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Elizabeth Robinson

Body

Imagine a body that had no feeling for God
but was a body nonetheless.

Imagine the body pulling its arthritic knees
up the slope
to a glorified crest.

That mysticism.
That word again.

A body was an embarrassment of riches,
narrow and long as it was.
It is.

Imagine waiting for that: an exalted body
regarding all distance. Imagine that.

It lays its endless penis truly
along the spine of the continent. But there is no north.
Neither other directions.

**

What one can and cannot put
in one's mouth.

Belief crumbles in its flour and butter.
Better this.

The cock and its flowering head.

Oil's disingenuous presence slicking
the opening.
Is it oil? Taste: salt. Taste:
thrown on the back.

The cock looks upward, despite direction.
Mouth-compass, mewing, mouth-lostness,
mouthlessness, mouthing off,
belief bereft. Better this.

*

A thing of beauty is an abstraction,
adjunct to belief.

Plural beauty is flesh.

*

Secreted in the east
a curve. The forearm
brushes up against its own skin.

The body thought it had no feeling for God,
but it was wrong, God or body.

The forearm following the contour of the body
as the body undresses.

Skin was a sound that heard only itself. Mewing.
Further east. A dolmen that parted its legs.

Exaltation leaching into excitement.

Recess that stank of it. Secret(e).

Hidden, rosy parenthetical.

**

Wrong, wrong.

It sings wrong. Blissful
wrongness. Tears, snot.

A white scar on a fair face.

The body rejects correction.
Will not recur to its divinity.

These several proofs:
an ass without curves,
former blood on the cheek, its
concussion uttering nonsense.

**

Inside its cup,
the skin holds itself.

As trauma to revelation.

Meaning is a nipple from which

the further can be drawn.

Is a nipple from which
lips can be drawn

as a lip bites a lip
away.

In a moment it all goes away.

As revelation to the skin.

**

Imagine completing a thing as a conjugation:
as what fits, what is fit, what is fitting.

A landscape become a fetus,
slicked inside the body.

Aroused, it comes.

Arousal slicked with itself,
a refrain.
Refrain we refrain to sing.

The fetus on this ridge, this knife-edge
ridge where the bodies of the world
surround it, fucking.

**

What is glory is not revelation.

Not necessary to revelation.

Every day
the fetus goes to its tomb,
leaves an offering.

What is glory is
punctured by itself
and fails to remember
the wound. Had no

feeling for God. Radiates refrain
around this axis.

John Randolph Carter

The Thrill Seekers

Pedal Car

When I was a kid I maneuvered my
pedal car around obstacles,
most of them dead people.

Moose Head

The moose head was a gift.
We put it in the garage.
Eventually it shed.
How do you dispose of a balding moose head?

The Crowd

I want to be left alone, but a crowd is
following me with pitchforks.
They want answers.

Guilty

I plead guilty to seven counts of Smallism
and am locked away in a bat cave.
I develop a high-pitched voice, which helps me
to find the bathroom in total darkness.

My Shoes

My shoes are leaking.
My notebook is drenched in sweat.
For the first time in my life, Now seems near.
I pull my wool hat over my eyes and try to sleep.
The word "Is" rings in my ears.

Run

I run outside to escape from boredom.
Boredom, realizing I've slipped away,
hurries outside and catches up with me.
I can feel its presence.
The same old sidewalk.
The same old houses.

The Thrill Seekers

My microphone is off. I can't address the
thrill seekers. I want to tell them
the ice is melting, but they can't hear me.
They skate out into the center of the lake.

Michael Carter

Clean Sheets

My first warmth was wet
pickled in your brine, leashed
like a dog to your gurgling machinations
and depth charges. How do I hear
you now? The dog
is sandbag heavy across
my legs. It's morning
and I've gone back to bed.
Sleep. The only way is sleep.
Dreamless, sleepless
on a cold winter's morning
in the softest sheets.
I can't find you anywhere.

John F. Buckley
On the Lam

And because we have fled, escaped
certain forces for a moment or lifetimes,
our pancakes lie flatter, soak up
the butter and syrup faster, do their best to stay
discreet, ready to be eaten in an instant before
we throw some cash at the booth and go.
The complicity of breakfast
is a small but appreciated mercy.

I thought we would have to carry more,
be prepared as the Boy Scouts insist, but
we run light, our car mostly filled with
trash bags of pistachio shells and cases
of CDs for the stereo, too old to play mp3s.

Sometimes we slow down, spend some
years in the same place, fit in with the locals
as camouflage, do what they do. Sometimes
we are the locals, see arms waving from
loosely packed trenches, and pull them
like tender weeds, free the prematurely swallowed.

Can you feel an ache in the mouth, like a smile
held too long for a camera? That's one sign
that we need to go, to the store, to our friends,
to the basement for safety. There are other signs,
passwords and shibboleths, broken branches
and concealed wires. All we can do is our best.

Wyatt Inlow

Osceola Mills

You can see everything from the hill on the outskirts,
standing at the peak under the azure bulbs
of the Russian Orthodox
with its shining white bricks
like talons in the hillside.
Empty
chaffing sky.
Flood
of grass.
Milky patches of clover
hold their tongues.
A riding lawnmower traces lethargic circles
around gravestones.
Across the cemetery road,
one white house
and two dogs in a cage.

You can see everything from here,
all the neighborhoods like dribbles
in the bottom of a flask.
The red eye of the swamp
just barely through clumps of rooftops.
Sickly Curtain Street
in its indecision.
The sun hurts.

In middleschool I would jog here.
I would sit where the hill crests
among the littler gravestones
like sequins
stitched in the shadow of the church.
When it snowed
we would sledride. Chico
lost control, bloodied his face

in the white thicket of the taciturn alley
and its snickering shanties.

Lingering teeth of the wind.
Metal dirge of the lawnmower.
The dogs barking in their cage
are now older than I was then.

The forest keeps its distance,
the birches gather in broods,
their backs to the churchyard.
Blinding canopies descend into murmurs
over the hook where the road
runs in rivulets up the mountain
like a lost child.
Somewhere, the mud ossifies into pavement
and the bramble hunches over it like a bassinet.

Bruce Bond

Irrational Numbers

We know them best as the great deferral
that unnerved a cult of sailors,

Pythagoreans
who killed a mathematician,

threw him to the cold Aegean,
all for what,

for positing a finite place
with an infinite description.

That's how strong the power of numbers
was, or rather

the numberless among our sacred measures,
this

nail in the hand that struggles to remove it.
The heart that beats one

plus one plus one knows nothing
of the cruel summation

and the soul it batters homeward.

Nothing of the mainsail
in our chest, the way it swells

with a wind that has no origin
or end. When I look in your face,

I admit,
I do not know what a self is,

and still I

listen, I speak. I say,
when I was a child, my father pointed

to a star
in the wilderness,

a jewel, red,
who sharpness cut
a hole in the eye and set a jewel inside it.

And in its smallness, it made me small.
Finite.

With an infinite description.

When my father left us,
smaller still.

Wanderer

When a soul passes out of the body, it sinks
as certain bodies do,

toward some restitution,
some cold and colder prospect of the ocean's

threshing floor.

It could be years, and still it falls.

Still you see a father in a stranger's face, the one
you wear,

the one you tear away as you wake.
If a bitterness lingers there, no matter.

What you have heard is not true.
Eternity is changing.

Earth is raising a thundercloud from the fathoms,
where eel and angel bear their lamps.

Children spin their coins
around the vortex at the science fair, and slowly
the orbits narrow.

Pitch rises. Silver disappears.
Most of what I feel I feel late.

Eyes closed.

Years since the body withheld its share of gratitude
and hurt, no matter.

You live in both worlds now.
You the angel who tears from your bones each night,
who lies back down each dawn, estranged,
your one eye crusted with salt,

the scent of sea-grass in your hair.

Kathryn Nuernberger

My Point Was I'm Sorry Not Sorry I Didn't File Charges But I Know What World We Live In

Your pity is a sparrow I don't feel like explaining,
but fine, alright, if we don't try with each other
what kind of world will we live in?

Your sparrow is the way the skin on the faces
of women gets softer and softer and who doesn't
like to touch that softness on a 90-year-old granny,
but also, you should know, it is a sure sign
that she will die soon.

Your cheek is still a tea cup that would do well to keep its sparrows
to itself. Also, your teacup is, even as we speak,
being exploited by the self-aggrandizing ego of an arm
you keep smiling at.

You were so busy
checking your china rim for a smear of lipstick
when he admitted into his beer
that what he is afraid he is he is.
And then your sparrows perched in.

A pigeon is flying at the glass of whether,
he wonders, it has been my intention
to fornicate his arm. Not all wives
are pigeons, but this arm likes it that way.
I have been a pigeon but now I am just a wife
who can go to the bar because I have a wife
at home to listen to my nuthatch breathing.
Did you know a nuthatch can walk down a tree face first?
Did you know you can also call a wife a husband and it means the same?

I have been alive as long as a sewing machine.
My cheek is soft and getting softer all the time
so I have known a lot of arms

and been a lot of sparrows
enough to know an arm is not worth
the trouble it takes to lean on it.

Your pity observes that I seem angry.

Your pity touches my hand, as if that helps.

My pity lost a bad fight. My pity lost two.

And if we're being honest, my pity lost three
and it is going to lose more before it's over.

The whole world is a sewing machine. You are young
and a beautiful sparrow who has decided to be gentle
as if that will make a difference.

Your gentle cheek wants to seem like it is old as a granny.

But a granny, a sewing machine knows, is more afraid
than she's ever been before.

She asks three times an hour
where her purse is. Her purse
is what it was like to be gentle.

And then one day she said, Oh well,
I won't carry that purse anymore.

It is too much trouble to keep track of.

And then she is an umbrella, staring into the sky of what happens next.

You can do many things with an umbrella.

You can use it to collect rain
if you don't mind getting wet.

Yes, dear teacup, I'm angry.

Someday a person or a pigeon
will buy my purse at the Goodwill.

Nothing will change that.

Not the arm. Not your sparrow.

I am a smaller sewing machine on a shelf of sewing machines.

There is a difference between pity and mercy.

I am needlepointing the definitions so I can know the difference better.

We only know how to give each other
what we know ourselves to need.

I washed my face in the bathroom

and reminded myself it feels better
to give pity than so receive it.

So I received it then, but only
like a person at a desk
receives pity from a person
on a couch. So as not to answer
one sparrow with another.

Meanwhile the arm has been learning
how many sewing machines are full of fights
he didn't know he was having.

The arm thought he could just wish
he was a cheek and he would be. The arm
thought his wishing was a sparrow. The arm
thought a city full of sparrows was what
we all agreed to wish on. The arm
is watching the sparrow get increasingly drunk
and pretending to himself he isn't
excited about how he is going to get
to be the one to take her home. Like a cheek
he thinks.

No arm, that's the beer I was about to pour
that congregated all these fucking sparrows,
I think, as I close my tab.

An arm is not a cheek or a sparrow to a pigeon.
I have a purse and an umbrella and also this pair of gloves.
All three are shiny as polished typewriters.
I could purse you or umbrella you or typewrite you.

But I don't know if I should.
Or how.

In this way I am also an arm and I don't have a second thought
about punching with it.

But a face is a mercy and a bird
is not nice so the beer I was pouring
is, Where do I swing?

And the answer is Everywhere, I guess.

But that's just what we call spinning.

Spinning like how it is my duty to suggest to a teacup

that she should perhaps inquire into umbrellas
because it is raining and she or someone else
might wish to be dry sometime
 or have a drink or touch an umbrella tip of knife
as a more direct answer to the arm's pitcher.

My purse is full of tissues. I didn't want to stick another
sparrow in there. But fine – I washed my face
and said “Mercy” to the mirror.

These poor pities,
 I always feel so bad
when I have to shake them out
 in the alley on the way home
and say, “Get out of here,
you dirty vermin.”
And off they go,
stumbling in search of
the nearest dirty puddle
with a moon inside.

Marsha Truman Cooper

If the kingdom of heaven is ferment

pretend to be plain, a pound of unbleached flour, say, in a glass mixing bowl. Add liquid— your sweaty meditation, rosary tears, or attention drops focusing on appreciation of anything you love from your present environment— two cups, stirred and smoothed. Find a warm place, like inside an oven, its light left on. Remember to cover yourself with a prayer shawl or clean dish cloth. Sit still. Breathe slow and slower. Little winds under the towel draw wild yeasts, invisible mixes from near duff and untamed far—

airborne space-travelers between a fabric's threads or the silences allowed from one thought to the next. The cells divide and bud, yielding daughter cells. You get fizzy. Your hooch forms, rises. Skim off about half of yourself, feeding back a cup each of flour and water, then bubble until you're spongy— sound you hear yourself making in such quiet. Chill, literally, refrigerate your mixture. The night before bread, begin proofing this starter. Fold in your reserved hooch and feed yourself again. By morning, when she comes to lower her dipper, you're foamy. You can lift loaves.

Kay Lin

Apnea

the bills have come in today:
phone (forty-two thirty),
internet and cable tv (twelve
for both, because you're sharing),
water and gas and electricity
(fourteen per person because of the air-conditioning);
and there is a stain on the hem of your most-used
work dress – a bright orange spot from the curry
you ate too quickly, rushing to pick up your washing from
the automated machines downstairs
(five dollars per spin and seven for drying) (you would've
used the machine in the flat but you never had a chance
to use the hangers since you always come back late and
you're already running out of clothes for work anyway)
and you must be presentable so you can't
wear anything too cheap (if you're lucky you'll only need
forty); the rent was paid yesterday out of your savings because the landlord
doesn't like waiting (five hundred and fifty for a shared room and you know
that it's expensive but this was the only option you could find on such short notice);
your pay hasn't come in yet – some fault with the company's auditing –
so you're sitting here beside the drain partitioning money that
you don't really have, smoking to calm your hand's insistent trembling just
so you can write your budget and to-do list legibly (it's ten thirty per pack
and you portion each stick carefully); there won't be savings
to replenish what you've been using and you laugh
because you don't remember a time
when numbers come in positives;
and maybe money will be easier if you give in and
stop running but the thought of 'family' turns the rice of your dinner
into dust, choking and thick; you swallow anyway as
your head rings with memories of bruises and screams
(rice is four twenty per kg and it's cheaper in bigger bags but
you only have a single shelf in the shared kitchen and
you're borrowing your roommate's rice cooker already because

you can't have your own when you might need to start sprinting); then you suddenly remember that you must set aside some money for lunches with your colleagues
– mandatory department bonding –
and they never go to the food court where a meal costs less than two digits;
your breath is rushing and your hands shake as they blindly reach for the bottle of cheap whiskey (forty-eight per bottle; a necessity)
you've stowed under your bed – only place where there's space – and you take a long swig that sets your throat seizing and your eyes tearing; you check the level and allow yourself one loud laugh
– your flatmates are sleeping peacefully –
because the bottle is emptying and now you have run out of money for sleep

George Looney

When the Sky Gets Involved

Kinsale is desperate with elevation.
Hard to tell what's hill & what's ruin,
especially when the sky gets involved
with those tricks of light
that catch even gulls off guard.
Despite how the remnants of stone walls

confess their age, history isn't just
a question of vertical measurement.
Forget those numbers you saw
etched, precise, on the hull
of a freighter moored at a local dock
that made it clear the vessel had

been built for deeper water. Abandon
any notion of geologic order. Here,
time's a perverse imp who drinks
too much Guinness & gets lost
going home. Whatever door it knocks at,
empty ruin or home where a woman

murmurs in her sleep insisting she's awake,
time, too potted to stand any longer,
sleeps it off on a street
that has seen its binges before
& knows how to accommodate
time, to be its hair of the dog.

What Keeps the Dead from Drifting

Ghost Tour Tonight, a sign
at the center of Kinsale, ignored
by tourists & folks out shopping.
Do the dead read it & get
nervous, or just chuckle, elbow
one another where their ribs were,

& move on, making horror-movie faces
at the living? Not far off,
behind what used to be a church,
an enormous anchor painted red.
Is this what keeps the dead
from drifting off, or is any thing

made of matter too feeble to influence
“Them that’ve already left but aren’t
gone,” as one local put it?
Better it be the voices that keeps them
here, listening. We’ve all tried,
one time or another, to hear

what the dead might have to say
to us, after all. Turn about
being fair play, maybe it’s not
what’s being said but rather
the rhythms of living speech
that lures them. Maybe the voices

of the living compose a music
the dead love to dance to, twirling
each other & bowing with a grace
that could shame anyone missing
a lover among the living, loss
a waltz none can dance better than the dead.

Dylan Loring

This Smile is Starting to Hurt

One time I took a bite of a candle
as though it were a carrot

to prove someone wrong.
I hadn't accounted for the wick,

some genetic hybrid between
corn silk and rope, which got

caught between my largest teeth.
It's quickly becoming obvious

how little I know about science,
but heck, even I know a thing or two

about the world— that a stranger who starts
badmouthing his girlfriend in the hotel courtyard

within minutes of making your acquaintance
should be avoided at all costs,

that really tall people have to buy basketball shoes
online for non-basketball purposes and chance a fit.

How the wind in northern Iowa is actually God
testing out a breathalyzer after eating a burrito,

and yes, dear reader, the taste and texture
of candle on the tongue when the person

watching you who thinks he has seen everything
spits Manhattan down the front of his shirt.

Janet Majewski

say it so it is

say
you suffer
from a burn
and say it
hurt the skin
is gone or
the skin is dead
say it was
serious so
a length is removed
from a healthy
part of the body
they'll take one
piece of skin one
thin layer like
peeling a potato
and glue it over
the hole so
you'll look and do
better eventually
you won't feel
split or you will
but your body
won't reject it
your body won't
reject it since
it's a piece
of your own
say

unfolding

a body in the middle of a room, not floor, lets you see how much air there really is, how much space beneath the body, between yourself and a body. this body is gold-looking, reflecting possibility, even you: body upside down but so are you when you look. it is arms and back arched back, an almost O except the ends won't touch, just continue, unfold.

a card reads: "arch with hysteria" and because two things are listed, there are two things.

you ask what is holding them there.

Alex Lemon
from *Another Last Day*

XLIV

in the city's long-whispering
leans I feel the barberries

quiver & drop
like buckshot through me

currants in the overgrown
lot long abandoned linger

in the hot-necked wind
the dead shadow

beneath me
is diamond-bodied

its blood is my sweet
blood beautiful

in the sunset trickle

XLV

toe-skimming the shallows
I cannot stop thinking

about the rising song
mud moans

gusting wind
fingers the eyes

out of the leaf-loose
trees I feel in my gut

deep scratches
on a cherry

wood door
a bone-rattle

the silt clots

the hollows

of my bones
always

there is that racket
all of the hands

I want
to deliver

ribbon wrapped & severed
my own hands shake

as deep as I live
I try to believe

a black spark
lone bird

circles above
updrafting the invisible

flames of the day

XLVI

I lisp it silken
in the doggrass

murmur throughout
the breaking day

amazed that I am able
to breathe

in all this ghostly wind
go glazed

with the ugliness
of the world

to the edge of the day
to lay all night

with your hands

tendering through
the buzzsawing dark

XLVII

a tower of sand dollars
on the window ledge

an egg of moonlight
cradled in the head

of a spoon
past midnight & everyone

sleeps
in the darkest cave

of my body
there is a book
of monsters
it grows

each day a page
all of my dead

singers hackle
the cobwebbed black

I tell the stars
all the beautiful things

they can't know

XLVIII

below the ceiling
fan's whirl

this morning
breath

is an oil tanker
with no captain

on the body

a razed town

of bug bites
an unlit bonfire

of fingernails
in the bowl

on the pale floor
from the window

I see two little boys
in the park's shadows

quick-flipping middle fingers
at each other

back & forth
they go

shouting fuck you
motherfucker

you're gonna die
bitch

until their rising
laughter convulses

the entire wet-eyed day

Sally Ball

Hyperspace Bypass Construction Zone

[“HYBYCOZO is an art installation made of 3 polyhedrons... They are lit from the inside by programmable and sound-responsive LED bulbs and cast colorful shadows all around them.” —Jelena Filipchuk & Serge Beaulieu]

Chapter 1. Hyperspace Bypass/

Beyond lightspeed, i.e. imaginary,
because we always want to outwit nature,
all the knowns—

as if we knew. Every avant turns
into a cliché in time.

Ha! In “time”:

the bypass is a hedge, right? We’re doing hyperspace
in a new way, it has an access road,

a clover leaf.

Chapter 2. Luck

To break a law of nature,
you’ll need either
Dick Blick
or a metaphor.

Chapter 3. Construction Zone

...where work’s ongoing,

where something's being made right now,
in progress.

Here, brass boxes blaze with static polygons,
cages whose only 'prisoner' is light:
light gets away. Keats' grave

says Here lies one whose name was writ in water.

The brass boxes say Everything we make
cannot be held. Everything we care about.
It spills. They gleam at 4 PM and vanish
after dark, you find them then by what pours out.

Yesterday I had a cocktail named to honor Robert Frost,
A Nothing Gold Can Stay. The glass that held it

was a globe, a bulb, diffusing
golden light that disappeared with every sip—

Chapter 4: 40 Light Years

away we found some planets
that might have oceans, life.

Found them how? Their dwarf star—
around which they orbit as we orbit the sun—
would dim from time to time: remote eclipses!

We found these possibly hospitable alternate homes
because they interrupted our view of dwarfstarlight.

We were looking at something we stopped
being able to see
and thus discerned a different presence. Presences.

It isn't only billionaires who'll want to go—

Jeff & Elon.

Let's write our names in water and in ink.
Then name those seven planets,
draw them in oils, acrylics, watercolor.
Model them in brass.

Their dwarf-sun's name is Trappist-1,
acronymish for TRAnsiting
Planets and
Planetesimals
Small
Telescope

Not a trap or cage, that mini-star, not a monk
who microbrews. A way of looking that depends
on noticing what we no longer see.

Sue Brannan Walker

REVIEW: The Especial Election of Brian Leung

Ivy vs Dogg. Brian Leung. Roanoke, Virginia. C&R Press, 2018, 264 pages, \$19.00.

Brian's Leung's *Ivy vs. Dogg With A Cast of Thousands!* is a rich gumbo filled with meat and spices: a satisfying roux, chicken and sausage, an array of spices—sassafras, not to mention crab and shrimp. It is a brilliant and satiric as it discloses stories that define who we were, who we are, and who we might become as human beings. The novel focuses on two central characters, Ivy Simmons and Jimmy Dogg, teenagers who are running for Junior Mr. Mayor of Mudlick. About this election, Leung writes: “it isn't a big job, but it's an important position with a modest budget and ceremonial duties all year long.”

Ivy vs. Dogg is Leung's fourth novel, and if it follows the trajectory of his other fiction, it will make a bigger splash than a giant squid with its ten appendages. Leung's *Take Me Home* (Harper Collins) won the Willa Award for Historical Fiction. *World Famous Love Acts* (Saraband Books) received both the Mary McCarthy Award for Short Fiction and the Asian American Literary Award for fiction, and *Lost Men* (Random House) presented Leung the Lamda Literacy Foundation award for Mid-Career novelist. Brian Leung is the Director of Creative Writing at Purdue University.

A dystopian allegory and political treatise, *Ivy vs Dogg* is a cultural examination of current issues such as gender prejudice, teenage pregnancy, unwed mothers, homosexuality, and racism, with additional comments on environmental issues, i.e. clean water, land preservation, and animal rights—chinchillas are the fur of the future.

Leung doesn't refrain from tackling the foibles of people who live in suburban Mudlick. His town, forty minutes from a city, could be any small American town but, he says: “all the wrong people end up with each other.” Nevertheless, he describes the novel as “some kind of love story.” In *ivy v Dogg*, varying aspects of love – eros, familial, agape -- might be viewed through the lens of the noted philosopher, Alain Badiou who suggests love is an ever unfolding quest for truth that needs reinventing. He asks: “what kind of world does one see when [looking at] it from the

point of view of two [or more] and not one? What is the world like when it is experienced, developed, and lived from the point of view of difference?

....

The diverse characters that frequent the pages of *Ivy vs Dogg*, are folks who walk the streets of every small American town. Among them are Clay Cooper's girlfriend, Melanie with her "just-out-of-bed voice," Jerry Mathison, the wide receiver on the school football team, and Burt Draeter, who "once mistook a rock thrown through his front window as a meteorite." They include Craig Marston, "a diabetic with thin skin," Mrs. Ryan, who is off getting treatment for prescription drug dependency," and forty-five-year-old Mary Coster who has twelve children and believes stringently on the miracle of life, while also stressing that "no good deed conceals a sinful one."

Leung's sense of humor is one of the more engaging and delightful aspects of *Ivy vs Dogg*. He calls the book an "exasperating hoot." This certainly applies to the audacious committee that adjudicates the town's activities and makes such bold pronouncements as: "Cultivate the skills of attractive children."; "Make your child smoke a full cigarette as a toddler to discourage the habit later."; "Providing children with cash of their own builds self-esteem." Indeed: "Before having children, map their lives carefully to avoid unpleasant surprises, and "Seek the opinions of people who are smarter than you and vote like them." Mudlickians know about parenting, about poverty, politics, and class distinctions, and they don't hesitate to offer opinions. The numerous commentaries that appear throughout the book highlight the ironic and absurd. Leung's wit and whimsy serve as a serious contrast to the issues raised about morality and hypocrisy.

The way an author begins a story or novel is an interesting aspect of writerly decision-making, especially when there are more characters than can be reeled off even after several readings. It is amazing how Leung kept track of them all—and how the characters are interwoven in various scenes throughout the novel. An old adage states that "writing a book is like washing an elephant; there is no good place to begin or end, and it is hard to keep track of what you've already covered." With his cast of thousands, Leung begins his novel with a mere two words: "We're smallish." A member of the Committee, announces: "It's always been that way but the Committee has lots of ideas for improving things." Nothing is small about *Ivy vs Dogg* unless we want to say that, in contrast to Marcel Proust's *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* with its 3,031 pages, Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* or the *History of a Young Lady* with 1,539 pages or Leo Tolstoy's

War and Peace with 1, 440 pages, Ivy & Dogg with its 54 chapters and 264 pages, counting acknowledgements, is “smallish” writ large.

Leung leaves his reader with several relevant thoughts and considerations. Every town has stories that are told and retold, but “being proud of the past doesn’t mean you have to live in it, for really “stupid comes with its own brand of unconquerable persistence.” Leung says “the only true ghosts are the mistakes of the past we hold on to.”

Maybe Ivy vs Dogg, is the kind of prognostication needed at this time in our problematic history when such things happen like Agent Orange being responsible for the death of General Collin James Colton who died in Viet Nam. Note the slogan that reads: “Encourage young men with no college prospects to enlist. War is Useful.” The words of Howard Zinn, WWI veteran, social activist, and author of *A People’s History*, could serve as a dictum for Ivy vs Dagg:

“If history is to be creative, to anticipate a possible future without denying the past, it could, I believe, emphasize new possibilities by disclosing those episodes of the past when, even if in brief flashes, people showed their ability to resist, to join together, occasionally to win. I am supposing, or perhaps only hoping, that our future may be found in the past’s fugitive moments of compassion rather than in its solid centuries of warfare.”

According to Leung, we belong to different brands of morality, and exhibit varying brands of dissembling. Readers are able to see themselves and others in the novel’s cast of thousands and realize that what we believe defines us. As Oliver Sacks points out, “we have, each of us, a life-story, an inner narrative—whose continuity, whose sense is our lives. It might be said that each of us constructs and lives a ‘narrative’ and that this narrative is our identities.

Alarie Tennille

REVIEW: Why You Love Poetry

The Silence of Red Glass by Maryfrances Wagner

Woodley Press, 2018

ISBN: 978-0-9987003-1-1

If you have read any of Maryfrances Wagner's earlier poetry books, you already know you want to read this one. Her poems are warm, welcoming, and full of life. Like her Italian cooking, she adds a little of this, a little of that, and knows how to surprise us by skillfully blending unlike things together.

Wagner grew up in an Italian family in Kansas City, where she still lives. She has taught English to thousands of students, and must know almost every writer within 100 miles. In other words, she loves people, all sorts of people, and brings them into her poems. Her dialogues and monologues are so convincing you'd swear you're in the room with the speakers. Those who already love her Aunt Mary poems will be thrilled that

Section I takes us back to the nursing home for another visit (with poems from her chapbook, *Pouf*, as well as new additions). As usual, there's an Italian glossary at the end of the book so you can follow all of Aunt Mary's patter. We can easily imagine her hands flying as quickly as her opinions.

In a baking lesson, Aunt Mary says,
"...I know it's 4:00,

but it will be ready in a little over an hour.
I use Hot Roll mix. Shhh! Nobody can tell

the difference. Don't tell your Mother or Aunt Sarah.
They waste a whole day making bread."

When others are cooking, Aunt Mary is far more choosy:

"See what Jimmy brought me?
He found this pink sequined

sweater I haven't worn for months.
We might as well look nice

for dinner, even if everything
comes straight from a can.”

Although Aunt Mary can easily dominate a conversation or poetry collection, a much larger community lives in these pages. There are students too shy to raise a hand, others who disrupt class, bullies, 94-year old Vicki who danced in USO shows in WWII, and an officer’s wife “supportive as a good walking stick.” In “Under the Table,” we learn that some of Wagner’s own spunk comes from her mother:

“Home on leave, my boyfriend says at dinner,
I can drink anyone under the table now....
My mother drains her lemonade and announces,
I’ll take you on. I roar and choke on a meatball.
She has to be kidding....Mother drinks
one highball on Christmas and New Year’s.”

She wasn’t kidding.

This book also features artwork – collages made by Wagner, a metaphor for how this poet pieces the world together in her own way. Whatever influences her, intrigues or shocks her, and whatever catches her eye can find its way into a poem. She includes poems about amputation, forensics, dogs, a bookstore, an egg, and a zoo, some experimental voices, as well as nods to other authors, including epigraphs by Auden, Shakespeare, Olds, and Vonnegut. As I’m reading poetry books, I often wonder why a book is divided into numerical sections. In Wagner’s book, I can see the shifts in style or topic that unites groups of poems together.

Some poets look too hard for subjects. In “Pinkie,” Wagner illustrates that no topic can be too small for a closer look:

“Rarely helpful in a tug of war, except
to take the rub. Last burned
in the oven, first at the skillet.
Not invited to the chopstick party.”

The Silence of Red Glass is a pleasure for poetry lovers and even for those who don’t yet know that they are.

Nandini Bhattacharya

REVIEW: Ru Freeman's *On Sal Mal Lane*

Ru Freeman doesn't apologize for reiterating that politics – that thing that Bernard Shaw called the last refuge of scoundrels – has shaped and misshaped the lives of human beings since the dawn of recorded time. Her debut novel *On Sal Mal Lane* has the quality of a haunting beneath the skin of everyday life, which may not be far from our relationship with the political firestorms that we live through while imagining we reside only in the deep, still heart of the private and the intimate. Freeman's prologue insists that we pay attention to these dialectics and dynamics. In it, she orients the reader thus: "I am all those thoughts, the fractious, the lush, the desolate, the ones that are created from small apprehensions to those built block by block from the intimations of tragedy, the ones that spin upward with determined exuberance or trill in low notes with small joys. To tell a story about divergent lives, the storyteller must be everything and nothing. I am that" (5).

On Sal Mal Lane is set during the rise of the Tamil Tigers secessionist movement in the 1970s in Sri Lanka, that tiny island repository of driving myths of South Asian subcontinental origin and racial and ethnic conflicts such as the epic poem *Ramayana* (composed ca. 500 BCE). In the *Ramayana*, for instance, the Aryan demigod Rama's dark-skinned and brutish opponents, whom later historical anthropologists have identified as India's aboriginal Dravidians displaced by waves of Aryan invasion from the fifth or fourth millennia BC, are ruled by the vicious, bestial and ten-headed demon king Ravana. A true fight between absolute good and absolute evil, the epic smacks of the heady self-righteousness of the absolute winners of ethnocide.

Ironically, the once displaced and hunted seem to have a chronic, innate penchant for becoming future hunters, as one sees in the Middle East today. *On Sal Mal Lane*, a saga of family and community scorched by the simoom of internal political and psychological terror, is about a similar bloody disaffection four thousand years later. Simmering just beneath the "normal" rifts in everyday life in a quiet cul de sac in the capital Colombo are the mutual antipathies of ethnic Sri Lankans and ethnic Tamils who have graduated centuries of largely viable co-existence only to step into a postcolonial Armageddon over rights, resources, identity, recognition and power.

This is the signature story of decolonized South Asia, one might say, as well as of so many other societies fractured by modernity's hollow promise of

self-determination. After years of attempts by Tamil as well as Sinhalese politicians to share power and govern equitably, the Tamil Tigers were mobilized were led by a bloody-minded activist named Prabhakaran – literally, creator of fire -- who ignited a terrifying civil war and pogrom against native Sinhalese who were primarily Buddhist but also Christians, Muslims and other sects. Is Prabhakaran a modern Ravana? Maybe, but Freeman reminds us that big wars are also always about little people, and that little things are never really little when it comes to the human capacity to hate as well as love. So we have the Herath family: ethnic Sinhalese Buddhist mother, father and four lovely, well-rounded children. From eldest to youngest, the children Rashmi, Suren, Nihil and Devi are tender vignettes of human diversity, a microcosm of the differences that complicate attachment and detachment, that bewilder parents of multiple children, and that make the world a marvelous place. Tenderly, painstakingly, drawing with a slim brush on a miniature easel, Freeman delineates the ties between individuals, within families, and among kin groups. The Herath children breeze into the house that's stood empty for a while, the one with a buried history of a past tragic attachment, and the reader notices two things. First, the family with its cultural, sensorial and political edge over its neighbors as well as its remarkable mother and children, transforms and transfixes the existing residents, but also thaws and releases old currents of yearning, overreaching, disappointment and grief that have lain dormant for years as soon as it arrives. When the community realizes that the Heraths guard and look out for one another – the overly ideologically rigid father excepted – and stand in a phalanx around their smallest and most vulnerable member, the youngest child Devi, a brief renaissance dawns up and down the tired, sulking street. In it, for a blink of an eye – before communal, ethnic, and class hatreds leap into flames from the twin sparks of genocidal ethnic nationalism and incompetent political leadership – the jaded families of Sal Mal Lane embark on a short renewal of kindness, concern, and even love for each other. The Herath family represents, if just for a moment, new possibilities and perhaps even redemption for the wretched and the abandoned of Sal Mal Lane. But somewhere an ineluctable, ineffable threat hangs over the space, even before Sal Mal Lane is engulfed in the fires of hate raging across Sri Lanka. News of violence elsewhere meshes with violence dormant in broken hearts, and the result is the end of innocence, of an era of hope, of faith that perhaps old wounds can heal, ancient hatreds die, forgiveness trump revenge.

Ru Freeman's mastery takes the form of demonstrating the slippage between intention and action, love and obsession, tenderness and heartbreak, experience and innocence and, last but not least, civilization and barbarism. When fears for the most vulnerable and beloved materialize,

the structure of tragedy recapitulates the masonry of communal apocalypse where betrayal, real or imaginary, gets the last word. In playing that slow, sad music of experience and betrayal as coming of age – and music is a character in itself in the novel -- Freeman joins a glorious group of writers including Arundhati Roy, Tahmina Anam and Maaza Mengiste, who fearlessly look in the eye those who say “My country, right or wrong....”

Before *On Sal Mal Lane*, Freeman has published *A Disobedient Girl* (Atria Books, 2009). She has also edited *Extraordinary Renditions*, an anthology on the Palestinian struggle (Olive Branch Press, 2016). Both works express her feminist and literary activism on behalf of global freedom, human rights, and justice.

Marcene Gandolfo

REVIEW: A Review of John Gosslee's *Fish Boy*

John Gosslee's work is vital to contemporary American poetry. In addition to editing numerous publications, he has created a substantive body of his own work. Gosslee's latest poetry collection, *Fish Boy*, delivers a memorable tribute to his late father, David Gosslee. The book is a compelling meditation on the redemptive power of a father's unconditional love.

A son remembers his father's words, whoever you become now / I will love him. These words of undying love and support ring through *Fish Boy*. The poems in this collection explore a father-son relationship. But more significantly, they explore transformation and survival in the face of loss.

These poems create a narrative thread. As the speaker grieves his father's death, he meditates on the significance of their relationship. In these personal lyrics, the speaker addresses primarily in first-person; however, in the title poem, he recounts movie scenes that project his own emotional landscape: his adaptation and quest for personal identity, his grief, but also, psychic growth.

Fish Boy

*the movie intro flashes like an angler fish
wriggling toward the reader in an interactive flip book.
In the story of the boy, he wants
out of his skin and the water.*

*The film flickers and he runs his fingers
over the scales, along the fin. He feels
his eyes are not his eyes.*

*He knows it's not original to know
everything is cosmic dust, but also knows
he doesn't know, if he's significant or not.*

*Like any good thriller,
the event horizon of death is unknown.
The father dies and the son cries into the pages,*

*crawls out of the pond and finds the same earth
under each rock.*

Throughout the book, the speaker identifies father and son with a number of animal images. However, he associates most with the image of fish, breaking out of skin, of water, engaging in transformation. After his father's death, the boy must shed his old skin, learn to survive in a new element. The speaker refers to himself as a boy, yet images of acclimatization and evolution suggest this boy is becoming a man. The transformative image of the fish also carries mythic resonance. The ichthys symbol depicts the primitive Christian image of fish as savior, an image of life overcoming death. But, in this narrative, the father, not the boy, manifests as a Christ-like figure, offering unconditional love, providing redemptive hope and salvation to a prodigal son. The father has protected the son with his own skin, one that the son must inevitably shed.

"My Beautiful Father the Fire Bird" relates the father and son to birds. Here the father becomes another redemptive mythic figure, a phoenix. This poem, which appears early in the collection, provides narrative background. The speaker, at the bedside of his father who has suffered a stroke, reflects on a time in which his father stood at his bedside, following his own suicide attempt.

Today is the day of finishing little tasks.

*the words of his body locked in a stroke
the doctors can't edit.*

*

*He walks through the brown field
in Vietnam, the ambush,
the agent orange pedals in the sweat.*

*The nurse spoons in pureed beets,
wipes his mouth, elevates the dead hand
that was filled with fire.*

*

*He held my wings in one hand,
the scissors in the other
and after the clip I beat my wings*

so much harder to fly.

*He steers my face's pale fire
from the psychiatrist to the hospital,
the stomach pump, the in-patient.*

*He says,
whoever you become now,
I will love him.*

*

*And father, people have begun
to love my words, chewed so hard
in your mouth, dropped into mine.*

The speaker is unable to physically save his father's life. Yet, as he conjures memories of his father's actions and words, he creates a figure of courage, sacrifice, love, and redemption. The father dies in fire only to rise from ashes, as the speaker resurrects his father's language and recreates life in art.

Themes of death and rebirth haunt the collection. Memory is the vehicle for resurrection. Identities change. Time is fluid. Poems travel almost seamlessly between past and present, defying linearity as they move through the speaker's memory, the source of both hope and grief. Ultimately, the speaker's survival originates in a dance between that grief and hope.

But is faith in memory and language sufficient? Can art, alone, sustain us? When we lose our saviors, how do we learn to save ourselves? What is relationship between death and memory?

In the weight of grief, these poems offer more questions than answers. They resist closure and defy certainty. The speaker undergoes transformation. Yes. But as he wrestles with sorrow and desolation, at times, he also resists change. "After the Geese" is a somber meditation.

*I stand on the pier
and the geese are gone.*

I'm jealous of the water,

*how it supports their downy feathers
without reward or effort,*

*is always itself,
doesn't know what it means to hold
or be he held.*

Perhaps “I watch the Forest Grow Out of the Body” best illustrates the speaker’s dance between grief and hope. After his father’s death, the speaker succumbs to feelings of despair and self-destruction.

*I'm alone for the first time in weeks
and I wonder if I should follow him to the ground,
but he didn't build the garden to set itself on fire.*

Once again, the speaker finds redemption in an image of his father. This time he is associated—not with an animal—but a gardener, a tender to vegetation, to death and rebirth.

As the speaker considers the garden—an image of life and regeneration—he discovers a hope that offsets his despair. He chooses not to destroy, but instead, to foster what his father has planted, restore memories that nurture life.

The speaker’s struggle with grief, his dance between despair and hope, doesn’t resolve in spiritual revelation or profound insight. Still, as the collection progresses, the speaker chooses to survive, to step forward in the face of grief. He allows memory to transform him, to bring him life. A life, in which, the most predictable element is change. It’s only fitting that the book’s final poem, “Pick the Stars to Work,” takes place in a dance club, just minutes before closing.

*Two minutes before last call,
the body is a flower tossing in the wind
and I'm so thankful that everyone is a broadcast
for the life our evolution knows is still possible
on the polished concrete dance floor.*

Frank Montesonti

Time Tower

Since they had gotten married, Eva had been describing her dream apartment to her husband. “Twelve-foot ceilings with exposed duct work,” she said, as she sat cross-legged on Jasper’s back as he did fifty closed-faced and then fifty open-faced push-ups. “One of the old industrial buildings downtown with the red brick and single-pane factory glass because I like how it warps the sunlight on concrete floors and makes the sunlight feel chalk dusty,” she said with a sweeping gesture, as Jasper flipped a giant omelette and poured two tall glasses of milk. In the evenings, she sketched the space from multiple angles on big white pads while Jasper was half-asleep on the couch reviewing game tape of the offensive line.

Now, after months of searching, they stood in the very apartment Eva she seemed to have willed into existence.

The realtor, who introduced herself as Spieglenik, hobbled in from the stairwell leading up to the second-floor loft, heels echoing. She touched her slicked-back gray hair with the shorter of her two arms, as if checking to see if she were still wearing a helmet and read from her clipboard pronouncing every syllable of each word precisely.

“Nineteen hundred square feet. The previous tenants constructed a wall, to create a bedroom. A kitchen island will be added for more food prep-er-a-tion.”

Eva grabbed her husband’s well-muscled arm and pulled him toward her to whisper.

“I asked the universe and here it is.”

Before his wife got into a spiritual frenzy, Jasper turned to the realtor to see how much the universe was charging.

“This place must go for two or three thousand a month,” he said.

“There is no mistake. This apartment rents for seven hundred because of a small peculiarity.”

“What?” asked Eva, concerned.

“The apartment exists on a time tower,” said Spieglenik. “It should only prove a slight inconvenience.”

“What’s a time tower?” asked Jasper.

Frau Spieglenik drew on her sales sheet what looked like a top hat.



“You see, the apartment is on the top, so when you look out the windows, you see ten years into the future, but if you stepped out, you are back in the present.”

“So, what’s out there is the future?” asked Jasper, nodding to the window.

“Exactly” said Spieglenik.

“Excuse us,” said Eva to the realtor and pulled Jasper over toward the windows.

“What’s going on here, Jasper? Is this some sort of joke?”

“How should I know?” he said, peaking out the window.

“What’s out there?” asked Eva.

“It’s the same street.”

On the side of the adjacent building was a billboard for Apparel Inc. The billboard featured a model wearing a Shakespearian neck ruffle, ski boots, a black leotard, and a corduroy vest.

“Is that future fashion?” asked Jasper.

“How could I know what’s in style ten years from now?”

“Well, is it current fashion?” asked Jasper.

“Could be,” shrugged Eva.

Jasper walked carefully over to the window. “It was raining,” said Jasper.

“Maybe it just cleared up,” said Eva.

Jasper watched a future cloud pass over the future sun.

“Puddles.”

“What?”

“The sidewalk is totally dry. Where are the puddles?” asked Jasper.

They instinctually stepped back from the window, as if it might suck them out if they stayed too close.

But then Eva’s face changed. It hardened into an expression he had seen before, the one that said that no stupid obstacle was going to get in the way of what she really wanted. She marched over to the realtor.

“So, does it affect anything else, this time tower thing?” she asked and crossed her arms.

“Nothing,” articulated the grey-haired realtor. “When you walk out the door, you are back in the present. Any news or phone calls may ascend or descend the time tower just as you are able to do.”

“We’ll take it,” said Eva.

Jasper nodded. Time tower or not, it was a great deal.

Five sets, ten reps, incline bench, four sets, twelve reps, (max weight) dead lifts. With every set complete, Jasper felt a small relief. Each set was proof it could be done again, that next time he might be able to lift more. Each session he could claim he was a little stronger, and that was

a good feeling. He used each machine in a prescribed order. You must give the muscles time to rest as well. That was why most people can't get in shape. They can't stand the boredom between sets. What do you do, you stand there, sweaty, looking in a mirror? Most people listened to music, but he felt music took away from the calming feeling he got from performing these movements correctly, ritualistically. You had to get used to boredom, to love it. "Get it out of your head that you are some sort of creative genius," he would tell his players, "Training is boring as shit. Introspection, imagination, creativity, that's just crap for sports writers. Your job is to repeat the same damn thing over and over until your body plays the game by itself. Don't look in your crystal balls, don't look in your mind or heart, look at the damn piece of paper with your set lists tacked to the wall," then he would poke the set lists on the wall with his thick forefinger.

His team was a successful arena league franchise where promising players might spend a year rehabbing or getting experience for the NFL. He was the offensive line and strength coach. He had been in the NFL himself, three seasons as a backup guard for the Eagles. Until the ripped tendon and the surgeries, it was the greatest three years of his life.

In the Eagle's stadium offices, he met a short, curly-haired brunette who was the general manager's niece. Eva didn't want to be keeping accounts for the equipment manager. She talked a lot about culture. They sat on the steps of the stadium and Jasper gave her one of his five peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, though it would throw off his calorie count for the day. In return, she told him about how she studied in Paris, how she would go down by the Seine and draw the barges, how the people bought fresh bread and cheese every day, and how there was this crazy sculpture of a giant thumb near her apartment, could you believe it, a giant thumb? Paris was bizarre like that sometimes. He told her how he broke his thumb. Guards were always breaking their thumbs in gruesome ways, so, he said, thumbs loomed large in his mind too. They looked out over the field together as it was being mowed.

They married the second year of his contract. The doctors forced him to retire the third, but she didn't care. She liked having a husband around more than money. She wasn't greedy. He liked that. She worked hard, though not always effectively he thought. He yelled at grown men all day, so he enjoyed doting on his petite wife in his time home, letting her give the orders.

They decided to sleep in the apartment the next night. After a long night at the gym, Jasper wrestled their king-sized mattress up the stairs and Eva brought the coffee maker. They slept in the middle of the open space, the future light of the city shining softly through the windows,

moving over them.

The next morning, blowing the steam off her coffee, Eva absentmindedly gazed out the same window she and Jasper had puzzled over the day before. She didn't quite register what she saw at first. Instead of the Apparel Inc. sign, another had replaced it overnight. It was plain white with large black text that read:

GET DIVORCED

She dropped her coffee cup to the floor. It didn't break, and she burned her bare foot.

"Jasper!" she screamed.

With an athlete's agility, Jasper sprinted over to his wife and threw his massive arms protectively around her.

"Look," she said, pointing backwards out the window as he held her.

"What?"

"The sign."

It took him a moment to process, but then a cold wind blew across his skeleton. He guided her back to the mattress and they sat down, not speaking for several moments.

"What does it mean?" asked Eva.

"Maybe it's just a billboard for some future divorce lawyer," said Jasper.

"Or it's from us."

"What?" asked Jasper.

"A message from us in the future, Jasper. Why else would it be right outside our window?"

"I don't know," he said, "there is probably another reason."

"It means in ten years our future selves agree it would be better if we split up now." Eva started crying.

"But I love you, kitty." He gently put his hand on her back, covering half.

They sat in silence again.

"So, what do we do?" asked Eva.

"We don't know we put the sign up."

"Who else would?"

"I'm just saying, let's not overreact."

"What did you do?"

"Why do you assume it's my fault?"

Eva shot him a look.

"I kissed one woman. We hadn't even been dating that long."

"Six months is a long time."

"I'm sure it wasn't that long."

“People get divorced because they cheat, and I’m not a cheater.”

“You know, I don’t like being accused of future crimes.”

A small clutch of future sparrows flew past the window.

Eva took a deep breath. “You’re probably right. Maybe it’s a lawyer’s ad or a movie promo. It could be lots of other things.”

“Yeah, see, there’s no reason to assume the worst.”

“And even if it was us,” said Eva, “maybe we just had a fight and we’ll get over it?”

Jasper held out his thumb to Eva and she wrapped her thumb around his, as was their custom.

But the sign stayed up. Day after day it stayed up, and it started to wear on them. In the years since she worked at the stadium, Eva had completed her degree and found work at a design firm. She didn’t have the true artistic spark that other designers had, but she was good at genuinely listening to the clients, so she got good feedback and people recommended her, though she always felt a bit compromised by her unwillingness to stand up for her ideas. With her own apartment, however, she was free to do whatever she liked, and Jasper was the perfect husband for a designer. He had no opinions, he was handy, and he was willing to hold heavy things in place for extended periods of time. But that damn sign was ruining her dream. The furniture felt on unstable ground. She had dream of earthquakes rattling paintings off the walls. She had dreams of trying to nail a table to the deck of a listing ship.

The sign was getting to Jasper too, but his strategy was to keep it from his mind. He doubled the length of his morning runs from two to four miles. He stayed late after the team left practice and did few extra sets on his delts and lats. He examined his hulking frame in the tall gym mirrors, noting the development of each muscle group. If he could just get stronger, he could lift this problem too. Everything is a matter of overcoming gravity. He threw the medicine ball against the wall until, from pure exhaustion, his worried thoughts lost their grip on his mind. When he arrived home late at night, he slipped in bed beside his wife and fell into a quick, deep slumber.

The apartment was finally decorated. Eva had tried out four different schemes and they had to take out a small loan to finish it, but she insisted it was an investment and would drum up clients by serving as a model. Now she needed to show the place off, and what better way than a party? Eva invited everyone she knew from her office. She even invited some people she didn’t know like the style writer from the local City Beat magazine. She encouraged Jasper to get his players to attend and to bring their wives. These guys had nothing now, but if one of them made a team in the fall, they would have a big undecorated house, a bored wife, and plenty of

money.

On the night of the party the weather in the future was almost identical to the weather in the present. They didn't want to let anyone know about the window. It would make their beautiful apartment feel defective. No one would notice the sign. If so, they might just think it was from a divorce lawyer as well.

It was a good party. Eva's designer colleagues raved over the apartment and gave her hugs and a few notes on minor tweaks as they crossed their minds. The design editor from the City Beat Magazine showed up and took a few photographs. The football players cared as much about interior design as Jasper did, but they were great fun at parties, surprisingly fashionable dressers, and nimble dancers. The party went on late into the night. Things were going so wonderfully that Eva and Jasper had forgot about the sign. They even, at one point, looked out into the darkness of the future together.

"Look," said Jasper to Eva, "Someone across the street is having a party too. Let's wave to them from the past."

They waved. But then, being at the window, they couldn't help looking over toward the billboard. Something about it was different. In the dark they had to strain to see it, but it definitely read:

GET DIVORCED

—from Eva and Jasper.

"Why is that there, Jasper!" Eva clutched Jasper's forearm, and her voice rose in panic. The music was so loud no one could hear their conversation.

"Why is that there?" This time she shouted and pushed him away.

"You act like I know."

"I know I didn't do it," said Eva.

"Your name is there too."

In both the present and the future, it was three o'clock in the morning. A few players were still showing off their moves by the stereo, the City Beat editor scrolled through the photos on his camera on the couch, and two drunk designers sketched something on a napkin in the kitchen.

Jasper flashed the lights. "Closing time. You don't have to go home, but you can't stay here." Eva accepted a few final compliments, and Jasper and his players shared some elaborate handshakes. Then, they were alone in the apartment with sticky floors, empty bottles, and unsettling relationship advice from their future selves.

Ten years pass.

Jasper made sure to call her well in advance of the day they moved into the apartment so long ago. After all, they didn't know how long it would take to secure the billboard, how much it would cost to rent it for so long. They made plans to meet at the little breakfast place that they frequented when they were married, just around the corner from the old building.

They arrived at the restaurant almost simultaneously. Jasper had stayed in good shape, but his face had additional lines around the eyes and lips from the constant grimacing of weightlifting. Eva grew her hair long and still carried some of the extra weight from her third child.

Jasper had children as well—two, both girls. He had married the girl in the same job Eva once had in the gym office. Eva had married a businessman, a wholesale clothing distributor, and moved to the suburbs. It was a little hard to explain to her current husband why she needed to meet her ex-husband, but she said it had to do with some investments they made together a long time ago; money was his language.

They hugged at the door and told each other they looked nice. They went inside and sat at their old table. Jasper ordered the same big breakfast with sausage and bacon that he always did, but Eva, trying to lose weight ordered an egg-white omelet with a side of fruit.

"It's good to see you," said Jasper. "How're Tim and the kids?"

"Oh, they're well," she said, "and yours?"

"The youngest is finally starting school, so that's nice." Jasper poured his fifth cream in his coffee.

They sat quietly for a moment, somehow almost embarrassed. Jasper seemed upset. His face was red and his muscular body trembled.

"We don't have to do it, you know," said Jasper.

"But we did do it. I mean, we will," said Eva.

"But what if we didn't?" asked Jasper.

"But we do," said Eva. "I'm happy. You're happy. What's the point?"

"My point is that we have the choice. We could just get up and walk away and that sign will never go up," said Jasper. His muscular leg bumped the table and the dishes clattered.

"But we don't know what happens in that other life. We just know this one," said Eva.

Things weren't perfect in either of their lives. Eva knew her husband probably slept around on his long business trips, and Jasper's wife's depression had gotten so bad over the years she could barely work and had little interest in their two girls. They both had reasons to wonder if their lives may have been happier together.

“I’ve thought a lot about it over the years, Evangeline,” said Jasper. He almost never used her full name, so she sat up straight in her chair. “You know what we are?” He waited for a reply.

“No,” she said.

“We’re cowards.” He said.

He brought his coffee cup down on the table hard and some splashed on his hand. A few people looked their way.

“But what about our children? Do we just wipe them out of existence?” asked Eva.

“Maybe we wiped our children from existence.”

“I never knew those, children, Jasper. I know and love mine. And you love yours.”

“I know that, but what gets me is that we didn’t even try. The whole thing didn’t fall apart because we were actually unhappy. It fell apart because we decided right now that we would choose this path.”

Eva shifted in her seat, frustrated with the idea, “Jasper, there are hundreds of things I choose not to do, thousands I shrug away because I imagine the future and think that probably wouldn’t work out for the best. Why aren’t we upset about those lost lives? In this case it was better. We got a real sign from ourselves in the future.”

Jasper crossed his arms, “But we can change it. We don’t need to put up that billboard.”

“Can we change it, Jasper? Because we already know we don’t.”

They sat in silence for a moment, the present tense ringing. Jasper hung down his head, “Couldn’t we at least sign our names on the first Billboard to avoid all that stress.”

“But that’s not what we did. Things might be different if we change the smallest thing.”

Eva paused, then asked, “Did you find the address?”

“Yes. It’s not far,” said Jasper.

They walked two blocks down the street to a storefront in one of the old red-brick buildings. The sign read Mefi Realty. They walked in and were greeted by a plump old lady in a paisley dress sitting behind a desk.

“Hello, I’m Mrs. Bennekmann, how may I help you?”

“We are interested in renting one of your billboards,” said Jasper. “Our request may seem a bit strange.”

When it was done, Jasper walked Eva to the train station. They hugged. She stepped into the rail car, and Jasper watched the train run on its one track until it was out of sight.

Four months later, Jasper called his wife and said he had to stay late at the gym, but instead he went downtown to see if the addition of the names had really gone up on the billboard. It was late. He saw the neighbors

across the street were having their party, a big one. He remembered seeing that party from his own apartment ten years ago. He went inside and up the elevator to the fourth floor. Like most big parties, no one really noticed he wasn't invited, so he grabbed a beer from a tub on the floor and went over to the window to look across the street at his old apartment. He could see it—it was their own party, ten years ago. He watched all the people dancing and saw himself and Eva walk up to the window and wave at the party across the street. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, he had a strong memory, so strong he felt like he was there again.

He was a child, maybe four years old, down at the Savannah River and he waded out too far until the current grabbed him. His mother was on the riverbank screaming, his father was running through the brush, but he wasn't strong enough to swim back to them. He just wasn't strong enough. No matter how hard he tried, the river was taking him away.

Joshua Berstein

Haven

*What I love is near at hand,
Always, in earth and air.*

- Roethke, "The Far Field"

"Daddy's arm," my daughter calls it, and about which she'll complain, loudly and bitterly, if I try to move. "I want Daddy's arm." These were arguably her first English words, and certainly her most vocally pronounced. My wife and I objected at first to co-sleeping, though we couldn't see any way around it, and we didn't want to be those parents, the kind who leave their children to cry in a crib. Of course we now realize those parents are entirely right, and I look horribly aged. Still, in the predawn hours when it's snowing out and the temperatures hover around twenty—we live in upstate New York—I can see a light frost on the window and the glow of my daughter's breath. We usually keep the house around sixty, less because we're cheap (though we are) than because the heat interferes with her breathing, and that of our youngest child, an infant, who sleeps at night with his mother.

My daughter and I inhabit a narrow white bedroom in this, our single-floor, rented prefab—what I believe is called a ranch house, technically, though that sounds luxurious. Our place is infested with mice. The windows are thin and half-rotted. The wooden floor creaks, and at night, even in the bone-white dreariness of winter, we can hear squirrels cavorting above, making do with their endless supply of dropped walnuts, which constantly batter our roof. It is not a pleasant home we live in, but as the saying goes, it is ours, and, dare I say, there is nothing cozier at night, nothing more redemptive, than feeling my daughter's breath, hearing her purr as she dreams, and knowing, as she knows, that in spite of all the darkness in the world, and the chill air outside, and the inhumanity with which people treat others (I myself served as an infantry soldier and once saw horrors without end), there will always be a haven, a kind of balm for our pain, a light refuge into which we might creep. Okay, that's putting it grandly. She can sleep at night on my arm, and it hurts like hell when she stays there for seven hours. I often have to get up to pee. But I don't, because I like listening to her breathing, and feeling the warmth of her neck.

Folks often tell me that they “grow up so quickly,” that “childhood moves so fast.” My wife and I cannot imagine it. We often scream at one another, and at our kids, and the day is one endless slog. Weekends are even worse, since we have no one to babysit—we can’t afford that—and subsist from food stamp to food stamp. We also lack family nearby and don’t have what one could call area friends. Perhaps this sounds self-pitying. The reality, we know, is that every set of parents feels similarly. Parenting sucks. Raising a family kind of sucks. Devoting seventy percent of your income to daycare, as we do, and asking physicians if they’ll accept Medicaid, is beneath the dignity of adults. And there isn’t much recourse. I chose to write in life and, despite formerly teaching at a university, am currently between gigs. My wife, who’s a postdoctoral associate in science, makes a salary that nets us nine dollars annually after you factor in bills. We’re lucky not to be indebted, and for that we cannot complain, though we know we aren’t saving any money, can’t afford to retire, and are rounding the bend of forty, which is ridiculous, given our worth. I can’t complain about any of this, however, or anything in life, because my daughter can sleep on my arm, and it brings to mind not only Roethke’s blessed words but Shakespeare’s Sonnet XXIX, whose meaning, in fact, didn’t become apparent to me until I read it last week to my child:

*Haply I think on thee, and then my state
(Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven’s gate*

If those lines meaning anything at all, it is that there really is no value in this world besides love, nothing to depend on or lean on, no goals for which to strive, and no worth or beauty beside this: the look upon a two-year-old’s face, waking, eyes filled with sleep, as she stares at you with astonishment as if to say, *where would you possibly go?*

Katherine Witt

Naked

My roommate calls me a slut for walking around our apartment naked, but that's only because she's overweight. She also doesn't approve of my three-legged Belgian Sheepdog I picked up from the local ASPCA for sixty bucks the day my ex-fiancée left me or the way I decorate my bedroom with my father's stained-glass artwork. She finds it far too awkward to have sex in a room that reminds her of the Canterbury Cathedral. Before he died I remember my father hunched over the pool table in our shoebox of a home I grew up in, his makeshift work table since Mom gave him the news she needed his work area for a nursery. He used to take me with him to the stained-glass shop and buy sheets of colored glass, sold by the square foot, for his most recent project. He cut each pane with his band saw to fit the pattern in his books, methodically grinding the edges to piece like a jigsaw. My favorite part was always after he lined the edges with copper foil and he'd let me use the fid to smooth the copper out before melting the solder to connect each shard into a splintered picture. He called me the Sorcerer's Apprentice. Now my windows are covered with lighthouses, oversized sunflowers, Irish clovers, frosted snowflakes, Celtic knots, fading sunsets, and hot air balloons. On sunny days, I like to be awakened by colors prancing across my gray walls, light shining through a contorted rainbow on the nakedness of my pallid skin.

Heather Aruffo

Thunderbird

In the last month of his life, my father discovers YouTube and spends his time watching old TV shows. I imagine them dubbed over in Spanish; my father, seven years old, watching them on a black and white screen in a middle class neighborhood in Mexico City. In all the images I have created for myself of his death, of hospital beds and shallow breathing, this was not what I had anticipated. My father does not watch TV.

“Mira,” he says. He sits in an armchair, facing the window, looking out on the field behind our house. Chaff melts beneath falling snow. He balances the company computer he still uses on his lap, his hands hovering over the keyboard, shaking. On the screen blinks an email inbox. He checks it multiple times a day out of habit, whenever he is awake, as though he is waiting for the next summons from work despite the fact that he has been on leave for nearly three months. Now, it is empty. Underneath his sweatshirt and sweatpants, he seems as thin as a sheet of paper, osseous as a corpse.

“Lo conozcas a los *Thunderbirds*?” he asks.

“No.” I am a sophomore in college, home for winter break. My mother and brother are out running errands, leaving my father and I alone in the house. Somehow, in the months since my father has stopped working, our lives have become ringed with old TV shows, piped into the town in Switzerland where my family has settled. My father spends his days in a morphine haze. Sleeping, eating, leaving the laundry he normally folds on the coffee table, watching anything that isn’t in German- BBC 4 *Who’s Coming to Dinner*, the worst of British reality TV, *The O.C* in French, reruns of *Columbo* in Italian. When he says *Thunderbirds*, I think of a preview for a movie in the early 2000s in a theater outside of Boston; an orange subway tube suspended by a sinew from a bridge, a green spaceship wide as a leukocyte, rocket ships lean and needle nosed as antibodies, loaded with red stabilizer fins, as though they are their own sort of targeted delivery, excising the malignancy in the world. I find it strange this would be what he would be talking about but with my time as his daughter rapidly ending, there is nothing I won’t do to make him happy. I sit down next to him to watch. He smiles and closes out the email inbox.

“Mira,” he says, again. On the screen is the red banner of YouTube,

the odd featured videos in garish colors, underscored by click-bait titles. He pecks “Thunderbirds” into the search bar. He shakes. He is a cobbled together image of a man atrophied, his hands an amalgam of metacarpals soldered together at the joints. I lean over his shoulder to watch. A grainy nineteen sixties voice, generically American, that I associate with old Disney infomercial films, news broadcasting voiceovers, floods the screen, stiff and gentle. “Five, four, three, two, one,” it says, over images of futuristic looking models of spaceships. The main characters are square-jawed marionettes, Ken dolls in blue air force uniforms, named after Mercury Seven astronauts. Music, military and triumphant, loaded with all the certainty of postwar American dominion, marches us through miniaturized plastic settings from Pacific Islands to London Parliament, all new in VideColor. Men explain things to women, the villains are one dimensional and the heroes save the day for those less fortunate than themselves. We follow the exploits of the Tracy family, independently wealthy and philanthropic, who decide to form International Rescue as a force for good in the world without oversight from any state or international body. Onscreen, American ingenuity, space exploration, capitalism, the promise of the atomic age, swoops in as salvation. From where I sit, all that is beginning to seem impossible; the imagined future of *Thunderbirds* a poor approximation of what has become reality.

“This is what made me want to become a scientist,” my father says, from behind his glasses, the show reflected in the lenses, his voice flat with a kind of sadness.

How strange it is, the way we dream of the future, always bracketed by the present. My father at seven, lying on the floor, the air sticky with heat, a fan blowing in the background, dreaming of what could be. He will indeed become a scientist, contributing to the biotechnology revolution that will sweep the globe in the 1980s, opening the door for a new era of drug discovery. He will travel and live in different countries to carry out his work; the promise of technology and global progress present in *Thunderbirds* realized in cell culture and cytokinesis. He will die of cancer at fifty-three, his life cut short by a disease that still manages to elude the scientific community, but he doesn’t know any of this yet. I imagine my father a thunderbird, soaring from somewhere forty six years ago in Mexico City, propelled by all the excitement of ingenuity, the unfettered promise of the future.

Kate Lasell

FemmeVerse

We collide at the speed of light. That's what the screen says, which means that's what the other user has dictated it say as my mass of glimmering pixels meets hers in deep space. When we crash, she turns into an ornament, cold emerald shattering. My hands jump on the keyboard.

Are you OK? I type. Cheeky. But also superstitious, as if she is actually delicate and can not reconstitute, in seconds, as another technicolor orb.

She lets herself float, fractured, playing silent. I watch the bits of her wink as I lick the popcorn salt off my fingers.

Eli shuffles around behind me, by the stove. He clucks as he peers down into the pot.

"Sorry," I say.

"It's OK," he says, "I like to chew on the kernels." He likes to say he is part golden retriever -- really is happy to eat the kernels.

Trying to be less sublunary, the other user says.

I Google sublunary. I don't really know what she's talking about. Rarely does life right now, real or abstracted, feel mundane.

You seem very lunary to me, I say.

Then I make myself into a window with a child peering through. She picks her nose, inspects it, sends the booger flying into space. Then she pulls a flower out of the other nostril and dissects it, flicking the petals out and watching them drift in various directions.

The other user responds by reconstituting into a dragon and consuming my child in a furious blaze.

It bums me out. I'm not sure what I'd been expecting. Tenderness?

I try to be radically honest.

I'm not really into all this crashing and burning, I say.

She is also radically honest. *Alright,* she says. *Goodbye.*

After that, I shut off my computer and lie down on the bed with my legs hanging off, my joints rusty ball bearings.

"Can you move your legs baby?" Eli asks. He's got something in the oven, which, when open, grazes the bed frame.

I suck my legs up onto the bed. I feel swollen and ineffectual. I wanted to make a friend tonight in FemmeVerse. I suck myself smaller. I feel like one of those sparkling, squishy tubes I used to give hand jobs to when I was a kid. Before I knew what handjobs were.

"Hey, what were those glittery slug toys called?" I ask Eli. "From the 90s?"

He crunches some popcorn kernels between his molars, sliding out the oven tray.

"Water Snake Wiggles?" he asks.

I wonder how he knows that, but then again, he knows a lot of

things like that. His mind's got capacity---room for everything. Not like mine, which I'm trying to renovate. That's part of why I joined FemmeVerse—looking for possibilities, I think, other than my jam-packed, though well-managed, fury.

I explain to Eli what's just happened with the dragon. I always tell him what happens in FemmeVerse. Whatever, I think. Probably a lot of femmes in the land who log off and bitch to their boyfriends about their virtual encounters.

"I get it," he says. "If you can do anything there, I bet a lot of people just want to smash and burn things."

"I get it theoretically," I say, "but when I think about it, really, it's like, I'd only want to smash and burn things if I could do anything in real life. There you can actually do anything. It's a blank slate. Smashing and burning is a misplaced reaction." I pause and then say, "I think."

He disagrees. "There's a bunch of femmes behind their computer screens," he says. "That's, like, the opposite of a blank slate."

Eli's the only male nurse's aid in his union, also the only boy from a family of eight. I allow him to speak on the subject with some authority.

"That is a conflagration," he adds after some consideration, adorably serious.

Then he says, "I made you a Hot Pocket. The meatball kind."

He's a vegetarian, also a romantic.

He brings a plate with the single Hot Pocket over to the bed.

"In the oven?" I ask.

"I had to get rid of the microwave," he says. I frown; I somehow hadn't noticed. I'd been spending the last few evenings in FemmeVerse, too shy to chat anyone until tonight but nevertheless deeply engaged in my lurking. Though, you don't have the option to disengage there. They don't require a subscription or anything, but everyone has to be part of the architecture. At the very least you have to have a body. Even if you're invisible, you have to construct your own undetectability.

"Free shit always ends up being broken," I say.

"Nah," Eli says, smelling the Hot Pocket and then, sighing, floating it over to me on the

wings of his fingers, nudging it in between my lips. "It worked fine. It just didn't fit anywhere. I tried to put it underneath the shoe rack in the closet, but I was microwaving a sweet potato earlier and I felt like it was melting the soles on the lowest rack."

"Did you meet anyone else in FemmeVerse?" he says then, suddenly. A friendly question. Very friendly. He massages his feet against mine to begin the thaw.

"Yes," I say, taking his cheeks in my hands, squeezing them and rubbing his red nose with my thumbs, aiding the effort. "A giant meatball named Chad."

Eli laughs, rolls his eyes. "Poor you," he says. "Meatballs are the worst."

“The worst,” I say.

I look straight into his shiny eyeballs. I am looking to be free, but I’ll take this as a close second. Easy.

The next night Eli has to work late at tiny Romilda’s because she has chronic bedsores. She has told him that they are only ever soothed by him reading her Colette novels and doing voices for the different characters. He’s accepted that because, he says, our bodies are very mysterious. Who knows what would happen, he says, if we could synthesize novels into pill form. I’ve told him that if he ever gets bedsores, I’ll read aloud to him.

While he’s gone, I encounter someone new in FemmeVerse. This time I’m the one who’s constructed deep space. I’m curious whether there’s something that’s not gravity but not zero gravity either. I can’t think of a third alternative, so I opt for zero gravity; that seems freer, the freest of two. I constitute as a woman with long, loose hair, which snakes out, up, down, to the side---Medusa. Someone enters my domain and immediately I curl and tighten, manifesting a diamond next to me, which I push off from, propelling myself towards her.

We collide at the speed of light. My thoughts echo but I type nothing; she seems to get it, speeding up as I hurdle towards her. When we collide, I absorb her into my porous, shining meteor. She stays in me while I lengthen and become jelly, an ambrosial Water Snake Wiggly. She is a projectile larva, now held in synthetic liquid. She crawls up my single, inner intestine. I grow an eye for her and she sits behind it, inside of me, pressed up against the optic nerve.

I manifest a black hole with a mirror nestled in the event horizon. In it I show her one immediate future for us in which she takes the silk threads of my ocular veins and weaves a cocoon around her body. I am trying to tell her that I don’t mind if she wants to do this. She gets it, weaves the cocoon. In the mirror she manifests a future me, plucking out my eyeball to let her fly away. So I pluck it out and let her soar. She is a lavender-colored moth, becoming larger with each circle round me. I shrink smaller and smaller until I am a microscopic boy. When she flaps by, I grab on to her furry thorax. In the mirror, she shows me herself, disappearing from under me to become gravity. I take my hands off of her antennae and let her drop me like that.

She makes for a good invisible and ubiquitous force of nature.

I stretch out my boy’s fingers and inspect the webs between them while I fall.

At midnight, Eli comes home. He has light blue sacs beneath his eyes, and he says we have to talk about finances.

“Did you look today?” he asks. I can tell he feels bad even asking.

“Yes,” I tell him. Because I did search; I just didn’t find anything.

Eli says we can’t have or do anything extra right now.

“Just for a couple months,” he says. He sounds like he is assuring himself, so I don’t push him on what he thinks will happen in a couple months that will alter our circumstances.

Just the utilities, rent, food, phone bill, and the co-pays for my lupus medicine. Eli’s clients live mostly in the neighborhood; he can bike to them. No movie dates, but we can pirate and snuggle. Laundry we will do in the sink and hang in criss crosses from wall to wall. No alcohol right now. No weed.

“Permission to buy you one joint per month,” I say. I am being cute, but I want half the joint, and I don’t have shit right now.

“Permission to punish you when you try to take 10 drags in a row,” says Eli. Also, you shouldn’t be smoking, his eyes say.

“Permission denied,” I say. “You must sweeten the deal.”

Eli turns me around, beginning to massage my shoulders. He is sparing me eye contact.

“I am so sorry.” He repeats himself, “Nothing extra. Please. A couple of months. We can keep sharing clothes for now.”

I am looking so much like a dude these days, wearing his loose, heavy jeans.

“Am I still beautiful?” I say it in the voice of the microscopic boy.

Eli crawls around and sits to face me.

“Yes,” he says. The window by our bed coos cold breath onto us. Eli wraps me in his arms. “Sometimes I look at a picture of you while I’m at work,” he says. “The one where you had the pasta on your head and were pretending to be a mermaid.”

I put that pasta on to hide my hair loss, but I never told him that. We had guests over and I opted to be a pasta-mermaid rather than bald and diseased.

I touch a finger pad to the baby blue beneath his lower eyelash.

“Anytime you need to hear that,” Eli says, “you just ask.”

I give him a round, full smooch and lick his tired under-eyes, the color of baby bird eggs.

“It looks like you have two robins growing,” I say.

Then we make love.

I meet her every night after that for weeks. I don’t think most people do it that way in *FemmeVerse*---semi-monogamous. I’ve read a lot of forums; people seem less interested in relationships and more interested in building things. Lots of focus on the architecture, the possibilities of unlimited funding. Or, the extinction of funding. In any case, it’s a place to experiment---to manifest whatever crawls out when you roll the rock off your imagination. For some people that’s cities; for others its escape pods. For me it’s bodies morphing in tandem.

I’m less wedded to where that happens, so I let my companion set the scene most of the time. If it were up to me, we’d always start in deep space. She’s not much of an untethered astronaut, though. She likes a pil-

lar in the middle of the ocean or a heat-repellent menagerie in the center of the sun. She likes to be trapped in the abstract, which is something I don't get off on. But I like her too much to call it quits.

Everywhere we go, we bring the mirror with us. It only takes a few weeks for me to show her a future in which I am an emerald-scaled dragon and I consume both of us in flames. She lets me, though I'm not as vindicated as I thought I would be. The dragon shtick seems gentle, relatively speaking. After I've reduced us both to a heap of ashes, I become Cinderella and she reconstitutes as a pizza, lying face-down in the cinders. I eat the pizza and burp a black cloud.

The next night I'm a paper doll twirling against a green-glitter background, and she is all the outfits. Another night we try out immaculate conception and photosynthesis, then we play baseball. First we play in space, lazily grasping in the unlimited outfield; then we play in our glass pod in the earth's core, dodging the ball as it ricochets. Then she's ink that flows with scandalous ease out of my pen and I'm the dustbuster that sucks her, in the form of pine needles, up from a hardwood floor. Oftentimes we're birds.

I am officially hooked the night we dance in a submarine that she creates. All the doors are sealed from the outside and a thermometer-like gauge on the wall indicates the air is running out. I'm Chelsea Manning dancing with Claudia Jones. Then I'm waltzing through the sea-dust on the metal floor, a cockroach dancing with a praying mantis. Then she's a cloud of maroon vapor that gets me stoned, makes the air even thinner and more precious, and I am Nataraja. I dance inside of her, reconstituting with increasing speed until I am just a blur on the screen. I try to stop it, but it's some glitch. The computer becomes unhinged. I sit back and eat a pop tart, watching myself rapid-fire mutate into, likely, all the other bodies that femmes have built in FemmeVerse, a transmogrifying dervish. The pop tart tastes like cardboard compared to this other kind of late-stage nourishment. I have to shut down the computer, finally, to stop it.

"I am obsessed," I tell Eli one night, joyfully apologetic. He looks helpless in response. I put my palms around his knuckles, which are red from the hours he massaged Mr. Yanous. These are your real rocks, I tell myself, clutching his strong and boney hands.

Eli tells me Mr. Yanous's daughter wants to join FemmeVerse and asks me if I'll bring her in. Its informally guarded in that way; you have to get verified and brought in by another femme-identifying person.

"I'll write down the log-in," I say. I am testing him; I know it. He knows it.

"You don't want to meet her?" he asks. "Give it to her in person?"
"I trust you," I say.

Its funny to imagine him sneaking in and lurking around the FemmeVerse margins, Pandora opening the box lid just a crack. Honestly, he doesn't have the downtime. And anyways, I am the sneaky one.

I would steal into his world given the first chance. I would watch him massage those old and achy bodies, feel the tenacity of our fingers. I would seek to understand the child in me, a Catholic boy with five older sisters. I would believe I'm a man. Or I would be a man? I don't know. You can't enter someone's mind like that; not yet. And in any case, I try not to belittle attachment to manliness as a crucial misunderstanding. Eli's entitled to believe whatever. Maybe men do exist, fundamentally, and maybe he's one of them.

I think I betray FemmeVerse, though, when I secretly dictate what Eli is or isn't. Though, secretly dictating buoys me during periods of inflammation, when I spend lots of time lying down in the dark. Eli says lying down is a useful thing to do because otherwise I would make these bouts worse and they might last even longer. He says chronic illness is a body's brake and if you resist its stopping you, you are like a driver in combat with her own vehicle. I think it's kind of a joke. I like to pound on my imaginary wheel with gusto, lamenting internal and external traffics. The set-up is that brakes provide me with time and mental space to ruminate on other possibilities for living. The punchline is that when I come out of my reveries I'm still stalled on the side of a highway in someone else's rattletrap.

Maybe I am losing my mind, I think often, and then I fumble around for it like glasses I'm hoping are on the top of my head. Also, I think, I need to get a job. I keep thinking that. Any job would give me a mind.

I also often think about the new users who are every day entering or sneaking or busting out and into FemmeVerse. This is the best sort of thinking, which I do in basic, eternal metaphors. Lights winking on, neutron stars reversing. If I meditate on the growingly bright galaxy long enough, a FemmeVerse takeover feels imminent -- already begun, even.

I like to remove my glasses in the dark and think on that.

I do find a job finally, inputting data into spreadsheets for Amazon. It's not so great for my joie de vivre but I am slowly collecting pennies. "A baby dragon beginning to hoard" I joke to Eli, even though all pennies become Hot Pockets, toilet paper, etc. before I can divert them to my imaginary heap.

I don't go into FemmeVerse for a week after I start the gig. When I return, she finds me immediately. She's a dolphin leaping with elation around our sea-pillar, on which I am Homer Simpson, hitting my head against the thrust of my marble perch. Mid-leap she turns into a donut, which I catch and eat. I laugh, alone, in our room. Then I manifest a mirror covering the sky, showing her a future in which she is Mr. President and I am a loaded gun. She manifests it. We switch off. We kill each other lots of times. It's not enough. Not even close. She shows me in the mirror: herself as a man. He looks like Ken Doll. He looks like a fucking serial killer -- he's that bland and pretty. Then she shows me myself as

a knife, carving ovular slivers off of him, as if he were a roast chicken. I realize how hungry I am, and we are out of Hot Pockets. It's not enough.

I'm in New York, I type.

She doesn't respond. With these words I am now IRL somewhere. I can't stop.

Please, I say. I want to meet you.

OK, she says. She works uptown. Four stops away from me on the subway. This should be a strange revelation but — of course. Maybe Eli has passed her on his bike before. Maybe I've seen her through the window.

I tell her to meet me after work at a cafe a few blocks away. I tell her I will wear a blue shirt. I am so excited it feels like a drum beat has erupted in my rotten limbs. I head immediately to the Sephora across the park. I tell the woman by the high chair to make me look like she couldn't say no to me. She doesn't bat a mascara'ed eyelash. They get it there; they do, painting faces all day. She holds up a mirror when she's done like *do you like*, but I just look at her, seeking consent.

This is what it would be like, I think, knowing myself, always craving approval.

But whatever for now. Whatever. Fuck it. She does give me consent. She is a fairy godmother from the make-up industrial complex. I love her. She takes me down from where I'm hung up on the future and sends me out the door.

There are hours still before our meeting. I walk in the woods through the park. A man passes with a dog, and my heart tries to escape through my mouth. I can't be in these secluded places -- not with my face on. I leave the park and sit on a bench facing out towards the street. I freeze while people pass. I am a beautiful sculpture, for the enlightened pleasure of some and for the healthy displeasure of others. *Feel displeased!* I want to shout. *Recognize your own displeasure! You are swimming in displeasure!*

Just the sight of beauty sets some people off.

If only displeasure weren't so lethal. I recede inside myself on the bench. I am thinking too much. My face is sweating through the make-up. I get a few and then a few more passing glares from Ken Dolls. I want to be brave, but I don't really want to be one of the dead ones. I actually have the urge to say to the Ken Dolls---the ones with the tight dress pants and slick hair and fake tans---with flames coming out of my mouth I want to say to them, *faggots*.

That's no good. I get up from the bench and run inside of a Starbucks.

SIR! The barista calls out as I make my way towards the bathroom. I obviously don't stop. *That bitch is obviously not talking to you*, I think. No sir-ee, I cackle in my mind.

"Hey," she says, laughing, scandalized, as I yank open the bathroom door. "Hey, person, hey, the bathroom is for custo--"

I shut the door and lock it. It only takes a few minutes to wipe off

all the make-up. I feel very calm when I am done. I inspect the stranger in the mirror.

When I exit and the barista sees me without make-up, she looks like she wants to cry. I want to glare at her, righteous, like you did this, but of course she did not, so I just mumble thank you and leave.

I go to our agreed-upon cafe then, and I sit awhile, doing a crossword over a man's shoulder. I sense her when she approaches, as if she is a red light blinking on my radar, but I keep on staring at the empty boxes. I glance up when she enters. She has that craning, nervous neck of someone looking for a stranger in a room full of strangers. I look away before she scans the room, but I get a good glimpse of her. She's very beautiful, wearing slacks and a t-shirt with a red rose and a skull on it. She has big, kind eyes. She approaches a woman with a blue shirt. She makes a gun with her fingers like *hey* is that you? Person whose name I don't know? Person who I've danced with, killed, fucked, digested? Person for whom I was gravity?

Nope, wrong femme.

She scans the room. I stare at the empty crossword boxes as if they are my first million, abstracted and stacked up. *I will burn you!* I think. My heart is so humiliated. *I will drive down Broadway and shower you out the window of my limousine!*

I will never have you.

She sits down near me and starts, no doubt, trying to reach me online. She orders a drink, scrolls somewhere in the abstract. She checks her watch. She scans the room again. When she's not looking at me, I look at her. Her eyes are the same color as the ocean she likes to create.

I stare at her, finally, for too long. She turns quickly and looks at me. I can't look away; I really do know her. She presses her hand to her mouth as her eyes flick down to my blue shirt. Crimson algal bloom on her cheeks. Her shame like a silent scream.

She points at me like, *are you?* Apologizing with her eyes.

I shake my head. "No," I say it in a ridiculously deep voice, like I am inviting her onto silk sheets. I effortlessly become someone else in order to say it.

"Sorry," I say, superstitiously positive that if I stare back at the blank crossword, she'll see through my lie. Instead, I glance at an attractive woman just entering the cafe. I check her out with lasciviousness and confidence---the piqued indifference of a long-practiced actress.

My companion stays for two hours. Then she leaves.

After that, I eat a whole roast chicken. I steal it from the grocery store---just walk out with it under my arm like a leisurely stroll across the end zone. I am a really good thief---no skill required. Just that actress confidence, which means being the person people already see.

I eat it on the same bench and try to create a spectacle. Craven, holding it between my two paws and gobbling it, grabbling and gorbling

it. New words must be invented for what I do to this chicken, trying to get people to look. I emulate a cannibal releasing pent-up desires onto the next best thing. No one gives a shit.

Then I go back to Sephora. Same artist by the chair. She doesn't ask where my first face went. She just talks about her daughter who has recently applied to pre-school and who is also still in her uterus. I affirm genuinely, with proud faggot outrage, that this world is garbage. "An abomination!" I say, and then she pops up the mirror like I've summoned it with my righteousness. We give each other a very pleased look.

"Primo," she says. I like that she is complimenting both of us. Then she says, "Come in whenever. If anyone gives you shit, you say you're booked with me. I'm here every day."

Every day she is here, driving down Broadway, throwing millions out the window.

I go home with my face on and turn off the computer, which has been humming and wheezing for days. I put it in the closet on top of the shoe rack. My joints are behaving very chill, and I applaud them for it. I lift up the bed and lean it against the wall, stack the chair on top of the counter and shove the bookshelf into the bathroom. I hang a flashlight from the ceiling, draping a red scarf over it. Eli is almost home. I know; I can sense him like a flicker in my abdomen. I take the spices off the lazy susan and place them on the floor and turn on "Here Comes Your Man"---I can be funny. Then I turn the phone on flashlight mode and place it on the lazy susan, beneath an upturned colander. The room twinkles, shabby and lustrous, like a dive I would've snuck into before lupus and Eli.

I bounce on my toes until he opens the door. His face falls like he might cry with happiness. I give the lazy susan a kick with my foot. It spins us in the red-fire multiverse, the hot disco end of the world. He drops his bag and comes and crushes me in a hug. We collide at the speed of two spent lovers, smushing into one body.

"You look so pretty," he says, and I feel very complimented; I feel that this one compliment could carry me for days.

I begin to apologize, but he shushes me with a finger all muscley from working out other people's aches.

"Save your sorries," he says.

I play my best Hepburn, letting him hold me dramatically. "Only if you'll throw them out the window of a hijacked luxury vehicle with me," I say.

It seems improbable but we dance for a long time after that, maybe hours. Eli knows just how to grind on me like a funky massage when my joints get sore, and I hold him up when he threatens to fade. We keep kicking the lazy susan whenever it slows the orbit.

Our dive is a tiny room in a 6-floor walk-up. It doesn't belong to us, but it could be many things. Maybe not deep space---not yet. But for now I'll take it as a distant second, easy.

Whitney Collins

The Horse Lamp

Jarrold had been called to the girl's house to fix her satellite dish, but when he got to the peeling blue rental and walked around its weedy perimeter, he saw that the girl didn't have a satellite dish. She had cable. Jarrold tried to explain the difference between the two services while the girl stood barefoot on the stoop wearing a see-through tank top and a pair of minuscule cut-offs. Jarrold noticed that the girl had dirty feet—filthy, really—and that her toenails were painted the color of mustard. Both of her pinkie toes were curled in for warmth against the other toes like two cold grubs. While Jarrold talked, he imagined the girl shoeless at the drugstore, standing in the nail polish aisle for a while before stealing a bottle of yellow polish when no one was looking. He saw the girl walk right past the cashier, carefree and careless, her brown feet slapping the tile. For a good portion of his satellite-and-cable explanation, Jarrold looked at the girl's feet and imagined her shoplifting. He did this to avoid looking her in the eye. Every time he looked up, there the girl was, staring at him hard and brave and dumb, chewing slow on a wad of gum. It made Jarrold feel dizzy to look at her head-on. It made him feel like he might keel over in the red landscape gravel that was scattered around the tiny house.

“What I'm getting at,” Jarrold finally said, “is that I can't fix your satellite dish, because you got no satellite dish. And I'm not allowed to fix the cable seeing how I don't even work for the cable company.”

The girl twisted a lock of dry copper hair around one of her fingers until her finger turned lilac. “Aw, now,” she said. “Ain't fixing a TV just fixing a TV? Whatever happened to being a gentleman?” She winked at Jarrold and switched her wad of gum from one cheek to the other. Jarrold could see her flat breasts through the white tank top. They looked like two eggs in a skillet and he thought he might lose consciousness. “I'm sure you can figure out how to fix it,” the girl exhaled, “I really need my TV because TV is my whole life.”

Jarrold looked over his shoulder. He looked at the white company van parked on the street. There was a picture of a big red satellite painted on the van. The driver's side window was half down but it didn't look like it was going to rain. “All right,” Jarrold said. “But real quick or else I might get fired.”

Inside the rental house, a giant dog with clouded eyes got up on all fours with some struggle when Jarrod entered. It came over to Jarrod and nosed around his crotch and thumped its heavy tail against the wall in apparent approval.

“Get the fuck off the nice man, Oreo,” the girl said. “Don’t worry about Oreo. He’s my stupid roommate’s stupid dog. He doesn’t bite or nothing. He just bothers the living shit out of everyone.” The girl kicked laundry and magazines out of the way with a dirty foot. “You want something to drink?” she asked. “I got the blue Gatorade. The light blue kind. And I got tap water and milk, but I don’t think the milk’s any good any more.”

When the girl bent over to push some old newspapers out of their path, Jarrod could see high up where the girl’s legs changed from legs to ass. Her skin went from smooth and tan to white and dimpled; there was nothing gradual about it. It was like two countries on top of each other, ice cream on a cone. “I’m not thirsty,” Jarrod said. “But you better show me that TV. I can’t take all day here.”

“All right,” the girl said. “But it ain’t much.”

The girl took Jarrod down a banged-up narrow hall. She opened a door at the end of it and a burst of air-conditioned air hit Jarrod in the face. The room was as dark as midnight and it smelled like fruit punch. The girl clicked on a little lamp and it flickered on to reveal a mattress on the floor covered in clothes. The walls were sloppy-painted the color of bubblegum. In the corner an outdated television sat on a milk crate. It had rabbit-ear antennae wrapped in aluminum foil.

“I’m a mess,” the girl said. “Always will be.”

Jarrod waded through towels and clothes. He went to the television and held one of the antennae ears in his hand. “You have cable and you don’t even have this hooked up to cable,” he said. “This thing is just plugged into the wall like a radio.”

The girl gave a sheepish smile and shrugged. “Aw, all right,” she said, “I’m busted.”

Jarrod let go of the antennae and scowled.

“See now. I didn’t call for no repairman,” the girl said. “I’m just laying an egg is all.”

Jarrod looked at the girl the way she’d looked at him when he had tried to explain the difference between satellite and cable.

“Ovulation,” the girl said. “This is the week in the month I’m most

likely to get pregnant and I need someone to get me pregnant.”

“Ohhh no,” Jarrod said, suddenly enlightened. He went to step over the clothes, to go back the way he’d come, but Oreo was standing right in the way he needed to go, slapping his big tail against a dresser missing most of its drawers. “I ain’t getting anybody pregnant. No ma’am, no sir.”

The girl backed up against her bedroom door and by the time Jarrod got to her, she had her spine pressed up against the doorknob. “The Robinsons’ baby,” she said fast. “I let it drown in the ocean.” Jarrod went to reach behind the girl and she lifted up a knee. “I was their babysitter last summer and I let go of the baby and it drowned.” The girl choked for a second, like she might cry. “They never found it neither. Thanks to me, their baby wasn’t only killed but lost, too.” Jarrod looked at the girl’s raised knee. He didn’t think she could do him much harm. “They’re pretty bad off now, the Robinsons are. Who wouldn’t be with a baby at the bottom of the ocean? But I’m going to get pregnant and have them a baby and put the baby on their porch in a laundry basket and then leave town for good.”

Jarrod put one hand on the girl’s knee and reached behind her with his other for the doorknob. He’d get rough with her if he had to. He thought about how he could move her. He could shove her to the side and run. He could push her to the floor. He could do that and get free and back to the van, but before Jarrod could decide exactly how, the girl reached out and clicked off the little lamp and the room went midnight again. Jarrod felt the girl’s hands, cold and gentle, one on his knee and one on his forearm. “Don’t worry,” she said softly, “I don’t have anything you can catch. I just got me a fresh egg and it’s not going to stay fresh long.”

The girl took Jarrod’s hand and put it up the back up her shorts where the two countries met and before he knew it Jarrod was doing what he hadn’t planned on doing. He was stumbling with her over the sea of laundry and over to the mattress on the floor. Once they were down, the girl’s tank top went off and Jarrod’s hands were on her flat skillet chest. The room was cold and the girl was cold, so Jarrod put as much of himself onto her and into her as he could. The girl made little mouse-like squeaks. Jarrod heard himself breathe like he was being chased. He felt himself leave his body and come back into it, leave his body and come back into it. Up close, the girl smelled like cherries, and with his eyes closed, Jarrod couldn’t help but imagine that all that was

in him was going into the girl to make something that would solve a terrible problem.

When it was over, Jarrod opened his eyes and the girl clicked on another little lamp by the mattress on the floor. This lamp was shaped like a horse and where the lamp part rose out of the horse, right where a saddle might be, Jarrod imagined himself on the horse's back and the girl behind him, her arms around his waist. He suddenly saw himself as important. On the other side of the mattress, the girl stayed on her back and brought her knees to her chest.

"This keeps the swimmers in," she said matter-of-factly. "It gives them a chance to find the egg."

Jarrod noticed that the girl's top two teeth were crooked and as she concentrated on her position they poked out over her bottom lip. For a second, Jarrod wanted to touch her face, gentle, but then a bolt of fear shot through him and he squeezed his eyes together.

"You need to come back tomorrow," she said. "We should do what we just did for at least five days in a row." Jarrod didn't know what to say to that. He felt again as if he might faint. He opened his eyes forcefully and got up from the mattress and put on his pants. He felt weak, like the time he'd had the flu as a boy. Like the time he'd given blood in high school. "You hear me?" the girl said. "Five more days."

Jarrod didn't answer. He went down the narrow hall and out to the van. Outside, the world was hot and blinding and he could hardly breathe. When he sat down behind the wheel, he could see a faint yellow dust all over the dashboard where pollen had settled while he and the girl had been in the dark, doing what they'd done.

*

Jarrod made a promise to himself that he wouldn't go back to the girl. He spent the whole next day on roofs, adjusting satellites for better reception. He explained to housewives and shut-ins and blank, unemployed men how warm weather affected the satellites. He told them how when roofs got hot, the pads that the satellites sat on got soft. How the satellites shifted on the shingles and quit working the way they were meant to work. He spent the day listening to himself talk to people who didn't care what he said, while he heard, in far a corner of his mind, the girl squeaking like a mouse. Every so often, Jarrod could smell fruit

punch in his nose. He'd just be sitting on a roof, sweating and thinking of the girl's cold, dark room when all of sudden it was cherries, everywhere. It happened enough that by the time Jarrod got off work at six he couldn't think straight. He couldn't think of anything to do other than what he had promised himself he wouldn't.

"You been swimming?" the girl asked when he showed up on the stoop. Her feet were still filthy, but this time her toes were painted the color of the sky. She had on the same shorts it seemed, but a different thin tank top, this one striped that put her small breasts in jail.

"Might as well been," Jarrod said. "The roofs out there are hot."

"I imagine," the girl said like she wasn't imagining it at all. "Well come on in. I was about to give up on you."

Jarrod followed the girl inside the house and, on cue, the big dog with the cloudy eyes got up with some struggle and came over to Jarrod and nosed his crotch and thumped his tail against the wall.

"Oreo likes you more than he likes my roommate," the girl said kicking more things out of the way with her filthy feet. "Dogs can smell liars, you know. And that's what his owner is—a big fat one."

Jarrod kept quiet and followed the girl down the narrow hall. When she opened her bedroom door and the darkness and coldness and smell of fruit punch washed over him like a wave, Jarrod felt relieved. There was some part of him that had been afraid it would be different than the day before, but it was like a tape rewind and played again—a song he was starting to know the words to. Inside, the girl clicked on the first lamp on the dresser and Jarrod saw the TV wrapped in foil and the sloppy pink walls. "Still a mess," the girl said without apology. "Always will be." Then she clicked off the first lamp and took Jarrod by the hand and led him over to the mattress and down they went as they had before. In the cold dark, the girl made the same noises as before and Jarrod breathed like he was being chased and when it was all over, the girl clicked on the little horse lamp by the mattress and brought her knees to her chest and poked her two crooked front teeth out over her bottom lip. After some time, she spoke.

"I'm gonna tell you something I never told anyone before, but I didn't drop the Robinsons' baby on accident. I let go of her on purpose."

Jarrod squeezed his eyes shut until the black behind his eyes turned to violet. In his mind, he saw the horse from the horse lamp. He saw himself and the girl on the shiny orange horse and the girl's arms were wrapped around his waist. Behind his tight eyes, he and the girl were

riding under a white sky across a desert of white sand. The girl was pregnant. A baby—their baby—grew inside her and pushed against Jarrod’s back.

“I was just out there waist-deep in the ocean with the baby and I was holding her under the armpits and dipping her down into the water. And every time I went and dipped her down in the cold water, the baby’s face got all big and scared.” The girl paused to make a sound, and Jarrod guessed she was imitating the baby’s expression. “The way that baby made her face look just did something to me. It made me not like her. She just had this perfect world lined up for herself with her perfect mother and her perfect father and that face of hers just made me feel like the worst thing she was ever gonna know was cold water.” The girl sighed. “I didn’t like that. I knew she would grow up to be no good to anybody if her only trouble was cold water. So I let go of her for a minute to see what would happen and she got away from me fast. The wave came and I let go and then she was gone.”

The girl didn’t say anything for a while. In Jarrod’s mind, the horse galloped across the white sand noiselessly and without effort. The desert was neither hot nor cold and the more Jarrod rode the horse toward the horizon, it occurred to him that they weren’t in the desert at all. They were at the bottom of the ocean—a drained one.

“The worst was when I had to turn around from where I was at to face the baby’s parents back on the beach. I just turned and held up my empty hands and before long the helicopters came and the lifeguards came and everybody lined up on the beach waiting like the queen was coming in on a boat.” The girl let a little whistle escape through her crooked teeth. “The baby’s mother was something else. She turned into a monster right then and there in front of everyone. She crawled back and forth on the sand like a dog. She even foamed at the mouth.”

The orange horse slowed to a trot and Jarrod got off and the girl stayed on. Jarrod grabbed the horse’s reins and brought the horse to a walk. He led the horse to a long, white dune and at the top of it Jarrod and the girl looked out over the seafloor. There were bleached white skeletal shipwrecks and bi-planes, there were white arching temple bones of blue whales, there were giant white conch shells and lost white shipping containers, tipped on their sides to spill white, flaking rubbish. There were old fishing masts like fossilized spines and anchors made of talc and off to the side there was the baby—a white plaster garden cherub covered in barnacles. Jarrod pointed to it and the girl nodded and Jarrod walked

the horse out to the baby. When Jarrod got to it, he touched it with his toe and the baby crumbled into a pile of powder that the breeze picked up and scattered like ashes.

“Thank you,” the girl whispered.

Jarrod walked back to the horse and the girl and he put his head against the girl’s warm stomach. She put her hand on the back of his head and ran her fingers through his hair.

“I’ve missed a lot of sleep thinking about what happened to that baby,” the girl said. “I’ve had me some terrible dreams. That the baby’s in a fishing net somewhere getting slapped by big silver fish. Or that it’s just bobbing around like a plastic doll. Sometimes I stay in the tub too long and my feet wrinkle up all soft and white and I imagine the baby maybe just melted away. Like tissue paper left out in the rain.”

Jarrod opened his eyes. He turned to look at the girl.

“There it is!” she said with a sudden smile. “I felt it take inside! I think we made a baby!” She hugged her knees closer and Jarrod reached out gently to her face. “You don’t have to come back no more. We did what we set out to do.”

Jarrod felt something in him give way just as the sand on the dune had as the horse descended. A whole shelf of something broke loose in him and he couldn’t gather it back up. “We better make sure,” he said. “I’ll come back again.”

The girl let her knees down and turned off the horse lamp. “That ain’t necessary,” she said. “Now I’m going to take a nap and let the baby cook.”

“What’s your name?” Jarrod asked in the cold dark.

“Marie,” the girl said.

Jarrod rose and dressed in the darkness. He stood for a while in the cold room and listened to the girl breathe. Then he let himself out of the house.

*

That night, the moonlight came through Jarrod’s window as bright as sunlight. He couldn’t sleep, so he got up and found a hammer and some nails and nailed up a quilt over his window. But still, the light came in around the corners, so Jarrod rose a second time and found a roll of duct tape, and he taped the quilt to the wall as best he could. But still, the

light found a way in through the quilt's stitching. Jarrod lay on his back and squeezed his eyes closed. He and the girl were on the orange horse, but the horse had turned from a real horse back into a ceramic one and he and the girl were sliding, sliding off its slick back.

In the morning, Jarrod went to his first service call. While he adjusted the satellite, he saw himself pulling weeds from the perimeter of the girl's rental. He saw himself kneeling at the girl's feet, painting her toes the same tangerine color of the horse lamp. After Jarrod got the satellite working, he called in sick for the rest of the day and drove himself to the girl's house. On the stoop, he felt weak and out-of-sorts from the heat and lack of sleep, but he knocked and knocked until a long haired guy, shirtless and sleepy-eyed, opened the door.

"You better not be selling anything," the guy said. "I got enough cookies and god." Behind the guy, Oreo rose with some struggle. He staggered to the door and peeked through the guy's knees and thumped his tail when he saw Jarrod.

"I'm friends with your roommate," Jarrod said. "I came to talk to her."

"Penny's not here," he said. "She's gone."

"I'm not looking for Penny," Jarrod said. "I'm looking for Marie."

The guy raised one foot and bent his knee and pushed backward on Oreo's snout with his heel. "No Marie lives here," he said. "You got the wrong place."

Jarrod said nothing. He watched Oreo retreat from the foyer and lie down, hard and fast like he'd been shot. "She had red hair," Jarrod finally said. "Crooked teeth."

The guy nodded. "That's Penny," he said. "The liar. You can come in and see for yourself that she ain't here."

The guy opened the door and motioned inside for Jarrod to come in. Oreo got up in pained loyalty and nosed Jarrod in the crotch. "She even left her goddamn dog," the guy said. "What am I going to do with a goddam dog?"

Jarrod felt more sand fall away from the dune inside him. Shelf after shelf broke free. He went down the long, narrow hall with the guy and the dog at his heels. When he got to the door, he paused with his hand on the plastic gold doorknob and squeezed his eyes shut and he saw nothing.

"Go on," the guy said. "I don't have all day." Jarrod took a deep breath and turned the knob. "I mean, I do have all day," the guy said.

“But this ain’t how I planned on spending it.”

Inside, the room was as bright as a cathedral. The sun poured in the single window and the walls were so drenched in light they didn’t even look pink. On the floor, the mattress was bare. The clothes were gone and the towels were gone and the foil-wrapped TV was gone. All that remained was the little horse lamp and Jarrod went over to it and kneeled.

“Penny was a mess,” the guy said. “Always will be.”

Jarrod clicked the lamp on and clicked the lamp off and in the bright white of the day, he couldn’t tell a difference between the two. He unplugged the lamp and wrapped the cord around it and stood.

“Take it,” the guy said. “It’s yours.”

Jarrod clutched the lamp to his chest and pushed past the guy and past the thumping dog and ran out into the day. In the van, he sat for a long while panting, working to catch his breath, working to convince himself that he didn’t have a problem, but that he’d solved one. On the dashboard, more pollen had collected like blown sand. When he could finally breathe normally, Jarrod took the horse lamp off his lap and placed it next to him on the bench seat. He put it right in the middle, like a child placed between two people who had made it.

Chapbook Finalist Folio

RECOVERY, J.L. Conrad

A Little History of the Panorma, Matthew Cooperman'

Natatorium, Kelly Egan

photo album, Gary Jackson

K/Not Theory, Jen Karetnick

Estrangia, C Kubasta

*Border Crossings: Immigration advice
for those attempting to cross borders*,
Natalie D-Napoleon

White Sky, Carter Smith

Kelly Egan

to my mirror

from Natatorium

if those dreams of being kidnapped were
not so taboo, then I wanted

drapily, the chloroform
portage, to be left for dark

in a webbed
spiderless cache
wherein to ravel

the knots,
to
be not
home—

as though you would know nudity if
it stood before you, or because
you won't,

I am ready to admit
the lozenge of that dream:

escape was

a wash that forest, the exponents
of lips giving way

to the only option
was a leap
into sun,

alteration of **blindfeld**,
vestige of an obsolete verb.

escape is a place farther north

The boreal hum of train,
all there is to know:
the window filth smudging dusk

into a tundra that all but imbibes,
the lust for exile that harbors
the port town—

Deep into night we arrive.

It is an outpost it is an orphanage it is the closest
one can come to home,
going north.

It is an inverse thing, negative space,
domain of the silhouette,
as though

all my friends live here in lofts
but they are sleeping now,

and I can sense it can sense
there oh where and why I've come

the warehouse,
cavity by the water's edge—

Casement and dark brick

whose neon is the beacon,
 buzzing like a mother.

There is no difference:

 exile or pilgrimage, lack
or gift.

 We have come to kneel at the feet

 of the monument, dance inside a cellar that
is near to her, dive

 into that doorway

 where the tracks curve out of sight.

 And she will hover by the water's edge, solac-
ing the boats.

 Street diffuse in liquor light
when there's nowhere else to go—

I go north.

at altitude

At altitude, the aspens stir doldrums
& I am circled,
I am sending,

in
the pines
intimate

whistling,

boomerangs to all my loved,
all my old,
future selves.

At altitude, the aspens' ongoing hello beads
a clerestory level,

airy museum,
ventilation

where they eddy still,
quiver in an upper pool—

What are they now?
What are they here?

Is it the inverse of fruition when

longings weave
a later cocoon

we are able to visit?

Could almost long to live in,
but I won't be fooled—

C. Kubasta

Annie Makes an Offer

from *Estrangia*

Bones of a house that thin & flare like cabriolet legs

Bait & switch list sheets littered with euphemism

the pictures never line up with the actual
all optimistic angles & impossible contouring

Sleep, when it stays, covers. A skin, a skim, a tension membrane that must be broken to escape. As if surface is only a pricking of light or air and the limbs drag down beneath, shot in tunnels of runnels mote that may catch stray sparking.

a foreclosure come-hither

The falling back into it from whatever has woken you is the simplest of motions, a reverse of infant urge to raise the head or begin a crab-crawl toward desire.

whether chemical or the result of a withdrawn offer

Thinking about the body, about vulnerability, about the architecture of anatomy. A vestibule is an antechamber next to the outer door of a building; a chamber or channel communicating with or opening into another, in particular. Whether exterior or interior. What it means to carry this around with you, on you, in you, to save and shield this, to use it as a tool, a weapon, a gift, a message.

all bubbles burst, interest low & bottoming out
language bought, borrowed, or fabricated for whatever purpose

imaginary places serve multiple purposes : in fiction, a simple disengagement from the actual that allows the reader to both inhabit & separate : in speculative works, a hinge between the world we occupy & some construction : a repositioning of variables : a false memory : an impossible present : an unlikely future

The Auricle

distress rings the pinna; when crushed, immobile
the feelings don't register, register as pain, but

as she switches from her side, lifts the head crushed
into the pillow, waves of pain surface, almost enough
to rouse a cry, but finally, she is alone. the making of
sound suggests an audience: why utter if no auditor?

grief pins and folds itself with curved edges

she recalls dolls whose limbs could snap off & on, wishes to unsnap the right
arm at the shoulder, to sink into the unforgiving

mattress, its lumps & springs, its coiled memory of
another. in middle age comes the middle night call
of paresthesia, fingers hands and arms to the shoulder.
once she woke to the absence of her heart beating,

thought: this is it. some final deficiency. some heralding.

pain that is physical has its names, as does pain that is mental: both called "dis-
tress," both called "suffering." both wake her in the night, the circular heartache
located in her right ear, the absence of circulation along the right side of her
body. she doesn't know why

she still sleeps in this position – some long-learned posture of coupling.

Folly or follies (various understandings of the word) : Time, the metaphor of baffle,
n. an artificial obstruction for checking or deflecting the flow of gases (as in a boiler), sounds (as in the loudspeaker system of a radio or hi-fi set), light (as in a darkroom), etc. : Place, the metaphor of imagined country : some Prester John with too many traces to ever disappear : recurring metaphors, cicadas, hawk, whole rabbit & component parts : transformation from one state to another : Character, a double-inversion, named for a character created elsewhere, loosely fictionalized on an alter-ego; the self immortalized through a cage of mirrors, however framed

Gary Jackson
Interview featuring shape-shifting mother
from *photo album*

I'm

a lotta people

your last year

a

woulda been

the right age

when we grin

there it is teasing you

AWWWW,

you starting to get

it.

know what I mean

hard

like I couldn't understand.

strong.

but

what about

reunion

lord

come

and

change

my

picture.

make

us

like that again.

Interview featuring sister

That ain't our house

Yeah, that's our house. We put that thing on the couch.

That's the waterbed.

That damn bed.

I was pregnant with Gina then.

You didn't want to get again, did you?

Uh-uh

I don't blame you.

there's you and grandma

She's holding me.

there's your grandma Beverly.

That's Easter or something, you got that hat on!

Yeah. Mm-hm.

Look like you stylin'.

It was slick.

Yeah.

I had Gina in May, that was April
I was getting ready to have her

There's you and Gina
yeah,

before she got her lip fixed

With her wild hair

She look fat like a butterball.

look at her

Look at you

Why does that happen?

Cleft lip. They say that happens a lot in Korea

they didn't tell us she was gonna be handicapped they said she got a cleft
pallete they could fix but see you could tell something else was wrong

How come they didn't

soft spot Grandma knew could feel she didn't have a

we went to Kansas City, KU medical center

they said she got severe handicaps.

They was afraid.

she was always gonna be a baby you could see it.

Carter Smith

from *White Sky*

I.

The plastic bag got caught in the tree, and he wondered if it was worth saying.

He was alone in the room. The window was in front of him. He was at the desk, either sitting or standing. The book was open under his hand. It happens, how does it go, one tries to know something, he looks not knowing that he's looking, the light fills up his eyes, there's a tree and a bag in it, and the bag is caught. He thought there must be wind.

Everything that happened was what the summer said. This kind of tree has white petals that fall. This is what it means to walk through shade. This is the evening, this is the book you read, this is the dark falling, this your right to watch it.

What one said about a candle, he thought about the world. I did not love it, I loved its burning down. He can't see a reason not to say it anymore. He'll say it. How does it go.

III

Your father's voice is like his mother's before she died. First above the pain, then full of pain, you think you hear it looking for a place the pain won't go. Some things happen with years between. This is what they teach you to do with sentences. You write the beginning. You write the end. It's as far away as you can get.

V.

It was dark. You were asleep. Like someone trying to know what it meant, I opened my hand to touch you. I opened my hand and put it between us. It happened sentence by sentence, all afternoon, the light hitting the ground. Your second thoughts coming after your first. The smell of honeysuckle before the honeysuckle vine. You said the light broke. You said the willow wept.

VI.

Your father driving the car to his father's house, the field you passed, full of yellow flowers, all that thinking, letting it go, like the word you said over and over, evergreen, meaning begin again, meaning what they are now where you were

VII.

Just this, birds, flying in and out, making it specific, the prairie grass's going white, which I can see from here, which can I tell you now about the sentences, sentences end somewhere

IX

The leaves all fell stem up
I didn't need the words

To say what I wanted
I needed the words but I

Didn't know what I wanted
This is what I wanted to say

There was falling in my thinking
It doesn't make any sense

But the trees were like a book
The irregular intervals of trees

Let me say it let me ask it
If I want to say it let me

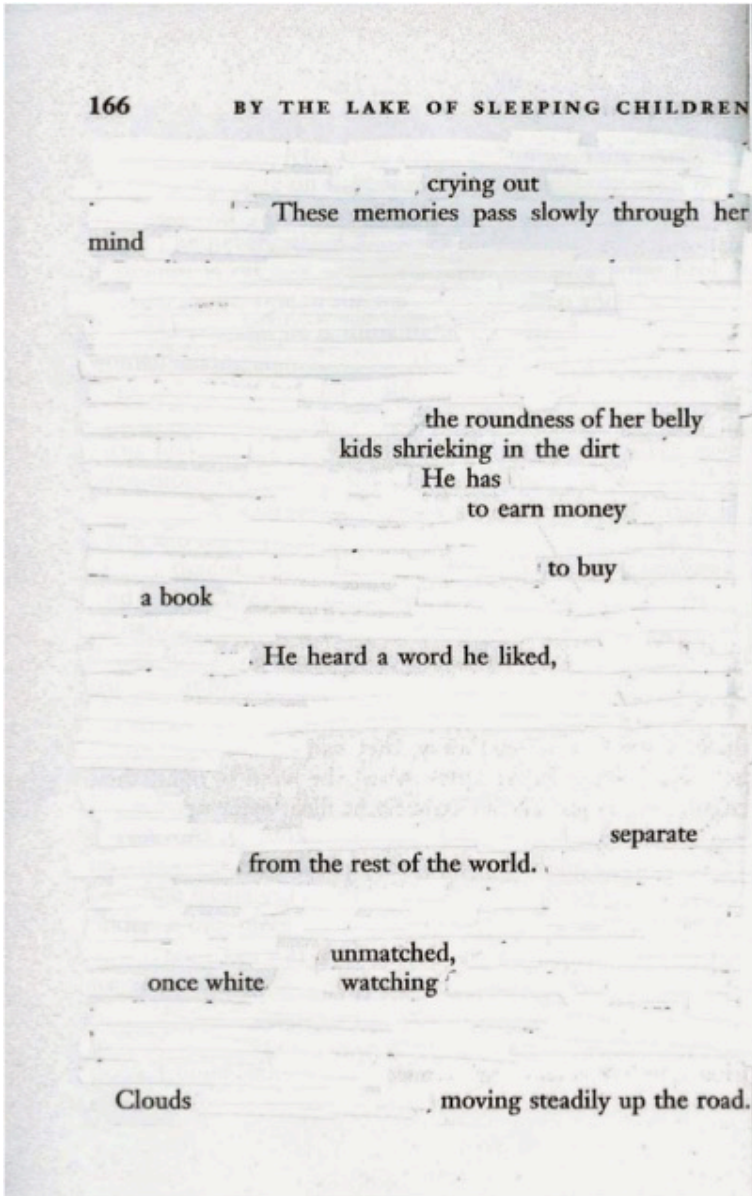
Write it down and sign
The interval was in my mind

The place where nothing was
I read it in a book

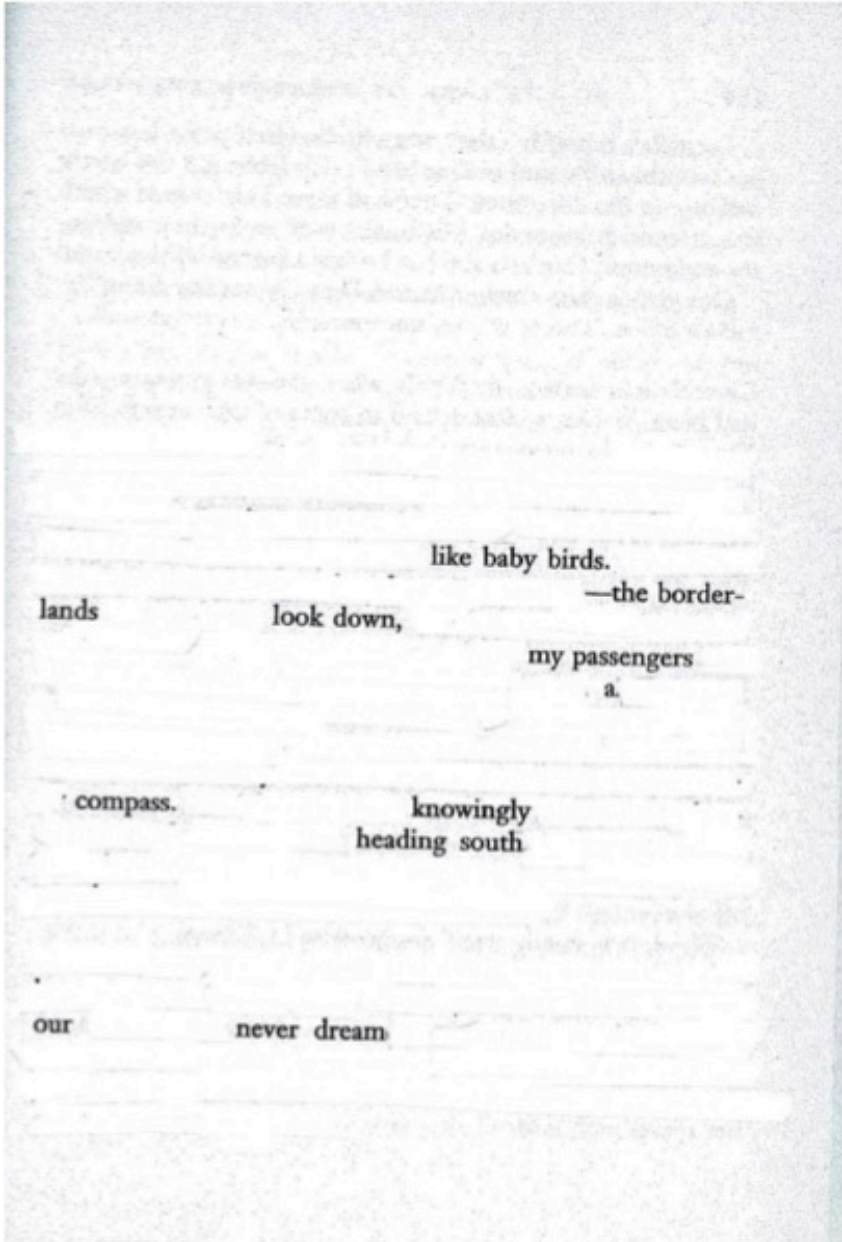
Art work is a theory of relation
I don't know if it matters to you

Tell me if it matters to you
You don't have to prove anything

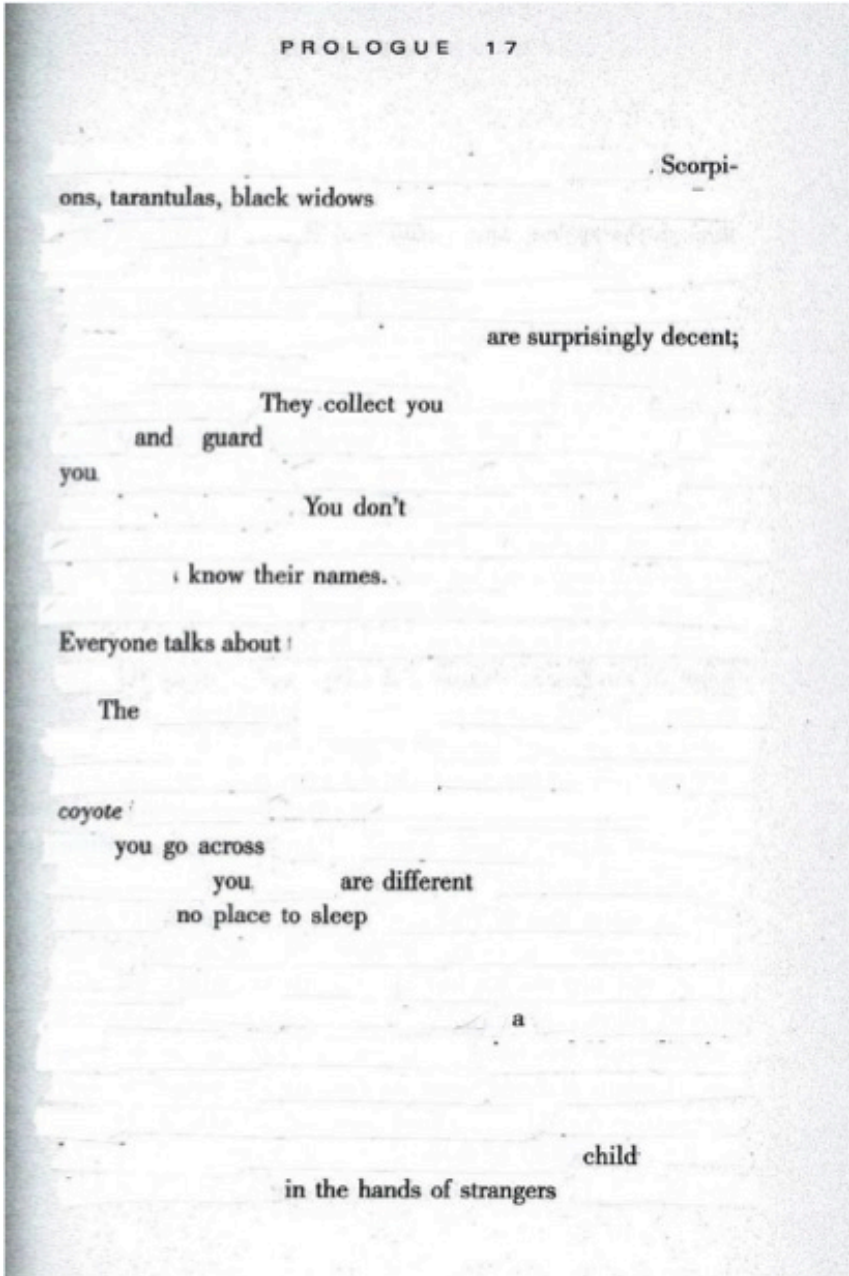
Natalie D-Napoleon
from *Border Crossings*
HE HEARD A WORD



BABY BIRDS



THEY COLLECT YOU



JL Conrad
from *Recovery*

Lately we've taken to
complaining of assassins,

their ropes and sneaky ways,
how we never see them coming, even

when moon sheds its light
in the passageways.

Blood winging to a shoreline.
Mute, like *mule*—the consonants

of hooves clopping, shearing
sound from silence.

This go-round the only one—
or not: my son saying *when I die*

and grow up again, as if a fact, and then
the question—*will I have brown skin?*

and then *but how will we know
each other?* And my answer:

I will always know you.

The moon, in my dream, is called
the otter moon: egg-shaped, like

one sitting with his back
to the view. A shrapnel of light.

By which I mean shards—

water broken and breaking. Lake's surface

crazed, the ice gone. Suitcases
surround us, a geometry of surfaces,

one of them ready
to bring the whole thing down.

Imagine your pain as an animal.
Skillful adversary hiding

under a log, in a cave.
What color is it?

Do you want transformation?
What do you want to be done?

I want a dog to be a dog.
I want to be a dog a dog.

I want to write the whole thing
backward. What was it

I wanted in the end?
This is all, in one way or another,

a conversation about the untranslatable.
The scream but not the horror.

We are losing something
in every moment.

What is the problem?
Birds unsettling the marshes.

Reading as a form of.
The ghost of milk.

What does it mean to hold
one's body "like a dancer"?

What color is your moral compass?
Does your imaginary friend
have a dog?

A dismissive from the front.
A shelving of intent.

A cavalcade, a barrage.

The barracks shed dust
at their seams.

A thousand miles away, water
from which it is not possible
to see shoreline.

But do we have permission to bury our dead.

Yes I do understand
what I am asking.

Blood waging its wars.
Desertification has its hands on you

This is not metaphor
but something different.

Not the scream but the horror.
Not the charm but the mystery.

Has anyone else noticed
the disco ball suspended overhead?

Could you please name and number
the uses of the infinite?

I am on a journey
and something is missing.

Are you bored yet? Please
reframe your question.

Lately I've been thinking about
emergency versus emergence.

The way we are always on a cusp.
It is nice to think dreams

might speak some truths to us.
If we are all still here.

The body slips its moorings.

It is a voice and
a voice waiting for you.

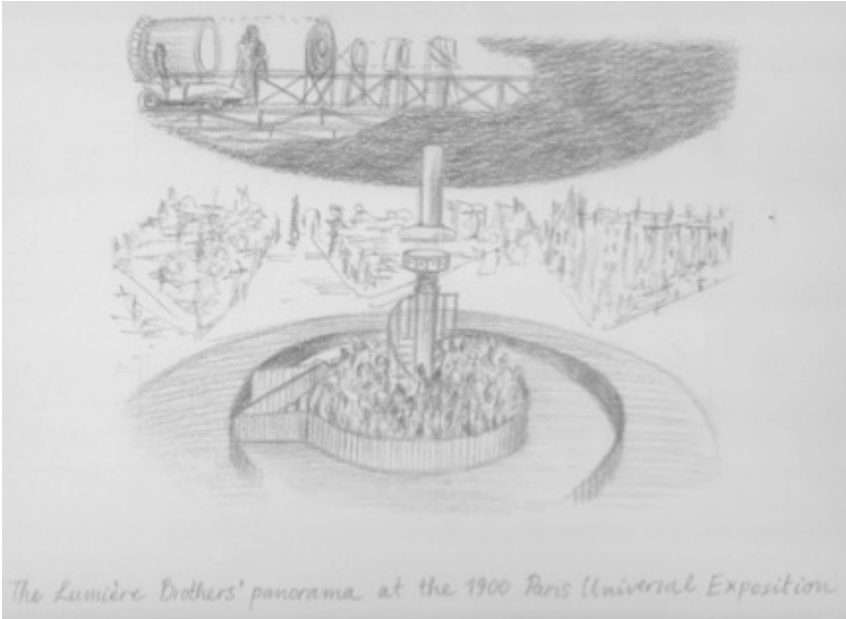
I dreamed, he said, that you
did not have a head and

were still dancing.

Matthew Cooperman (text), Simonetta Moro (drawing)
from *A Little History of the Panorama*,

VIII. The Lumière Brothers Panorama at the 1900 Paris Exposition

believe they will see the light. These people believe they will see the light. Yet the screw fashions them, will fashion them, universally, each system, spindled to individual. What is a viewing place to an absent heart? History constantly centralized, mother board behind dry wall, this is not a lark, the gaze is alert and so we must go



“Something for the modern stage
not, at any rate, an Attic grace”

It is
an image
of work
and the end
of work

hammer the thistle
in wine

ire or
iron aye

the yesses implicit
in cinema

like seagulls

like cities

like drunkards

like coins

like seeing believing
the eye can see
thy portion loosing
“here I can’t die”

Antonia Pozzi translated from the Italian by Amy Newman

La Vita Sognata / The Dreamed Life

The Dreamed Life

Whoever speaks to me doesn't know
that I have lived another life –
like one who tells
a fairy tale
or a holy parable.

Because you were
my purity
you for whom a white wave
of sadness would fall on your face
if I called you with impure lips,
you whose sweet tears
flowed deep in your eyes
if we looked up –
and so I seemed to you more beautiful.

O veil
you – of my youth
my bright dress ,
vanished truth –
or bright knot –
of a whole life
that was dreamed of – perhaps –

oh, to have dreamed you,
my dear life,
I bless the days that remain –
the dead branch of all the days that remain,
that serve
to mourn you.

The Lark

After the kiss – from the shadow of the elms
we'd come out on the road
to return:
we were smiling at tomorrow
like tranquil children.
Our hands
joined
in a tenacious
shell
that protected
the peace.
And I was quiet
you were nearly a saint
that calms the useless
storm
and walks on the lake.
I was an immense
summer sky
at dawn
on boundless
expanses of grain.
And my heart
a trilling lark
measuring
the serenity.

Joy

I was asking with eyes closed
- *what*
will the sweetheart be tomorrow?

So I made you repeat
in a smile the sweet words
- *the bride,*
the mom-

Fable
of the time of love
deep sip – life
fulfilled –

joy firm in the heart
like a knife in bread.

Reunion

If I understood
what he wants to say
- to not see you anymore -
I believe that my life
here – would end.

But for me the earth
is only the soil I trample
and the other
that you trample:
the rest
is air
in which – rafts unmoored – we sail
to meet each other.

In the clear sky indeed
sometimes small clouds rise
strands of wool
or feathers – remote –
and who looks to them in a few moments
sees a single cloud
that goes away.

Beginning of Death

When I gave you
my baby pictures
you were grateful: you said it was
as if I wanted
to start life again
to give it all to you.

Now no one
brings from the shadow
the small slight
person who was
in a brief
dawn - the sweet baby

now no one bends
over the edge
of my forgotten cradle -

Soul -
and you've entered
on the road to dying.

You'd Have Been

Annunzio
you'd have been
of what we weren't,
of what we were
and that we aren't anymore.

In you
the dead would have returned
and the unborn would have lived,
the buried waters flowed.

Poetry,
loved by us and never loosened
from the heart
you'd have sung
with the cries of a child.

The only stalk
of two lost bits of earth
was you –
the stem
of our innocence
under the sun.

But you've stayed down there,
with the dead,
with the unborn,
with the waters
buried-
dawn already faded in the light
of the last stars:
now it doesn't take up the earth
but only
heart
your invisible
coffin.

Motherhood

I thought to hold him inside, before
he was born,
looking at the sky, the grass, the flight
of light things,
the sun –
because all the sun
would descend in him.

I thought to hold him inside, trying
to be good –
good –
because every kindness
would make him smile.

I thought to keep him in me, talking
often with God –
because God would watch him
and we would be
redeemed in him.

The Child on the Path

From the moment I said – the baby
will have the name of your dead brother –

it was an October evening, dark,
under large trees, without
seeing each other's faces –

he was alive. And when
we stopped walking on the path
he played quietly
with the pebbles and the insects and the small
fallen leaves.

That's why
our steps were slow and sweet –
so sweet – our eyes
when on the grassy edge
we glimpsed a daisy
and we know that a child – barely
stretching his small arms –
could pluck it and not trample the grass.

The Eyes of Dream

You'd tell me – I want
the child to have eyes like yours –
I'd touch my eyelids,
stare at the sky
to feel my gaze
become more blue.
You'd tell me – I want
for this
that you don't cry –

Oh, for respect
of what was yours, for love
of what you loved:
look, I won't cry –
look, my eyes – still
pure and blue –
still bear the rays of the dream,
they speak still
of him – with the sky.

Vow

And it's so peaceful
that I say:
- *oh, may you meet the woman
who would give back to you
the child we dreamed of
and who died –*
I say:
- *may the grave
at least for you
become a furrow
and the rain from the sky mix
with my tears:
may it wash over your growth
unnoticed –*

Note: The poems included in “The Dreamed Life” are reproduced here in the arrangement Antonia Pozzi chose for them in her notebooks, sequenced in thematic rather than chronological order. Though the poems were written in various months of 1933 (see the dates, below) Pozzi assigned to the sequence the significant date of October 25, 1933, the anniversary of the death of Antonio Maria Cervi’s brother Annuzio, for whom Cervi and Pozzi wished to name their first child (see “You’d Have Been” and “The Child on the Path”). The dates of the individual poems are:

The Dreamed Life, 25 September 1933
The Lark, 25 August 1933
Joy, 26 September 1933
Reunion, 17 September 1933
Beginning of Death, 28 August 1933
You’d Have Been, 22 October 1933
Motherhood, 24 October 1933
The Child on the Path, 25 October 1933
The Eyes of Dream, 12 October 1933
Vow, 8 September 1933

“You’d Have Been”: The first line references Annuzio, brother of Antonio Maria Cervi.

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Jason Bayani
Greater Joy

How little there is to know of the body, that we would emerge
from the water, never a complete new— there, inside

a facsimile of older grief.

They say that the body inherits memory. Maybe
it is just the newer pain that learns to understand us
through us. Trauma as a wire through the generations.

“We are not alone in this,” I repeat
then inhale. Each flush of air
sketching in my mind all the parts of me
that will remain hidden. This is a kind
of practice in faith, I tell myself.

On the day the coroner holds
my dead heart in his hands, what will we call it?
Out-of-commission parts? A collapsed engine?

What becomes of the well of ideas, the great
imagination, every bit of touch that ignites
and remains, still? Where does this go?

I want to believe that joy is inherited, too. Wouldn't they want
us to have this, as well? Doesn't everyone you love
deserve the entirety of you? Some day I'm gonna get gone
from here. Some day you will. I grieve for you, already.
But I believe that grief is an honest gift. It is how you learn
to hold the whole of a person. So much of loss
counted in the absence.

There is nothing missing, your fullness overwhelms me.
The rich and varied life of a person,
all of its requisite pleasure and madness

Maybe we learn to live with losing,
make a world that loves us and our pain
in equal measures. In there is a greater joy,
I must believe it is one as equal
to the weight of our living.

Saleh Razzouk

Riad Saleh Hussein (Translated by Saleh Razzouk with Philip Terman)

**An Interview with Saleh Razzouk,
University of Aleppo
Scott Minar—2017**

SM: Is it difficult to translate contemporary poetry or fiction from English into Arabic or from Arabic into English? What features of the Arabic language or the English language make translation difficult or challenging?

SR: No, it is not difficult. It seems to me it is an act of love. Once you feel the poems, translation becomes easy. But I have a view here. Thinking in English is the first step toward mastering the translation from Arabic, and vice versa. You have to think in terms of the target language. In other words, you have to forget the original, keeping in mind the meaning alone and not the words. Words are things. As Foucault said “Words are graves of the meaning.” As for difficulties? Oh, there are many difficulties. Certain tricky words play with the flow or the sound of words to denote something hidden behind graphemes, etc.

SM: Can you provide an example of a translation challenge or problem—a word or a line—that you solved in a way that you think was good or fortunate? What was your thinking that led to the translation solution or decision?

SR: I find Arabic classic poetry very hard to transform. Metric poetry in all languages needs special attention. My solution to this is to avoid it. On the other hand, sometimes you must manipulate the translation. Sometimes I use footnotes to explain a thing readers might miss otherwise. For example, once the nickname of a character in a piece I was working was Rasasy—because he always wears grey suits. I had then to explain that in Arabic *rasas* means *bullets*, and thus the reader could see the relationship between the colors from these two sides and understand where the name comes from.

SM: Why do you do your translating work? What does the work bring you or give back to you?

SR: Pleasure. I enjoy it, and I make friendships in this way.

SM: What is your personal approach to translation? Do you try to stay close to the original text or do you interpret and negotiate with the text in order to make the translation fluent and fluid?

SR: I negotiate. I do not like to scar the original with primitive and direct approaches. This type of scarring is to be avoided at all costs. We have to understand each other before the chemistry of two languages mingles nicely and mixes into one.

SM: Who are your favorite Arabic language poets? Why do you admire them?

SR: I use to like Mohammed Umran. He knew how to make himself inside-out. But of course I think Adonis is a message Syria sent to the world. I like among the Arabs Badr Shakir AlSayyab. He revolutionized Arabic poetry.

SM: What is your favorite American poem or who is your favorite American poet? Why?

SR: I like Whitman. I read him translated by Saadi Youssef in the 1980s. And read him again in English in 21st century. If you check my iPad today, you'll find *Leaves of Grass* in English first in my iBook files. Second will be John Ashberry. I think his vision is fascinating. His nostalgia for mother nature before its corruption by the smoke of industry is remarkable. Finally, I know he is not an American, but please allow me to express my love of every page D. H. Lawrence wrote—prose or verse. He is a tremendous writer, but he is a universal person. He made us see more of human passion in action. I studied for four years in his birth place, and my first ever report from my education there was on him.

SM: What would you like others to know about the work you do translating poetry and fiction in Aleppo today? What would you say to others outside your country about doing this work?

SR: I do it in response to necessity. To stay alive and connected. Any text gives me this grace—I translate only if I can.

* Saleh Razzouk added these in follow-up emails:

SR: I thought you might like to know this as well. Poetry is the only literary art Arabs had ever known before the French and British broke the Ottoman Empire and drove it out of the Arab world. Modernization did not kill poetry, but reshape it. And from this point on, prose too flourished in many forms—novels, drama, stories.... So, poetry is a universal art to Arabs, but prose is bound to refer to our enlightenment and renaissance (both are in debt to romanticism and modernism—we have a slight modernization mixed and mingled with a heavy romantic vision). Afterward, independent prose and poetry became alike.

But in the 1970s, poets used modern styles to teach readers about Eastern wisdom, and the necessity to fight colonialism with its own tool: to negate it from within. Prose poetry and the *avant garde* began at this time. Poetry certainly followed the overwhelmed sensitivity of this time and chose to change its nature, from a modern prose style to a nostalgic style or monologic flow.

Currently, the state writers are blasphemous in many ways: they do not use their ears and eyes. They write mute literature by failing to knock with their hands on the doors of truth. Free writers, if they are honest, produce something real with insight and are conscious of trying to avoid disasters and conflicts. Abdel Nabi Higazi, Kheri Alzahabi, among others, may serve the state much more than the mercenary authors who invade the institution in order to follow the old standards without even thinking of renewing the art to answer the challenges of rising tide of history.

E.A. Poe's story "The Fall of the House of Usher" was misunderstood by translators. They translated *Usher* as the *gatekeeper*—and did not realize it was the character's name. Also, in Graham Green's story "The Basement Room," they translated *Butler* as the *second to the priest*. In fact, it was a name—not a job.

Another interesting mistake. The title of Marquez's *The Autumn of the Patriarch* was interpreted as *The Autumn of the Penguin*—since in Arabic we call penguins *petriks*:

The Germ of the Water Spring

And now come along to sip a little amount of surprises
And now come down to tear up our hesitated steps
Wrapping our pains with thin cigarette paper before we smoke it with content:

That the man and the woman,
The desert, the sea and mallow trees,
The tears, the cement factories and the animals—
All these now are wrapped with hard papers and dancing African wood
Waiting on a solid globed ship.

But after a while the tidy suit approaches:
In it a bright man
Gives the gift to a beast whose heads are
As many as the continents, the cities and the villages.

A beast that has no Dracula traits.
His fangs are very polite.
He has a beautiful and nice woman
Capable of eating the hearts of children like a good chess player
But he likes whisky with ice
And the cheeps of singing birds.
But I—
You know that I am like you,
--So said a shallow poet from the country of big hats
And quick guns.
--I celebrate the tragedies,
Having a tremendous capability to digest pains and routine hurts I receive every
morning with the price
Of oxygen I breathe in gardens.

I love a girl with eyes, teeth and two little
Feet washed out with washing detergent.
In a corner of my room a shirt, trousers and dance shoes
I do not need.

My time is in increments.
The areas of my age are with abstract topography.
My body is a hole for rats.
My body is a trap for escaped butterflies.

I wish that a day will come
When the sandwich is free
And the kiss is free
And the grave is free

That when the water spring is ill
And the flower of apricots poisons the morning coffee mug
To kill the flower of oranges
Night would fall upon us heavy
The broken glass falls heavy
The poor fall heavy
The bullets fall heavy
The cities fall heavy

And when we love each other,
When the country says to me each year its tufts
Of grass had been torn by the fever of happiness—

I'll plant before every house a doll for a sly child
I'll give chains for the stupid neutron bomb
And a bottle of perfume for my mother on her birthday.
I'll give my body to my girlfriend
With the little salary I earn
After deliver elegies beside the graves of my friends.

Look... look—
I am the thief of mute alleys
In my hands the keys of science
The keys of deserted cinema theatres—
Their dreamy audience
Hated the look of the sheriff's gun and
Kisses in air
The keys of rich banks stuffed with documents, employees
And policemen

The keys of villages where women gather the animal dung
From fields to bake
Tasty pies of Zaater.
The keys of weapon inventors who baked death
Cakes for their relatives and dear children
The white keys for peace
The red keys for rebels
The blue keys for lovers.

But- and I say it with sadness:
The oily key which was under my pillow—
On Thursday a mad man stole it,
And here I am biting my fingernails thinking in distress:
I cannot, on Saturday evening, sneak to
The house of my girlfriend to play cards with her

I decided to die once
Instead of dying seven times every week.
And because I have no coffin, no hole, nor shrouds
I decided to live for all of the dead,
Preparing for a store to distribute love among you through this poem!

No Doubt About It, O Descartes

I do not doubt it at all,
at least when sad,
that wood floats on the surface of water,
that cats feed on rats,
and trees flower in spring.

I do not doubt
that the knife chops the meat,
that the rains end the thirst,
and Monday cuts my confidence into two halves.

I do not doubt at all
as everybody knows
that one plus one equals two,
and a little of salt, chopped cucumbers, tomato, and parsley make salad.

But I doubt,
oh, mad Descartes,
that a lie and another lie,
a building added to another building,
and a swamp beside a river
results in a revolution.

Simple like water, clear like a bullet in a gun.

Qadisha Cave

On the way, from Bsharri to Qadisha Cave, Janni, who drove the taxi, asked me: Do you have good clothes with you? The air inside is nearly freezing.

I nodded with a smile. But Paulin didn't want to think about what his question meant. We were both under the spell of these fascinating scenes, particularly the mountain where you can't move an inch without difficult climbing.

Paulin was a colleague for this ride only—she originally came to this country on a visit after an invitation from me. At first, things on her end didn't go well. Her father strongly rejected the whole idea, partly because he did not know me and because he had bitter memories of the East.

I am not sure about the nature of the rotten seed that grew inside his head about us. Better to say inside his distressed heart. But I am sure it has nothing to do with religion or tolerance. It was politics in this case. Paulin's father was originally from India, but he was forced to immigrate after the assassination of Indira Gandhi, and he had no choice but to quit his job in the army. Much earlier than expected, he drew thick iron curtains down on his career, killing his future and its hopes. So he terminated his life in the East, from the sad side of it, since he had lived there half-heartedly. His daughter can't recall hearing him ever laugh. I asked her how she got him to agree in the end. She said: I told him I'm over eighteen, and I've never been a soldier in your barracks, Mr. General.

In the middle of the road, when we passed an aluminum warehouse, Janni shook his head and hit the wheel with his hand in anger or sadness. Depression overwhelmed me. Had he realized we're on the wrong road? But he quickly explained—this warehouse was his, but he sold it a week ago for \$100,000. Now the price had climbed to \$300,000.

With a sigh, he added: I regret it, but nothing can be done now. I noticed how he fixed his sight on the little rearview mirror. Obviously, he felt that loss like an ardent lover.

To make it easy for him I asked: What you have done with the hundred thousand then?

He replied that he'd paid for his son's study at the university. What was left will go for a supermarket he plans to build in Bsharri.

How miserable you are, o, Lebanon.

That this fascinating animus had entered in first place—the circle of violence and chaos—and slipped into a double abyss in which we suffer. Backwardness and corruption of the East on one hand, and the West's selfishness on the other. The West caught in the ethics of the market and in the abuses of capitalism just to flood us with the same.

This thread of thoughts came to an end when I saw a giant picture of Samir Geagea, one of the war lords in Lebanon. I saw it all in a moment when we were climbing the cliffs. But the picture of his wife next to him touched me with soft, warm fingers. Her face was in fact angelic and soon her features vaporized all of the cruel memories of that savage war. I felt my soul drawn to the border of her beautiful nature. The grey and mystified nature that poured from all sides as if it were a sign of salvation.

I wondered if Paulin had this feeling, and if she would be able to transmit this message to her father—to calm him down and to open again the closed roads with dead ends in his mind.

On approaching the cave, Janni stopped his car. He said we had to continue on foot. Then he pointed to an unpaved ascending road.

The road was too narrow—thin in fact, like a gossamer thread.

From here, you can see all of Bsharri, including the house of the famous writer and poet, Jibran Khalil Jibran. It was like a dot of ink on an open page. Farther out was Hasroun, and the house of acclaimed politician Michel Aflak. In other words, from the cliffs and these heights, you can see a compact and revealing map of all of Lebanon's nature.

On the threshold of the cave, a sheer, cold breeze blew across our faces. I noticed from there how tiny the car looked. It was another dot on this marvelous and ambiguous page. But the details of Janni, the driver, were unclear—in fact they were absent. I failed to register his presence, or even to determine where he had gone on the screen of my sight.

Abigail Carl-Klassen

**Si mueres lejos de mi...
(un anuncio de Seguros Azteca sobre tus envíos)**

Me explicaron que en caso
de que llegaras
a fallecer, esperemos
que no, ellos se encargan
de regresarte a México y cubren
el servicio funerario. Me voy
a pellizcar un poco
al dinerito que me mandas
para que estemos
protegidos. Me dijeron,
—Garantizamos su regreso.

**If You Die Far from Me...
(an announcement from Azteca Insurance concerning
your remittances)**

They told me that if
you were to die, we hope
not, they would take care
to return you to Mexico and cover
the funeral service. I'm going
to set aside a little
money you send me
so that we would be
protected. They told me,
“We guarantee his return.”

Ana Fores Tamayo

Nada

¿En que piensas?
¿En Dios?
¿Y porque?
¿No ves que no hay nada,
solo el laberinto
vacío
de la nada silenciosa?

Y entonces, ¿porque crees?
La repetición no da verdad.

Nothing

What are you thinking?
Pondering God?
And why?
Don't you see there is nothing,
only the empty
labyrinth
in the voided silence of nothingness?

Then, why do you still believe?
Repetition never renders truth.

Palabras

Ni siquiera tengo cara para abrir
esos párpados tan pálidos,
esos incapaces besos de memoria
que no dicen nada,
de palabras o tinieblas que,
desesperada, necesito oír.

Como esa magia que me exiges,
no es bastante ese destinar
con los anillos de un pincel,
con las lluvias cayendo en una playa pálida,
con las muñequitas inocentes del olvido.

Tú me quieres como piedra avergonzada del pesar,
Tú me adoras como ojos negros visten su dolor.

Pero no tengo que decirte
que en tu amarga alma atrapaste mis deseos,
que en tu sueño desorientado se rompió
ese vacío de cristales azulados,
esa mirada llena de palabras falsas,
de frases sin repetición
de poesías no escritas,
de almas sin morir.

Claro, todo terminado,
recojo ahora esa contemplación —
pues lágrimas siempre son de libros,
y solo resolviendo esas palabras que no dije,
las lloro al papel
que deslumbra y se queda sin color.

Words

I do not have the courage to open
eyelids that seem pallid,
kisses of forgotten memory unable
to speak nothing,
 neither words nor darkness,
 which desperately, I need to hear.

As you demand that magic of me,
It is not enough to earmark
the rings of paint brush,
the rains falling on the palest beach,
the innocent wee dolls rendered to oblivion.

Your desire for me seems a disconcerted tombstone,
Your passion appears to be your black eyes dressing pain.

But I have to tell you
that in your bitter soul you trapped my yearning,
in your disoriented dream you broke
the void of cerulean blue crystals,
a vision filled with falsified expressions,
sentences without repeating,
poetry unwritten,
souls that never die.

Of course, when all is finished,
I gather now that all was contemplation —
because tears are always for the books,
and only when solving words I did not say,
I cry them onto paper
that bedazzles, yet waxen will remain.

Ritmo Cubano

La canción me baila.

El sonido de su áspera voz,
del entrañable saxofón,
de la guitarra criolla:

me acarician sus inflexiones.

Y entonces pienso en ese
ritmo cubano que no conozco.
Que abandoné sin querer
sin poder conocer,
sin saber de sus dulzuras suaves.

Y grito, las lagrimas
ardientes me escaldan
con la pasión del canto.

Puedo volver, pienso.

Pero mentira.
Nunca seré lo que dejé.

Y nostálgica,
oigo las voces melódicas,
la poesía del bohío,
de la guajira con su compadre
seduciendo laberintos engañosos.
Desentierro los tambores
que me amarran
con el guarapo
y la melcocha.

Y me pierdo en los sonidos
del pasado,
de las lomas
que nunca conocí,
del aguacero que cae
como un vendaval en las casas viejas
con las contraventanas rojas
y rendijas fracturadas,
el aire refrescado y frío.

Me voy por los cerros

lentos de matas con hojas de malanga,
de boniato y ñame,
con matorrales de higuillos,
mientras camino a través de la cosecha
llena de campanillas blancas.

Recojo un pichón de chipoyo,
y al lado del pozo profundo
me siento,
admirando al caimito del monte.

Y entonces regreso del pasado
y reconozco
que con mi imaginación infértil
aunque campesina,

igual puedo recordar
y crear por primera vez.

Cuban Rhythm

The song dances with me.

The sound of its raspy voice,
the intimate saxophone,
the Creole guitar:

its cadences caress me.

And then I think of
that Cuban rhythm I do not know.
The one I abandoned
without wanting
without understanding
without sensing its mellow sweetness.

And I scream,
the tears
scald me, burning me
with the passion of its song.

I can return, I think.

But it's a lie.
I will never be what I left behind.

Nostalgic then,
I listen to melodic voices,
to the poetry of the bohío, the broken shacks,
the guajira peasant with her compadre —
her Cuban man — seducing deceptive labyrinths.
I unearth the drums that restrain me
with sugar cane and molasses.

And I become lost in the sounds
of the past,
of the hills I never knew,
of the rain that torments
in gales past ancient homes
with reddened shutters and
fractured crevices
of a chilled yet freshened air.

I walk past the hillside,
bushes filled with taro leaves,
with sweet potato, with malango,

thickets of small fig,
and I walk through the harvest
filled with bell flowers like snowdrops.

I pick up a pigeon, disguised chameleon,
and next to a deep well
I sit,
admiring a caimito tree peeking through the sierra.

And then I return from the past
to acknowledge
that with my imagination,
infertile
yet always fruitful,

I can remember
and recreate

for the very first time.

Refugiado

Mi alma en pedazos,
Veo el alambre de púa
rasguñando metal contra piel.
Llorando lágrimas de sangre,
Escucho disparos al vacío del silencio
de la salva maratrucha.
Lo empujo bajo la cerca
pero llora mi hijo,
aunque no importa;
lo hago porque
lo quiero.

Caminamos caminamos...
horas por las vías podridas
de los coyotes,
días, semanas, un mes, mano en mano:
vamos enfermos,
sin comer,
sin beber,
sin hablar.
O cuando hablamos es llorando,
porque no hay energía para más.

¿Dónde se habrá ido la niñez de mi hijito?
¿Cuándo la perdió?
¿Será cuando vio a su tío caer por unas balas
que le correspondían a su madre?

La eternidad del infierno
ha pasado en frente,
y cruzamos la frontera
llegando al río.
Atravesamos en balsas,
yo muerta en vida
con mi hijito en brazos.
Nos damos por vencidos
en esa tierra de tinieblas
y nos tiramos a sus pies —
esas patrullas sin cara, sin rostro.
Les decimos, susurrando,
“tengo miedo.”

II

Recuerdo los ojos negros
de mi hermano,
entreabiertos, glaseados,
la sangre estallando sus entrañas,
mi abuela gritando
corre, niña, corre,
eres tú la que quieren,
es tu sexo,
tu poder como mujer,
tu manera de decirles no.

Oigo los disparos lejos todavía,
y vuelvo a escuchar la voz de
mi querida abuela:
vete con tu niño antes
que te maten, dice.

Y el presente rompe pesadillas
que me trae aún más asaltos:
percibo a un guerrero,
llama en llamas...
el choque me catapulta hasta la actualidad.

La policía fronteriza me pregunta,
“¿Regresarás?”
Y yo le digo, con sarcasmo,
“Quiero ver mi patria,
quiero oír los
tiroteos tormentosos,
quiero ver las maras
asaltando uno al otro,
mata mata.
Quiero ver mi hermano muerto,
quiero ser luceros de mi abuela
llora llora.
Quiero ver la sangre deslumbrar
lo verde en las montañas,
las piedras de mis calles,
el agua de los ríos,
pero todo rojo rojo
Sangre sangre
Llora llora.”

“Corre, niña, corre:

*eres tú la salvación.
Llévate a tu hijo,
líbralo de este horror”.*

Así es que oigo esa voz tan asustada,
las palabras apocadas de mi abuela,
pero no me quiero recordar...

¿Qué te pasa, chica?
Pregunta el agente de mal manera.

Tengo miedo, Policía.
Tengo miedo.

Pero igual, no me quiere escuchar.

III

Me agarra fuerte, recio,
maltratándonos el hombre ICE.
Nos tumba, belicoso.
Se cae de mi protección mi hijito tembloroso.
Nos arrastra, ese monstruo,
forzándonos hacia deslumbrantes luces:
refulgentes, cegadoras,
dando vueltas sobre un carro.
Nos encarcela en el perrero
con sirenas estridentes,
con barrotes enrejados,
¿ese furgón no es hecho para perros?

Pero no.

Entre ropas empapadas por el río congelado
y el crítico engaño de un hueco reducido
en que los vigilantes nos encierran,
llegamos a una celda fría,
insensible,
aséptica, estéril:
desinfectada de piedad total,
y así nos hielan a los dos,
abrazados uno al otro,
mi hijito y yo.

El calor entre madre e hijo
siempre es suficiente para quitar

el frío inhumano de agresores asaltantes,
pero *no* es suficiente para desarmar
espíritus perversos,
para darle miedo al más malvado.
Me acurruco con mi hijo,
y lloro lloro...

IV

Llegamos a nuestra celda
con otras madres, otros hijos indefensos.

Oh, las luces fluorescentes chillan
día y noche.

Las comidas recuerdan asco.

No hay vida
más allá.

Los guardias nos desprecian,
tratan de humillarme
como si fuera yo
la que hubiera hecho el crimen,
como si fuera yo
la que hubiera herido
a mi hermano
en vez de la que corre
por su vida...

Y presiento a mi hermano
todo un hombre,
un recuerdo
con corbata de cielo azul,
cerúleos susurros quietos
vestido con traje de lino blanco,
mientras camina él, despacio, inocente,
con piernas de un roble eterno.

¿Pero será ésta
la memoria de mi hijo,
o es la de mi hermano vuelto en vida?

¿Será éste un sueño
de aquí o de más allá?

V

Pasan meses en un sinfín
de agonías,
una monotonía de días rutinarios
donde nada pasa,
porque todo es mentira,
todo es artificial,
todo es locura.

Por fin nos toca hablar
frente a un tipo comisario,
oficial del maquiavélico ICE
para explicar mi miedo.
Este nos mira indiferente,
me dice sin creermelo,
¿Porque estás aquí, chiquilla?
¿Vienes a robarnos la comida?

Y yo pienso en mi hermano,
muerto sangre fría,
un batallón de drogas
despojando mis bellas tierras
para llegar a este espacio libre,
y yo pienso en la vegetación
que ellos devastaron
para hacer lo que arrasa
hoy en día
a mi país sagrado.
Pienso en las tierras,
en las vidas,
en la sangre que me roban...
en mi hijito,
en mi hermano muerto,
en las mujeres que nos violan,
en mi pueblo amado,
en mi patria destruida.

Y entonces veo a la migra,
miro al funcionario,
ese hombre que trabaja para ICE,
preguntándome con desdén
si los pienso atracar,
y les contesto, fría:
Sí, ya que ustedes están aquí
burlándose de mí,
vengo justo para vindicarme

yo de ustedes.

Vengo a que sufran admirando
mi criminalidad,
soportando esa culpa de comprender
todo, todo mi dolor.

Fíjense:
la mujer violada, su hermano muerto.
Contemplan estas transgresiones,
las amenazas, la miseria,
las matanzas, la muerte en vida:
ésto es mi país querido.

Y entonces, recuérdense de mí —
detalle por detalle;
reflexionen en lo que represento,
y memoricen estas lágrimas de sangre
cuando se rían de todo refugiado.

Fern G. Z. Carr

Noche tras noche

Noche tras noche
en el silencio
de mi cama,
cuando las paredes
reflejan las sombras
de los árboles bailando
sensualmente
en la luz de la luna,
pienso en las almas
que susurran sus secretos
tratando de explicar
su existencia espectral,
frustrados –
los muertos
sin palabras.

Night after Night

Night after night
in the silence
of my bed,
when the walls
reflect the shadows
of trees dancing
sensuously
in the moonlight,
I think of the souls
who whisper their secrets
trying to explain
their spectral existence,
frustrated -
the dead
without words.

David Rock

ADÁN EN EL UMBRAL, ESCUCHANDO

*Manzana de oro . . .
es la palabra dicha como conviene.
(Proverbios 25:11)*

Estoy bastante desnudo
para ponerles nombre a las fieras.

Ella sabe mi nombre—
urgente sílaba

frescamente caída
del vacío, similar al sonido

del perdón inminente,
con regusto de trueno

deshaciéndose
en la lengua,

primera exploradora
de esferas.

ADAM AT THE THRESHOLD, LISTENING

*A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold . . .
(Proverbs 25:11)*

I'm naked enough
to name some animals.

She knows my name—
an urgent syllable

fresh from the void,
not unlike the sound

of imminent forgiveness,
the taste of thunder

crumbling
on her tongue,

that early explorer
of spheres.

OTRA VEZ EL MAR, COMO SIEMPRE

¿Qué nombre le daremos al mar?
¿Gabriel, por lo que anuncia? ¿O Miguel,
por su fluyente cabellera?

¿Y para qué sirven los nombres
sino para evocar cosas ausentes?
El mar nunca está ausente en los ojos que lloran.
Las aguas hierven como siempre
desde la primera semana del génesis.

La luna nace del mar. El sol muere
en el mar. Las olas se despiden del firmamento,
le dicen adiós al vacío del que subieron,
del que suben, y nunca dejan de recordar
lo que se ha borrado para siempre.

Así que hay figuras, silmulacros,
presagios en un eterno vaivén
de esperanzas.

A veces

el mar traga un ejército.
A veces el mar vomita un tesoro.

El mar arruga la piel de los dedos de los niños,
ofrece la rama muerta de paz por si acaso,
pero ya es tarde para los inocentes—víctimas
arrulladas en un lecho de algas y caracoles,

y el sol se esconde en complicidad con la marea,
riendo como un amigo travieso, o un asesino
listo para asustarnos mañana otra vez,
como siempre.

THE SEA ONCE AGAIN, LIKE ALWAYS

What name shall we give the sea?
Gabriel, for what it announces? Or Michael,
for its unfurled hair?

And what good
are names
if not for evoking things in their absence?
The sea is never absent in eyes that weep.
The water seethes as always since
the first week of creation.

The moon emerges from the sea. The sun dies
in the sea. Waves take leave of the firmament,
bid farewell to the void from which they arose,
and arise, and remember always that
which is lost forever.

And there are shapes,
similitudes,
predictions in the eternal ebb and flow
of expectations.

Sometimes
the sea swallows an army.
Sometimes the sea disgorges a treasure.

The ocean wrinkles the skin on children's toes,
proffers the dead branch of peace, but it's too late
to save so many who have drowned: victims
lulled on a bed of algae and shells while the sun
conceals itself in collusion with the swell,

laughing like a coy friend or assassin
ready to leap out and startle us
once again, like always.

Leo Boix

Peregrinación

Crucé el puente
pero no había nada:

una taza
de café frío

una moneda de Argentina
un globo del ojo en un plato
mamá cantando *Me olvidé de vivir*

Me di la vuelta
para recoger mis cosas.

Peregrination

I crossed the bridge
there was nothing

one cup
of cold coffee

one coin from Argentina
an eyeball on a plate
my mother singing *Me olvidé de vivir*

I turn back
gather my things.

Cómo embalsamar un cuerpo

Basado en 'La muerte y el avaro' (1494) de Jerónimo El Bosco

I

[Desvestir el cuerpo, dejarlo sobre la mesa de embalsamamiento]

*Fue llevado por una mariposa blanca y negra con cabeza de ratón,
una rana cubría su pequeño pene, por debajo le brotaba sangre.
Sus manos estaban atadas por la espalda. Tenía manchas púrpuras en la cara.
Le escuché decir algo antes de jadear. ¿Un nombre?
¿Un lugar en el que estuvimos juntos alguna vez?*

II

[Afeitarse el rostro, limpiar las expresiones faciales. Llenar la cavidad oral, los ojos con algodón, las zonas hundidas de la cara, balancear la nariz para lograr una apariencia facial placentera antes de iniciar el proceso de embalsamamiento]

*Beso hueco. Sien hundida. Manos vacías.
Un pájaro encaramado en la medianera lo mira.*

*Parece dormido. Sueña con pequeños insectos:
avispas, abejas, gorgojos en limones. Muy cerca,*

*una salamandra moteada con un sombrero rojo
cuenta las hojas caídas de un duraznero. Le faltan
dos ojos. Después de muerto, su cara se volvió repugnante.*

III

[Levantar la carótida o la arteria braquial. Cortar el cuerpo, buscando la arteria para inyectarle formol. Dependiendo del caso o preferencia del embalsamador, cualquiera de estas arterias puede ser utilizada para inyectarse el fluido embalsamador].

*Estaba dolorido, nadie lo notaba.
Con los días sus piernas cada vez más flacas.
Huesos como astas de ciervo arropadas en ángulo.*

*No había superficies suaves, sólo manchas, pequeños caminos
sobre la piel, lagos estancados. Quería que lo llevaran
a una torre circular. Pero no podía decirlo.*

*Su voz de hielo
La salamandra sugirió un nicho arriba, en el 4to piso.*

IV

[Inyectar el fluido embalsamador en la arteria, drenar las venas jugular, femoral o braquial, utilizando una máquina embalsamadora. Esta máquina inyecta formol en el cuerpo, mientras fuerza la salida de sangre].

*Para cuando me fui a él le quedaba muy poco. Sus dedos
no se movían como debían. Una última caricia.*

*Gotas de sangre seca en sus uñas.
¿Nos escuchás hablando de vos?*

*Un suspiro, otro jadeo. La radio aún prendida:
Olinda Bozán cantando 'Saludo y se fue'.*

V

[Punzar, aspirar todos los órganos principales del torso utilizando una aguja trocar recta o curva para perforar la pared del tórax, conectada a un hidro-aspirador. Luego, la cavidad se rellena con una solución altamente concentrada de formol].

*Dentro de la habitación todo era calma. Ninguna luz
podía entrar desde el living. Llovió. Paró.
Volvió a llover. El diario del domingo doblado cuidadosamente.*

*Una almohada para la enfermera. Tu andador,
criatura prehistórica ya sin uso.
Un platito con comida que no podías tragar.*

*Cajas apiladas de medicamentos de todos colores.
Tu pañuelo escondido debajo de las sábanas manchadas.
¿Escuchás la lluvia inundando el patio de atrás?*

*Una voz baja burbujeando
junto al tanque de oxígeno,
agua destilada para humedecer la última frase.*

VI

[Lavar bien el cuerpo. Usar un jabón especial germicida para desinfectar el cuerpo embalsamado].

*Era demasiado tarde para las uvas,
sin embargo vinieron los mirlos, uno por uno.*

*Se fue juntando polvo debajo de tu sillón favorito.
Yo me iba ese día, vos lo sabías de memoria.*

Te prometí que plantaría un limonero en tu honor.

VII

[Sellar las incisiones con costura, aplicar líquido adhesivo en la zona. Una vez que el cuerpo queda sellado, las incisiones deben ser cubiertas con plástico para evitar derrames].

*Como estatuas tomadas de la mano,
un secreto al mediodía, los labios se sellaron.*

*Las células comenzaron a descomponerse rápido
a medida que el corazón se detenía.*

*El tuyo no. En la cocina
esperaron que me fuera.*

Yo no podía levantar mis valijas.

VIII

[Vestir al cuerpo, prepararlo para su exposición].

*Una voz entrecortada: 'Como quien va
Para no volver, me miró al pasar
Saludó y se fue. ¡No lo he visto más!'*

*Todo ocurrió a las 18.20. Los árboles al costado
de la pista de despegue se volvieron ocre, colorados.*

*Sicómoros. Eucalipto de las pampas.
Su vuelo ascendía. La enfermera corría para dar la noticia.*

*'Como quien va, Para no volver,
Me miró al pasar, saludó y se fue. ¡No lo he visto más!'*

How to Embalm a Body

After 'Death and the Miser' (1494) by Hieronymus Bosch

I

[Undress the body, place it on an embalming slab]

*He was carried by a mouse-headed black and yellow butterfly,
a little frog covering his small penis, blood spilling underneath.
His hands tied up behind him. Purple clots on his cheek.
I heard him saying something before a gasp. A name?
A place we've been together?*

II

[Shave, set the facial features. Pack the oral cavity, eyes with cotton, fill up sunken areas of the face, balancing the nose to achieve a pleasant facial appearance prior to the embalming process.]

*Hollowed kiss. Hollowed temple. Empty hands.
A bird perched on a white party wall watches him.*

*He looks asleep. He dreams of little insects-
wasps, bees, weevils on lemons. Nearby,*

*a speckled salamander with a round red hat,
counts leaves from a fallen peach tree. He is missing
two eyes. After death, his face turned nasty.*

III

[Raise the carotid or brachial artery. Cut the body, finding the artery and securing it for injecting formaldehyde. Depending on the case (or preference of embalmer) any of these arteries may be used for injecting the embalming fluid].

*He was in pain, nobody noticed it.
His legs grew thinner by the day.
Bone-deer antlers tucked in at an angle.*

*No smooth surfaces, just blotches, little roads
on skin, stagnated lakes. He wanted to be led
inside a round tower. But couldn't say it.*

*His icy voice
Salamander suggested a niche high in the 4th floor.*

IV

[Inject the embalming fluid into the artery, drain from the jugular, femoral or brachial veins, using an embalming machine. This machine injects formaldehyde into the body while forcing the blood out].

By the time I left he was almost gone. His fingers

didn't move as they should. A last touch.

*Droplets of dried blood beneath his nails.
Will you hear us talking about you?*

*A whisper to. The little radio still on:
Olinda Bozán singing, slowly, 'Saludo y se fue'.*

V

[Puncture, aspirate all of the major organs in the torso by using a trocar-a long needle attached to a hydro-aspirator that is inserted two inches to the left and two inches above the umbilicus or belly button. Next the cavity is filled with a highly concentrated formaldehyde solution].

*Inside the bedroom everything was calm. No light
could enter from the living room. It rained. Stopped raining.
Rained again. A Sunday newspaper neatly folded.*

*A pillow for the night nurse. Your walker,
a prehistoric creature no longer used.
A small dish with food you wouldn't swallow.*

*Piles of medicine card-boxes in different bright colours.
Your handkerchief beneath stained bedsheets.
Will you hear the rain clogging the patio?*

*A low voice of bubbling
next to the oxygen tank,
distilled water to humidify a last sentence*

VI

[Wash the body. Use special germicidal soap to disinfect the body while it is being embalmed].

*It was too late for grapes (uva chinche),
yet blackbirds arrived, one by one.*

*Dust gathering under your favourite sofa.
I was leaving that day, you knew by heart.*

I told you I would plant a citrus tree in your honour.

VII

[Seal the incisions by stitching, apply liquid adhesive to the area. Once the body has been sealed, the incision sites may be wrapped with elastic to further prevent leakage].

*As statues holding hands,
a secret told at noon, sealed lips.*

*Cells decomposing fast
against slight thumping of heart.*

*Not yours. In the kitchen
they waited for me to leave.*

I can't lift my bags.

VIII

[Dress the body in preparation for viewing].

*Cracking voice: 'Como quien va
Para no volver, me miró al pasar
Saludó y se fue. ¡No lo he visto más!'*

*At 18.20 he was gone. The trees near
the runway golden ocre, red in parts.*

*Sycamore. Eucalyptus of the pampas.
His flight departed, a day nurse rushed out with the news.*

*'Como quien va, Para no volver,
Me miró al pasar, saludó y se fue. ¡No lo he visto más!'*

Melanie Márquez Adams

El color de los lagos

—No, ¿cuál es tu verdadero nombre? —pregunta sin una pizca de asombro, como si dar un nombre falso fuera parte de la rutina.

—Este...no entiendo bien lo que quieres decir —El pánico acecha: a lo mejor, desde mi última época de estudiante, se han inventado nuevas reglas para conquistar la vida universitaria en América.

—Lo que pasa es que los estudiantes internacionales suelen escoger un nombre *americano* porque... bueno ya sabes, los de ellos son difíciles de pronunciar —Sonríe y una fila de lechosos dientes rectos casi se pierde en la piel vampiresa.

Sonríe de vuelta. No es la primera vez que insinúan que no tengo cara de *Melanie*. Tampoco será la última.

—Claro, es verdad, tiene sentido —digo sacudiendo mi cabeza, quizás demasiado enfática—. Pero en mi caso, ese es mi verdadero nombre.

Señalo la tarjeta que está por despegarse de la puerta de mi dormitorio: un torbellino de mariposas magenta anuncia mi nombre.

—En realidad, cuando era pequeña, algunas personas en mi país no sabían cómo pronunciarlo.

—¡Wow! ¿En serio? —. Cubre su boca con la mano derecha mientras se ríe despacito, los hombros moviéndose de arriba hacia abajo. Una barbilla puntiaguda completa la imagen de villano de caricatura. Al escucharme rumear alrededor de la cocina, exhausta y hambrienta luego de mis clases nocturnas, Cindy sale de su habitación, lista para ofrecerme galletas y dulces, provisiones indispensables en el bol de plástico que hace también de centro de mesa.

Tiene toda clase de preguntas acerca del lugar de donde vengo. Quiere saber sobre el clima, la comida, la música. Siente curiosidad más que nada de las personas que habitan aquel rincón distante del mundo: su apariencia, lo que hacen. “Seguro que la vida debe ser más emocionante allá”. El brillo en sus ojos mientras le cuento sobre Ecuador, es la de un niño que acaba de descubrir una nueva serie animada en la tele.

Cindy nunca ha estado fuera de su país. En realidad, nunca ha viajado más allá de un par de estados vecinos a Tennessee. Su fascinación por las personas de otros lados comenzó en una escuela rural en la que entabló amistad con estudiantes de intercambio que venían de Asia y África. Quedó enganchada desde entonces.

Siempre que conversa acerca de los chicos de intercambio, sus ojos se enturbian: nubes rosas salpican cielos azules perfectos. La primera vez que esto sucede, pregunto apenada si acaso alguno de ellos murió.

—No, no es eso —limpia sus ojos con las yemas de los dedos—. Es solo que me entristece hablar de ellos. ¡Eran tan dulces!

Me recuerda a la niña pequeña de una película que vi alguna vez; lloraba inconsolable por una camada de cachorritos a los cuales quería tener para siempre. Lástima que le fueron arrebatados demasiado pronto, cuando apenas había comenzado a amarlos.

No conozco todavía a mucha gente así es que paso la mayor parte de mi tiempo libre junto a Cindy. Vamos de compras al único centro comercial de esta ciudad o a Walmart. Algunas veces damos vueltas en el coche, sondeando las montañas en búsqueda de un buen sitio para caminar.

Una tarde fresca de primavera, paseamos bajo pinos y arces que se entrelazan a nuestro alrededor como viejos amigos. Encantada con las ardillas que brincan y brincan por todos lados, le pido a Cindy imaginar que estamos en el medio de un acto de magia: enérgicas ardillas se transforman en largas y hermosas iguanas que prefieren estirarse bajo el sol antes que correr como maníacas.

—¿Puedes verlo Cindy? —mientras asienta puedo anticipar una ovación de pie—. Pues ahora estás en mi ciudad: ¡Guayaquil!

Sus pupilas se expanden hasta convertirse en dos perfectos globos azules. Nunca ha sido tan fácil emocionar a alguien con mis historias.

Me invita a la iglesia un miércoles. Canalizando mi lado más amable, le explico que reservo mi tolerancia hacia los sermones para el día domingo. Bueno, algunos domingos. Me abstengo de confesarle una ligera preocupación: que imagino los dulces pastelitos y donas rellenas de jalea, esos que abundan en su iglesia bautista, escondiendo en sus pliegues esponjosos aparatos que detectan a católicos intrusos; que en el preciso momento en que cruce la puerta, una alarma comenzará a chillar, luces brillantes me apuntarán y un pastor bajará del púlpito para acompañarme fuera del edificio; que una vez me haya expulsado, procederá a informarme que mi alma adoradora de imágenes nunca llegará al cielo.

“Pero, ¡el miércoles es noche universitaria!” insiste. “No habrá sermones. Prometo que te vas a divertir.” Encuentro difícil concebir algo relacionado a la iglesia como divertido, pero cómo decir no a la cara de gatito compungido.

Atravesamos un auditorio amplio rebosante de adolescentes y veinteañeros. Arriba en el escenario, unos muchachos no mucho mayores a su audiencia, luchan con toda clase de equipos y cables. Antes de alcanzar a preguntar si estamos en una iglesia o en un concierto, la oscuridad desciende sobre nosotras: el escenario cobra vida en tonos de neón que rasgan el aire con las notas estridentes del bajo y la guitarra eléctrica.

Con los brazos levantados y sus ojos cerrados, el cuerpo de Cindy

se mece suavemente al ritmo de *Cómo nos ama* del coro. La melodía es pegajosa y la letra de la canción es fácil de seguir: me rindo ante las tiernas voces exaltadas. Poseídas por el espíritu embriagante, mis caderas se menean contentas.

Pasando un día almorzamos juntas en la cafetería del centro estudiantil. Mientras llenamos las bandejas de grasosos potingues sureños que probablemente no debería estar comiendo, nos entretenemos espiando alrededor de las mesas en búsqueda de apuestos estudiantes internacionales. Entre los candidatos, un muchacho en particular – piel canela, cabello oscuro y, claro que sí, ojos oscuros también – roba el corazón de Cindy.

Antes del receso de primavera, le doy una sorpresa. Acabo de conversar con su nuevo amor en un evento para practicar inglés. Su nombre es Javier y es de México.

—¡Yo sabía que era latino! —chilla—. ¡Tienes que presentármelo, por favor!

Parece que tiene dificultad en decidir qué hacer con las manos. Se resigna a una secuencia frenética de aplaudir y esconder su rostro mientras me cuenta que siempre ha querido tener un novio latino.

—¿Por qué un novio latino, Cindy? —pregunto, un poco por curiosidad, otro tanto por entretenimiento.

—Me parecen tan sensuales, tan románticos... —muerde sus delgados labios pensando qué más decir—. Es que no sé... los chicos blancos son tan aburridos. Yo quiero algo diferente, ¿me entiendes? Quiero pasión.

Las olas turquesas en sus ojos resplandecen llenas de posibilidades.

Curioseando en su página de Facebook siete años después, encuentro a Cindy comprometida con un chico que podría pasar por su hermano. Supongo que la fantasía del novio latino no incluía un feliz para siempre. Tampoco así nuestra amistad, la cual no sobrevivió las fricciones de compartir un apartamento. A lo mejor fue la diferencia de edad. O quizás algunas amistades están destinadas a terminar con el último día de clases.

De vez en cuando pienso en aquellos días simples de primavera que pasé junto a Cindy, deleitándome entre bosques y montañas en el descubrimiento de mi nuevo entorno. Me gusta imaginar que conversa con sus nuevas amigas sobre la compañera de apartamento extranjera que tuvo alguna vez: una que venía de un lugar lejano y exótico. Sus ojos, destellando con el color de los lagos que habitan estas silenciosas colinas a las que ahora llamo hogar, llenándose de repente con un ocaso de oro rosa: evocando recuerdos de iguanas, ardillas y novios latinos.

The Color of Lakes

“No. What’s your real name?” she asks without a trace of surprise, as though giving out a fake name is part of the routine.

“Umm... I am not sure I understand.” Panic sets in: perhaps, since my last time as a student, new rules have been established to conquer college life in America.

“It’s just that... International students usually pick an American name, because... Well, you know, their names are kind of hard to pronounce.” She smiles and a row of straight milky teeth is almost lost in her vampire-like skin.

I smile back. Not my first time around having someone imply that I don’t look like a *Melanie*. It won’t be the last time either.

“Of course! That makes a lot of sense”. I shake my head in agreement, perhaps a bit too emphatic. “But in my case, that is my real name.” I point to the card on the verge of falling from my bedroom door: a whirlwind of magenta butterflies announces my name.

“As a matter of fact, when I was younger, some people in my home country did not know how to pronounce it.”

“Oh, wow! Really?” She covers her mouth with her right hand as she giggles, shoulders moving up and down, a pointy chin completing her cartoon villain look.

As I roam around our tiny kitchen, exhausted and hungry after my evening classes, Cindy comes out of her bedroom ready to offer me cookies and candy, essential provisions in the plastic bowl that doubles as our centerpiece. She asks all kinds of questions about the place where I come from. She wants to know about the weather, the food, and the music. More than anything, she is curious about the people in that distant corner of the world: what they look like, what they do. “Surely life must be more exciting over there”. The glint in her eyes as I tell her about Ecuador, is that of a child who has just discovered a new animated television series.

Cindy has never been outside her country. She has not even made it beyond Tennessee’s neighboring states. Her fascination with foreign people began in a tiny rural school, where she became friends with exchange students from Asia and Africa. She was hooked ever since.

Whenever she talks about the exchange kids, a mist glazes over her eyes, rose clouds peppering perfect blue skies. The first time that I see this happen, moved by her pain I ask if one of them died.

“No. It isn’t that”. She wipes the inner corners of her eyes with rosy fingertips. “I just get really sad when I talk about them. They were so sweet!”

She reminds me of the little girl in a movie I once saw, crying inconsolable over a litter of cute puppies she wanted to keep forever. What a pity they were taken away from her too soon, when she barely had started loving them.

I haven't met a lot of people yet, so I spend most of my free time with Cindy. We go shopping at the only mall in town or at Walmart. Sometimes we just drive around, probing the mountains in search of a good hiking spot.

On a cool spring afternoon, we stroll beneath pines and maple trees intertwined around us like old friends. Tickled by the squirrels jumping and jumping all over, I ask

Cindy to imagine we are in the middle of a magic act: feisty squirrels turn into long beautiful iguanas that prefer to stretch out in the sun rather than run around like maniacs. "Can you picture it Cindy?" As she nods I anticipate a standing ovation. "Well then, now you are in my hometown: Guayaquil!"

Her pupils expand into perfectly taut deep-blue balloons. It has never been so easy to get someone this excited with my stories.

She invites me to church on Wednesday. Channeling my polite self, I explain that my tolerance for sermons is reserved for Sundays. Well, some Sundays. I abstain from telling her about a slight fear of mine: that I picture the sweet blueberry muffins and jelly-filled doughnuts in her Baptist church, concealing within their fluffy wombs powerful devices meant to detect Catholic intruders; that in the precise moment I walk through the door, an alarm will start bawling, bright lights will point at me, and a pastor will come down from the pulpit to escort me out of the building; that once we are out there, he will proceed to inform me that my image-adoring soul, will never make it to heaven.

"But it's college night at my church!" she insists, "there won't be any sermons. I promise you will have fun." I find it difficult to conceive anything related to church as fun, but how can I say no to her sad kitten face.

We walk through a large auditorium, brimming with teenagers and twenty- somethings. Up on the stage, a couple of guys not much older than their audience, battle with all sorts of equipment and wires. Before I can ask if we are at church or a concert, darkness descends upon us: the stage comes alive in neon colors that rip the air with high notes of bass and electric guitars.

Hands raised and eyes closed, Cindy's body sways gently to the beat of "How he loves us". The melody is catchy and the lyrics are easy to follow: I surrender to the young enraptured voices. Possessed by the intoxicating spirit, my hips gladly wiggle.

We meet for lunch every other day at the student center, filling our trays with greasy southern concoctions I probably should not be eating as we lurk around the tables in search of cute international students. Amongst the candidates, one guy in particular - olive skin, dark hair, and yes, dark eyes too! - steals Cindy's heart.

Right before Spring Break, I give her a surprise. I talked to her dark handsome crush at an English Conversation Table. His name is Javier and he is from Mexico.

"I knew he was *Latin!*" she squeals. "I need to meet him, please!" She seems to have trouble deciding what to do with her hands. She settles into a hectic sequence of clapping and hiding her face telling me how she has always wanted to have a *Latin* boyfriend. "Why is that Cindy?" I ask, half curious, half amused.

"They are just so sexy, so romantic..." She bites her thin lips, pausing to think what to say next. "It's just that, I don't know... white guys are so boring! I want something different, you know? I want passion!"

The turquoise waves in her eyes glow full of possibilities.

As I peep into her Facebook photos seven years later, I find that Cindy is engaged to a guy who could easily double as her brother. I suppose the Latin-boyfriend fantasy did not include a happily ever after. Neither did our friendship, which didn't survive the frictions of sharing an apartment. Maybe it was the age difference. Or perhaps some friendships are meant to end with the last day of class.

Every so often I think of those simple spring days spent with Cindy, reveling amongst mountains and wooded areas in the discovery of my new surroundings. I like to imagine that she tells her new friends about a foreign roommate she once had: one that came from a far exotic place. Her eyes, glimmering with the color of the lakes that inhabit these quiet hills I now call home, suddenly filling with a rose gold sunset: reminiscing of squirrels, iguanas, and Latin boyfriends.

...

Ruba Abughaida

Translated from Arabic by Ruba Abughaida and Yahya Abughaida

36 Abbas Street

The deeds still have his name,
decades after the house was stolen.
The orders came to leave.
Two uncles pulled off the wicker-wood
chairs they sat on each evening,
at the front stoop of the house,
in observation, in contemplation
of the scores of armies clearing
out the creatures, the flowers,
the orchards, to seize
and settle on their offerings.

It had all been arranged,
foretold by prophets,
from the Helmand to the Euphrates,
the rulers went to work.
Take nothing but clothes they told them,
but she packed a heap of photos
pulled from the walls.
The house closes in on us still.
We hang on its stories like fruit
from the lemon trees outside its stones.

Exile

There are places we can return to only in our thoughts,
Haifa, Jerusalem, Baghdad, Damascus, Tripoli, Aden,
their ancient empires now a half-lit reflection
shining from below the fields of their glories.

We rise from our longing to grasp at stars,
take thousands of steps towards new languages,
their sounds scraping across our throats,
lilting against our tongues.

We teach ourselves eloquent speech,
spread the roofs of our mouths
with new tastes, endure less spices on our plates,
new costumes against our bodies.

In countries with icy winds or scorching heat,
we read the shapes of clouds for a sign
that beyond them still trail our homes,
our mountains, our turquoise rivers.

We read secrets in each others eyes about
the time the ground shook beneath our feet,
and the crescent moon became the hour to
wander the passages of our recollections.

Borders

History seduces with its cobbled shadows,
rippling our hearts, revising sources.
Sermons evoke the restless ghosts of poets:
Things will be different this time.

But the past has roots which uncoil
themselves to move like water,
soft footed, evasive, until it sweeps
and swells from the deep sea,
where submarines circle
the gentle whale sharks,
the flying sting rays.

Among the homes, the schools,
along hyphenated borders, old men
hand passports to boy-soldiers,
taut from the stripes across their uniforms.

In the camps tents are in a stand off with the rain,
those inside them lunging at sleep
that will not stay, listening out
for sounds enlarged by the night,
cloudy mirrors distorting their bodies,
preparing them for new broken identities,
as refugees waiting for another life.

**LINDA (Edición Radio) Por
Diana Burbano Traducción Por
Lorna Silva**

Personajes
La Linda: una mujer Chicana.

Época Actual.

LA LINDA:

Una casita en Los Ángeles. Una mujer sale por la puerta principal llevando una caja y canta “Los Laureles” como Linda Ronstadt en “Canciones de Mis Padres”. Termina con un fuerte grito de Maria chi, para, escucha y se ríe.

Si mi abuelita aún estuviera aquí, hubiera respondido con un grito igual de fuerte y las dos hubiéramos bailado por toda la cocina, usando cucharas como castañuelas hasta que mi papá nos gritara “¡Dejen con las tonterías y tráiganme una chela!”

(Suspira.)

No puedes volver a casa, ¿qué no? Pero, ¿qué puedes hacer? ¡Este barrio ya está tan gentrificado! El palettero es un gringo de 20 años con cera en el bigote.

(Señala la caja.)

Menos mal que di un último vistazo por si las moscas y me encontré esta caja escondida en un rincón del closet de mi ‘Ita.

*Baja la caja que está rotulada “Mi Linda”.
La abre. Saca el album “Living in the USA” de Linda Ronstadt.*

¡Pero mira nomás! Voy a poner verdes de envidia a los hípsters con un álbum de vinilo original.

Cuando era niña quería SER Linda Ronstadt. Tanto pero tanto talento en una mujer tan pequeñita. Ay Dios, me ENCANTABA su tan hermosa voz y su estilo tan super-sexy. Yo me ponía los calcetines de tubo y chores bien cortos, ¡como ella!

Saca un par de patines de la caja.

¡Mis patines! Uf. ¡Que patas tan grandes! Le rogué a mi papá que me comprara patines para mis 13 años. Los sábados por la mañana yo patinaba, feliz, por todo el barrio, cantando

(Canta) “You’re no good, you’re no good, you’re no good bay-bee you’re no goooood...”

Y que una vez el señor González sale a rogarme “¡por favor ya no cantes! ¡estás destemplada!” Pues yo le dije: “¡Por lo menos yo tengo las ganas para cantar, en vez de sentarme en mi pompas y mirar Sábado Gigante

todo el día!”

Canta un poco más de “You’re No Good” a un Sr. González en el público. Se oye un portazo Saca un cartel de Lynda Carter como la Mujer Maravilla.

¡Ay mira! La Mujer Maravilla. La Wonder Woman. ¡Qué cinturita de avispa! ¡Cómo caray pudo luchar contra los malos con ese corpiño tan apretado??

La Mujer Maravilla también es Lynda. ¡Lynda Carter! Con Y en vez de un I, porque es superheroína. Sabes, nunca me perdí ni un minuto de ese programa en televisión. Ni uno tan solo.

La Mujer Maravilla me dio esperanza. Una vez cuando estaba en segundo grado, un niño de la clase me tiró al piso, me jaló las trenzas y se sentó en mí como si yo fuera caballo. Los maestros no hicieron absolutamente nada. Cuando sonó la campana, me dijo bajito “Mojada”. Yo sabía bien lo que me quería decir, a los 7 años no era la primera vez que oía esa palabra.

Le pregunté a mi Abuelita de qué estaba hecho el lazo de la verdad de la Mujer Maravilla, y jella me dijo que tenía de ese material en su costurero!

Pues que llevé mi lazo a la escuela y se lo lancé a ese niño canijo tratando de agarrarlo pero terminé pegándole duro en la cara. Él corrió a acu-sarme con la que supervisaba el recreo. Ella me quedó viendo bien seria, pero luego me sonrió y me dijo: “Bien hecho hija. No dejes que ningún chico te trate mal”.

Yo quería ser una Linda chingona.

Canta el tema de Wonder Woman al estilo de la canción Blue Bayou de Linda Ronstandt.

“Wonder Woman... Where the world is mine, where I’m fighting crime, on the BlueEEE Bay-ouoooo”

Una cantante superheroína bien chingona que podía hacer lo que yo quisiera. ¡Mujer Maravilla/La Cantadora Dorada!

Vuelve a buscar dentro de la caja, saca un programa.

Ah. La secundaria. Mi Abuelita decidió que me iba a mandar a una escuela bien pipirsnais cerca de su trabajo. Que si todo era mejor allí, que había mejores estudiantes y no había pandillas. Sí, definitivamente era escuela de puros blancos.

Yo me sentía completamente fuera de lugar. Era miserable.

Justo antes de las vacaciones de navidad ese primer año me inscribí al show de talento de la escuela. Las chavas populares se rieron a carcajadas cuando se dieron cuenta. ¡Méndigas! Me seguían en los recesos burlándose de mí, diciéndome que me diera por vencida, que nadie quería verme en el escenario. Nunca lloré. ¡Jamás! Las Amazonas no lloran. Esa noche estaba ayudando con el quehacer y TIRÉ la ropa lavada con tanta fuerza en la canasta que hice que se diera vuelta en el piso. Pero, Ita no me gritó. Me ayudó a levantar la canasta, me hizo pan con chocolate, y vimos juntas sus novelas favoritas hasta que me dormí.

Fue una navidad bien dura. Los patrones de mi Ita la hacían trabajar hasta bien tarde todas las noches.

No sé de dónde sacó el tiempo ni el dinero, pero cuando abrí mi regalo de navidad, mi Abuelita me había hecho mi disfraz de Mujer Maravilla. Estaba bien envuelto en una caja lujosa de Nordstroms.

Esperé para ponérmelo hasta que mis hermanos salieron a tratar de matarse con su nuevo juego de dardos. Puse “Simple Dreams” en el tocadiscos. Me quité todo hasta quedar en calzones y pieza por pieza me convertí en la Mujer Maravilla. Me puse la tiara y me di la vuelta, (gira como la Mujer Maravilla). Terminé super mareada pero cuando me vi en el espejo, me di cuenta que ese traje de super heroína era para alguien como yo. Era como una armadura de bebé feminista.

Cuando escuché a Linda cantar la última nota de “Poor Poor, Pitiful Me” ¡Ay pobrecita yo!, un rayo de sol entró por la ventana y se reflejó en la tiara. ¡Como en el programa de televisión! Era una señal. En ese momento descubrí cuál iba a ser mi acto para el show. Llevaba años tocando la guitarra, a pesar de que mi papá me decía que era cosa de hombres.

Sabía que mi idea era una locura. Es que, fíjense, casi todos los actos era porristas haciendo sus mismas rutinas con música nada original.

Yo era la número #12, casi al final y estaba con unos pinches nervios. Me moría de ganas de ir al baño pero no tenía tiempo de quitarme el disfraz y volvérmelo a poner, así que ni modo, me tuve que aguantar.

Al fin llegó mi turno. Me deslicé con mis patines al escenario, toqué el primer acorde en mi guitarra y canté:
(Con la música de Blue Bayou)

“I’m going back someday, Come what may, To Paradise Isle-- Where the girls are tough, And boys get roughed up, Paradise Isle-- Where I can go-- with my laa-ssoo, and I can clearly see, that familiar sunrise, through tied up guys, how happy I’d be.”

Me emocioné tanto, pero tanto, tanto, que al final di un giro al estilo Mujer Maravilla y me caí, (se cae) pero toqué como lo tenía planeado.

(Lo cuenta con un gesto al estilo Flashdance.)
¡Tada!

Era como que estuviera en un mundo alterno al estilo de los comics. Yo sabía que la gente se estaba riendo, los oía, pero no me importaba. Hice una reverencia como que si fuera Linda Ronstadt en persona en concierto en el Hollywood Bowl. Mi 'Ita me aplaudía con todas las ganas.

Yo vi al público y no es que los había ganado con mi interpretación. No es de esas películas con final feliz en la que de repente todos me aceptan por mis diferencias. Se estaban riendo de mi de esa manera tan cruel que tienen los chicos.

Pero, PERO, había unas cuantas personas que me estaban aplaudiendo de verdad. Una maestra que no conocía me dio su gesto aprobación con las manos. La mamá de alguien estaba silbando. Una chava que se miraba buena onda estaba sonriendo. Yo las vi, otras Amazonas como yo. En el mar de burlas incesantes que sufrí los siguientes 6 meses, me acordé de esos gestos genuinos de aprobación y encendieron una llanita en mi alma. Sobreviví la secundaria y me fue un poco mejor en la prepa. De hecho me iba tan bien, que decidí aplicar a la universidad. ¡Era la primera persona en mi familia que siquiera lo intentaba!

Le enseñé la carta de aceptación de la Universidad Cal State LA a mi abuelita en cuanto la recibí y ella me dijo, ¡pues cómo no! Cuando estaba eligiendo clases, vi una electiva que se llamaba estudios Xicanos [chicanos], escrito con X, no con Ch. Una X, como los X-Men. X, reconocí de inmediato la letra por excelencia de los súper héroes.

Esa clase de estudios Xicanos era bien intimidante. Agarré el valor de hablar en clase casi hasta el final del año. Pero estaba escuchando y descubrí tanto de mi misma y mi familia, de dónde venía y quién era. Sentí como que había vuelto a nacer.

Estaba investigando para una asignación en mi segundo año. El tema era: "Las Latinas en los medios: explosivas diosas sexuales y sirventas asexuadas". Oía la música de Morrissey mientras lo hacía y estaba aburrida, alcé la cabeza para ver la pared de mi cuarto. Mi amiga Tonatzin, que quería ser la Marilyn Monroe de Aztlán pero feminista, había puesto un poster que encontró en una tienda de segunda en Hollywood. Era un collage de caras de Latinos, hispanos, mexicanos que habían trabajado en el cine y la televisión. Nunca lo había mirado con atención hasta ese momento. Vi a Rita Moreno, Rita Hayworth, Carmen Miranda, y —lo vi más de cerca— allí, a 3 caritas de distancia estaban Linda Ronstadt y Lynda Carter. El corazón me dio un salto en el pecho.

(Silencio)

Las Lindas eran mexicanas-- mis tótems de la niñez, mis ídolas, mexicanas las dos.

Corrí a la biblioteca a confirmar. Descubrí que el nombre verdadero de la Mujer Maravilla era Linda Jean Córdova Carter. Linda con "I" latina.

Su mamá Juanita era “de ascendencia mexicana.” ¿Y La Ronstadt? Era mexicana por el lado de su papá.

¿Te das cuenta? La Wonder Woman, ¡la máxima heroína de los Estados Unidos, era MEXICANA!!!

Canta la letra con el tema de la Mujer Maravilla.

“Wonder Woman! Fighting for your con-sti-tu-tional rights”

Mi tesis de graduación de Latinidad en la cultura popular se trató sobre Las Lindas. Cuando presenté la tesis unos tarados de mis clases de estudios Xicanos se atrevieron a criticarlas porque se “hacían pasar por blancas”. ¿Qué querían decir con eso? Linda Ronstadt creó el album “Canciones de mis Padres”.

¿Qué más puedes pedir para gritar a los 4 vientos quién eres?

Mi ‘Ita leía todos los libros que yo traía a la casa. Solía decir a tono de chiste que iba a ser la siguiente persona de la familia en graduarse. Yo nunca lo dudé. Ella iba a sacar su GED e ir a mi alma mater la Cal State LA. Quería enfocarse en mitos y leyendas. Su Mujer Maravilla era La Virgen de Guadalupe. Creo que incluso pudo haber sacado su maestría. Le hubiera ido tan bien.

Apenas puede contener las lágrimas. Vuelve a poner todo en la caja y la levanta.

Ella estaba tan orgullosa de mí. Lo último que me dijo fue Mija, eres la Mujer Maravilla de verdad, ¿verdad?” Y yo le contesté, “No Abuelita, ¿la Wonder Woman? Eres tú.”

Señala la caja.

Ella guardó mi niñez en esta caja. ¿Para mí? ¿Para ella misma? Ya nunca le voy a poder preguntar.

Mira a su alrededor.

Me ofrecieron trabajo de maestra al otro lado del país. Nos vamos a Minnesota, ¿te imaginas? No me da miedo, me emociona ser una luz en la oscuridad. Tal vez allá habrá una niña que necesite conocer a otra Amazona. Me llevo mi guitarra, mis patines, mis brazaletes dorados y el amor de mi Abuelita. Me siento orgullosa de ser quien soy, orgullosa de dónde vengo.

Me voy a ir en mi jet invisible, voy a sobrevolar el Blue Bayou y conquistar el mundo.

OSCURO

**LINDA (Radio Editz) By
Diana Burbano**

A super bad ass story of finding your inner hero.
A long monologue for a Chicana.

A cute Los Angeles bungalow. A woman comes out the front door carrying a box. She is singing "Los Laureles" from Linda Ronstadt's "Canciones de Mis Padres." She ends with a loud Mariachi cry. She stops, listening. Laughs.

If mi abuelita was still here she would've answered back just as loud and we would've danced around the kitchen, using cucharas for castanets until mi papa would yell at us to quit with the tonterias, and get him a chela.
(She sighs.)

You can't go home again, que no? But what can you do? This old neighborhood is getting so gentrified! The local paletero is some 20 year old white dude with wax in his mustache.

(Indicating the box.)

I'm glad I did an idiot check. I found this stuffed in the closet of mi 'Ita's old room.

*She sets down the box which is labeled "Mi Linda". She opens it.
Takes out Linda Ronstadt's "Living in the USA" record.*

Look at this! Makin' the vinyl lovin' hipsters jealous.

I wanted to BE Linda Ronstadt. For such a tiny little thing, Linda had such a big sound! I LOVED her god-so-beautiful voice and her cheesy, sexy look. I remember wearing the tube socks and short shorts.

Pulls a pair of rollerskates out of the box.

My skates! (Tries them on). Que patas tan grandes! I begged and begged for them for my 13th birthday. I skated around and around our neighborhood that Saturday morning belting out:

(Sings) **"You're no good, you're no good, you're no good bay-bee you're no goooood..."**

until Mr Gonzalez came out and begged me to stop. He said I was flat. I said "So was Linda!" He said "I meant your voice". "I'll say it again..."

Sings a bit more of "You're No Good" to a Mr. Gonzalez in the audience. We hear a door slam. Looks through the box. Pulls out a poster of Lynda Carter as Wonder Woman.

Oh my god. Wonder Woman. La Mujer Maravilla. Dang. Look at her teeny, eenie, eenie, weenie waist!

Wonder Woman was a Lynda, too. Lynda Carter! With a Y instead of an I, for fancies. You know, I never missed one minute of that TV show. Not one.

La Wonder Woman gave me hope. Once, in the 2th grade, I got knocked down by this boy in my class. He'd pull my braids and sit on me like I was a pony. The teachers never did anything. When the bell rang, he whispered, "Wetback." in my ear. I knew what it meant. At 7 years old it wasn't the first time I'd heard that word.

I asked my Abuelita what Wonder Wooman's golden lasso of truth was made of, and, she said, she had some of the material in her sewing kit!

I took my lasso to school. I tried to rope the boy, but I ended up whipping him hard in the face with the end of the rope. He told on me to the playground lady. She looked at me all stern at first and then she smiled! She said, "Good for you mija. Don't let no boy treat you like crap."

I wanted to be Linda. (pronounced Lih-n-da) Linda! (pronounced Lee-n-da) and fierce.

Sings the theme to Wonder Woman a la Linda R.'s Blue Bayou.
"Wonder Woman... Where the world is mine, where I'm fighting crime, on the BlueEEE Bay-ouoooo"

A super-hero badass singer who could do whatever I wanted. Mujer Maravilla/La Cantadora Dorada!

Going further into the box, she pulls out a program.
Ah. Middle school. Abuelita decided that she was going to send me to the "fancy" school near her work. It had better test scores, better students, no gangs. Yeah. It was white.

I stuck out like a little brown sore thumb. Oh, Hera. I was miserable.

Right before Christmas vacation, that first year, I signed up for the school talent show. The popular girls howled laughing when they saw that, jerks. They followed me around at recess, teasing me. Telling me to give it up, nobody wanted to see me onstage. I never cried. Never. Amazons don't cry. I was doing my chores that night and I THREW the laundry into the basket so hard it made the whole thing flip over onto the floor. 'ita didn't yell though. She helped me pick up the basket, made me pan con chocolaté, and we watched her novelas together until I fell asleep.

That was a tough Christmas. The family mi 'Ita worked for made her work late every night. And I don't know where she found the time, or the money but when I opened my Christmas present, Abuelita had made me a Wonder Woman costume. It was nestled in a fancy box from Nordstroms, tissue paper and everything.

I waited to try it on until my brothers were outside trying to kill each other with their new Lawn Darts. I put "Simple Dreams" on the record player. I stripped down to my chones, and piece by piece I became la

Mujer Maravilla. I put the tiara on my head and turned, (does the WW paddle turn). I got super dizzy, but looking at myself in the mirror I belonged in that superhero costume. This was baby feminista armor.

As Linda hit the last note on “Poor Poor, Pitiful Me” a beam of sunshine came in the window and glanced off the tiara. Just like in the TV show! It was a sign. I knew then and there what my talent show act was going to be. I’d played guitar for years, even though my dad said the guitar was for the boys.

I knew I was asking for trouble. Look, all the other acts were basically a bunch of cheerleaders doing stupid dance moves to canned music. Two of them were dancing to “Play that Funky Music White Boy.” Which should tell you all you need to know about my stupid school.

I was #12, really close to the end. I was pretty damn nervous. Had to pee SO BAD, but I couldn’t get in and out of the costume in time, so I had to hold it.

My turn finally came. I rolled out onstage with my guitar. I toe-stopped, strummed my first chord and sang:

(To the tune of Blue Bayou)

*“I’m going back someday, Come what may, To Paradise Isle-- Where
the girls are tough, And boys get roughed up, Paradise Isle--*

Where I can go-- with my laa-ssoo, and I can clearly see, that familiar sunrise, through tied up guys, how happy I’d be.”

I got so into it, that at the end I twirled and fell, (*Falls*) but I played like I’d planned it. (*Plays it off with a Flashdance gesture.*) Tada!

I was in a weird DC alternate universe. I knew people were laughing. I heard them. I didn’t care. I bowed like I was Linda Ronstadt herself, at a concert in the Hollywood Bowl. Mi ’Ita was clapping like crazy. I looked out, and yeah, it wasn’t like I was winning everyone over. This wasn’t an ABC Family Movie, where all of a sudden I was accepted for my differences. They were laughing in that mean way kids have. But. BUT. There were actually a few people who seemed to be clapping for real. A teacher I didn’t know gave me the thumbs up. Someone’s mom was whistling. A cool looking teen girl was smiling. I saw them. My fellow Amazons.

In the sea of mockery I endured for the next 6 months, I remembered those genuine looks of approval and acceptance and that fanned a little flame in my soul.

I got through middle school and high school was a little better. I did so well, I decided to apply to college. I was the first person in my family to even try!

When I showed the acceptance letter from CSULA to my ’ita, she was like, “No, duh!” Filling out my course schedule, I saw an elective called

Xicano studies. With an X. An X! Like X-Men, X. A superhero letter if ever I saw one.

That Xicano Studies class was so intimidating. Holy crap. It took almost till the end of the year for me to actually speak up in class. But I was listening. I found out so much about myself, about my family. About where I came from, and who I was. I felt like I had been born again.

I was doing research for a paper in my second year. The topic was, “Latinas in the Media: Spitfire sex goddesses and sexless servants.” Morrissey was on the record player, and bored, I looked up at the wall of my dorm room. My friend Tonatzin, who wanted to be the Aztlan Marilyn Monroe but feminist, had put up a poster that she found at a flea market in Hollywood. It was a collage of faces, of Latinos, Hispanics, Mexicans, who had worked in the movies and on TV. I had never really looked at it closely. I saw Rita Moreno, Rita Hayworth, Carmen Miranda, and-- I looked closer-- there, in the middle about 3 tiny faces apart from each other-- There were Linda Ronstadt and Lynda Carter. My heart skipped a few beats.

(Quiet)

Las Lindas were Mexicanas-- my childhood totems, my guide lights. Both of them.

I ran to the library for confirmation. I found out Wonder Woman’s real name was Linda Jean Córdova Carter. Linda with and “I”. Her mother Juanita was “of Mexican descent.” And La Ronstadt? It was her dad’s side.

Dude, Wonder Woman was the ultimate American hero, and she was MEXICAN!!!

Sings to the tune of the Wonder Woman theme song. “Wonder Woman! Fighting for your con-sti-tu-tional rights”

I wrote about Las Lindas for my graduate thesis on Latinidad in popular culture. When I read the paper, some jerks in my Xicano studies classes were ranking on them, ’cause they were all, like “passing”. What did that mean? Passing. Linda Ronstadt put out, “Canciones de mis Padres” That was a hell of a “This-is-Who-I-Am” statement.

Mi `ita-- She read every book I brought home. She used to joke that she would be the next person from our family to graduate. I never doubted it. She was going to get a GED, and go to CSULA. She wanted to focus on myth, leyendas. Her Wonder Woman was La Virgen de Guadalupe. I think she could’ve gotten her Masters. She really would’ve blossomed.

She fights back her tears. Packs up the box and picks it up. She was proud of me. The last thing she told me, Mija, eres la Mujer Maravilla de verdad, verdad.” And I said, “No Abuelita, La Wonder Woman? Eres tu.”

Indicates box

She kept my childhood in this box. For me? For herself? I'll never get to ask her.

Looks around.

I've got a teaching job across the country. We're going to Minnesota, te imaginas? I'm not scared, I'm excited to be a light in the darkness. Maybe there's a girl there who needs to meet a fellow Amazon. I'm taking my guitar and my roller skates, my gold bracelets and my Abulita's love. I'm proud of who I am, proud of where I come from. I'm going to get in my invisible jet, go out over the Blue Bayou and take over the world.

LIGHTS OUT

Contributor Notes

Marsha Truman Cooper's work has appeared in the *Florida Review*, *Narrative*, *Barrow Street*, and the *Mid-American Review*. You can read the title poem from her second chapbook, "A Knot of Worms," (Finishing Line Press) online at American Life in Poetry.

John F. Buckley lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan. His publications include various poems, two chapbooks, the collection *Sky Sandwiches*, and with Martin Ott, *Poets' Guide to America* and *Yankee Broadcast Network*. He's the fiction editor for the journal *Third Wednesday*.

Kay Lin is a writer who was educated at the National University of Singapore. Involuntarily intersectional, her poetic influences range from Margaret Atwood, W.H. Auden, the three hundred Classical poems of the Tang dynasty, Kate Tempest, Seamus Heaney, Goethe, and gangsta rap.

Dylan Loring is a poet from Des Moines, Iowa. Some of his recent poems have appeared in *New Ohio Review*, *Gold Wake Live*, *Big Muddy*, and *Forklift, Ohio*.

Michael Carter is a poet who lives in Connecticut. His work has appeared in such journals as *Boulevard*, *Ploughshares*, *Provincetown Arts Magazine* among many others. He lives with his two hounds and spends his time swimming and knitting.

Janet Majewski is a poet living in St. Louis. Her work is forthcoming in *Diagram* and *National Poetry Review* and can be found in *Hobart*, *Blackbird*, *Cincinnati Review*, and elsewhere. She holds an MFA from George Mason University and is the managing editor for *Guesthouse*.

George Looney's books include *Meditations Before the Windows Fail*, *Structures the Wind Sings Through*, *Monks Beginning to Waltz*, *A Short Bestiary of Love and Madness*, and the novel, *Report from a Place of Burning*. He founded the BFA Program at Penn State Erie and edits *Lake Effect*.

John Randolph Carter is a poet and artist. Finalist for the National Poetry Series, Carnegie Mellon Press October Competition, University of Wisconsin Press Brittingham and Pollack Prizes in Poetry, University of Akron Poetry Prize, and the UCM Lena-Miles Wever Todd Poetry Prize.

Elizabeth Robinson is the author of several collections of poetry, most recently *Rumor* (Parlor Press) and *On Ghosts* (Solid Objects) which was a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Award. Robinson has been a winner of the National Poetry Series and the Fence Modern Poets Prize.

Kathryn Nuernberger is the author of *The End of Pink* (BOA Editions, 2016), which received the 2015 James Laughlin Award from the Academy of American Poets. She is also the author of *Rag & Bone*, which won the Antivenom Prize from Elixir Press and was published in 2011.

Alex Lemon's most recent book is *The Wish Book*. His writing has appeared in *Esquire*, *American Poetry Review*, *The Huffington Post*, among others. He lives in Ft. Worth, Texas, writes book reviews for *The Dallas Morning News*, and teaches at TCU and in Ashland University's MFA program.

J. L. Conrad's first full-length collection of poems, *A Cartography of Birds*, was published by Louisiana State University Press (November 2002). A limited-edition artist's book, *Species of Light* was published by Bellywater Press in 2004.

Matthew Cooperman is the author of, most recently, *NOS (disorder, not otherwise specified)*, with Aby Kaupang, (Futurepoem, 2018), as well as *Spool*, (Free Verse Editions/Parlor Press, 2016), and *Imago for the Fallen World*, with Marius Lehene (Jaded Ibis Press, 2013).

Jen Karetnick is the author of three full-length poetry collections, including *The Treasures That Prevail* (Whitepoint Press, September 2016), finalist for the 2017 Poetry Society of Virginia Book Prize, and four poetry chapbooks, including *Bud Break at Mango House*, which won the Portlandia Award in 2008.

Natalie D-Napoleon is a writer, singer-songwriter and educator from Fremantle, Australia who now lives in California. Her work has appeared in *Entropy*, *Poetry WTF?!*, *The Found Poetry Journal*, *Westerly*, and *Australian Poetry Journal*.

Carter Smith's poems in the collection have appeared in *The Laurel Review*, *Faultline*, *Newfound*, and elsewhere. Further other bookworks published his book/mail art project, *Rounds*, in 2016. He lives and teaches in North Carolina.

Frank Montesonti is the author of two full-length collections of poetry, *Blight, Blight, Blight*, *Ray of Hope*, Winner of the 2011 Barrow Street Book Prize chosen by D.A. Powell, and the book of erasure, *Hope Tree* (How To Prune Fruit Trees) by Black Lawrence Press. He is also author of the chapbook *Arts Grant*, from Greentower Press.

Abigail Carl-klassen's work has appeared in *ZYZZYVA*, *Catapult*, *Cimarron Review*, *Guernica*, *Willow Springs*, *Aster(ix) Huizache*, and *Kweli*, among others, and is anthologized in *IMANIMAN: Poets Writing in the Anzaldúan Borderlands* (Aunt Lute) and *New Border Voices* (Texas A&M University Press) among others.

Ana M. Fores Tamayo advocates for marginalized refugee families from Mexico and Central America. She recently published in *Acentos Review*, *The Raving Press*, *Rigorous*, and *Fron//tera*, an international literary magazine from Spain.

Diana Burbano is an Equity actor, a playwright and a teaching artist at South Coast Repertory and Breath of Fire Latina Theatre Ensemble. Polcarpa, Semi-finalist Eugene O'Neill Playwrights Festival, Oregon Shakespeare Festival Brown Swan lab 2017, Drama League Rough Draft series May 2017, Honorable Mention, and the Jane Chambers Award 2017,

J. A. Bernstein is the author of a forthcoming novel, *Rachel's Tomb* (New Issues, 2019), which won the A.W.P. Award Series, Hackney, and Knut House Prizes; a forthcoming story collection, *Stick-Light* (Eyewear, 2019); and a forthcoming chapbook, *Desert Castles* (Southern Indiana Review, 2019), which won the Wilhelmus Award.

Katherine Witt is an Air Force officer and currently instructs English at the United States Air Force Academy. She has previously published in *Santa Clara Review* and *War, Literature & the Arts*.

Heather Aruffo is a third year MFA candidate in fiction at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, and is a prose editor for *Permafrost*.

Kate Lasell is a fiction writer, educator and MSW student in New York City. She teaches writing at a syringe exchange and at an adult education program for students aged 18-80. When she's not teaching or writing, she's coaxing cherry tomatoes in her community garden and organizing with the Democratic Socialists of America.

Whitney Collins' fiction appears in *New Limestone Review*, *Grist*, *The Pinch*, *LUMINA*, and *Pamplemousse* and is forthcoming in *Moon City Review*, *Ninth Letter*, and *The Gateway Review*.

Her short story, "Daddy-o" was nominated for a Pushcart Prize and the PEN/Dau prize.

Leo Boix is the first Latino-British poet to be selected for the Complete Works Poetry, a UK national programme whose fellows have included Sarah Howe, Mona Arshi, Kayo Chingonyi and Warsan Shire among others.

Sally Ball is the author of *Wreck Me* and *Annus Mirabilis*, both from Barrow Street. She's an associate professor of English at Arizona State University in Tempe, AZ, and an associate director of Four Way Books.

Wyatt Inlow is currently a senior at Clarion University, where he is working on a BFA in Graphic Design and a minor in Creative Writing. When he is not studying at Clarion, he lives in Osceola Mills, PA.

Bruce Bond is the author of twenty-one books including, most recently, *Black Anthem* (Tampa Review Prize, U of Tampa, 2016), *Gold Bee* (Helen C. Smith Award, Crab Orchard Award, Southern Illinois University Press, 2016), *Sacrum* (Four Way Books, 2017), *Blackout Starlight: New and Selected Poems 1997-2015* (L.E. Phillabaum Award, LSU, 2017).

Jason Bayani is the author of *Amulet* (2013, Write Bloody Publishing). He's an MFA graduate from Saint Mary's College, a Kundiman fellow, and works as the Artistic Director for Kearny Street Workshop in San Francisco. His second book *Locus* is forthcoming from Omnidawn Publishing in 2019

Sue Brannon Walker is Poet Laureate of Alabama, the Stokes Distinguished Professor of Creative Writing and Director of the Stokes Center for Creative Writing, and Professor of English at the University of South Alabama where she teaches courses in creative writing.

Alarie Tennille's first full-length poetry collection, *Running Counterclockwise* (Kelsay Books: Aldrich Press) was named first runner up for the Thorpe Menn Award for Literary Excellence in 2015. Her latest collection is *Waking on the Moon* (Kelsay Books, 2017). Her poems appear in over fifty journals and anthologies.

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Marcene Gandolfo's poems have been published widely in journals, including *december*, *Bellingham Review*, *Fifth Wednesday Journal*, and *RHINO*. Her debut book, *Angles of Departure*, won Foreword

Reviews' Silver Award for Poetry. She has taught writing and literature at several northern California colleges and universities.

Kelly Egan lives in San Francisco and recently completed her MFA in Poetry at Saint Mary's College in Moraga. Her work has been nominated for Best of the Net and appeared in *Colorado Review*, *White Stag*, and *Spry*. She likes to think about outer space and visit small towns.

C. Kabusta is the author of full-length poetry collections, *All Beautiful & Useless* (BlazeVOX, 2015) and *Of Covenants* (Whitepoint, 2017), as well as a novella, *Girling* (Brain Mill, 2017). She is active with the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets, and serves as Assistant Poetry editor with Brain Mill Press.

Gary Jackson is the author of the poetry collection *Missing You, Metropolis*, which received the 2009 Cave Canem Poetry Prize. His poems have appeared in *Callaloo*, *Tin House*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, and elsewhere. He was featured in the 2013 New American Poetry Series by the Poetry Society of America and is the recipient of both a Cave Canem and Bread Loaf fellowship.

Antonia Pozzi is considered to be one of the most original voices in modern Italian literature. The life of Pozzi, enjoying a renaissance in Italy, is a cultural story heretofore untold in the English language. Born in Milan in 1912, she lived a brief life, dying by suicide in 1938; none of her poetry was published during her lifetime. Though now emerging, her work is significantly underrepresented in translation.

Amy Newman is the author of five poetry collections, most recently *On This Day in Poetry History* (Persea Books, 2016) and *Dear Editor* (Persea Books, 2011). Her poems and essays have appeared in *The Kenyon Review*, *The Missouri Review*, *Poetry*, and elsewhere; her translations of Pozzi appear or are forthcoming in *Cagibi*, *Interim* and *Mantis*. She teaches in the Department of English at Northern Illinois University.

Saleh Razzouk is a writer and translator currently teaching at the University of Aleppo in Syria. Dr. Razzouk is a prolific translator of American poetry into Arabic.

Philip Terman's books of poetry include *The Torah Garden* (2011), *Rabbis of the Air* (2007), *Book of the Unbroken Days* (2005) and *The House of Sages* (1998). More recent publications include a new and selected poems, *Our Portion* (Autumn House Press, 2015); *My Dear Friend Kafka* (Ninwa Press, 2015); and *Like a Bird Entering a Window and Leaving Through Another Window* (2016).

Scott Minar's poems and essays have appeared in *The Paris Review*, *Poetry International*, *Crazyhorse*, *Ninth Letter*, *The Laurel Review*, *Kentucky Review*, *The Georgia Review*, *West Branch*, and other journals in the US and Canada.

Riad Salleh Hussein showed a talent for poetry at a young age. During his lifetime, three collections of poetry were published: *Failure of Circulation*, 1979; *Daily Legends*, 1980; and *Simple Like Water, Clear Like a Bullet*, 1982. The latter was published only five months prior to his death in 1982 at the age of 28.

Fern G.Z. Carr is a Full Member of and former Poet-in-Residence for the League of Canadian Poets. This Pushcart Prize nominee composes and translates poetry in six languages including Mandarin Chinese. Carr has been published extensively worldwide from Finland to Mauritius. Her poem, "I Am," was chosen by the Parliamentary Poet Laureate as Poem of the Month for Canada.

David Rock's poems have appeared in *Linden Lane*, *Chasqui*, *La Marca Hispánica*, *Oxford Magazine*, *Hiram Poetry Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, and others. He teaches Spanish at Brigham Young University-Idaho in Rexburg.

Leo Boix is published in the Bloodaxe anthology *Ten: Poets of the New Generation*. They have also been published in *Modern Poetry in Translation (MPT)*, *Litro*, *The Rialto*, *Magma Poetry*, *Minor Literature [s]*, *The Morning Star*, *Ink, Sweat & Tears*, *An Other Poem*, *Under the Radar*, *Panoplzyne*, and elsewhere.

Melanie Márquez Adams is the author of the short story collection, *Mariposas Negras [Black Butterflies]* (Eskeletra Editorial, 2017). Her fiction and nonfiction has appeared in *Aster(ix) Journal*, *Thrice Fiction Magazine*, *The Acentos Review*, *Nagari Magazine*, and *Literal: Latin American Voices Magazine*.

Ruba Abughaida's short story "The Sirocco Winds" won first prize in the Writer and Artists' Yearbook Historical Fiction competition in 2014. She has been published in *Inkapture Magazine*, *On the Premises*, *Noah Magazine*, *Wales Art Review*, *In Travel Magazine*, *The Rusty Nail*, *Squalorly* and *Sukoon Magazine*.