claws into my psyche,
particularly when forced

to run from the male lion
eyeing me for dinner

in this deep African night.

Wind after Wordsworth

I feel sorry for words
Trapped in love poems about wind.
How many years have they waited

For their grand entrance
Onto the stage of the poem:
Dreaming of the day they speak

An absent landscape into being:
An absent lover into a bed:
An absent poem into god's mouth:

#

(But the words in this poem
Seem little more than words in a poem . . .
Words in a poem
about words in a poem:
Wind in a world of wind.)

#

I want to blow
Through wind like a tunnel.

I want to know where
It slinks at night to rest.

I want to know what the wind
Has against tennis matches,

Where it stops for beer:
Where it keeps its spare change.

#

(So this is what a love poem
About wind comes to:)

#

Or this:

To blow as the wind blows
Through Wordsworth's Prelude:
(*O there is blessing in this gentle breeze*):

To mean like the word love or heart
In a villanelle written for the Almighty God,
(*Or two sacred ghosts in the act of love*):

To be the wind on your lips,
The wind in your hair, the wind in the mouth
of your mouth:

O to be the final poem bowing
On your heart's windy stage:
#

The Renovation Sonnet: San Francisco

It was Picasso who said that every act
Of creation is first an act of destruction.
Maybe, but I bet he never looked behind

The wall of that bathroom in the Haight.
Lathe and drywall, plaster, panel and parquet.
We live not what we see but what we build.

Bachelard tells us that inhabited space
Transcends geometrical space—that's
True even in the Sunset. If the fog
Closes in, change your house to sky.

Maybe it will be a small bedroom off
The hall, a nursery for the first baby,
Or a sun-soaked foyer where the light
You didn't know you missed repairs.

Sleep Is Not Unlike a Waiting Room

The dead deer is more alive to you now
than reclined, early September, split skin

in the chill shadow of the cherry tree.
The dead deer is more alive to you now

than the featherless bird without a nest.
Neither do you claim by the happiness

of plans, dropping your pencil to the floor
as if to ask what it means to scrape skin

crudely, punch a small boy until he bleeds.
You too think frequently of the jumpers,

whether any stole for the arms of god
or if only the sky, the blue it's said

that seemed to ring the smoke like a halo.
Like horses, like gypsum leaving those birds

splayed, to fall must have felt like flying,
jetsam in exchange for the body's flesh.

Like rifles falling with the sun, flying
like chorus. You took photos of the deer,

by which I mean you blinked a broken thing
lying there, a bruise of wrinkle & dust.

The dead deer is more alive to you now
than childhood. To wonder why you weren't

saying much, not unlike his awful shirt,
thought like a caption for the falling man.

Living Statues on Horseback

Am I a pedestrian, best foot forward,
or am I grass? Along the highways

I let pass the 90s, the white, roadside
wood enclosed by roses, roses, roses.

The lyrics of my last favorite song
betray the sentiment of their chords

& headlights, the single procession
toward the tarpaulin of the cemetery.

In the miles between here & Missouri
the billboard I say aloud is the one

that reads *Jesus*. Later, not too later,
I hear my song on the advertisement

for cars: the notes, the word hammered
like a cross to the ground. Am I stuck

in breathing or am I shrub? The sun,
which also rises, ignites the horizon

before us, birds truncate the radiance.
Sometimes those wayward engines fly.

Just Act Natural

Take your desire for cruelty and put on a show
When you put on a show you have to modulate your voice

If you're going to put on a show, better serve wine and libations
It's important to keep things romantic: rose petals, candles, really put on a show

Put on a show of looking really busy at work
He certainly put on a show but as usual no one was paying any attention

It is possible you may one day coin the motto of an age—until then, just put on a show

Fake it till you make it, they said, but now that I've made it I still put on a show
Only say "Put on a show" to a bartender you trust

We wanted to put on a show for them but didn't have any wigs or anything
If you put on a show, identity becomes more evidently a masquerade

You try to be sincere and it feels fake so you put on a show
It smelled like ketchup when I got off the train, so I put on a show of sniffing the air

You can act crazy and put on a show in bed but you have to live with yourself in the morning
Oh great I guess we all have to put on a show now

The task of the press is the education of the masses, but 9 times out of 10 they choose to just put
on a show

To better dramatize the conflict of logic versus faith, why don't you put on a show?
We agree to put on a show because we're too tired not to

The Cyclical Nature of Fashion

The former practice of 7-digit dialing was overtaken by 11-digit dialing last Sunday
This arises from the former practice of installing doorbell-like mechanisms in coffins

I tried to explain to my mom that the former practice of turning out lights every time you leave a room doesn't apply to fluorescents, but she wasn't having it

I guess the former practice of kissing during sex has been retired

I'm revising the former practice of introducing non-diagetic music to my films; from now on, the characters will be able to hear the soundtrack, but the audience will not

We need to bring back the former practice of being massively dope and in your face
It can't exactly be the former practice if we're still actively doing it

The former practice of "the happy dance" has been replaced with the inward smile
This particular cliché describes the former practice of pursuing a pet topic—can you guess what it is?

Yes, we're irreligious now; we never fully embraced the former practice of praying anyway
The former practice of appearing live, in actual size makes you seem all the smaller now

The loss of the former practice of the smoking break has actually decreased productivity
The former practice of sleeping with the fishes has been replaced by only sleeping with the fishes you really love

If we have to be in the office all day, can we bring back the former practice of naptime?
Regarding scholastic aptitude tests: was the former practice to know the answers, or to guess?

The former practice was to choose a "trade school" if you weren't a man of means
Establishing a secret question was the former practice; at present the policy is no questions asked

The Year Was A Saturday In Spring

The year was a Saturday
in spring free to sleep in
breeze and birdsong

you were the storm
disinterested deadly
that swept into town

suddenly without a name
silencing the birds gathering
the winds raining
shadow your eyes

black clouds folding into
black clouds
me beneath you

searching for shapes now
I see a church now
I see a wolf now

others would set their tables with
candles and matches
seal their homes
in anticipation of the fury building

who else but me lying
in the grass
ready to be struck

who else pleading for you
to fall but all that fell
that day was the night

the ancient flood of shadow
to reclaim this transient
darkness a silent lake absorbing

a single drop of rain
burned clean by the swing of stars
like a fog exhausted
you were gone before

the sun rose resolute
through the blue summer
morning church bells ringing

white as ghosts echoing over
reflections in the puddles
you never left me

Three-Flat

The rain fell
hard and I couldn't
sleep so I dreamt
about the rain.
I dreamt about
the rain in a
tree, the tree
that would stretch
to catch your key
amongst the drops,
all the drops,
but I never dropped
your key.
Not when
you dropped
it
to
me.

Tuesday Morning

Through the window of the loft
the breeze rolls damp and dark and soft
over your pillow, your picture, your glove still on my chair.

And the cars say “hush”
in their morning rush,
and you could be anywhere.

Acusmata (i)

Pour libations to gods
from the ear of the cup;
don't craft their images
to wear on your fingers.
Make any sacrifice
barefoot. Put your right shoe
on first, eschew public
roads. Remember, planets
do not love you – they are
vehicles of divine
vengeance: only the moon
and sun can be trusted.
Marvel at silence, try
to be silent for five
years and if all else fails,
recall the *tetraktys* –
the first four numbers, which
when added together,
equal ten, the perfect
digits – the harmony,
believed Pythagoras
("chief of the charlatans,"
eye-rolled Heraclitus)
in which the Sirens sing.

Acusmata (ii)

Whatever you do, don't eat
vicia fava – the pale broad bean
may act as receptacle for the soul.
You'd be a consumer of souls
and that's no way to live.

Some claim the mild legume
an aphrodisiac and you know how
the boss frowns on all things carnal.
You need no degree in philosophy
to see how it resembles the testicles.

As for that rude black freckle
it bears – you can't tell me that's not
the prefect of omens. Who needs democracy?
One man, one bean – light or dark –
one vote: that's no way to run

a nation-state. They are hard to digest,
hinder concentration – please, it's tough
enough to wade through the oracle's
elliptical comments. Poor bean, conscripted
as container of sex, spirit and luck,

minding its business, predestined to mean.

House Brand

Yesterday, a man named Stephen Alternative
wed a nice girl with the last name, Smith.

She became Barbara Alternative.

What would it be like to be forever the other?

My name remained my own.

I know – don't tell me – it's my father's name. I am still steeped in the patriarchy yeah yeah yeah
and worse,
a named shortened from endless Eastern European glottal syllabics for what shtetl from which we
hailed or what blue-collar profession my ancestors
performed with such integrity
to satisfy the homogeny police.

Tell me again, with a sharp stick: I should have chosen a new name
in some uncorrupted language
but I stuck with the status quo
because Latin holds up well, over time.

I thought everyone would do this.

I meant to fit in.

It backfired.

I have a lot of dinner parties and try to invite people
not like me, not like each other.

No one has a very good time, but no one leaves early,
out of fear they will be the subject of chortling.

At home in bed, they think glad thoughts
about the course of their lives and when they turn off
the lights and the moon turns on, they say aloud,
Hello, Nothingness, Where Have You Been Hiding?

Solanum Tuberosum

Unightly root crop, durable tuber
unburdened by beauty's chores *I like mine*
baked with crisp skin washed up on Irish shores
from the Spanish Armada's wrecked galleons –

“the devil's plant” in France – to eat one,
a sin – member of the deadly nightshade
family – remember them? that bella-
donna felled Marcus Antonius' troops.

I prefer mine mashed You, pocked, amorphous
shaped, are the most pedestrian, plainest
Jane of staples, ardently endorsed
by Antoine Augustine Parmentier

(humble servant of the 16th Louis)
who believed the mass of French peasants
I like mine small and roasted should love it as
he did, long-imprisoned by ill-tempered

Prussians during Wars enduring Seven
Years: ah, the stamina of pain. But what
are looks and dates, 7,000-year-old
spud, patata, pomme de terre –

translatable and edible until you're
green and poisonous – most of us embitter
after salad days. Desiree, Amandine
fried I think the world of you

Maris Piper, Kerr's Pink *pancake*, *gnocchi*,
au gratin Mona Lisa, Yellow Finn, Fingerling
Sussbury Gambit, who'd not take a chance
on your survival, you have made your way

into the new world, upended
the supremacy of rice and grain – what
would the Peruvian gang say now?
I like mine shredded, browned and

served between a poached egg and buttered toast
on the democracy of a clean plate.
May we all maintain such dignity
in the face of slander, myriad eyes

on and upon us, bathed in dirt from birth –
no easy berth, yours – sideman, second fiddle –
how few of us valued at what we're worth –
what exactly are we worth? *Pureed with leeks*

and butter into a soup Oh Russett
Burbank – the greatest of your bountiful
gifts, itself, is bounty – fill, sate, satisfy,
I fear it's more than I will be or do.

Day Tripper

At first, a horror film thrill at the razor wire that garlanded the hospital. Sat in the waiting room holding her breath beside the other out patients who were unexploded bombs liable to go off 'BANG'. Scrabbled in her bag for a book as defence against the man in rumpled clothes who tossed random phrases at her like a lonely kid trying to entice someone to play ball with him. Looked up eagerly each time a consultant or therapist greeted their clients with the impeccable manners of maitre D's over looking the foibles of the very wealthy. But after several appointments, she and her therapist remark upon the weather whilst navigating the hospital's computer game of locked doors and forbidden levels. In the coffee bar watches with animal indifference the in patient waitress slowly calculate her change as if it is foreign currency. Eats sandwiches in the grounds where squirrels caper and occasional screams issue from acute wards indigenous as the cry of sea gulls by the coast.

Weldon Irvine

(1943-2002)

Please forgive the long silence.
In my gut, which is the blue flame
Of the stovetop, the broken lance
Of fear quakes my liver and my name
Means not celebration and critique
But concealment (what the Dogon
Call *obeah*). And so I take
Myself into myself, that long
Ribbon folded inside the cowrie
Shell. I am a massive animal.
The torsion in the muscles of my
Neck serve up the image of a mal-
Contented demon, and I suck my own grave
Through my sinuous mantle groove.



Sonnets

Neruda wrote a hundred *sonetos*
in Spanish for Matilde, his *amor*;
and Shakespeare wrote a hundred fifty-four
in English of the King James Bible, true,
but not exactly biblical in tone;
and Petrarch wrote two hundred sixty-three
before his Laura died, and then about
another hundred after she had gone.

Some poets find the form a real constraint,
while others like the boundaries it sets;
and I confess I'm in the second group,
who find the mold a fit for formless words.

So mock the sonnet as archaic art;
I praise it as the poem of the heart

Eight-year-old Andrew comes into my study
and seats himself at my desk and begins
examining my pens and letter opener
and other items that catch his sharp eye.

He finds a tin of push-pins near the corkboard,
and in the tin a little saxophone,
which prompts an exclamation of delight,
“Hey Dad, look at this saxophone thumb-tack!”

A moment later out he runs to find
his instrument, and soon he's practicing
the seven notes he knows the fingering for.

The kid's an autodidact, like his father:
he only calls for help when he gets stuck,
occasionally asking, “Am I doing good?”

One afternoon I walked a riverbank,
where children played nearby and parents strolled
the garden paths and often stopped to feed
the ducks and geese, or simply to observe
the gothic teens who congregated there
to smoke and smooch and, as they say, hang out—

their piercings, silver chains and black garb worn
in protest of the privilege they spurn.
Across the covered bridge a little crowd
had gathered at the river's edge to watch
some drama in the water, which I could
not see from where I stood, and so I crossed.
A snake[1] held fast a struggling fish too large
to overcome at once—but it was doomed.

[1] . . . *und sah die Schlang die dir am Herzen frisst.* . . Heinrich Heine, *Dichterliebe*.

Mostly

“Express yourself completely, then keep quiet.” —*Tao Te Ching*

Pretty blue writing book that
came to me from
somewhere, that someone
may have given me
in my hands
to fill with words to
express
where I was,
or am
at that moment
or this, or wanted to go to,
and might,
if we find a cheap flight
or, better,
drive
with whatever belongings
we feel we can't
live without
for the duration, the duress,
of being away from
the place where we
live mostly,
and most.

Makeshift

How about if I just start?—
mosquito-spray perfume
on my hands,
the dog next door
making demands,
September partly cloudy
for some unseasonable
reason—
although I'll take it, as
Studs Terkel would advise
when he was alive and on live
radio. But let's not dwell
sentimentally on the past or
passing, as my brain
likes to do when put on
“automatic.”
My sinuses are stopped,
throat raw, mind somewhat
spacey, but I *do*
feel a breeze rubbing my face
and enjoy watching the swaying
rows of tiny locust leaves
draped over the cinderblocks
that cement my enclosure,
my space and angle
on the world, the world I hear
driving by,
just past the house, quietly
now, but to pick up
at lunchtime.
As for me, there's nothing I
have to do, nowhere
to go. Right here
was always the best place
anyway
and I've arrived,
work-tools in hand,
or head: notebook
and pen, eyes, memory,
words.

September Song

Inside this enclosure of leaves,
pickets, and cinderblocks, I
ruminates, while a dove
pecks at the fleas under his wing, rolls
his neck & head, then continues
to perch on the trellis. He has nothing

to do either, except
live, which is mostly
perching these days;
in my case, under
a tree, beneath
the September sun that's been

coming up later each morning,
while the radio in the bedroom
was blabbing, and my body
was refusing to crawl out of bed,
preferring to rub up against
the warmth
next to it for just
a little while longer.

Election Day

—à la *Ted Berrigan*

Take the glasses off, put them
down (I can read
without them anyway),
see the world
manifested
in a few backyard trees, faded
pickets, bits of houses, and a leaning,
giant yucca (to add sex appeal)
this Election Day, such perfect
weather I don't care
who wins ("we're all winning, we're
alive," said Frank O'Hara), Jill
volunteering at Democratic
Party Headquarters,
calls people
to remind them to go vote, put
politicians in so they'll become
incumbents
and be voted out, with
no big change, though things
were fine already—the cloudless sky, leaves
that turn
colors, fall, and
decorate
"the ground we walk on"—
to go inside, warm up
some coffee
(with a cookie),
take a nap.

Windfall

In between all this
ruminating,
there are times to be
alive
you take
for granted, such as
going for “second breakfast”
because you’re hungry
and want
the pleasure of eggs with
hash browns and sausage
set down
before you by the waitress,
the coffee warmed
with a smile,
while you watch
the trucks
go by
outside.

Field Accomplice

She lives in a grove cottage, her mossy vapors
seeping out the cracked stone door.

She flies around for hours begging me to catch her in my throat.

She is legally blind and wears thick glasses
in which the future is inscribed in tintype.

She is a dwarf star with one eye on the moon.

A hired mourner I do not know how to fire.

She keeps a diary of pocket ghosts,
spends autumn putting dead leaves back on the trees.

When I look her up in the dictionary, it says:
rubicon melting snow emptied egg
ornate mercy lo and behold darkling to beckon to muddle

She prefers a collage of the sea
instead of the sea.

Occasionally she offers practical advice:
forget renovation, a dark horse can do a lot for a lackluster house.

As private as breath, there is no entering another's grief.

Heavy as a sunken gown, light as a matchstick.

Blueberries in Michigan

A season in time-lapse whisks by
wrinkled and wrong
where streets veer into distance
through unmapped towns
and the dusty community church
stands like a sentinel next to the freight tracks,
searchlight of the diner
blinking its worn constellation.
What is it to never leave a place—
small plot of tumble and grit,
tractor rusting in the wheat—
or to arrive here from Mexico,
a migrant family stashed in storage shacks
to wait out the rise of prized fruit,
the coveted hands of children
nimble enough to pluck blueberries
in noon heat without collapsing ripe skins.
When fingerprints are rinsed
away in the colander, jam preserved,
pies baked and ribboned in town fairs,
the workers emerge from hiding
in the dying light of August,
blue hands in pockets
and make their silent exodus
from the back of beyond.

Not-Yet-But-Soon

For months you heard the insistence of Not-Yet, even tasted it in the bread that took hours to chew. *Hold on* the voice said. *For-a-while*. You go on, with the vestiges of your heart. You go on with the ordinary grace of washing your hands when they are dirty, turning off the lights when no one's in the room. The waiting consumes as you knew it would. You throw figurative things off a cliff. This helps some. Meanwhile the trifold of winter expands to a groundswell. Meanwhile the slipstream. Then the moon is breaking up with you all over again and you knew it was coming but it's awful all the same. Consequence never seemed a sultry word before, but now the way the q slinks its way toward the soft c, you can hold it in your mouth past noon. You walk a lot. In the vaulted forest you hear barred owls, bullfrogs. Both announce from their whole bodies. Under the sodden leaves you spot something twiggy. Downturned bowl of bird-matter ovoid in your hands. *Oh void* says the heart. On the windowsill the nest houses a tryst of light. *Not-yet-but-soon* it says.

The Rehearsal

Every month I tried to make of my body
a home. I was an hourglass
made of shell, made of bone.
I lay under the Perseids and let the stars

hold up the night. There was me and the idea
of you. I saw for both of us—
tule elk silent among ferns,
sunset lying pink over a field of Dakota corn.

In the museum, I walked through a hall of Buddhas.
Felt the cool lotus curve in the half-dark.
Granite, terra cotta, bronze.
If I could have made you like that—

I would have held the hammer,
I would have opened the stone.

Winterproofing

Returned to zero after a decade,
we hear the Canada geese
drain the sky.

I want to go back.
To before I knew this would be so hard.
To the beginning of us

when I first dreamt our child
was a wood sprite we chased through
redwood trees.

I winterproof,
buy bushels of tomatoes to roast and freeze,
place osage oranges in the windowsills

to ward off insects.
Everything wants to come in.
I hear a bat trapped between the walls

for a week, abide with the knowing,
then the silence.
Snow falls on the ultrasound.

We search the static for eggs.
The needle injects its promise
and I am waiting again.

On the porch at midnight,
the first shimmer of flakes
make a visual music.

Some things I don't remember from before—
when all the leaves have shed,
the bare trees are full of nests.

Jacob's Reflections After the Bout

Space heater of volcanoes—mountaintop
no feather can peak, you are jasmine breath

of spring, breast of terra firma, wrapped in
cowry shells of clouds. You are torso of time

clearing thunder's throat—lightening strikes
in cage fights of celestial arenas. Who am I

but dressed up dirt to wrestle you? What am I
but a tapped out hip—bankruptcy of tricks

slipping out of the ring to change.

What the Snake Whispered in Eve's Ear

Well now, looka hear Eve, your skin is soft as a silkworm's belly. Hasn't anyone told you? And I mean, really, what has Adam done for you lately—leaving you alone in the garden like this with hips as wide as all creation? I wouldn't, but that'ssss just me. And I

don't mean no harm, but didn't that first boy tell you you're as fine as Hummingbird's feathers—fresh as dew collecting rainbows on an orchid's lips? Everyone in the garden can see it Sis—except perhaps for you. I want you to. But ah, that's right, that's right—

the tree that lets you know your glow is off limitssss. That's what God said, didn't he? I mean, that's what I thought I heard him say when he was lying to you about good and evil cuisine and all. Oh, did I say “lying?” I mean when he was just “talking” to you about

the way he thinks you, and all other ribs, should live. My My My. Now, how is anybody going to tell a goddess what she should or shouldn't eat—or who she shouldn't kiss? Oops, did I sssslip up and tell the truth again—call you by your name? Goddess? My

Goddess? My serpent curious queen? Well now, listen hear Eve, you know I would never be the one to come between an idol and the Most High's commands. Just let me introduce you to a little nibble. I'm sure God will understand.

Alaska

The languishing magma voluptuous,
The pine pancreas purchase.
We wish a convoy.
We wish to convey.
We wish a cowboy would.
Merry Christmas.
Cholera.
Finches.
What's important are corpse.
Harpsichord lakes.
Cabins and quartz.
The law. The bishop.
If they all found solace
in Alaska's sunsets,
eternal borealis,
distractions, lights.

Truth Eggs

My strike in a bald bath came
through a funneled, zinnia rain.

Your hands, felt me as naked rice,
each grain a drill into my back and
tiny wells turning tide, new gelatin
embryos to reside in the small.
We exist as a tobacco leaf and orchid,
and devour the protein of our waking life.

You Loki, and I beaten, silt upon my face

like voluptuous women I cannot break.

Art





1









The Shadow of Evil





Number Sequence



Miller's Arch



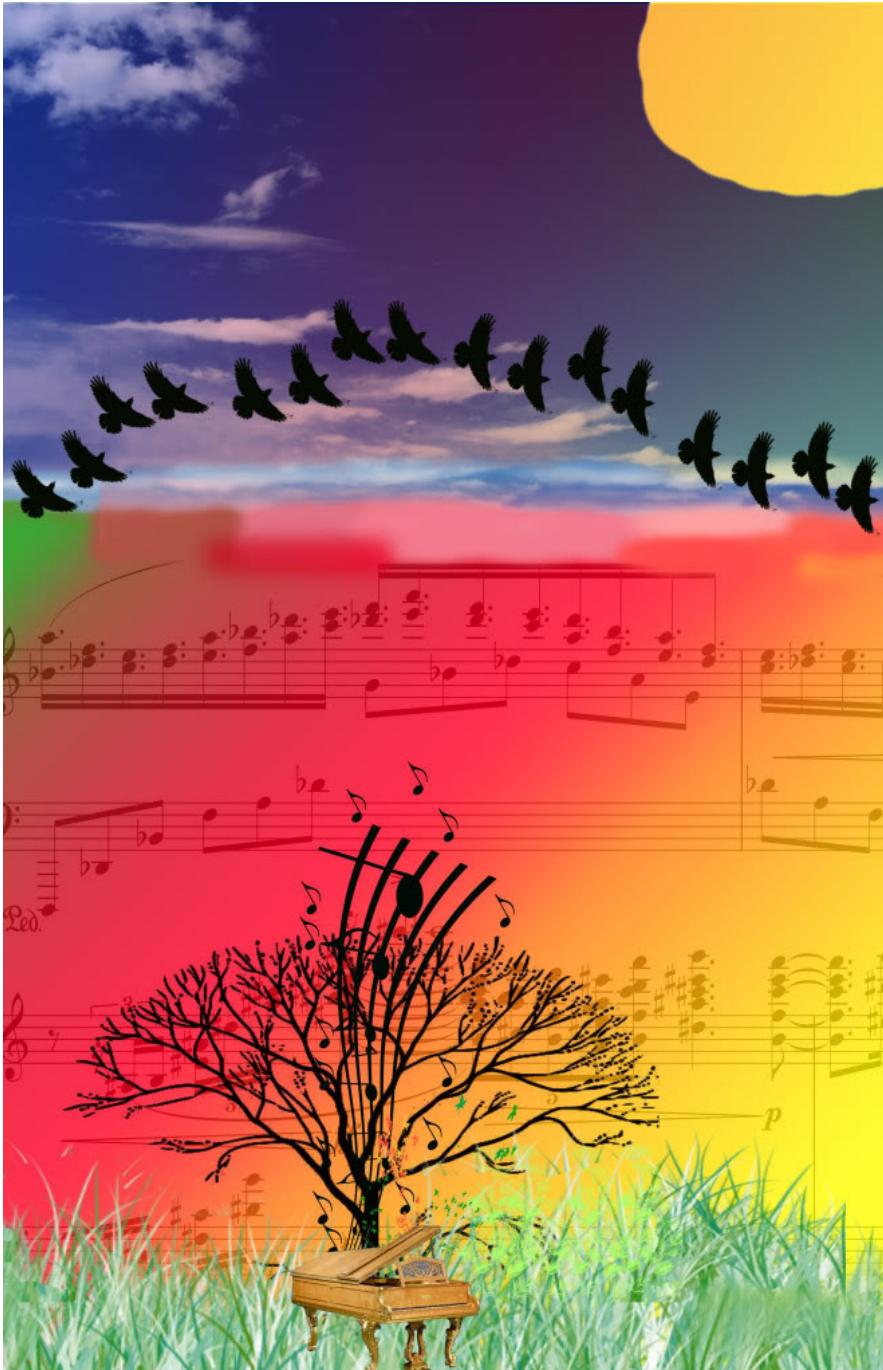


Magic Window



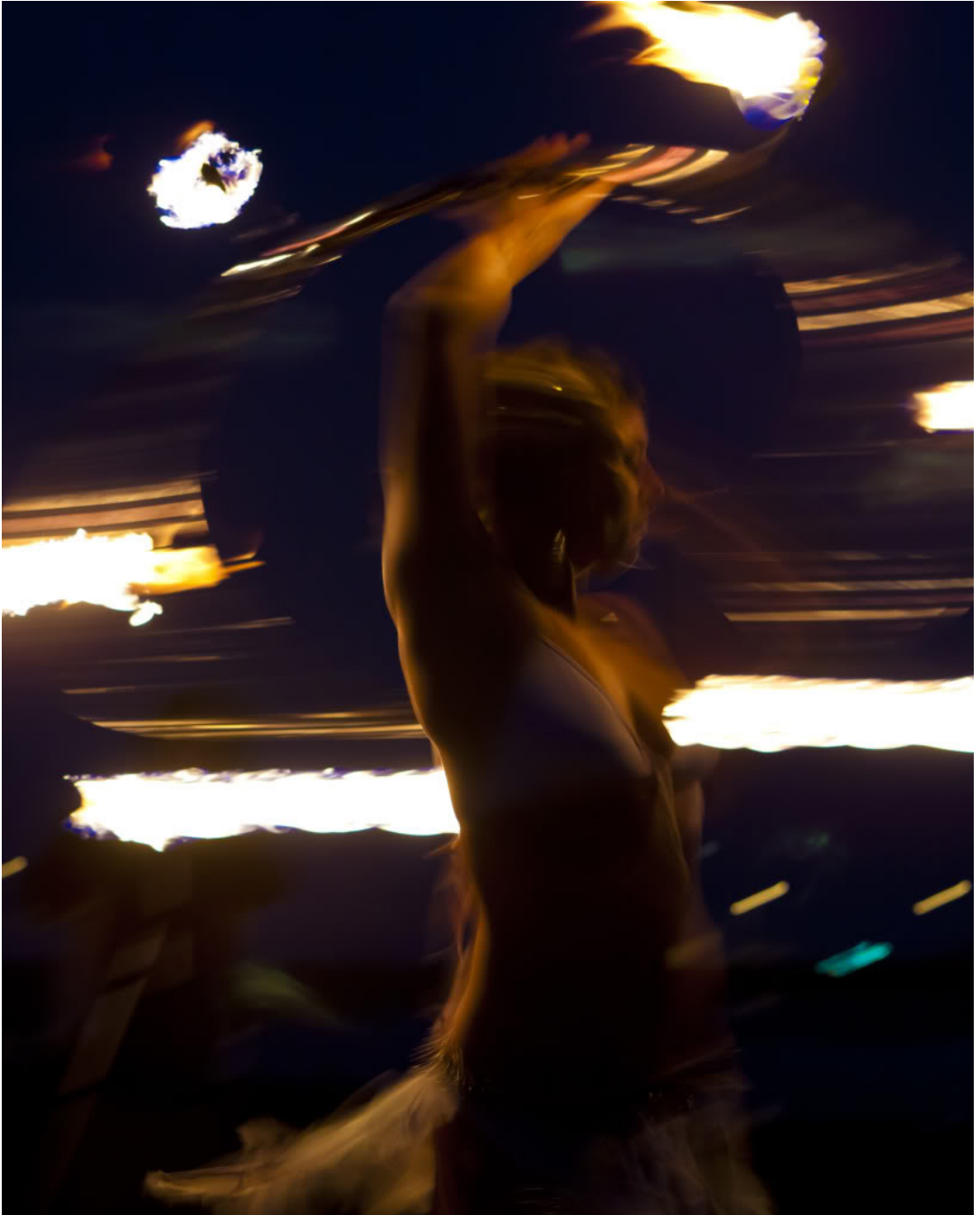


Autum Symphony





Fire in Her Eye





Thoreau'n It





1





Fiction



Flophouse Stripper Hotel

Morrie has given me a new room up on the third floor because I complained about the noise last night. I can still hear the thump of the deejay in the bar downstairs, a strip joint called Thrills, but it's better, even with all the stairs. The only elevator in the building is for freight and some of the people in here are in a lot worse shape than I am.

"Want to come down to the bar for a drink?" a raspy voice asked me.

It was the old lady who used to live down the hall on the second floor. She is bald in the mornings when she trots down the hall to the bathroom, but she has a collection of wigs, not all of which are particularly suitable for her lifestyle or her age.

"Um," I muttered, but I found that I was following her, patting her withered arm and then my pocket to make sure I had my wallet with me.

"I'm Irma," she said. It was almost a challenge, as if I wasn't going to believe her. I just nodded and followed her down the shallow wide steps.

Sometimes I wondered about the layout of the old hotel and could see ladies in proper dresses of the 1880s floating down the stairs for parties, or in black mourning dresses, just off the train at the Don River station when there was only a narrow wooden bridge across Queen Street.

NO VISITORS AFTER 11 PM a sign on the side of the stairs read. This is to prevent the kind of women this hotel attracts from practicing certain occupations here.

Irma nodded to another woman on the stairs, my age, but even more bedraggled. Her navy sweat pants have purplish patches where bleach has hit them. My roots may be dark, but hers are longer and gray.

"This is Freddie," Irma said. "Comes down for happy hour."

Freddie smiled and I saw a gold tooth glint in the dim light of the landing. I was clutching at the asthma spray in my pocket.

"Hope Morrie's not down there," Freddie said, eyes darting. That's the way people look around in this building. I just hadn't gotten into the habit yet.

Another woman, Selma, joined us.

"Seen you around before," she said calculatingly. "Not in here," as if this is a bad thing, an omission on my part.

"Just live up the street," I said, and realized my mistake before I even heard the humpfs and smiles from my companions.

We were almost at the bar door. I wasn't sure what to expect. The heavy bass beat was climbing through my aching feet to my head. Freddie opened the swinging door and the sound and gloom pushed out at us, one enticing and the other pushing me away.

"-hear it for Celeste, straight from the Tiki Lounge in Montreal -" yells the deejay.

"That joint's been closed since the separatists won in the seventies," Selma chortled as we found a place to sit as far away from the stage and the speakers as we could.

I sat in the banquette behind the table. Freddie was a heavy woman and could barely squeeze in. Irma was so skinny that she might slide into the gap between the front and the back of the seat.

The waitress prowled over.

"Two drink minimum in happy hour, cocktails not included," she intoned in one breath.

The others ordered rye and coke. I ordered rum and coke and got a look.

"Might as well make it two if that's the minimum. And no ice," I said defiantly, and the

others nodded.

“I’d have a lot more,” said Irma, “but my liver got ruined by the chemo when I had the cancer.”

“Too much information,” Selena said.

Too many definite articles, I wanted to say, but I didn’t get the chance. I hated the phrase “the cancer;” after all, I said “the flu,” didn’t I? The music started up again and penetrated back here. The waitress plunked our glasses in front of us and collected our money. I had a sudden horrible feeling about what was expected of me.

“No rounds,” Freddie said, peering up at the stage.

She had produced a pair of very ugly harlequin rhinestone glasses from somewhere. Probably a 1964 timewarp.

I was relieved. Paying rent here to Morrie and at home to Mr. Jarusek was not making my life easy.

“Gonna go up front and talk to Jerry,” Freddie said. “Dickhead owes me five bucks.”

“More likely the other way around,” Selina snickered as soon as Freddie was gone. “And don’t let that old dyke guilt you into anything.”

I watched Freddie go up to a middle-aged man in a crumpled suit, tie askew. She wasn’t really looking at him, though; she was peering up at the stage. I had never had accurate gaydar and I was really off tonight.

“Oh, she’ll do an old guy, or two or three, if there’s something in it for her,” Irma said. “Even just a drink or two.”

There were too many lights and the music was too loud. I downed the second drink and made excuses.

“I’m beat,” I said, but I didn’t know in which sense of the word.

Thrills, where old strippers go to die, my old boss at the restaurant used to say.

And where do old waitresses go to die? I asked myself as I headed up the sagging stairs to the room that would always smell of old cigarette smoke and vibrate to the endless music below like a heart refusing to stop beating after the life support was turned off.

As Any Man May

I

The bartender hesitated.

“Isn’t it kind’a early for scotch?”

Hunched in a booth, Onslow looked up, but said nothing. The bartender shrugged and turned away.

“Where’s that, uh, what’s-her-name that works here?”

“I don’t know which what’s-her-name you mean,” the bartender replied, “but in case you hadn’t noticed, it’s eleven a.m. – I don’t even open this early most days.”

“So what?” Onslow griped. “What does that have t’do with-”

The bartender paused. “It’s eleven o’clock, dude. Why would there be waitresses here? You see any customers? Besides you?”

Onslow felt a bit of a fool, having missed the point previously. Without moving his arm, he waved a hand at the bartender, then looked down. A moment later he looked at the wall as though there might be a window in it – there was not. He looked through it anyway, staring sideways.

When his drink arrived, the bartender didn’t take the time to say anything. So, Onslow spat out one of those little conversational entrapments which everyone hates equally: “I got fired today.”

The bartender sighed. “Life’s not fair,” he said flatly. It occurred to him that being rude to the customers wasn’t especially conducive to business, so he added, “Wait ‘til what’s-her-name gets here. They love that stuff. As long as you tip.”

Onslow winced without moving any part of his face, went back to looking out the nonexistent window. In his mind, this would all play out just like in the movies or some particularly sappy country song. He’d wander in, his moroseness and generally dour state being evident to all at hand. Then the bartender, or an elderly war veteran, or someone like that, would come and sit with him and listen to his story and sympathize with him. Of course, this wasn’t the movies; this was Seattle.

What does that even mean, he wondered. Life’s not fair. Everyone knows life’s not fair. That doesn’t make it any easier.

Still facing the imaginary window, he spoke softly, “If you get run over by a bus, knowing that it’s not fair doesn’t make it hurt any less. Why do people say that? What’s that supposed to mean, anyway? Might as well say the sky’s not red. So what?”

“Oh, Christ,” said the bartender, from behind the bar. “You know, last night I went home early, didn’t count the drawer or anything.” He stepped out from his station and walked towards the booth. “I came in early to finish up from last night, and I thought I might as well open up since I was here. I should’ve known I’d get stuck listening to someone like you bitch and moan.” He sat heavily across from Onslow. “Okay, go. Get it over with.”

Onslow mumbled something about the bartender’s bedside manner, to which the bartender replied, “You in bed?”

Sitting with his back arched noticeably over the table, Onslow had to strain to bend his neck back to meet the bartender’s eyes. That done, he glared.

“Well, what?” the bartender asked. “Man, I got work to do. If you’re looking for someone to, y’know, confide in or whatever, go ahead and do it.”

Again without moving his arm, Onslow waved his hand. "I don't know where to start," he said.

"Well, think about it," said the bartender. "I'll keep bringing you scotch and when Chris gets here, you can tell her aaaall about it."

"The roof was leaking," Onslow explained. "So stupid, the roof. The roof was leaking. Everybody's roof leaks sooner or later."

The bartender looked around, waited.

"They came and fixed it. They redid the whole thing." He nodded at his scotch. "A week later, it was leaking again. So, we called 'em up, said you messed up, get back and take a look. Well, they came in and said the problem wasn't the work they'd done, it was the structure where two joints met or some... I don't remember. They said they could strip it all off and put new tarpaper and shingles down and it would still leak, so I asked why didn't they, y'know, point that out the first time and they said they didn't know."

"That's tough," the bartender conceded, sincerely enough.

"So I called around and asked how much it would take to get the bracing fixed, and they came out and did a free estimate that only cost half a grand or something, up there crawling around for three days, and finally said we'd basically have to redo – like completely rebuild – half the roof, 'cause they'd have to go down to the ceiling and everything. I don't know why.' I asked them to explain it about a dozen times and I had no idea what they were talking about but it didn't help that they changed what they were saying every time, so it was impossible to follow."

The bartender thought about offering platitudes, but decided against it.

"So, while this is all going on, I'm driving to work one day, and it's slippery as hell out – this freezing rain crap. Never get that around here. They've got these potholes in Factoria and I hit one 'cause the road's only so fuckin' wide, and you're going downhill so you can't just slow down right away or, y'know," he waved his hand, "veer around it. Anyway, went through it, and it broke the brake line, and I'm going down this hill. Well, I got to the bottom and couldn't stop. I don't think I slowed down. I got the back wheels locked up, went all spinning, right into the intersection, got run right over by a garbage truck."

"So, you got a leaky roof and a totaled car," the bartender summarized.

"Yeah. Yeah I got more than that. And this is like four months ago, too, y'know, so--"

"I was wondering about that," the bartender interrupted.

"What?"

The bartender nodded and explained, "Freezing rain. It's- what is it? June."

"Yeah, no this was--"

"Four months ago. I heard." He looked at a spot over the bar where one might expect a clock to hang, noticed that there wasn't one, and thought that he should put one there. Onslow was saying, "I was in the hospital for three weeks, and all for this." He swung one arm halfway around, indicating something beside or behind him.

"What?"

"My back," said Onslow. "My- you saw me come in."

"It rains. People keep hunched over. I didn't make anything--"

"It's not raining," Onslow interrupted. "Shit, man, I can't stand up straight. I'm thirty-two and walking around like an old cripple."

"It'll get better," the bartender said too quickly, having apparently decided to go for the platitudes after all.

"No," said Onslow. "It won't. They said I'm lucky my spinal chord's not broken. But it's mangled, anyway, and it ain't getting un-mangled. It's just a mess."

"Yeah, but there are worse--"

"We took out a second mortgage to pay for the hospital bills, and the roof. We had to fix the roof. Of course, by the time we got the roof fixed, there was mildew and some kind of black

mold in the ceiling, so they had to come in and redo all the ceilings over the bedroom. We were a hotel for two weeks. Not cheap, either.”

“Didn’t feel like sleeping in the living room?”

“They, and you never know if this is just a bunch of crap they feed you, but they said with the mold and spores and sawdust and stuff all in the air, it was a bad idea to stick around, health threat and whatever, from spores and... whatever.”

The bartender nodded.

“So, for three months I was taking the bus to work. But they don’t run up and down every damn street. I walked like three-quarters of a mile to the stop. I mean, and y’know, some people don’t have stuff, fine, so I didn’t make much of it. Except, look at me. It’s not easy to walk when you can’t even stand up straight.”

The bartender waited. He didn’t have a watch and there were no clocks visible from the booth. He noticed that Onslow hadn’t touched his drink.

“So, while all this is going on, the transit workers union went on strike-”

“I remember,” said the bartender.

“Why do you-”

“I’m sure you noticed there’s a bus stop on the corner.”

“Yeah, I’m there every day.”

“Yeah, well, there’s a reason bars pop up near public transit. You don’t want people drinking and driving. It’s, y’know, socially responsible.”

Onslow wasn’t sure whether or not his makeshift therapist was being asinine, but he was sure that it didn’t matter.

“Well, when they went on strike, I got screwed. They stopped running those busses-”

“Like I said,” said the bartender, “I noticed. What’s-her-name noticed too, y’know. That’s how she got to work every day.”

Onslow realized that he and the bartender were actually having conversation and felt one drop of compassion in a very large sea.

“Yeah?”

The bartender nodded. “Sure, man. You ain’t the only one with problems.”

“No, I know,” said Onslow.

“I mean, I guess most people don’t get all of it at once-”

“Yeah,” said Onslow.

“So. You said you got fired. That happen today?”

Onslow nodded.

“Yeah. Yeah, we were going to get a new car, but her dad’s been in and out of the hospital for his whole fuckin’ life and for some reason, we’ve been paying for it. They were going to send him home if he couldn’t pay, so we had to, so no more car. And she talked me into it-”

“Your... wife?”

“Yeah.”

“You call her ‘what’s-her-name’ too?”

Onslow meant to glare in response, in defense of his wife, but found himself darkly amused. “Only sometimes,” he said.

The two sat in silence for several seconds.

“Not a big fan of scotch, huh?” asked the bartender.

“Not blended, really,” Onslow answered.

“We got some twelve back there somewhere,” said the bartender.

“Twelve?”

“Lagavulin 12. Better than that.”

“Whatever,” said Onslow. “I’m not... here for the booze.”

“I noticed.”

Onslow thought for several seconds, slowly turning his glass. "I mean, I know she loves her father, but I don't know why we had to pay for- and I don't know why we had to keep paying when we couldn't."

"She work?" asked the bartender.

Onslow squinted. Why was this stranger asking about his wife?

"No," he replied. "Not at the moment."

"Bites, huh?"

"Huh?"

"I mean, you making all the money and spending it on her dad?"

Onslow thought, shrugged, nodded. "Yeah, I guess. Yeah. It's not... I mean it wasn't about it being my money and *her* dad; it was just how much money there was and all this other shit going on and then all of a sudden we just had - and that's the thing, really - we paid the hospital just because we had been for, fuck, for as long as I can remember. I mean, how do you say to your father-in-law, 'Yeah, we'd love to keep helping you but the roof needs replacing so you're S O L? Y'know?'"

"Sure."

"And with the busses being canceled, and I can't walk like-" he paused, looking truly pained, "like a young guy, anymore. I... I just started being late, and-"

"And coming in here."

"Yeah."

The bartender nodded. He had no advice, nor did he imagine his patron had come in search of any.

"There's other stuff," said Onslow. "Like... you know... when you can't sit up straight or stand up straight." He nodded, hoping the bartender could draw the appropriate conclusions. He could not, and waited patiently enough for a conclusion.

"Man, we haven't done it in... I mean, seriously, since we came back from the hotel. Since I came back from the hospital looking like the hunchback of Bellevue. I mean, and you hear jokes about marriage and shit, but jokes are jokes and... I mean I'm thirty-two, y'know, and we did. I mean, not a lot, but enough... y'know, it was nice, and now..." he shrugged.

The bartender tried to sound pert. "So? Why can't she be on top?"

Onslow immediately replied, "Because I can't lie flat on my back. We... man, I'm gonna need some a'that whatever you've got you said. We've tried, but it's just embarrassing and awkward and... I mean, you don't feel... you just... can't. It hurts."

The bartender did a master's job of containing a laugh as he was genuinely ashamed to be amused by his guest's fumbled descriptions of bedroom awkwardness. He got up, went scrounging for something more poisonous beneath the bar.

When he returned, he pushed Onslow's glass aside, presented him with something that smelled like strength.

"So-"

"Drink," said the bartender. "I didn't pour that so you could let it catch dust."

Onslow obeyed, nodding approvingly.

"So, I went in today, and... y'know, I've, with the time away in the hospital and then being late ever since... and I was going to ask them for some time off, like a leave of absence. I guess it was a shit idea. They paid to move me here, y'know. Anyway, so I asked and they just said why don't you just go home and leave it at that."

"Nah, man, that doesn't mean it's over. You can go back there and - trust me, I've hired back a ton of people we've fired. Go back in there and-"

Onslow was shaking his head. He took another drink. "The thing is, I don't... I didn't want to be there. Ever since we left Texas... I just..." he shrugged, looked - again - for that window. "I just, it wasn't... and we weren't making ends meet even to start with. Something

would've had to give sooner or later, even without all this other crap, without, y'know, without—

“Without the roof caving in? Literally...”

Onslow nodded, shook his head, took a drink, then another. He put the glass down, then picked it up, took another drink, put it down again. He accidentally whispered, “That’s good stuff.”

“Yeah,” said the bartender.

The door opened. The bartender got up, expecting a customer.

Onslow did not look up. He stared at the faux wood grain of the table surface through the sad, amber and auburn hue of his drink. The newcomer was Chris – or what’s-her-name – the waitress. She and the bartender talked idly for a minute or two. Somehow, this made him feel lonely. He held up his scotch, forced his neck back too far, sending pain through his spine, and swallowed the remainder of the drink. His throat stung a little; his eyes watered. He closed them. There was only so much comfort a man could find in a bar. At least at home he had a wife. She would offer the kind of compassion and sympathy which only a woman can when he broke the bad news.

Onslow stood up slowly.

“Hey man,” said the bartender. “You leaving?”

“Yeah. What do you- I owe you for this?”

The bartender shook his head. “Whatever, man. Hey, why don’t you let Chris give you a ride.”

He opened his mouth to decline, but stopped. He felt old. He could use a hand.

“You sure she doesn’t mind?” he asked, wondering when he started asking things like that.

“If she minds, you’ll know.”

“Oh?” asked Onslow. “How?”

“You’ll be walking,” answered the bartender. He went into a back room, calling, “Christina!” as he did.

Onslow tried to chuckle; it didn’t work.

Though his legs were nimble, he had to hobble up the front walk to keep his balance. With his permanent forward lean, walking was a precarious undertaking. He’d been offered a cane more than once and declined more than once. He did not want to be that old, that needy. When he got to the front door and opened it, he turned and waved to Chris. She waved back and drove quickly away.

The house was quiet. He’d only come home from work this early once or twice since the car accident, and there was always either music playing or a phone call being made – usually the latter.

From the bedroom, he heard Annette’s voice.

“Maybe someday,” she said. He tried to smile, imagining how many ways that phrase could be applied to his present circumstance and all the ways in which it could be improved. He set down his attaché case and went into the bathroom. He looked at himself in the mirror.

You’re not so old, after all, he thought. *Not yet.*

He heard Annette laughing lightly.

He could hear her speaking. “No,” she said, “I wasn’t going to ask. I don’t think he even likes them.”

Annette and whoever she was talking to laughed. He heard a man’s voice then, though it was too low and muffled to be heard through the bathroom door.

He opened the door, looked around. When he’d come into the house, he’d been able to see the kitchen, and he’d gone through the living room to get to the bathroom. He wondered, trying not to worry about it, where else his wife might be with a male houseguest.

He told himself there was no reason for snooping because there was no reason for suspicion. Nevertheless, he exited the washroom more quietly than he might have otherwise,

walked down the hallway, and stopped at the bedroom door. It was closed.

He stood, hunched lightly, and listened.

“On Fridays?” she asked. “Nooooo... why?”

“It’s not Friday,” said the man.

“Yes it-” Annette replied, hesitating as anyone would in such an instance. “Yeah, it’s Friday.”

“It- oh you’re right,” said the man. “I’m not... I’m not-”

“Aware of what day it is?” Annette asked.

And then laughter – cozy laughter, the kind which exists only between two persons who are close enough together to be able to appreciate the humor of what might otherwise be an embarrassing moment.

Onslow opened the bedroom door.

The man sat up, sideways, in bed, exposing his chest, got halfway back down, then halfway back up, then froze. He stared at Onslow because, after all, that was about all that he could do. Annette didn’t turn to face her husband. She couldn’t. He saw her shoulder blades, her neck, her long, amber and auburn hair. He didn’t see her eyes, and he didn’t want to.

II

He looked down. The sky was grey, the water below was the color of coal. Three weeks had passed, and things had gone from bad to worse. Onslow spent three nights in a hotel, then went home when his credit cards stopped going through. He’d looked into Annette’s eyes, and she’d said that she didn’t know what to say. He responded by informing her that he was out of a job and they were no longer paying for her father’s medical care because they couldn’t.

It was just too much. There were too many problems. Everything having to do with the house, the car, the job – or lack thereof – these things seemed like they could be handled by the team. But the team itself no longer existed. When it went away, so did Onslow’s desire to fix things. He’d begun to ask himself why – why they had fixed the roof, why they had taken care of her father, why he’d walked to work in the rain despite his physical limitations every day... why he’d come to Seattle in the first place. For Annette, things were slightly less dismal and considerably more awkward. She loved her husband, and she knew she’d let him down terribly. At the same time, she was angry. They’d left Springfield as partners setting off to start a new life. Suddenly, it felt as though an entire decade had been a façade, the slow erosion of pretense exposing the truth. That truth seemed to be that really, when push came to shove, he wasn’t the man she’d thought he was. She was not self-righteous; she knew that she, too, was less of a woman than she had ever reckoned. The long and the short of it was that this just wasn’t how things were supposed to be. With all the damage that had been done, all the things that had gone wrong, it seemed like starting over would be impossible. So, though she loved him, she didn’t know what to do – what to do with him.

Onslow met Annette before he met puberty. They were friends on the playground. They grew up together in the same part of Springfield, Missouri. They were two years apart in school. She had joined the Peace Corps after high school, and after not speaking for more than a year, they’d both concluded incidentally that their friendship had worn away with the coming of age. But the first day of college, there they were, in the same room, taking many of the same classes. The proverbial ‘one thing’ led to the infamous ‘another’ and the time they’d spent apart seemed only to make being together again more precious.

Twenty-some years after meeting her, fourteen years or so after falling in love with her, and ten years after marrying her, Annette had been the only thing he looked forward to, the only place he knew that he could go, the only one in whom he knew he could trust, confide. Now, that, along with everything else, was gone.

They were going to have to sell the house. They were going to have to move. He could almost feel it in the air, like moisture and wind, that Annette was thinking about leaving altogether. She loved him, of course, but there was just too much in the way. Whoever the other man was, he had a place to live, a car, a job, and certain talents which Onslow now lacked. To one degree or another, he couldn't even blame her. It seemed more and more each day that the problem was less that she was unfaithful and more than he just wasn't worth believing in.

Annette thought many of the things he guessed she thought, and she hated herself for thinking them. It seemed horrendous that the thought would even cross her mind – the thought of leaving the man she loved because he could not love her, because there were too many broken pieces to make repairs seem worthwhile, if even possible. But horrendous or not, she had the thought.

So, Onslow looked down. It was so easy, he thought. All he had to do was tip a bit too far over and all the problems, the pain in his back, the debt, the headaches, the fractured love, would be gone. It seemed strangely rational, too. He thought that if life is not fair, then some people just end up getting the short end of the stick, and there's nothing to be done about it. You can't really expect everyone to come out on top. Life just doesn't work that way.

Onslow looked at the water. The sky broke. In a flash, the wave crests glinted and the inlet was blue and alive.

Something mournful bombarded the air, a mighty growl. He forced his neck back just enough to see the huge and solid waterway broken by a cargo ship as large as a city. He could not look away. It was a tremendous thing, so slow, yet so certain. And... so alone. Though it broke the surface with spray that went up, over the bow, it hardly seemed to be moving at all. It, like he, seemed frozen in time.

Onslow closed his eyes, and tears fell from them. He thought, *Whoever he is, I hope he's good to her.* Had it not been for that thought, the thought that there was someone better for her out there, he probably would not have gone through with it. But there was someone better. He knew that, now. She was in good hands – better hands than his.

He had not come to the bridge with a plan, he had not left a note behind nor did he have one on his person. He knew why he was going to the bridge, but he did not know whether he would come back home or not. He could feel the warmth of the sun, now, on the back of his neck, and it seemed to lift him up, to carry him away.

In his mind, he repeated Annette's name, remembered her as a child, remembered seeing her again after her time in the Peace Corps, remembered the first time they made love. Below, the ship sounded its horn again. Onslow fell.

And, as he did, he imagined that all who fall must feel what he felt then. It is a degree of regret that mortified the soul. It is not a regret for the decision that has been made; it is a regret for all that never was, for all that might have been, that could not be, for a world built up in such a way that when some fall apart, the best advice which can be given is the obvious – that life is not fair. He wished he had not fallen. He regretted it, regretted it, and wanted it to be untrue. He wanted to go back, to make things right. He did not know how, and now it was too late. A few miles away, alone in a forsaken master bedroom, Annette was feeling exactly the same thing.

III

There was a light, and for the first time since he'd been a very young child, there was a sense of wonder. What was this? How it could it be?

The light dimmed, or his eyes adjusted, or... something. There were voices, then shouts, then a flurry of excitement, running, thumping on the floor, more shouting, voices, and someone calling his name as though it was the last name ever called.

He opened his eyes. Everything about him was laughter. Not from comedy or incident,

but from a simple, simple joy. They were all there, brother, sister, parents, friends, classmates, colleagues, doctors, a handful of strangers – there must have been two dozen or more, in such a small room, laughing with and hugging one another, crying, laughing, crying, and laughing more. His mind could not make sense of how this was possible, but it was clear: he was alive.

A nurse raised his bed ever so slightly, so that he was sitting partway up. Behind the crowd of friends and family, behind a window, watching through transparent safety, was the woman. Her hands covered her face, and she cried. He watched her, suddenly unaware of all the others around or whatever they were saying, how they patted him on the shoulder, held his hands. He stared through the glass, watched her cry.

The others saw this, and stood to the sides. They wondered aloud why she didn't come in, why she was sobbing so much more than the others. Though they none of them knew what they did not have any business knowing, they could see that her tears were both of joy and concern. Then, she looked up. His eyes met hers, and the window through which they looked nearly broke for the seismic lock established in their gaze. The others were completely silent, clearly confused, and totally respectful.

Without thinking about it, Onslow got out of the bed, stood up as straight as any man may, and walked to the door. He opened it, stepped into the hall, and faced his wife, and faced his life.

They stared at one another like strangers in no man's land, unsure whether they were friend or foe, unsure whether the next moment would bring cries of outrage or those of glee.

Annette only wanted forgiveness, a second chance, a chance to rewind and start again, to be willing and able overlook prior offenses, however grievous.

Which, more or less, is exactly what Onslow wanted.

In the room, everyone murmured and cried anew. Only feet away, on the other side of the window, Onslow and Annette hugged as though they'd been separated for years by war or worse. Their chins were on each other's shoulders, their tears were on one another's backs. Their arms were wrapped around themselves. They cried and took little gasps of breath and held each other so tightly one might have thought they were clinging for dear life. And rightly so.

As the mammoth bulk freighter had passed beneath the bridge from which Onslow fell, the captain, who'd seen and suffered others who'd jumped before, had ordered open the massive, hydraulically operated hatches which covered the cargo holds. The odds were still slim, but miracles do not require anything more. Onslow had fallen two-hundred feet into a vault as large as a cathedral full of wheat. He'd landed on his back, the brunt of the fall absorbed by the deep grain. When they lifted him out, when they laid him on a stretcher, when they took him to the emergency room – no one was aware of his back problems.

The doctors would only say, "somehow" and somehow, that just had to be sufficient. Somehow, the height of the fall and marginally cushioned impact of the landing, or luck, perhaps, had pulled his back straight, or decompressed the discs, or done something. Somehow. In any event, Onslow could stand up as straight as he wanted, as he ever had.

In a small room in what's-her-name's apartment, Annette and Onslow lay together and listened to the excitement from the adjacent bedroom.

"Lord," said Onslow, "that makes it hard to sleep."

Annette chuckled and replied, "Yeah, well, life's not fair. Besides, we are kinda staying here for free-"

Onslow sat up. Annette rolled her head and looked up at him from the pillow. "What?"

"I think..." he replied, "it a little fairer than... than we might think."

"You think so?" she asked.

Onslow put his hands on his wife and tried to nod with soft sincerity. He was interrupted by a chuckle, itself a function of sound effects coming through the wall. Annette had to laugh

quietly in response, and Onslow laughed a little less quietly in reply.



Burntime

As the Chevy pickup lumbered onto the grass alongside the highway, Robert grabbed his cell phone. He had trouble hearing over the idling engine, but since the display said it was the social worker, best not let it go to voice mail.

“Hello!” Shirley’s semi-rasp bespoke too many cigarettes. “I wanted to check in before the weekend. How was Amelia’s appointment?”

Parked where the highway crested, Robert looked at the pine woods falling away to the south, the mountain mangy where the maples stood with their leaves autumn-burnt to brown. A half-mile to the north a granite outcropping towered over the highway. Years ago there might have been a “fallen rock zone” sign, but now there stood only a rusty rail.

Robert ran a finger over the steering wheel’s cracked vinyl. “Same. The doctor told me to have her keep using vitamin E, but unless I find a million dollars for surgeries, there’s nothing else really. Medicaid won’t pay for more.”

He didn’t mention the doctor’s face when Amelia told him how she’d gotten that way. A check of the chart. A horrified glance in Robert’s direction.

“Did Amelia speak to him?”

“She took a while to warm up.” Ouch—why’d he say it that way? “But after a bit, she turned into a regular chatterbox.”

When Robert raised his eyes, he could distinguish the graffiti on that outcropping thirty feet above the highway. Paint stood out against the drab of a boulder, a blue unfaded after a decade.

Ten years ago, he’d awakened in the lockup. Down the hall voices echoed: cops mocking some kid who’d climbed so high no one could figure out how to get him down. It’d been too dangerous to send an officer up after him, so they’d waited him out. The kid had slipped and sent five empties and a can of spray paint clanging down the cliffside, then laughed like a loon when they clapped on the cuffs. One cop quipped, “Too bad he didn’t break his neck.”

Sitting up to rub at his stiff neck, Robert had looked around for the crazy kid. Then shock: he’d been the only one in the lockup.

He never did remember how much he’d drunk before blacking out, why it had seemed funny to climb over the highway to spray-paint his name. As a juvenile, Robert had gotten off the hook with just community service. The judge wanted him to clean the rock, but when the parole officer saw how dangerous it would be climbing it sober, they changed his sentence to trash pickup. And forever over the highway remained his name: *Robert*.

“Robert?”

“Uh—yeah.” The engine started knocking real bad. “I missed what you said.”

“Will I see you and Amelia tomorrow at the church cleanup?”

Not court-mandated community service this time, just something he did. Paying his debts. “Yeah, we’ll be there.”

“Talk to you then. Bye.”

She hung up just as the truck stalled.

After another glance at his name in blue, Robert restarted the engine and lurched onto the road.

At daycare, Amelia bounded up to him carrying a canvas bag with her crafts and leftover snack. Over the sound of Amelia’s nonstop chatter, Miss Marcy the child-minder said the physical therapist had been by. She stepped closer and added, “She had another nightmare during naptime, too.”

Without looking too closely at his daughter, Robert took her mottled hand and walked her out to the truck.

“Miss Marcy said you had a nightmare?”

Amelia said, “It was the fire one again.”

When he tried to start the truck, it wouldn’t turn over.

He looked into the back seat and took in Amelia’s eyes, deep like black coffee, the only living thing amidst the burn scars crusting her face. Her smile couldn’t crinkle her cheeks as it should. One ear was just a nub, and her blond hair grew in patches. “I’m sorry,” slipped out, and she laughed as she exclaimed, “Daddy! I dreamed it all by myself!”

He turned the key, and this time the engine responded.

He couldn’t remember the night of the fire any more than he remembered spray-painting a cliff. He struggled to, but the pieces never came all together, not so they meant something. He’d been somewhere, drinking with his wife. Football. Beer. A wager. Ice on the road.

It seemed you could destroy someone’s whole life and not remember the instant you did it.

The memories congealed only when he came to, lying in the hospital with a punctured lung and a broken leg, tended by silent nurses. After two days, a doctor muttered, “You never asked about your daughter, but she’s in intensive care.” Turned out, in another hospital. Airlifted. PICU. Burned over a quarter of her body.

In the hospital, with no booze to numb the grief—he detoxed. He refused his pain meds and no one objected. Let it hurt. Nothing would make up for it, but he had to get sober and see the baby for himself. He managed to get himself released, then scrounged a ride from one of his in-laws. At the other hospital, Melissa stared at him across the bed of their intubated, bandaged eighteen-month-old, hate in her eyes. He never saw his wife again. When divorce papers arrived in the mail a few months later, he just signed. By the time the hospital released Amelia, he had full custody plus a job at the lumber yard.

They should have thrown the book at him. They should have. Maybe because he didn’t hit anyone other than a highway overpass, maybe because his wife was long gone (last he heard, still drinking) and because no one else would have cared for his kid, he got a suspended sentence. Had to attend an alcohol treatment program. No driver’s license for a year. Probation.

And that was it. No more wife. No more friends. The friends were still drinking, and seeing them meant drinking too. Instead he bummed rides to doctors’ appointments and met with social services and survived a CPS investigation. By the year’s end, he’d scraped together the cash to move to a trailer home furnished with stuff his neighbors dumped on Freecycle. He had enough left over to make payments on a “new” thousand-dollar truck.

The alcohol people said, “You have to hit rock bottom,” and sure, he deserved it. But why did his daughter have to crash onto those rocks with him?

From Amelia’s conversation as they drove, he gathered that one of the daycare kids had cupcakes for his birthday. Easy to put it together: there had been a birthday candle, and two hours later a fiery nightmare. Miss Marcy never turned on her stove where Amelia could see, but who imagined a birthday candle as traumatic? He hadn’t thought it himself until Shirley lit a candle for Amelia’s second birthday and triggered screams.

“We’re going tomorrow to the church,” he said, gunning the engine at a red light so it wouldn’t stall. “We’re raking.”

“Can I jump in the leaves?”

“If they let you, sure.”

Back at the trailer he heated hot dogs in the microwave and a can of soup on the electric stove. Amelia watched the thirteen-inch TV while he sorted the mail at the rusty-legged table and paid only the bills that came in the pink envelopes. He gave her a bath, careful to keep the water the right temperature and use the gentlest soap on her damaged skin, lathering her lanky hair with peach-smelling shampoo he got on sale last week. Afterward, she played with her dolls and

colored until bedtime.

In the long silence after she slept, Robert could hear voices crescendo as neighbors walked past. Older kids shrilled in the narrow street. Still later, when he awoke on the couch after accidentally falling asleep, nothing but cars. He moved to his bed and then lay open-eyed for an hour, remembering.

#

Pulling into the parking lot, Robert flinched on seeing a crowd, maybe twenty-five people. Amelia wore a wool cap that covered her ears, plus gloves on her hands, but he couldn't cover her face.

How long until she realized people stared every time she went outside? Stared at her? Next year, when she entered kindergarten, would the students bully her because she looked different? Or would they just run away? And from the teachers: pity? Horror? Disgust?

Amelia unbuckled herself and climbed down. Others already at work called hellos. How many people were so well-known at a church they never attended? The alcohol program met in the cinderblock basement where the bulletin board always had notices like "Volunteers needed," so he'd show up with a shovel, a broom, a paint brush, or a trash bag.

Amelia came too because, well, he had Amelia. Everyone remembered her.

The pastor met her as she raced into the leaves. He squatted at her eye-level, and by the time Robert had gotten close, Amelia had run toward the other kids. "Morning, Robert!" The pastor nodded. "I sent her to pick up sticks. Quite a lot of leaves this year, huh?"

Volunteers had already piled a good heap at the center of the field. Robert went to work himself, raking. The afternoon passed with the mound getting larger in the field's center and the kids taking a break from pushing wheel-barrows to deliver icy bottled water to the adults instead. Shirley showed up, said hello and then sat at a picnic table with Amelia to section an orange.

Around Robert the volunteers chatted, but he focused on the swoosh of the leaves, the motion of the rake. It was just him and his work. He did the same at the lumber yard, wearing ear protection to block out a buzz saw rather than the buzz of words. Just get the work done. At the end of the day, go home. The signs said "volunteers wanted," not, "Robert wanted."

But Amelia they did want. Whether they were nice to her because they felt sorry, Robert never was sure. But after the initial gasp, the adults would manage a weak, "What's your name?" That triggered a flood of words from the girl, and she'd follow the person from task to task with never a break in conversation. Robert would call Amelia back only to have the person tell him, "It's fine." So he'd return to work.

With the sun setting as he took another bottle of water, he registered what those eight-by-eight piles of leaves meant. A scan of the area located the pastor, and he walked heavily toward him, shoving the bottle into his pocket.

"You're having a bonfire?"

The pastor nodded.

"I'll be taking Amelia home."

The pastor said, "We were going to grill up some hot dogs and hamburgers, if you want to stick around." A pause. "Oh, is she afraid? Take some food with you. You've been working hard."

"We'll be all right."

Amelia whined to stay when he told her it was time to leave. She begged. He told her no.

Only when Amelia glanced at the folks preparing the grill did she stop protesting. Her hand in her father's, she accompanied him across the parking lot and climbed into the truck cab.

Robert made sure she was buckled, then turned the key.

Nothing.

He tried again and got the same disheartening click. "Blast." He turned to Amelia. "Stay put."

Robert poked around under the hood for a while. There didn't seem to be any real

problem with the truck, other than it being an old truck with worn-out parts.

As he opened the cab door to take Amelia back out, the barbecue flared. Shrieking, she buried her face in his neck.

“It’s okay.” He clutched her shaking shoulders as tight as he could. “It’s real far away. I’m not going to make you go close.” When she didn’t uncoil, he said, “Do you want to stay in the truck?”

She did. He released her, and she huddled on the floor.

He wavered, unsure if he should sit with her or if he should ask one of the other volunteers to look at the engine. Finally, he shut the door.

It took several minutes to find the owner of the closest car and convince her to jump his battery. All the while Robert kept an eye on the bonfire preparations.

The piles of leaves were huge. The first would go up like a volcano, and then they’d drag the others over to keep feeding it. He tried to hurry the lady who owned the adjacent car, but she took her time. It was a day out for her. And she was doing him a favor. Eventually they got over to the truck, and he hooked up the cables.

Three tries later, he’d drawn a few onlookers, all of whom thought they knew what was the real problem. After the third dull click of the key, Robert looked at the pale face down by his thigh.

Amelia peeked up from the floor well. “I still can’t get it started.” He leaned close so her face was right against his. “You sit tight and be brave, you hear?”

Shirley’s voice said from the other side of the car, “Is Amelia in there?” She opened the passenger door closer. “Would you like to come with me to get something to eat?”

Amelia’s resolve might as well have spilled right out that open door. She crammed back toward the seat.

Shirley said, “I’ll bring you a hot dog. Would that be all right?”

Mute, Amelia only nodded.

The sky had darkened already. One of the men was messing with the starter.

“It’s a ten-year-old truck,” Robert told the man under the hood.

“And it looks it!” The man laughed. “You look it, too—you’ve got grease on your face.” Robert glanced at his hands to find oil-stains. “I drove one of these beaters for a while. There’s really only one thing you need to replace on them.”

Rather than waiting for the punch line, Robert said, “The whole truck?”

“The whole truck, that’s what you need to replace!” The man slapped the quarter panel. “Have you got a screwdriver?”

While Robert looked in the tool box in the truck bed, the first flares shot from the bonfire.

Kneeling, he stared over the cars as the flames crackled skyward. The smoky scent trudged out over the parking lot on the shiftless wind.

The truck jolted beneath him, and Robert realized too late that Shirley had returned with a hot dog on a paper plate.

He scrambled over the side to intercept Amelia before she poked out her head, but Shirley was already setting up the hot dog, a drink, and a bag of chips on the seat.

Amelia whispered, “Thank you.”

Shirley said, “Do you want to see the bonfire?”

Amelia shook her head vigorously.

“Thank you.” Robert slipped up alongside. “I’ve got her from here.”

Amelia nibbled the hot dog huddled on the floor. Robert again shut her inside.

Back at the bumper, the would-be mechanic reached a verdict. “It’s time to call for a tow.”

Terrific. Just terrific.

Robert slammed the hood. As he did, he caught sight of his face reflected in the windshield, smudged and exhausted. And through his reflection, Amelia.

Staring at the bonfire. Not in horror, just staring from the other side of the window.

Robert opened the driver's side door. "You okay, honey?"

Amelia sat enthralled, her chips forgotten on the seat, the soda unopened.

He settled himself behind the wheel. "You want to watch?"

From behind the glass, she did, hypnotized by the flames, by the way their fingers grasped toward Heaven.

As Robert touched her, she moved to sit encircled in his arms. The fire rose, minute by minute. And then she whispered, "Can we go out and see?"

He carried her, pivoting so she watched through the window of the open door. The smoke smelled thicker now. Chokier. Her breaths against his ribcage came light like a sparrow's, and her arms around his neck were tight like steel bands, but still she stared.

"Do you want to go back in?"

She repeated, "I want to see."

He left the door open in case she needed a fast escape.

Amelia breathed heavy as he advanced. He stopped. She whispered, "No, go."

Unsure if this was going to result in weeks of nightmares, Robert stayed planted in place.

Amelia struggled from his arms and got her feet on the ground. She walked forward toward the fire.

Firemen stood at the perimeter, their trucks by the curb. Other children raced on the green grass, safely distant but close enough to make Robert's heart pound. Amelia watched them, and she took a step toward the group.

A hesitant return to him. Her hand in his. Her hand slipping free. Then another pace: toeing the ground as if testing the water of a pool, then her whole foot, and then a gradual shifting of her weight toward the other kids. Toward the fire.

This time, Robert didn't move with her. Was his heart pounding faster than hers?

One of the girls plunged toward them, shrieking with laughter, and grabbed Amelia's hand. "Come on!"

Amelia looked at her father, and he forced a smile.

She bolted with the other girl.

All the air had been sucked from his lungs. He stood like granite, unable from where he was to feel the heat of the fire and able only to see its light.

With the other children, Amelia's shrieking laugh rose higher than the roar of burning leaves. She came no closer than the other children, but in the clearing where they played she had positioned herself between Robert and the bonfire. Arms outstretched, she whirled like a breath over the grass, and over her sprang tongues of flame.

She whooped as she chased the other children, then turned and let them chase her.

Robert took another step to the edge of the clearing, the outskirts of the church volunteers and the children, the trees themselves ignited by the sunset at their backs even as Amelia glowed from the light at hers.

Breaking from the children she bounded to him, laughing, her gaze dark and deep. Robert crouched at eye-level to her.

She said, "Why are you crying?"

He rested his forehead against her cheek and felt how smooth it was, but also how flush.

"I'm sorry," he whispered.

"It's all right," she said.

When he sat back, she touched his face. "You got a smudge on you," and she rubbed his forehead with her thumb, then looked chagrined as she smudged him even more with the dirt on her own fingers. He pulled the water bottle from his pocket and poured some on her hands, and she rubbed his forehead.

When she finished, she turned so her back nestled against his chest, and he wrapped his arms around her. Her smooth fingers settled over his hands, and then with her head to his shoulder, together they faced the fire.

Mr. Hirsch and the Woods

Dumb, really dumb idea. The worst mistake my normally level-headed parents made. Sanctioning a “survival trek” with Mr. Hirsch in The Woods. It was 1969 and Mom and Dad made sure I had a crew cut, so that, by their reasoning I wouldn’t do reefer or drop acid (their theory: long hair=drug user). They were big on manners, opening doors, saying please and thank you, and having me wash my hands more than Lady Macbeth. But they saw what they saw. Long-haired freaks taking drugs and burning draft cards and American flags. Anti-war protests. Hippies. Yippies. Communists. Drug dealers. Mini-skirts. Free love. Black Power. Jimmy Hendrix making a shambles of the national anthem. Too much change to swallow. So here’s this guy with a crew cut who is a big shot at the synagogue and the VFW, a decorated Viet Nam Vet, an outspoken critic of anything free, whether that be love or handouts to people of color. Mr. Hirsch represented the anti-zeitgeist. Mom’s explanation for the foray into The Woods: “Mr. Hirsch thinks—and your father and I think—this kind of activity is wholesome and will keep you off drugs.” Always about keeping us off of drugs. Oh, and my mother added, Mr. Hirsch was such a nice man and he had done our family a few favors, like helping my father acquire 100,000 corks we stored in hall closet. At that time, Dad estimated he’d make about 50 grand by selling them to wineries. Unfortunately, as Dad found out later, the corks couldn’t fit in any wine bottles manufactured on the planet.

Mr. Hirsch arrived at our house with his station wagon early in the morning. Us, I say, because Brian Hartman and Sammie Silverman also were also going, courtesy of their my-kids-are-going-to-do-what-they’re-going-to-do parents. Spending a Saturday in The Woods with a testosterone crazed vet with a square Marine haircut and fatigues. “This’ll get you guys ready for Nam,” he barked, pushing us into the car by the tops of our heads. Dad and Mom saluted as two helicopters flew overhead.

Pony-tailed Brian Hartmann could have given the Marquis de Sade a few lessons. In my yearbook he wrote: “May a million basketballs fall on your head.” Having my hair cut every other week was also an invitation to flick his fingers on my neck and yell “Swipes.” Brian did this over and over again from the backseat until my neck was red. Skinny, stringy-haired Sammie smirked every time Brian swiped me.

When some hippies tried blocking the intersection in an impromptu peace demonstration, Mr. Hirsch tried to run them over.

“We’re losing in Viet Nam,” I said matter-of-factly, as if I had learned this from a military strategist and not from a drunken baseball fan over a urinal.

Mr. Hirsch stopped the car in the middle of a crowded road and peered at me.

“We will win the war!” he bellowed. “It may take us a thousand years, but we will win the war. When you’re 18, you’ll be drafted and you will have a chance to die for this country.”

“My father said he’d take me to Canada rather than fight in Viet Nam” I replied. “He says the war doesn’t make any sense.”

“Your father never said that, young Mr. Goodman,” he said.

“He did,” I replied.

“He was drunk then.”

“Yeah, he was, but he still meant it. He’s not letting me die.”

“He’s not letting me die,” he mocked.

“Yeah, I’ll go to Canada.”

“Well, you’re going to The Woods,” he announced. “You might change your mind after

today, Ho Chi Min.”

I was scared shitless. Did he intend to leave me in The Woods like Hansel and Gretel? Maybe he had a rifle and he'd track me down like the Viet Cong.

Brian and Sammie embraced in the back seat and I could see Brian's hands advancing over placid body with little resistance.

“What are you looking at?” Mr. Hirsch bellowed.

“Yeah, what are looking at?” Brian laughed, reaching out and swiping me again.

“The enemy will always try to divert your attention,” Mr. Hirsch admonished.

We hit a bump and I almost bit off my tongue.

We stopped at four stores to pick up supplies. Food at the grocery. Tents. Army fatigues. Canteens. We didn't get to The Woods until almost twilight. That made it scarier, even though I thought I could see my house in the distance.

“Where are Brian and Sammie?”

“They went ahead.”

“You let them go into The Woods by themselves?”

“Jealous, are we?”

I had expected a long road trip. It wasn't. I expected to go somewhere deep in The Woods. We didn't. Just 2 miles from my house. Kids said there were cliffs in The Woods, but that probably was urban legend. A curtain of reddish-blue clouds began falling on The Woods. The Woods became loud and restless with night sounds, like those fabricated sound effects on TV shows. Loaded down with enough supplies to last through Armageddon, Mr. Hirsch trampled on the moist leaves. I followed—what else was I going to do? I'd get lost otherwise.

Suddenly, night fell like a guillotine. Mr. Hirsch became terrified. He backed away like he had seen a ghost.

“We have to stop!” he screamed. “We'll fall over the cliff!”

He grabbed me by my ears and tried to take me with him, but I twisted away. Mr. Hirsch continued to backpedal at a furious pace, out of control, like an unfettered marionette.

I sprinted forward as Mr. Hirsch continued to backpedal. I was going my way, he his. To tell you the truth, I didn't know whether I was going to fall off a cliff. There were those stories. Overhead, a helicopter with a searchlight buzzed the top of the trees.

“You're going to die, you're going to die,” I heard Mr. Hirsch bellow before I slipped, fell, and hit my head. When I looked up from the dewy leaves, I no longer saw him above me.

“What the hell are you looking at?” Brian screamed.

He and Sammie were half-clothed about 10 feet in front of me.

“Come here!” Brian commanded.

With Sammie there and parts of her unconcealed I could not resist.

“Swipes!”

“Where's Mr. Hirsch?” I cried.

“He's dead,” Brian said. “Let's get out of here.”

“We have to look,” I insisted.

We didn't look very hard, but we did look. Sammie, who looked bug-eyed, just giggled the whole time. We got back to the car and Brian even though he was only 14 drove us to the police station.

“Goodman did it, Goodman did!” Brian laughed.

The police looked at me like I was scum and I heard later on that Mr. Hirsch did blame me, but “as a good-hearted person to the very core, and knowing his parents as I do, I will not press charges.”

The police quickly found Mr. Hirsch. As he backpedaled away what he thought was a cliff, he fell off the real cliff. Lucky for him, he banged against a few bushes and suffered only the mildest concussion during his 129 foot descent. After that, we never saw him again in the

neighborhood, only on the news years later after being one of the most culpable executives in the Enron Affair.

Several weeks later, I walked up at The Woods, this time with Sammie's younger sister. It was clear in the daylight how Mr. Hirsch had back-pedaled off a pretty scary cliff.

I took Sammie's sister's hand and we walked over the recess where Brian and Sammie had been and into a clearing and into a nice meadow. I think you know what I hoped would happen next. It was midday and everything was bright and quiet except for a train that seemed miles and even centuries away. Sammie's sister (whom I call Sammie's sister because that's all I ever knew her by) quickly stripped and ran away from me into the clearing. She had Sammie's smile, but was a good deal heavier yet much more ebullient than her sister. There was no one around, absolutely no one around, and it was 1969 and everybody who was young was happy and naked and so were we. It seemed like a glorious time running under the sun like we were in Gauguin's Tahiti. I felt proud when I finally ran her down, even though she made it clear that our romp in the meadow had ended as soon as I caught her.

A helicopter zoomed in for a closer look at us. I swear I saw my parents in the cockpit. We just laughed and waved.

Third Shift

Dave should have been a happy camper, but he wasn't. What was there to be unhappy about? He was out of high school-class of 1980. Like most of us, his diploma was probably a gift from the teachers and the principal who were sick of our shitty attitudes. But out is out. He had turned eighteen and in Vermont that meant that you could legally drink, thanks to the draft during the Viet Nam war. At least that's what my history teacher said. You should have seen the traffic from New Hampshire on Friday nights. The troopers had serious problems, but that's another story. To top it off, Dave had also landed the best job of us all, a third shift slot at the local ball bearing plant. The third shift-that turned out to be the rub.

He tried to explain to me and his other bar buddies what it was like to go against every normal function of his nervous system and body. He described how his eyes began to close at about twelve a.m., how his mind went off to some inner world far from the grinding machine that he was feeding; how he had to shake his head as the polishing wheel finished its cycle; how he had to blink, pry open his eyes as he plucked another ball bearing with his pliers and set in the machine, and he told them how thankful he was when the machine was loaded and he could push the button that would give him a moment's rest before the process began all over again.

"Man," Joe said, "suck it up. Mike isn't working, Kevin is washing cars, and I'm swimming in grease at Friendly's. And you're pulling in more money than we are. In two weeks you won't give a rat's ass about whether it's night or day."

As for me, I still worked as a bagger at the local supermarket; I've been doing it since my sophomore year. It's okay but nothing to brag about or to even mention now that I was supposedly in the real world. Just a kid's job. So I decided not to dump on Dave and just sipped my beer and smiled. Dave was pretty quiet the rest of the night.

2

When he showed up the following Saturday, Dave went right back to the same topic. We couldn't figure out why it was so important to him that we get what it was like when he was working when he should be sleeping and sleeping when he should be working. As Kevin said, "No big fucking deal." But Dave just shook his head and began to use a couple of really freaky, really weird comparisons that he thought might do the trick.

"Just imagine," he said, "that life is broken down into three shifts and that seven to three is one, three to eleven is two and eleven to seven is three. You guys and most of the world live on a one, two, three schedule. Been that way for eons. Me and the rest of the people on my shift live a 3, 2, 1 existence. We're in a totally different time zone, cut off from you and the entire nine to five crowd."

Kevin put his beer on the bar, turned to Dave, sneered and pretty much summed up our reaction. "What the hell are you talking about?"

So he tried again. "Okay, assume that most workers wear their shirts the normal way. And by five p.m. let's say, the normal people are out of work and my guys are out of bed, but my guys are wearing their tees shirts inside out. Okay, now imagine that were all parading down Main Street. We're together but also separate and only the third shift people notice. Do you see what I mean?"

No they didn't see what he meant. Crazy Dave, just crazy Dave blathering away. For some reason I thought of a poet we had to read in our English class that used a compass to try to get his

point across about being absent but still there. I thought that was interesting but, as usual, never said a word in class.

After the hooting ceased it was on to discussing good looking and easy babes- and determining which one of those two characteristics was most important. Then, as usual the talk turned to the Patriots and the coolest car. Dave didn't join in, and we didn't see him again for quite a while.

3

Don't ask me why. I just felt like talking to Dave. When I got him on the phone, he said he didn't want to go to the bar, so we met at Mocha John's coffee shop. I couldn't help but notice that he was pale and edgy, couldn't keep his hands still and had trouble holding his cup steady.

"Hey, thanks for the call, Terry," he said. "I've been downing a lot of java lately. Helps to steady the nerves and get me going." He took a sip of coffee, hesitated for a moment and then said, "I know you're wondering why I haven't shown up at McNeil's on Saturday nights. I don't know; it seems like I don't fit in there any more. So I've been going out with some of the younger guys on my shift. I guess I have more in common with them at this point." When I didn't say anything, Dave asked, "So how's everybody doing?"

"Same old, same old," I replied. I didn't go into detail because I thought he really didn't want to know or perhaps I didn't want to relive the mundane details of the last month or so. Anyway, he didn't ask for more info, and I happily moved on. "So are you getting used to those weird hours?"

"Not really," he said, but I'm learning a lot. Not just about ball bearings and precise tolerances, but about how people cope with something so strange as working the third shift. I don't want to bore you but..."

I looked at him more closely and noticed that his hair was longer and that he was starting to grow a beard, but I didn't want to change the subject just then so I didn't say anything. "No, no, go on. I'm interested." I wasn't bullshitting him either.

"There are two groups on the shift. There are the younger guys like me who have to start on the graveyard shift if they want a job. Most of them hope to work their way onto the second shift and then grab the gold ring and get onto the day shift. So they get all excited when someone on an earlier shift quits, gets fired or dies. Then there's the old timers who have worked the graveyard gig for years and have either given up any hopes of moving to an earlier shift or who over the years have embraced the eleven to seven cycle."

That last comment got my attention." Why would anybody want to work that shift?"

"The rules are different, you do have to grind so many ball bearings according to specs and keep those machines humming just like any other shift. But no one gives a shit how you reach your quota. The floor mangers really know what they are doing but also realize that they are not going anywhere-maybe they told someone in the office to take a hike or they're considered to be too weird to be seen in the light of day. It's great, no one bugs you."

He took a deep breath and a gulp of coffee. I could see he wasn't agitated or angry, but just really into what he was describing, even a bit excited, which surprised me.

"So," he continued, "if the machines were up and running and the total count was ahead of schedule, the foremen would call a time out. You can't imagine what a relief it is to not hear the sound of those machines. Then out would come the foam footballs and someone would run down an isle for a pass. Others might pull out a book and start reading aloud-poetry no less. Can you believe it? Another guy breaks out in song, others join in. It's a little crazy, but I love those breaks."

"It's nothing like life at the supermarket," I replied. "Maybe a customer drops a glass jar of whatever on the floor and the crew runs to the scene and tidies up. That's the excitement for the day."

He nodded. We finished our coffee. I liked talking to Dave and asked him to come down to the bar some Saturday. He didn't answer, just shrugged as we went our separate ways.

4

A few weeks later I ran into him on Main Street. Because of the long hair, the bushy reddish brown beard, and the knitted toke pulled over his ears, it took me a minute to recognize him. The guys would say he looked like those weird hippies that started to come into town in the late sixties, but to me he looked more like the lumberjacks that you saw up north or in the backwoods of New England.

Although it was a chilly November night, we stopped and talked for a while.

"Can't stop too long," he said. "Sorry I haven't stopped by McNeil's, but I've been taking off on weekends and doing some hiking. Have to get the smell of the lubricating oil and the grating sounds of the machines out of my head when I get a chance."

"I can see why," I said. "Snow's going to start flying pretty soon, though. Might put a crimp on traipsing through the woods." Why I didn't think of snowshoes or skis is beyond me since I was born and raised in Vermont. But, you know, my crowd was never into that kind of thing.

"I know," he said. "I've been thinking about it. I take my mom's car to work, and I leave early now, head up to the hills and just sit there with the windows open or sit outside on the hood and just look at the stars. Seems like there's no end to the sky, just goes on and on. Then there's the snow that says hunker down, dig in. Makes you think."

I knew then that Dave would never show up at the bar; never get back into the old routine. He said he had to go. We shook hands, then I watched him head down the street. When he passed our local book store and funky hardware store, he raised his hand and turned the corner. I wondered if he was a lost soul or one of those pioneer types that has to head out, look around. Before I got home, I stopped for a few minutes and peered at the vast night sky.

5

Right after New Year's Day, I received a postcard from Dave that featured the Colorado Rockies. There were just a few lines on the back saying that he was enjoying his travels and heading for Durango. Didn't know where he would end up. Wished me well, but didn't say a thing about the rest of the gang.

If I had his address I would have written him to tell him that I had quit my job at the market, had actually landed a job, you guessed it, on the third shift. Don't know if it had anything to do with his departure, but I was glad to get it. Would have told him that I was saving up my money, checking out Durango on the map, and spending a lot of time listening to the wind and watching the Connecticut River first flow and then freeze over.

Interview



Jet Fuel Review talks to Brigid Pasulka

From her website, “The descendant of Polish immigrants,” Brigid spent most of her childhood in a farming township in Northern Illinois, population 500. In 1994 at the age of 22, she arrived in Krakow with no place to stay, no job, no contacts and no knowledge of the language. She quickly fell in love with the place, learned Polish, and decided to live there for one year. Brigid is still a frequent visitor to Krakow; she has also worked, studied or volunteered in Italy, Germany, Russia, England and Ukraine. She is a graduate of Dartmouth College, the Program for Writers at the University of Illinois at Chicago (MA) and currently teaches at Whitney Young Magnet High School in the Chicago Public Schools. *A Long, Long Time Ago* and *Essentially True* is her first novel. It won the 2010 Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award and was a Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers selection.”

1. How does your process for writing short stories differ from how you wrote your novel?

I don't know that I have a process for writing either. Aside from a few high school and college assignments, the only short stories I have written were the ones set in Russia that I did about ten years ago, and I'm only on my second novel. I guess the obvious difference is that stories can be done in short, satisfying spurts, but novels take a lot of patience, and, I find, daily attention or else I lose the thread of the story. Then again, Julia Glass said something like the only people who write every day are those annoying morning people, and I definitely fall into that category.

I do find some crossover. The Russian stories all ended up with the same set of characters because each story grew out of a minor character or the germ of an idea that had appeared in a previous story. I kept going like that, hand-over-hand for eight or nine stories. Similarly, I like to make each chapter in a novel as self-contained as I can, and haven't yet gotten over the urge to title each chapter. I think for both, if I can get three-quarters of the way through the story, that's when it really starts to come together.

2. What is your “origin story”? How did you come to decide that writing was what you wanted to do?

I was definitely not one of those people who always wanted to write. Up until I was in my early twenties, I had only written letters, lists, spotty diaries and school assignments. I did take a couple of creative writing classes in high school and college, and I did receive some encouragement, but I was always more into art. I ended up majoring in Studio Art (mostly sculpture) in college and double-majoring in English Literature as a “back-up.” In my senior year, though, I realized that I was not all that talented at art and I felt ham-handed in expressing the things I felt. I ended up going to Poland because I didn't know what else to do. It was only when I got back that I started telling stories of everything I had seen and heard, and it was only when my friends got tired of listening to my stories that I started writing them down. *A Long, Long Time Ago* actually started as a numbered list of all the things I didn't want to forget. The list expanded into descriptions, and I remember making the leap to fiction when I started saying to myself, “Well, that was interesting, but it would have been more interesting if X had happened.” I think I was about 25 and a few years out of Poland when I made a New Year's resolution to write every day. Ten years later (including three years of grad school), I sold my novel.

3. Is travel an important part of your writing process or do you simply enjoy globe-trekking? Do you find that being in other places stimulates your writing?

I have always enjoyed learning languages, so that has been my impetus to travel, and in my college and post-college years, I didn't have a lot of money, so I always had to work or study, and therefore stay in the same place for an extended period of time. I don't know if this is the cause or the effect of those two things, but I don't like globe-trekking as much as I like returning to the same places over and over. So I actually have a pretty limited canvas of places I feel I have enough depth to write about.

I think other places definitely stimulate my writing (and my reading choices, for that matter). When everything is "foreign," it forces you to look at what remains the same between cultures. Once you clear away the clutter of language and history and customs, the one thing that remains is human emotion—sadness, joy, greed, longing, unease, determination—and I think human emotion is at the core of every good piece of fiction.

4. For a novel like yours — *A Long, Long Time Ago and Essentially True* — which requires a lot of research, do you feel it's necessary to embed yourself in the book's setting as you did?

My process on the first novel was pretty haphazard, but now, looking back on the first and finishing up on the second novel (which is set in Italy), I think I work best having an immersive experience and then fortifying my memory with book and Internet research only when I need a particular detail. For example, I had spent a summer in the small town in Italy where my second novel is set. But that was in 1998, so when I decided to write about it in 2007, I went back once, mostly to remind myself of the feeling of the place. I've avoided more trips there because I'm afraid of clouding my own memory and imagination.

I do look at a lot of photos. The main character of the second novel is the son of a butcher, and one of the greatest pieces of "research" I did was asking a butcher in this small town to let me photograph every inch of his shop. Also, I can't tell you how many YouTube videos I've watched on butchering, soccer, Dante and the Sistine Chapel. Accuracy and plausibility are more necessary than ever now that readers can look anything up, but you have to resist the urge to cram all the research in or it can cramp the story. So although I have looked at hundreds of photos and videos, read thousands of pages, and have hundreds of pages of notes and "scrap" stored on my computer, most of it never makes it into a novel.

5. Aspiring writers at Lewis University are likely to be in the same position you were — hailing from a small Illinois town. What is your advice for someone graduating from Lewis and looking to break into the writing world?

Be yourself and realize that you have something to contribute. Once I started meeting other writers, I realized that this monolithic pantheon I had imagined was actually comprised of as many diverse backgrounds and personalities as the real world. They only had this odd habit of writing in common. So there's not a secret cult to break into or a way to act or a shibboleth that you can utter to get you "in." Similarly, there's nothing like that to keep you "out." One time I heard someone in a writing workshop say that he planned to figure out where the gaps in the market were and then FILL THAT GAP! It made me cringe. You can't do that any more than you can change your hairstyle to make someone fall in love with you. I mean, that doesn't even work in junior high. At the same time, I don't feel like you have to "represent" or claim a niche ("Midwest Small Town Writer") and stick to it. Write what you want. When I think about the books that I love, they were books where the characters were recognizable, but they opened up an entirely new world to me.

6. When you traveled to Poland, you were completely immersed in their culture without knowing much about it or the Polish language. For those who possess the same wanderlust that you have, what is your advice for being immersed in a new culture?

Be open. Learn the language. Try to lead as ordinary a life as you can there. Don't eat at McDonalds, Skype your mother every day or ship over five crates with all the comforts of home. And if you want to go to Ukraine, get in touch with me because I know a great summer volunteer program with the Ukrainian Catholic University in L'viv.

7. What was it like having the cover of your book illustrated? What was it like to work with an artist — Christopher Silas Neal — to meld what you had written with an artistic expression? Or, as is often the case with publishing houses, did you not have a say in your cover art?

First I should say that I love the cover art—on the American edition and on the foreign editions. It's also interesting for me for the same reason it's interesting for me to receive projects from high school students who have read my book or to go to book clubs. It makes what I've written more of a dynamic interaction instead of a just a museum piece to be admired.

Houghton Mifflin did ask me for my input, and I responded by taking pictures of sculptures and prints in my apartment that I'd brought back from Poland. For me, the contemporary Polish aesthetic is both very original and very characteristic of the current culture. When my American editor and my British editor saw the photos, they both thought of Christopher Silas Neal. He obviously read all or part of the book for his inspiration, and it was a slam-dunk. I had two very, very minor adjustments I wanted to make, and those were made. I think with cover art, and with a lot of things in life, though, you have to remember that while you were becoming an expert on writing, other people were becoming experts on other things, and it's important to trust their judgment. Relying on your own opinion all the time can be really limiting.

8. Do you have any advice concerning publishers? For instance, do you have any dos and don'ts when searching for or dealing with publishers?

Be yourself. Be professional. Be patient. I've seen a lot of people more motivated to publish than to write. Make no mistake; the important work happens in the chair. I remember early on coming to the realization that I would write for the rest of my life whether I was ever published or not, and I think if you don't feel compelled to write in the same basic way that you feel you have to brush your teeth or take a shower, don't do it. You'll have a lot less angst and a lot more free time and brain space to do other things.

If you feel that you must write though, it's natural that after putting a certain amount of time into something, you'll want to take it to the next level. Start by publishing short pieces in small journals where you get paid in copies. I think I had about five short pieces published and a finished novel in my computer before I seriously thought about contacting an agent. Then I went and bought a copy of *Writer's Digest's Guide to Agents* and picked out twenty who I thought were compatible and who might be open to a new, untested novelist. I looked at the advice on query letters in the front of the book, wrote one, edited and re-edited it, and sent it off. My agent, Wendy Sherman, came out of that list, but I was prepared to contact a hundred more before re-evaluating. Obviously, given my experience, I don't agree with people who say you need connections; honestly, the agents and editors spend an enormous amount of energy looking for exactly what you want to produce—an interesting book that readers will want to pick up and recommend to their friends. Rejections aren't personal. You reject menu items and dresses and books all the time not because

they're inherently flawed, but because they're simply not your taste. It's the same with agents and editors looking at your work. And if you do face a lot of rejection, don't sit in your living room and make effigies of the agents and editors who rejected you; go back and take another look at the writing. Great writing and a great story will get noticed.

9. Who do you consider to be some of your writing influences?

Definitely Flannery O'Connor, both for her short stories and for her essays on writing. I didn't realize how much Louis De Bernieres' *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* had influenced me until my British publisher referenced it on the cover. And I've always been an admirer of Salman Rushdie. Generally, I like books that unfold an entirely new world, but I love to read, both fiction and nonfiction, and there are so many great books out there.

10. What are some daily writing exercises or schedules that you adhere to?

I get up at about 6:30 every morning, and have to be at school by about 11:30. (I teach part-time at Whitney Young Magnet High School in Chicago.) My routine is this: Make coffee. Pray for inspiration. Sit down and write. Stick with it.

Biographies

Poetry

William Allegrezza

William Allegrezza edits the e-zine *Moria*. He has published five books, *In the Weaver's Valley*, *Ladders in July*, *Fragile Replacements*, *Collective Instant*, and *Covering Over*; two anthologies, *The City Visible: Chicago Poetry for the New Century* and *La Alteración del Silencio: Poesía Norteamericana Reciente*; nine chapbooks, including *Sonoluminescence* (co-written with Simone Muench) and *Filament Sense* (Ypolita Press); and many poetry reviews, articles, and poems. He has books forthcoming with *Salt*, the *University of New Orleans Press*, and *Furniture Press*. In addition, he occasionally posts his thoughts at <http://allegrezza.blogspot.com>.

Salvatore Attardo

Salvatore Attardo's poetry and translations have appeared in several magazines, including *Asian Cha*, *Marco Polo Quarterly*, *the delinquent*, *Rough Copy*, and *The Worcester Review*. He has recently been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and is currently at work on a book titled "Complex Manifolds and Other Riemann Surfaces: Love Poems."

Hadara Bar-Nadav

Hadara Bar-Nadav is the author of two collections of poetry, *A Glass of Milk to Kiss Goodnight* (Margie/Intuit House, 2007), which was awarded the Margie Book Prize, and *The Frame Called Ruin* (forthcoming from New Issues, 2012). Her chapbook, *Show Me Yours* (Laurel Review/GreenTower Press 2010), was awarded the 2009 Midwest Poets Series Award. Recent publications appear or are forthcoming in *The American Poetry Review*, *The Iowa Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schooner*, and other journals.

She is co-author, with Michelle Boisseau, of *Writing Poems*, 8th edition (forthcoming from Pearson/Longman, 2011) and is currently an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

Mary Biddinger

Mary Biddinger is the author of three collections of poetry: *Prairie Fever* (Steel Toe Books, 2007), the chapbook *Saint Monica* (Black Lawrence Press, 2011), and *O Holy Insurgency* (Black Lawrence Press, 2012), and co-editor of one volume of criticism: *The Monkey and the Wrench: Essays into Contemporary Poetics* (U Akron Press, 2011). Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Copper Nickel*, *Devil's Lake*, *Gulf Coast*, *The Iowa Review*, and *Puerto del Sol*. She teaches literature and creative writing at The University of Akron/NEOMFA, and edits *Barn Owl Review*, *the Akron Series in Poetry*, and the *Akron Series in Contemporary Poetics*.

Jaswinder Bolina

Jaswinder Bolina is the author of *Carrier Wave*, winner of the 2006 Colorado Prize for Poetry. Poems from his new manuscript will appear in upcoming issues of *Columbia Poetry Review*, *Third Coast*, and in *The Best American Poetry 2011*. He teaches at Columbia College Chicago where he is the 2010–11 Liberal Arts & Sciences Emerging Poet-in-Residence.

Jason Bredle

Jason Bredle is the author of three books and three chapbooks, most recently *Smiles of the Unstoppable* and *The Book of Evil*. He lives in Chicago.

Marcel Brouwers

Marcel Brouwers lives and works in Knoxville, TN. His chapbook, *The Rose Industrial Complex*, was published in 2009 by Finishing Line Press. He has had poems published in *Kestrel*, *DIAGRAM*, *Pebble Lake Review*, *The Chariton Review*, *Pisgah Review*, and others.

Meriwether Clarke

Meriwether Clarke is a poet living in Chicago, IL. A graduate of Northwestern University's undergraduate creative writing program, she was the 2010 winner of the J. Scott Clark Scholarship for Aptitude and Excellence in Creative Writing. Her work has previously been published in *Helicon Literary Magazine*, *Prompt* and *The Stillwater Review*.

Patrick Culliton

Patrick Culliton is a small blue sock from Ohio. His chapbook, *Hornet Homily*, is available from Octopus Books.

Brandon Downing

Brandon Downing is a writer and visual artist originally from California. His books of poetry include *The Shirt Weapon* (Germ Monographs, 2002) and *Dark Brandon* (Faux Press, 2005), while a monograph of his literary collages from 1996-2008, *Lake Antiquity*, was released by Fence Books in late 2009. A long poem, AT ME, will be released as a chapbook by Octopus Books this Fall, while his next collection, *Mellow Actions*, will be published by Fence in 2012. In 2007 he released a feature-length collection of collaged digital shorts, *Dark Brandon: Eternal Classics*, with a 2nd volume forthcoming in 2011. You can see some at his link, along with his photographic and other work at www.brandondowning.org

He currently co-curates the *Poetry Time at Space Space* reading series in Ridgewood, New York, and lives in Astoria, Queens.

Gail Eisenhart

Gail Eisenhart's poems have been published recently in *Mid Rivers Review*, *CANTOS*, *Front Range*, *Barely South Review* and in *Flood Stage: an anthology of St. Louis Poets*. A retired Executive Assistant, she works part time at the Belleville (IL) Public Library and travels in her spare time, collecting memory souvenirs that show up in new poems.

Rich Furman

Rich Furman, MSW, PhD, is Associate Professor and Director of Social Work and Criminal Justice at the University of Washington, Tacoma. Rich has published over 100 scholarly articles, books, and book chapters. Rich's main areas of research are social work practice with transnational Latino populations, men at risk and masculinities, and the use of the arts and humanities in social work practice, research and education. He has conducted research, practiced, volunteered or taught throughout Latin America.

His first full-length book of poems, *Compañero* was published by Main Street Rag Press (2007). He has published over 250 poems in various journals. He has performed his work throughout the United States, as well as in Colombia, Peru, Nicaragua, Mexico, and Guatemala. He recently completed a memoir, *Falling South*, about his ten months in Central America during the time of the Contra war. He is currently working on a novel and narrative nonfiction essays.

John Gallaher

John Gallaher is the author of four books of poetry, most recently, *Map of the Folded World*, from *The University of Akron Press*, and *Your Father on the Train of Ghosts*, co-authored with G.C. Waldrep, due out in Spring 2011 from BOA, as well as the free online chapbook, *Guidebook from Blue Hour Press*. Other than that, he's co-editor of *The Laurel Review* and *GreenTower Press*.

Howard Good

Sheila Hagerman

Sheila Hagerman is a multi-tasking mother of three. She received her MFA in Creative Writing from Hunter College, CUNY. She teaches Yoga, Creative Writing, Composition and Literature. She has been published in places like Salon, Conversely and Moxie.

Brandi Homan

Brandi Homan is the author of *Bobcat Country* (Shearsman, 2010) and *Hard Reds* (Shearsman, 2008). She is also a cofounder, with Becca Klaver and Hanna Andrews, of the feminist press *Switchback Books*.

Audrey Keiffer

Audrey Keiffer is a poet and artist living in Kansas City, Missouri with her two siamese cats. Audrey's poetry and art explore themes of emotion, the unconscious, neurological and psychological conditions. She will soon receive her BA in English/Creative Writing from the University of Missouri – Kansas City, and will attempt existence in the “real world.” For more about Audrey, visit her website and her tumblr site.

Alan King

Alan King is a poet and journalist, living in the DC metropolitan area. His poems have appeared in *Indiana Review*, *MiPoesias* and *RATTLE*, among others. He's also the senior program director for DC Creative Writing Workshop, a Cave Canem fellow, VONA Alum, and MFA candidate at the University of Southern Maine's Stonecoast program. He's been nominated for both a Best of the Net selection and Pushcart Prize. His first collection of poems, *Drift*, will be published in 2012 by Willow Books. Find out more about King on his blog at <http://alanwking.wordpress.com>.

Becca Klaver

Becca Klaver is the author of the poetry collection *LA Liminal* (Kore Press, 2010) and the chapbook *Inside a Red Corvette: A 90s Mix Tape* (greying ghost press, 2009). She holds a BA from the University of Southern California and an MFA from Columbia College Chicago, and is currently a PhD student in Literatures in English at Rutgers University. A founding editor of the feminist poetry press *Switchback Books*, she is also a member of the VIDA: Women in Literary Arts outreach committee.

Karyna McGlynn

Karyna McGlynn is the author of *I Have to Go Back to 1994 and Kill a Girl*, winner of the Kathryn A. Morton Prize from Sarabande Books. Her chapbooks include *Scorpionica* (New Michigan Press, 2007) and the forthcoming collaboration *Small Shrines* (Cinematheque Press, 2011). Her poems appear in *Fence*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, *Salt Hill*, the *Journal and Verse Daily*. Karyna received her MFA from the University of Michigan and is currently pursuing her PhD in English Lit and Creative Writing at the University of Houston. She is an Assistant Editor at *Gulf Coast* and co-edits *linelineline* with Adam Theriault.

Laura Merleau

Laura Merleau lives in Waterloo, Illinois. Her novella *Little Fugue* was published by Woodley Memorial Press in 1993. Her poems have recently appeared or will soon appear in *Ragazine*, *The Los Angeles Review*, and *Qarrtsiluni*.

George Miller

George David Miller is a writer, activist, and philosopher. He has performed his poetry and given poetry workshops to over 40,000 people over the past decade.

Jacob Oet

Jacob Oet lives in Solon, Ohio. He has loved writing and making images since he was a boy. Jacob's poetry and images appear in *The New Verse News*, and *OVS Magazine*.

Emmanuel Pendola

Emmanuel Pendola is a senior Creative Writing and Psychology major. He enjoys writing Poetry and reading fiction pieces and is currently trying to use my background in Psychology to create more interesting writing. He hopes to one day write Psychological Thriller pieces.

Tonya Peterson

Tonya Peterson is a senior at Lewis University in the English Department's Creative Writing program. She enjoys reading and writing and plans to attend graduate school to continue to expand her writing and literature knowledge. Her poem "Convoy" was first published on *Poetry Ark's* online anthology of poems. Tonya also enjoys spending time with her family and attending events and activities her two children are involved with.

Diana Raab

Diana M. Raab is a poet and memoirist who teaches writing at the UCLA Writers' Program and at conferences around the country. Her writings have appeared widely in anthologies, literary journals and magazines. She has three poetry collections. *Dear Anais: My Life in Poems for You* (2008) won the 2009 Next Generation Indie Award and Reader Views Annual Award for Poetry, as well as received other high honors. *My Muse Undresses Me* (2007) is her chapbook and her latest collection is *The Guilt Gene* (2009).

Her most recent book *Healing With Words: A Writer's Cancer Journey* (2010) is a self-help memoir which includes narrative and poetry.

Dean Rader

Dean Rader has published widely in the fields of poetry, American Indian studies, and popular and visual culture. His debut collection of poems, *Works & Days*, won the 2010 T. S. Eliot Prize and is a finalist for the Texas Institute of Letters First Book Prize. Poems have appeared in *Colorado Review*, *POOL*, *Connecticut Review*, *Quarterly West* and many others. In 2009 he won the Sow's Ear Review poetry prize and his "Twilight at Ocean Beach: 14" was named by Verse Daily as one of the Best Poems of 2010. He also writes a regular column for the City Brights section of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the most notable of which is the now famous/infamous "10 Greatest Poets" project. He is a professor of English at the University of San Francisco.

Michael Robins

Michael Robins is the author of *Ladies & Gentlemen* (Saturnalia Books, 2011) and *The Next Settlement* (UNT Press, 2007), which received the Vassar Miller Prize in Poetry. Born in Portland, Oregon, he currently lives and teaches in Chicago.

Kathleen Rooney and Elisa Gabbert

Kathleen Rooney is a founding editor of *Rose Metal Press*, a non-profit dedicated to the publication of literary work in hybrid genres. Her first collection, *Oneiromance* (an epithalamion) won the 2007 Gatewood Prize from feminist publisher Switchback Books, and her collaborative collection *That Tiny Insane Voluptuousness* (co-written with Elisa Gabbert) was published by Otoliths in 2008. Her latest chapbook, *After Robinson Has Gone*, has just been released by Greying Ghost Press.

Elisa Gabbert is the poetry editor of *Absent* and the author of *The French Exit* (Birds, LLC) and *Thanks for Sending the Engine* (Kitchen Press). Her poems have appeared in *Colorado Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *The Laurel Review*, *Pleiades*, *Salt Hill*, and *Sentence*, among other journals, and her nonfiction has appeared in *Mantis*, *Open Letters Monthly*, and *The Monkey & The Wrench: Essays into Contemporary Poetics*. She currently lives in Boston and blogs at *The French Exit*.

Michael San Filippo

Michael San Filippo works in non-profit communications in suburban Chicago. His poetry, photography, and short fiction have appeared in *Curbside Splendor*, *In Between Altered States*, and *Liquid Whale's Tails*. He hopes you're having a great day.

Patricia Seyburn

Patty Seyburn has published three books of poems: *Hilarity* (New Issues Press, 2009), *Mechanical Cluster* (Ohio State University Press, 2002) and *Diasporadic* (Helicon Nine Editions, 1998). Her poems are currently in *Boston Review*, *DIAGRAM* and *Hotel Amerika*. She is an Associate Professor at California State University, Long Beach and co-editor of *POOL: A Journal of Poetry* (www.poolpoetry.com). She recently won a 2011 Pushcart Prize for her poem, "The Case for Free Will," published in *Arroyo Literary Review*.

Fiona Sinclair

Fiona Sinclair's work has been published in numerous reputable publications. Her second collection is due out at the end of this year by Indigo Dreams Press. She is the editor of the online poetry magazine *Message in a Bottle*.

Sean Singer

Sean Singer's first book *Discography* won the 2001 Yale Series of Younger Poets Prize, selected by W.S. Merwin, and the Norma Farber First Book Award from the Poetry Society of America. He has also published two chapbooks, *Passport* and *Keep Right On Playing Through the Mirror Over the Water*, both with Beard of Bees Press and is the recipient of a Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. He lives in New York City.

Lawrence Sisk

Lawrence Sisk has been chair of the Music Department at Lewis University since 1988. He is also the conductor of the Metropolitan Youth Symphony Orchestra and choirmaster at St. Athanasios Greek Orthodox Church in Aurora. Sisk holds a PhD in historical musicology from Northwestern University and was a Fulbright Scholar in Italy. His favorite poets include Homer, Dante, Pushkin, Heine, and Neruda. Excerpts from his translation of *The Odyssey* have been published in *Windows Magazine* and are available at his website: www.lawrencesisk.com

Joseph Somoza

Joseph Somoza retired from college teaching (New Mexico State University) and editing (*Puerto del Sol*) some years ago to devote more time to writing. He now sits in his back yard most

mornings and tries to educe a poem his way. He has published four books and four chapbooks of poetry over the years, most recently *SHOCK OF WHITE HAIR* (Sin Fronteras Press, 2007). He lives in Las Cruces with wife Jill, a painter.

Jennifer Sweeney

Jennifer K. Sweeney's second poetry collection, *How to Live on Bread and Music*, received the 2009 James Laughlin Award from the Academy of America Poets and the Perugia Press Prize. Her first book, *Salt Memory*, won the 2006 Main Street Rag Poetry Award. Her poems have been translated into Turkish and published widely in literary journals including *American Poetry Review*, *Poetry Daily* and the *2009 Pushcart Prize anthology*. She currently teaches poetry at Kalamazoo College in Kalamazoo, Michigan, where she lives with her husband, poet Chad Sweeney and their son, Liam.

Truth Thomas

Truth Thomas is a singer, songwriter, and poet, born in Knoxville, Tennessee, raised in Washington, DC. He studied creative writing and music at Howard University, before earning his MFA in Poetry at New England College. He is formally writer-in-residence for the Howard County Poetry and Literary Society in Maryland. He is the author of three collections of poetry: *Party of Black* (Flipped Eye/Mouthmark Press, 2006), *A Day of Presence* (Flipped Eye Publishing, 2008), and *Bottle of Life* (Flipped Eye Publishing, 2010). His fourth book, *Speak Water*, is scheduled for publication in the fall of 2011. He serves on editorial boards of both the *Tidal Basin Review*, and the *Little Patuxent Review*. Some of his work has appeared in: *Mythium Literary Journal*, *OVS Magazine*, *Pluck!*, *The Progressive*, *Quiddity Literary Journal*, *The Ringing Ear: Black Poets Lean South* (Cave Canem Anthology), and *The 100 Best African American Poems* (edited by Nikki Giovanni).

Lina Ramona Vitkauskas

Lina Ramona Vitkauskas has authored the poetry books/chapbooks *THE RANGE OF YOUR AMAZING NOTHING* (Ravenna Press, 2010); *Failed Star Spawns Planet/Star* (dancing girl press, 2006); and *Shooting Dead Films with Poets* (Fractal Edge Press, 2004). She was the recipient of The Poetry Center of Chicago's 15th Annual Juried Reading award, judged by Brenda Hillman, and has been nominated by Another Chicago Magazine for an Illinois Arts Council Award. In addition, she was a semi-finalist in the Gwendolyn Brooks Open Mic contest sponsored by Chicago's Guild Complex. Previously, she has placed as a semi-finalist in the Cleveland State University Open Poetry Series, and in 1999, she received an honorable mention from *STORY Magazine* in its Carson McCullers Award competition. Her work has appeared in many literary magazines and anthologies including: *TriQuarterly*, *The Prague Literary Review*, *The Chicago Review*, *Van Gogh's Ear* (Paris), *VLAK* (Ed. Louis Armand, Edmund Berrigan), *The City Visible: Chicago Poetry for the New Century* (Cracked Slab Books, 2007), *Aufgabe*, *Drunken Boat*, *White Fungus* (New Zealand), *MiPoesias*, and *Paper Tiger* (Australia).

Art

Kim Ambriz

Melissa Chicola

Julie Clack

Audrey Heiberger

William Hicks

Eric Lee

Grant Palmer

Tonya Peterson

Tonya Peterson is a senior at Lewis University in the English Department's Creative Writing program. She enjoys reading and writing and plans to attend graduate school to continue to expand her writing and literature knowledge. Her poem "Convoy" was first published on *Poetry Ark's* online anthology of poems. Tonya also enjoys spending time with her family and attending events and activities her two children are involved with.

Michael San Filippo

Michael San Filippo works in non-profit communications in suburban Chicago. His poetry, photography, and short fiction have appeared in *Curbside Splendor*, *In Between Altered States*, and *Liquid Whale's Tails*. He hopes you're having a great day.

Fiction

Lucile Barker

Lucile Barker is a Toronto poet, writer and activist who has been writing since she first swiped her grandmother's Waterman fountain pen and her mother's lilac ink. The time spent in the corner gave her more opportunity to write. Since 1994, she has been the co-ordinator of the Joy of Writing, a weekly workshop at the Ralph Thornton Centre. The group now has a Facebook group page and almost 150 members, some of whom actually do the assignments. Recent publications include *Glass Coffins in Memewar*, *Summer Vacations and Flower Shows in Antigonish Review*, *Diminishing Territory in Rougarou*. "The Golden Age", the first place short story winner in the Creative Keyboards contest, a project of the Hamilton Arts Council, will be published in an anthology in February 2011. Poetry and short stories are also forthcoming in *Bat Shat*, *Lost in Thought* and *Flashlight Memories*. Flophouse Stripper Hotel is from a collection of stories, Rehab Row, where a very luxurious addiction facility is asked to run a satellite program in a transitioning downtown neighborhood leading to a great deal of culture clash. With an unlimited supply of postage and chutzpah, there is the possibility of having the largest collection of rejection slips in the world. However, there are no plans for an exhibit of these at present.

Mark Jacobs

Mark Jacobs is a freshman Air Traffic Control Management major. He has a reputation for telling very bad jokes, talking too much, and absent-mindedly coming to school even on days when the campus is closed. He lives on the northern edges of Chicago and works at O'Hare airport, where he sprays toxic chemicals all over himself and occasionally the planes. He does not have spare time, but if he did, he would spend it complaining, playing the piano and singing badly, and eating (he thinks very highly of food).

Jane Lebak

Jane Lebak is the author of *The Guardian* (Thomas Nelson, 1994), *Seven Archangels: Annihilation* (Double-Edged Publishing, 2008) and *The Boys Upstairs* (MuseItUp, 2010). At Seven Angels, Four Kids, One Family, she blogs about what happens when a distracted daydreamer and a gamer geek attempt to raise four children.

George Miller

George David Miller is a writer, activist, and philosopher. He has performed his poetry and given poetry workshops to over 40,000 people over the past decade.

William Sullivan

Bill Sullivan is professor emeritus, Keene State College, NH, where he taught courses in American literature and American studies. He is a co-author of *Modern American Poetry* and *Containing Multitudes: Poetry in the United States since 1950*. He also co-produced "Here Am I," a documentary film on the life of Jonathan Daniels, a slain civil rights worker. The film aired on numerous PBS stations. His poems have appeared in a number of online journals and in print. He now resides in Westerly, RI.

