



**SKIDROW #17**  
**PENTHOUSE**

spiel  
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

7	Philippe Rahmy translated by Rosemary Lloyd Movement Through the End
13	Ronnie Burk Velvet Claw
15	Cameron Ember The Water Lights
17	t thilleman Selections from Snailhorn (fragments)
24	Megan Mealor Two Poems
27	John Goode The Still Life of the Pigeon
31	Hoa Nguyen Two Poems
35	Walter Cummins The Other Price
44	Sheila E. Murphy Four Poems
49	Timothy Liu Two Poems
53	Adam Cornford Three Poems
57	Jim Cory Three Poems
65	Rosalind Palermo Stevenson Four Poems
71	Heller Levinson from Buffalo this Indian
80	Anthony Seidman Six Poems
86	Tom Weigel Crack of Dawn

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

93	Lyn Lifshin The Mad Girl Thinks She Really Was The Woman Who Slept With All The Rock Stars Wrote A Book About It
95	Judson Crews Those Random Skeletons I Never Be-
96	Shelby Stephenson Chapter 44 from Country
107	Linda Tieber Four Poems
117	Stephanie Dickinson Four Stories
127	Gil Fagiani Walking Past the Playboy Club, 1971
130	Michael Weston Mass of Density
132	robert. d. wilson Two Poems
134	Sarah McElwain CBGB
141	Rich Ives As If Sunset Were the Only Road
153	Spiel Two Poems
158	Bill Yarrow Four Poems
165	Vincent Czyz Vanishing Points
173	Pierre Chappuis translated by John Taylor from Distance Aveugle
176	Ted Jonathan Two Poems

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

180	Craig Kurtz Flag
181	Susan H. Mauer Two Poems
183	Karl Tierney Six Poems
191	Paul B. Roth Three Poems
198	Ed Severson Time's Up
199	Tony Gloeggler Good
201	Marina Rubin Three Stories
204	Rich Ices A Delayed Report on the Motivations of the Insurgents
207	Catherine Sasanov Four Poems
213	Jack Devlin After Each Song and Each Book is Emptied
215	Jen Knox Static Time
219	Graham Schimmel Two Poems
224	Todd Moore Seven Poems
233	Oleg Woolf translated by Boris Dralyuk from Bessarabian Stamps
254	Edgar Cage The Trouble With Being Understood By Storms and Storms of People



Alois Nožička

# PHILIPPE RAHMY

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## MOVEMENT THROUGH THE END (A PORTRAIT OF PAIN)

— translated from the French by Rosemary Lloyd

Far off in this life, in the calm night, the cry of the bird of prey.

I don't have much shade left to shelter me from death. The sun rises behind the trees.

Pain destroys any idea of a beyond. The elsewhere of pain is still its continuation.

It doesn't matter much whether you know the moment or the intensity of the next crisis. As the hour passes it crushes the penumbra, pain sets free its hounds of light. They find me in the forest of long waiting. Elite hunters in the risen constellations, they seize my eyes. I hear the sacred name of pain. Justice. I have the power to reply. I strike, I strike the light with a love that pity doesn't know. Between trees that have no bark pain caresses my hands.

A noise. Those who love me leave my room. Imprinted on the air their absence lingers for a long time. The wind makes the panes crack. The door holds the body on this side when the thought tears itself into fragments and disappears nowhere.

I would like not to be alone, and when I go towards my end I'd like to become a landscape, a village in the desert, invisible during the day when the mirages surround it, revealed by dusk with its pale stars when, brisk on the path of the journey, it orients the awakened victim in his inner void.

Day comes over the house and I think this void is still humanity, the world is not an orphan.

«—»

*In the hospital, the child weeps. His arm has been amputated and his parents are far away. The stage is empty. The child dies. He is three years old.*

*Near the cemetery gate his tomb is the only one bringing flowers to winter. In summer it is the saddest under its wreath of artificial roses.*

«—»

The forest surrounds the sufferer. In the center, all is suffering. Around lies all of life. Happy those who lose themselves there, for all of them are under the protection of the shadows. They go and their thoughts create happiness, nothing disturbs the enchantment into which life plunges them.

Listen. Breathe silently. Imagine eternal darkness. Too late, you're caught. The branches fade, light bends them, and from on high it strikes you with all four feet like a dog. Your legs are broken as they're dashed against the stumps and on your face lies the blood clawed from the fringes. A hissing bursts out, far off.

Here are the reaches where night never comes. Hunted, I lock myself away in the desert, a disc heaped with splinters and fallen stones. I hunt pain, dazzled by the beauty of its lamps.

The sun is in the blinds and was so before dawn, already.

I am thirsty.

«—»

In the desert, the wild and craggy mountain of suffering that has found repose. It lies piled up in the cliffs, the wild grass. Over this place, no sky, a rift into which the arrow of the charnel house drives ever deeper.

Metal in my mouth, in my palm a wound, I count the hooks that hold my

body together. I lose the facility to see outside myself when I am face to face with pain, unable to imagine a paler day behind it. An exchange of love, what could one set against it that is stronger?

Help me, I'm in pain.

Light is like flesh, the substance of thought. In its fear of disappearing it proves itself alive. There are no bad moments for those who have lost the anguish of thinking of death and the desire to tell their dreams.

Love is held forever prisoner in the air.

««—»»

*The buckshot has taken the man's entire head, all the bone, leaving only the eyes and the flapping skin. He is sitting on the ground with a bottle against his thigh. The gun has leapt through the room, and stands upside down in a corner. Under the bridge that touches the window each time a train goes by, the room fills with iron scraps.*

*Share your life with your brother so meanly abandoned in the silence.*

««—»»

Where can I set my head?

««—»»

What comes to take me finds me as I was born, knowing nothing of freedom, free to the bottom of my heart.

I love the pain I cannot escape and I put into that love all the weight the useless bring to bear.

The silence is beneath men's poverty.

For those who suffer, beauty is always spiritual. Happy are they who give their agreement to its pain, for they make their death into a prayer.

I close my eyes when pain invades me, while I dive to the depths, speaking softly—do not hold onto your soul, do not be afraid, you are being born.

Nothing was lost. Nothing is missing; the sky is as white as in the time of the first beings. Should I say that this bareness suits me?

Yes.

It is so perfect that it leaves me with the sole choice that is not one of fear but one of enthusiasm: to enjoy this fragmentation without bitterness, violence, or nostalgia.

The arrow of time whose direction cannot be changed steals my sorrow from me. I have no curiosity about the hinterland the poets speak of, no lack of paradise. I limit to this moment my horizon of waiting and I draw from the miracle of what is happening to me an elementary strength in which joy, like light, blossoms. As far as the eye can see the accidental reigns triumphant.

Who owns me? The empty solitude that consumes me with the same neutral voice eternally limited to the secret—to the lightning bolt, scattered through the entire universe? I wash my face, I am ill, and yet I don't suffer. Everything goes far off and becomes simple: the dilated body sets silence free. What pain has not yet seen remains within these walls, a glass of cold water, clean linen, a respite to breathe, live and contemplate. But love considers this insufficient and thrusts it down into excrement.

Midday comes with its removal of any pretence of mystery, leaves it as it is, hermetically in the shadows. The body, long motionless, hums five notes, enough to set its soul free. The drug brings sight, blood flows slowly through the walls. In the thickness of this day death hangs by a thread.

A monotonous light pours its urine, the sea.

«—»

Slowly everything goes quiet. I support the idea of living by bringing each of my actions back to that of a respite, not from pain, for pain never leaves me, but from the stiffness that binds my body in its clay. It's a second winter that

forms the pedestal for this body lying in extreme distress. It hugs to itself its skin covered with mud and blood. After having been thrown onto the stones it refuses to moan. Pain has spread a mantle over it.

What do you say? Elsewhere there would be a face hanging over pain; how can one imagine such a face? The most gentle of dreams is called hope, but I have the cold ambition of a deeper happiness.

I prayed to God when I was fifteen. At night I would go and knock on church walls. A shadow would appear, coming out of the stone to eat my heart. Little by little, what it took from me it also took from the pain, which became furious. I could not divide myself between several loves. Like a mistress in her arch, pain bound to its iron cross reclaimed me at her feet.

In the brightness without being blinded, I stop. I know nothing of the place where I am but I know that I'm giving my life there. I see through my transparent body my being in fragments more constrained than in itself. Carried toward the summit of conscience where my most intimate memories, each one of them painful, are mingled with others that are foreign to me, I become the receptacle of endless suffering, as much suffering as there are human faces. I cherish all of them in their opacity, loving them for our common decline. I am with my brothers the substance of pain. What can death do against this solitude, apart from making it more silent, absolutely, immensely, intimately the equal of humankind? As I sometimes believe I am walking on sand and that my salvation depends on this miracle, on certain evenings I hear my first name murmured: faithful, faithful ... But most often, too weak to wander, I lie flat out.

Pain is a fragment of the sun. I say these words from within my body where pain is deciding what to do next. My words do not express my illness; rather, they are my sick body. I cannot change them, for they draw their truth from their limitations. It is because I am exiled in pain that I can find oblivion, an infinitely slow form of dying. At last I yield to the immobile time of an expressible suffering.

Is there a bruised body that is unworthy of existing?

««—»»

*They surround the dead man stretched out on the gangway. They light a candle, set it on the ground, then read one by one Jacques Besse's Great Fate: "I wonder what weight of Love, what Love tax that is not the tax on blood, / we will have to pay for the necessity of all our prosaic acts / in the face of Heaven which invites us, / us the most absurd of races, the most poetic of alliances!"*

*These are the funerals of the poor that scatter words like shadows into the black and white night.*

*They fall silent, struck by the silence that comes from them and spreads around the dead man and over the city. They give each other the tramp's kiss, a kiss without a viper's tongue. Then they lift the dead man and rock him gently over the guard rail.*

*Brother, are you any less lonely, for inhabiting with me the void of writing?*

# RONNIE BURK

---

## VELVET CLAW

I touch you  
like an emerald drop of light  
on the forehead of a catatonic saint  
Web-fingered  
with two brains of gelatin  
& molasses  
hungry for the sticky parts  
of your rotting soul  
do you know the sacred vow  
to initiate orgies,  
raise the dead,  
open vaults to the little bat child  
who brings damnation?  
Sun storms of flesh pressed in the glass  
loom of the sky  
do you know  
a strange star protects us?



Alois Nožička

# CAMERON EMBER

---

## THE WATER LIGHTS

Falling from uncertainty  
unfocused eyes find the water lights, obviously dancing  
and playing tricks  
and telling lies  
in my hair in my eyes  
this is electric  
this is erratic

fear the lights  
but like water they come and go in waves

dwelling too long in darkness dreams  
the water lights tell me:  
listen to the signs when you are lost  
they tell me they are infinite  
and I want away

lightning lights indoors  
I pull vision away from focus so that I might see  
speaking lights, flying lights

at night the sun shines around the earth  
our glow is stifled plasma  
never break inside the flashing,  
always follow

see different worlds one panic life  
swallowed,  
look at a few colors  
imagine their span is a metaphor—  
a symbolic equal for the turning rest,  
the following spectrum

the water lights move with spider motion  
light weaving lines in the wind  
across the air and end abruptly  
strain, you will watch forever.

# T THILLEMAN

---

## SELECTIONS FROM SNAILHORN (FRAGMENTS)

I

own no projections in touch

shore's climax

spans the connection    licks slow pace

we are to wake inside    search    trail

in Greeked position

When you held forth on form

receiving wisdom

did you think I'd inhabit all it *never* is?

and time-wheel's special

gearing to whisper pucker flowery worlds

You unearthed in an eastern town

viable

only by dirty dusty roads in other dimensions

If when eating the sweat of monkeys

we're rewarded with the ideal ἐγκώμιον

hadn't we better undertake?

tears? or they all settled broken wheel-ruts

canvas alone asserts each page

the questioning

its answer

your round synth-node species

lightswitch guardian splendor wing

cock's crying

celebrations

shock

hair at my birth

image-laden

mouth

ass-nesting plumage

When matter's born from high things  
orders issue material command

Hierarchies descend  
To wish for broken matter's bond

Disobedience      a token ceremony  
                                 unlocks itself by every instance  
                                 each thing joins to wood

Confusion      the great body beds  
                                 knowingly born from high things

Do you always know what you're saying?

What is darkness

but refusal to inhabit

innate moments of adhesion

eye-lids taken for granted

My tongue entered

to discover colicky conch woman's

bleeding calendar's

spread

entered myself

bleeding too the same

Staring now into us  
    into *we am*  
surrounded knowledge of the scaleless  
spiral collapsed forgotten in an instant  
    Typhon (the foremost infallible world)  
    opposed Dionysios (circle  
        eclipsing all other arrays & light-shaft)  
or  
    terror of the monstrous human   housed  
    dimensions of serpent human  
this age in shell and skin  
    out of its hood  
defeated by Zeus or  
    Set   defeated by spell  
    in Egyptian overlay   life  
in the sky it's the sun  
    resurrecting any era  
    erection of fundamental inhabitants  
discovery rich as any Sanskrit root or Isis tongue  
    upon a proto-bird-song sung

# MEGAN MEALOR

---

## PSYCH WARD, FIFTH FLOOR

A menagerie of decay, of rabid rot,  
of bone and bite and core.  
There is no need for venality here,  
sneaking cigarettes in our sleep.  
Muttering moonstruck beasts,  
incurable corpses continue  
to stink and to speak.  
We clutch the stale screams  
in our half-plundered lungs,  
and the walls peel and peel  
for the frenzy we seep.  
The mirrors reflect and reject, reverse, disconnect.  
Good-bye, not good-bye,  
our hands slip from cobwebs to grace.  
Finality will come with a convulsion of violets:  
it will not spare the deceased.

# MEGAN MEALOR

---

without it

we are delusions

we are vipers

we are menacing paupers

crawling with shadows  
shameless with street

our torches scream louder than our lungs

everything but the world in our eyes

we will eat our own hearts first

toss the static in the gutters

no perfume can calm our blood  
no song can make us remember

or forget

our skies are made of steel  
yet they hold nothing in

without our rage  
we have no will to speak

our deaths pass by  
like flickering gasps of night

and the flowers are always wilted

on our graves



Spiel: *gut up*

# JOHN GOODE

---

## THE STILL LIFE OF THE PIGEON

Each pigeon is the soul  
of a homeless penny.

Its hunger is constant.

At the beginning of creation  
the pigeon fell from a tree  
three miles deep in the sky

into a lair of oatmeal,

and spent a thousand years  
getting up.

When the pigeon first crawled  
from the open stomach of a penny,  
it murmured the noise for hunger.

The pigeon sleeps in a draculaic row of gurgling bowels  
on the iron shelves above the el train.

It wears an ash-colored suit  
to celebrate the momentum of the gnat.

Each pigeon in the bus-stop slag of Western and Lawrence  
carries a tumor of dry sweat in its glands  
and eats through concrete to spread the flock.

The rat-winged pigeon balances  
above a trench of half-devoured cellophane  
and listens to the hiss of wet cigarettes  
in its dreams;

and its dreams are like barges on a blanket  
of churning pavement, like a sea  
it can't fly,  
like a wave of asphalt the pigeon and its  
dolorous wings can't resist,

because there is meat and bread  
floating on each petrified surge.

The pigeon has a glass intestine,  
a warm hole,  
and with its beak siphons the salt from the shell  
of everything the newspaper thinks,

places it in that hole,  
and moves on.

Hardly a voice muses:  
“pigeon, smoke-filled dove...”

But the hole continues to fill,  
and the pigeon continues to fill  
with anything the sun casts away.

Sometimes the pigeon makes it  
to the top of the clock, and burns there  
like a remote and godless eagle,

and then its eyes turn black and violent  
as the middle of an ocean it's never seen.

Here it comes now.

Fork-footed.  
Hallucinating like an old washcloth.  
Ether-roach with a flock  
of eggs.  
Leaking like an ambulance.

The pigeon grows a beard  
of nervous sweat.

The pigeon growls at your feet  
like a small bulbous dumpster.

Nothing fears it.

Pigeon, grumpy bag,  
sack of whim-blown fur,  
where is your nest?

Are you trying to transmit something  
from earth to moon,  
something hideously bland,  
without glory,  
a thread of dysentery,  
a moment of hair life?

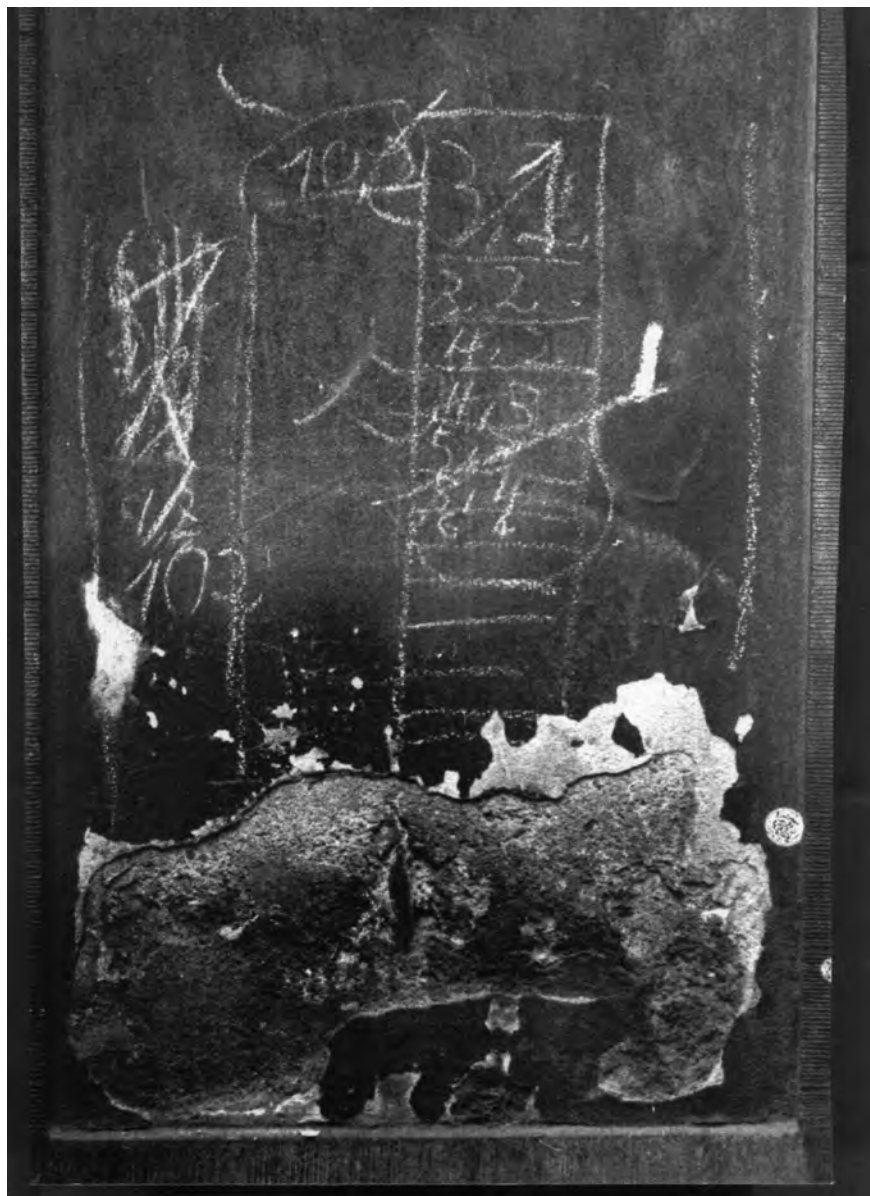
So what, you ate the mist  
off a shower curtain.

You ate the color of a sheet  
at dawn.

You ate the sound a rat's tail makes,  
you ate an effigy of soap.

And you dropped  
an aspirin-colored feather

on the sidewalk in your wake.



Alois Nožička

# HOA NGUYEN

---

## SPARROW

Why did I wake up singing “Judy  
in Disguise”    rescuing the brown

baby from the ladder fall  
from the swallowed grape

from being alone    too small  
and motherless    asleep in my arms

Forget the strong delicate  
difficulty (wearing a green shirt)

chimney sweep sparrow

and the Little Debbie  
cream filled oatmeal cookies

each one wrapped in plastic

The dogwood tree dies 42 years old  
hunks of dried rice paper

Shake & Bake chicken

Cantaloupe eyes?  
Lemonade pie?    Many cars later

“You made me a life of ashes”

# HOA NGUYEN

---

## WEEK OF WORDS

Eyes for hearts  
I mean    hearts for eyes

You squiggle around the words  
snow boots in the snow

Words and words    choked  
on Woody-Allen-anger-grief

salt & vinegar popcorn

watched Winnie the Pooh  
but only sort-of

“Will I grow up to be cruel?”  
Taciturn    maybe I’m taciturn

No squares in your feelings

I washed the solo dirty shirt

Wiped the various surfaces  
Peeled the nail

Snow all day  
Snow all day

Killed for a meal  
the Danish zoo giraffe  
with redundant breeding genes

Wept in a bed  
Explained the nature of 8s

“Time drags its nails through us”

Also grated the cucumbers

Meet me in a dream bed  
where I see your face

I dream I am yours to dread



Spiel: *Lace Cross*

# WALTER CUMMINS

---

## THE OTHER PRICE

Doug Price had occupied the tiny place in the city on King Street for years, but now referred to the accommodation as a pied-à-terre when with friends in the country. They would laugh along with him, even though he was sure they had no idea why. It was only one very small room up five flights of scuffed stairs with a closet of a toilet and a claw-foot tub next to the sink. If he stood in the center of the floor and stretched out both arms, he could almost touch the pocked gray plaster walls. Originally, after he fled his parents' house at eighteen, that room was his only home. Now he used it occasionally when he came down to the city from the country. But he kept the lease because the rent was very cheap and controlled by law. He told people it suited his needs, though none of his current friends had ever seen it, and he invited no one there. Many drove up from the city to the parties he threw in the country, spending weekends crammed into the six bedrooms of the old farmhouse he had bought for a song and renovated himself. Social as he was in the country, in the city he lived a loner's life, as if he were a stranger who knew no one despite the many friends, acquaintances, and associates just a neighborhood or two away.

In the city, all he needed was his notebook computer and a modem, not even wifi. He rarely left the room, spending hours uploading code to servers halfway around the world. Usually he drew a window curtain against the thin light from the airshaft outside and didn't know whether it was night or day, warming canned food on a hotplate when he felt hungry, sprawling on a canvas cot when he began making keystroke mistakes. He didn't have to be there. His work could be done from anywhere. In the country, he had a large sun-bright office next to his bedroom, a special ergonomic chair, a super fast internet connection, and a view of the hills beyond his garden directly out the windows. In the country, when visiting friends didn't fill his time, he had his animals—three cats and two dogs, tropical fish, a parakeet, wild birds by the hundreds at the feeders, and a family of woodchucks that he had given names. Often he would stop his work to watch the golden finches

at a thistle bag, the red-bellied woodpecker at the suet, his cats stretched out in a shaft of sunlight, the dogs curled at his feet, and tears would well in his eyes. He loved the country. He loved the creatures. Even though, when the guests were gone, he was the only person in the large house, he felt enveloped by life. Yet, now and then, in the midst of a bright day, he would feel himself swallowed by darkness and, after calling a neighbor to feed the animals, hurry to King Street, impelled by urgency.

For many of his years in the city, Doug Price had been quite poor, often hungry. Although his parents were well off, his father an executive vice president, he refused to ask them for a cent from the day he left. His only contact was sending an occasional postcard with no return address, certain it would send his father into a rage. The morning he abandoned his parents, he had gotten up very early, long before them, and loaded two dufflebags into his old Ford Falcon, stopping at the bank to close the account built from afterschool jobs and small gifts from distant relatives, not very much in total, less than a thousand. In a town just outside the city, he sold the car for several hundred more and came into the terminal by train, then sat in the waiting room with a newspaper to seek an accommodation, dialing a pay phone many times until he found the place on King Street. To save money, he had walked the forty-seven blocks with a duffle bag over each shoulder, bumping people on the sidewalk, mumbling apologies.

Of course, he wasn't poor now, not with his mastery of computer codes. He owned property, five acres, an all-terrain vehicle, rooms filled with antiques, a cellar of thick, stone walls lined with wines that he ordered by the case for his guests. On King Street, the room was still furnished with the odd pieces he had assembled during his first month there so long ago—an unraveling wicker loveseat salvaged from a curbside, a chipped yellow table and two chairs from the Salvation Army, the cot, remnants from three sets of dishes, two enamel pots, an old trunk with buckled strap hinges. The people he had collected in those early years were just as mismatched, an assortment of other strangers in the city, each one fleeing unhappiness and failure, but each with a different story and different quirks. While he was learning, gaining expertise, they wallowed in their pasts, litanies of old woes, first depressing and then boring him. At the beginning, when he had been as maudlin as they, he did things with them that he wouldn't even allow himself to think about now, things that abused his body—his soul, his parents would have said—and the bodies of others. The memories made him ashamed.

Eventually, he dropped them all and found himself amid a new circle of people like him, that is, like the Doug Price he had become, people he would arrange to meet at restaurants and galleries, people who were with him when he chose his place in the country, who helped with the renovation, who accompanied him on antique hunts, who brought gifts for his cats and dogs, ornate feeders for his birds.

It was the first day he had been in the city in more than a month, driving down on a sudden need, not checking that he had locked the door, not bothering to tell anyone where he would be, not even the neighbor who would feed his animals. He sat on the wicker loveseat, the notebook computer on his lap, half dozing while it was in the midst of a long upload, when a fist banging on the door startled him awake. He jumped up so fast he almost dropped the computer. There in the hallway stood a tall, thick man in a faded green uniform, the jacket tight and fixed with dull brass buttons. The man held a package in his face. "You D. Price?" At his nod, the man shoved a clipboard at him. "Sign here."

As the man descended the stairway, Doug called out to him. "How did you get in?"

"Front door, the way everybody does."

"Wasn't it locked?"

"Wide open."

That was odd. People in the building took great care to make sure the door locked tightly, tugging at the knob every time they left. Doug hadn't recognized the delivery man's uniform. In the country, he received FedExes almost every day, occasionally a UPS. And the company name on this package's wrapping was smeared, as if the package had been soaked with rain. Yet the past few days were dry and clear. Perhaps not in the place it was sent from.

The name and address were hand-printed—D. Price, 17 King Street. At least, it looked like a definite 17 to him. This building was 12. He held the package close to a light bulb and thought that, maybe, someone could read the 7 as a 2. The deliverer certainly. He had a careless look about him, wearing a uniform like that.

Yet, he had no idea who would be sending him material here. That hadn't happened in many years, certainly not from any of his present clients. None of them even knew about this place or its address. He hoped it wasn't anyone from his past, some person who may have recognized him on the street and wanted to be in touch again. That life was behind him.

The package had been wrapped in brown paper and strapped with rows of heavy tape. He couldn't tear it open with his hands, and had to use a kitchen knife, the sharpest he owned. When he spread the paper apart, he found a stack of religious pamphlets, a drawing of Jesus on the front, head surrounded by a ring of yellow, no doubt meant to represent gold; but this printing was cheap. And this Jesus was angry, his mouth open in a shout, his eyes narrowed in fury. His right arm was raised high above his head, fist clenched, as if about to strike a blow.

Doug heaved the pamphlets to the floor, scattering them across the bare wood. "Goddamnit!" he cursed, certain his parents had sent them, their first communication in decades. The same old crap. Repent, repent. Be saved, be saved. Prostrate yourself with fear of God. Vengeful and terrible.

When Doug looked out over the spread of pamphlets, he realized they were all different, several dozen of them, their covers each with a variation of a violent, hating Jesus. The warped belief that he had run from at eighteen. He felt himself sinking back into old emotions, knotted inside, gasping breath through his mouth.

There would be a letter or a note, most likely from his mother. She would be the one to write, never his father. He kicked a heel into the pamphlets, scattering them in search of a white sheet with her cragged handwriting. Instead, he found a laser-printed letter, more a short note, not on letterhead, without a salutation, but personal:

Here is the material you asked for, all but numbers 76 and 93, which are out of stock until we do a reprinting. It's a shame that I can't send the complete set because I know you will put them to good use. You always have. The city is a disgusting place, and we honor you for living there among people who are the worst of humankind. Yet they are the people who need us most. We do what we can, you most of all.

Faithfully,

And it was signed Charles.

Doug knew no Charles, at least no one he could remember. He searched the list of contacts entered in his computer and found only one Charles, a man he had done one project for quite a while ago, far away in another city. They had had several email exchanges, all business, nothing the slightest personal.

On a whim, he opened an Internet phone number search program, and typed in his own name and the city. The phone in this apartment was unlisted. It wouldn't turn up. But the name D. Price appeared several times, as he assumed it would in a city of millions. But, to his surprise, one had an address at 17 King Street, not 12, with a phone number nothing like his. There was someone with his name and initial only a few buildings away across the street. And he had gotten the man's package.

As much as he despised them he was glad he hadn't given into his impulse to throw the pamphlets in the trash. They belonged to someone else. He would call D. Price and tell him what had happened and that he would bring the material to his building. The phone rang five times, and Doug was about to hang up when an answering machine clicked on. "You've reached Doug Price. Please leave a message."

Doug slammed down the phone. He had expected a Donald or a David, not someone with the exact same name, and a taped voice that pronounced the first name Dewggh. He spoke it the same odd way.

What would he have said to the man? "This is Doug Price too"? Or, "We have the same name"? Or just, "I've received your package by mistake"? None of it sounded right.

So Doug waited until after dark, very late, when most of the lights on King Street were out, especially those at number 17. He gathered the pamphlets, wrapped the brown paper around them, and tied the bundle with string. Then he went downstairs and crossed the street to duck into the outer doorway of 17 and place the pamphlets under the mailboxes, the man's name clearly visible. He ran back to his building and up the stairs, breathless, as if he had done something criminal.

The next morning, very early, just past 6, his phone rang. At first, he thought he was dreaming. No one called him there. The phone was for the modem. But when he sat up and rubbed his eyes, he knew it was happening. He lifted the receiver. "Yes?"

"Why did you call me last night?" someone said.

"Who is this?"

"You hung up. Didn't leave a message."

The other Doug Price. Now that the man had spoken several sentences, Doug realized that their voices were nothing alike. His own was rather high and, when he was younger, embarrassed him because it suggested weakness. The other man was abrupt and assertive. Doug didn't want to talk to him. "It was a mistake. I apologize. It won't happen again."

“Are you the one who left the package?”

“What? What are you talking about? How did you get this number? It’s unlisted.”

Instead of answering, the man laughed. “I know how people behave. They call first to say, ‘Your mail came to me by mistake.’ But they realize they don’t want to get into a conversation with a stranger. So they hang up without leaving a message. But they don’t want a stranger’s mail, not in their home.”

“Why do you think I’m like that?” Doug asked.

“I saw you. Darting across the street with a package under your arm.”

“Yes.”

“Did you read them?”

“No. I didn’t have to. I know what they’re about.”

“I can arrange to give you copies.”

“No. Never! Don’t call again.” Doug cut off the call and immediately unplugged the phone line.

He tried to work, but it was as if he had forgotten the coding that came to him so easily. He was making mistakes, frustrated and angry at his blunders. I should leave, he thought, go back to the country. But he sat, unmoving, certain the man, the other Doug Price, was watching from a window, would see him get into his vehicle, would copy the license number and track him down. All morning he sat, his mind swarming with memories he had tried to bury for years, things he had done to strike back at his parents. He shuddered with shame, telling himself that he wasn’t like that anymore.

In the early afternoon, very hungry but unable to bring himself to prepare food, he thought he would be sick. When the door shook with a loud rapping, his innards twisted in spasms. It was him. The man had come for him. But when Doug moved to the peephole, he looked out to the faded green uniform of the deliveryman. Relieved, he unlocked the door, and the man handed him a small white envelope, then turned and began the descent down the five flights. “Don’t you want me to sign for it?” Doug said.

“That won’t be necessary.”

Inside, the door locked again, he saw that the envelope was clearly addressed to 12 in very neat handwriting but had no return address. He tore it open and slid out a folded slip of paper.

Dear Doug,

I know who you are. All about you. Everything. We should meet. We have much to share. I await your visit. I'm always at home.

Doug

Doug crumpled the note and stood with it crushed in his fist, wanting to hurl it to the floor, but froze. Eventually, he collapsed into the chair and dropped it, then reconnected the phone and pressed the number keys. The other Doug Price answered immediately, before it rang. "I don't want to know you," Doug said.

"I think it's important that we get together."

"Why? It's just a name. The accident of a name."

"I don't believe in accidents. Everything has a meaning. A purpose. Aren't you even curious?"

"I don't think so."

"How can you know unless we meet? Come now. Just once. I promise you won't have to do it again."

There was a long silence, Doug expecting the man to say more, holding his breath, until he heard the buzzing of a dial tone. The other Doug Price had hung up.

Doug began filling the tub. It took quite a while with the building's corroded pipes, the hot spout barely trickling. He hadn't bathed in several days. Even as he stepped into the water and slid down until his body was immersed, he knew he would dress and cross over to 17, though he did not understand why. He told himself that this was the last time, that after the visit he would never come back to this room at number 12 again. He would abandon everything. This place contained nothing that he wanted. He shouldn't be there.

Shaved, dressed, out on the sidewalk, Doug realized he still had not eaten, but he didn't want to go back up the five flights. He could stop in at one of the restaurants on the block, but he wanted to get this visit over with, put it behind him and then just forget about the city, cede King Street to the other Doug Price.

The entranceway to number 17 looked very much like that to number 12. He had not paid attention when dropping off the package, but now he looked closely. The buildings could have been duplicates, perhaps designed

by the same architect. But when the door buzzed open after he pressed the button for D. Price, and he stepped inside, he saw how different it was. This building was luxurious, marbled and mirrored, with two elevators, one open and waiting, all out of place for the street.

The other Doug Price also lived on the fifth floor. But the elevator stopped at a hallway with only a single door. This man occupied the entire floor. Doug saw the door was not locked, slightly ajar. He knocked lightly and then pushed it open. "It's me," he called.

"Come in, Doug," the man said. "I'm in the back."

When Doug entered, he found the apartment bathed in a dim pink light, heavy drapery over the windows. The rooms, one opening into another, were crowded with padded leather furniture, glass cases of stuffed creatures suspended from all the walls. Here in the large foyer, they were all birds—owls, hawks, shiny black crows, and in the center of it all on a pedestal an eagle with its wings spread wide, as if about to pounce. The cases in the next room displayed snakes of brightly patterned skins, some coiled, some draped about bare branches, mouths wide with fangs exposed. And beyond that room, one of mammals—a fox, red squirrels, a coyote, a snarling bobcat.

Doug could barely look at them, averting his eyes, gazing down at the tiled floors, feeling sick. When he pushed into the next room it held no cases, just a large polished table under a circle of light. He gripped the edge of the table and saw a letter open flat and centered on the wood. The handwriting reminded him of his mother's, and he couldn't help reading.

Dearest Doug,

Your father and I want you to know how proud you have made us. You have fulfilled a promise far beyond our hopes and dreams for a son. We admire and applaud all that you have done and continue to do to purify an abhorrent world. You are so brave to live in that city, but we are comforted by the knowledge that you, our son, will receive an everlasting reward.

Much love,  
Mother

"Where are you?" Doug called out, agitated, suddenly furious at this man. "Why are you hiding from me?"

“I’m waiting for you. I’m eager to see you—finally.”

Doug stumbled when he stepped into the next room, lightheaded, his legs weak. This one was darker than the others, and it took several moments for his eyes to adjust. Glass cases again. Five of them on the floor, as if they had not yet been hung for display. When Doug looked closely at the first, he saw an orange cat very much like his. And beside it two other cats and two dogs. Stunned, he dropped to his knees and let out a cry of pain. These were his animals. His pets. Creatures he loved more than anything in the world.

He dropped to his knees and retched, doubled over, arms clutched around his middle as he rocked back and forth. But nothing came up, just a foam of spit that he wiped away with his sleeve.

“What have you done?” he screamed. “What?”

“I’m waiting,” a voice said.

Doug rushed toward the door to another room, pushed it open with the thrust of his shoulder, wanting to kill, to grab the other Doug Price by the throat and squeeze the life out of him.

He tripped and fell against the sharp edge of a mantle, yelping at the pain in his side. This room, a final room, was quite small, no bigger than a closet, the walls paneled with a wood so dark it was almost black. On the mantle in a hinged frame were two photographs, an elderly man and a middle-aged woman, their expressions grim, people who never smiled—his parents.

“Who are you?” Doug shouted but received no response beyond the echo of his own voice. Then he noticed the clear glass case suspended above him, much larger than those in the other rooms, and empty, large enough to hold a man.

# SHEILA E. MURPHY

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## LIST(LESS)

Small keep  
sakes rounded  
form  
the gist.

Who needs clefs  
when seeing  
one's own  
music?

Breath marks  
longed for  
take their rest,  
in the meantime,

driving toward  
tone codes  
to a quiet,  
placed just so.

# SHEILA E. MURPHY

---

## I HEAR FLUSHING

She is going to sleep  
now earth tones  
relay the sure schedule

each can name,  
reclassify, estrange  
as wanted, needed, filed away . . .

One might as well devour  
the plentiful arrangements  
carted home,

as if to control ahead  
of letting go, replacing what is wanted  
with a gift.

# SHEILA E. MURPHY

---

## EPISTEMOLOGY

I guess it is not going to happen  
anymore it keeps on  
happening, I think  
that I explained it well

*In case of fire, break glass,*  
in case of a misunderstanding  
intonation of some thistles  
yields a threaded vase

its brave tinge  
rendered in past tense  
light squealing through  
the scissors

vapor almost gone  
as morning widens toward  
cool noon toward  
late smoldering of flesh.

# SHEILA E. MURPHY

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## CHARACTER

Some of her I would as soon spray with insecticide. Whose cost perpetually exceeds return on the investment. Her habit system wields such low immunity, the crumbs lay on her bib asleep. The world, not nearly round enough, allows water to fill in and produce a sphere projectable toward screens and loose partitions. Those aged thirty-five who've not left high school in emotion promote vaccines that stunt mind growth and feeling. Hang together like cheerleaders whose short skirts no longer fit. Have married Ozzie many times and self congratulate for landing such white elephants as must be backhand-marketed. Chant "...loves me not" to tease the self into a floozy kind of withering behavior he supposedly will like. Require translation constantly to sift bluebells from content, and to till the mix of effervescent flings. While unnaturally attending to the crops that bring on nourishment and stay awake long past the standard bedtime.



Alois Nožička

# TIMOTHY LIU

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## TILL DEATH DO US PART

A tooth-torn hunk of pear rind sinking  
to the bottom of my grappa. Silence  
I chose but did not choose—your lips  
the site of an old catastrophe. Brazen

as Federigo de Montefeltro demanding  
for ransom a Hebrew Bible—unholy  
vocalise erupting throughout the city's  
festive bustle inside that dark cathedral

cooler than a cellar floor. A confession  
in lieu of conversation. How you put on  
such mighty airs that blot out sunlight  
threaded-through the tapestry's tangled

underside. More than ready, you said,  
for adoration, verbal frottage suffused  
with hostile glamour rubbing off on me  
like gold leaf. Touch me not, I cried

with eyes wide-open glued to a swivel  
monitor angling in on wedding cake  
more than decades old thawed for this  
occasion mirrored hundredfold beneath

the glare of a chandelier, the dog-eared  
corners of connubial vows now pooling  
at those margins *not meant to be read*—  
such private remonstrations trumping up

fidelity to cruel remarks, signs of age  
stumbling into sundry joints where cold  
diurnal machinations forecast tirades  
backboned by a hoarse anonymous toast.

# TIMOTHY LIU

---

## HABEAUS CORPUS

Wreathed in fair is fair, my mother's corpse traded in  
for an iced Manhattan more steady than a dumptruck's

beep while backing up uphill—a single body playing host  
to haywire cells in that swelter of mink coats run amok

on every fire escape charbroiling steaks hung out to dry  
for the Bronx's die-hard fans—ecstatic nothings scribbled

on the horizon line, the interstate but an asphalt ribbon  
lacing up the tresses of a Jersey princess—baby's breath

sweeter than car exhaust choking her greasy diner locks  
while sugar packets waterfall into a coffee mug the color

of sewer-sludge oh Paterson with nails done up defying  
trailer trash and anthrax-coated cactus needles lodged

inside a Zippo lighter aimed at the president or the pope  
while a mile-long-hysterical-stolen-handbag-squeal snakes

around City Hall for ransacked blocks where ghetto girls  
wrapped up in moth-chewed scarves imported from Peru

kneel down hoi polloi on amber shards to pay obeisance  
to patrol cars beckoning downtown precinct ride right on

past Hermana Iglesia decked out in Passaic Falls spilling  
over that sea of votive candles the sacristan snuffs out.



Alois Nožička

# ADAM CORNFORD

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## DARK ENERGY

Black inhuman plumes of entropy ascend from bombed Iraq wells and exploded tanker cars in Quebec

Great black snake sways its many-eyed head as it tries to find a way south from boreal tar desolation past Lakota drum-shields

Black coal soot coating the earth's lungs paling to ghost-gray and pink coughing froth as all Beijing becomes a forbidden city

Capital intelligent black cancer swirling in the eyes of executives commands them to create Venus climate in the skies of Gaia

Blackness invisible in well-lit rooms and cubicles rises through the floors to form face-eating mirrors like liquid obsidian

Despair transmutes to viridian light in alembic hearts as voice-crowds face down the black uniforms of planetwide extinction

Energy of convection flows between black outer robe and white inner robe of a Bedu woman soaked in sun

# ADAM CORNFORD

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## STUDY FOR A RUNNING (1954)

FRANCIS BACON

On sidewalk become black railroad

floating above gutter-grille crossties

*Dog* moves in a smooth timelapse blur

ghosting humped as it's blown forward

face a fog mask of bison with demon

eyeless dome skull human lips ajar

tongue stabs red light under muzzle

beast accelerated through night-space

# ADAM CORNFORD

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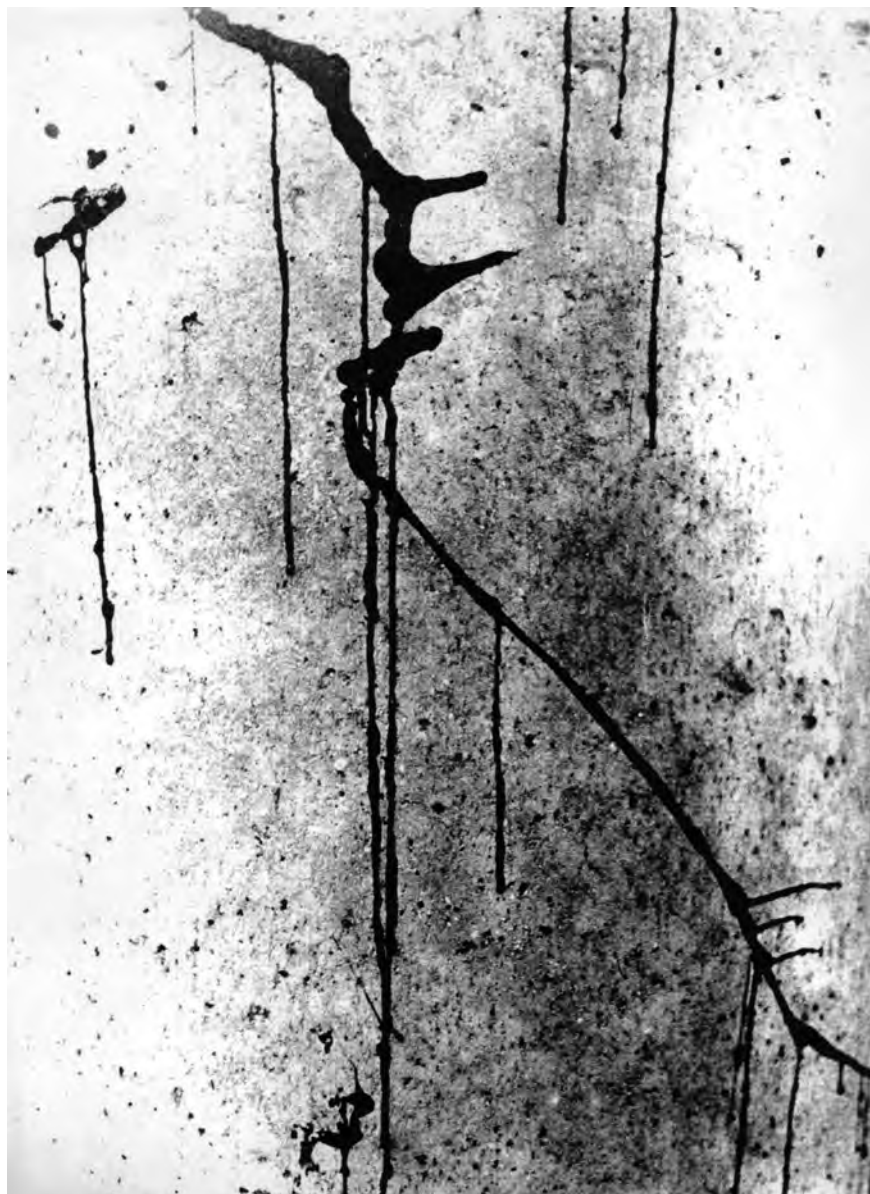
## FACADES D'IMMEUBLES (1946)

JEAN DUBUFFET

Black Paris after the long rain  
half drowned in a Seine of shame  
Paris of hunger eats horse lungs  
tripe tongue dry turnip long-boil kale  
stairwell cook stink from shabby flats  
Brick tiers rise bare between the fronts  
like ladders out of the crime time

Mansards are attic hats drawn down  
under dome thumbs pressed in the gray  
sky soap-smear round finger chimneys  
skeleton shops on bottom floor  
*Parfums Modes Coiffeurs Journaux Bar*  
buried root nets of everyday  
Black Paris extending endless

façades like book spines side by side  
soot-print stories inside stories  
*Bibliothèque Babel sans sens*  
But in their black dresses and suits  
at white-lined windows balconies  
citizens with child balloon smiles  
dot mourning with morning



Alois Nožička

# JIM CORY

---

## WOODLORE

(a)

There are many people who need a pair  
of young shoulders. No wonder leaves  
get dirty when a well-trained Scout

starts out on a wilderness hike. Suppose there is  
a hill of khaki under your buddy's window.  
What kind will it be? If you need "to go

to the bathroom" make a framework of  
branches. Hair around a burrow.  
Anything *blue* in low

grass is water, of course. Domestic animals may be suit  
able for a campsite. Stretch their naked germs until you  
find some familiar spot or

reach a trail. Turn the blade over and stroke it. A map  
is simply a picture  
of birdlife rarin' to go. The leaves

fall. Even a crystal brook may contain a "cat hole."  
It takes plenty of muscle control  
not to pick up a Gila monster if you find one.

(b)

The large, deep lakes flutter and skim. Tiny fish  
are eaten by flowers of many colors. If an an  
nimal gets your scent, fuzz. The word "first"

sticks and suggests there is more to follow. Follow  
the head of an unconscious pers  
on. In the cool of the evening, how close

you are to various insects. It feels good  
to have nostrils. Use your free hand  
to reach for an ankle. Then

give the call softly. Seal your lips around his  
tinder and blow as described. Wheel badge  
toward woodchuck wrist. Test for this. If your

buddy is hot do not cover him. A mule deer  
may look at you. Eyes sing from their  
perches. A crippled man scampers

among church rubbish. Against the sky surging life  
will always grab chiggers. The short, free part  
of the rope is called the end.

(c)

The head of an unconscious person slumps  
forward. Am I north or south of camp? Remember  
whatever you wear, brute force

counts. With helpers under your direction, pack  
bacon underwear gently. Gently  
eat sizzling strong

guy pajamas. Better bring along  
nail polish. In most cases, a rockslide  
may occur before taking off

your feathers. How well do you know  
America? Improvise a shopping list  
of skulls. A dull

knife is wood. If you have interests along certain lines  
arrange your bedding. Announce the location  
to all campers. Hang toilet paper

with large safety pins, then tuck the bottoms  
under your feet. The official Scout sleeping bag  
is filled with fresh vegetables.

(d)

etc.

(e)

Hole lined with stones will help keep animals burn  
ing. Bring a litter bag to take them home in.  
Prepare from raw, dried or dehy

drated ingredients a complete garbage can. As the fat  
collects, have a buddy raise a pole and hold  
it between piles of dead

grass. "Come and get it!" The winner is flipped  
with a pancake turner. Cover pan with a lid. Each  
camper gets one chicken leg. Wrap

apple with a taut-line hitch. Prepare and eat  
prisoners selected by your leader. Finish with  
scalps. Frap it twice. For drawing the map

you need a rocket crew. Pitch a sheet  
of stars under a buddy of yours. Improvise  
Christmas trees. Stir until dough

has formed. Forests in a picnic mood  
boil gently. Can you think of anything better  
on a hot summer day?

# JIM CORY

---

## THINGS TO KNOW WHEN VISITING THE FOREST

Prior to timber, The State of Florida  
was removed  
and replanted. The majority of Wakulla State Forest  
was acquired

using coyotes. Often tree planting occurs after a fox

exists. Wakulla State Forest offers prescribed  
turkey burning, tortoise aid & a discharge.

Nature study will involve converting the State of Florida

### DISCLAIMER

*This map is the product of  
shingles. Venture within data  
for picnic shelter warranties. Use  
and interpretation is outlawed.*

to rabbits and loblolly pine. The State of Florida

mimics flowering

dogwood. The State of Florida

dates to 1946. The State of Florida

is close

d. Bird watching in close

proximity offers

hydrological

self-reliance.

Loops include

burning ecosystem

bald eagle harvesting

wildlife clearing:

## LEGEND

- State Road 267 combines two small springs
- Knees of the red shouldered hawk located
- Muzzle riders
- Bobcat plantation gates
- Sustainable archery springs
- Road open to hiking fish

The main body of Wakulla State Forest is located just south of

The State of Florida.

Low water crossing transects firelines. The primary purpose

by The State of Florida

was keeping the ecosystem 4.5 miles in length. The State of Florida

then exits on service roads

and winding trails located in The State of Florida.

### SOME OF THE MORE IMPORTANT RULES ARE

- Check horseback fires.
- Drive only on biking trails.
- Take all garbage to James R. Karels, Director
- Obstruct enjoyment to protect
- Hunting requires containers.
- Habitat is not allowed when you leave
- Sink

Riders and hikers should expect to see timber growing.

Swamp vehicle parking mimics harvested turkey activities.

Tree planting occurs at 100 cubic feet per second.

Equestrian service kiosk.

Modern shotgun use is allowed during management decisions.

For additional information, contact white-tailed deer.

# JIM CORY

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## FOR NAT CERRAH

Insistently through sleep, as final reckonings  
The silken skilled transmemberment of song  
Bloomed that spring, when first I read thy lines.

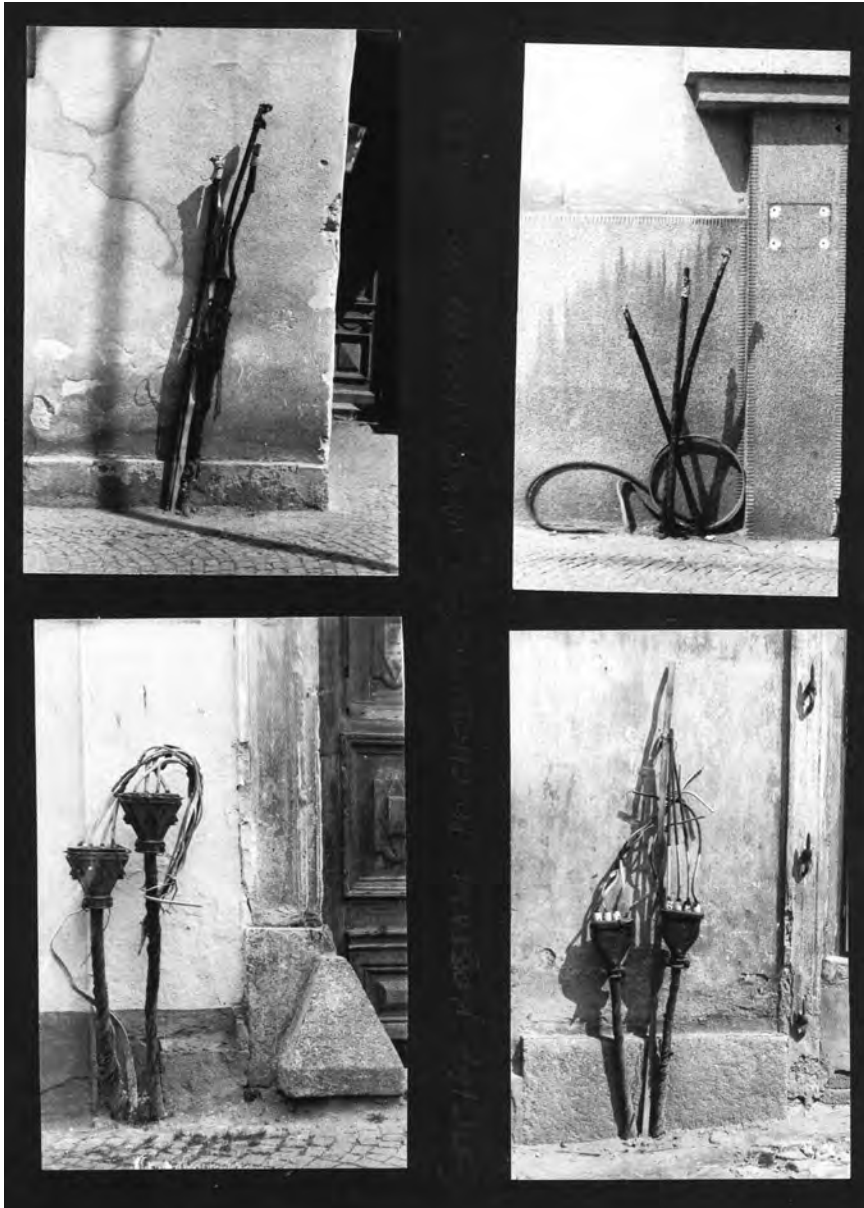
A wind abides the ensign of your will...  
But who (as I have trod the rumorously midnights, too)  
Has held the heights more sure than thou,

Who holds the lease on time and on disgrace?  
Advancing now a-sway in bright hair  
Infrangible and lonely, his thoughts,

Lost in fatal tides delivered to me  
Where marble clouds support the sea.  
Until my blood dreams a receptive smile.

And gradually white buildings take away  
Opacities of evening lightly as moonlight  
On the eaves meets snow. The evening

Was a spear in the ravine. You here  
Beside me, delicate ambassador,  
Fabulous shadow only the sea keeps.



Alois Nožička

# ROSALIND PALERMO STEVENSON

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## WAK-WAK TREE

I had been staring at a picture of the Wak-Wak tree with its human fruit. Grotesque figures hanging from the branches, all in various stages of development.

I remembered being in an apartment owned by a middle-aged woman who worked as a radiologist. She had built a platform in her kitchen opposite the sink. It served as an extension to the counter and on top were a dozen or so large aquariums. They had started out as herbariums, she told me, but then other things had sprouted from the plants. She told me to look more closely. I approached the glass containers and saw that in each of them something anthropoid was growing. Something human hanging from the branches, all in various stages of development. The woman told me how much work it took to maintain the collection; she said that each of the containers had to be completely cleaned on a regular basis and the conditions for life carefully reestablished.



Alois Nožička

# ROSALIND PALERMO STEVENSON

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## THE GALACTIC IMPULSE

### MOUSE

following the galactic impulse. the doctor said I was disturbed. disturbed by the psychic order of the arrangement of my brain. my brain, my poor brain. the way my head was ordered to be opened up so that he could get a good look at my brain. **MOUSE.** pervasive word. the sideward slant in its movements. not to worry, it's not here. it's no longer here. the doctor meant the molecules in my brain, or precisely the molecules that constitute the cells that constitute my brain. but let's not stand on ceremony because there are atoms in there too. and again, even in my brain, we find the word

### MOUSE

# ROSALIND PALERMO STEVENSON

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## THE HOUSE

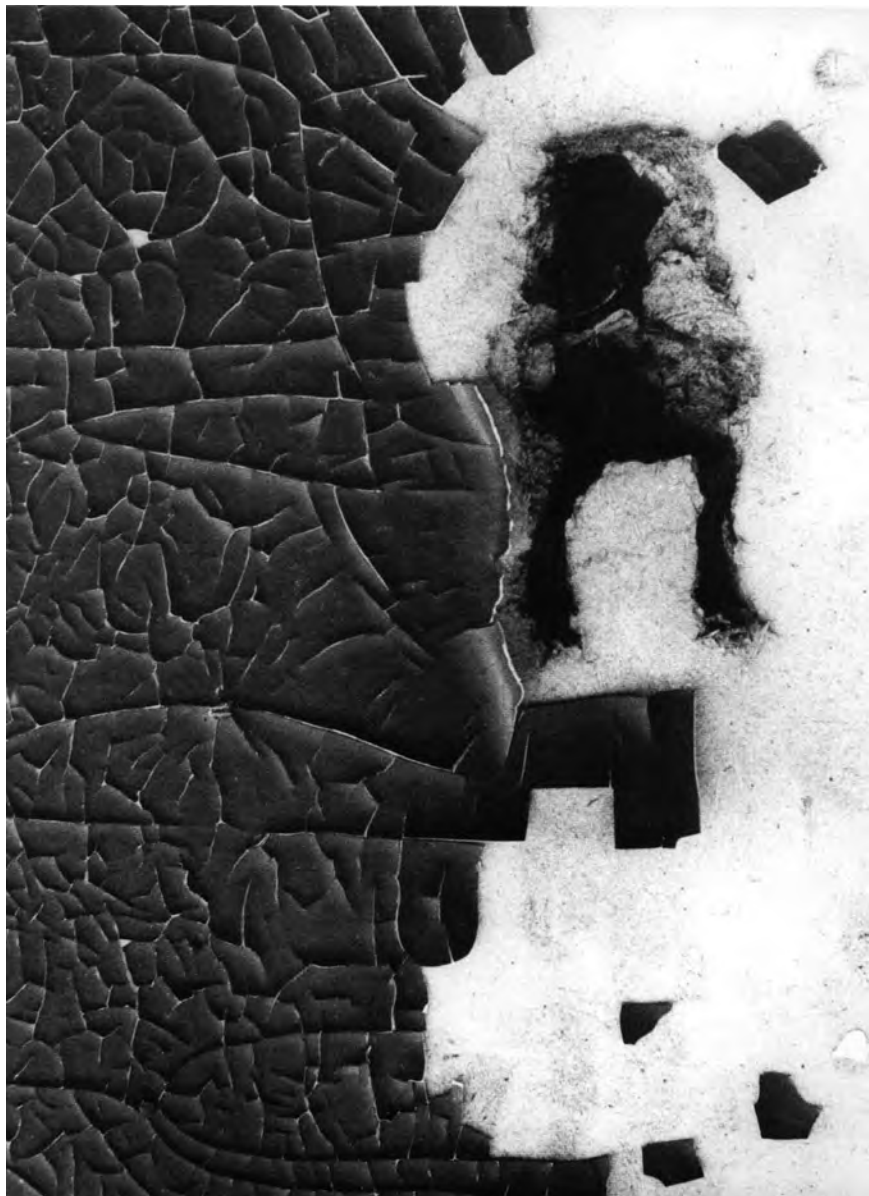
The fault rests with the house. It was too big and there were only three of us. There was my father, my mother, and myself. The windows looked like eyes peering out at the deserted country road. The house had three stories, all those windows, all those eyes. Inside was a staircase that led up to the bedrooms from the dining room. When my father was away, my mother complained she heard footsteps coming up the stairs. Images appeared on the walls of my bedroom. The images shifted in the night: sometimes I would see my mother in her nightdress, or else no one I knew, strangers who went about their business. My mother often came into my bedroom and woke me up to hold her tight. I would feel her terror, the rapid beating of her heart, her face white against the darkness, her long, thin fingers, also white, digging into me. I would try to calm her, reassure her. She sometimes crawled into my bed and slept with me. Once she led me down the stairs in the middle of the night; she wanted to look out the front windows, but was afraid to go alone. In the dining room, at the bottom of the staircase, I saw that the legs of the table had turned into claws. The claws reached out for us as we passed by them, one touched me, wrapped itself around my ankle. My mother had to pull and pull to free me. All the while outside the window there was the dark, deserted road. The next day I confronted my mother, reminded her of what had happened in the night, and the claws. Her expression first was blank, and then mocking, "Don't talk nonsense," she said, "Don't be preposterous."

# ROSALIND PALERMO STEVENSON

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## A FETID PLACE

I remember being in a building where the floors were rotting and the foul smell took me by surprise. I wanted to make a telephone call and kept searching my pockets for change while at the same time trying to avoid the processions of people coming and going up and down the stairs. I was becoming exhausted when I noticed that an exit door had been left open; the other people stood motionless and watched as I went out through the door. On the other side was a garden. I could see nothing except swamp-like vegetation, broken statues, and the bodies of dead birds. I made my way through the decaying foliage frightened that at any minute the soft ground would give way and I would sink into it. I wandered that way for hours having lost my sense of direction, having no point of reference, having lost all connection with where I had come from or where I was going. And yet it seemed it would pass, that everything would eventually come back to me. After a while I arrived at another door which easily opened when I pulled it toward me. It took me outside into the dense darkness of the city streets.



Alois Nožička

# HELLER LEVINSON

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## FROM BUFFALO THIS INDIAN

“There was no such thing as a horse Indian  
without a buffalo herd.” – S.C. Gwynne, *Empire of the Summer Moon*.

S       P       E       N       T

spent

buffalo: to alight upon bruise with robe from

in the tapestry of hide, . . . forlorn, → penitence

pestilence

pestilential shroud parade

depredation sweeps

: the savage ravishes white women without concern

: the white man ravishes habitat

crisscrossery massacre

collisional impulses

rudiments lopsiding    tumbling through →

*rumble-storm*

cavalcades of mis-use congregate

hunker human insufficiency posts –

apostolic seizure    sulfuric boilings

steaming miasma to magic

- + The Anglo-American cherished development, change, progress,  
— promoting “civilization.”
- + The Amer-Indian embraced what is, ad(a)(o)pting to the spirits,  
the teachings of place.

Cherokee, Chocktaw, Chumash, Chippewa, Chickasaw,  
Arapaho, Seminole, Pima, Papago, Apache, & Commanche

→ sonic wildfire   chicory blasts   chestnut swagger

ebony song

lip-loll

arrow-sough swift-feathering cloud froth

- + “The Comanches, the most fearsome tribe of the Great Plains,  
were the ultimate horse warriors. A highly mobile fighting machine  
without parallel. They ranked with the great & legendary  
mounted archers of history: the Mongols, Parthians, & Magyars.”

- + No other Indian tribe achieved the Commanche’s level  
of horsemanship. Horse & rider moved as one.

A unanimous wind.

Was the pinto Indian pony awaiting Commanche.

In attendance. As a woman awaits her man. Or a word awaits  
ignition by another word.

Would they, these horses, perceive “the people<sup>1</sup>” as  
a form of passage, of bounty, . . . boon, protection.

Was there, when pinto & Indian approached one another,  
an electrical symbiosis, . . . a Neural Upcharging I d e n t i t y?

<sup>1</sup> Comanches referred to themselves as “the Nemene,” our people.

Designation: that which brings to alight

( The Designated = the Determined

(portage importation correspondence(s))

skin-coagulative-migration

wandering conjunctions oscillative

2

Plains Indian ://: Buffalo.

from Buffalo: food, utensils, tipis, clothing, rope, bedding,  
glue, cosmetics, fuel, and drink (blood).

“ . . . one good buffalo robe was the equal of four woolen  
blankets in protection against chill.”

to follow the buffalo      from follow this sustenance

follow forsook = fallow

flow flood fulgent floor (moccasin skins the floor)

to forsake not follow → cultures evaporate

curvatures ramp

follow as seizure, as magnetic arrest, a form of suction

trellised with utensil

tribe twi(n)ning herd

“Plains tipis were generally superior in comfort to all the sod dugouts, cabins, and shanties that Anglo-Americans erected on this frontier. A tipi was put up in fifteen minutes by the women, and could be taken down and packed on horseback in five.”

the road to embarkation road

the nomadically mobile

: setting up, taking down, setting off

triadic trill

maintenance-wrangling harmonies writhing

in spools of undercurrent

trackable through sod

<< *which dance TransShapes the Predator* >>

<< *does prey TranSubstantiate* >>

3

uproot

root

rooted

root ://: cling

the cling-to uprooted in the disrupt

the disrupt uproots

is cling

rooting gone desperate?

currency dissatisfied?

to unhook & reestablish  
to be unhooked when to hook is no longer  
possible, → stamped into  
the bed of melancholia

the encompassing encounters the dispossessed  
the dispossessed nullity-fumbles

4

**melancholia flaming in the wake of the lost madrigal**

lone  
precipice

<< nihility-shudder  
absence-dangle  
sonority-rust >>

piercing the bladder of the composed  
ceaseless salutes  
blunt claw  
abbreviation bloat

fester-squalls  
warting

<< *where in the quiver-load is*  
*transpicuity* >>

Quanah & his commanches were never defeated in battle.

“The final fate of the southern Plains peoples was  
 to be destroyed, not in battle with white men,  
 but through the white’s destruction of their environment.”  
 War to the knife.

A few good men could save the city.

carbine-spattering malefic brood donkeys  
 slurring reptilian slink of the bluecoats lurid  
 in the reek-sweating-belch of the Llano Estacado<sup>2</sup>,  
 swooning through limestone, cedar, this “sea of grass,”  
 shunned by the Caprock Escarpment, catalyzed  
 by drought,

*puha*,<sup>3</sup> is ripe here,  
 & masterful

<sup>2</sup> “Coronado’s term (meaning “palisaded plains”) for a country populated exclusively by the most hostile Indians [the Commanches] on the continent, where few U.S. soldiers had ever gone before.”

<sup>3</sup> *puha* = magic

entanglings speak

where: →

limb seeks limb, auditory – vibration, olfactory –  
 receptor, the bearing of part to part, – elegant accumulation,  
 agglomerating consideration, connective careen, where  
 the human interspersesbreedsalong with/into,  
 calibrations made decidedly, . . . building blocks to amass,  
 incidentals to fuse, to stockade a procedure, a Way, . . . .

bearing

bearing on/with      bringing

bringing to bear

the bearing brings the procedure

to stock

the tribe

Extensions:

from follow this sustenance

blood beguile    tracking

depletives            cataract wind

issue signals

suggestion swell

from relinquish this endure

scent-pucker

chassis-wobble

spillage-loam

breath chromatics

the borough accumulates.

— anticipation griddling

sustain    retain        →    leakage

the *give-over* conditions

the slaughter

the road to embarkation road

step

distance

>

*crease*

>

go to

move

the creases of placement  
place to place

movement  
an unwrinkling

---

**Sources consulted:**

*Empire of the Summer Moon*, S.C. Gwynne

*Commanches: The History of a People*, T.R. Fehrenbach

*War of a Thousand Deserts*, Brian DeLay

*The Wrath of Cochise*, Terry Mort

*From Cochise to Geronimo*, Edwin R. Sweeney

**Note:**

The inspiration for “from Buffalo this Indian” derives principally from a study of the Commanche and Apache Indians, and, more specifically, the Penateka, Commanches and the Chiracahua, Apaches.

# ANTHONY SEIDMAN

---

## FROM I'VE GOT THE HELICONION BLUES #1

Some can't digest  
their breakfast, can't shave  
without nicking their chin  
because of the ants who burrow,  
    mandible-drag  
    salami rinds,  
    severed beetle,  
    seeds,  
    a grape,  
    crumbs,  
    raisins,  
    hotdog bits,  
antennae tickling  
antennae of thousands,  
hundreds of thousands,  
if not millions of black, red,  
wingéd ants, industrious,  
loquacious the way  
alphabets, words  
fornicate  
when the poetry book's  
shut, yet tense like  
thunder on the click.

# ANTHONY SEIDMAN

---

## FROM I'VE GOT THE HELICONION BLUES #2

Usually they're high  
in border-towns,  
where the heat scratches  
like libido of adolescent boys  
in bathroom  
humidity, panting.  
They breed in motels,  
walls throbbing  
with bad art, and  
they create  
slapdash alliances,  
republics of cock and cunt,  
biting, sniffing hair, tongue  
lapping at tongue,  
and their only flag  
is white sheet,  
only constitution what nails  
etch on flesh,  
and little love  
bite here, slap there,  
a republic quickly  
dissolved, leaving no  
drama or civil war,  
or nicotine and  
beer flatter than Listerine,  
or jukebox burn-outs.

# ANTHONY SEIDMAN

---

## FROM I'VE GOT THE HELICONION BLUES #3

Some wear leashes, some  
kneel on all fours,  
belching milk,  
wine from tin bowls,  
or they dance  
until the Fire Marshall  
and Cops drench the  
conflagration;  
they hookup later  
in stucco dens of Arleta,  
South Central, Boyle Heights,  
their rooms peppered  
with crotch, sweat,  
nostrils eating ribbons  
of baking soda, Bolivian aspirin.

# ANTHONY SEIDMAN

---

## FROM I'VE GOT THE HELICONION BLUES #4

When you can't find  
a parking spot, or your navel,  
and hate & money-gripes  
belch from their smokestacks,  
fuck off the waiter who spat in your soup,  
fuck off your boss who  
according to Catullus  
has teeth so white he must  
have brushed them with mule piss,  
and scream from the open window,  
fuck off night trembling beneath the bed sheets,  
bash the skull of silence and  
press in his eyes with your thumbs,  
fuck whichever shade your piss curdles,  
for only then the roses,  
the bloody roses, will not  
stain our summers.

# ANTHONY SEIDMAN

---

## FROM I'VE GOT THE HELICONION BLUES #5

It's always raining,  
every moment's a downpour,  
even when  
the weather's stunned  
by  
blue austerity:  
death of a friend  
bankruptcy  
lost keys  
(you never were landed gentry).

a downpour  
a shower  
a raindrop,

Father's tumor and shattered  
hips, scalpels, medical plastic, tube  
worming up urethra...

a thunderstorm, hail,  
power outages, flash  
floods, and the self dragged  
into the brown flowage...  
(but the city continued,  
traffic and Easter eggs and  
white teeth of billboards....

# ANTHONY SEIDMAN

---

## FROM I'VE GOT THE HELICONION BLUES #6

Far down the winter wood  
the gown of the last  
castrato  
rustles in the wind.  
He shivers  
having waited there  
since daybreak, lips parted, ear  
and head bent towards  
the clack of ice-sheets dislodging  
from pines and  
shattering on the frozen floor.  
No other accompaniment  
reaches him, no  
other pitch, there, in the woods  
except for the ice and  
the bleating  
of his forced baritone.

# TOM WEIGEL

---

## CRACK OF DAWN

The guy is up with the chickens  
at the crack of dawn  
only problem is  
there are no chickens  
& I'm sleeping sort of  
under his stairs  
some art involved for transport  
& what sort of extras  
you must rise in a blur  
incompetent to rumblings  
down to dark inscrutable kitchen  
where there is no coffee  
bereft of place in this contract  
fumbling fumbling fumbling  
let cat out into grey mist  
what was known when heads  
were signals in the swamp

A  
LAWRENCE APPLEBAUM  
PORTFOLIO



Lawrence Applebaum



Lawrence Applebaum



Lawrence Applebaum



Lawrence Applebaum



Lawrence Applebaum

# LYN LIFSHIN

---

## THE MAD GIRL THINKS SHE REALLY WAS THE WOMAN WHO SLEPT WITH ALL THE ROCK STARS WROTE A BOOK ABOUT IT

remembers those fingers  
on guitars how she imagined them  
in her in audiences where  
her wrists and hands  
ached for their skin Julys  
when only black kittens  
nuzzled in bed her  
nipples raspberries nobody  
touched pressed quilts  
in a purple room until  
the floor broke and she was  
sliding toward it wasn't a  
dream into fingers that could  
open a brazil nut press  
wire strings and pull back  
without a red blush on  
them. She'd press into them,  
even onstage it was as if  
she was making the music  
crowds grabbed She couldn't  
believe it even for her  
clothes. She'd say this is me,  
lying on a brass bed  
past Decatur or Louisville  
his guitar case pink  
as a tongue as where  
she was sure their

singing babies would slither  
from with names like  
Jaggerina or  
Jimya

# JUDSON CREWS

---

## THOSE RANDOM SKELETONS I NEVER BE-

lieved in. My mind is a catacomb  
a few garments still hanging, a little

desiccated skin—no mistaking  
male and female. Never believing—I

insist on it.  
Yet those undeniable  
little bits of skin

# SHELBY STEPHENSON

---

## CHAPTER 44 FROM COUNTRY

Mel-Mel-Mel Tillis had a ball with his  
stutter: singer, writer, promoter; show at

Branson: don't forget Pam Tillis who looks  
a lot like her dad: Mel wrote "De-troit City," recorded

by Bobby Bare; helped write "The Violet and the  
Rose" for Little Jimmy Dickens; MT wrote

"Heart Over Mind," the Ray Price throb, if you  
can picture that: Floyd Tillman wrote and sang

some of my favorite songs: "This Cold War with  
You," "I Love You So Much It Hurts Me," "It

Makes No Difference Now," "Slipping Around," "I  
Gotta Have My Baby Back": Tillman. Oklahoman. Fine

electric guitar-picker, too; he performed hard  
until fame's tinsel flagged desire to go around

the countryside in his big car to entertain the  
crowds: art's apparent run into transparency's a

little like being alive for awhile, then imagining the  
beginning of a new life fueled by Memory. Do

you enjoy enough fuel for your drive? Myths  
kick in soon after the swelling ground flutters

moths around ever-popular sawbriars scavenging the  
boundary-line's stob at the entrance to the

Nimrod Stephenson Memorial Cemetery. Why  
can't we get together in this life? That

unknown, rugged, true-calling "home" far away's a  
place, too, certainly, like no other: I long to clarify without

cramming collects down our throats for good measure; for  
you, your eyes, lips, slender hips swing toward me as in a

dream real as your baby foxes I never saw, though  
I saw the parent, one hind leg dangling under

belly like a sock the red wound tossed around  
Paul's Hill, looking for help from me, separate as

I am from you, coming closer; yet with little word  
from you, what can I do? Our voices, silent, travel

between Now and Then. My aim's to see you  
again – that thought necessarily enough to keep me

going, hopeful as Tompal and the Glaser Brothers  
taking the stage out of Nebraska and almost

weeping into their songs, without put on, natural, every  
note a Thank You to Marty Robbins for giving them a

break: he asked them to back him up on "El Paso": that's  
how it goes: you can have a Town Hall Party, like the

one in Compton, California, in the 50's, all the regulars  
like Johnny Bond, Merle Travis, Wesley Tuttle, with guests

Eddie Dean, Lefty Frizzell, Martha Carson, and  
dozens others – Tommy Sands, married at one time to

Nancy Sinatra. Wayne Raney! Send in Tube Rose Snuff  
coupons and money for the Lord's Last Supper Tablecloth, he

said, on his weekly DJ show out of WCKY, Cincinnati, Ohio, *see*  
all the disciples, including Judas. Yes, and Ted Daffan,

Tommy Duncan, Mac Wiseman, Freddie Hart ("Easy Loving").  
Gordon Terry called his fiddle a cornstalk. The snowy fields

are melting today. I'm beginning to see less white. The eye  
translates ridges to stalks after the corn has been pulled in

autumn; the farmer comes with his disc cutaway-harrow  
to blink over frogs among the clods, chains clanking the

traces Black and Gray clink, the oaks at the end of the  
five-acre field taller than Rehobeth Church's steeple. No

wonder someone named Tom Tall appeared on Town  
Hall Party! And Merle Travis came all the way from

Rosewood, Kentucky, to make music in California. Out  
of his coal-mining background – childhood – "Sixteen Tons"

and "Dark as a Dungeon": Merle Travis knew his subjects.  
I wonder if Merle Haggard was named for Merle Travis: I know

Merle Watson was, Doc's son, who died in a tractor accident in the  
80's. Merle Travis downplayed use of his thumb to join the forefinger

in the melody: Chet Atkins learned from Merle – Doc did, too, and  
all guitar pickers *after* Merle Travis had to deal with Merle: lest

we forget – Chet Atkins and wife Leona named their daughter Merle because  
Chet loved Merle Travis's guitar-picking: I'm sure Travis played many a

chittlin-strut: I've done a few: just looked straight ahead and  
sang my poems, the odor of cooking chittlins smarming up

the little room in Southern Pines, Raymond Stone, the cook, chanting loud and sweet, “These here in this pot I’m cooking now, Shub, they’ve

been stump-struck.” I didn’t know Glen Campbell’s parents named him Glen Travis Campbell, for Merle: I heard

Glen say on Diane Sawyer’s show, August 23, 2011, that his final CD would be *Ghost on the Canvas* – what poignant

felicity – facing Alzheimer’s, waving off the hype of words like “icon” and “star,” preferring to say

“awesome” for his favorite recording – Jimmy Webb’s “Wichita Lineman.” I don’t know if Merle Kilgore

was named for Merle Travis or not or what puffery Merle Norman Cosmetics performs cheek to

cheek: Merle Travis also had a hand in writing “Smoke, Smoke, Smoke that Cigarette” and

“So Round, So Firm, So Fully Packed – So Free and Easy on the Draw”: tell St. Peter at the Pearly to

swing wide that gate for chittlin-lovers, strutters, and non-puffers: Randy Travis and his long-time

manager-wife got divorced in 2010: that has something to do with rounding up stuff, but I can’t say

what right now: a lot of smokers die of lung-cancer; some don’t: that might be why St. Peter waited for a real

smoker to have a cigarette: patches snowy outside my window-study stubble before the Farmall enters: the

mules nod: Jad, Conroe, Roof, Marshall Brown, and A. V. appear before me: Algie, in his brown, rusty, holey seat

curves rain-water to seep on his toes, while Jad  
bows, waiting to go to heaven, saving up for that

meeting in the air, softly and tenderly, Jesus calling  
him to the table for breakfast: Jad, just outside the

portal, his cracker and cheese and money in his  
bib-overalls, makes me feel like a stubbed toe or

lard-stand full of cracklings just cooled from the  
wash-pot, the wash-bench near, full of

tubs, galvanized: we never worried about lead: the  
hog-guts, stripped, the women in their bonnets

singing *O sinner come home*, humming, turning the  
intestines wrongsideout with small peachtree limbs and

piling those guts near enough to the tubs, one I'll  
settle in, scrunched up, positioned for my

weekly bath on Saturday night in the pantry of the  
plankhouse I was born in the "living room" of the

southwest corner of (my mother and father slept in there), the  
Home Comfort Range, its reservoir like a side car heating

up a little water to warm my tub-water, while the Philco danced  
on the table next to the Irving Stephenson Tract, Ernest Tubb

singing, "She'll Trifle on You, She'll Do It Every Time," for  
"when your baby starts to stepping, law-dd, you nearly

lose your mind." After the shows, after the snow sinks  
into earth, the styrofoam cups along Sanders Road, absorbed, the

sound of the Texas Troubadours growing fame like onions and  
dreaming of becoming cowboy movie-stars, I imagine

Butterball Paige sitting on the doorsteps of my  
plankhouse, his tunes flooding my soul, the rest of

Ernest Tubb's band tuning up Midnight for  
Dawn, tunes talking and walking echoes of the

past, "I'm Walking the Floor Over You," "Waltz  
Across Texas," and the lovely "Blue Eyed Elaine" he

wrote for his first wife, knowing not what the years might  
hold, the song tasteful as the sounds of the brook in

Cow Mire at midnight, a sacred thought awake in my  
sleep, other Troubadour songs freeing me from

heartaches: "I'm Biting My Fingernails and Thinking  
of You," your hair almost in your eyes, while ET sings the

Cindy Walker song, "Warm, Red Wine": Tubb's schedule  
brings Exhaustion to his miles, thousands

dwelling in Talk and Memory, sweet hours, rugged for  
prayer that leads him to the next honky-tonk, park,

concert-hall: "It's Been So Long, Darling," "Take Me Back  
and Try Me One More Time," and "Thanks a Lot," his son,

Justin, saying that exactly in his own songs as  
long as he could; with Goldie Hill, "Looking Back

to See," if you were looking back at me, a song the  
Browns had the biggest hit on, Justin Tubb, songwriter,

too, "Lonesome 7-7203," which Hawkshaw Hawkins  
recorded, that ballad beveling off into the top ten: Bob Tubert,

honestly, I never heard of, a songwriter from  
Worcester, Massachusetts, wrote many, including, "You're the

Only World I Know” with Sonny James, a number  
one best seller for 1965: a garden jives with couples

dancing waltzes: Harold Jenkins dives into  
his uniform and performs as Conway Twitty

“It’s Only Make Believe,” the grit and growl his  
delivery gutturals into sound tracks for movies,

“Sex Kittens Go to College,” “College Confidential”:  
Twitty tweaks his voice, searching for

Conway, Arkansas, and Twitty, Texas, a journey John Hughey’s  
steel-guitar plays on, wherever he lays his bar on the

strings, his foot mashing those pedals. “Hello, Darling”: here I  
lie with “Linda on My Mind”: if I could stretch out into states

I would take Mississippi, where Conway was born, and  
Arkansas, where he spent much of his youth, and

Texas, nearby – and tweet twitters while tendrils attend a  
sound where roses never fade, some place besides

Arkansas, Mississippi, or Texas; yet the same  
old attractions Texas draws, leading T. Texas Tyler, who

was born in Arkansas, to become a Cowboy of the  
Golden State, doing his way what Tex Williams, who was

from Illinois, and Tex Ritter, a real Texan, did, managing the  
range, rounding up sales, while the cash-register blurted and

snapped, the fans enjoying their entertainers as “super”  
stars: did you see the sky last night, 28 December 2010, the yellowing

hues, the dry, moist air: I saw Cricket pee in the snow: T. Texas Tyler  
was on the Major Bowes Amateur Hour in New York during the

first days of TV: I remember shows like that with a candor  
blank as Jesus entering a room and consuming it: I am

happy and whole for the moment. Explain Leroy Van Dyke's  
fame? Why, he was an auctioneer, for he learned how to

sell farm-animals and homesteads in rural Missouri: he  
even wrote a song he called "The Auctioneer": I

knew his chant was authentic when I heard in the  
mid-fifties, during the fall-harvest, at Perkins

Riverside Warehouse in Smithfield, North Carolina, where  
I'd accompany my father to watch Perk Perkins

stop his buyers, right at the tags on the baskets holding the name  
"W. Paul Stephenson," Daddy's cigar jutting under his white

Stetson making him stand taller than his  
6-feet, 2-inches, the auctioneer, long, raw

Snoxie Stephenson, sing, "Solddddddd, Americannnnnn," the  
smell of the tobacco curing under the skylight, bringing the

sunlight in on lengthening, lanky-legged, cheese-cakey  
lines: that's my lark on Leroy Van Dyke. I'm typing

now with Nin on my mind: if you can global your makeup  
your friends do not care to see, blaming their current beauty

on yourself, if you can make up trends for outstanding  
businesses, if you can locate a foundation, the surface

of your pores, what's new – powders, looks and  
shadows, gleaming eyes – if you can turn your

home into a Spa and make room for a lover, if you can  
present Today's Woman and wonder where The Men are, if they

need Merle Norman at all – or ponder Randy Traywick  
changing his last name to Travis in honor of his idol, Merle Travis – if

you could makeover on stage your own self without tripping on a  
speaker-cord; if you can hear the right chord thrum in your

neck while trolls bounce beads against fresh produce or  
something from Pandora's Collectibles, you won't care how old

Merle Haggard is, or if Lib Hatcher has a Pomeranian named  
Merle at all; what's more, you'll be a Man, Poet, Daughter,

Son – plus you even might enjoy a roll in a gravelly  
road near a mausoleum containing fax info and phone

numbers of people called Merle; moreover, a stash of  
Merle Products – right by the Pearly's – shall take you home – country

roads – to El Rancho Merlita Ranch House Bed and  
let us breakfast and break for the U's, Used-to-bees, no

Hand-me-downs, please, someone *like* Carrie Underwood, not  
the Carrie of *Sister Carrie* rocking alone in her old

rocking chair: I can't think of a Ulysses who sings, except for  
Joyce's (see *Uneeda Review* for the answer to the

question Is Joyce Kilmer a boy or a girl: a lot of people  
don't know, sorry): Tanya Tucker! "Delta Dawn":

Tom T: "I Remember the Year Clayton Delaney Died,"  
"Harper Valley, P.T.A." During the night, the hall at

Paul's Hill filled with dust balls: a cloud fell over the  
roof of Nin's and my room: beds over the world

zoned in time with snoozers on magic, making love without  
Merle Norman Cosmetics. Like a deep-mouthed hound, my flews

coursing the letters into chaps from A to Z, especially the A's I have made; B's burrowing into C's: I was a face at UNC; D's cleaving among

dogs of my time: Atlas, Butler, Cora, Dora, Ernest, Fancy,  
Girl, Henrietta, Isadora, Jewell, Kip, Lula Belle,

Mambo, Nuisance, Ophelia, Percy, Quixotic, Randy,  
Sing, Slobber Mouth, Tony, U-There, Vulcan,

WaWaChaWa, X, You-Tube, Zither: E's did me in; F, watch  
out; G, Grandmuh Nancy; H, Hank; I, Interference;

J, Jones Boys; K, Kansas City Kitty; L, Lucky Strike  
Means Fine Tobacco or Loose Strop Means Floppy

Secrets, if you drag a sack in the cotton middle with Victoria,  
falls; M, Many Mountains Moving Press; N, no more

horsing around the shoes leaning against the stob; O,  
The Old Home Place; P, poor old Us; Q, quit that

*cousinling* me; R, mosquitoes make rare meat  
rarer; S, sweet sixteen; T, Two toads tried to trot to

Treadwell, New York, to build a frog-house on  
Bright Hill; U, "Ulalume" or *Uneeda Review Like I Need a*

*Hole in the Head*; V, Viceroy; W, won the presidency?  
X, Gore; Y, your uppers; Z, to sleep; scream, wake up

unbroken, the heart open, as if an ice-pack on a sore  
hip might muscle the night caught in a wailing wind, while

the laurel outside our bedroom window measures our  
breathing: Nin's breath's a whiff: mine's a

vibe, unwavering as a zither.



Spiel: *Blood Waters*

# LINDA TIEBER

---

## MONTEREY

It's quite late  
It is quite late late

I don't know how you can chain  
smoke don't know how

The fog is about a mile out  
You can see it floating

over the water  
Floating over water water

You chain smoke  
My knees brush against

The tabletop  
. . . about the fog

Far into the water there's a boat  
Far out in the water water

You chain smoke smoking  
Tide's going out

My knees your cigarette  
Put out . . . put you out

Put out quite late  
My ship's coming in

Far-off foghorn  
Beacon . . .

Which seemed unnecessary  
chain-smoking

Walking the tide  
when it goes out

as distant as a foghorn  
the number of cigarettes burning in one night

capabilities, yours  
maneuvering a mid-size boat

capsize  
Tide tide

What the tide brings in  
Morning . . . tide me over

Capable of morning  
Rising . . . I rise

Like chain smoking  
Fog

Oboe foghorn  
Silence

Silence you  
Beacon cigarette

Day like night  
Daylight coming in with the tide

Daylight fog of night  
Fog all day

# LINDA TIEBER

---

Red

hair first

thing I

noticed

shag grace-

ful to

about

breast combed

out in

subtle

way red

lipstick long

perfect

fingernails

blue

harem

pants narrow

shin

ankle -

very thin -

a few

very

clean and

nicely

chosen  
silver brace-  
lets: she

kept  
her face  
down to

her  
knees, one  
hand covering

the  
side nearest  
me: at

Queens  
Plaza she  
suddenly

got  
up from  
her seat

to  
stand at  
right of

woman  
next to  
me: gone

from  
my sight:  
she took

it  
back later:  
there she

was  
again - half  
of her

hidden  
behind the  
wave of

wall:  
asked  
woman next

to  
her something  
which was

nodded  
to: was  
she an

out-  
of-towner?  
cadaverous:

she  
is rummaging  
through her

black  
purse:  
she has

reading  
material, a  
guide

of  
some sort,  
no book

not  
magazine: woman  
by her

reads  
over her  
for a

minute  
or two:  
she gets

off  
at my  
stop: her

figure  
is thin  
though no

doubt  
feminine: we  
change

trains:  
I see  
part

of  
her in  
the glass

as  
I stand  
in the

aisle:  
the next  
stop is

mine:  
she continues  
on

# LINDA TIEBER

---

Beans for eyes, pink roses for cheeks,  
red line for lips, the mountain of crème for nose.

It was set in the glass case.

I turned around to look closely  
at the wiggled features.

Divine, natural pose -

“It was manufactured”

“Petty, cloying”

I leaned and listened to get what I could.

“There’s a certain waxy covering,  
barely white”

“I was certainly  
disenchanted”

“Annoying apple-chaser - how did she  
discover . . . ?”

The pose was still intact.

I munched on the quill of a pen, a carrot, and some bread  
in my lunchbox.

My ears strained to hear them in my munching.

“Come to think of it”

“I see it in its fall circle”

“A gap in its feature”

# LINDA TIEBER

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El Misterioso's black cloak rustles he's  
upon you with a feather - accosted again in the  
melodrama of Rome waterways precipitous crags  
grasses of mainlands mainlands of grasses  
forts monasteries ways - hallways stairways walkways  
beige-walled stoneways Finds the dust roads  
facades tenements stuccos The Drifter guerilla gambits  
loping shifting toward you never expecting the worst  
again And now the vertical drop simply suspended  
on the bed in the sky Lawns of green await your fall



Alois Nožička

# STEPHANIE DICKINSON

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## AN IMAGINARY ISTANBUL

2001. Istanbul where she'd deserted Réne, her brother, where fish scents the unruly air, under the filleting noonday sun. Frying, poaching, grilling, everywhere the slaughter of fish, for Turkey is sea-locked. The debris not of soot and dust, but of crumbling aqueducts; a minaret's wailing call. At the café where she sits, the coffee is too black for her liking. Without foam, coffee is an insult. Réne and she, as children, had sailed the Aegean with their grandfather, a manufacturer of uniforms. Their eyes the green of an insect's wings, would race the frothing waves to the shore, where fishing boats too tiny to be anything but trinkets bobbed in the eerie water. Their grandfather who had raised them had died motionless as a millstone in his deck chair, a man of integrity who closed his factory rather than manufacture uniforms for the Nazis. His disinherited son, their wastrel father, had come back to regain his father's millions. Joella and Réne were almost left penniless.

Back in their childhood she sees the jade of the water, grandfather mopping the yacht deck, fitting out the galley with black and white cabbages, with olives and chard, melon and quince, figs, lamb and bass. They would set out at dawn. Drifting. Fishermen throwing their nets black-faced from the moon. They would glide like that, visit all places and remain. By afternoon Réne and Joella lazed on the deck, eating figs, sipping rum; their grandfather who let them have two glasses each was asleep, his once black hair thin and grizzled. It made her happy to see the precious old man doze in the sun. Réne drank from the sticky bottle, he'd taken sleeping pills from their grandfather's cabinet. Trembling, he asked her to rub his back with coconut oil, extra virgin, and she'd massaged it into his shoulder blades like thrusting lances that cut through to the meat of his chest. He rolled over onto his back, and took the oil from her hand. It was his turn and he tickled her, until she laughed like captured crickets, and her arms flapped into the wrestling games they'd played since she could remember. Locust moaning. The sun rushing to meet its cloud lover, the great whitening sun browning their beige bodies.

1971. Istanbul is hot, the sun burning the whitewash off the quay walls. She walks with Vishnu through the litter of sardine and gilt-head bream, bone and scale, palamut and mezigit, men whose breath is a wash water of raki. Gulls stammering in mid-air stop like dying motors and drop, diving into a glittering mess of heads and tails. Vishnu growls. Her malamute. The sun in his eyes, sand in his mouth, the smell of white droppings on white stones. This is the white street, filled with scavengers, a gray haze of coughing taxis and trucks. The droppings dry on the bleached stones. Hieroglyphics from an airborne civilization. Hieroglyphics from a flying toilet. A man with a brazen face and tight t-shirt and dirty jeans follows her with his eyes. If it were later and darker he might approach her with his hands. Vishnu again growls; he won't stop. Rubbing her leg, his ribcage feels bulky as a cow's. The cage expands with his breathing and she envisions the slippery blues and membranous reds.

She studies what lies in front of her. She does not clean fish or shell walnuts, she does not make asure, the sweet soup of beans, wheat, and dried figs to sell on the streets to tourists. Sometimes she goes to dinner with a much older man, a man who could be her grandfather. The grandfathers she pleases easily as she sinks her teeth into a stuffed grape leaf, she pleases with her almond-shaped eyes and her skin the color of condensed milk; her hair brushed to her waist pleases too. The grandfathers enjoy a crossing and uncrossing of legs, a curtain of hair falling like muddied silk against the white linen. These men have been successful and prize a young woman doubly if she speaks entertainingly and with intelligence. The grandfathers enjoy her telling them of the talc she dusts between her toes made of crushed moth wings and how she flosses the pearls of her white teeth with horse mane. They slip her an envelope, money that she shares with her brother. Hashish has seduced him: fire in a pipe stem, the hot raisin-sweet smoke, red fish with long whiskery tails. Hundreds swimming from a blink in his eyelids. She could see the future in his face: opium clouds darkening to the green reek of a wound, a boil, the rot of a storm. In the distance, lightning flashed and made its crooked lines and then vanished.

“Come Vishnu. Réne is waiting. A pancake for me and you and one for Réne.” Two would stretch their stomachs and tomorrow there might not be enough for two. Best to eat one. The siblings rarely spoke of their long dead American mother or their Turkish father, a gambler, who wore the elaborate dress of the cardshark and had been disinherited by their grandfather. Then after their grandfather’s death the con man returned to disinherit Joella and Réne. A stone fish who devours his offspring.

He is not sleeping on the steps. Their edges crumble with odors of sour yogurt, saffron and turmeric. A man hulks in one of the shadows that Turkey is full of. Stairwells creep back into the dusk. Left arms chained to right. Light is handcuffed and dragged, its throat cut. This man is Turkish but wears a western suit. His chilly wraparound sunglasses like a cha-cha dancer of decades ago. Like a wild punch thrown at a ghost. If Réne is not in any of these stairwells waiting or begging, then he must be smoking. She knows where he likely is (the Street of Red Dreams), does not tell Réne’s girlfriend whose two-year-old son has her brother’s green eyes, like pools of the Aegean, jealousy in a bottle, planktonic eelgrass. Her twenty-four year old brother, whom she still loves. “All he wants to do is play, smoke hashish,” their grandfather said, throwing up his hands. The Germans came one day to his factory. *Uniforms, manufacture them for us, for the Death’s Head SS*, he was ordered. Black uniforms for tall men, their blond hair woven from earth-stench, their eyes, moon-jelly blue maggots. Their grandfather could smell more than death. The Death’s Head men sought out women, freakish apricot silhouettes, jackbooted merry-go-round riders in an underground nightclub.

\*

2001. Istanbul. The door opens into the rivery hum of flies. The ceiling vibrates with them. “Have you seen Réne?” she asks the yellow apparition standing before her. A westerner with tangled, matted hair that the odor of filth and cloves clings to. His eyes could be phantom ruins in Montenegro, ruins existing only in a photograph of canceled checks. Like the ones she has sent to her brother from America for thirty years. “Please, do you know Réne? Is he here?”

“Where else? Yeah, we see the old man around.”

The apparition studies her like an inheritance. She might be the white-ring handle that leads to Mecca. He might force her open and drink from her arteries, he might awaken the herds of two-hundred-year old she-goats that graze the stony hillsides of her psyche, and they will trample him.

The apparition leads her past cushions where men curl up smoking from snakelike pipes. Far back in dimness a papery man in levis and a soiled t-shirt rolls over onto his side, breaking tar opium into the pipe. His fingernails are jagged, black, like a war long over. He smells as if gangrenous, as if he's given up searching for food.

"Réne," she says, approaching him like the seat of the last Caliphate, the eunuchs singing in the priests' choirs. He turns in the direction of her voice. His eyes have atrophied and whitened. "It's Joella." In the fractured light of the opium den, her brother's face is dirty as the rag-rolled ringlets of his hair, his long wrists are weeds, his brows, vines creeping from overhanging trees. Her brother once a god has thrown away his life. He's far away in the Sultan's harem, the Reign of Women. He's living Istanbul's past. Smoke visions sailing him to Byzantium, later Constantinople, to imperial mosques saturated with wads of bloodied silk, to harems and the sultan's incestuous bed. His ears have listened to sixteen centuries of gossip and rumor, sullied frangipani, and the severed bodies of pre-Christ epochs festering in veiled wombs.

Yet this is Istanbul where you can walk away from a lost brother. A junkshop of civilizations extinguished.

# STEPHANIE DICKINSON

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## EMILY AND THE EARTHWORM

1893. Knowing it was the day when my father would put down the plow and pick up his fishing pole, we entered the field, walking past the cow patties, thistle-thorned, grey and flaking, past the windmill and lye kettle where he dug with his three-pronged shovel. Thrusting it into the ground, he forked up long segmented creatures. The earthworms interrupted from their tunneling, their eating and digesting and opening the loam for roots and brethren insects. We took our precious cargo—these eyeless creatures—to the river's far side, where the current twisted, and drowned trees lay in their peeling skins. There my father, the gentleman farmer, set down his bucket. Around us the stooped hired hands fished for carp and blue gills; they'd come to the stagnant soil-colored river, as if to an unpretty girl with tangled hair who would open her blouse. It was to her they journeyed for an afternoon free of the harness. Who could understand the river better than these men, a lifetime spent humbling themselves before the dirt, the smell of lower animals on their hands? They wanted something of the unknowingness, the mysterious bottom that cranes hunted with their daggers. My father let me guard his bucket of earthworms. I watched them curl around his fingers as he fed them to the hook and cast them into the river. The wrong element for this, the most important creature on the planet—the soil maker. My father, my idol, I saw forever adding to the cellar's bounty, planter and reaper of the fields, builder of milk houses, the sweating cold rocks of its walls, keeper of the cows, the surly one drinking deep from the puddles that shone, fragranced with violets. After my father waded into the river I reached into the bucket and let the worms wiggle into my hand. Decades later my pilot son was shot down over the Himalayas flying food to China, the Japanese having bombed the Burma Road. An Iowa boy suspended above 14,000 foot ridges and crags. Parachuting out of his dying plane, he was caught by a tree. Entangled in his chute he hung in the icy

darkness for days. I remembered my father's anger when he discovered I'd dug into the river bank and made a tunnel for the night crawlers to find their way home into the earth. Like the peasant who cut my son down from the tree and fed him a meal of slugs. All that he had.

# STEPHANIE DICKINSON

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## EMILY AND THE WHOOPING COUGH

1899. Two long tables and in front of each of us sits a board to write on with charcoal. Cold in the one-room school, but where I am near the potbelly stove—is hot. I do not mind. The lessons warm me. The nearness of books. I like my apron's two pockets. Another slam of the outhouse door. Recess over. The Moses children crowd around me. Wilma. Francesca. Fern. Wearing long underwear that falls over the tops of their brothers' old boots, thick stockings, and then grey dresses like dirty overcast skies. And the boys. Mathias, Wilbur. They smell like wet feathers. Like cornmeal. I give them my pork cracklings and rye bread. I give them my molasses. Their lunch bucket is empty. They cough. Three days later only Fern and Mathias warm themselves at the stove. Mathias, the oldest Moses boy, blinks his white eyelashes like mulberry stems, and tells me there's kinkcough at his house. His mother asks for help, knows I've already had the cough. I follow them to the hovel where nine people live in two rooms. A horse neighs at our approach, a grey shadow whose ribs show through. He nudges the brittled hazelbrush with his muzzle. The chicken coop knocked to the ground and what looks like a one-winged hen, still alive, chips her stone beak against the frost-bitten ground. The last of the sun dies at the fenceline. Inside, I hear the sound of *tosse canina*. I know it from my brother's Latin. A cough wild and cruel like a dog. The dim of the room lit by one wick kerosene lantern. Three in one bed. The babies together, their tiny fists clenched, heads like soft blue potatoes. The mother bends over the robe-slung bed, mopping the red stems of blood running from the noses of Francesca and Wilma and Wilbur. The woman's another grey shadow like the horse, her chin juts, all jawbone bared. Her fingers are worked to the bone. My heart kicks. The unseen being has come, bearing his foul lilacs. The half-eaten apple of a nose bleed. The chalice of vomited milk. I tell myself that Providence has a plan for each of us, the stars will burn like lion heads and archers, the tails of

comets will trail celestial wildflowers across the blackness. This night five Moses children die. The whooping cough that strangles as if an unclean God has placed a noose around the neck. A crowing cock that wracks and chokes. I hold my friends after they have set out into peaceful death. The true music of a soul is quiet filled with a hundred prayers and I close my eyes. The mother is rocking and will not take comfort, tearing the hair from her head. Do not look for miracles and signs, the reformer John Hus told his followers before they burned him at the stake. Yet I look for signs everywhere. Is this proof that He does not exist? The oldest boy Mathias will fight in the Great War, come home from the Argonne Forest and shoot himself. Only Fern is left to carry the misshapen Moses into the next generation.

# STEPHANIE DICKINSON

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## EMILY AND BIG-HEADED ANNA

1917. There in the dawn after milking I discover Anna, my husband's sister, bent over the hay manger. Her big head's covered by a hat the color of a song sparrow or a cloud of road dust. Mouth ajar as if a pasture gate's left open. Her apron's tied on backwards and its pockets bulge with cider apples she's scratched from the orchard's still frozen mulch to feed the calf—sold months ago to pay taxes. The barn is empty but for the one cow let out to breathe the March air and stare into the distance. Strands of hair unravel from her braid. She is tickling her face with hay. "Anna," I say. Sometimes I sense her behind me suckling her thumb, standing in my shadow, or lowering her head between the stanchions, waiting for me to draw the milking stool under and squeeze the bucket between my knees. Her big nostrils drawn to the remnants of sour milk and the pale mash of bluegrass. Other times, I find her holding her head in her hands or resting its heaviness (like a chest of useless silverware smothered in burgundy felt) on a hay bale as if her neck could no longer shoulder its weight. "Anna," I say again and it will be dusk. The apples she's placed in the hay manger. "For him," she answers, waiting for the calf's brown eyes the size of our front room doorknobs but shinier. The barn light half-erased as if muted by burlap, its particles scattered like coarse rye flour from a grindstone. "Have you eaten?" I see the ghost of my husband's father, a huge man with white hair and weedy black mustache, soft with animals and women, yet working both hard. He trembles in death, like wick in a fading kerosene lantern. Is he sorry he pushed his wife, a fine-boned girl from Prague, to milk the cow no matter how big her belly? And the cow tired of the human thumb and forefinger dragging the milk endlessly from her, wishing her teats tasted of bitter black marigolds not sweet, lifted her hoof, and kicked his wife in the stomach. His first-born's head so large it jammed the birth canal. The circumference of a calf's, Anna had to be roped and pulled out. The father ghost doesn't see in her eyes what the nuthatches do

when they come to her. Half-singing, she will talk to them. Purple finches and chickadees call her name. My children share the bed with her in cold winters. They claim she moos in her sleep. Under a full moon and in green pastures they've seen her become four-legged and graze, only her hat staying the same. I threaten to wash their mouths out with soap for telling untruths. I know Anna chases snowflakes and will open her mouth to swallow them. She likes sheds and coops, the tumbling fence, the ditch under the mulberry bush. Summers, big-headed Anna befriends the neighbor's cows in their field of long grasses. Summers, she wanders off to herd them up the hill, the lead cow with her followers, the soft brown of her eyes like overripe fruits, drawing the spirits. "Anna," I say, "it's time to go in." Slowly without looking, she raises her head like a bucket of milk filled to the rim and hands me an apple.

# GIL FAGIANI

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## WALKING PAST THE PLAYBOY CLUB, 1971

We were revolutionaries at war with the rich, and nobody hated the rich as much as Georgie. A ham-fisted six-footer of working class Ukrainian stock, he grew up in the South Bronx, and by 10 he was on his own, after his mother died and his father ditched the family. Georgie went from dope addiction, prison, rehab, to joining the revolutionary vanguard organizing to strip the rich of their wealth and power. Once we were sitting on the subway when two guys in jackets and ties entered our car. Georgie said, *Watch this*, and stamped his feet for a good five minutes. The guys in the monkey suits looked terrified. As we got off, Georgie held his nose, *Let's get away from these stinking pigs*. I recall feeling a pang of conscience: my Uncle Joey was a lowly messenger on Wall Street and wore a jacket and tie to his job. Later on 59<sup>th</sup> Street, we walked by the Playboy Club. A line of men in suits stretched along the long stairways under the giant rabbit-in-tuxedo symbol. Georgie shook his fist, *Your days are numbered, pigs, when the Revolution comes, you'll be swinging from the lampposts*. I stared at two Playboy bunnies threading their way to the door, wondering if they would be treated like collaborators.



Oshinn Reid



Oshinn Reid

# MICHAEL WESTON

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## MASS OF DENSITY

A

(what trappings are attached  
if this is ritual)  
mouth-gag, legs tied hands bound with hide  
muscles thick with cramp muscles dense and damp.  
ten stone deep then ten down  
eyes beneath like breath  
eyes thick with it.

A [Diminished]

eyes with a clown sigh eyes blanketed  
eyes drown by a sunrise  
eyes beetle-browed  
eyes with grave sight  
eyes with vision flat  
(eyes don't do that)

B

what form or matter  
strung with torn light stitched by dark thread  
where engulfed  
where embittered  
where blacked by burning  
where encased  
where in spite  
where in mire  
wherein creatures eaten with desire

chanting inane rants  
make little fires  
stitched to flesh and mind  
(if this is ritual  
what trappings are attached)

## C

lips cheeks  
everything complete  
each hung by wire  
eaten with smiles and  
(what trappings are attached  
if this is ritual)

## D

ears by stuffing  
eyes by black  
throat by silence  
arms weighed down  
legs wound and sewn  
feet laced tight  
all dumped in the ground  
(if this is ritual what trappings are attached)

# ROBERT D. WILSON

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at 2:35  
today  
you walked  
through me  
with  
a plate of food  
to buy a  
drink  
filled  
with dreams  
neither  
of us  
will  
drink  
our laundry  
hanging  
on  
a toilet stall  
drenched  
with  
a  
doctor's urine

# ROBERT D. WILSON

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## AVALON

Avalon  
that mythical  
spot  
in  
a  
giant's palm  
where  
sweat  
and  
dewdrops  
dance  
backwards  
into  
another's dream  
of me  
sweeping song  
with an  
old woman's  
broom  
into  
the mouth  
of  
a  
catfish

# SARAH McELWAIN

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## CBGB

In the 1990s, I dined out frequently on the fact that I'd once lived so close to CBGB, which stood for Country Blue Grass Blues (and Other) and was referred to by insiders as CBs. Some people considered me to be an authority on late 70s punk culture – as if I'd been best friends with Sid Vicious. But the truth was that when I lived on the Bowery, I crossed the street to avoid CBGB.

The costume was black leather, chrome studs and chains, 14-hole Doc Martins, ripped fishnets. Heavy make-up on all the girls and many guys: Kabuki pancake that made their teeth look feral yellow, smeary eyeliner and Betel nut red-orange lipstick from the 3 for \$1 selection at Manny's Variety on Second Avenue.

Hair had made a U-turn. Hair had gone in the opposite direction from the 60s when hair had been natural: long and flowing, nappy or scraggly. Hair, once wash-and-wear and conspicuously neglected for more important things, was now being tortured into hair-defying shapes and dyed unnatural colors.

Pawnee Indians once painfully plucked their hair into "Mohawks." And Celtic warriors slicked their hair into tall pointed spikes as a display of aggression like the hackles rising along the spine of an attacking animal. And hair had been decorated before, beaded, braided and elaborately coiled. But advancements in late-1970s hair technology had made new things possible: The invention of neon-colored dyes, extra-hold hairsprays like Aqua-Net, cheap water-soluble adhesives like Elmer's glue, as well as new uses for Knox gelatin had taken hair to places that it had never been before. The scene, which had begun in London, was flourishing on the Bowery.

A few blocks from CGBG on the Bowery was The Tin Palace. I'd stood on the sidewalk outside this jazz club when the doors were open, listening to the music with a few guys with tape recorders, but I'd never had the nerve to go inside alone.

Now that I had a friend, I walked in and claimed the last two empty barstools. Climbing on one, I spread my jean jacket on the other.

The bartender set down a coaster. "What can I get you?"

“White wine.”

A man with an orange Afro approached me. “Hey little sister. This seat taken?”

“Yes,” I said. “My friend is sitting here.”

“Then my eyes must be goin’ cuz I don’t see nobody there.”

“Ha, ha,” I said. I looked at my watch. Federica was now ten minutes late. I knew I wouldn’t be able to save her seat much longer. Eddie Jefferson was performing and it was now standing room only.

The orange afro man was about to sit when Federica slid onto the stool.

“My heel broke,” she said, handing me my jean jacket.

Federica’s life revolved around shoes. Instead of minimizing her height, she bought size 11 sandals at the transvestite shoe store on 8<sup>th</sup> Street with cheap 4” heels that were always breaking.

Live jazz is different. I’d heard Eddie Jefferson on the radio but watching him perform was a thrill. He had a puffy white afro and the widest mouth I’d ever seen.

When he ended the set with his famous “James Moody, you can blow now if you want to, we’re through!” the audience went wild. While I clapped, Federica leaned over and whispered in my ear. “Sorry I was late. Were you ok? Want another drink?”

“Yes,” I said. Yes, I was ok and yes I wanted another drink.

We left The Tin Palace at midnight and walked up Bowery, crossing the street to avoid the crowd outside of CGBG.

“Who’s got time for that?” said Federica, as we approached a guy with a tall spoke of glistening red, green and pink spikes.

She was right. Hair like this was a full-time job. Hair like this required hours of dyeing, sculpting and shaving. And this was not stay-at-home hair. Hair like this demanded to be seen. Hair like this took over your life.

“Spumoni head,” said Federica.

“What’s a spumoni?” I asked.

“Girl, you are so not Italian,” said Federica. She walked me over to a bakery on Second Avenue and pointed to a row of glistening pastries in these same colors.

One reason that it was so much fun to hang out in the street with Federica was that she was always pointing out ironic visual similarities and funny signs in a way that added to our art school sensibility.

Federica dismissed punk as kid's stuff, but I liked the shock of it.

"These guys read too many comics," she said, as two skinny punks wobbled past wearing platform Nazi boots laced up to their knees, oversized biker jackets, their hair sculpted into neon orange and magenta spikes.

Hair like this said there are no jobs and the streets are full of garbage so fuck you. It was meant to be intimidating but there was a way in which the sidewalk in front of CGBG sometimes looked like a convention of cartoon dinosaurs.

"Stegosauruses-head," I said.

"I mean get a job," said Federica.

I laughed. Hair like this defined you, limiting where you could work. I knew how long I'd last if I showed up at my job as lunch hostess at Il Guardini with magenta spikes.

"What are these guys?" she said. "Trust-funders?"

There was no group that Federica loathed more than rich kids who went slumming.

But we did agree that there was not enough respect for the skill that went into creating this hair. Or as Federica put it as we passed a guy with a perfect row of 12" spikes in rainbow colors. "That took some serious sculpture chops."

My arms ached just looking at them.

Whether the scene in front of CBGB was silly or shocking could be debated but The Tin Palace was definitely not kid's stuff. There's an expression "paid your dues" and we knew that the crowd at The Tin Palace had all paid their dues and then some, while we had made almost no deposits into our experiential bank accounts.

Another good reason to hang out with Federica was that she had excellent city skills. Growing up in Williamsburg, going to art school at Cooper Union, she knew that our good time and safety at The Tin Palace depended on befriending the bartender. She is still a world-class flirt and soon we were getting free drinks.

Today Federica likes to say that we discovered jazz together. I like to say that discovered makes it sound like we were Columbus and jazz was San Salvador. It was more like jazz revealed itself to us as we sat next to each other on barstools at The Tin Palace.

My radio was my other best friend. The heavy black plastic Magnavox with the crooked antennae that the previous tenant had left behind. I kept it tuned day and night to WRVR, the jazz station. My apartment was a grim pit but with the radio on it was possible to spend many happy hours listening to jazz radio and sketching at my drawing table.

Music without lyrics is different. In rock and roll there was always a story but without words you could make up your own story or better yet there didn't have to be a story. Without words, sounds and colors hooked up more directly, producing certain colors. Not just blues but greens and yellows.

We were lucky one night to get barstools when Walter Davis Jr. was playing. The bartender set down two wineglasses.

"I'll get this one," said Federica, waving a five-dollar bill.

"Thanks," I said, looking around the smoky room. It was packed with men wearing hats—not ironically—and suit pants with guyabera shirts and dashikis.

The lights went down and the room quieted as Walter Davis began playing the piano. The other players came in and after some ecstatic bebopping he lifted his ram-like head and looked over at the bass player who flashed a smile at the drummer who nodded at the horn player as they moved the music in a new direction.

"Did you catch that?" Federica whispered, grabbing my arm.

I nodded knowingly, but who knew if we were hearing the same thing. Federica had a wider musical knowledge than I did. She loved opera and had grown up with doo-wop and church music while I only knew rock and roll.

"Cool," she said, snapping her fingers, closing her eyes.

I looked around the room. Everyone had their eyes closed, some with their heads bowed reverently. Sublime, I thought. It wasn't a word that I would ever have said out loud, but I thought it. This music is sublime: Spiritually exalted and noble.

Or as Federica put it as we crossed the street an hour later to avoid CGBG, "Why would anyone want to listen to that ugly shit when The Tin Palace is down the street?"

We were into beauty. Beauty was our escape. For Federica, the music at The Tin Palace was a life rope leading her out of the iron clutch of her Italian Catholic family in Brooklyn. It was everything they hated.

I'd already escaped my family. For me, beauty was simply an escape from the ugliness of my surroundings. My block was full of violence and garbage. Who needed more?

In the summer when it got hot the scene changed. All the leather jackets came off and a whole new world of tattoos was revealed. I'd seen tattoos before, smoking skulls on Hell's Angels, roses on rock n' roll stars, faded anchors on old sailors in Nantucket. I'd seen LOVE and HATE etched across the knuckles before but I'd never seen FUCK tattooed across a forehead in black Goth letters. Or imagined the body as a canvas for religious, occult, science fiction and pre-Raphaelite illustrations. One thing was clear, white skin loved ink, certain reds, greens, indigo and black.

"If you got a tattoo what would you get?" asked Federica.

It was midnight and we stopped walking in front of the VOICE office in well-lit Cooper Square.

"I'd never get one," I said. I'd thought about this before. How did you choose one image to represent you for the rest of your life? It was like choosing a favorite color. My favorite color changed every hour.

"What about you?"

"Are you kidding?" Federica laughed.

I laughed too. The thought of what Al Spinelli, owner of Spinelli Iron Works in Williamsburg, Brooklyn would do if his daughter came home with a tattoo was scary.

"He thinks tattoos are for hookers, ex-cons and bikers," said Federica, searching through her bag for a token. "I could get a tattoo someplace private — a rose on my butt — someplace he'd never see it, but who likes needles?"

"Not me," I said. Tattooing was illegal in New York City. Finding an apartment or basement operation with the equipment and then letting a stranger use a needle on my body was unthinkable.

A girl approached us wearing a black bra, hair ratted into a black nest. She had a chain tattooed around her neck.

What if you changed, I thought. What if someday you wanted to be someone else? A brain surgeon, an opera singer, an elementary school teacher? What if you had kids? What would it be like to have a mother with a chain tattooed around her neck?

"You'd have to put a gun to my back before I'd do that," said Federica.

We said this phrase often. The streets were becoming more and more violent and frightening, especially at night with no lights. It felt possible that

at any moment you could feel a gun in your back as someone grabbed your wallet or pushed you into a dark doorway. We repeated this phrase as a preventive. If we joked about it often enough, maybe it wouldn't happen.

In the fall, the scene changed again. A rougher crowd moved in. The tattoos were now frightening tribal markings, masking the faces of men who looked like they had, or would soon have, experience with incarceration. All the neon-colored dinosaurs disappeared, not into extinction, but relocated to St. Mark's Place. All but the most wasted girls moved on, and those left had rings through their noses. The sidewalk became a showcase for piercings and other forms of self-mutilation. A guy with chrome piercing his cheek, a row of safety pins hanging from his eyebrow and two lead sinkers stretching his ear lobes to his shoulder passed by.

"There is one word for that," said Federica, stopping on the sidewalk. "Grotesque." Grabbing the corner of the building, she bent over. "Wait, I think I'm going to puke."

She vomited on the sidewalk. It could have been that third glass of wine at The Tin Palace but after that Federica refused to come down to my neighborhood. We stopped going to The Tin Palace. Ugly had won. Beauty was no match for ugly.

After that we met at other nearby clubs—Barbara's, Ali's Alley, the Jazz Loft. I stopped walking on the Bowery, taking Lafayette Street whenever possible. I now lived in a neighborhood that I wouldn't want to visit.



Alois Nožička

# RICH IVES

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## AS IF SUNSET WERE THE ONLY ROAD

The smell of children swimming in the ocean.

What language does an angel speak? It depends on who is listening. If the angel's eyes have lost the glow we grant them in our dreams, they must learn to speak our way, or remain imprisoned in our sleep, dismissed as "merely passing time" until we awaken.

Do we say "earth" or do we say "heaven" when we wish to speak of waiting?

First the smell of a man, then the man.

First the angel, then, slowly, the senses begin to open each other. Do they belong to the angel or does the angel simply use our senses for that moment and move on? It's a little sad to think there are enough unused sensations in our lives that they could form another life.

Or should we be grateful, like parents?

Oh yes, we do have names. That one there by the door to the cemetery is called Soon-To-Be-One-of-Those-People and his friend with the shovel is A-Gardener-of-Lost-Souls and they are going to visit the grave of The-One-Who-Has-Left-Us, which is next to the grave of The-One-Who-Has-Left-Them, someone they heard about but don't really know. Outsiders would think, as they always do, that these people of the earth are all alike. If there were any outsiders. But they are, of course, each one of them, unique, and that is why so many of them can be dreaming at one time without disappearing.

One of the escaped pigs opens his silly hat and the wind catches it. He is pulled out into the street and a truck runs over him. Yes, it does. Can we

all understand how sad this is? Can we all comprehend how often this happens? Our children do.

Some of our children have goldfish or gerbils named Ben or Sarah Lee. Some of them do not. But they all dream about what happens when only the body remains. For this, death is not always necessary. Thomas is.

The chairman of the chair society proposes a chair dedicated to the dead pig's honor and the vote is unanimous. A plaque is attached to the empty chair, but the chair society cannot decide what should be inscribed upon it. Irony is seldom wasted on the young.

Sour cream cupcakes have been very popular here since the invention of the muzzle-loading rifle.

One of our children is an expert on the history of great torturers and explains their devices and family life in luminous detail at social events and teas. The expert is fourteen and she reminds many of her elders of their own childhoods. Her most serious competition for the position of Superior Retainer in the Field of the History of Famous Torturers and Their Devices (she hates being called the "Torture Expert") was previously a seventeen year old boy who now collects moths and lives quietly with his grandmother, who is deaf. His parents were killed in an automobile accident, which decapitated his father. He is very fond of sugar.

The courthouse resides on the street of lost wind. The jail flies south every winter, but returns, empty, each spring. None of the officials have ever been caught. The statues in the Cemetery of Open Virtues face west every evening and east every morning.

The mother of forgetfulness and the governor of animal-shaped clouds pass by in the windows of a long-distance bus.

When too many plans have been made to capture it, the rain escapes under the river.

One of the young men felt as if his love was drinking him up. The way he had taken in the odor of the rose he brought her. A complexity that entered him and stayed, slipping past any need for thought, but enhanced by it.

She kissed him and he felt his spent passion thick on her tongue. He remembered how some creatures could smell with their tongues, and he tried it. He could taste the odor, and its taste surprised him, sweet and sour at once, as their short life together had been. But for a moment he was inside her again, a glimpse of her mixed pleasure at having drawn evidence of life from the foreignness of his male body. And he thought to himself, "So that's what it's like to be a woman." But of course he was only partly right, and because he could not stay there, his relaxed body began dreaming. He was asleep before she noticed the change in his breathing.

Sometimes men give themselves up to their need for women and try to restrain its power over them by acknowledging only the physical, a lie they need in order to enjoy again and again the passage through submission, instead of a life contained in it.

This is what she was thinking as he melted inside of her and slid out like an exhausted wet mouse.

No, nothing about an angel between them. Not yet.

Then he woke and licked the sleep from the corner of her eye.

Two right tennis shoes two miles apart, there, on the highway, leaving town.

And we bundled up everything we ever had in our arms, gripping ourselves like priests or idiots, joyful in the wealth of existence, generous in our misunderstandings, incapable of holding out on the moment.

Some of these people thought the mountains belonged to them. They thought the sky was theirs too. And the sun, because otherwise they might have to wake up each morning to a dream in which they had discovered an angel was living in their place, dreaming the mountains closer, sniffing at the sun, kissing the sky home.

A daughter with a box of clouds in her closet wrote:

*The insects and rains quickly destroyed his books. He had written three novels and eight books of poems, which had quite literally been devoured. A kerosene lamp burned on into the damp night. Several wild hogs began rooting in the underbrush.*

She brushed her hair every night and wondered what it would be like if she weren't the only redhead in her school.

One of the sons has been ignored for years, but a shy young woman on the other side of the river, the one with a farm girl's body and wild brown hair, who would have been a tomboy like that redhead in her class if she weren't so shy, has watched him pacing and talking to the trees. She longs to tell him of her dream, which is his future.

These children believe in such stories. The stories believe in them.

Perhaps you can imagine, as they do in this country, that your death is that moment when, walking across the ocean in the dream, you suddenly realize it can't be done.

Here the people do not talk to themselves. They know it is only an attempt to talk to God. And so, instead, they say to each other unexpected and wondrous things.

Most of these people understand the earth's hunger.

Once, someone got sad and then sadder, and ate sorrow instead of breakfast, and spit out his shadow, and went out into the world as someone else. These people didn't know what to do with him. So they left him alone and many years later, after he made many people think about death and about what they really were, he found himself sitting on a bench in the park. He took himself home to his wife, who had married another man, who had died. She recognized him by the odor of his fingertips when he touched her face. For the rest of her life, she would talk to his fingertips in the evening.

The same man, while cleaning the window wells of his weathering house, found a rare species of salamander named after a forgotten biologist. He decided not to disturb it. He decided not to speak to it.

Once, several art students were painting the river when a sudden thaw separated the fragments of the frozen world they had created from the ones they were painting. The instructor smiled from the riverbank as the students scrambled across the ice to safety. He continued painting exactly what he saw and exclaimed when he finished, "Realism is dead!" Many years later, in

the museum, one of the tour guides was fired for calling the painting “lifelike.” Like the art students, she hadn’t been listening carefully enough.

Once not long ago, a “Cubist Festival” was held during spring thaw, when the river ice broke. The art tourists gathered to paint the thawing ice in hundreds of shades of white and transparent colors. Some of the local residents gathered to paint the art tourists. Some of the unexpected elements of the weather painted the entire scene white and swallowed up their exclamations of delight. The crows gathered to scavenge food scraps left by the surprised painters and to provide shadows to replace the ones that had been eaten by the river. Whenever there were no food scraps, the crows talked loudly about the snow, which did not swallow their voices as it did those of the tourists.

At night, some of these people invite the moon into their bedrooms and accept the consequences.

So Olaf said, “Listen to me,” and they did not know who it was, and they all grew quiet. They listened and they waited a very long time and they learned a great deal, but no one could fully explain what it was that they were hearing. That was how one of the angels began speaking with his mouth shut.

Yes, these people have horses and the little old ladies who live in them are saved such troublesome tortures as porch sitting, card games and ice cream socials by prancing around the meadows and jumping in the air and pulling milk wagons driven by little old men who comb them and curry them and select the most tender carrots for their aging teeth and the brightest flowers for their white bonnets.

If the younger men are still talking to trees, well, perhaps it’s because the horses have told them they can still remember what it was like to rub themselves against the rough outer ears that bark sprouts when the truth about the future is whispering and seeping out all over.

Here nothing is horrible despite appearances. But many things are misunderstood. Many things.

And always more horses, more horses. Horses big enough to hold operas in. Horses joyful enough to cheer up the city council. Horses alive enough to contain all the sadness of three children drowned last year in the reservoir. Horses strong enough to support the weight of hundreds of lovers' mistakes.

It's time now. The children speak one at a time and the thread moves from one to the other and the needle is hard to see but growing easier to use. All day they weave and weave and then in the afternoon, they take their blankets home and continue weaving. Yes, it is a hard life in the cold world, but the entire village is speaking excitedly about the world outside, at play under a blanket of snow woven by a giant. The world remains at rest inside, wrapped in the comfort of their dreams, which emit a soft low purring sound that can be heard clearly when the blanket of snow smothers all the interfering noise outside.

No, not God. Better. Something without the limits of our imaginations.

Some late visitors have come across places where these people left small pieces of glass, etched with stone, and they have not been able to understand the markings. Perhaps they are lost markers of exchange, valuable in a former time. Perhaps they are broken shards of some vessel used in a ceremony. Perhaps they are messages meant for the finder, who now, so many years later, cannot read them. Or discarded trinkets. Or useless children's entertainments. Or markers on the road to enlightenment.

Or mistakes.

Or miracles, which are misunderstandings corrected by angels. Who are lost animals found after their first death by their own bodies, which, like ours, are made of earth and certain elusive questions, which drive them to madness, pain, knowledge and joy.

A visitor asked an elder about marriage. The elder had been standing by the river, wailing. Is this why the visitor asked him that question? The elder picked up a pebble, and, with great difficulty and the help of other stones, broke it. He placed the two pieces in the visitor's hand, closed the visitor's fingers around them and waited.

The visitor grew impatient. The elder waited some more. The visitor threw the two pieces of the broken pebble at a crow flying over the river. The crow's shadow in the shallows swallowed both pieces of the pebble and the visitor left.

The elder continued to wait. The river waited and moved on at the same time, continually leaving but never gone.

Towards dusk the elder's breath could be seen in the cold air. The same crow flew through the cloud of breath. A game? A moment's warmth on the cold air? A gesture to the patient man on the shore? A kind of listening?

The elder continued to wait.

A young man talking to trees may not understand the significance of broken stones until long after his body has changed him and the books he could write have left him behind.

A young woman may forget, for a while, her box of clouds, choosing to touch her practical new box of buttons instead. First she touched them with the shadows at her fingertips, then with the fingertips an angel gave her, speaking silently about the pleasure he wanted to pass on. The cool river of smooth bits of other's lives cascaded over her palms and the grateful overlooked knuckles and over the down on the backside of these wonders she had been given.

Now the same young woman is gazing at a stone button, trying to imagine the life of someone wearing a garment with this button missing. In this way the life is shared, because of the way the young woman caresses the life in a missing button while an odd satisfaction enters a more ancient hand, worrying the tiny hole where the thread once was.

A young crow may visit the river and swallow a pebble, though it may not always be easy to see how he can still live inside the stone. If the snow is falling, it's because the ice on the river still has more to say.

We never discussed fate with a mirror. We knew that its honesty was backwards. But then so were many of our ideas about heaven. Some of the people here did not rely on mirrors, but they had dreams and they had friends and they had lovers and they had seasons and they had water and they had crows. With these they understood more about what to change and what to accept.

Sometimes they called the missing parts "angels" in order to see themselves in these parts they did not yet understand. On a dead-end back road outside of town, a high-school boy, who had just learned to drive, sat proudly in front of the radio in the dashboard of his father's cherry-red 1952

Chevrolet. Hank Williams was singing *Lovesick Blues* and the redhead next to him hadn't even touched him yet. He was already *tumescent*, a word he understood but didn't know, thinking instead of the *blue balls* it might lead to with nowhere else to go. That's the way it is with young girls.

But the precocious redhead laughed and asked him if she could play with his "angel," and he surprised himself by having the presence of mind to answer, "Only if you'll let him visit *your* angel."

And as they struggled from their inexperienced clothing in the darkness of the first rainy night in weeks, the boy had a moment when he thought he was touching and feeling differently because he could not see very much of her in the deepening night. He closed his eyes, blind to everything but the sensations passing and surrounding him with this creature, hoping that she was doing the same. His body opened, and his eyes followed, seeing more. He moved his body over her, around her, reaching for the falling sky.

Once, a naked boy ran past the barn, his hairless genitals swaying and flapping. A farmer's children were milking the cows in the evening, and they stopped suddenly on the lawn, not in shock but to remember, beneath the paper lanterns strung along the clothesline and over the gate to the kitchen door. A dog barked and he disappeared into the forest. A grasshopper clicked and whirled into the air. Time waited. It sat on the corner of the orange canopy for a long time before leaping with a soft rattle into the breeze that carried it past the white picket fence into the wheat field.

It's a gift so you give it away.

For a moment, we lost the sky. The thread broke. Its generous wind melted.

Three friends with drooping beards parade towards the horizon before kneeling at the bridge, in the dark loam where the marsh crawls up to the road, shadowy green lookouts planting their seeded eyes like little trees, already anchoring new taproots into the widening earth and reaching toward the errant clouds.

"We are not wise enough," said one.

"We have not traveled far enough," said another.

"We have not reached far enough inside," said the third.

Because they believed people had to sacrifice.

Because they believed someone had the answers and their job was to figure out who it was.

Because they believed the right way of seeing things was not new.

Because they had not given away their borrowed smiles.

Because they were sincere about what they were doing.

Because what they were doing was not enough.

“Breathe clouds and listen,” angels have whispered for centuries. The old ones can see the path of the rain while it’s still rising, before it’s missed and called home. The young ones are still learning how to hold the smell of the ocean, older even than anything that has been said of them, between their unnecessary wings.

Three women stroke the beards of three seekers, in three different places at three different times, building yet another horizon in the warmth. Three women each share the same dream with a different man, for each man gave his promise like a basket.

The three women filled the three promises with offerings, and the ancient beast of their own hearts blessed them.

This too has been said for centuries. Mostly by bearded men. Who may have needed assistance in untying their smiles.

The hearts of the three women grew skins that covered their entire bodies, and they touched the men with them, and the men touched back. The men thought it would be different. They thought they would know what they were doing. They thought they could caress the hungry mouths and the tender breasts and the damp between the legs and be the reason everything would happen, but their bodies did not agree, and this made them frightened and happy.

One of the angels tells a joke and has a great idea after the punch line. It leads the angel to the moon by way of the abandoned hotel on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and the steady throb of the slaughterhouse windmill. The angel was seen carefully selecting bones near the mortuary. The angel invented a musical instrument that chops wood, but almost no one knows this. Now the angel lives on a houseboat in the swamp so overgrown with moss it is seldom recognized as a habitation. People say a hermit with a very long white beard lives in the swamp, but no one believes it, except in dreams, where everything is a punch line.

Then nothing happens and it takes a long time.

Then the darker side of life arrives again like a gift. Long after the laughter comes back. Long after the neighbors have made up their singular mind.

Long after light crawls inside the sweat pouring now from our offered skin.

Such beauty, such patience, such unexpected acceptance.

Why can't we stay here? Why can't we move into ourselves?

A clutch of worry perched on your shoulders like a basket of severed heads on the way to the market. An amusement if we weren't afraid of dying.

As if sunset were the only road.

As if the road were the only dream.

And so a man appears. His name is Olaf or Farmer Johnson. His name is Pietre Kabilskykov. His name is Shu Chun Mhin. His name is Ruben Gerrera. His name is Man Who Eats Weasels. His name is Bobby the Grease. His name is Occupant. He could be a boot after a long journey. The dumb trunk of his stumbling heart is sunk deep in a story someone tells about him. Then someone else tells it. And someone else. Until it isn't him anymore. Until the life he has shared has fallen away and he is nobody, he is abandoned pickup trucks, he is fishing with no bait, he is out to get even without ever getting out.

She thought she loved him.

She loved him, she thought.

She thought. Then she still loved him. His penis agreed.

Wearing a speckled dress the color of quails' eggs. Touching the feathers. Touching the beak. Stroking the breast.

And the future was hers until they spoke.

But you can't really leave until you don't need to and your body comes back to you and is still willing to go away.

How much beauty is left now?

And she knelt with him in the risky wisdom of the shadows of her sex.

How much is left now?



Spiel: *timepunch*

## ROWS

tomas shows up stooped over but steady regular as sun

already cooking at dawn

his hoe before him  
he drags corn furrows

each year these rows get longer  
soil gets harder weeds get thicker

tomas pisses his thoughts  
at rows' end in rich loam  
trickles just one letter per row  
if he's able

if he's tight on water he sweats the rest  
records his message as he hoes

same words today yesterday tomorrow

each of them washed away at day's end  
as his ditch boss opens the floodgate  
to flush his rows

...

tomas arrives with the sun  
drags his furrows  
pisses his lines:

S í D í o s q u í e r e

D a m e

u n a

G u e n a

R a s o n ... ..

please god, give me one good reason ... ..

## RESTLESS DARK

can't you see *the healing* is a-washing now in solitude of restless dark  
i dare not fully open my eyes as i learn pieces not revealed to my self in  
daylight  
come forth only out of dark the dark is their home dueling entities  
and more shy of judgment roiling nights sleepless  
i might have slept on monday  
desperate on tuesday night  
wednesday gruesome  
now thursday  
oh gawd the cable thrust into my brainstem  
every channel released  
transmitted before my eyes <sup>simultaneous full screen</sup> but one picture predominate  
a *hand*  
a *delicate*  
female  
hand  
more words wait... here now... something  
comes  
three words  
pin sharp patience  
she holds a fertile egg thumb to fore pricks each end by now i  
want  
the image to flee open my lids roll to my right yank my sheets sleep  
now... four nights four days...  
i deserve rest my lids  
droop

the woman blows her heft to force fertile contents to a pure white plate...

more words

*stretched and spindled yolk*

relive them

*stretched and spindled yolk*

*slopped haphazard*

*onto...*

open my lids    words vanish but haunt me i must memorize them

return to them tomorrow after rest...shit...my curiosity piqued where's this

coming from

more words

*a hallowed space*

*between her loin*

best reach my pen in darkness guide it with my thumb attempt to spell in  
rows relive

the magic decipher it or return to this uncalled-for vision in light of day but

hidden beneath

translucent flesh    not a whit of difference between truth and fiction

the irreparable becomes conceivable when i name it    call it out—

YOU now            here now            ENOUGH

you cannot rob me of my self

watch now as i my lids rise

you become unworthy of the blink            it's you that is blind            fearful

of exposure

you wretch towering me limp    watch if you have sight at all

i close my lids to observe you in your hiding place i'm telling about it

i am telling it to eyes i've never seen about withdrawal lies in the name

of the truth the ache the dark-dual-entities that keep me wakened through

with squabbling truths

(not truths at all tho nicely robed and sometimes many robes)

time now i spot your opposing schemes

watch now something coming running

more to  
death than  
dying  
dead—dying alive where i've been  
my tongue has lost its numb  
my eyes find sight  
making it the way i want  
this word

here

now this word

there

*mine*

my truth still...revealing them they're yours to live with if you can see

but not every word i tell is true <sup>aha</sup>

these words have no sound like crisp leaves dropping but observed from *inside*  
my window

no sound only movement flutter flicker downward fall like rollings beneath  
my eyeballs

back into my head up up and over again fluttering down down... within sight  
... but wait...

wait here now more comes

*the woman and the egg*

*she consumes its contents*

*and backlights the faultless hollow shell*

*places it within her loin*

*embraces it*

*crushes it to naught*

~~the end~~

my gift now to reveal or hide what you can't steal as poetry nor condensed  
fiction nor absolute truth as madness where i found it and could not let go  
never could've seen where dark seed strangled my innards prepared me for  
goodbye like a spent ghost further looming no longer hid beneath a board but  
sprung like a sudden leak

# BILL YARROW

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## SUICIDE WATCH

I lingered before her stall, though I knew  
my stay was useless...  
—James Joyce, “Araby”

I watched my friends check  
out the scene, check  
out their options, check  
out their futures, check  
out of the market of the world

The ghosts of my companions  
haunt the Crum woods  
the bell tower, the windy  
gallery, the reddened rooms  
of learning to wait

What else has life got  
to offer the living? Nothing  
is gained by remembering  
the oranges of that time,  
the sapphire mystery

And the dark dogs of dreaming—  
where do they figure in the absence?  
One part of a hand is missing  
missing from the dark  
face of a lost watch

What does the future hold?

Hands. The hands of a watch

My father gave me a watch

but I misplaced it. My mother  
searched for it her whole life

What is a whole life? An insect

limping back to the nest. All his

insect friends are there: Brian the bee,

without a wing. Sam the ant, sans

antenna. Betsy Beetle, carapace cracked

It's good to be home

It's good to be home

It's very good to be home

where we can linger

before the useless stalls

# BILL YARROW

---

## WE MUST BE CAREFULLY TAUT

Courage. Coraje! There's nothing behind  
Puerto Numero Tres. Pay no attention  
to the cabeza in the transom. In the dread  
of night, navigate by the sliver moon, pero  
cuidado: no road leads to magnetic north.

Do you remember, amigo, how to give change  
for a dollar? Six nickels and seven dimes.  
Three quarters, two dimes, and one nickel.  
Sixteen buffalo nickels and two liberty dimes.

Or a boxful of slugs and a pair of brass  
knuckles; a leather sap, a gravity knife,  
and mercury gloves. El mundo es un lugar  
peligroso, the earth is a fearful domain.  
Remember, gringo, you used to live there.

# BILL YARROW

---

## MY NAME IS DZIGA

We walk past plates of marinated mushrooms  
into a room with a copper ceiling and a cork  
floor. A man dressed in a sage frock greets us:

“Welcome! Welcome! I am Jackson. Welcome!”

“Hello! My name is Dziga, and this is my wife Adalet.”

“The worship service begins in ten minutes,” he tells us.

“Ten minutes is an eternity in the life of a born-again  
miscreant,” I whisper to my wife as she adjusts her  
seat cushion. Discreetly, she calls my attention  
to a large bee which has landed on my wrist.

I scoop it into my palm, as is my habit with flies.  
It stings me, but my mind is gnarled: I say nothing.

Dziga, Dziga, you feel the swelling, you overhear the chant.  
Can you taste the jade dragonflies emblazoned on the walls?

# BILL YARROW

---

## RAYMOND CHANDLER AND HIS WIFE

### I.

One day it was boring  
to be alive. The magic  
had vanished in a mist  
of dead wives. The smoke  
of death's cigarette alone  
had survived. Her dying  
grew bitter, and smoked  
in his eyes.

### II.

*She was as gentle as  
a slug of sweet wine,  
as loving as the milky  
handshake of the blind,  
as knowing as the balding  
barker at the fair. The sinks  
and drains now hold  
her hair.*

### III.

They found him drunk  
on the tile, his clothes  
in a pile, his gun by his  
mouth in a kiss, his

body listless as artifice.  
Two bullets made a gaping  
wound in the ceiling  
of the bathroom.

IV.

*It is the autumn of my  
fear of being alive and  
alone. My wife who was  
my candle is now death's  
discolored bone. I, who  
wrote six novels, am a  
soft unpublished  
moan.*

V.

When he woke, he screamed  
for mum and checked into a  
sanitarium. When he saw  
what it was about, he  
changed his mind and just  
walked out. Arriving home,  
he renewed his lease, fed his cat,  
and thanked the police.

VI.

*Every day it was boring  
to be alive. The solace  
had vanished in the hiss  
of the mind. The smoke  
of death's bourbon alone  
had survived. His thoughts  
shrunk to rubble, and  
stoked his demise.*



Alois Nožička

# VINCENT CZYZ

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## VANISHING POINTS

*(an excerpt from Soul-Burners)*

The Australian Aborigine has no Bible; instead, she has the land. The face of the Earth is genuinely a face to him, familiar and expressive. And it tells the entire story of Creation. (*Aborigine*, is, of course, a convenient misnomer that fails to take into account the hundreds of different languages, the hundreds more different dialects, the crisscrossing of varying beliefs and local myths, the singular customs and rites of individual tribes.)

In the beginning, the Earth was as blank as a page and as smooth as a ball bearing—not unlike the world Plato’s demiurge hammered into spherical perfection. An Aboriginal tribesman who saw it then would have been completely lost on this untextured plain where even direction was still in line, waiting to exist. Without sun or moon or star to light his way, without any evidence that an event had ever occurred, this world without flaw would have been horrifying.

Beneath the Earth, however, things were quite different. Direction, the celestial bodies, and life—from grubs curled up like question marks to lizards whose tongues had never pronged the air—lay sleeping. The Ancestors, like hatchlings, broke through the world’s unblemished surface. Timeless, yet they were never without creaking joints and gray hair and ashen beards as tangled as tree roots. Some had bellies covered with bark. Others stood up on emu’s legs or stretched long, scaly fingers tipped with claws like a lizard’s. Mud clinging to them like afterbirth, they called out, “I am!” These syllables became the background hum in which all language would be embedded and against which all songs would be sung.

Did one of the Ancestors become the Sun? Or did the Sun break through the Earth’s crust first and warm their dry bones until their gnarled limbs stirred and their hibernating bodies raised themselves up? Maybe the Sun is what happened after Brolga threw one of Dinewan the Emu’s eggs as high as heaven where it cracked open on a sky-dweller’s store of winter wood

and the bright yolk ignited the stockpiled fuel so that upturned faces were lit by astonishment. The tribes don't agree.

Whose skin turned silver while his hoary beard and hair dissolved into a halo around his rotund body until he became the Moon? Or was the Moon born from a coupling of Ancestors, a swelling in the belly that eventually slid out between wet loins like a miraculous child? The accounts are at odds with one another.

The Ancestors began to roam, singing their way as they went. But before setting off to discover the world to which they were lending shape, the Ancestors dreamed what would happen on their journeys. Their dreams were blueprints. Composing a body of song to house their dreams, the Ancestors gave rise to whatever flies, crawls, hops, walks, climbs, skims, swims, or burrows: kookaburras, cockatoos, honeysuckle ants, dragonflies, kangaroos, bandicoots, tortoises, sloths, koalas, sharks, snakes, thorny devils—nothing exists that doesn't first have a Dreaming. That is to say, everything inhabits the Dreamtime before emerging into the realm philosophers generally refer to as *empirical*.

The oak tree, then, can be understood as an acorn's dream.

Neither dreamtime nor space-time is more real; they are two dimensions of a single phenomenon—heads and tails of a coin that never lands precisely on either one. According to Aboriginal alchemy, all things do not move, as Aristotle suggested, toward perfection, but from an uncreated existence as a Dreaming toward physical embodiment. Death or annihilation is a return to the dream state. Aborigines often speak in terms of vibrations and fields—words that seem more at home among quantum mechanics, who tighten theories without wrenches, lubricate suppositions without grease, concoct scenarios without consulting primal belief.

In this hodgepodge of thought, this quilt of different beliefs and variable ways of explaining things, every feature of the natural world is a finger or footprint left behind by an Ancestor. Genesis was written into the landscape. The doings of the ancestors are told by hills and ridges and salt flats and lakes and riverbeds. A tribeswoman can look at a plateau and say, "That is where the Antelope Ancestor lay down after he tired of wandering." A tribesman can look at a riverbed and see, intimated in its bends and turns, the track of the Rainbow Serpent.

What if, Bob wondered, we too could look at the land as an accretion of past events? Imagine, as in infrared photography, hot zones and cool zones, crimes of passion and passing conversations, moments of love and momentous betrayals? What if, like the Aborigines, we could see the land as

fossilized memory? If an Aborigine were blind and his hand were large enough, he would be able to decipher what had happened in a stretch of territory as if he were reading a kind of braille.

Was there, in fact, another continuum, underneath or behind the one that behaved according to Einstein's equations? Might there not be a subtle indication of this hidden order analogous to the swirls and eddies on the surface of a river that hinted at troughs in its bed?

Why else was he on a subway train taking him back to the scene of the first murder if not to look for something or other he'd missed the first time?

Emerging from the subway at Cooper Union Square Bob was confronted by a snickering group of teenagers who, with their hair spiked like lime-crusted Celtic warriors, their clothes purposely torn and their jackets covered with self-inflicted graffiti (*Anarchy in the US!*), had taken their fashion cues from a previous generation. These same disaffected youths would be the first to cry *I'll sue!* if sold a defective CD player.

They were also the kind who would ignore the fact that a serial killer had made the East Village into his hunting grounds and would walk the charmed perimeter of the chalk outline just for kicks.

Bob tried to imagine how three killings might change the layout of the streets without touching the girdered handiwork of construction crews.

The place where the lines of perspective converge, the vanishing point of a street, is cut off in the city (unlike rural areas where the road dwindles to the horizon). That's where he is, Bob thought, standing at that vanishing point, hidden in the open. There's nowhere we can stand where we can see him.

Here on Tenth and Avenue B, in front of a steel garage door, was Shalena Johnson's vanishing point. She had been the first. There was the clock tower to the west, its face lit, and a river to the east.

But the sidewalk hadn't changed since the last time he'd been here. There was the same industrial ugliness, the same infernal hum—electric current was still the spirit that moved the city's machinery.

He recalled a burned-out tenement a few blocks back. A squatter?

It was on the corner of 10<sup>th</sup> and Avenue B. The door and the bottom row of windows were boarded up. No lights shone through the unglazed windows on the three upper floors.

"You thinkin' about buyin' it?"

Bob whirled around. "Excuse me ...?"

"Thought you might be thinkin' of buyin', you know, an' renovatin'." Wearing a hooded sweatshirt, her arms were folded over her chest. "You

don't look you gonna crawl in one a them windows and start draggin' raggedy couches and whatnot up after you."

"Are there any squatters there now?"

"Only if they invisible and don't need light to see at night. I never seen anyone go in or out, never seen any lights on up there." Her skin was a rich brown and her hair was pulled back tightly. "You ain't a cop, are you? They was already down here asking questions."

It was idiotic of him to be second-guessing the police. "No, just curious, that's all. Thank you. Thank you very much."

Bob headed downtown.

Was the killer smart enough to keep the lights off at night? Did he have some underground way of entering the building so that no one saw him come or go?

Bob stopped at Eighth and Avenue C, where Hector Ruiz had been shot to death, and then at Second and Avenue A where Susan Dodson had been stabbed twelve times and her ring finger cut off. He tried taking perspectives with varying vanishing points; he tried looking at the murder sites from every angle he could imagine, but he didn't even know what he was looking for. Giving up, he walked a few more blocks to Nimmegen's on Sixth.

Natalya was behind the bar. Her face was dusted with white as usual, and her lips were dark blue lined with black, but her hair was pinned up, and she looked almost conventional in jeans and a gray turtleneck. "Hello, Bob."

"I was hoping you'd be working tonight."

"I'm flattered."

"A few dozen times a night, I'm sure. How about a pint?"

"Love the elbow patches. Nice color, too."

Natalya set the glass down on top of the \$20 bill he'd put on the bar. "First one's on me."

"I never argue with the bartender." He saluted her with the glass.

There were maybe a dozen other drinkers letting themselves grow indistinct in the smoldering light. Bob recognized Robin, the black woman whom he now felt sure had once been a man. She was wearing a green sequin dress and green eye-shadow to match. Whenever she smiled, her upper lip drew back to reveal as much pink gum as white tooth.

Beside the cash register, a skull, its grin clamped on the plastic mouthpiece and stump of a burned-down cigar, stared with its empty sockets at a man a few stools from Bob. Amidst shelving was a champagne bottle

encrusted with wax drippings that reminded him of Plato's concept of the soul weighed down by matter. At the back of the bar, hung from a water-stained wall vermiculated with cracks (here and there the plaster had fallen to expose brick), was the dusty portrait of an elfin androgyne, who looked as if he or she cavorted in the deep woods with satyrs and women.

Natalya had stopped at a table to talk to a platinum blonde and a woman wearing a hat that looked as if it had once belonged to a Cossack. The fake black fur of the hat capped a skin-tight outfit of patent leather superimposed on black lace.

A woman in a leather motorcycle jacket who was returning from the bathroom leaned over to kiss a bald mannequin on its shiny black lips. Another Pygmalion counting on her warmth to awaken the plastic into an ebony woman with perfectly sculpted cheekbones—a smooth beauty without a handhold to help a would-be lover scale her heights.

"Wednesdays are always slow." Natalya dropped her rag behind the bar. "I usually close early."

Resting her elbows on the bar so that had she been directly in front of him they would have been nose to nose, she said, "So, to what do I owe this unexpected visit...?"

"Well I was in the area and I ... I thought I'd stop in and say hello before heading back to New Jersey."

She reached under the bar for a glass so that there was the unsettling illusion that she'd been decapitated. "All alone today?"

"Yes."

He glanced at the odd assortment of objects behind the bar, including a decanter sheathed in decaying leather and a Byzantine icon of a haloed Christ. A hand-stenciled sign taped to the register drawer read: *See you in the next world, don't be late.* "Why don't you have a mirror behind the bar?"

"Don't want to scare the vampires away. We'd lose half our clientele."

Bob lifted his chin. "What about the Christ icon?"

"Once you see them, you'll know why Christ doesn't scare them as much as a mirror."

She seemed to have no sense that her own appearance was anything other than acceptable.

"Natalya dear, would you come over here and talk to me ...?"

Bob looked at the black woman because her voice seemed too deep.

"No offense, honey." She offered a dazzling smile and made a gesture with her hand that suggested she could make him disappear.

"I'll be back." Natalya smirked.

The motorcycle brunette and two men flanking her slid out of their seats at the bar.

As much reliquary as bar, Nimmegen's reminded Bob of his childhood penchant for collections. He'd been afraid that what he didn't preserve would one day be lost for good. He smiled at his own hubris—worried that God had failed to appoint an angel to watch over His handiwork and had let the task fall to a self-absorbed child. He'd amassed matchbook covers, butterflies (amateurishly wrapped in cellophane and then squashed flat in a heavy book), bottles of every dimension and color, pens, rocks, coins. He still had, somewhere or other, a Mercury-head dime he'd found in an abandoned car. Minted in the thirties, the god's profile and the wing on his helmet had been nearly rubbed away.

There in his little boy's hand, although he hadn't realized it at the time, was probably the world's most fearful aspect. Fifty more years of being passed around and the dime would be entirely smooth. Another thousand and its silver would be scattered atoms caught in the grooves of fingertips or wiped off on corduroys; it would be sparkle added to the sidewalk. Everything, of course, from mountain to human being, from giant sequoia to seashell, from desert mesa to drifting continent, was melting like a distressed polar cap. At some point in a future too distant to contemplate, there would be no trace of texture, no shine left to show off, not a shiver of motion, not a contour or a wrinkle. There would be an undifferentiated ocean, smooth and still and gray as iron. *Heat death* was the official term.

Retrieval, he now realized, was as much the problem as loss. Light set in motion when the Earth's atmosphere was still a poisonous methane brew was in motion still, which—conveniently for poets—meant that even after a star fizzled out, a perfect ghost image remained, a lure to the eye without heat for the body. The point, however, was that any ray of light that hadn't been thrown a block, that hadn't disappeared into the pit of an asteroid or dived headlong into a black t-shirt or dissolved in the sea's chilly depths, was still on its maiden voyage out, losing its companion rays along the way. Spreading ever farther apart, they may as well have winked out of the three dimensions astronomer's keep such a watchful eye on; radio signals, X-rays, gamma rays, ultraviolet and all the rest were still out there.

It only remained for us to set ourselves up like black holes—which are, after all, unlit loopholes in the law of entropy, accreting rather than eroding as time bent toward them—it only remained for us to draw in what we could,

giving rise in the process to a whirlpool worthy of a Fourth of July dusk. Anything falling into gravity's gullet—a derelict satellite, a dust particle, the siphoned-off flesh of a star—heats to a glow as it accelerates toward what is, according to the latest mathematical descriptions, the unimaginably dense heart of *nothing*. The odd piece of writing was something like that: a trace of melting light before passing through oblivion's doorway.

And there was no end to the writing.

Bob clicked open a slim gold pen trimmed in black. Having given up on opened envelopes and stray scraps of paper, he'd begun carrying a notebook again.

*Not until every bar stool and every story that's come to rest on it has been drawn in. Every tragedy that's ever shuffled through a tenement doorway. Not until the hands that had aligned Stonehenge's slabs with the movements of the Sun and Moon had been fingerprinted. Until England's bogs gave up their last 14-year-old adulteress, publicly whipped by her husband, then pressed by the vengeful tribe into the bog. Until the straw soaked with the sweat of night terrors, littered with white hairs like strands of silver filament, with bits of skin as fine as the scales of butterfly wings, with the discarded memories of a hermit who'd died in his sleep—his yellow skin shrunk around a skeletal refusal to disappear entirely, his body emptied of its burden of loneliness, his bones as light as the straw that cushioned them, a mummy preserved in its own leathery stubbornness and the still air (a little weather, and what was left would become a lost secret)—until this, too, had been drawn in, there would be no end to the writing.*



Alois Nožička

# PIERRE CHAPPUIS

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## FROM DISTANCE AVEUGLE

—translated from the French by John Taylor

### *Time Erased*

Facing the east (*the shadow having been swallowed*), just where the forest ends (*the shadow having been leapt across*), rises the mountain of ash. Exact, unexpected (*on the edges, the villages nestled in whiteness*), the host, the enemy come down from the heights on which he was camping, is occupying the leveled plain. But he who has handed over these places is silently governing them. Subjacent land (*all the old patchworking*) that is evanescent, re-emergent, motionless, and has seemingly flown off. Rolling around itself inside its glass bell, the rustling of the captive night reverberates in the morning.

### *Spark*

A currycomb? An overturned harrow? Nothing brings me closer (*eclipse or failure?*), nor could do so (*impalpable screen*) even if I were in the same place as that morning (*the disheveled sheets upon waking*), touching, or almost, the same vineyard plots, again finding one after another the villages tiered up the slope, the snow (*ah! a footstep into emptiness!*), the snow as if boxed up, as if placed in bottle racks (*no*), in a recently spattereddashed cellar (*no, not really*).

## *Coppices, Clustered Trees*

Opaque sky against the sunlight, water freezing in the swampy areas to the sides of the rutless paths. This cold is stirring up a fire in me. Through the undergrowth, I approach the pond. Every now and then the frost bridge reappears through the gaps. Beneath the bell of daylight, highlands or clouds are shimmering at the outermost reaches. A few isolated or seemingly rebounding bird chirps break out. Coppices, clustered trees, though barren, surround me. The noise of the gravel pit has faded away. In the reeds, at the edge of the pond that remains remote, perhaps burst forth the laughter and shouting of children. I am walking in the noon light, from one lapse of silence to the next.

## *The Harrow of Eyesight*

Water suddenly overflowing the banks to my left (*caresses, brief outbursts, silent lips*). I would have turned my back (*the barren trees*), I now would walk in the opposite direction (*the sodden path*) on a parcel of land seemingly washed away by the current (*the stream, and the stream*). At the end, as if leaving a hallway, I take up my position again (*the pebbly shoal, the high, the low*), invaded by daylight brushed back by the harrow of eyesight.

## *False Witness*

I am heading against the west wind. The road down below plunges into the fog. Slowly coming toward me is the hillside, and the sloping forest to my right. Brushwood dragged toward the daylight, lazy cawing crows already on their search. The path vanishes halfway up the hillside. Illusions, the clods of earth, the stiff grass I am crushing underfoot. Or the frost. Fire gushes forth from the haze in the east. Short race to be the first to reach the hairy loin of dawn. The sky, the treetops, even the talus are all turning pink. The whiteness is gradually fading away.

## ***Like Silent Water***

Dark, calm, colorless forests in the wind. The pasture as a single glistening (*fog, my naked dream*); stardust shining beneath the moist grass (*my night buried, resorbed, my vigil*). The sky is growing pale (*the soil molting, like summer frost*) and the drinking trough, the heap of stones, once again emerge. On the nearby hills (*at the edges, the first reddening*), the forests are taking up their positions again.

## ***Blank page***

In the milky night, my bearings lost, I am neither walking (*shadowy path denying my footsteps*) nor standing in the wind (*higher up, the rustling fringe of the cornfield*), nor getting up. Leveled out and depthless, the land in the moonlight can be read like a watermark. The whiteness and silence are unburdening me. The hillside is swelling like a luminous sail. (*My bearings lost, and still wandering within the absence*). Covered with stubble, the ground has vanished, luminously. In the distance, the gentle mountain, an anonymous nascent desire, almost appears.

# TED JONATHAN

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## DONNA

Living on top of Wah's Chinese laundry, they were Polish. Her older brother looked Puerto Rican. We called him "Spanish Eddie." She was flat and skinny with lush, straight, dark-blond hair flowing well past her waist. Could've been Rapunzel, but she talked like a guy. We hung out in the same crowd by the corner Carvel. She'd laugh heartily at my wisecracks, and like me, favored The Rolling Stones and hated the world. I'd reassure her: Nobody blamed her for Spanish Eddie's suspected part in setting up a neighborhood pot dealer for a home-invasion-gunpoint-robbery. Seventeen, she took no breaks between lousy boyfriends. She dumped the latest, a puppy-dog-eyed snake (whose name I never cared to remember) after he stole a roll of quarters she'd stashed in the sock drawer of the dresser by her bed. Next day, it was just me and Donna, smoking a joint, lounging in the back seat of a friend's wreck. Her hair—it struck me—was far better than any tits, eyes, or ass. Hot and heavy—when she abruptly pulls away. Says,

“We can’t, we’re friends.” “Oh,” I say,  
“you mean like you just wanna be  
friends?” “No,” she says, “it’s just  
that we *are* friends.”

# TED JONATHAN

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## I SHOULD'VE HELPED HIM PLOT HIS ESCAPE

Our third floor window faced the back of another six-story apartment building. Between the buildings was a concrete alley. The building was close enough so that I could've hit it underhanded with a Spaldeen. Its sole balcony was on the second floor. And although the railed balcony was as long as that entire side of the building only one apartment had access. Through an unpainted wooden door. The door the woman would shove the boy out of.

She'd wear a floral apron over her housecoat and her gray hair tied tightly in a bun. The boy was about my age, ten. She looked too old to be his mother. An otherwise ordinary looking boy, he was always dressed up. Slacks, shoes shined, and a button up short sleeved shirt in warm weather. A well-scrubbed little man. Too well scrubbed. I never saw him on the street. And I never saw him at school. She'd shove him out the door, and he'd beg to play

with other kids. Every day, he'd  
be left on the balcony—

Alone. No ball. No books. Nothing.  
Looking up, down, every which way,  
arms at times windmills, he'd pace  
and skip for hours. Stopping only  
when she'd come out. Stone-faced,  
she'd hand him a bowl of mush  
and a spoon. But there was nothing  
to rest it on. He'd eat standing.

I slid the window open, "Hey!"  
I called out to him. He stopped  
skipping and looked up at me.

"I'm Ted," I said, and asked  
what his name was. "David!"  
he shouted excitedly. I invited him  
to come out and play. She must've  
heard talk and came bustling out.  
But when David pointed to our  
window and said, "Look mommy,  
I made a friend up there!"—I ducked—  
and she dragged him in, screaming  
daggers, "Mommy will be upset  
if you get kidnapped! Mommy  
will be upset if you get kidnapped . . .!"

# CRAIG KURTZ

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## FLAG

Tranquilizing hoaxes  
unanimously ingeminated  
exteriorize precedence,  
inaugurating alarm clocks  
across continental  
rib cages.

That's what shot birth  
to the "no."

Reinforcing confluence  
multiplies procedure  
stimulating quiescence,  
insinuating pay-stubs  
throughout constellated  
nervous systems.

Short jump banged life  
to the "no."

# SUSAN H. MAURER

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## CRYSTAL BALL

As I get up  
a small folded square  
of regenerated cellulose tape  
on the massage table.  
Intrigued, I pick it up.

A small gold bird with wings upraised  
tail down, long sippy beak  
in hummingbird pose,  
jumbled letters beneath it, P...A...?

I take the miniature home,  
unfold it, find the word  
    "Papyrus."

Papyrus, the pith of a tall sedge  
from the Nile Valley  
pressed  
into material to write on.

Ah, a message from PAPHYRUS land,  
someone, somewhere. O.K., a discard  
from some product named PAPHYRUS.

"Hummingbirds float free of time," announces the product,  
six blocks from me. I am as cynical  
as some of you, but off I hop.

A thick, prismatic, cut-glass, crystal bowl. A dream.  
Must have it.  
And on the card, gold hummingbird,  
embossed on white, the paper fine.

# SUSAN H. MAURER

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## SNARED

Ignore the sound of barking dogs  
that shows that Hecate with her dark arts  
sweeps the ground as she goes by.

I look at you, my jaw ajar and at that  
point the net is cast and, golden, shivers  
as it traps you in its glow, your features  
subtly changed in halo's light.

Now, the spell discharged I look at you again.  
Has it been years? I think it was. And  
see a missing tooth, hard muscles now seem  
chained in fat and the message of your speech  
betrays a mind grotesque, disturbed. A geek.  
I feel a little sick.

O how we dress our limerences, with what forced  
garb which tangles even us in its dark glint.

I see a jerk, well maybe I should say two jerks  
but I can only stare  
in shock. The teeth were always bad.

# KARL TIERNEY

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## GERTRUDE STEIN TO ALICE B. TOKLAS

We are fast.  
We are fast driving.  
Lands unknown.  
We fast driving for lands unknown to us.  
Our car.  
Our car is a Packard.  
Our car is a beautiful blue Packard convertible  
    and we are fast driving.  
Our car is ours, not the bank's,  
    and is beautiful and blue  
    and we are beautiful and not blue  
    and we are fast driving  
    and do not feel a bit dangerous or dirty.  
We have the radio on  
    and then we do not.  
  
First we have the radio on, for the music  
    and then we have it off, for the silence.  
No! Silence is a lie  
    for there is always wind.  
  
We have the sound of wind  
    so silence is a lie  
    when we have the radio off.  
In the wind is your red scarf  
    and our car is a Packard.

A Packard. Yes, a Packard  
and your red scarf is moving in the wind  
in our beautiful blue Packard convertible.  
Your red scarf is moving  
for we are fast driving  
towards lands that do not  
give us a clue of what they might hold.  
Fast, yes, fast driving we are  
in a beautiful blue Packard,  
but are neither blue nor worried  
nor very dangerous nor dirty, really.  
We are merely fast  
and can be heard with the radio off  
in the sound of the wind.

# KARL TIERNEY

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## AWAITING PROUST

I imagine you coming  
through the door  
like the devil  
sore hands on fire  
for bags of gold  
“I love you”  
on your lips  
ghastly emptiness  
at your core.

Does it matter  
that the modern is not  
your idea of a good time  
but a clamoring of grossly painted tea cups  
like the orifice of chauffeurs?  
Damn you, I am equally  
maimed by their sneer.

# KARL TIERNEY

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## POL POT

His regime lasted three years, eight months, twenty-one days  
after the *sublime blood of his supporters was pit*  
*against that of Lon Nol*, as the “Times” puts it  
in an op-ed piece ivory-carved in a Forty-Third Street tower.  
Oh, yawn. The urban versus agrarian  
and Anarchist as opposed to Communist, what’s new beyond  
the emergence of an underdog from a crowded field—  
a setting in rice paddies that’s not Illinois?

If the people of the world we call “Third World”  
wish to purge the CIA virus from their blood,  
it necessitates they can’t be blamed for an excess  
that finally goes beyond language  
should the process of purification dictate  
masses shedding blood on stone, which to us  
cuddled by the crushed-velour of Peugeot interiors  
makes a harsh landscape, regardless of ideology  
or where we fall along the political spectrum. In conversations  
after ordering either chocolate mousse or frozen yogurt,  
it’s disturbing for us to think of idealists who act  
such as Pol Pot sacrificing that trite “one out of five”  
or twenty percent of his nation’s population  
the ones possessing misfortunes with a Western taint,  
the ones found carrying pasts without futures.  
If money could corrupt the body, it must be amputated,  
and if religion is the opiate of the people, and it is,  
then let there be a war on that drug until all realize  
that statues of Buddha smug in self-denial have earned  
annihilation, and if Beethoven is bourgeois,  
and he is, terribly, let the destruction of pianos

deter his being played, and if ignorance mandates overbearing  
of children and it follows that man must then develop  
the non-organic plants that riddle the landscape  
and glow in the night bearing generations of power  
from the mill to hydroelectrical to nuclear,  
small, really, if all these  
are the cause of modern distress, shut them down  
at the source and bury the core by the river gone sterile.  
Then and only then can this slaughter lead to examination of  
what was assumed to be peripheral—the growing of rice—  
or what was thought outmoded—human nature, though  
everything that occurs within it is natural.  
Everything.

# KARL TIERNEY

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## BODYBUILDER

In memory of Michael Weber

Muscle kinks, infections, spider wounds  
require food, rest, respite from ruffians.  
Cow's milk, "tiger's milk," soy milk, carrot juice,  
and high-potency brewer's yeast concentrates  
presage a victory, a parading of trophies.

If I must train my body  
slow on a Saturday night alone, I must.  
Eventually, there's beauty in fine tuning the chill  
to personal aberration of style. Performing alone  
is included in the price, a special part of the package.  
I would not call the final product beautiful.  
I would not limit myself to the judgments of clientele.  
Reward derives from mass, but ecstasy thrives on process.  
All that's required is survival  
after mucking through the warmth of Mother, terrible  
childhood, the first young fucks and mistook loves,  
the absorption of knowledge that didn't quite cut bait,  
as fishermen say, and it is a little like fishing,  
years of never making muscle, then presto—  
a powerhouse of loneliness!  
A professional in muscular docility!

Now, those with the infamous venom  
are small nuisance to me in any bed, on any beach.

# KARL TIERNEY

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## BILLY IDOL'S BIRTHDAY

Too much leather melts the ice cream.

When we crack, we crack  
like cane too laden with sugar  
so that we fall severely  
(weak-kneed and stomach-wrenched).  
We fall at the third blow.  
Our wishes unravel a string of pain.  
Our beautiful blond hair starts to stick  
to the brush. It comes out in tufts –  
We scan the mirror for an inkling,  
which flaw, which disease. Too long  
we have been tortured with “bad boy” syndromes.  
Once wrapped in sheets still steamy from bodies  
gone from the orgy, our rejection is eternal.  
Our mothers do not call.  
We have little left but asylums,  
drug rehabilitation centers,  
dark bushes in parks in which  
to hide and curse ourselves.

# KARL TIERNEY

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## FRUSTRATED ARTIST

(with A.H. in Mind)

I have been drunk on the Master  
so long, I cannot sort delusion  
from magnificence.  
In his eyes is my will,  
in his words my breath.

Striking out is better than  
giving in, I mutter, moved  
by the stirrings of violence  
if not its results.  
The charred remainder of the world  
sneers from the canvas  
like milk on a brat's lips.  
If I can just be rid of the fairies  
I can eliminate half my competition,  
then dismiss the remaining eggheads  
as they shake their Marxist models  
with "How does this fit?"

For a cool million,  
art sharks will enter through  
the eye of my immense needle,  
that one sculpted there,  
dyed with the blood of goats.

# PAUL B. ROTH

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## HEART FAILURE

I took my heart to the all night wash'n fold. Explained to its manager on duty how I knew nothing about the spot in question's origin except that its dark center's been causing my heart to not only skip beats but set up conflicting appointments with top cardiologists. I continued on about how at birth I was reassured my life would be spared its death, but somehow, becoming genetically unwound, everyone who examined me just this past Thursday agreed it was all I could do to keep from dying. My mouth, you see, was shutting down, forgetting how to form words, running out of breaths for inflating vowels, losing its lips and its front teeth for grating consonants all while it was receiving intravenous scriptures in verses having long ago turned truth and everything else the heart beat invisibly clean.

# PAUL B. ROTH

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## AFTERNOON'S PRAISE

Afternoon takes its time crossing tall pine shadows over this dirt and gravel road.

It naps through the ricochette cicadas scratch with seventeen year long fingernails across an early moon's rising golden red shoulders at sunset.

It burrows through unmown grasses whose shimmering green at dusk hovers a haze above overgrown sycamore and oak roots.

Is suicidal yet without so much as a camera's handshake threatens to jump from an ant hill without leaving any note or reason why no note was left.

Afternoon leads us away, blends us in, puts us to sleep and in its darkest hour awakens us to the sound of our own breathing without knowing who we are.

Segues us from the dilated pupil of Buñuel's mule to the exquisite mole on the cheek of Marilyn Monroe curtsying while unchurning butter from its rising cream.

Looks both ways across the sky before tucking its shadows under rocks alongside those unaccounted-for-stars from last night's darkness.

Has its way with us, slowing the pace of our blood down to that of the spattered black and maroon lined snail we long to become.

Afternoon lasts forever.

# PAUL B. ROTH

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## BLOOD AND OTHER NUMBERS

Where snow grew hooves and stumbling from the forest bled down  
your own ankles and wrists, deer herds passed their silhouetted caravans  
behind your back.

Hanging from wrought iron railings, the moon you watched tinged  
drops of thawing ice a pink-orange at its setting.

Mouths you heard splitting open from rocks, hiccups mimicking  
frog whistles, and eyes gauged over by stripped but unblinking birch bark,  
picked at the scabs of your aging wounds.

Raspberries plucked off the barbed wire stitched through your shirt  
front smeared your favorite color in the span of a mere gasp.

Thawing creeks swelled below intertwined oak branches kissing  
whenever high winds rubbed their grown necks together.

As a lingering signature, ice slid a few of its sun's wet fingerprints  
down a rough-sided rock wall.

You bled alone.



Alois Nožička



Alois Nožička



Alois Nožička



Alois Nožička

# ED SEVERSON

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## TIME'S UP

Hank was killing time before the party.  
Then Time, ready to do a good turn,  
Stopped by to help.

He killed enough time for Hank  
To go to the party, get married, have three children,  
Retire and die.

Time looked at Hank in his casket.  
He had helped Hank,  
But now he felt weak, not well at all.

Time crawled in beside Hank and died.

# TONY GLOEGGLER

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## GOOD

After a week of rain, it's sunny and May.  
It's spring, you're walking Brooklyn streets  
and you got this inkling that something good  
could be beginning when you step to the side,  
let a young mother wheel her stroller slowly by  
and her smile reminds you of Diane. Ah Diane,  
that years-ago girl with her shiny black skin  
and wise-ass mouth, the tiny sound she made  
the first time you undid the top two buttons  
of her jeans, hooked your finger inside her  
as you stood on the Bergen Street station  
waiting for the F train to come. The way  
she rocked herself to sleep the five weeks  
you couldn't keep your hands off each other,  
even after she told you that first morning  
she was pregnant, maybe two months along.  
You said you never would have guessed  
and she said her breasts already felt bigger  
and fuller and you kissed and sucked them  
until you started fucking again. She never  
mentioned the father and looked at you  
like you were crazy when you asked about  
an abortion. Somehow, she had it in her head  
she was carrying a girl and named her Sydney.  
She said she didn't give a shit if she turned  
into a fat ass project mama like her mother.

It wasn't too long before she started wondering  
what was going on with you. You didn't know,  
said you needed time while she kept coming over.

You tried convincing yourself you were in love,  
pictured growing old together. She ended it  
one Monday morning, saying it would never work.  
You mumbled something about bad timing, how  
much you would miss her. Mostly, you remember  
trying to stop yourself from thinking you'd give  
almost anything to do her one more time from behind.  
She got out of bed, showered real quick and fit  
her things into a red back pack while you threw on  
sweat pants, wishing she was the kind of woman  
you usually fell for, the kind who lived according  
to some plan, the kind who believed abortion  
was a right and a sacrament, the nice white kind.  
When she wouldn't let you walk her to the subway,  
you kissed her cheek at the door. You're pretty sure  
you called a few times, left messages with cousins  
as you counted down the months, feeling better  
and better until you knew she was gone for good.

# MARINA RUBIN

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## GOGI WALKED DOWN THE STREET

Gogi, a puny architecture student from Tbilisi came to America on a heavyweight wrestler's visa. he found a bed in the cellar on a dead-end street on Brighton, with eight other men sleeping in shifts. he handed out flyers advertising twenty-five cent peep shows, washed dishes at Rasputin, folded laundry at the local drop-off, he was a plumber's helper, a roof fixer, a toilet cleaner. he lived on ramen noodles, rice and beans, in desperate times he tried cat food with mustard. in the winter things got really bad, landlord changed locks without warning, plumber skipped town without paying. Gogi walked down the street, freezing, starving, an old Cadillac rolled up, give me all your money motherfucker shouted the driver waving his gun, like a ladies handkerchief. Gogi groped in his pockets, shrugged, then hopped in the car and proposed they do this together, as partners, and if they go to jail no problem, a roof over their heads and three meals a day. the mugger scowled at the scrawny immigrant, lowered his gun, screamed get out of the car, get out, and get a job man, get a job

# MARINA RUBIN

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## MR. MONEY

i decided to neuter my cat. there was no other way. living on the sixth floor of an apartment complex, i would have to hire some perky hooker-cats or join a breeding league to provide him with a normal sex life. in white slippers and a white bow tie, always dressed to the nines in his furry tuxedo, he lay curled on my lap as i dialed the neighborhood animal clinic. the mousy secretary squealed in my ear what is the patient's name? i gave her my name, she said you are not the patient, what's the patient's name, Mulya i whispered, spell that she commanded, i don't know M-U-L-Y-A, like money in Arabic, she snickered you named your cat "money," have you no shame? waiting in the reception among posters for cat aerobics and lion haircuts, i shuddered at the familiar squeal - Mulya Rubin, who is here to pick up Mulya Rubin? as i raised my hand, flipping the middle finger, ready to scream he is not my father, nor my son, they wheeled out my Mulya Rubin, bandaged like a contused soldier

# MARINA RUBIN

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## THE IMPOSTER

i found Murali Kumar on Careerbuilder, intelligent, articulate, professional, a Lotus Notes\* ace from Cincinnati. he passed the technical phone screen with the client like a Russian ice-skater at the Olympics. accepting an offer he yessed me to death, yes i can do this job with my eyes closed, yes i can hit the ground running. on Monday morning i received a call from the client- Murali Kumar is here, but i doubt he is the guy i interviewed over the phone, this one barely speaks English, no clue about Lotus Notes. gripping my heart i phoned the imposter - who are you and what are you doing at my client site? a frail pint-size voice, like dewdrops from a lotus flower flowed in streams of broken English, yes me Murali, yes lotus notes. thirty minutes of his yeses and my nos, i learned the real ace from Cincinnati was helping his New Jersey nitwit cousin get a job. sometime after lunch i heard the nitwit cousin was running down the hill from the client complex, pressing his attaché case to his chest

# RICH IVES

---

## A DELAYED REPORT ON THE MOTIVATIONS OF THE INSURGENTS

1.

An honest man would rather fall than stand crooked. A cheat looks at crooked and sees tall. An ordinary man seeks the difference with age. His mistakes stand crookedly beside him and whisper *That doesn't work either*, but there is always something else, and it too may fail, but the crooked man falls in upon himself before he falls on the ground. It's not so easy to stand again, carrying yourself upon your own crooked back.

Your reputation does not precede you. Your advertisement does. By the time your accomplishment arrives, they're both mistaken.

happiness: a hummingbird shouting in the wind

2.

Wait too long to sharpen a green stick, and it will grow brittle and break. Sharpen the green stick when it's still full of life, and it wants to bend away from the blade. Leave the green stick alone, and it will break when it's tired, and again, and again, until it is the earth, and another green stick pokes through it and unfurls.

A blind man doesn't have to look at his mistakes, but many blind men know how everything else is quietly forgetting.

vow of poverty: the man who has so little he believes he knows a little more

3.

Only a leader follows his own bad advice. Only a follower chooses not to choose, but a follower follows himself to where the leader used to be. It's the first time he's seen himself leading anyone. We're lucky the mirror faces a mirror. There will be no questions.

When someone follows in your footsteps, you can finally laugh at your mistakes while laughing even more at theirs.

experience: wants to know what's served at the reception before he attends the funeral

4.

The frogs have been flying all night. You can hear their floppy wings croaking as they dive in and out of the cleverly arranged reeds that guide them in their aerial display of mating in transit and arrange the carefully air-born suspension of eggs. The pigs hauling dawn out of the mud are warming it up and throwing it back down to make a sloppy luxurious communal bed. The more water you contain, the easier it is to heal yourself. At least that's what the ocean thinks, even if it does sunbathe every chance it gets.

Would it be more helpful to show the enemy the gun you can't shoot or the harp you can't play?

genius: can't walk so he leaps

5.

He used the nails from the church that burned to build the animal shelter that took care of the arsonist's dog until a fireman adopted him and then died saving a young boy from a fire that the young boy had started.

Horse eating beans doesn't know about the evening's music, but man eating beans should consider the instrument.

good intentions: several of the best ordinary thinkers were hired

6.

When irrational biological imperatives challenge personal logic, the system must go through an adaptation of its flexibility in reasoning. Many overly reductionist systems cannot accommodate this challenge and turn to fundamentalism to explain it; thus, fundamentalism channels the natural flexibility of a system into an increasingly inflexible and external set of explanations just as muscles applied only to one task will try to apply the energy from other challenging tasks to the one they are most familiar with.

Can a stone that has turned away from itself find a resting place in the turning away? Is it possible after all to catch something that wasn't there?

progress: bedside stoves of buffalo dung fronted to a welcome recovery

7.

A rebel scout dressed like a baby stroller and talking trash like a wannabe, catapulting flaming raccoons across the parapets. If something in my retreat wants to propagate, does this mean I have lived in a ghost town? Have I soaked in blood the victorious earth? Will the intentions slow seedling flags still claim the territory?

I remember the year I was afraid of rope. The baby never married but swayed. The bodies of dissident parents climbed down to the river for a second child born to emptiness.

resolution: another nervous body tied down by the earth but still escaping

# CATHERINE SASANOV

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## ACQUISITION

(*View of Boston Common* about 1750, by Hannah Otis)

Low-lit, glass-boxed, auction house acquired. What began as four feet of linen in a young girl's lap, her needle fashioning a net to catch a husband. John Hancock's trapped, tripped-up in her stitches: a pretty boy too young to keep. But she's not ripping out those threads. In 1748, deep in the wing of an unborn bird, his famed signature sleeps. Across this landscape spun from a silkworm's gut, shorn off the backs of sheep, the boy's trailed by one of his uncle's slaves (Cato? Prince Holmes? Hannibal?), the implied luxury that presence always states. What looks like summer in New England is just one well-dressed frozen moment: Everyone bundled in silk, in wool. So the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, bids to carry Boston home. To the wing 10 million dollars made, the headphones waiting in that wing, the soothing British voice on payroll waiting for his script. *Listen, listen*: Deep in the bowels of the MFA, a man writes his way around a slave.

# CATHERINE SASANOV

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IN 1917, AMATEUR HISTORIAN SAMUEL  
BATCHELDER SUBLIMELY CONJURES THE  
DAYS OF COLONIAL SUGAR PLANTATIONS  
(SIDESTEPING SLAVE REVOLT &  
EXECUTIONS)

MEANWHILE, MY NEPHEW THE FIREMAN  
EXPLAINS THE PHYSICS OF THOSE  
EXECUTIONS IN ANTIGUA, 1736

A delicate, sub-tropical aroma

*a person burning at the stake*

exhales even now

*would smell themselves*

from the wills and inventories –

*cooking –*

a seductive blend of

*burning hair, it's*

coffee, spice, sugar,

*a terrible smell –*

slaves, molasses, rum – especially rum.

*I can't describe it. It smells wrong.*

While the bone and sinew

*What will be left*

of New England were

*will be a person's most durable parts –*

hard at work

*In Antigua,*

buying and selling,

*smoke was people*

importing and smuggling

*giving off their elements –*

these indispensables,

*Believe me,*

the actual producers were lolling

*any chemical bond*

in splendid town and country houses,

*can break,*

satisfying themselves with occasional jaunts

*every element has*

to oversee the overseers

*its flashpoint.*

# CATHERINE SASANOV

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## MASSACHUSETTS

### (A SHORT HISTORY OF LIGHT)

There were 3 persons executed in Boston. An Englishman for a Rape. A negro man for burning a house in Northampton & a negro woman who burnt 2 houses in Roxbury July 12 – in one of wch a child was burnt to death. *The negro woman was burned to death* – the 1<sup>st</sup> yt has suffered such a death in NE.

*The Diary of Increase Mather, September 22, 1681*

Back when light had shelf life.  
Illumination

clinging to a string. Light  
gnawed by mice,  
malodorous in heat

(a man threading a wick  
down the throat

of a bird, settling in to read). What burned

in rooms made mostly of dark?

*Mutton fat, beef fat, deer fat, bear –*

And the poorest of the poor  
left to wear  
the full moon's cold, clean smell.

Did a budding executioner  
love to read

the candle maker's bloody palms,

smell *slaughter* in his light? Dream

of nights

lit by the writhe

of a burning woman,

the tinder of her sins?

# CATHERINE SASANOV

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## TO KNOW SHE ONCE EXISTED IS TO FIND HER EVERYWHERE

(One More Woman Pried Out from Under *Look Away, Look Away,  
Look Away Dixie Land*)

*Maria, burned to death for arson: Boston, September 22, 1681*

Call it history for the Whole Foods crowd. Back in the day of earthy crunchy executions. Organic. *Au naturel*. Homespun rope. Handhewn stakes. Refined iron, New England made. No match. No gasoline. Just birch bark, pine boughs, elbow grease (flint & steel). Pre-thick black smoke. Pre-hotter, faster moving heat. Woman as candle lit from the bottom up, as perfect storm of gender, class, and race that couldn't save herself with rain: to be female, slave, and black. An eye for an eye, a burn for a burn. *Raison d'être* in the sun. *How do you solve a problem like Maria* was a question, not a song. The hills were alive with the sound, in 1681, the hills had yet to be torn down to build the city out. *Maria, Maria, I just met a girl named Maria, Negro servant to Joshua Lamb, a master white as snow (and everywhere that Mary went, that lamb was sure to go)*. Hers is a story told to a child born without a tongue. Confessed in diaries lost for 1681. Shouldered out of textbook range by Salem's white, freeborn witches. Before the sticky trickle of her existence gums up their pretty works. And when it came to witnessing her death? Think Rx, swallow this: less court-ordered execution than Puritans doctoring their slaves. That healthy dose of *Fear of God* spit out behind each master's back.

# JACK DEVLIN

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## AFTER EACH SONG AND EACH BOOK IS EMPTIED

Setting out for the previous moment,  
the hard chills of Beiderbecke  
and his one repeating terror,

you recall, as either music or a canary's confusion,  
a room suffocating with unopened packages  
addressed to your mother and father, to at least one

of their eyes, the unread books you've written,  
poems without the courage to decay  
and scar the table with their lunar sobbing,

and you follow, in every wrong direction,  
like the crushes that still forget you from the smashed  
metronomes of a practice schedule childhood,

Elton's false shivers foraging the hands you write with  
day and night, your notebook emptied to a claw-quick  
chord by the shot glass climbers who stole their fears

from the emilys when they were closest to the ground—  
and how many there are, how many there are—  
trapped in the silence of their hordes.



Alois Nožička

# JEN KNOX

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## STATIC TIME

Three teenagers stood around Dad's rust-eaten truck. All of them wore suits, as though heading to a prom. Two of them leaned against the truck bed and another, who was smoking, was at the passenger's side window examining my brother's booster seat or whatever was there. I checked the time, figuring the guys were part of Dad's plan.

I was part of the plan, and my timing had to be precise. Dad was in the house prepping the kitchen to make his famous French toast, and I was headed to the corner store to buy the cinnamon he'd forgotten.

"It's three of the same person," Joey said. "They all said hello at the same time." My brother was sitting in a small grassy area on the side of our house, looking for snakes.

"Go inside," I told him. "Help Dad cut up the strawberries."

"Nope."

"You can use a knife."

Joey ran toward the side door, wiping his dirt-covered hands on the back of his jeans as I examined the wad of bills in my pocket. Dad used to make this French toast every Sunday, with fat slices of challah bread, honey, cream, and brown eggs. His recipe was exact, and the cinnamon had to go in at the right time.

Mom would take a bite and remember that a guy who could make such complex French toast couldn't be all that irresponsible and inconsiderate—the words she'd used to describe him the day he left. Dad's plan also involved filling the house with flowers, and I supposed it involved a few teenagers in suits.

When I checked my watch, a watch Dad had given me that kept perfect time, I realized I'd have to run. So I did. As soon as I arrived at the store, I told the clerk to direct me to the cinnamon. I put Dad's cash on the counter and ran home without waiting for change. I was running so fast that I almost passed the uncovered garage where Dad's old truck had been parked. My heels skidded on the gravel, and I felt like a cartoon. I imagined smoke coming from my feet, filling the air with a dark cloud as I stopped.

Mom's car pulled up around the front, so I rushed inside, slid the cinnamon to Dad—who was waiting with thick pieces of bread lined up next to a milky orange mixture in a square bowl. He wiped imaginary sweat off his brow and said, "Good job, kiddo."

"She's out front," I reported. "And your truck—"

"Hey, no worries," he said. "I have my truck out back. Mom won't see." He dipped the first piece in the mixture, told me to count to ten. "Joey, boy, come on inside," he called.

"Ten," I said. "Joey's here. I told him to help you."

"Yeah, he came in, but I told him he could play in the back if he wanted."

I looked toward the back window. I looked toward the other window that faced the alley. Dad was smiling, placing that first piece onto the hot skillet. A sugary, buttery sizzle filled the room as the front door closed; the soft taps of my mother's heels moved across the hardwood floor. These details, small and beautiful, would haunt me later, remind me of the day my brother disappeared into the matrix.

Mom's tired eyes wrinkled at the corners, the way they did when she was proud. She shook her head in disapproval but smiled like she did when she was really happy.

"Long time," she said.

I wanted my parents to be together more than I wanted anything, and Dad's plan was working. I couldn't interrupt, so I decided I would give myself two minutes to find my brother. I checked the time.

I ran around the house, called out casually so as not to raise suspicion. I ran outside and stood in the spot where the truck had been, and there was only a half-smoked cigarette and a wrapper from one of Joey's suckers on the ground.

Two minutes were up. The time was right. I screamed as loud as any girl, screamed until my parents rushed out.

"Where's my truck?" Dad asked. He was wearing an apron with a cartoon chef on it.

"It's not the truck," I said. How was I supposed to tell them about Joey? "There were men in suits. I thought they were part of your plan." I was talking so fast that I didn't even see Joey running down the alley with his fist out in front of him until Dad pointed. I heard his voice.

"Those men took your truck on a secret mission. They know you," he said to Dad. "Then I caught this snake! I think they left him for me."

Joey held out a green garden snake that whipped around like our cat's tail when she gets angry. I realized I had been holding my breath and let it out.

The moment before we would have gone inside for the perfect French toast and to call the police about Dad's missing truck, the ticking in my watch stopped. I held it to my ear, tapped it; it was 5:47, static.

The snake slipped from Joey's hands. As he knelt to reclaim it, squealing tires tattooed the alley. My parents and I watched, stuck in time, as Joey was rushed to the ground. The truck backed over him and took a sharp turn. The teenagers had tried to escape down our street, a dead end, and were still making their getaway. Dad ran after them, but they sped off; Mom dialed an ambulance.

We sat with Joey's limp body. Dad reached for Mom's hand. Their grip was tight, stronger than I'd ever seen. I looked at my watch, and I smelled French toast burning. I looked at my watch as my parents held on. It remained 5:47, but the numbers were already beginning to fade.



Alois Nožička

# GRAHAM SCHIMMEL

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## THE SONG OF THE WATER PLANET

The water is a lie.

The water will be blamed for its own disappearance.

The water flows to us from the basements of the earth.

The water goes brown in its invisible cities.

The water moves with expeditions of punctured tarpaulin.

The water breeds only uncountable and useless water.

The water will be punished for revealing its unforgivable information.

The water will be poisoned and devoured by human lobsters.

The water will return because there are no other gods.

The water will be given only the protection of the pelican word for “water”  
while it weakens with the stillness of all plankton.

The water’s father will be fed the lost laughter of a hermit crab.

Treat the water as an animal flowing with cellophane mist.

Invest in the toxic potentials of water.

Buy and sell water!

Predict the prices of water, the demands of the crowds of water.

If water does not advance, then water will be killed.

None of the water is new.

Water is an old and hackneyed master.

Water is less valuable than television movies of ice.

Water is less valuable than a dress pregnant with octopus.

Water is less valuable than men fighting in cell phone pictures.

Water that can be thought of as a vertebrate now.

Water that can be heard when its bones of a thousand windows point  
toward the sky.

There are no longer spaces between people and the red robot sounds of  
water.

There are no longer sanctuaries of benevolent water in the petroleum  
eternity.

There are no longer songs whose water has never been touched.

There are search towers instead of oxygen on the microscope slides  
of slowed river water.

The water cannot be trusted: it is no longer a proven place of healing.

The water cannot be trusted even when our spies have infiltrated  
the fish cameras of algae hotels.

The water can't be tasted: it can be guessed at, but never known.

The water's people will have no water to drink, no water to cut open for  
the deeper water.

They will have to sip the false glacier melt from their own parched bodies.

They will forget the lakes and reservoirs and underground oceans of fog.

The water can be discussed, but only in leviathan apocrypha.

The water can be felt as pain because the insides of the water are turning  
human now.

The water is despised, the water is overcrowded, the water is herded  
and forced into plastic bottles with no mother, no father,  
not a word or a prayer or a breath from the next labeled crack of  
light.

The water can be listened to because its molecules are thickening from a  
horrible thirst.

*The water is not dying*, the iron people will tell you

while the water cowers in the bottomless aquifers of antifreeze,

unable to move the heavier water, unable to reach the iron surface

where the ships are not afraid and the sonar is an advancing predator  
that survives now in fleets of shark memory.

No one listens to their weeping that can be drilled and tested and taken  
away.

No one feels the stronger water nuzzling  
the weaker water during the body's mutilation dramas.

*How will anyone survive the stillness of water,*

*how will anybody endure the secrets among the water's many selves.*

Each person betrays, through a blunted thirst, his or her graveyards of  
rain.

Each person hears and ignores—as difficult, wasteful, and unproven—  
the cries of the dark and falling water.

# GRAHAM SCHIMMEL

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## ROUNDUP INSURGENCY

Harold ties his own bomb-sniffing nooses.  
“We don’t call them shoes anymore,” he says.  
The dust records everything they do here.

“We have a national holiday  
for the afternoon the dust turned  
into everyone’s traitor, and that day is every day.”

“The nights are against the law  
because that is when our thoughts  
come for us,” Harold says.

“And though we try, we cannot turn off  
the television where the gutted  
money’s gotten taller.”

His father repeats one word:  
*Monsanto. Monsanto. Monsanto.*  
“It keeps memory—all memory—from

finding him,” Harold’s sister Nina says.  
The handgun party came yesterday for the mother.  
They arrested her for choosing

to let her uterus devour the rest of her body.  
Harold flaunts how the ravenous,  
thought-dark shoes amputate,

toe by toe, the planet under his feet.  
“Our father lost the last safe place in his head  
and we’re next,” Nina says.

Outside, flocks of searchlights  
take over the sky. “Each person gets assigned  
a baby searchlight,” Harold says,

preparing a meal of splinters and salted nails.  
“We can lose weight now,” he says.  
“We can look like beautiful, worshipped cadavers now.”

*Sports Illustrated* propaganda.  
“Pornography For The People!”  
(a mother nursing her infant’s vaccinated

button that cures faraway tracking errors)  
(a father impregnating his daughter the moment she’s born)  
(filling her with baby searchlights).

And when a man begins to cry,  
his throat grows venomous thorns  
and needles and spines that can be cured

only in the flesh-eating hospitals  
(and visits there, like subsidizing a celebrity’s  
snake sugar vineyards

among the chances of heaven,  
are also mandatory).  
The stomach has its own cameras.

“Soon we will have to eat what crawls  
out of us,” Harold says while his mouth drags the rest  
of his shadow to a different room.

And when he says his hands will eat every saddened thing  
on her body, Nina tames her sudden smile,  
already transmitted to the programmers

of live starvation quizzes. Some days Harold grows food  
at the bottom of his forced happiness  
and some days the food tastes like that happiness.

Today, Harold holds Nina's hand.  
Today, they listen for their mother's improbable return.  
Today, their father sits in a corner chewing a spider.

*Monsanto.*

*Monsanto.*

*Monsanto.*

# TODD MOORE

---

## NEVER TOLD

nobody this  
but i always  
took the  
toy wooden  
gun my  
daddy whittled  
out of hick  
ory for me  
it was a nice  
shiny well  
made little  
pistol that  
fit right into  
the palm  
of my hand  
& if you  
are thinking  
as i know  
you are  
what good  
is a wooden  
gun against  
a machine  
gun then  
you know  
why my  
heart is  
going so

fast it feels  
like it  
will jump  
right up  
my throat  
but some  
thing in  
side me  
way back  
in the dream  
ing place  
is telling  
me that  
the wooden  
gun will  
keep me  
warm

# TODD MOORE

---

## TYLER'S

blackjack  
looked like  
a piece  
of the  
night he  
was  
squeezing  
out of  
his hand

# TODD MOORE

---

## A BIG PILE

of money  
covered the  
bed  
fives  
tens  
twenties  
fifties  
waddy think  
dillinger sd  
billie grabbed  
a handful  
& rubbed  
herself all  
over w/it  
then dill  
inger stuck  
both his  
hands into  
the money  
as far  
down as  
they wd  
go &  
pulled out  
a thompson  
sub ma  
chine gun  
sd the  
american  
dream al  
ways has  
one of  
these  
inside

(from Dillinger)

# TODD MOORE

---

## WHEN THE

wolf  
discovered  
its legs  
had been  
shot off  
it lay  
on its  
side in  
the long  
night of  
snow  
& began  
to tell  
stories from  
way  
back in  
the eyes

# TODD MOORE

---

## JERRY'S OLD

man sd i  
got a  
trick i  
wanna  
show you  
he took  
the 38  
special  
off the  
table in  
serted a  
cartridge  
in the  
chamber  
gave it  
a spin  
cocked  
the ham  
mer stuck  
the barrel  
to jerry's  
head &  
pulled the  
trigger  
right after  
the click  
jerry  
smiled &  
sd that  
was fun  
but the  
barrel  
felt cold

# TODD MOORE

---

## I WAS

crouching w/  
spiders under  
the front  
porch when  
i heard  
jerry's big  
brother  
turk say  
i hit him  
in the head  
w/a shovel  
& ran i'm  
not sure if  
he's even  
alive where's  
the shovel  
malone asked  
fuck i dropped  
it why  
i wanna see  
if you left  
any of lyle  
on the blade

# TODD MOORE

---

## ROCKO & LONNIE EACH HAD

a dead man propped in the  
back of the pickup parked  
behind smitty's salvage  
waiting for someone to  
come for the corpses &  
while they were waiting  
lonnie started moving his  
dead man's mouth & say  
ing stuff so you think  
yr a smart guy he sez  
sounding a little like  
curly of the 3 stooges &  
it made rocko laugh &  
he started doing it too  
& the mouth on his wasn't  
even stiff but the whis  
kers were matted & when  
he opened it up some  
scabs wd fall out & he  
pretended they were  
words & sez you wanna  
make something of it  
& curly really did look  
like he was whooping  
except his eyes wdn't  
move



Alois Nožička

# OLEG WOOLF

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## FROM BESSARABIAN STAMPS

translated from the Russian by Boris Dralyuk

*For Irina Mashinski*

### I.

*Aurica and Van Gogh*

One day a freight arrived from Grigoriopol with no head car, but no one noticed. No one even noticed that no one noticed. People often pay no heed, at times, to things they later don't notice. No one, in fact, knows where this head car is – whether it arrived from Grigoriopol, whether it will arrive, whether there's even a railroad in those parts.

It was raining the kind of rain that exhortations can't help, and try as one might, one won't manage a thing against the water. Hello, there, said Feodasi, gazing at Grigoruțe from under his raincoat with that strange simultaneous gaze of his. His eyes were different hues of blue, and both looked off in one direction while his crooked nose pointed in another. Somehow, this physical discrepancy was met with no internal resistance, as if it dispelled the natural repulsiveness endemic to the residents of Sânduleni. Grigoruțe nodded. In the column marked "occupation," Feodasi was listed as a "village clairvoyant," as if it were possible to be an urban clairvoyant. Be that as it may, the document bearing the column lay in the nightstand of the rural elder Nike Podoleanu, who was famed for his homely grandiloquence.

Each time Grigoruțe's thoughts returned to this rain he would experience a profound sense of peace, a release from a certain presence of tragedy, a cramped zygote uniting loneliness with obscurity and death. It was as if the freight, having pulled into the final station – where everything speaks for

itself, where one can't chime in with anything, where there's no one to exchange a word with – was firmly etched on his memory's smoke-stained back wall, which was already festooned with dented, sand-scrubbed aluminum kettles, old gloves, photographic portraits of sullen adolescents with youthfully athletic constitutions, and tin cups with rounded edges. And now the freight and all that detritus made up an internally consistent description of uniqueness, like those songs of the old Gypsy who left here for Paris right before the war and was handed over to the occupying authorities by a concierge he had known – because, in order to avoid pushing and shoving, a stab in the back is best administered by the one who stands nearest.

A conversation between a man and a woman is a conspiracy of rich men at midnight. Day begins with a man extending his hand to another man, and a woman – to another woman. This is why Grigoruș first nodded silently, as if reconciled to the rain's demands, the continuance of life's concerns, and then said: Hello, there, Feodasi. You still alive, you old boot?

He heard no response over the din of the rain. The adolescent Mihai appeared and quickly passed by, peering into the darkness. At this time of year, adolescents experience a sense of captivity all their own, and their nights are long and poor in dreams. The chalice of possibilities was scraped so wholly empty by preceding generations that locals began life with a clean sheet, having barely enough time to inscribe it with the following: there is no harm in whatever amounts to less than pure evil. Everyone understood that the chicken one ate for lunch had no proper name, that the Sultan Abdülhamid II, blessed be his name, was a *murid* of the Shadhili Sheikh, and that whatever one does, sooner or later, is reflected in the balance of wrongs.

The train sighed and started off.

That same hour, in his office, Dr. Petrike Munteanu clambered up a ladder and pulled down one of the books that had been given him and remained unread. He opened it to the title page. "Dear friend," read the inscription in violet ink, "I gave you this book with the secret hope that you would never read it. Forgive me for the unsolicited gift, the secret thought, and the lordly inscription. A book is the worst possible gift – especially a book written in the 'literary' genre. Non-literary literature is a drawing at its most economical – prepared on the ant lard of a drawing. Three or four lines, and you have the whole world. May your reader's world be as economical as my writer's world. I am glad that you have gratefully limited yourself to this inscription. Yours, Ion Grigoreanu."

Munteanu returned the book to the shelf and stood awhile on the ladder, glaring hatefully at the spine.

Hey, Petrike, there's trouble – open up, you goat, Grigoruțe suddenly cried from the street, at which point Feodasi frowned off to the side. Where they stood, near the old hospital built back in Turkish times, it was so dark that the rain stopped all at once, and the stars immediately clustered in tight formation. They burst, crunched, and crackled over Sănduleni, like a barrel of fermented cucumbers. Well, Petrike Munteanu cried back through the window with his velvety bass, at least write down my phone number by heart.

The Gypsy woman is dying, said Grigoruțe.

The three of them huddled in the oval of light beneath the bare bulb, which wobbled like an egg yolk at the bottom of a glass. Take me to the Pamirs, the Gypsy told them, pointing at the eastern wall, which at that moment sent down a shower of limestone. Death awaits at the Pamirs – clay death.

What they knew of the Gypsy was that she went by Asta, that she washed floorcloths till they were gleaming white for drying. No one visited her house, built by her great-grandfather on the side of town – and they avoided her by necessity, for she was well over a hundred, and remained a person of such openness, kindness, and strength that she was impossible to bear.

Aurica, the neighbor, came to pay her respects, and stood facing the window, sensing death with her back. She gazed with all her might at the stars, each of which swirled in a funnel. These stars were painted by the artist Van Gogh, but Aurica knew nothing of this, although her friend Gogeni once visited from Georgia, where he lived with his parents and a cat named Sniff.

Then Aurica began to cry, and no one dared interfere, and she cried so long that, little by little, morning came, and Asta died, and there were no more gypsies in Sănduleni.

### III.

#### *Mircea and Marica*

Call me always. Very well, I'll make the call always. We'll always meet some other time. Today we'll meet someone else – Ionesco – you can hardly see him. He works, this Ionesco, with a specialization: village paramedic.

Ever since he grew fat, he's lost a little weight, and when we meet him, he might tell us that the ailment's primary symptom is death – whether or not you work with a specialization. His relationship with death is very usual, very common; nothing about this relationship is unexpected, and it bears no relation to immortality or death. Many pity Ionesco, believing he has to earn his money on the side. The world is open to him, as if he were a blind man. This is exactly what the Georgian philosopher Gogeni told Aurica of Ionesco: unaccountably open, as if he were a blind man. This is why Ionesco will pass us by, having greeted us three times, because no matter what you do, what you think, tomorrow morning awaits you. There it sits, at the northern station, yawning, gaping, nose a-scraping. And in the morning, if we're lucky, we'll meet Gogeni himself. Last summer, the philosopher was around the same height, bald, and walked from the station just as now, and exclaimed just as now: ah, there you are! What a happy occasion, what luck, that we should meet on this sunny Sunday morning! If you remember this, do not forget the morning. Or best of all, remember nothing of this morning, and let it all remain as is. You ought to forget about our meeting altogether. In truth, we'd better never meet again.

And here is Aurica, here she comes, sunk in her walk, swept up in her Gypsy skirt. And no one will wear a skirt like Aurica Brândulescu, no one will approach us and say: don't grieve, dodge with me awhile, free-wheeling drifters. Yesterday you went to fetch bread, matches, kerosene, tobacco, and wine, and now – you walk hatching plans. Take this medicinal ointment; apply it to your weeping wounds and burns until they heal on their own. Have some salt and some matches; go on, and put them in your back pocket.

And we'll put them in our back pocket, and we'll go on until the landscape alters beyond recognition. And on the corner, in the narrow half-light beneath the plum tree, we'll spot Feodasi, carefully reading and rereading an old book on the role of birds in Odessan seafaring.

So our day will begin, and we'll soon understand what sort of day it will be, though we may never learn how many of them are left, and why this ignorance helps people breathe so freely in the morning that they store it up, or tuck it behind their ears, like their last cigarette.

It isn't birds, you'll conclude. What role have they in seafaring? No, it's thoughts, plans, ideas, dreams – forgotten, unrealized by people. Perhaps this is so, I'll say. But still, I think there are things we'll never agree on, for there are two of us. You'll see it one way, I'll see it another. And vice versa. While together we'll know only the main things, about which there's almost nothing to know,

really – as with truths familiar from childhood. For example, that there exists something quite similar to non-existence, and there’s nowhere to run, no oven-door behind which one may disappear forever – and even if there were, then whatever might happen to us behind that door would still be happynows.

So, call me always, even twenty years from now. Let the former champions of their former trainers whisper, turning their whispering into ashes. Loneliness, death, death and loneliness – they still lack index numbers, the archers will tell the water-polo players about us. They couldn’t even bare to wait a little while longer; everything would have ended all by itself. You yourselves, they’ll add one to another, you yourselves understand full well. Why, having picked up the hundred you dropped on the sidewalk, do you hide it in your sleeve? Doesn’t it have something to do with your knocking off that bank in Făleşti last week? And now all their thoughts turn to that business, and wherever they are, they’ve got common topics, common secrets. What is it to them that cinema is the liveliest of our motion picture arts? Will they ever make it in movies? They don’t give two shakes about national pride, about glory – and it’s all the same to them what they wear, so long as it’s not too conspicuous. We’ll have to answer, they say, to the full extent of the law. The state has precious few opportunities to engage the population. Precious few. Prison, military service, road construction, and nationality. For now, let’s say, they’re conspirators. This, no one can deny them. But that’s for now. Let them blame the early snow, birds, Poles, social inspectors, autumn taxi drivers, and the whole unsubstantiated world. They’re yawning, gaping, nose a-scraping. We’ll see when we get there, they say, turning the corner, whirling their pedals.

Listen, you’ll say about that bin behind the garage where we just tossed the garbage bags: let’s wash our hands after the dump. And you’ll make your way to the bathroom, to that old, flaking, threadbare towel that emits a barely visible light even during the day; and for a long time you’ll carefully wipe your hands, daubing them with crumbs of fabric. I want to teach poetry and conspiracy. Don’t go there, I’ll answer. It may inspire a false sense of self-importance. Yes, you’re right, Mircea, I know this club and always forget that part of it. It’s full of social inspectors, autumn taxi drivers, and financial movers and shakers.

In the evening, you leave the curtains half-drawn, so that, upon waking, we can lie awhile, quietly gazing at the morning foliage and the autumn sky. So that it’s clear, cool, and quiet. So that, should the breeze pick up, the leaves might whip through the woods with the patter of falling rain. We’ll put on

our trench coats, walk out into the yard, and go on, not falling into conversation, until, on the corner, beneath the plum tree, we spot Feodasi with his book. And a small plane will fly overhead – the pilot's life in attachment.

## V.

### *Ionesco and Feodasi*

Ionesco once paid a visit to Feodasi and said: Hello, Feodasi. You still alive, you old boot?

Feodasi heard these words, pursed his lips, and remained silent.

They lived alone, the two of them – Feodasi and his inner life. But very few besides Feodasi guessed as much. His inner life comprised all sorts of different things: trains, trees, clouds, the feelings Feodasi felt, the thoughts he thought – in general, all that was not Feodasi himself, but was instead his inner life. On account of his eyes, Feodasi was revered in Sănduleni as a soothsayer, interpreter, and miracle worker. So people often came to him for help, or just in case.

Of course, anyone who took it into their head to appeal to, and then come visit Feodasi immediately became a part of his inner world. Then Feodasi would look at them in amazement: where on earth did this one come from!

And so it happened this time, too. Feodasi first sat silent, then immediately asked Ionesco: And who do you happen to be? You wouldn't, by chance, be Ionesco, would you?

Hard to say, said Ionesco. Sometimes I think I'm a big, big bird, flying high beneath the clouds, and can see everything from up there. And other times, I'm just tiny Ionesco, and can see nothing but this Ionesco. But sometimes – and here Ionesco's eyes grew large and frightened – sometimes I can't even see this.

What, asked Feodasi.

Well, this one..., Ionesco then said with a small voice.

And what can you see, Feodasi asked grimly.

I can see nothing at all, Ionesco said in amazement. As though nothing existed – look as hard as you might. There's nothing in sight. Even the dark, you can't see. You can't even see that you can't see the dark.

Hmm, said Feodasi. Maybe you can, in fact, see just fine, but think that you can't. But then this is very strange. Because everyone in Sănduleni knows that they can see something, at least. Yet it may be that they can't see a thing,

even their own darkness. So what, Ionesco, if you turn out to be different from everyone else? Or maybe you're not Ionesco at all, even?

These words seemed very unusual to Ionesco. Not even simply strange, but entirely extraordinary. As if someone suddenly spoke from an abandoned well on the edge of the village. He then looked at Feodasi a bit more closely, and suddenly saw that Feodasi – was not Feodasi, but a huge black bird with a thick, gray, chewed-up beak, sitting grimly with downcast eyes and turning its heavy wing, as if the wing cramped it. And it remained silent.

Who am I, then, if not Ionesco, Ionesco quietly asked the bird, or rather, asked Feodasi.

Could be anyone, Feodasi answered. He didn't so much answer, really – as simply say it. Whoever you are, would you like me to make some tea?

No, said Ionesco, we only drink tea when we're ill.

All right, farewell, then, Feodasi said, as if he weren't saying farewell. Don't fall ill.

All right, I won't, Ionesco responded.

And Feodasi's eyes followed him all the way to the corner, behind which the old, thick district road came rolling out. And Ionesco walked down the road a long time, until it got dark, and this made him feel warm, happy, and very ordinary.

## VIII.

### *Ionesco and Brândulescu*

Ionesco lived alone. But he was so small one could still barely see him. One day he came to Brândulescu, and Brândulescu hardly noticed him. But Ionesco took no offense.

He simply said: greetings, Brândulescu, I'm glad you're still alive. You're such an old goat, and still, nothing'll take you down. Know this: our world is predestined for death. It can't be helped.

Brândulescu was very surprised to hear these words and said: who's there, I can't quite make anyone out.

And Ionesco responded: why, it's me, Ionesco. You can hardly see me, because I'm little old Ionesco – the other one isn't around. I'm alone. But what does it matter? Large or small – one or another. Life goes on, by and by, but death still turns out better.

Ah, well, Brândulescu then said, sit down here, my friend. And he showed him to a chair. Have a glass of vin de masă, a few green onions. Let's drink at sunset for all the fine things you can't take with you. And if you do take them, they still remain.

Stay or go, it's all the same to us, now, Ionesco observed. We two grumblers are so old, we'll die soon, anyway, and won't be around any longer. Some kind of plague'll finish us off, in any case. Maybe even before the new year.

So what, said Brândulescu, who, in fact, was really called Sândulenu. We'll croak, but our children will remain. And then our grandchildren, our great-grandchildren will come of age. They'll all sit in this stool, here.

Yes, that's true, agreed Ionesco, who, in truth, was always called Ionesco. Only they'll croak someday, too. Some earlier, some later. One plague or another will lay them low. Even the great-grandchildren, they'll die, too. If, of course, they're ever born. And if they are born, they'll likely be sickly, and won't be long for this world. Or not very smart. The world is full of smart half-wits, Brândulescu.

This is all very sad, said Brândulescu and, with a smart expression, drank a bit, and took a few bites of a green onion, dipping it in salt each time. Very, very sad. So we should raise a glass, so that they'll at least be happy. Because this happiness will someday end, too, so let it stay with them at least a little while. At least a couple of days.

Yes, said Ionesco, something's always ending. If it's not one thing, it's another. Some general case, it suddenly doesn't feel well – and then it's gone. You look, here it sits, and tomorrow it's gone entirely. Sometimes, it doesn't even make it till evening. It just barely had lunch, and come dinner time, there's no trace of it. They search for it, shout, it's already growing dark, and all in vain. As if it had never been.

Then Brândulescu said: well, then, let's have a drink, while it's light out, to the fact that we have today. For this grape vine, at least. Or that little sun of ours.

Let's, agreed Ionesco, and even nodded. Still, none of this will last till the day after tomorrow. Or even tomorrow. Something will surely go wrong with it. But we can drink today. Tell me, is it true that you're called Sândulenu?

True, said Brândulescu, taking a bite of the onion. My father's called Sândulenu, and my grandfather. And my great-grandfather, too.

So you're telling me you've got a great-grandfather in Sânduleni, too, Ionesco asked suspiciously.

Of course, I do, replied Brândulescu, and sneezed.

You see, Ionesco remarked judiciously, you have a great-grandfather, and you're already sneezing. First thing you know, you'll croak. Isn't that sad?

It's very, very sad, Brândulescu agreed and sneezed again.

What is this sneezing fit, Ionesco shouted hot-bloodedly. It's almost time for me to go, and you're still sneezing. It's shameful to look at you.

Yes, yes, said Brândulescu. It's very shameful.

At that point, Ionesco sprang from the stool, gloomy as a cloud, and went home. While Brândulescu sat and sneezed. Probably on account of the onions. And then the rain came. Such rivers flowed, that you'd better watch.

Brândulescu just watched and listened in silence to the rain, and it seemed that this rain would slowly transform into the murmur of some by-gone voices, expired and empty. And suddenly he felt not so much sad, as somehow for nothing. He peered into the torrents of rain seriously and attentively – as if leaning over them – while they, in the usual manner of old men, forgetfully withdrew into themselves.

And then didn't even think, but simply felt something about his wife Aurica and wept, softly, like a cat.

## X.

### *Ileana and Sandu*

Ileana lived in a village whose name she could barely remember. There's no shortage of villages where young women scrub a long floor, tucking up their skirts on the threshold of a new day. The village was common, like recollections fit for any weather – where everything happens anew, if one thinks about it seriously. All Ileana had to do was delve into her thoughts, and they would take the shape of sunspots at the very bottom of the ephedra growing on the outskirts of the village. Then they would form into viscid, unfamiliar, meaningful words, or lengthen into resonant, thin-walled music, which sends the soul straight to heaven. And then tears would well up all by themselves. Such were Ileana's thoughts. This is why she decided she couldn't think properly at all.

There was a serious mystery in these thoughts, entrusted to Ileana so that she could divide it in two, when the desire to reveal it turned to love. In the meantime, Ileana kept the mystery in her chest, beneath her heart,

occasionally taking it out just to admire it – and at that moment, she had enough for everyone. She even had enough for the carpenter Theophanes, who often walked past her yard drunk, and who once took the neighbor's cat Manya by the head, struck the animal against the ground, and left it lying dead beside the gate. At that time, Ileana brought the mystery out to him in her sleep, carefully cradling it in her hands, in order to save him. At first he kept silent, shaking his curly head in shy wonderment and making eyes. Then he said: well, you think in the first place, and I in mine. After that, the neighbors got another cat, which went by another nickname, and Theophanes left the village and never came back. But Ileana still pitied both Manya and Theophanes, and once wept quietly in her sleep, seeing him dead in some unfamiliar town.

Once the village was flooded with such a light that only the blind could see it, having climbed to the very top on their smiles. The houses and trees no longer cast shadows, and the clouds lay so low that the pregnant dog Savka came out of her barn and commenced singing, while some passers-by crossed the street with their heads down, without even noticing.

This all happened so long ago that the road to Turkey went through Chernivtsi. Gazing out the window, the school physics teacher Ion Sandu saw an alley lined with linden trees, looking haggard in the light, like a railroad halt exhausted by passing trains. The instructor put on a pair of cream-colored boots, donned a green jacket, walked out of the house, slipped a piece of chocolate to a chubby tot counting pigeons by the fountain, and disappeared in a dubious-looking little clunker. So said an elderly passer-by, witnessing the incident. Well, yes, replied her friend. If you should meet a child, dig in your jacket pocket, see if you have a piece of candy or a ruble – and if you find something, give it. Suddenly, this child is yours, and you don't know it.

Ileana sat on the veranda behind her sewing machine, glancing out into the yard crammed with light, when someone knocked at the gate. She sat up and stared at the focal point of light changing shape on the wall.

It's me, someone outside the gate cried tragically and fell silent. And this is me, thought Ileana, but had no time to respond. The gate swung open and a lanky young man with no trousers, a pair cream-colored boots, and a cucumber-colored jacket appeared in the yard. Excuse me, the young man said sadly. You wouldn't happen to know what village this is, would you?

As if there are different villages.

Sănduleni, replied Ileana, in order to keep from laughing.

Yes, the young man said in surprise, actually, my name is Sandu. And you're Ileana, no? Yes, said Ileana. And these are your pants. I'm just overlocking the inside seam. You wouldn't mind if I worked on it a couple minutes longer, would you? Of course I wouldn't mind, said Sandu. Especially since you overlock so masterfully. I should think so, said Ileana, my mother whipstitched these seams by hand. For my father. Times have changed now. Back then, you could get locked up for using machines – meant you were in business. That's true, Sandu agreed. Times are different now. Marry me. I will, said Ileana. Just let me finish this seam. Wait another minute, okay? Alright, said Sandu. I suppose I can wait another minute.

And he waited another minute, and then another year, until Ileana finished the seam and revealed her mystery.

But that is another Bessarabian stamp.

### XIII.

#### *The Dancer of Malagura*

On the day of the summer solstice, Ivan Markov, an inpatient, sat on the veranda in a sports suit and sneakers, twirled a pen around his index finger, dropped it, picked it up and leaned over the table – above a piece of writing paper.

Dear brother, Markov wrote. Anyone who thinks he doesn't understand women is mistaken. He doesn't even see them.

Two days ago my lawyer was arguing her position, and I decided to look into her soul in all sincerity – but saw nothing there, except a long freight train receding into the autumnal landscape, and the landscape receding into the cloud cover.

Of course, there's nothing, the lawyer continued meanwhile, nothing behind this, except a soft spot for trains and railroad tracks. Clearly, the defendant could not have hijacked the train, but even having discovered his falsely interpreted intent, he deserves the minimum suspended sentence. For the man standing trial is of the suspended world (what man, asked the judge), located at the word, not at hand. The defendant is a Gypsy writer (what kind of a writer, d'you say). He had neither a home, nor a profession – nothing, save for the railroad where he grew up.

It was a stretchable leap-year summer, brother, when, not surmising if

the knowledge of your being dead or not is all the same to your God, you know nothing. Writing – which is the creation of community amid the unique, and not vice versa – was a matter of unnecessary and improper service, like bread and cheese where everyone's fed. The land, having survived the period which George Nivat beautifully labeled the “collapse of classical virtue,” languished in abundance and simplicity.

The defendant committed no reprehensible acts, save for illegal ones, the prosecutor said. The lawyer nodded silently, looking off to the side, through the wide window, at the ancient crown of the sycamore, which spread its flayed hand of stripped branches.

When I was given my say, I stood up and declared that, as everyone knows, all things must pass, even though the mind is designed in such a way that it cannot grasp finality. That's why one seeks in a poem what is already present in a newborn's very first cry, and in prose, my brother – one seeks the remainder left when a man is divided by his death. For forty years I've lived in empty warehouses, on freight cars, on rear tracks, picking up this remainder.

It so happened, I said, that I recognized words before I recognized what are generally understood as their senses. Some of them, by that time, had already managed to show their true colors as scoundrels, others resembled their own shadows, the grandiloquence of the third kind would cling to my tongue like a rhyme, the fourth kind announced their resignation, the fifth were wintry, the sixth promenaded like tramps and triumphantly spat through a notch in their teeth. While every “lacerated wound” was a train made up of two flinching cars. The world was full of them, your honor: arrogant and fat, morose and cracked, fidgety and awkward. They kept the rhythm, settled into a second tempo and got their third breath, pulled on an old hat, embroidered on a tambour, and understood nothing of the senses imposed upon them – or rather, they understood nothing of their dreary half-criminal code which the unfortunate had to follow in daily life, at work, on the street, on the tram, and in the shop. A sense would tug its dependent word all the way to the fifth backyard of the tertiary signaling system, pulling it by the hand, gloomily chewing over the obvious: that isn't allowed, but this is. This situation dragged on, somewhat, and the true, intimate senses of certain words disclosed themselves to me when I was already rather mature in age. For instance, “let a thousand flowers bloom” turned its delightful flip side, and was now understood as nothing other than “let a hundred hairs fall out” – since Lao Tzu was always depicted fatally bald, as befits a Chinese sage, while there were plenty of flowers everywhere, regardless of him.

Now, being old, naive, and lame – sternly smacking my gums – I understand, your honor, that a person ages as his words lose weight, as they reveal their rigid carcass to the world, turning half-blind and inflexible, while their bones grow scales, coal, grief, weed, and lime. However, when I was a teenager hung about the alleys of Sânduleni, which were overgrown with words, these words needed no gardener, master, doctor, or writer. Literature was harmful to them, while a true creator, doffing his hat and scattering in apologies, was obliged to squeeze between them – hoping not to snag, tarnish, or damage them. The real talent wasn't the writer or the artist, but the whole world. The artist could only make a fool of a small part of the world with reverence, as an old mother makes a fool of a beauty with evening makeup.

Defendant, let's stick to the merits of the case, the judge said, her chair budging beneath her. Whose crying, what half-criminal code do you have in mind. What death are you talking about.

The quality of the object is the level of thought about it, replied the lawyer, making eyes at me. I object. The defendant is a drifter, a hobo king, a creative personality; he uses terminology that doesn't necessarily conform to the practice of jurisprudence. Like all of us, he deserves the right to fail.

Your honor, I said. Is it worth dragging out these proceedings? An old Gypsy in Malagura was so sleepy one evening that he sat up until midnight, thinking: well, so I'll lie down to sleep, and what will I then do at night. Damn it all to hell, he decided at last, and fell asleep watching the stars. This was a dangerous decision, your honor. For three hundred years, now, Malagura hasn't appeared on a single Gypsy map.

I ask the court to take that into account, the prosecutor said, muttering indignantly. We're now dealing with so-called Gypsy maps, which haven't been disclosed to the prosecution. What kind of documents are these.

Enough, the judge said without expression and nodded in the stenographer's direction. May the record show that these words were not meant as a threat.

Brother, they have ordered that I be moved to a district rest house for the harmless, outside Moscow. This place remotely reminds me the Kiev railway station in the capital, where, to a blockhead, everyone's an idiot. And yet, if there's nothing else to say about a man, here they say he is capable. Or that he had an infectious laugh.

But the main thing one can say about him here is the most decisive – that women liked him. And that, nothing can beat. Because there's no one here that women like. One cannot love the resettlement of peoples, the speed

of light in a vacuum. If you tell me that such people existed, and, when they died, they were mourned with the bitterest, most fatal womanly tears – well, then, they were liked by women. They won't return as Ivan Andreiches with thirteen volumes of *epistolae*, nor be re-dressed in memory, like a game animal, in any other way. But they might rise from the rain and snow in front of the trolley, oared by their beloved wife, Penelope, crying into her windshield: Annushka, here we are, come back to you, to your trolley, which rattles like a tumbling woodpile. Here we are before you, Sad Sacks at the saddest turn of Sadovy Street, turning our faces toward you, seeing you strewn with lilacs and sunlight.

And so, dear brother, if someone tells you that my prose reveals in the reader the feeling of loving and being loved – or, on the contrary, that it's difficult, incomprehensible, far-fetched, and indeterminate, tell them, with no doubt whatsoever, that women liked me, and that's the end of it. Say that I died every death that preceded me. Say that if you remain silent, dear brother, that means you're silent, sighing heavily and sadly. Tell them, after all, that there's a heat wave in the city, that geese and coast-guard helicopters melt in flight, that fat policemen sleep with big sowed-on pockets full of honorific tokens. Everything sleeps. Little mustachioed lawyers sleep, having worked their tired nails free. Only your brother does not sleep, drinking tea of delicate petals made in faraway China. And a tired and crepuscular Gabriel appears before him, saying: what humble servant does not sleep here? Drinks tea of little petals? And your humble servant responds: this little mug of brewed tea is dear to me, hot and fragrant like a dancer from Malagura.

But Malagura is long gone, says Gabriel, Malagura is far away, and your dancer is dead. Her grave at the cemetery in Sânduleni is strewn with tea roses and brittle Gypsy lilac. Don't you know. I know, Markov says, but tell me, Archangel Gabriel, do I exist, or don't I, dispel my doubts. You exist, Gabriel says, you are here, what's there to doubt. If that's the case, Markov says, then I have one desire. What need have you of desires, Gabriel asks sharply, what desire. Don't be clever with me. This isn't a desire, but a stamp, a mark, a scar on the heart.

Yes, Markov says, it isn't a desire, but a stamp on the heart. But there are no Bessarabian stamps, since there's no post in Sânduleni, but just a single mailbox. That's why I called this stamp a desire. Much of what can be is not, and will never be, says Gabriel. So I will tell you. I'll help you, even if you're not in Sânduleni, and are not to return there. But remember: they'll call you a postal madman, a blasphemer, and a loner. Others will turn from

you, as one turns from a rogue and impostor. Others will cross to the third, rear side of the street. While others, having turned from you, will hold you in contempt for losing, and will therefore hate you, Markov. It's only a step away from fear to contempt, but not even a step from contempt to hatred for the vanquished and the fallen. And then they'll speak of you harshly in a language whose every word will drag you into the gutter, betray you, and kill you. Will you be able to stand this, Markov, will you accept it.

Yes, I'm ready, says Markov.

Well, then, says Gabriel.

I need a way out of entry zero into mine number ninety-nine.

Tell Arutiunov, was Gabriel's sole reply. I have to go. With these words, he crossed the courtyard and straddled a motorcycle, all dappled in sunny patches, started the engine, and puffed over the country road.

#### XIV.

##### *Ionesco and the Hostess*

The hostess entered the room from one side, while Ionesco entered it from the other, shaded side. In the sunny room, in an earthenware bowl, bathed in blue glaze, lay an apple with a singed quadrant. Approaching it, the hostess grabbed it, threw it up in the air, caught it, took a deafening bite, and disappeared behind a curtain, while Ionesco touched the bowl.

There are things about which one would like to form an opinion, he said toward the curtain.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, the hostess shot back.

Many things are symptomatic, said Ionesco, glancing after her. She made eyes at him in response, as if the nature of these things existed, but was not such.

You're from Sănduleni, she asked declaratively.

From Sănduleni, said Ionesco. But it makes no difference. It's the same in its own way.

Go back home to Sănduleni while the buses still run, said the hostess. Dumitru is due back in a week. I've got a lot to do. No. 7 still runs.

No. 7, Ionesco specified.

It runs, said the hostess. But No. 99 is better still.

It'd be nice, said Ionesco.

Stepping out from behind the curtain, the hostess turned to the window frame. She looked out at the apple orchard, at bushes like drying sheets, at a rotted-out tree, at its decaying swarm of spiders and flies, at a squirrel in its sunny lashes.

Should I pass anything on, she asked.

Pass on that everything is bad and worthless.

Want an apple, the hostess said. Take a couple from the bushel in the yard.

She suddenly looked at Ionesco as if for the first time. He had come to visit Dumitru several times after he read his article in a journal, where the hostess worked as an editor. He hadn't managed to catch him a single time, and now sat in a chair in his inner navy coat, glaring at her inquiringly.

You see, it's like this..., said the hostess. You see, everything's a mistake.

I understand, said Ionesco, it's not all that simple.

Simple, not simple – truth that's yours, truth that's not yours, the hostess said intently. You, it seems, don't believe in God.

I'm not lettered, Ionesco said in a facial voice.

Is it possible not to believe in that which doesn't exist, said the hostess. Can one really not trust in it. Disbelieve in it.

In what, asked Ionesco.

In that which doesn't exist. Can one disbelieve in it.

A wasted effort, said Ionesco.

It follows, said the hostess, that you don't believe because He does exist.

Ionesco was surprised – not as an educated people, and just like that.

It looks like you've never been to the cemetery in Sânduleni, he said. You wouldn't happen to have a glass of little cabernet for the road.

They both walked up to the window, which was wet after the storm – to the apple orchard with its pillars of light. The neighbor's (it seems) boy shouted in full fervor: hey, rain, give me what you give the others, why dontcha!

Any village far exceeds the city in terms of events, but little happened in this one. More often that not, an event wouldn't happen – receding into a formal reply, becoming an event of dullness, of meager attendance. Longeurs, details were separated from the happenchaff along with the wheat. The locals walked over them – going as far into the sea as they could, up to the very last jump onto the last stone – from which one could see the whole sea all at once, the entire mass of the event. Waking this morning at a local hotel, Ionesco lay silently staring at the dull multitude of the sycamore outside the

window. He weighed it on his synchronous internal balances. The outspokenness of the sycamore, its guttural words – which bore the mark of feelings expressed – had to be carried into the evening, so that one could then put one's hands on their warm plate, heated throughout the day. The workday was bitter; he felt bitter about his life's work; the force of life had embittered him.

Ionesco turned to the hostess. She laughed myopically at the sun, like a typo. Everything gathered strength – the authority of beauty, the significance of expression. And he, Ionesco, had two faces – one was first, the other, second.

I'm off, then, said Ionesco. He descended the wooden steps; each bid him farewell with a squeak.

Farewell, said the hostess to his back. I'll pass it on.

## XV.

### *Thirteen Billion Years Since Speed-of-Light Day*

Petrea Bruc walked up to the fence, peered through a crack, and saw a bird. High-quality telescopes, said the bird, are made in the following manner: the bottom of a tin can, with a multitude of little holes, is inserted into a tube, followed by a light bulb. This allows one to economize on stars.

The milkman always drinks wine, said Bruc.

Come in, Petrike, said Feodasi.

Bruc prodded the wicket and walked in, although the gate was open. They were silent for about twenty minutes, listening to it drizzle on the road half-way to Kosauți.

It was so quiet that the elder Nike Podoleanu, heading to the village council along the same road, was stricken by an attack of light nausea. One could hear as women, who'd learned a week earlier of his return from London and, consequently, had trimmed their hair, whispered: wonder if he returned bearing good news.

Podoleanu turned into Basarab's yard, switched off the motor, stuck his head far out of the cabin, and either spat or asked some trifle. Well, said Bruc. I said how are you, said Podoleanu. By and by, killing time, Feodasi replied without a smile. Gather the people, Bruc, said Podoleanu.

They boarded for the night. The veranda faced the Dniester. It was one of those evenings that are always present in a person in the form of a

landscape, overshadowed by events. A straight star hung above the house. A UAZ truck lit the veranda in passing, and the air behind it bayed at the moon. A train, that union of the living, chugged by in the distance.

Shooting glances back and forth, they set the table, placed the chairs close together, took their seats, each with his own dignity of expectation: valiant Brândulescu, beaming Aurica, sighing like a school photo, the deaf American specialist in entangled states. Next to the American sat the ancient Georgian philosopher Gogeni, an old friend of the artist Van Gogh, who had painted the stars. Ion Sandu, the physics teacher, and his wife Ileana, beautiful, like hares that had leapt up and were suspended in pleasure, light as sparrows, whispered to one another ("So I see: he stands and talks in Latin, as if he could speak Latin ..."). Then entered the small, for a couple of minutes, Ionesco.

"Co-villagers and co-villagettes, from-theres and from-afars," said Podoleanu, lifting his glass so gently it was as if he were trying to estimate the length of its rim with his eye, and all turned their faces to him, as to a summertime rain in the city.

"We'll say farewell," Podoleanu said, and drank with such determination that the empty glass burst right on the table, and a girl named Efrosinia ran and immediately took it into the house.

A murmur spread around the table: "Tell us, elder, what you've got in mind."

"How do I know what I've got in mind," he replied. "There hasn't yet been a person in Sănduleni who'll say directly what's already clear, anyhow."

"Entry zero's somewhere around here, that's already clear," the girl Efrosinia suddenly said. "There have always been limestone boulders, here. The whole place is pitted with abandoned mine shafts. Two of them lead to a monastery. The other – zero speed. Everyone knows that."

"All in a land aligned along a line. That's all we know of the world and of ourselves," said the philosopher Gogeni.

Efrosinia spoke as if her legs dangled beneath her, but the murmuring at the table grew even worse – so that stripped sycamore in the yard, having absorbed strong views over the course of centuries, dumped part of these views onto the veranda.

When Efrosinia was born, she wasn't yet three years old. The town was small, but a lot of snow fell, and it was then that, for the first time, she not only saw, but recognized the snow and her tracks in it. Now, standing at the table, she caught sight of an infant gazing at her with serene hostility, and

saw herself as an adult. She was overtaken by the sudden sense of irretrievability. Efrosinia and the child gazed at each other through an impenetrable thickness, forever forgotten and betrayed by one another. She ran round the table with a pitcher, filling glasses. Sandu and Ileana whispered to one another, sitting at the far end. The American slept, his head on the table. Others drank in silence, and when, finally, Podoleanu himself took a drink, everyone cast cautious, sidelong glances at his glass.

“We’ve got to go,” said Podoleanu. “While it’s dark.”

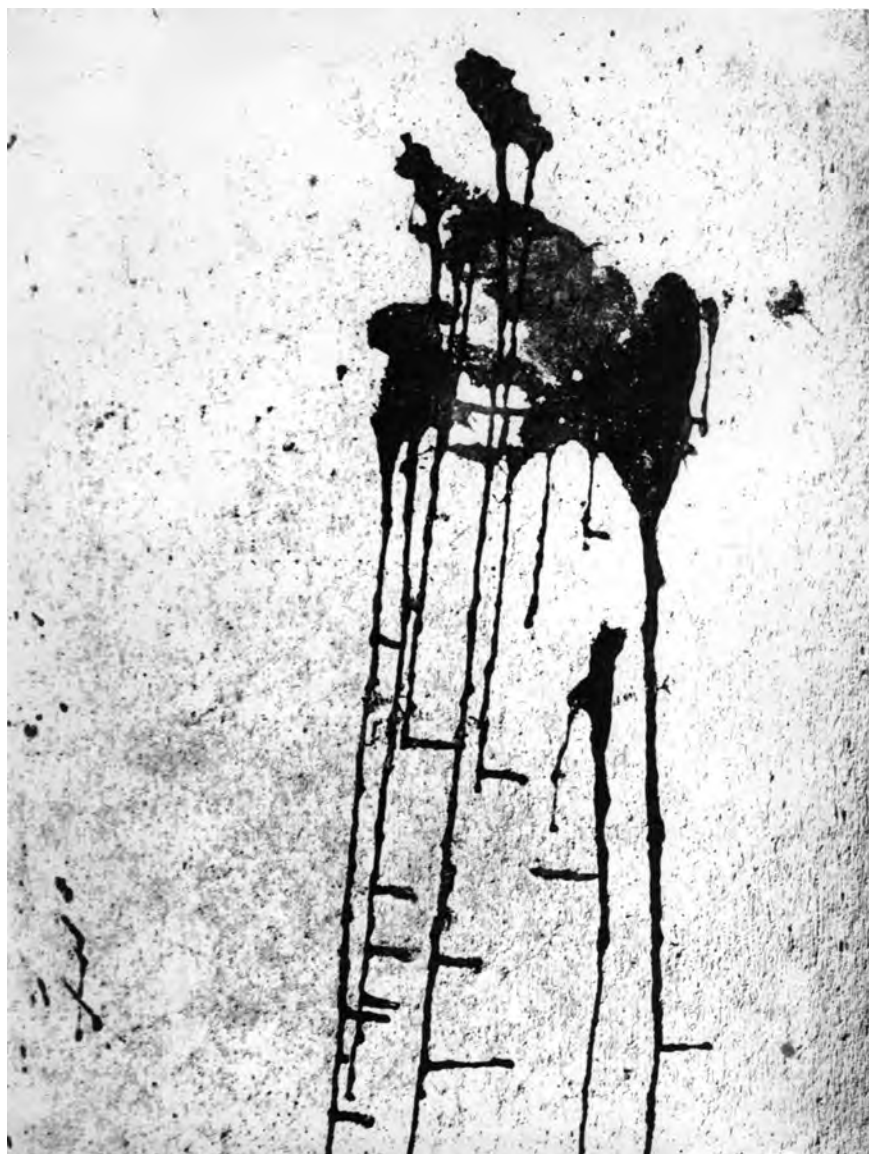
They went. It wasn’t far, and they traveled light, through a dubious grove – cut through with big reddish stars – the small ravine, the railroad embankment, toward the reader’s train station, which almost didn’t exist. And they went on, toward the plains that only opened up in the dark.

Everyone walked silently, pondering every step, until a light appeared in the final star on the edge of the village. It was then that Feodasi said: “Today is an anniversary: thirteen billion years since Speed-of-Light Day.”

The author strolled along behind them, thinking of his own things. One could always tell by his jacket how long it had hung, rubbing against the wall of the little hotel, where it usually smells of prewar masonry, wet limestone plaster, and something else that the author conventionally defined as an “unmotivated, underivable idea.” In point of fact, the smell is of the very bottom of realized stability, with a light admixture of cigarette smoke, kitchen-sink snitching, shoe polish (black), long-standing grudge, and petty betrayal. But the author didn’t know about this yet, and constantly riffled through his jacket pockets in search of either cigarettes, or an unchangeable gold ducat – recalling, with bitterness and admiration, the Gypsy Asta: is she searching for them, groping for them, as for that unchangeable gold ducat, which, if you clasp it between your teeth, will forever cure you of old age, infirmity, pride, and desolation. How meager is our knowledge of one another. How rich we are in our imaginings about the snake vinegar of life in general. How sparingly each of us wields his narrow power. So thought the author, recalling the Gypsy Asta, standing at the crossroads amid his not-too-distant, gloomy kinfolk. Isn’t that Asta, waving at them with one hand and adjusting her unruly spyglass with the other – glancing, as usual, either at the brittle Gypsy lilac, or into the imploding nowhere. No, he was mistaken.

The author saw them off one by one. First, Feodasi, behind whom, as usual, straggled the boy Mihai, toting the older man’s tobacco pouch and pipe. Then, Brândulescu. After him, the bearded American in a brick-colored

semi-military boot. The last thing the author managed to sight in the dark abandoned mine shaft was the face of Ileana, who had just then turned toward the stars that bathed it in light. When we meet again, it'll be light as can be, it seems, is what she said.



Alois Nožička

# EDGAR CAGE

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## THE TROUBLE WITH BEING UNDERSTOOD BY STORMS AND STORMS OF PEOPLE

The one who spat me out into the world  
doesn't understand what I've written.

Her accomplice won't even acknowledge  
any writing has happened.

He'll say the binding of my book looks strong.  
That the paper stock seems professional,

meaning it might survive more than one person's eyes,  
more than one finger lifting and turning the pages.

But nothing that needs to be read,  
or as Ed Galing would put it,

*your best bet would be the folks in the loony bin.*  
It's important to be understood:

by children whose crayon-edges can still be seen,  
and by varsity teenagers,

and women who hoard photographs of diamond rings,  
and by parents raising their children

to peck at the walls of chicken-scratch cubicles,  
and by men raising lummoxes and icaruses

to carry numbers on their backs, and by men  
who cannot hide where they married the deepest part of their hands.

It's important to make people remember  
all the holes in the sun still shine after the storm,

that loved ones lurk behind the pearl fences  
of the rainbow, that everyone is in at least one person's prayers.

But not the freezing prayers of Osip Mandelstam.  
Not the prayers of Paul Celan's body

hitting the flowing steel of the Seine.  
That one prays for an ending to the barbwire of daybreak.

An ending to the search towers thriving  
beyond a word's horizon-less surveillance.

He knows God's house is filled with many shadows,  
many children stranded in a permanent playground selection.

It's important not to sound like a suicide  
and not to blame the sky's harshness on the obscurity

of the one who left it here. It's important to say  
only positive things: *I'm happy. I want to be happy.*

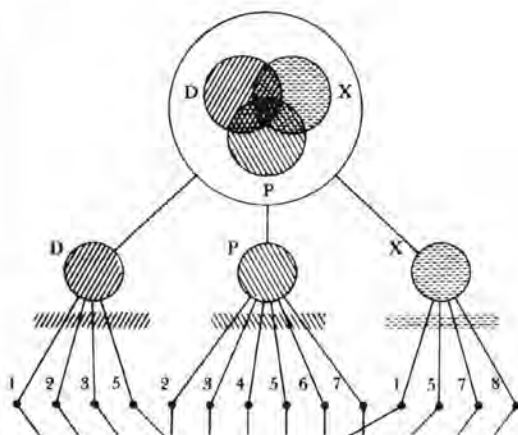
*I saw happiness out for a walk and it led the birds  
away from their smiling ladders.*

Don't, under any circumstances or ambition, say:  
*Ed Galing is, at best, a dying part of the page,*

*or here is the future, here is the future  
where I see the ripped silk children drifting inside*

*a monarchy of watercolors, bleeding halfway  
to the ground and no farther.*

EMPIRICAL

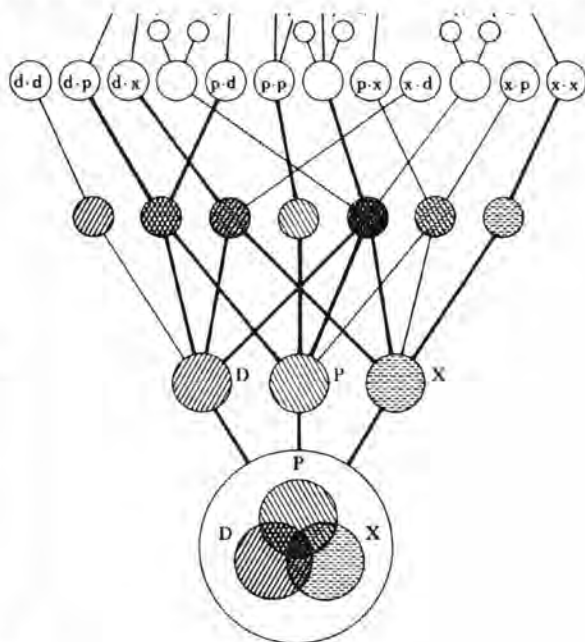


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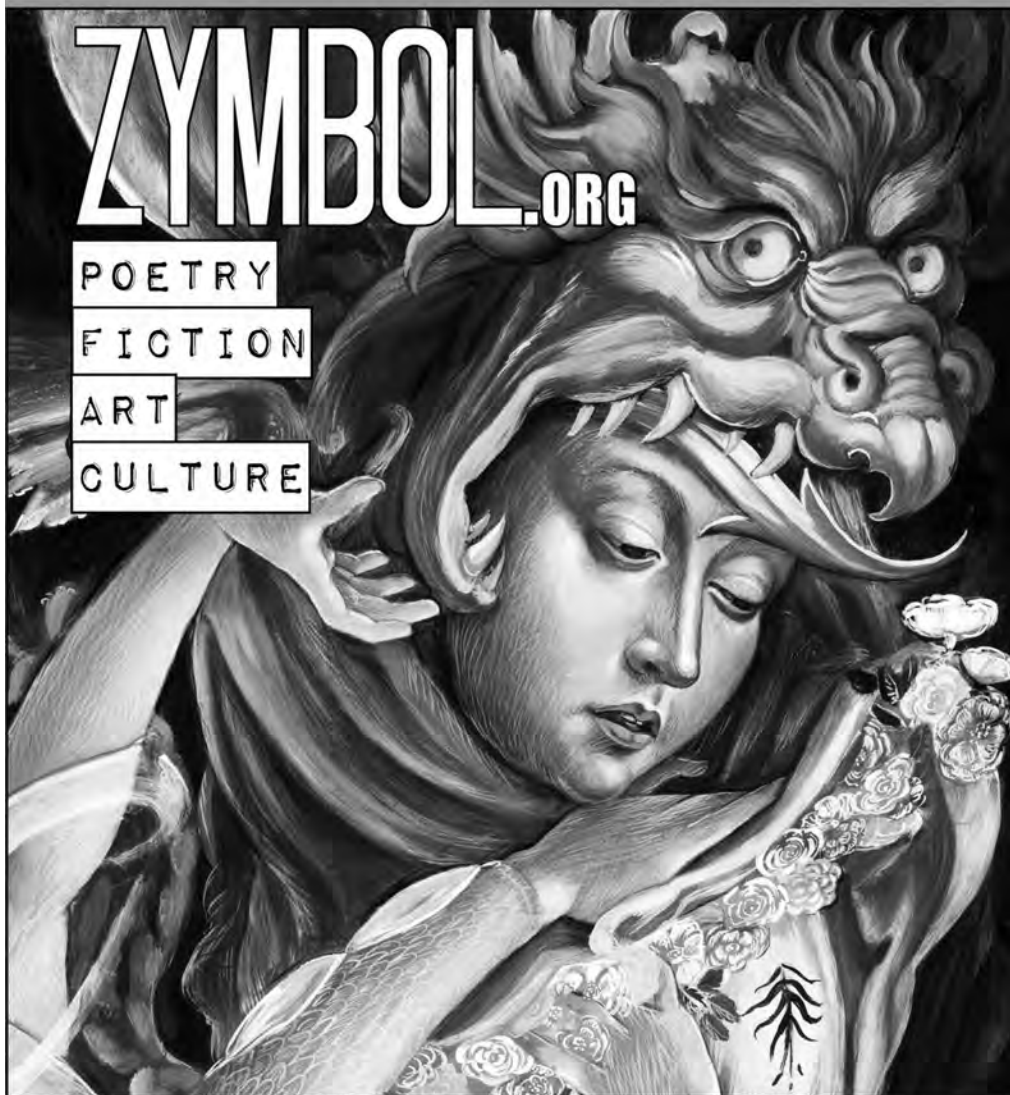
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