

**narrative (dis)continuities:  
prose experiments by younger  
american writers**



**KRISTINA MARIE DARLING. EDITOR**

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*editor:*

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## Forward

In recent years, the literary community has seen a dramatic shift in the status of the prose poem. Not only do hybrid works appear in such mainstream journals as *The Boston Review*, *The Indiana Review*, and *The New Yorker*, but these pieces are widely anthologized and taught in college courses. Yet most of us remember when their status as poetry was vehemently debated. Prominent critics like Louis Simpson, Dave Smith, and T.S. Eliot have all argued for the integrity of the line, presenting enjambment as necessary to the musicality of a poem. In this sense, hybrid writing offered a provocative challenge to literary tradition, a re-envisioning of the very definition of poetry.

With the continued professionalization of the creative arts, however, prose poems have become somewhat conventional. As the controversy surrounding them continues to dissipate, audiences are presented with anthology after anthology claiming a definitive canon of hybrid writing. In a relatively short period of time, this exciting genre has been transformed from a reaction against tradition to an establishment in and of itself. The younger writers selected for inclusion in this book represent the next generation of prose poets, who are attempting to recapture the sense of danger inherent in hybrid writing. Just as Baudelaire's *Paris Spleen* offered a formidable challenge to literary convention, each contributor subtly questions the boundaries prescribed for the genre by his or her predecessors.

As you peruse the stunning, formally innovative work included in *narrative (dis)continuities: prose experiments by younger american writers*, you'll notice that the prose poem has been re-imagined to suit both literary and non-literary influences, which encompass college term papers, popular journalism, and the mixed tapes that many of us made as teenagers. These writers inscribe their own boundaries, and with that, they create their own worlds. Although the texts in this book range from Kim Gek Lin Short's heavily footnoted narratives to Adam Field's poetic memoir, William

Allegrezza's image-laden prose paragraphs, and Kate Durbin's fictional interview with Marilyn Monroe, the reader will sense a certain unity among these vastly different pieces. They offer an exciting snapshot of the ways in which hybrid writing is being revised, modernized, and made dangerous once again.

—Kristina Marie Darling





WILLIAM ALLEGREZZA

**retaining the eye**

another line splatters, falls, and somehow we know the extent of the flashing is really intended to break the liquid flow spilling from beaded household doors alongside island aqueducts crumbling into hillside neighborhoods filled with schoolchildren where one trolley fires away into commerce and another lurches under sun to a peak of rest where i hope the scene imagined is enough to sustain a lone walker trying to fight off the binding thorn vines and passive stories that swell under, almost undetected, until they are the covering over that romanticize the purged eyes crafted of balsa in secrecy.

**tour dates**

i am the three a.m. rush—the belief that the myths of death are as comforting as those of life—the staggering argument that we like violence and thus destroy ourselves for joy through fear and anxiety to feel. i am the word through which we become but am unhinged from what i describe, and that is my momentary freedom, for around me voices repeat history's call for oblivion while i throw my arms around you and lull you to sleep.

ERIC BEENY

*Fled from Fainting, Flung Off the Wide-Awake*

Fled from fainting, flung off the wide-awake, a nursery, but to hide  
in untime, after we when calmly need that the whole fall premised  
by flawless thoughts wasn't real.

I continue the new scenery, and it looks, looking like a  
consequence, new-named, it seems to me, an autograph, signed  
here.

All, a new machinery, all good words, wheels turning, then  
spoke.

**Taproot**

I'm in love with you, so I think about your death: where I'll find you (bathroom, kitchen, fire escape), what you'll look like (stunned, resting, pleading, vigilant), if your eyes will be open or closed.

Because in these dreams (what else to call them?) I do find you (& isn't that preferable?), trekker on a solo expedition, the night black ice, the phone heavy in my hand.

There's a Navajo tradition involving a pocket knife & an upturned palm in which a word, meaning *warrior*, is written in blood on the body of the beloved just after death (was it forehead? was it chest?).

The palm of the living freshly wounded, the warrior is sent on her way, a badge, an offering, adorning her tired body.

Dear one, there is no way not to disappear.

The body lies down, finally, in exhaustion, &, simply, though hardly without effort, lends its shape back to the wet, black earth.

*Courage*, I'm reminded, comes from the Latin, has its roots deep set in the word for *heart*.

A bumper sticker says *Sustainability Is a Viable Option*.

And it is.

But how can it be?

What do we call out in one another? (Temper the weather in my bones.)

A car strikes a dog along the highway (sedan, retriever).

A man in an orange uniform reaches for a shovel, lifts the dog's body from the pavement, places him in a large plastic bag.

Later, he goes home, kisses lips belonging to a body he's known in both pleasure & in grief.

He takes their dog for a walk in the autumn air.

Repetition (habitual, mindful, gone entirely unnoticed) is a form of root-taking, the taproot holding on (*make it last, make it last*) for dear life.

### **Still Life with Blur around the Edges**

The first form of disavowal is omission. Consider the liquidity of a traffic jam, a swarm of bees. A mug full of steam & color, the viscosity of what the mug contains, a little of it spilling over

the lip. Always the mystery of what lies behind the red velvet curtain, the bewilderment of royal jelly, the controlled panic of lucid dreams.

The function of language is to draw likeness. The function of language is to cause division. A trace amount of skepticism is natural, often necessary. Arm yourself with what you know. 1)

Birds: peacocks have eyes on their tails; doves swallow grit to aid in digestion; the method of removing a turkey's backbone, of smashing down the bird as a preparatory move before roasting, is called spatchcocking. There is no understudy for water or for love.

Adroit, fur coarse & damp, a doe moves across the scene, oblivious. Our eyes four bottomless

Wells; we focus & wait, the spinning dumb between us. We stare lame & wondrous as she nuzzles the dirt for treasure, a crushed soda can laying flat & askew in the grass.

It was tonic water, the way she navigated the forest floor, simple divination. The knots gave way beneath our feet & then everything went dark. The knots gave way to reveal an entire world behind things, a realm complete unto itself, just enough tension to hold it all up, enough give all directions to keep it all from sudden & utter collapse. What tiny sacrifices go on within these walls? It was die-back, runoff, snowmelt in the land of drought. I'm three-fourths water. Dinner bells. A skirt of veldt. The dark of the matinee. Silence after a stranger coughs.

When we were swimmers, we breathed in & out & in from the delicate slits on our sides. When we were young, nothing mattered, nothing existed, But what lay, bare & unabridged, in front of us. All the world was tangible. Alert the cartographers, the weavers of incredulous dreams. A quart of water, a length of rope. I was raised among the cloistered. I have no delusions about your carefully buttoned shirt.

## **The Elegance & Danger of Desire**

The dream, lately: a stretch of veldt as backdrop to various large mammals—elephant, springbok, eland—and the aloe, the poultice & weaponry of its leaves, its red firework of a head, populating the hillside like so many firebrand nomads. You point to the leaves, call them teeth, fix on me a wild eye I've come so much to love, each red-plumed bouquet a lustful tongue hellbent on sky.

Our boots wear the dust of travel, & I taste salt, though the nearest ocean, by car, is hours away—rough & tumble Atlantic, Indian quiet & calm. There's no sign of drought, or rain, & the film in our cameras documents everything but what we choose to hide: a shin splint, a fistful of dirt, what's left over of the morning's sense of ruin.

Madcap, we two, & yet one foot always on the ground. You remove a layer, & I hum, the sky above a country unto itself. We watch as, suddenly, the ghost that wedged its head between us long ago abandons us for higher ground. It gallops up the mountainside, hobbling a bit, as if struggling to adjust to the newfound lightness of its body.

The terrain seduces even as it dismantles—the aloe standing at attention; a single calla lily among the blackened remains of a cigarette fire; a cape sugarbird resting on the orange anemone of a fynbos, its riding crop of a tail many times its body's size.

## The Great Ball on Which We Live

In order to move through the world less a ghost of yourself, you need to admit the truth. To do this, you need to know what words are missing from your mouth. And to locate those words, to free them from the rubble, give them that quick frisson, that sudden release, they've been craving, you need to do one of the following:

- 1) say nothing for long lengths of time, three hours maybe, a day if you're maverick or have extensive meditation training, or
- 2) talk to someone, yourself even, until the words fill your mouth like water swaying in a horse's belly.

Look. There are crooked hearts around every corner, & people walking about bent with broken ones. I know. But listen. There's a train coming. It's on its way from a city you've always wanted to visit. It's full of swans.

\* \* \*

It's been proven that cows that have been named produce more milk, on average, than cows that have not been given names.

What does this say about people?

\* \* \*

The word *blessing* has its roots deep in violence & adoration. Its original meaning is "to mark or consecrate with blood."

\* \* \*

The people I love I love not because they offer some measure of closure, resolution, some semblance of life the way it was before the bevel-edged weeds began gnawing their way through the yard.

Though they do. And I'm grateful.

I'm love-driven, blind, dumb to it, because their weight, each one, upsets the balance, keeps one foot planted in the wet earth, the other angled just so, prescient. In the distance, a dog does its steady barking, its small voice carried on the shoulders of the wind.

Now I understand: it's in the readying I depart, in the departure that, world weary, yes, eager, maladroit, I come home.

\* \* \*

When was the last time you felt untethered?

Tomatoes ripe on the vine, cleavage roaring in its cage: at midsummer, heat cracks the year in two, a tea light placed beneath a windshield.

*Bang.*

\* \* \*

You must be dogged & regularly on your knees if you're to make it in this world.

\* \* \*

There's a galaxy of light at the bottom of the sea, but to witness it, you risk claustrophobia, suffocation, drowning, acute loneliness. I hear it's worth it.

But since I lack the required experience, my salt sea is dried up, a desert of air, the night sky my ocean floor. On a clear night, Venus flashes her distant bulb, the sky a field of large mammals blinking their quiet eyes into morning.

\* \* \*

*The impulse to save something good for a better place later is the signal to spend it now. Something more will arise for later, something better. These things fill from behind, from beneath, like well water.*



\* \* \*

Impossibly, the Mississippi River watershed keeps one-third of the country alive.

\* \* \*

Suspended high above the blue earth in their tiny metal ships, astronauts have to exercise several hours a day to prevent their muscles from becoming rubber bands.

\* \* \*

Like any muscle, the heart is sure to break. And when it does, it doesn't crack in two or sag at the middle. It simply continues to beat, heavier than before.

And you'll let it happen:

\* \* \*

Because when you lifted your face to that brilliant glare, that plainsong light, that low, steady hum, the world fell away in panels. And you with it.

**EMMA BOLDEN**

**The Magician**

Her medicine was strange, tasted of shoe polish. I saw the wires sewn into her sleeves, the water spritzer built under the flower of her heart. I trusted anyway – a pale drift off in her breath's breeze, the soot of a city snoring in its own debris. I wanted her as angel. She balanced a halo over her head for me. I needed her, a shrine: her toes ten small rubies, her eyes lights bright in their sockets. The feathers weren't what I expected, but I did not question her wings.

**Sorrowful Mysteries**

How many funerals without flowers, how many monsters shift their weight in the deeps no light has seen – blood muscle, a red rose pumping. Life is precious and pointless. The crocus raises its proud head for snow to scissor off. Birds build nests in the blizzard's blank path. Life is the black snake's white mouth, the silver line on an angel's wing. This is my finger on your hand, this is your image dying on my eye.

### **Conversation and the Receiving Line**

He appraised her eyes and deemed her m'am. He bartered for her elbows, settled a good price.

She must seem cordial. She must seem happy to be. She receives her name and is passed on to him. She is given felicitations, a gown. She is zipped into his arms. She is given a tall glass of whiskey. Her teeth are filed down to stubs.

Quite honestly she does not know Sundays, nor does she stop a draft under the door.

She will listen to his robber's blues, she'll learn a lesson for curious hands. She will sit for a spell in a dome of rosed night, nightingale and song. She will want to learn a throat like that. She will have morning, frost and snow. She will carve for him a silver set of keys.

When she sings mistaken, he tempers her with a kick.

Give her stockings and needles, a pinked handkerchief. Give her old maps and silver, floral wallpaper, glue. Give her serving dishes, salad forks, spoons. Give her the glass slipper stained ruby, a wood box filled with knocking, the fair maiden's small heart.

### **Reasons to Fear a Birthday**

Fear of fire. Fear of frosting. Fear of the plastic cup, teeth bubbling blue within. Fear of the stroller with toddler included. Fear of the white dress, zipper let out after six months'

snacking through mothers' advice. Fear of salted nuts, of lime sherbet punch. Fear of crustless triangular sandwiches, boxes of china, baskets of diapers and baby lotion. Fear of the husband below six bottles of beer. Fear of the fence gate stuck yawning like a teenager. Fear death by mortgage. Fear the toothbrush bristling towards its new companion. Fear strange old women swarming your swollen belly by the broccoli. Fear cold cuts, brown bags, lunches trashed at school. Fear the lover downgraded to t-shirts and sweatpants. Fear the roof that drools in the rain. Fear Crisco and canned ham. Fear quarter-priced coffee. Fear forgetting your own tongue, your left hand.

**To Krista:**

When you found me I was carving up a tree, yet you never asked me *what* I was carving. To my relief, you never took a closer look at the formula. Instead you grabbed my hand and told me to close my eyes before the ash crept in to spoil my visions. You led me away to the way. Still, I couldn't ever really say *where* this picture originated. I could smell the forest burning all around us—green-swirling patterns revealed intricate thoughts—you took the lead. When my mind paled to a losing-white, you whispered *it's best to keep thinking whatever you're thinking, because those thoughts are bound to change you in some way, eventually*. Once I had rusted the thoughts, I reminded myself about the act of transmutation (though I am only a novice, at most), and wondered...if I went to running my hands over the lumped roots beneath my feet, then maybe I too could sprout up and outward like an UMBRELLA—over you, mother, father, and the red rail that transports Sickness between us. That's when I began to feel things, Fears, shifting on the shelves inside of me, sparking three questions (like sudden prophesies): *What is a fist of flowers? Were there thorns between my mother's teeth? Is there an acceptable routine to be had in the greater darkness?* Then I remember what you had once said about the nature of dreams, and how some dreams ascend from summer bonfires. Well, it's set! But, what happens when we are dead and buried? Will we ever feel the weight of people passing over our fingernails?

Melting: "Your father is not a shadow yet," you said. I asked, "when?" Only after I smiled aloud did you tell me what that smell was—the forest was never really burning. Only later would you begin to warn me about the powers of the great red rail. Then I asked, "Well, *why* can't we define what this RED RAIL *really* is? Would there be some relief from acceptance if we understood?"

*There will be many clinking sounds to come—more dreams, more wine, more quarters, more fire, and the greater darkness—and there will be boxes to retrieve. But, not now, no...for now we should try to define and hold on-to specific things. My mother once told me that the only OBJECTS worth a damn were the ones that could be gripped in the palm of your hand. “Don’t be so damn abstract, Zachary!”* **Let’s see what happens with a compass.**

**Witness—**

I watched Krista take a thunderaxe to the great red rail and split it open like a banana belly under pressure. From the fissure seeped voices that had been long-trapped beneath the cold surface. Voices: ‘This rail is a magnet.’ ‘What is the color of my magnesium orbit, Jessica Rabbit?’ ‘This rail will cut through *anything*, un-defining sounds; even fears!’ ‘The author’s middle name is Cecil,’ ‘This red rail will take you away...see?’ ‘I thought the tumor was a pecan in disguise, but...’ And, the voices seared Memory, and now I’ve got too far to be pegged by unbridled seeds. I fear signs, always have. Get that out of my face, please! I see a penny vibrating inside a glass. I hear the waves in between. There is now a single voice. I can smell it—“FORRRASH...FORRRNASH!!!”—coming from the screaming man; the faceless and anonymous screaming man. Though there were a few fleeting hunts, this voice is not that of the dancing bear—paralyzed in effect. There is a secret that has been revealed. The secret has been snatched back away from us. The bear is.....This voice is curled up like a tongue and it stands (figuratively) for all of the things that tongues typically stand for these days. Wait. Even tongues have changed over time. Everything happening to us, to me, happens now. THE FUTURE IS NOW! This tongue is actually a flame, see (truth be told), and it

is the same flame that I watched prong-puncture the walls of my childhood home and gut it like the inside of a whale. This flame nearly charred my family to dust (though we all survived to inherit this Sickness), and ash filled up the silent corners of each and every shadow. Then a rail was built where many lives had once danced before the greater darkness. And then the voice disappeared like a mosquito in a tornado and I watched.

Footnotes to a Victorian Novel

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1. An unpublished vignette, in which the heroine believes her voice is trapped inside her mother's gold cigarette case.
2. Within the foyer, an odd stillness. Upon finding him she hid the laudanum in a cabinet of dried violets and tiny silver spoons. Her unmindful stare.
3. "It was only after that I realized the gravity of the situation. Out of my jewelry box the most delicate insect emerged, its ominous buzzing."
4. Stifle:
  1. To quell, crush or end by force.
  - †2. To suppress or withhold.
  3. To kill by impeding respiration; to smother.
5. In a little known version of the myth, Penelope realizes that her household has been usurped by the maids. Each disconcerted by her new posture. A chorus rising from their cool white throats.
6. Again the hidden Faustian motif. Despite numerous descriptions of the empty field, one senses the ubiquitous presence of the sea.
7. *Denouement*. Translated quite literally as "the action of untying."



8. This film version of Gaskell's *North and South* (c. 1986) depicts Margaret as an elderly widow. Although its nameplate was shattered during production, the statuette remains among the museum's special collections.

9. See also *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature*.

### Footnotes to a History of Architecture

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1. Three of the darkest rooms, long since cordoned off from visitors.

2. Here she would hang the portraits one by one, straightening their tiny wooden frames. Her delicate hands.

3. "I wanted to preserve the sequence, its faultless order. From the corridor I heard him sing the last notes of *Orphée et Eurydice*. But beyond my window, the most pristine snow."

4. *Cornice*.

1. The uppermost part of a classical entablature

†2. Any of various ornamental bands, most often for concealing.

‡3. To furnish or finish.

4. A mass of snow, ice, etc., projecting over a mountain ridge.

5. The frieze depicts a series of attempts to stave the avalanche. Despite several recent excavations, the lower portion of the piece remains obscured.
6. According to Spiro Kostof, author of *Settings and Rituals*, the building is itself a daguerreotype of the inhabitant. Thus volition could be said to function in much the same way as silver and mercury.
7. Because each house contains a hidden staircase, leading only to a set of empty rooms, one would classify Zembla as the most introspective of these snowbound empires.
8. Translated from the Russian as *dissonance*. Meaning the disparity between interior and exterior.
9. As a result, the girl suffered from a rare form of claustrophobia. Every night she sought a new cathedral. Even the grandest arcades leaning towards her.
10. Note the tiny doves etched into every marble balustrade.
11. Compare, in this case, to an inland sea.

### **An Introduction to the Lyric Ode**

8. Let each room grow dim. Note the confluence of evening and a thousand unopened black umbrellas.
7. Thus, we see the connection between lyric transcendence and place.

- a. In an effort to balance desire with restraint, the Romantics were said to take their opium in a field of poppies.
- b. "And it was only then that the most unusual bird would emerge, singing."  
*Where exactly? And how?*  
"In the meadow. It was when you were sleeping, so the thistles were out of season."  
*But what sort of event was it, precisely? I don't understand the occasion, or the light catching in every darkened window.*
- c. The beloved should be accompanied by a euphony of tiny silver bells.

6. For the work to succeed, one must recognize the difference between life and art. In other words, partaking in a lush pastoral scene is not the same as observing it.

5. "Now my covetous eye casts over you, taking you apart. I'd like a trophy of you for each room of the house."

4. *Subjective:*

- a. Occurring within the individual psyche as opposed to the external world.
- b. Relating to the nature of something; essential.

3. Within the narrative, a disconcerting stillness. That was when she wandered the unlit house, a heavy fog drifting through all the windows. Her glass of water still shimmering on the nightstand.
2. A hollow murmur. Every violet burned to the ground.
1. "I have overtaken you."

NICK DEMSKE

### Naughty Mudflap Silhouettes

Paparazzi-flash volcanics. A blockbuster. A showstopper. By virtue a pyrotechnician. Organized sky fire. A sheet of tinfoil blasts sunlight goliaths. *Me Likey*. The fireworks snap flashbulb magica. The Beauty Star likes shiny things. Flapper damsels decked in sequins. Towering junkyard metallics. The Beauty Star likes flashy things. Electric storms and tripping balls and bling cacophonies abating excess cilia. Go, Shorty. It's your birthday. May your sun be blown out like a cakeload o' candles. May your jazzercise class's spandex glisten a Hollywood sheen. Why does this screen's flicker hypnotize you so, dear? What primitive instinct has it refomented? The Beauty Star watches lightning through the screen door. The news cast in the next room warns of a sudden deluge. I know the knife is bad for me, but it glints so Vangogh in my nightlight. The Beauty Star likes shiny things for their abrupt reflections. It displays its naughty bits to unexpected, innocent bystanders. Smile for me, daddy. Spread eagle lips, like curtains, drawn back to flash bazooka tooth supernova. The sun catapults like a flash of mad cameras. I won't be alive till I'm blind.

### Glory Glory

Show me your asterisks, the silky mullets of scintillation trailing from that comet. Show me your pentagrams, the blurred convexity broadcasts deemed more obscene than murder, or crack addicts, or four centuries and counting. I do love them hoes, which is oh so ungangster. I want to gazelle rush the soul barren world, but am

stymied by gauntlet bazoombas. Starfucker, when will this culture's redeemer be free of its standards of beauty? The topless sunrise sizzles. Show me your blackest of halleluja holes. Show me your celestial body double, spreading all ten of its legs. With these hooker hooves we teeter upon, who questions why our money maker shakes so polaroid picturesque? Sphincter is fancy for buttohole. The difference between sodomy and intercourse is one of them feels especially good. Donkey punch me until I see, Starfucker. Stumpgrinder flashdance your Vonnegut footnote, pushing on a pull at the entrance of the A-list. Skeetly deetly deet. The homemade video leaked. Starfucker hottentot video vixen. The softcore sun rises like a big, fat you-know-what. The winking glory holes of night spit flirtation's folly. Beautystar, fireball, climb the sky's shoulders, peel the tank top from your torso. Melt the arctic from our bosoms. Show me your new day has come.

**Our Marilyn(s): Interview**

*I'm always running into people's subconscious.* —Marilyn Monroe

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO NORMA JEAN

When I was a girl, that's what they called me. Now everyone wants to know where little candy pop Norma Jean ran off to. That pauper princess no one turned a head at twice, who got left in all the foster homes, and never raised a hand in school but still got passing grades.

Nothing, I say. Nothing happened to her. So she changed her name, got a dye job, moved to Hollywood.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE IN THE ORPHANAGE

I had to wash dishes all day. One hundred earned me a nickel, as long as I didn't drop one. I still remember the nun looming over me in her dark habit, the grease that made the plates slip from my fingers.

Every crash, my mother leaving me on those stone steps over and over...

## WHEN DID YOU FIRST KNOW YOU WANTED TO BE A STAR

Always, I wanted to be in pictures. For my name to dazzle the marquee set a washed-out Hollywood sky to Technicolor.

## TELL US ABOUT MODELING

People think modeling's not work, that beauty's a passive thing. The opposite is true. I don't wish to be a garbage bin for people's desires, *only* a body—so I've worked with every

photographer who's ever shot me. Movement is key. To capture the body in gesture is to reveal its truest quality, its aliveness—

it's the spirit of the person, always shifting.

## WHAT WAS IT LIKE IN THE ORPHANAGE

I'd stare out my little window at the back of Fox Studios, across a dirt lot—that ocean I couldn't cross.

I'd dream of being a star, so my audience would love me because I couldn't, and my mother and father didn't. Nobody but you, though you didn't know it yet...

## WHAT DO YOU WEAR TO BED



I've always slept in the nude. So do lots of people. I love the touch of silk sheets, the wind sneaking in the window on summer evenings like a secret lover.

I don't believe in shame. It's not exposure I'm after—it's the bare minimum. I want the world to know the skin I'm in, for my skin to know this world before it's gone. Flesh is the most genuine meeting point any of us have got.

#### WHAT WAS IT LIKE IN THE ORPHANAGE

I knew then you would be father, mother—my deepest lover. I'd be your ice cream...

Good? I see your ecstatic tears.

#### DID YOU EVER DO IT WITH AN EXECUTIVE TO GET A PART

Sure, I've been with producers. Name one star actress who hasn't, and I'll show you another liar. Just because I've made it with people I didn't love—and it's not for you to know which ones I did—doesn't mean I don't deserve my success.

It also doesn't mean I never came.

#### LIFE MUST HAVE BEEN DIFFICULT WITHOUT A MOTHER

I have a mother. She's in an asylum. I suppose that means someday I'm going to split open and butterflies will flitter out. Or houseflies.

I don't understand why some people get to call others "insane."  
Isn't it a little bit nuts to push people into rooms without windows?

A or B, sugar, tell me, (what *they* say)—you Norma Jean today, or  
you Marilyn Monroe?

What I want to know is, where'd the rest of the alphabet run off  
to?

WHY DID YOU LIE ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE AS AN  
ORPHAN

Sometimes the public demands a bare bones beginning, to excuse  
the full-flesh woman who emerges.

YOU ARE ALWAYS REINVENTING YOURSELF. WHICH  
MARILYN IS THE REAL ONE

I put on a new suit and they asked, is this a new Marilyn?

No, I said, this is a new suit.

YOU HAVE BEAUTIFUL EYES, MARILYN

They're my mother's. Light and filled. Eyes unable to hide. I've  
always been grateful for the camera's filter, to mask the blood after  
a bad night.

SO YOU BECAME THIS WAY, BECAUSE YOU DIDN'T  
HAVE A FATHER

Then I am symbol, public property, too hot to tame...because I  
didn't have Daddy, to kiss my head to bed?

Clark Gable is Marilyn Monroe's father. I will to be loved by my  
public, like he is. To make mine a shared dream.

MARILYN

Sugar?

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE A SEXUAL ICON

A sex icon is a thing. I'd rather be nothing, if I had to choose. Do I  
have to?

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE STILL CAMERA

It's a form of grace. Capturing that which is already lost. A  
butterfly's wings in mid-beat. Me on the movie set, mouth open in  
a laugh—radiant in the light of thirty-six birthday candles.

DID YOUR MOTHER LOVE YOU

Yes, but with an anorexic's love. I was starving too, so I turned to the world, that endless smorgasbord.

#### WHAT ABOUT LOSING YOUR LOOKS

I'd like to grow old geographically, to let my face sink into whatever folds and ridges time has given it. Like an old mountain, set deep into the earth. Well loved by sun and wind and snow, and by those granted to see great distances from her heights.

#### WHY ALL THIS TROUBLE MAKING IT TO THE MOVIE SET ON TIME

I carry a burden too large for one person to hold. It pushes everything down, like too much gravity. When night enters my room I hear all those voices telling me how inadequate I am, making it hard to enter the silence of sleep.

The pills help a little—my blue and red friends. They don't demand a thing. Like a nurse, saying: shhh, sugar, it's okay to go away now, retreat, if you need to. I'll make sure the lights get switched off; I'll keep watch on this dark city until dawn.

#### WE'VE HEARD ABOUT THE "HYSTERICAL" PREGNANCIES, THE MANY MISCARRIAGES, THE FOURTEEN-PLUS ABORTIONS...WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SAY FOR YOURSELF

In one breath, they say I made movies and killed my babies. My shelves filled with dusty film reels; my insides a collection of hemorrhaging scars.

A or B, sugar—whip out those metal tongs. I'm taking C through Z and running.

#### WHAT IS IT YOU WANT

Moving pictures are my life's great dare. When they flop, they are shameful, but when they succeed, they are truer than life. They demand an actor's core. Taking all, they promise nothing back.

When that blank lens points at me, I see my shell reflected—it shrinks or grows according to the one looking through, whether that person is friend, or bystander. I become either a blossom watered by kind hands, or a seed left to dry in too-bright sun.

*Be sexy, dear Marilyn*, they often instruct. As if sexy were a static state. As if it were *all*.

I *am*. But what the audience wants isn't just animal attraction. It's their selves. Existence in another body, another voice. That's a gift, you know, to be able to give that to someone. To say yes, I see you, and this is what it's like, isn't it? Here, take my hand, it's yours.

#### DON'T YOU EVER GET SCARED

I'm afraid. I'm also brave. Are you?



(*Cue*                      *'s...*)

*Wait*, she says, from the doorway, as we are about to turn the key in the engine, our notebook tossed in the backseat. She sprints down the sun-stained path. Even the roses stand at attention. Still a starlet, cameras whirring to seize each sensuous advancement, she appears as a woman hounded. What role is this?

At our car, she proffers a delicate hand. But instead of the touch we hunger for, she grips our open window until her knuckles turned paler than her already-pallid skin.

This is our cue, our infinity in the white light, but we are paralyzed by this glossy cherry, so near on the branch.

Her arms, onscreen so supple, are muscular. And though we think there should be, there are no tears (how we thirst for that sweet wet).

*I love a good joke as much as anyone*, she says, and we begin to laugh but she is not done:

*Don't make me one.*

**Mrs. O'Connor**

The matriarch's children wouldn't milk a cow to save her from hell and the help won't pick up anything but stones big enough to break a window. Also, an animal emerges from the river to devour the shoats. The child living with the codger has never heard a woman's voice or profited from this experiment. Everyone else is stupid and cruel except for the young man who stops to ask for water and agrees to stay for supper and never touches his fork or gawks at the girl like last week's bible salesman did, as if her nose and tongue had been cut out instead of just her eyes, who even asks to walk with her on the violet hillside you can see from the parlor, which the matriarch takes as a good sign because she buries her sons there. He keeps trying to carry her for fear she'll fall. He asks if he can guess what she's thinking so they can have a conversation. He's been wandering the highway for days since his daddy's funeral and it's lucky that this August is clotted with raspberries. He says, "Here, take and feel this. It'll be like the sunset for you." And she fingers the gold and red embroidery on the funeral handkerchief that she realizes he's managed to keep clean and you both begin to fall in love with him and he trips her down the far side of the hill, out of sight of the matriarch who is shucking peas with another woman she calls nigger and the young man stuffs her mouth with his hanky and you wonder what it's like in Georgia today.

## The Curse

The sun arose like a grand, avenging melon, come to make us pay for relishing its brood. I struck the golf ball as a formality. My family had exempted me from the scoring component after I had attempted to croquet the first hole. House rules also forbade any kind of defense. Sheila, the taxidermist, approached me at the lady's tee. "I could do those," she said, nodding at the mallards ruffling the cattails. The club sultan hollered at us to get started. I struck another ball into the pond, which seemed to satisfy him. "Perfect," Sheila said, teeing up, "just a little higher." "Are you doing okay?" Aunt Holly said. "It *looks* like you're really struggling out there." "Am I?" I said. "Yes," she said, "you are." "He's doing fine," Uncle Muscle said. "Don't listen to him," Holly said. "Here, have some of my juice. Oops, just a sip. It is *my* juice." "Quit making out and get in the goat car," Jeffrey said. He was the child actor of the family. It felt like he had spilled some of his juice on my cushion. Nobody discussed my aptitude once we were coursing the lime turf, Uncle Muscle jostling us along as was his right he informed us after registering Holly's complaints. The golf cart mewled and Jeffrey offered me a smoke. I smiled at him, placing the cigarette I had selected in my breast pocket. "That's not how you do it," he said. I nodded. Something thumped on the canopy protecting us from the sun's vengeance and the cart quivered like a kick drum. "Hold on," Uncle Muscle yelled, as if he had been expecting the impact and devising the appropriate evasive maneuver, which turned out to be pointing the cart at a soggy depression and burrowing it there. Water spun in the wheel wells and sluiced the interior with a grassy vomit. "Why?" Jeffrey said, positioning himself as the incredulous inquisitor. "Yes," Holly said, "why?" "Is everybody okay?" Uncle Muscle said. He squirmed toward Holly and began groping her. I stepped out with a plop. The sun was upon me. They argued about how to extricate the cart. Holly and Jeffrey said to drive backwards. Uncle Muscle checked the depth with his seven iron. A pinecone rested in the frothy wake we had cut. It looked like one of those big ones. The really big ones. "Hey, what you got there, fella?" Uncle Muscle said. I held up the pinecone. "Quit fondling the wildlife and get back in the goat car," Jeffrey said. I assumed he had to talk like



that in order to stay in character. I looked up. The sky was naked, blue as Krishna. The sun beat like an evil heart. Uncle Muscle capitulated and put the cart in reverse, draining its hold. "See?" Holly said. I got in and Uncle Muscle drove straight through the slop again, I imagined, to spite her. "See, you," he said and bounced on his cushion. The fairway resumed to its high-speed shine. Jeffrey declined to examine the pinecone. "Give it here," Holly said and turned it over, testing a spine against her thumb. She shuddered and tossed it back into the world. "It's cursed," she said and looked at me. "Either it's cursed or you are."

From *Held*

XVI.

For the first time  
in my life, I felt  
I had everything—

I was writing songs  
under the influence  
of Nick Drake,  
and of being in love—  
many were among my best ever—

*Where go all your Romeos  
when your bed becomes a grave?  
Where go all your Romeos  
when all your sunshine's gone away?  
Where go all your Romeos  
when you're stranded in your mind?  
Where go all your Romeos  
when all your love gets left behind?*

I played “Where Go”  
for Steve on a bright  
spring morning outside  
Runkle, wearing my  
Warnock Commons  
shirt; “mind-blowing”—

I'd be working at Warnock  
another summer, take  
a few classes, but  
most excitingly, I'd be  
staying in an indie rock house on  
south Atherton Street—  
home of "Gerb," conquering hero—

Chris and Emily  
prom King/Queen  
of indie State  
College also—

(ridiculously, Emily looked exactly like Jen and Justine)

Unfortunately, it was  
a big house, there were  
also several skate-punks,  
malcontents fucked up,  
always, on something—

In the room next mine,  
a blonde girl I heard  
getting banged every  
night, I didn't mind—

Jen came up to see me  
(to prepare, I did sex-ercises  
to a Marilyn Monroe  
poster, it worked)

I had no bed, so we

rolled around on a beige-carpeted floor—

One warmish night  
I was banging Jen  
the same time the

girl next door was  
getting it, we were  
a chorus of moaners—

(Steve came up to see me too, can't remember much about his  
visit)

Yet I was starting to feel strange—  
I had this sense of an infinity  
beyond my mundane  
perceptions, of boundlessness  
interfering with my daily functioning—

I went to the Center County Mall  
with Jen, I kept thinking “this  
could be anywhere, I could  
be anyone,” as if I were  
consciously entering the Collective Unconscious—

it was a lot like acid was  
(so I'd heard), I began  
to think that  
the communal fridge  
held (my) items acid-spiked—

skate-punks were (and are) notorious for doing that—

stripped of armor,  
I couldn't function—  
walked out of  
Warnock in the  
middle of a shift—

freaked out when I  
couldn't find the  
rooms where my  
classes were—

I was paranoid that everyone (in State College)  
was privy to a great secret  
that I had no access to—

meanwhile, Adam, my  
new friend, made a tape  
of me singing the new  
Drake-influenced songs  
on a four-track—

I spent a few nights  
hanging with him,  
his friends getting  
smashed, I looked  
at the cover of his  
Bryter Layter, Drake  
was a were-wolf—

This is when it started to get seriously spooky—

I was sleepless, there were  
pictures of the Beatles, Stones  
on my wall, I had a vision  
of Jagger's face decaying—

I had a few plastic Buddhas,  
I “flew them around the room,”  
thought I was unveiling deep  
mystic truths; this climaxed  
when I decided to call Bob  
Field, which I did, told him  
I was on acid; to this day I

have no idea what he made  
of the situation; I played him  
“Here Comes the Sun” on  
guitar; later I wept, thinking

of Siddhartha (I had been reading  
Hesse the whole time),  
how much I had suffered through—

there was one peak moment  
after a crying jag, when I  
sat in the window  
(this was late afternoon, but  
I'd been up for days) listening  
to Big Star's “Daisy Glaze,”  
thought I had entered  
para-nirvana, complete empty ecstasy achieved—

Yet when I'd walk down College Ave,  
I thought everyone was a vampire,  
I was wheeling out of control,  
Emily seemed to sense that something  
was amiss, I saw her by the Apple Tree—

it was like I was pure nerve,  
a turtle sans shell, living on  
a level so raw that contact of  
any kind was overwhelming—

eventually, I broke down,  
got a cab to come, take  
me to a hospital, I  
knew I was cracking up,  
Jen and Steve were far away—

a god-damned  
ambulance, even

in the midst of  
delusion I thought  
it looked bizarre  
outside an indie house—

I really had no idea  
what the fuck was  
going on, other than to know  
it was bonkers—

**Birds and Papers**

She stirs the sugar into her coffee with a small spoon found on the table. The man reads his paper. She stares out the window where a small nest of birds has almost toppled from the oak branch, eggs held loosely, near lost with another slip in angle. The man reads his paper. She stretches, silently at first and later with the sort of sounds that resemble muted moans through a wind tunnel--fascinated by the shadow left by his paper on the table, so small and black compared to the larger newsprint mask that crinkles and mutates in black and white before her. The man reads his paper. On the table, she slides the stack of documents she has cared for and handled towards him and then toys with the soft, almost baby-like skin of her finger where a ring once sat--not long ago either--the flesh moist and pale as if no one should have seen it this way. It will need to toughen up, as she will need to toughen up. She goes to the window, watching the nest, wondering when the next sweep of strong September wind will send the whole thing hurtling to the ground and whether, by then, the small birds will have broken through eggs to escape it. The mother bird goes to sit on the nest. Millimeters of safety are gained as it moves to a slightly safer position. But the mother bird sits silently on the eggs, seemingly impervious. Though a songbird, she does not sing. There is too much exhaustion, perhaps? Does she think: hatch, hatch, hatch already? The man reads his paper. His head is bent. To the woman, with his eyes shut off to her as they have been for months, he does not appear familiar in the slightest. He looks like a big black cat who can jump very high. One who has been napping. She endures a sudden urge to kick at him from under the table. Instead, she says only, pointing to the paper he was not reading, "Sign."



## CLAIRE HERO

### **what we saw from the ruined house**

In the beginning, flies. A horizon the color of gasoline. & what was burning went on burning.

The earth was a slag. The invasion kudzued the house & we who were left sucked the weedy rind & huddled in our dark. & the river watched us with its compound eye, & the sea gorged itself on plastic & blubbered onto the shore, & pig lagoons broke from their pens & shat upon the earth. The earth was a mouth, & something belched forth—

A breedy rain, & the earth star opened, ray by ray, to reveal its great stomach. & I crawled inside. & I waited to be born. & the spores spoke into my ears in their small animal voices & each word was a hypha I wove & wove together. Into a burl. A bolus. A fruiting body.

I donned the fruiting body & was change. I moved about the earth quiet as a virus.

### **inside Dolly**

Sometimes the fleece falls open & I see inside Her. Her wreckage of ribcage & gearshift. Her factory of small parts. Conduit & spool. Ships full of things that gnash in the hold. Sometimes the fleece falls open & I see a dazzle of pasture. A needle & a wound. Sometimes the fleece falls open & I see inside Her the red house. The red house squats on the edge of a dark forest & every window

burns. Burns so I feel it inside me, inside my cells. Dolly smells foetid, foxed. She smells of scorched oil & wet metal. Sometimes the fleece falls open & I put my eye to the window. In one room I spy the dark forest, but bonsai-ed, clipped to knee height. In one room a feral thing, matted & pink. She is crouching on the body of an animal & she is peering through the fleece. The animal on the floor grows smaller each time the feral thing blinks. The animal on the floor opens its mouth & it looks shiny inside, silver as a chute, & animals are coming through, one by one. They are small, these animals, no larger than seeds, no larger than droplets of spittle. They are coming down the chute one by one & their eyes roll white, their feet skid in the blood at the foot of the chute. & I am waiting at the end. I am waiting in the window of Dolly with the knocker in my hand.

### **sucking Dolly**

It is night, & the lambs on the body of Dolly sleep. Such Hungry we have never been. It is night, & the milky stars mock us, up there, milky on the fleece of Night, a milky crown for Dolly. & she falls upon Dolly with her blind mouth. With our terrible mouths we fall & suckle the greatly Teat. & the white Milk pools in our mouths, & the white milk Wools our blunted Tongues. Wools our tongues & so wools our Eyes. Wool-blind, I watch the milk fleece my veins until I'm sheep-tracked. Frontiered. Pasturage upon which the Dollys graze their white invasions. We will fatten ourselves on the Milk of Dolly, & the Forests will kneel before us that we may put them in our Mouths. In our mouths we will Gnaw the forests to the root, we will Cud the forests with an outlaw Tooth. In our mouths we will Succor them, here in the Shadow of Dolly, here in the white waste of Dolly.

## hoard

What won't survive such weight. We wander among the piles, touching each broken thing. The buried bed. An empire of trash. & when we unearth the terrible baggage, I want to laugh. There's a dead child at the root of this. A boy, a strangling cord. A shovel can reveal the strata, the thin corridors between years & what runs along them. Would that we could hoard even this life, its meatbones & mildew, but where to place your hands among such boxes. When the son says of his mother, *I'm not even sure she's human anymore*, I want to laugh. The gloves & the masks. What more can be plundered from the quarries of grief. Every closet, packed. *This is what the inside of me looks like*, she says. Something small skitters through, seeking safety. The loaded pistol, lost. The lower teeth.

## DONORA HILLARD

### Lemons

I found a poem written by the teenage girl you almost slept with. She mentioned you licking lemon juice off of her feet and giggling, an event which never actually happened. I'm grateful, though one of the first things you said to me was that you had been in love and thought she was a genius. I just wanted you to shut up and tongue my bellybutton.

You said that you had talked to her every day for a long time until she was stolen from you by a boy she had hidden in her closet. You said you cried so loud that you were overheard and cut yourself. I've licked the scar. Your friend, who has a tattoo of Buddha somewhere, said you barely made it. He also said he would slit my throat if I hurt you.

You later said that she sounded like a robot during phone sex and you thought the blood she sent you wasn't real. In response to this, I sent you an entire page smeared with mine. When we met, I put my feet on the ceiling of your car. My nails were the color of milk. You could see all of the bones. You held them in your hands until my sobbing stopped.

## BRANDI HOMAN

### Welcome to Bobcat Country

We drove to the border just to say we pissed in the Mississippi River, six in a car to see whether a Lifesaver makes a spark. We danced in the headlights.

We had sex with boyfriends at the funeral home, slept with the gym teacher. Snuck into the hot tub at the Holiday Inn. Watched porn at Niemeyer's and went swimming and swimming and swimming, held each other underwater too long.

Our mothers chain smoked, our fathers came straight home. Everyone spoke the same language. Everyone felt the layoffs.

We taught gymnastics at the Y, sunned on rooftops, watched MTV in the basement.

We rode our mopeds to Burger King, ate cheese curds at Totem Bowl. We sucked on Atomic Fireballs, gobbled Runts by the handful.

We waterskied at Okoboji in bikinis too big for our bodies. Were thrown over shoulders, rode piggy-backed, played chicken.

We waited outside the counselor's office trying to make the phone ring. We moved in and out of lockers. We spit things.

We bought blue Wet-n-Wild nail polish, purple mascara, wished for an extra quarter for Banana Yellow. We got our ears double-pierced.

We detasseled corn for Agri-Pro, Pioneer. Worked ice cream stands, gave friends free footlongs, sang Guns N' Roses songs.

We touched each other over our jeans. We celebrated six-month anniversaries, bought promise rings. We drove on the wrong side of the road with the lights out.

We went to every home football game, scooped the loop, peed in parking lots. We laughed hysterically and guessed who was having their period.

We didn't know for certain that others had lives that weren't like ours. We read *Sweet Valley High*.

We carved initials into our ankles, rode to funerals in pick-up trucks. We knew the deceased all our lives, whose dad beat who, whose sister got locked in the dog kennel.

Our mothers read Ann Landers and took naps in the afternoon, watched TV from a stool next to the kitchen counter.

We drove to Planned Parenthood, picked wedding colors. We listened to gangster rap in the stock room, ate at Perkins and Perkins and Perkins.

We drank in the barn, the backyard, the back room, the bedroom, the haunted house where they filmed *Twister*. We had the highest teen alcoholism rate in the state.

We let our hair bleach dry, took naps on towels, snapped pictures of our private parts. Talked on the phone for hours, ignored the flashing porchlights.

We shot each other with bottle rockets, drove T-top Trans Ams.

We ate salad bar with our grandmothers and dreamed in waterbeds with tiger-striped sheets.

We avoided the meat-packing plant, walked the train tracks. The only 22-year-old left in town bought us beer.

We promised we'd never tell. We believed everything we said.

**Body Logic**

Next I started growing real tall and then very short. While I was tall people could never see me whole; while I was small they couldn't see me at all.

You've told me already, girls, that you know what it feels like for your bodies to whirl out of control. You told me not to make it a metaphor this time—not to say something like *like an errant bottle-rocket*—and so I didn't, not for so long, but now I'm convinced that that's what the body's there for.

On short days my belly would be round and full, and on tall days it would implode. I had off-days and on-days, like I'd invented a new cycle.

I wondered aloud: *Is this fame practice? Am I going to be made famous?*

And then I realized everyone else felt it, too—the glimmer of celebrity beneath the breastbone.

And then I remembered the reunion, when each Catholic schoolwoman confessed she'd thought *she* would be the one to wake as a virgin with child, to carry the Messiah straight into the new century.

Remember how they told you you were special, and then special but not-special at the same time, and then it was up to you to decide?

At first I understood a lot of things about my body, but later I could not believe in them at all.

**Shadow Boxes**

Let's build a fire. A shifting location. A change of wind and I can smell myself. Like something foreign. And into the fuller fascination. I can see the Chrysler Building from the window of the subway car on the bridge. I would measure the distance between us footwise. I would pull this poem from you with my whole body. Beneath your bright palms my breasts might become a reality. While my hands, full of acreage. Are budding outside your open. Third story window. The dancers push their painted feet across the page.

I don't remember you putting even one finger inside. Me: these burn blotches, the dresses I wore. An example of the body. The body wants what the body. Wants. Is it so emblazoned? Is it possible to be in a garden and not be in Italy? Each night we managed to consume. Two lobsters each. Apple pie *à la mode*. We embellished the margins with the city. To wake up every morning forgetful. City of fedoras. You



might say it was trusting but you would  
veer wrong. Somewhere, the city of.  
Shaking bedbones. All I want now are  
your birds. All of them.

Have you ever seen a pecan grove? That  
was the one time I've been arrested in my  
life. The wet grass like drunkards. A *fleur  
de lys* of feeling. It was pressed. I was  
kicking. The comforter. They called the  
cops. I've been haunting you for hours  
now. The trick is to not get too gnarled  
up about it. Imagine rendering chicken  
fat. Turning to you then away. The  
overturning of your turning. The tailored  
shirt, for example. It can be worn tight on  
the body, or totally oversized, with tights  
and a pair of tall heels. I could say what  
you're expecting. I could be a blond. I  
could keep going.

Let's scare you up some drama. An 18th  
century peepshow. A typical  
entertainment of the time period. Take a  
look. Through this peephole. The  
dimensions pile on, revealing a poor paint  
job. There I was, fearless and standing on  
tables. Now I am something vivid. You

are some thing. Seaward. What are whales? Why are whale hunted? In my sleep I start stealing. A puddle of pale blue on the floor. The most delicate patch of it. In the city their hands smell of oranges. Soon I will stop. Matching you stroke for stroke. I count the scratches on your back. I name them like ships.

Our poems will never be as good as pop songs. I dare you to dance them across the floor on a Sunday. It's one thing to say I like your shoes but it's another to say I like all the shoes you've ever worn. Or push me up against the tree why don't you. As the essentials are not around, I concentrate on the accessories. I am moving as slowly as possible so you won't see me. An assemblage of. What hurts where. We didn't sleep for weeks. When we did it was about the forsythia. This is all I ever wanted: a room of Marie-Antoinette-blue: a chandelier where my heart                    once                    was.

For years I made a living. Making sweaters and cakes. The square of light around. My bedroom door. Also captivated with birds. These boxes are meant to be handled. My skin takes its color. Takes it all. You continue to comment. I tend to have a favorite piece or silhouette I wear constantly until something else catches my eye. The city is the place where. At nightfall our shadows grow up to become choreographers. They instruct the dancers not to touch but to imagine touching. We tried. To make it look antique the usual practice is to stain. The city is the place.

This is a routine that I made up myself because it utilizes every part of the body. Almost like a window. You ask if it's snowing outside and I say No. Blossoming. Yellowglowing. Like a good dancer. You do it on both sides. These whales do not have teeth. They are the oldest true fossils. To be recorded on 35 mm. Is expensive. A cut-out of gray pasted against. Sea foam green and the infinite numbers. The baleen of the corset bending. I also cheap out on leggings, scarves, and denim. Increase the white-space. Is it out of alignment? Is it leaf-time yet?

There are always ways for me to assemble, wear, mix, and customize my clothing. I had one and you had one. It was reciprocal. You were a snowfall and I was so dunzo. Like an object. Small and glass-fronted. A ball might represent a planet or the luck associated with playing a game. The men put on their dance belts. They harpsichord me. *Pas de deux* me. Rock me like a ship that is mostly cobweb. How can your body not be your livelihood? The thought of you still clinging to me like the screams of a crying baby. This ocean of menswear.

This one is coming to you on its belly. Sleepless, star-heavy. Almost like a burden of fruit. I become a substitute or bottomless. You ask if it's OK and I say Yes. Now I know, I am not waterproof. Something like I gave you. A thousand civilities. Oranges and citrons. I slip on something black. And a pair of heels that stand out. If you could paint an orgasm. This is what it would look like: wind again. I mistake it for your car in the drive. I take down my hair. I take my car to the field, the snow. Fills in between the lines. Of broken. Where the orchards were.

**B.J. LOVE**

### **Slaughtering Day**

Clouds linger like spoiled chicken. Weighty & purple. I want to tell you how they can only mean death. Righteous & black with blood. How they stick to you in your sleep. How they make dogs howl. I want to tell you that today is the day we dig up the after birth, or at least the tree that grows over it. That those chickens are up there because my cousins & I were left with only their heads in our hands & how their blood had to be cut from our fingernails. That these clouds seep through floors & into ceilings. Make brave men root in mud & drive cars. That these clouds push the paint out on your walls. But science tells us that weather is merely percentages & when was the last time somebody died from that?

### **O**

One day, I asked you what the O in poems was for & you bit me. It welted & itched for days. It bled. It grew smokestacks that colored over all the stars & you would kiss it, scrape at it, eat chunks of it. Farmers planted crops they never intended to harvest in it. It got rotten. Smelled rotten. You said, I've seen this before, which made me wonder what all these people were asking you about O's in poetry for. The moon cut deep shadows in it. I sent pictures of it to politicians & celebrities. It became an accurate barometer of the stock market, a thing people prayed to & then, it became a monument unto itself. There, you said, you get it now?

**Sparrow, Eulogy 3: Topography**

A door shut—a door shut in me.

De-synchronization of watches, library, picture-book, letter-drawer.  
Of wardrobe into mismatch, relics into trash.

*...the bombing of Macchu Picchu...kindlings of the brushfire that will render  
all Nebraska's grasses speechless, grotesque, and impotent...*

Is that your song I hear, rupturing my anchorhold?

(I was still chasing that old story. The one that goes off without  
hitch or ripple [title: Midwest.]

It was just the tango artist again:

“Life is an absurd wound,” she said.

I reached and she evacuated the hillside in a cloud of dust.  
Underground what I still think are our artifacts, weren't.

I bought big earrings like I never wear, kept walking around the  
block, circling the house, circling the house, circling the.

(out in a field again, listening to children scream through summertime, standing here listening)

Iowa skinned from eroding maps.

### **Sparrow, Eulogy 5: The Body Insists**

Fastened in the black: bread, milk, unkempt winter hair, television projecting blue light onto my face. I awake boiling over in its deepest pit, birthing letter-fragments by the thousands.

*Hello?*

*How are?*

*Remember that*

(All winter I've stayed in bed waiting for the shape of you to appear in the mattress like Mary in an underpass waterstain, a grass-smearred pantleg.)

*bloodied forest*

*never have I so deeply*

*despised*

*Murder(er?)*

(Outside I cannot breathe. Outside black branches terrify.)

*Love me*

*again*

*over and over and*

*like Iowa*

*tornadoes*

When I pray for doves, stray pigeons descend to me; I straps sentence-scrap satcheled to their backs, fly them off cross-country at random intervals.

*wrecked treetips*



*body tangled in*

*shredded to*

*where oh where*

(Someday bits of my story will fall somewhere in the vicinity of your coordinates? Materialize in your medicine chest, the toe of a brand-new tubesock, or arrive on your tongue during a dream of snow?)

*has my*

*mad for peachface*

*longlost*

*skull*

*flown off to?*

*Pages of forests*

*stillborn*

*black*

*clutter the*

*floors*

(but I cannot birth anything worth repeating.)

*All winter I've been*

*waiting*

The truest stories evaporate upon exposure to voice.

**Sweat of Tears**

**I.**

If truly none of theirs, in all ways hairy nerves—  
alienation to skin and claws—

then he'd wild to run and peep the exact time.  
If he penciled his name (only)

cross-hatching a dirtful signature—fully percentagous + fearing—  
then he'd out the side door into the long alley.

They car adore their alleys here: daring to touch,  
touching the slatsful and curling windows.

Lights do go out, molesting the lazy night time—  
the sour mugging breath, nuzzling a delectable moodliness.

Something like cloven hooves sifts the tall grasses  
on the marpled beds lowing train tracks a block away—

harrowing the wheels—orbits rated for speed.  
If he was truly a beast then,

gnarling on the sweat of tears and locking hambones  
with, to a lesser extent, great plains softly to sea again—

then the crustacean time sweets the smell of a baker's loaf.  
If so long a certainty in the flint stone

and under water buried to some lineage;  
he was promised—damnation you—a strict rap on the knuckles

and something—damnation it all—to sop up the blood—  
then why no bruises and a pocket book written dollars large?

The bleary sack of booze, plane to the core,  
a challenge to his pride, burning vain-sex, safely his low wattage.

Americana, Americana wheel racked, unfurled straight + true;  
the wheelie bisectors mark the grassmen razors'

cut smilingly Parallel O' Lanterns candle-waxen on the glassed  
shoulder.

The milk was windows and sweaty towels,

the speeding car failingly lustful against the air hoses:  
dawnted—tankish. The cops in their dormantories. . .

If the breaking came on, a full swerver's stoppage of fleas and their  
five-star jawings,  
then the cannonade very plainly ejected entomophilous all over the  
dash.

It's haught this late—so haught—on this tateful of road  
passing might, fog, horns-in-the-harbor—history and its torches!

He flailed at some tappery the dash made whale-fall  
so sweat-ridden his eyes went nightblindingly batty—

so poor the barnacles he had just paid \$200 for.  
His wife was unsure he left in her socks yet.

The oceanic, mottled swattage paying out more slower now—of  
course!

The face wiped the corner store hat back—

the first U-turn bequesting the necessity of future socks in the  
hamper.

No! It would all bound up like all badliest times.

The bunyons on the church foots soled at the unmade ungoods  
    unsniggering—  
the palms closed, fingernails tearing at the marling doggerels.

The doctor dreams horning out her bare shoulder's forehead—  
movie mirror filling bulging lab coats molested behindingly.

No pot shots, the tears bare-assed the strange rolled penis back  
eating carcasses too sweet to imagine.

Gloaming. Time to back time again: the bedding,  
the sweaty pretend sleeping sheets and buzzer soundly without  
    fear.

## II.

Hanging from the knot: the gordian devil (a ledger full of names)  
smoking pipe tobacco—the doggeries so maliced, a desert plaid  
    skyline—flamed.

A sample tapping cubicled all things—as one would expect—  
a theory of dinging—so many birthdays to candle out bits of map.

The old index—all breath—whore's time on his mind's  
clackering—sweat—deep ending pits unblack like yellow around  
    the collar.

Hanging from the knot: What if . . . if then . . . if what . . . a host  
    of  
slack spent phone lines—daring-out service requests.

Buttons eying him to death, administering to yet another sweatful  
    night's rest.

Tarnation! Pennies, smallish in his hands, jangled cowboys in his  
    right front pocket.

He schooled his allergies, and the emeritus devil,  
his nose was Latinate, walked down the hall raiding the pace to his  
office door.

With the exorcized and aired doorway, he felt abound + lashed.  
He twinned himself a lovely eye for all the manly good things  
passing by--

the muddy ruts of his careening hallway. Sadliest of all the hard  
resurrections in his tightly-assed jeans,  
the splitting mirror never loved itself without reason.

Sunning himself florescent—straining out yesterday, not today,  
not ever—until next time when the Blameworthyies predictably  
meet again and again.

That is the nature in things. He'd rather bicycle to work anyway  
because it's nice  
like tarnished pennies, smellish in his hands, jangling cowboys in a  
cupholder.

We can pretend away the tarnish, but the nose is no fool—no sir—  
that is the purpose behind the doctrine of allergies—sweet, sweet  
designer air.

Like his phony twin—all bronze and latinate;  
he's latinate and has an eye for all the manly good things passing  
by.

Wiping his eyes on his tight-assed jeans—the spitting mirror  
from behind  
goes penguin-legged, knowing the intimate aftershocks of a funny  
dance.

He dodged something wading in the pavement at the end of the  
day—  
a soggy peanut shell. He guessed it could still be disgusting.

On a day like this, he will cease professoring and all the old  
Romancing  
will violin in, (Why Not?) and geometer him by unstandard lengths  
of nose breaths

whistling a funny tune until the summer comes to stay—  
unburdened by the meowing lawn and the dead pages folding in  
plastic trays.

It was happening: a staggering of the primitive functions, a mixup  
in the fossil record

AND and OR or Plus plus Minus—a flock of block quotes—

years of dinging in the ears @ low frequencies, low watts, bad  
breath

and hydraulic equations. Paris dog shit was yesterday's amore and

more than one at a time—clubful of hands; the right thing to do  
was out of proportion. Hell, Darwin, for instance, cries the Dodos  
the night long:

every crag a feather, every tumbler dusted, the igneous rock wolves'  
teeth marking

scented urinous and Saturn growing old on the classroom walls.

Molding are the classrooms chalk-dead baseball caps, graven  
images

ghettoized and skillfully tuning the street-corner jives.

Sweetly the summer night softs like some closet's pillow matchlit  
against a hurricane, like talking as a plane goes down—

a distant voicing of words clear but foghorned, shoehorned,  
leghorned

slippering the meanings words used to have

when he was youngish and spoke of parents  
innocent of the grapples and tangled tongues in the breakwaters.

Broken, televised, radioed, bent will o' the whispers style  
on the peat moss bogs and the withering moors found in books.

### III.

She, on the other hand, picked lovely all high school long day:  
weird to date,  
piney sparkles choked necklace black

lovely dressed all in nines inching heels up her supine ass. As  
pictured.

When openly mouthed—olden wilderness—a yearling love,

of course, flattered all babies' cheeks, feet  
in the plastic book: pitcher full of sweating

beads on the wrist of softly skin toned down  
then pricking the perfectly out-timed Father's

socialist-marked pinstriped 70s disco glitteringly  
long haired to match the red boy lipstick—

a sex's curve daringly angry poor mummies and daddies  
curing, hammering the gadflies with plastic flippers

at what happened next. Time. The shower dressed you down  
sparkling bitty boys watching under the floor boards

a full wattage of high beams so bright till now.  
Third time without charm, no crawfishing or tears, little craws to  
daddy.

Balding the dress on the floor gagging the slippage  
legs curved back rent apartmentalizing: day 1, day 2, day now.  
Time.



Gone again that longish way—more than once—startles  
matched in miniature starlight on the car's roof—new girls,  
unknowingly sure about the messiah of dogs and their houses  
fated sophomoric, hungry for sweetness above high levees—  
a parental floodplain breaking into rough hands  
serious as hidden panties in top drawers from naughty catalogues.  
Hurling headless-long courting very lately a disappointing  
window box w/o eyes perverting the moonlight's swinging tree,  
without the kissed rain. We may be a dressed-down floor  
but kissed lawlessly, teething, a ravage, the king of cats, and a wolf  
to ululate.  
Jaws unbit the winter breathless in the back of the garage  
sighing the floor boarding house belonging to someone's else.  
Dreamery. Icing caked country heating the top layers  
coveringly a sweat of breath salt licking the Minnie Mouse doll on  
the shelf.  
Eye, swears, revenge, fortune casts on the act  
blistered, glory, before he goes again, glory, *Gloriana Vagina*.  
If he was a queen—so much the bettering the game—  
smoking fags British style, stalagmatic the girls like  
caged crickets in their leggings—boys under the floorboards—  
so many kissing crevices; silly their boys' under things  
practiced. If she called of the wild, would they slag  
hind legs on the livingroom floor? Of course. What recourse?  
They wept for the top buttons of their sweaters, for the long skirts  
lipping their lacy socks. Hate bred his reputation proud

growing over time—the busy hands heard round the world—a day  
w/o end.

Amen. All in bloom now—roses to be had by the handful

and no one to smell the buds. Wither, wilt, going on and on. A  
wrinkle. Time  
the watch and tumble in the woods. Danger at this age

begging, sad, empty of sex like a chest heaving timbers—  
kindle the stove. He forgot to burn for it—sticks piling high—a  
cemetery is for bones.

What else? A digging in the bedding and no bones about it—a  
grave mistake  
and so much timely dirt to shovel a respectable whole and  
monument with carvings.

KYLE MCCORD & JEANNIE HOAG

**Letter to J.R. (To the Conch from Which a Gentle Light Sounds)**

There was Knife and there was Candle, who lived in the blue house by the dark-skinned cherry trees. Candle out on the veranda, Knife calling her name from the street. Knife in plaid pants running the mulcher. Sometimes Candle laughing to herself while Knife swore the spa to a hail of nuts and bolts.

Knife loved the smell of Candle fallen from her hair—its inviting, tender air and always the something of her whereabouts imbedded. A humid linen from the laundromat, talc from a friend's gymnasium. The hair was Knife's Scheherazade and each night he gathered its gifts to his touch.

In the morning, Knife settles over his paper—his ex-wife has died. Candle pouring Corn Pops in a bowl. Her southern accent, sudden awareness of the bloodlessness of his arms. Candle scoots around the chair, puts the spoon to her mouth. What's wrong? she asks.

Down in the cellar, they are digging in the dust-sticky cardboard. Here, says Candle. They flip through photos, Knife explaining each one. Knife flipping forward. Candle flipping backward. Knife cutting the cake, his wife's nose smeared with wet frosting. That cabin on the lake in the town with its thousand novelty flags.

What were you like? asks Candle.

Miserable mostly.

Be honest, she says.

We lived by burnt-out television, the white-hot arguments. Always one of us misunderstood by the other, then the fuming, yelling, usual makeup.

Look at this one, says Candle. She steps back a step holding a wrinkled letter.

They go upstairs. She sets Knife to rest on the couch, and when she comes back from the recycling bin, he's asleep again. She stoops to caress his head. Light lines his body and the burnet hairs of his arm.

Oh Knife, in this two-horse town, what can one do but rest? And a gate, long ivied over, parts in Knife's chest.

### **Epilogue (To Be a Part)**

There's a city where the street's a light. Where the windows into light unlatch and out of their mouths comes moths. The moths stream the roads causing passersby to swat and dance, drop a cantaloupe.

In this city, the people vanish into light and saunter out of light. Sometimes living one life, sometimes another. It's possible, in the city, to fall asleep in lingerie and snap back to consciousness, to a spreadsheet at a desk where you work. One person boards an aircraft, another emerges, back stiff, a breath of stale pretzels. In the dampness of the airport's florescence they say to each other, "Do you ever wish we'd have night? Like two big waters could push light from light and end up with something else."

But they don't mean it, these people. Don't blame them; their ideas are little pouches of sand poured, all their days, into a desert.

In this city, the choir boys carry my coffin to the center of town. Four basalt pillars are set and my coffin shouldered atop it. One

boy wipes his head with his hat and they shuffle off, hands in pockets, kicking a clod of earth. It wasn't sad, knowing I would die. All day the light's a goat and little girl laughing. They rattle and snort, one pulling the other by lasso. I see auroras, flashes of a woman's earring falling unnoticed in the fountain. Children kick a ball beneath me. A shadow emits, and their acceptance of it seems all I ever asked.

I've understood enough of the path to know I've lived a thorn. When I was eight, a mineshaft became my mother. I grew ragged, unaffected, all relatives dead of revolution or alcohol. Some boy came to take my book and I killed him. They were right to hang me, bury me in the shallow bog, and that I've arrived here— sitting on a stone, my huntsmen's gown half-digested—seems right too.

To return to this single reality, then to be the dark moment of a moth's wings defines for me the impossible. We learn to love in spite of the shade we proffer or foster discontent to an art. Though by neither am I made sufficient, the silence of this music's also music. I allow it to take me to the city's square where the short politician shouts from his stacked bread racks. To its effortless untenability by which I am certain of its truth. It's feeling of a dress slipped over a neck and the crack of hunters in the outliers and the lighted windows

in which they sleep.

T.A. NOONAN

### On Noticing a Pattern in My Dreams

I'm not sure why it fell on me to kill the Cabbage Patch zombie army with Kentwood-filled Super Soakers. Or why I was trapped in a blurry room, stacking towers of Reese's Peanut Butter Cups. Why I shined every flower on the cover of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, why my Christmas scooter was teal, why I sucker-punched my fiancé over tea. My nights are built on anxiety, the knowledge that I must *do something*. Tonight, Cher has a zipper on her bodysuit that runs from wrist to hip. Tonight, that zipper holds back such waves of pit hair and gems; she plucks those stones so carefully, arranges them on my neck. And tomorrow, I'll know when a friend says — *I dreamed I could turn into either a zombie or a werewolf, so I turned into both* — we blaze.

## EYESORE: A Quick List of Poetic Eyes

### Asking Eye

An eye that detaches itself from the brain in order to beat it down with questions. Angst-filled and fruitful, this type of eye rarely allows itself to be rounded up to the nearest common denominator. *Ex. The eye asks if the green, frilled geranium puckers, clustered at angles on each stem, are similar enough to stop time.* ^1

### Barrier Eye

An eye that stays attached to the body to serve as a barrier between the brain's questions and the outside world. Oftentimes, the owner of this kind of eye will place a sheet of glass on outside of the eye to catch any questions that happen to slip past the eye barrier. Or, the eye used when eyeing someone up and down the blockade. *Ex. A thousand questions bit my eyes from the inside.* ^2

### Break Eye

An eye that breaks under the weight of a ton of G-d. This eye should not be dismissed as weak; it is just doing what it was built to do in case of emergency. A bloodshot eye. *Ex. My face is heavy with sight. I can feel my eye breaking* ^3

### Finite Eye

An eye filled to the brim. An exactly measured visual experience. To realize the parameters of an eyeful. *Ex. As much of noon as I could take -- Between my finite eyes.* ^4

1. Rae Armantrout, "Manufacturing," *Veil: New and Selected Poems*

(Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001) l. 18-23.

2. Anne Carson, "The Glass Essay," *Glass, Irony, and God* (New York: New Directions, 1995) l. 36.

3. Robert Creeley "The Window," *Selected Poems of Robert Creeley* (Berkeley: University of California, 1991) l. 21-24.

4. Emily Dickinson "Before I got my eye put out - (336)," *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge:Harvard University Press, 1999) l. 12-13.

### **Fire Eye**

An eye durable under the weight of a fire-hemmed G-d.  
Exceptionally human. An eye like this is made something like  
every one in one hundred million seconds. *Ex. The fire eye in the  
clouds survives the gods.* ^5

### **Glittering Eye**

An eye belonging to an older ghost with sinister aspirations.  
Though attractively sparkled, the eye is a curse-thrower. In polite  
society, this eye is most often covered with a pirate patch. *Ex. I  
fear thee and thy glittering eye.* ^6

### **Intrepid Eye**

An adventurous animal eye. A bird's eye insofar as it suggests the  
ability to imagine flight. A bull's eye insofar as it suggests the  
ability to stomach bull. *Ex. His eyes were intrepid with phantom secrets.*  
^7



## Jealous Eye

An eye purposely altered to observe otherwise invisible monsters.  
An eye sore from trying to follow the movement of entities that should be of no interest to it. An eye that spys with it's green lights on. *Ex. The eye is jealous of whatever moves.* ^8

## Mind's Eye

An eye tucked inside the skull for safekeeping. It helps relay information gathered from the sixth, seventh, and ninth senses. Tense and colorless as it rarely winks or blinks. *Ex. Now as at all times I can see in the mind's eye, in their stiff, painted clothes, the pale unsatisfied ones appear and disappear in the blue depths of the sky.* ^9

5. Wallace Stevens, "The Sens of the Sleight-of-Hand Man," *Collected Poems* (New York: Random House, 1954) l. 12.

6. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner and Other Poems* (Dover, 1992) Part IV, l. 5.

7. Mina Loy, "Giovanni Franchi," *The Las Lunar Bedecker* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1997) l. 143.

8. Jack Spicer, "Radar," *My Vocabulary Did This To Me: The Collected Poems of Jack Spicer* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008). l. 6.

9. William Butler Yeats, "The Magi," *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (New York: Scribner, 1996) l. 1-3.

### Parasitic Eye

An eye that takes up residence uninvited. Rooted to a couch it didn't pay for. Feeds on a residue of newspaper clippings and sleep crusties. Doesn't clean its host's apartment but goes to great lengths to shrink and loosen the host's apartment's foundations.

*Ex. I, too, once had a brash artless feeder: his eye set firm on my slackening sky.* ^10

### Quick Eye

An eye thick with militaristic impulse. Belonging to or victim of sharp-shooting. Possibly nationalistic. *Ex. Charm, smiling at the good mouth, quick eyes gone under earth's lid, for two gross of broken statues, for a few thousand battered books.* ^11

### Red Eye

An eye (o,r The Eye) of a (or, the) fire-hemmed G-d. Exceptionally inhuman. An eye like this is made something like every one in one hundred million years. *Ex. Into the red eye, the cauldron of morning.* ^12

### Vegetable Eye

An inanimate eye. Dumbly wholesome. Shadowed in coppery powders. Enhance-able to a point. *Ex. Through the halfmoon's vegetable eye, husk of young stars and handfull zodiac, love in the frost is pared and wintered by.* ^13

10. Olena Kaltyiak Davis, "sweet reader, flanneled and tulled," *shattered sonnets love cards and other off and back handed importunities* (Bloomsbury, 2003) l. 18-20.

11. Ezra Pound, "H.S. Mauberley (Life and Contacts)," *Selected Poems of Ezra Pound* (New York: Direction Books, 1957) Section V, l. 5-8.

12. Sylvia Plath, "Ariel," *The Collected Poems* (New York: Harper

Collins, 1999) l. 29-30.

13. Dylan Thomas, "When All My Five and Country Senses See,"  
*The Poems of Dylan Thomas* (New York: New Directions, 2003) l. 3-5.

### **Wraparound Eye**

An eye whose ligaments are stretchy enough to allow for the eye to be pulled to the back of the head. Typically found in nuns, mothers, and school bus drivers. *Ex. You have a lovely liquid wraparound eye.* ^14

### **Yellow Eye**

An eye so liver-less that it can't produce any bile. A foolish but useful eye version. *Ex. Pointed hat and a yellow eye; his cave is in such a mess that minor miracles occur spontaneously.* ^15

14. Frederick Seidel and/or Imru'al-Qays, "Mu'allaqa," *Poetry Magazine* (2008) l. 39.

15. Miroslav Holub, "The cast," *Poems Before and After* (Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, 2006) l. 28-29.

### **Inafa'maolek**

The word 'maolek' means 'good.' Inafa'maolek literally means 'making it good for each other.' The first two hours consist of presentations by Inafa Maolek on "Tough Love." A centerpiece of modernity was the doing away with the primitive and premodern idea that everything is inafa'maolek. Inafa'Maolek literally means "to make peace." There are two parts of our consciousness on Guam: Inafa'maolek and that you must tuck in your shirt handsome. Inafa'maolek, or the spirit of loving and giving. Literally, the importance of the clan. Families that starved and suffered were presented with an "Inafa Maolek" coin shadow box. The spirit of inafa'maolek is tossed around like it's "democracy" or "patriotism" nowadays. The result is that many of our people come out of this system culturally lost! Inafa'maolek, literally the word interdependence. I recently attended an Inafa'Maolek meeting where the cast put on a short skit about Customer Service. The spirit of inafa'maolek will prevail just as the aloha spirit does in Hawaii. Inafa' Maolek will hold its annual peacemaking conference "Peacestock" today and tomorrow at the Royal Orchid Hotel in Tumon. It is simply a rationalization for thievery, done in the name of Inafa'maolek. Inafa'maolek, literally, is an umbrella concept. Being Chamorro means inafa'maolek as in you help each other to make things go well for another person and not your self-interests. The value of inafa'maolek literally translates as "to make good." Abiba I Inafa'maolek yan Pas gu Enteru Mundo. This concept bonds people to the root of Chamorro culture, and was passed on even to modern generations who left the island. Inafa' Maolek has been the lone voice on Guam.

## **Islas de los ladrones**

Angry at larcenous natives of Guam, Magellan first dubbed the islands 'Las Islas de los Ladrones'. The name 'Islas de los Ladrones' (or 'Islands of the Thieves') was given them by the ship's crew of Magellan on account of the thieving propensity of the natives. He called them 'Islas de los Ladrones' following the disappearance of numerous objects during his stay. Magellan calls them 'Islas de los Ladrones' ('Islands of Thieves') because the natives steal articles from his ships. In anger over the islanders taking property from his ship, Magellan renamed the islands 'Las Islas de los Ladrones'. Later named 'Islas de Los Ladrones' ('The Islands of Thieving') after an incident wherein the islanders were considered to have stolen iron from the ships. Angered by the islanders' penchant for stealing from his ships, he renamed the archipelago 'Las Islas de los Ladrones'. The Marianas were named 'Islas de los Ladrones' ('Thieves' Islands') by Magellan owing to the theft of the boat of the 'Trinidad'. In the Ladrones, Magellan christened the friendly but overcurious natives with a blood bath. These islands were called by Magellan 'Islas de los Ladrones', or 'The Islands of Robbers', because those people, not being perfectly versed in the 'meum et tuum', happened to eat some of their ship. Wikipedia explains that the conception of Chamorros as thieves was probably actually a culturally different notion of property. However, this notion of property is still alive and well in the Chamorro custom of 'let me fan borrow.'

## ALLISON RIDDLES

### Mixed Tape

#### *Side A*

In Soho, with the girl wearing a t-shirt saying, "I Blow," he cheated at pool all evening until she took the eight ball and smash-twisted it in his face like a lemon. Anger shook and shone on his sharded skin but someone jiggled the plug on the jukebox as the house lights clicked on. Two bouncers observed her exit, the night ending in a crash of static and Fleetwood Mac tambourines.

#### *Side B*

The front field drummed with Karner Blues dining on wild lupines. He stirred the okra and tomatoes, slotted spoon chiming against the pot as he perched by the kitchen window, hoping for headlights or a heavy-handed honk. She'd come back because guilt is seasonal and affairs in seaside hotels never last. Spine hunched in a lower case r, he carried a rifle to bed and slept all night with a finger curved in memory of the trigger.

KATHLEEN ROONEY & ELISA GABBERT

**City Walk I**

To walk in a world of my own invention Deny my fleetingness, immateriality Continued perceptions of social distance prevent me from reeling Cracks in the sidewalks Sets of photographs I'm not in A real guy in a shop window dresses a fake girl as a governess I'm feeling the word *desire* more than the feeling On the pocket subway map Incoherent marginalia I sometimes like to pointedly miss the point Refuse to look up, though everyone else is All the panorama at the end of the line/time Shambolic, pure shambles Expression of utopia and instrument of something something

**City Walk VII**

A little contact improvisation, a little exotic eye contact The subway is a sex act Performed in an echo chamber A little music please Nothing too cute The anxiety of not knowing what to do with your hands The parting of molecules Dramatic & sad Limelight & stagecraft Sudden blink of black Stupid condition of the air, stupid holographic ads Is everyone waiting to take advantage of my first perceptible weakness? Who's the projectionist? Am I going to die here?

JOANNA RUOCCO

**Boris**

I have swallowed a large bird. Yes, it hurts me. A tree is a weed. A bird is when mud freezes. Carrots are brighter than anything. Within the radius of the telephone cord, he beats her with the black receiver. The forested range of that radius is dogs, onions, dogs, sheets, onions, metal, ice, planks, static, birds. A barbarian is who is living.



From *The Bugging Watch*

**Harlan**

Harlan Grone is less is human. Harlan plays with a capelike sheet all the way up to his chin. Eventually with pillow on he takes a bow and exits.

In the bed his eyes are warm are humid and Harlan likes that very much because Denver is a dry cold morbid place. Harlan is wet is shiny. He retracts under covers a tropical snail, pushing his long spine into the sheetcape.

In dreams Harlan unbecomes himself with needles and wires and Toland-shaped dolls. Or he wakes to take a piss and Toland sees animals of thread visible on his textured back. Toland cringes.

Always this way the bathroom is warm is damp too: it has no windows. Always this way there is no other way during the 1st and 2nd months Harlan keeps a stage curtain shut against the tub and props a space heater on the floor.

An audience comes and often Harlan enacts a beetle. If it's bright enough he tunnels the cold wet soil beneath. In nocturne looks for children in the flour and pancake mix open under pipes in the kitchen. Harlan is skinny because dreams poison his kitchen. Harlan is scared of bugs. He wrote a poem about bugs.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> BUGS IN EVERY ROOM

You harvest the small boxes / at my sink you halt your black / foot your white toes leave / a stiff shadow at my sink is / your treasure. // Toland, I have shown you / the child in the wall the / clover of your womb. You

## Audition<sup>2</sup>

Harlan has an audition. The director appears he asks Harlan if he would like a potion to drink. Harlan reads the script and answers, "Yes." The director signals to an immature larva who spills a cloudy tincture of borax. "Jean Toland is our protagonist, have you heard of Toland? Are you familiar with her hamartia?" "Yes. I studied at a sister institute--here are my references. My emphasis was in bugs so Toland's hamartia inevitably surfaced throughout my studies." "Did you say 'bugs'?" "No." The director called Harlan a week later. The director deigned to cast Harlan as Toland's bane.

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are: / Companion, this is nothing. / This is a mouth in bandages and / some dusted moth along / the tile where the powder is a ridge / and a bug the valley. // (TOLAND RAN ACROSS MY FACE / THE STRIDE OF SIX LEGS / AT MY CHEEK / SHE CRAWLS AT MY WOUND LIVES / INSIDE AND GOES WHERE I GO.) // This bug at the bone / in my cheek sleeps / and the flour at her / feet is portulacas is my nose.

<sup>2</sup> This spell from Toland's datebook is written on a pajama label and sewed to this entry in Harlan's datebook:

### POTION

After the highest floor floods I talk in such a language like a colloquy of noodles sucked for sacred pauses. Along with measured explosions *drizzle* is pronounced as "cleansed" and insect parts through the wetness innovate me. Poured hither I come to later where swirls into shape a hatbox upon the void and permits audition. I rehearse at this time for the Head (whoever it is) it is making of spilling a musical.

## Homage

Toland designed the Potion Kitchen and explains the concept of her set. She says it is an homage. She asks, *do you pronounce the “b” in homage?* Harlan shrugs. *It sounds like privates swabbing water*, she says, and pretends with her privates on a splatter of black paint. *Say it with me*, she chants, “homage.”

Toland makes Harlan wet like that black paint, so Harlan compensates by smiling like on bug dust every time Toland glares at him. *Toland never smiles*, Harlan thinks to himself subtextually. *Harlan is a very good cook and hence he is very good in this role*, Harlan imagines they will say soliloquistically. He acts in the kitchen for many years. When Toland disappears into the district of angels, the director offers Harlan Toland's part. <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This piece on Setting was torn from Toland's datebook and is glued to Harlan's datebook with some sort of bugslime shaped into a heart:

### THE DISTRICT OF ANGELS

I recalled the one light in the theater broken, a short bath for the excavation of disease. I sewed backless raincoats for the dead and had urges even though their holes were the same size as mine. Maybe I was making the raincoats for myself, I forget. I was put in an outline of my room and given string. A bandage for an umbrella convinced me of his love. The usual usefulnesses follow. It was the spring that lost leaves and my life peeled as not life, left pools on the concrete floor and outdated music when I swam. By Monday I had one catchy drain of body I shed into several wingless insects. I had different colored spills every night until I wouldn't, for which I was asked to fondle a stunning mass of sky and miraculously return. A long period of empty suitcases thereafter. Then a surgical choir on Sunday and squeamish women. *It will always be like this!* I tell the other children, but my mouth is a—there are no songs for it.

## The List

Harlan without a cape in a man costume contacted the local newspaper and told them Denver has a huge bug problem--the bugs eat entire people, leaving only their pajamas behind, "isn't it your job to inform the public of this?" Harlan made a list:

1. You have a basement.
2. Your theater is old, esp. Edwardian.
3. The dirt is dusty but shines.
4. A stage door.

The list went on and on. Harlan worked on it for days, hoping to publish it in *The Post*. During this time, the audience gathered enough evidence to criticize Harlan for villainism.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This criticism was sung on Denver schoolbuses: *Harlan Groin eats deadgirl loin and / wears Toland's panties. / When he sleeps / he likes to beat / his tiny insect wanky.* And during recess to the skip-rope: *Harlan Grone lost his bone / now he is a girl. / He wears earrings long / and sings bug songs / and hangs at the Y drinking pearls.*

ERIN ELIZABETH SMITH

**Basement of Eden**

*for Christine & Adam*

The three of us escape into the earth, the basement quarried for this waiting. These storms are simple – the sky spins, trees leap from their roots, then the black passes and nothing is changed. Yet there is a moment we think the end and we will be left to repopulate this city – a woman who kneads air into bread and out of clay, a man who takes rhythm from outside the body, and me, named for a country that tried this and failed. If no one else survived, must we touch down on the emptied land and fill it? Must we bear this land, until what we carry razes us? We would be two women and Adam, who would point into the tilled distance, call it time, who would call us things we knew better than to answer to.

**Hurt**

*for my sister*

I.

I think maybe it's a tree. This hurt. Maybe that's it. A pin oak or crabapple. A basket of virgin's bower. It's Spanish moss gnawing the limbs. It's kudzu. Yes.

Or maybe something useful like vanilla or coffee trees. Something Scandinavian I can't pronounce. Maybe it's the way some keys fit in a lock but won't turn. The VCR that blinks and blinks. It's my sister bleaching her hair, painting her nails green. It's how you're so quick to touch me now, like we're family, like you know the way I write about trees.

## II.

I start to think there's something more. Something like the Easter egg I sniffed out in the toe of my stepfather's shoe. How my boyfriend split me open in the Travelodge when I was fifteen. Or the way I flirt with the man from Cambridge at every party. Half a beer and I'd fuck him if he asked.

And still every time I bury my nose in your neck I want to tell you I love you. And I think I might, at least in the way I was taught. I think I would make you salads, paint your walls. I think I would trim your boxwood, tell you about the azaleas in Columbia, the house where they grew nearly patriotic. The daffodils that bloomed for my sister's birthday. The way my stepfather would call me an idiot, a chore. Teach you the algebra of his belt clasp. Or tell you the story about snow. The one snow that lasted.

## III.

It hurts. Yes. In the way I'd leave my desk job in Boston. How I'd sit in my car at lunch, how you could wear the heat, the sun like a sponge on the skin. It reminded me of the South, how my sister and I couldn't swim till it was 80. How we'd drape our feet in the pool or sometimes doze on a raft, safe on technicality.

There I'm thirteen, my shoulders sucking the sun. My bathing suit blue, so blue. Where are you when I tell you how he chucked the bathroom sink onto the lawn? Or the day my mother left him, how he punched a hole through the living room wall, his fingers as

bloody as if it'd been my face? Were you there? Were you watching through the late dogwood, through the mulberry with its purple fruit? Are you here when you touch me, when I tell you about your trees.

#### IV.

Maybe not trees. Maybe a fog horn after the wreck. A siren after the storm. Maybe the forgotten crab trap we pulled up as kids. (The shells don't change when they die. They just don't move. And don't move.) Maybe it's the bull gator that rises from the marsh, the way we told everyone we almost died the day we found a rattlesnake in our bushes. How we ran like it'd chase us. How I stopped when I lost my breath.

I'd never give you this – the bodies of the dogs he shot, the note from my mother's lover left errantly on a desk, how my hands learned the story of my body from others.

#### V.

No, it's not trees. It's other people's children. It's birds that don't have names. It's the strip of 20 through the Midlands – Columbia in the summertime. How it knows me. How it's always known me.

It's how I'm destined to be a woman alone at a hotel in the South, drinking Diet Coke, eating lo mien. Watching women's basketball, though I hate it. Watching the ticker to see if the Braves are bad. And I look at myself in that room, and I look, and I'm sad you're not there, but that my stepfather is. And my sister, pregnant and sixteen, she's there, saying my name as if I touched her, I would know her. Understand the way her father killed us both. And I think, maybe, maybe we're both buried in garbage bags in our neighbors' backyard. And that their children will find us, rotted and green, one day. I think maybe their children will find us. And that they will scream. They will find us. And then we will scream.

## **Drawing What I Hear**

In the coffee shop, the last time I see you, I hear you move from me. My friend is saying "I don't know what he'll do. I don't like him anymore." She is talking about her husband. There is a swallow in my throat. Water drips into a pot. Steam. My body is shrill, the way the lids lower and brush to you. Your hat, your shirt, they make no noise, but they did when you threw them on your bed, always unmade, always cold and expectant. Though some nights last winter we made it warm and I heard you say my name. And you saying, "Wait. No." Then the turning of my body in your hands. The sounds of sheets bunched at the heels. The night you told me about the ex who held you like I did. I hear your sink drip in the bathroom and do not rise to stop it. Dishes make glass sounds in the sink. The click click click of a pilot light and the opening conversation of flame. The near silent way your hand covered mine at the bar the first night I met you. The way your darts hit the board, so clean, like something going in that can't come out. The way you made it come out. The pluck of it. The night you said "Come in." And I did. And here today, my friend saying "He was never this way. Or he always was." I say "Come here," and her hair makes a sound across my cheek. I do not hear the closed door of your leaving, your car start up in the lot. Instead I remember fingers in your hair the last day I knew you. The way I didn't say your name when you passed. The way the air didn't raise its breath to voice, but it could have been the sound of your voice. The sound of your voice saying "No" and then the brushfire in my bones, the low, long crackle.



## **How to Fall in Love**

Here is where you pack the heart. In a small dark box. A box cut for heart-shaped things. Like a case for a French horn, a crystal paperweight. It can be stored anywhere – in a cool linen closet, in the cat-eyed dark beneath your bed. You may line the box with tissue. You may spin the combination on its fire-proof lock. You may look at it sadly or punch the fist-sized object with your own closed palm. But you must forget it, must not dream about its soprano in the shower, its sleepy Southern lilt. Must think it as you did the possum you ran over last winter – it must be old and sick and feeble. It must have needed to die.

Once it is packed and put away, go outside. The sun will set, but before it does, it will pour hotly onto your little shoulders. It will sink into your neighbor's roof, and as it turns the sky a candy-colored blue, you must say aloud "It will not be like this again. It cannot." When you do, there will be a moment when you turn back toward your house. You will see something common – a kitchen window, a shovel leaning against your porch – and it will be transformed. There are some who say this is when the heart comes back, a bit bloated, too high in the throat. You might want to cough it up. You might want to touch the doorknob to your house. Hold it firmly in your hand until it's warm. Then you will turn it. You will turn it slowly. You will go back in.

LINA RAMONA VITKAUSKAS

**Beguine The Begin**

A flabbergasted Renee wept solemnly into the gold lamee handkerchief, knowing full well she'd never see Ron, the well-coiffed lead singer of Autumnal Taco, ever, ever, ever again.

## CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

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Her fictive work was among the short-listed stories on the 2009 Story South Million Writers Awards Notable Stories of 2008 list. Among other venues, her work has appeared/is forthcoming from: *Feminist Studies*, *Portland Review*, *Up The Staircase Quarterly*, *Necessary Fiction*, *Surreal South 2009*, *JMWW*, *Etchings*, *Abacot Journal*, *Night Train*, *Underground Voices*, *A cappella Zoo*, *Trespass*, *Keyhole*, *SubLit*, *Coming Together: With Pride*, *WordRiot*, *Storyglossia*, *DOGZPLOT Flash Fiction*, *Temenos*, and *Mississippi Review*.

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## Books/E-Books Available from Moria Books

Jordan Stempleman's *Their Fields* (2005)  
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j/j hastain's *autobiography of my gender* (2011)  
Kristina Marie Darling's *narrative (dis)continuities: prose experiments by younger american writers* (2013)

The e-books/books can be found at

<http://www.moriapoetry.com>.

## POETRY

"Another line splatters, falls" is a pithy commencement to this anthology of variegated prose poems. Though the poems differ in approach, tensility and focus—from "spatchcocking" to "Victorian novels" to the humorously coined "Autumnal Taco"—they are connected by the form's often rectangular frame: language staged beneath a proscenium arch instead of on a staircase. The prose poem's hydra-like proliferation, especially over the past two decades, has demonstrated that it isn't merely a trend going the way of acid-wash and 8-tracks; it is a renovated form of inquiry, of investigation, and these particular poems are "box[es] filled with knocking." I hope you'll listen in.

—Simone Muench, author of *Orange Crab*

Because of the uncertainty and bewilderment that precede revelation, there is always a feeling of danger, even nervousness, in the best writing. In her brief forward, Kristina Marie Darling promises that this anthology will "recapture the sense of danger inherent in hybrid writing," and these "prose experiments," as she aptly calls them, more than deliver. As a whole, this anthology not only exemplifies the variety of forms such experiments take, but also how such attempts can often create the kind of strangeness, coalescence, and suddenness that lead to genuine vision—the kind that make us more awake to beauty and terror, and less sure we are alone.

—Allison Benis White, author of *Self-Portrait with Crayon*

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