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ALL

ENDS

HERE

Future Earth Magazine
Volume One
“The Future is Now”

Publisher
Daniel Rappaport

Editors
Travis Hedge Coke, Rose Hugh, and Daniel Rappaport

This first issue is dedicated to Mark Gruenwald, Amiri Baraka, Peter Lamborn Wilson, and Hagio Moto.

It is also the editors' wish that this be dedicated to our friends, our families, and to everyone we really don't care for. And, for all generations. No matter how long ago, they are still with us, and regardless of how far ahead they may be, they are we apace with us.



It all ends here, so after this, we should probably try some
new stuff, yeah?

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Message Bird

dg okpik

After: Major Jackson

Commit your soul from the death of the north.
I drift, as you turn, pause, then turn again.
Your claw scraps deep into the muddy pit,
as you roll in the bedchamber where you reseed.

When the last broken harp cello string snaps,
I dare you to over turn the dry trills of laughter,
which feed the fatal swarm of hornets.

You catalog-list King Eider's 12,119 in abundance,
a surge crosses the low ice, they wash over us,
we breakout in metal clawed boots, unfettered by voles,
and the first rains.

I wade through the nesting ground fitted
like a fingerprint, pursued by wind-ripped laughter,
like two-caged in a funerary temple, dismembered,

covered in a yellow shroud, yet ready to mate, nest, molt.
You may see only algae in bloom, but really it's
fox-on-fox killings. Distemper chasing, kicking the drool,

merged with rabies. You might find I outlive you.

Birds are vessels known for switch grass burrows.

I watch you with a shrewd gaze, you carnivores
with dark manes and golden hides, seldom seen

but tracked by hoof prints, by collared lemmings,
scythes. During an aerial gunning, drive by the lost,
children, with necks like moray eels, skin on their faces
twice bitten, striated and not faring well.

It's bullet-ripped all over the refuge with the prevalence
of murder having five walking legs which, migrate
pole ward, crazed and affixed to collapsed ventral fins,
prickle-backed and gaunt.

In the time of Okvik

dg okpik

.The smell of wormwood,
fresh snow
on beach greens,
like a place name,
from a hand scribed map.

I walk the slash lines,
forwards, backwards,
into that shadow.
I listen to the cry
of puffins, they disorient me.

I pick up a chipped blade,
start carving into plague,
carving on my arms,
slashed lines and steeples.

A handful of broken spheres,
a caribou antler,
each slice a countenance.
Open water freezes,
icing my large intestine.

The twang of palpating hands,

of sinew, snapped to vibrate.

Micro-blades, burins, chisel
my wrists, my side gouged.

Blood and root, ptarmigan and shrew,
 over the veins,
onto the clefts of skin,
tapping, snap,snap.

 Eyes of basalt staring
at the upper, bloody walls.

I rise from wasps in the dark-bowels
 of earth. Broad loose wings,
 behind the face of black feathers.
 Raven eats the sting of destruction.
 As I conjure the snow goose in barren skies.

10,000 Years

dg okpik

Encrusted with thick red stone ochre,
imieauraq prowler sets the willow stick
with a snare. His protruding abdomen
deforms his back, hunched, bow-legged
with bulbs, and bones. As he walks the red settles.

Reminded by tatqiq moon to leave
the fat on the sinew while drying it,
in case of a winter of sand drifts,
when he can savor suck the protein.

He ties on every harpoon head, with notches,
a piece of lashing, which drags and drapes,
across the siksriks squirrel's neck. Imieauraq
shaman removes the meat from the bone carefully,
not to snag a vein.

In his small plywood cabin on the north shore,
as the cold settles in his knees, he remembers:
ice forming on the lagoon. He scrapes
the framework, closes the eyes, combs
each frozen, blue, hair until it is thawed.

He sponges with tundra marsh across the flesh,

wiping and digging, older strata, descending,
probing, eroding flesh beaches. He finds
the eldest inuk, person farther inland in deep house pits,
in every ridge, and yellowed body part.

On Kotzebue Sound he places the inuk
upon a driftwood alter rising above on stilts.
Imieauraq places wolverine furs over
the appendages, flanks, and feet with kamiks boots.

A pair of caribou mittens fur-side in,
he lays around the inuk for the journey.
Below he gathers gooseberries in a seal poke,
mixing it with marrow and moose meat.

At last he sets his breathing hole net,
tends his muskrat barrel, sharpens his black,
jade whetstones, collects water in his seal flippers,
used as water bottles, for dipping in a shrinking pool.

Foist

dg okpik

In Kuukpik we find them,
let no one be in any doubt,

of the remedy from Anatkuq,
for the white illness. She prepares

the poultice in a mauve clay bowl,
Cotton grass, seal liver, rainwater.

In patches of seawater, devils clack and claw,
into the sun. They cross fishnets into gnarls, knots.

I roam in a sideslip of milk blue clouds,
I paint a sign used in music thresholds,

extinction, marking the direction south
of light-shadow, as if for a fossil record.

I meet her bringing lead pieces, which shrink
for making spark, pumice burns slowly.

Coldest moon reacts to the equinox,
the age of earth is already in tact.

Isibru

dg

okpik

A man creates a whale bone arrow
in a Z pattern, he gently slides the sharp
into walrus blubber, he freezes the fat
whole, then places it in a trap line.
A black tipped silver wolf eats it.
Thawing in the stomach it springs,
piercing the membrane lining.

Isibru: whalebone wolf killers
oblique holes for eyes in a wooden
mask with a dancing gorget.

Tornado's Fourth Wall

Kim Blaeser

Outside corner walls
shudder then lift away
now funnel spun
and scattered
confetti
on barren
winter
fields.

Mouth agape, you stand
a mime of bewilderment.

Bedroom pried open
family lace exposed.

This theatre set
with sodden props:

oak dresser
closet
clock
bed.

Wearing coat boots gloves face-mask
like a mad surgeon hand poised
black garbage bag held aloft,

you sift sort scavenge
parts and pieces
of your life
find lone shoe
frantic search
lost
mate.

Manoominike-giizis

Kim Blaeser

Ricing moon

when poling arms groan

like autumn winds through white pine.

Old rhythms find the hands

bend and pound the rice,

rice kernels falling

falling onto wooden ribs

canoe bottoms filling with memories—

new mocassins dance the rice

huffs of spirit wind lift and carry the chaff

blown like tired histories

from birchbark winnowing baskets.

Now numbered

by pounds, seasons, or generations

lean slivers of parched grain

settle brown and rich

tasting of northern lakes

of centuries.



Boneless Beasts

Scarlet Ross

It was three o'clock in the morning, and Adam was in his bed, staring out the window at the streetlights. He listened intently for any human footsteps, but there was only the sound of an occasional passing car.

As though responding to some kind of internal fire alarm, the boy shot out of bed. From under his mattress he took a small makeshift screwdriver he had somehow fashioned from a paper clip. He silently, methodically began to take apart the flimsy lock on the window. The room, one of the few single bedrooms in the boy's dormitory, was on the top floor, three stories up. After finally getting the window open, he managed to remove the mesh screen, so that it fell soundlessly to the grass below.

Adam returned his bed, quickly stripping it and tying the sheets together. After securely tying the sheets to the metal bed frame, the boy scrambled out the window and shimmied down the sheet-rope like it was the sort of thing he'd been doing his whole life. For all Adam knew, he had.

He couldn't remember anything about his life prior to one month ago.

When the police found the little boy walking along highway 67, he was naked and covered in blood. Although DNA tests revealed that the blood was the child's own, the examining physician could find no cuts or abrasions anywhere on his body.

The boy was either unwilling or unable to speak. His age was estimated at somewhere between ten and twelve years old, but he did not fit the description of any known missing children in the area. Officials were at a loss as to where he came from or who his parents were. He was subsequently placed in the Chapel Valley Youth Home. There, he was given the name "Adam" because nothing else really seemed to fit.

The police and child welfare office had done a good job of keeping the strange circumstances of the boy's sudden appearance out of the papers. However, the story was well-known to the folks at Chapel Valley, who regarded Adam with pity and a little fear. He was never pushed to interact with the other children, because no one wanted to risk provoking some kind of incident. Adam was content to stay in his room, staring out the window, until he was forced to leave for meals, bathing, therapy, and supervised outings.

When brought out of his room, Adam was calm and obedient, mutely doing whatever was asked of him. Thus he quickly became the favorite among the staff, who assigned him simple chores such as sweeping the floor of the rec room or peeling potatoes in the

kitchen. He performed his tasks diligently and (obviously) without complaint.

The sheets only extended about fifteen feet down; Adam had to let go and jump the remaining height. He landed on his feet, stumbling a little, and took off for the woods that surrounded the grounds of the home. It was a minimum security facility, and there was just a simple, easily-scaled chain-link fence between the boy and his freedom.

One staff member in particular took an interest in the boy. Mike Shepard was a groundskeeper and a compulsive gambler. He had lost over \$60,000 betting on the St. Louis Cardinals in the 2004 World Series, and was having some difficulty paying off this debt. Shepard was now in big trouble with his bookie, Fred Sampson, who was a close associate of one Ivan “The Terrible” Federov.

Federov was a Russian-American “businessman” of particularly brutal reputation. But the reputation of his only son, Maxim, was even worse. Numerous unsubstantiated tales of young Max’s occult dabbling, blood drinking, strange sexual exploits, animal cruelty, and other bizarre behavior were well known in certain elite circles. Even small time losers like Shepard had heard the stories of strange goings-on at the Federov homestead.

Shepard knew Adam's story, and held suspicions of his own. The stretch of road where Adam was found was a mere five miles from the luxurious gated community where the Federov family resided.

Shepard was convinced that the boy had survived some traumatic ordeal, and that the Federov scion was somehow involved.

Shepard had a plan, and the first step involved getting Adam to talk.

The boy ran quickly and quietly through the woods, intent on putting as much distance between himself and Chapel Valley as possible before his absence was discovered, which could be any minute as the sheet-rope was still hanging where he left it and the window still open.

He didn't know exactly where he was going, or what he would find when he got there. All he had was a direction, and he wasn't even sure how he knew that.

"Hey there," said the older man. "I got something for you."

Adam looked up at Shepard, his young face expressionless, before his clear crystal blue eyes were drawn to the object in the man's hand. It was a small LCD game. To demonstrate its use,

Shepard pushed a few buttons. A tiny simply-rendered motorcar moved left and right across the bottom of the little screen, deftly avoiding obstacles in its path.

“Well, look at that, isn’t that cool?”

The child looked at the object, then at the man, his face expressionless.

“Go ahead, you can have it.” Shepard said, handing the game to Adam, who took it and began to play, his brow knitting slightly in concentration.

At a loss as to what to do next, and not wanting to spend too much time hanging around lest the playground supervisor think he was some kind of pedophile, Shepard said good-bye and left Adam with his new toy.

It was early in the morning after Adam’s daring escape. The black Mercedes pulled into the Chapel Valley parking lot and a young man in his late teens got out, went into the building and approached the visitor sign-in desk.

He was tall and androgynously beautiful, with narrow ice-blue eyes, high cheekbones and an imperious air about him. He was wearing a simple black suit, like something one would wear to a funeral, and his dyed-black hair was slicked back with gel, a few strands strategically hanging in his face.

“I’m looking for my brother,” the young man said. “His name is Fredrick Federov.”

The receptionist, a zaftig bleach- blonde in her mid-forties named Terry, would later state that he bore a strong resemblance to “that little Adam boy” who climbed out the window the night before.

After confirming the spelling, Terry typed the name into the computer. It came up “file not found”.

“I’m sorry,” she explained. “We don’t have anybody by that name here right now. Could he be filed under a different name?”

The young man paused briefly, as though he were contemplating his next move. “Actually,” he said. “I think I may just have the wrong place.” He smiled, “Thank you so much for your time.”

Maxim Federov left the building but did not go back to his car. He wandered the grounds until he came upon the boy’s dormitory and walked in. There, a security guard was talking to a police officer, and a plumber was repairing a drinking fountain. Max approached the plumber, “What’s going on over there?” He nodded towards the officials.

“One of the kids took off,” said the plumber, “He climbed right out the window.”

“That sucks.”

“Yeah, but that’s not the weird thing,” the plumber lowered his voice. “You heard about that kid they found on highway 67?”

Maxim’s eyes narrowed, “Vaguely.”

After a few days of trying to befriend Adam, Mike Shepard realized it was a lost cause. It wasn’t that the child was particularly hostile or unfriendly, just disinterested. He’s obviously autistic or something, Shepard decided. And Sampson wouldn’t stop calling his voice mail, demanding payment.

Thus Shepard found himself sitting in his car outside the Federov compound, trying to convince the gate guard to let him in. He knew what he was about to do was incredibly stupid, but if he didn’t take some kind of action, he’d be dead anyway. At least this way he could try to buy himself another chance.

“Look, it’s really important.” Shepard pleaded. “It’s about his son. Just call him up and tell him I have information about his son!”

At the mention of Ivan Federov’s son, the gate guard’s eyes widened slightly. He closed the gate-window, dialed up a number on his cell, talked for a while, and then hit a button on the control panel. The gate lifted and the guard waved Shepard in.

A heavysset goon greeted Shepard at the front door, and led him through the mansion to Federov's office at the back. On the way

he noticed a large painted portrait of a small boy hanging in the hallway. The boy was a dead ringer for Adam.

As Shepard walked into the office, he was greeted by a tall, handsome fellow in his mid-fifties, dressed expensively yet casually in a pair of slacks and a white linen shirt, sleeves rolled up, the suggestion of a Kevlar vest barely visible through the fabric.

"Mike Shepard, I presume?" asked Ivan Federov. His tone was not friendly.

"Um, yessir." Shepard stammered, suddenly overcome by the realization that he would have been better off just chucking it all and taking off to Mexico or something.

"Have a seat." said Federov, gesturing to a chair. "I understand that you have some news about my son."

"Um, yes," With the sleeve of his jacket, Shepard wiped away the sweat pouring from his brow. He had no idea what to say, as he hadn't planned this confrontation beyond getting in the door. He

thought about the boy in the painting. “How many kids do you have?” he blurted out.

“I have one son.” Federov’s eyes narrowed, “Why do you ask?”

Mike decided that his only chance of getting out of this alive was to just come clean. He told Federov about Adam, how and where he was found, and about his resemblance to the boy in the picture, which was presumably a portrait of a much-younger Max.

“Listen, Shepard, I’m a very busy man.” Federov said his upper lip curling in disgust. “I have no time for the ravings of lunatics. I’ll have to ask you to leave.”

Shepard wasn’t about to argue with that. He sputtered his good-byes and left, flanked by two of Federov’s men. After he was gone, Federov picked up the phone and dialed.

“Anton, I want you to contact my son. Tell him to come home immediately.” Then, as an afterthought, “And tell Nick to get rid of Shepard.”

Max walked around outside the dormitory building until he saw the open window. He stood directly under the window and stared out over the field at the woods, where the doppelganger had undoubtedly fled. He had to find it, before his father did.

There's no telling what Ivan would do once he discovered the child's existence. Perhaps he would simply have the clone killed. Or maybe he would adopt it as his own. Surely, dear old Dad would have no qualms about trading in his current, good-for-

nothing embarrassment of a son for a newer model, once he realized that he had the option.

After all, "Get rid of it" was Ivan's catchphrase, his panacea for all problems, personal and business alike. Why should Max be immune? His mother wasn't.

Pushing these thoughts out of his mind, Max walked towards the woods, even though the odds of picking up any kind of trail were slim to none. At least, the walk would help clear his head a bit.

Where would the boy go? Would he return to the place of his spawning, like a salmon swimming upstream?

By three o'clock in the afternoon, Adam was hungry, thirsty, and exhausted. He had no idea how long or how far he had walked. Instinctively, he avoided detection by staying as hidden as possible. But starvation was getting the best of him, and he needed to get something to eat.

School was letting out, and the park where Adam had stopped to rest was rapidly filling up with children. One young mother was setting out a picnic lunch while her two kids were still playing on the swings. She turned around and called to them but her efforts were in vain.

As the woman stomped angrily in the direction of her wayward brood, Adam saw his chance. He ran up and grabbed an apple, a sandwich, and a banana off the picnic table and took off running as fast as he could. By the time the family had realized what had happened, he was already long gone, or so he thought.

A passing bike cop had been spotted the shoeless kid in pajamas running as though the devil himself were after him, he tried to give chase, but the boy ducked into some bushes and disappeared. Out of breath, the officer made a call to dispatch. The boy fit the description of the kid that had gone missing from Chapel Valley. The folks there would no doubt be happy that he was still alive and well.

Ivan Federov got a call from Anton, who informed him that, according to the scanners, the cops had spotted the boy at Woodford Park.

“Okay,” Federov responded. “We need to get to the kid before they do. Leave no stone unturned, and I want him alive.”

Max also had a police scanner in his car; he picked up the signal as he was cruising the route from Chapel Valley to the warehouse on Ledford Drive. Said warehouse was a piece of property his father owned and had pretty much forgotten about. It had been

Max’s workspace for various projects over the summer, the doppelganger being the most successful.

He wasn’t far from Woodford, so he circled the block until he spotted a bit of movement behind a dumpster. Quickly he grabbed a chloroform-soaked rag out of the glove compartment and jumped out of the Mercedes, without bothering to turn off the engine.

The scrawny little figure was no match for Max’s longer-legged and better-rested speed and strength. Max then dragged Adam to the car, looked around for any potential witnesses, popped the trunk and unceremoniously stuffed the boy in, then got back into the car and sped off in the direction of Ledford Drive.

A parked Cadillac with tinted windows, previously unnoticed by Max, started its engine and followed him.

When Max got to the warehouse, he was only somewhat surprised to find his father there waiting for him. Ivan stood staring incredulously at the instruments, large glass tanks and diagrams strewn throughout the room, before turning around to acknowledge his son, who was carrying a still-unconscious Adam in his arms. Max laid the boy down on a small sofa near the entrance.

“Do you mind telling me what in the hell has been going on here?” Ivan demanded, and then pointed at Adam. “And while you’re at it, you can explain to me what exactly that thing is.”

“I’ve been using this abandoned space for certain...creative projects.” Max absently began to straighten some papers on a nearby desk. “The child is a doppelganger, a sort of a blood golem.”

“And what is a blood golem?” Ivan asked. His tone was even, but his temper was audibly fraying around the edges.

Max stopped shuffling papers around and faced his father. “A golem created from my blood.” He said, patiently, like a professor speaking to his student. “As you can see, it is an exact copy of me as a child.”

A muscle in Ivan's face began to twitch, "And how -why did you make this?"

"To see if I could, of course. As to the how-well, a magician never reveals his secrets."

"DON'T YOU SMART OFF TO ME, YOU LITTLE PUNK!!!" Ivan roared, shoving his index finger in Max's face for emphasis. "If you don't get rid of that unnatural thing, I will!"

Max stared past the finger into his father's eyes, his expression completely blank, while Ivan stood there fuming. "As a matter of fact, I was planning to destroy it before it escaped." Max said, "I can't have it growing up and deciding it wants to replace me or something."

He came close to adding a "So there!" but thought better of it. He reached into the top drawer of the main desk and brought out a .22 pistol. At this point, Adam was just beginning to come to; he sat up, looking around and blinking like a sleepy kitten. Max leveled the gun at Adam's head.

"Wait." Ivan said, his face paling at the sight of this boy who so resembled his only child at a happier, more innocent age. "I'll meet you outside." With more haste than dignity, he turned and walked out the door.

“Okay then, this won’t take long.” Weak stomach all of a sudden, Father Dear? thought Max, though he didn’t dare say it out loud. He had the old man right where he wanted him.

Max turned again to Adam, who stared at him apprehensively.

“Sorry about this.” Max told Adam.

From outside, Ivan heard the pistol fire once. A few minutes later, Maxim emerged from the warehouse carrying the doppelganger’s lifeless body in his arms, wrapped in a bloodied white sheet. He stuffed the boy in the trunk of his car.

“I’m going to dispose of the carcass myself.” Max coolly informed his father. “I have a friend up north who will gladly lend me his chipper-shredder.”

They found the child passed out in front of the ER at the Clinica del Centro. The paramedics almost ran over him with a gurney. He was wearing blue institutional pajamas and had a dressed wound on his forehead. There was evidence that he had recently suffered a concussion.

When he woke up, the boy was either unwilling or unable to speak. His age was estimated at somewhere between ten and twelve years old, but he did not fit the description of any known missing children in the area. His blonde hair and pale skin raised an eyebrow or two among the hospital staff, but officials were at a loss as to where he came from or who his parents were. He was subsequently placed in the Casa Hogar de la Santa Maria. There, he was given the name “Adnan” because nothing else really seemed to fit.

White Things

Scarlet Ross

Late last night I was
wandering around
in that big empty field
down by the motorway.

I was quite startled to notice
that I was surrounded
by a huge flock of baby vultures.

Thousands of fluffy white hatchlings
sat at my feet and stared up at me
with quiet yellow eyes.

I thought to myself,
"Mother likes white things;
maybe I should bring one home."

But Mother likes birds in trees.

Veteran Story

Layli Long Soldier

“I happen to be a veteran / but you can't tell in how many ways / unless I tell you.”

- The Significance of a Veteran's Day, Simon Ortiz

In his one-bedroom Rapid City apartment, I am the only listener.

Family line their butts in the couches so closely they are nearly piled on each other's laps, each with a can of Coke or red Shasta. His wife sits with grandma at the kitchen table, and wipes the last of her potatoes from a plate. But it's as if he is a child walking the periphery of walls, chatting with visitors about his small world. Listen, this is what I did.

And look, here is something I want to show you.

It was a special day, he says. During the spring graduation ceremony, the same day his daughter graduated with a nursing degree, the college held an honoring for all the local vets. They invited him months ahead of time. And he towers over me, holding a photo album.

He has a thing for pictures.

Like the glossy 8x10 photo tilting on the living room wall: a biker in leather chaps hangs a tattooed arm over his shoulder. As a respectful comrade, he stands with his hands in his pockets. Every year, he finds his way to the Sturgis Bike Rally, to hang out with the bikers. And every year, he takes a picture with one of them—some wild road man who was a stranger to him only moments before—then hangs it on the wall at home, replacing the photo from the year before.

These are the things he does, non-sensical sometimes, that he values. The photographs and mementos he collects, I imagine, as fragile as bird's eggs, placed into a nest. When we visit, I peer into his world—admire, without touching; listen, without flinching.

On the way to the ceremony, he says, I fell and gashed my head. Tore my arm open.

He points to his hairline and shirt sleeve. Teeters as if the memory, itself, tips him off balance. And everybody kept saying to me, You should go to the hospital! But I went anyway, you know. There was no time to get bandages or change clothes. I had to get there by noon.

I don't ask how he fell on the way to the ceremony. I know how he is and what could have happened. If he doesn't take his meds, gases from his liver trail to his brain, and he forgets. Yesterday, he didn't take them.

Later, his wife found him under the bridge, in the cold, letting go more trapped stories to the other soldiers. Men with the same look of slackened, hanging mouths.

She brought him home, showered him, and cooked meat.

He points to another picture from the graduation ceremony. In the celebrating crowd, he stands next to a fellow veteran. The left side of his face and shirtsleeve are ripped, encrusted, and blood-soaked. Pointing to the collar and mother-of-pearl snaps, he says proudly, I bought a special shirt for the occasion.

He's always buying expensive shirts, his wife says. He's always been like that; always had to have the best shirts. That's probably why you left early from the powwow the other night—to meet some lady under the bridge with your fancy shirt!

Scabs are still healing on his arm and head. In the corner, there is a folded metal walker—stowed for

his difficult days. With things like this, it's hard to imagine him running off with another lady. Even harder to know why, at their ages, out of nowhere, his wife stirs up little storms of jealousy. He doesn't respond. And I think, well, she is a woman. And he is a man. And maybe this is the way she remembers this for him.

As he leans down to me with photos, I look at his daughter glowing under a white cap and tassel. Her graduation gown is wedding-like, and there's a fullness in her lips I recognize in all of the family. Something in the tilt of her head, a sweetness, makes me think she will be a gentle mother.

But there is a rift between them—between daughter and father. He says without any shame, She wouldn't speak to me at the ceremony. And I notice that the photo of her was taken from a distance—other young graduates blur the foreground with bright, satin joy.

Yes, it was a special day, he says. His daughter graduated and the vets were honored. And even though it was hard to get there, it paid off, he tells me. He shows me a white certificate with the official seal of the college and the president's

signature—an award given to each veteran who came.

As he returns his certificate, unframed, to a shelf beneath the t.v., his wife tells him, Go lay down. I don't want him to shuffle back to his room, but he will, after he tells her, Hey, wait a minute. I'm visiting with these people. And only after his sister, feeling a little protective, says to his wife, Hey, don't talk to my brother like that! And in a flash, like birds rushing from oncoming cars, the whole family gets up from the couches, dispersing themselves out the door. Knowing what these kinds of fights can be like.

I leave too, because he needs his rest. But there is something I take with me: he doesn't have any photos of it, but as he told me the story, I remembered it like I was there. I saw him stand up with the other vets at the ceremony—six-foot two, black hair, a blood-decorated cowboy shirt. And I saw the whole audience rise when the drum began a veteran's song. There is a picture of a memory of a story from my uncle (the part he couldn't tell me) I keep as a memento.

This is the way I remember for him.



Let Your Light Shine

Melissa Regas

Locked lips, the key

Trapped inside

The center of the palm

Fingers latched around it

Can feel the light reflecting the layers of tense
muscles protecting

each other

Can't hide a burning candle under a table

Fear opens the eyes

Exposing them to a little square of hope

The candle is in the other room

Beginning to burn the table

The key is jabbing its edges against the blood
vessels trembling in

the palm

Fingers begin to loosen

Melting with the tears of the table

The candle is helpless to be where it is

Wanting to reveal its pure light

Key fell to the ground

Muscles leaped up, supporting the
hands

Black bruises began to appear on the table

The light can't hold any longer

Running for the candle

The hand rescued the cleansing fire

Exposing the bruises of the table

Anointing the scars

Put the candle on top

Shhhh...

Melissa Regas

It's a lonely time

It's a lonely day

I often don't know what to say

I see you there across the room

Imagine you're my future groom

I wonder what's the magic key

To make your heart alive to me

I see the emptiness in you

I feel it in my gut too

I wonder what we are to do

Look at me

Be true to you

I look at you when I walk by

You stare at me like you wonder why

I am the way I am

There are mysteries that lie within me

No one discovered what they may be

One thing that I can't hide

Is the hope I hold inside

Midnight Hotel

Rick Marlatt

Somewhere in the pulmonary trunk
between St. Louis and Kansas City
your body lies open and exposed
like a pink heart breathing.

Too tired to write or think, too
tired to jack off or pray or wait
for the roll of dreams to come on
the way grey rivers slur into new cities.

The ceiling above you is a good
listener with an empty stare
and the mantra of I-70 keeps
keeps your best secrets coming.

Like a valve that connects both ends
of the sky for a moment it seems you
might live forever, yet deep inside
your eyes sink back, and below
you feel the blind pull of rivers grey.

Santa Monica Pier

Rick Marlatt

The French woman with
the pearled nostril
wants forty dollars
for this skirt of hemp
and heaven seed.

It's that word you haven't
thought of yet-
the one you stumble over
when I ask how much you
love me.

I've watched the patient
hands of time
finger blonde locks of
sunset from your turquoise
eyes as Novembers have
rolled onto one another in
foamy lashes.

And I'd offer each sand
Crystal to this old familiar
breeze over and over again
to watch you search-

it's a pelican watching stars

explode teal across patina caps-
a kite that children couldn't
harness with nothing to lose
making the most of one last ride-
a narwhale running deeper into
new worlds that look more and
more like home.

Walking with fresh legs and fish
smell to the car-
hemp and heaven seed around
your waist
sunset dying a slow, fake death-
I love you now like the narwhale runs
and in midnights of waiting color,
I smile.

Anniversary

Rick Marlatt

My darling,
another year has added itself
to the index at the back of the book.

Tonight we'll sit in the north corner booth,
our booth, as you call it,
sipping Chardonnay until memories mingle and
overlap.

There won't be any uncomfortable silences-
we'll talk forever
about how the second boy
is so unlike the first
how the sex
has gotten more complicated
how you don't read nearly as much as you used to
how it was a good thing we left the city
how all our old friends have lost touch
how the rains have returned
how proud you are that I left the company
how you knew it was forever right away.

The waiter will have to come back
at least twice before you decide
on the baked chicken parmesan with
roasted garlic mushrooms.

“I’m excited to try this,”
you’ll say with an innocence I think our girl
would’ve had.

Your round eyes will inflate
at the overzealous picture of the
caramel fudge brownie
or the after-dinner drinks that call Kalluha
a staple-
but you’re watching your waistline this year.

“What does it mean?” you’ll ask
and though I know it means
a few more seconds will pass
when people we meet ask us “how long?”
You’ll know the answer but look at me wonderingly
as if you’re hoping I’ll come up with the number
you’ve suddenly forgotten-
a man running his finger up and down the index
which gets larger all the time
though the print gets finer
and finer-
but I’ll say it means some things are still
meant to be.

During coffee that you’re disappointed in
we won’t dive headlong into another year-

it won't toy with us or sneak up when we aren't
looking,
but be waiting with a twig of parsley and toasted
dinner rolls
when we return from the restroom
just like it's been planned.

Our lives are a sketch scene,
we merely fill in dialogue
and add action when we feel moved.
There are no cues from the director
who has long since walked off set,
bored to death by our creative ineptitude.

And we aren't marching
towards middle age
or years that are somehow golden

we're sitting
across from each other
in our familiar smells
and contemplative looks,
listening to the other chew.

And on the drive home
the theatre's marquee
will twinkle like fireworks
in your tired eyes.

"Shall we take in a show?"

I'll ask without slowing down.

"No," you'll reply in the middle of a yawn.

And we'll drive home,

mouths defined by toothpicks and thin mints.

Tires we just had rotated

will propel on into the night

and headlights due for change

will show us where we're going before we get there.

This is our life, darling, nothing more and

nothing less.

I love you for not leaving and the index points to

the rest.

i didn't come inside her

Jan Beatty

dear future:

i have heard rumblings of the star-fucking kind—

the ground rumbustious

with lies about my past

this will all come out in the wash

i've been on street corners with men

you wouldn't want to know—

what are the headwaters of my life?

this is all very heady—

heaped up on me:

she's a real comer

this is not comfy

my life the comic opera:

com ic o pe ra n

1. an opera with a humorous plot and a happy ending

see asterisk

*somebody's future, especially as supposedly revealed in a
horoscope (informal)

what's the difference between a star and a staple gun?

one is what you wish for/one you can use:

star n

1. a gaseous mass in space such as the Sun, ranging in size from that of a planet

to larger than the earth's orbit, which generates energy by thermonuclear reactions

see asterisk

*somebody's future, especially as supposedly revealed in a horoscope (informal)

vt to cover or decorate something with stars, or with many brilliant or colorful objects so as to give an effect comparable to that of the stars in the night sky

star cham ber n

a court or tribunal noted for being harsh, arbitrary, and unaccountable in its proceedings

what kind of tribunal, what kind of whacked star chamber is this?

i'm a pin-up, a nobody. i'm a lump sum. (pay the money, get the baby)

i'm lumpen:

lum pen adj (disapproving)

1. living, or regarded as living, on the margins of society
2. stupidly content with a life regarded as intellectually empty and socially inferior

npl

people regarded by others as lumpen (disapproving) (takes a plural verb)

I'm wonky, wanted and wooed by many

so many comings and goings—mostly cum-ings,
then goings for good

I always wanted to be a luminary in my own life—
dear rummage sale of my heart, echoing dull and low,

my beginnings:

this was no charming rumble seat,

but ruination—

earthlight, earthshine:

earth · shine n

sunlight reflected from the earth that illuminates the part of the moon not receiving light directly from the sun.

also called earthlight

just within earshot,

no headwind.

head · way n

1. progress toward achieving something
2. the interval or distance between two vehicles, trains, or ships traveling in the same direction along the same route

earth moving in my dreams.

the facts have been sketchy

I had this piece of paper—took years to get it.

the story before the story changed.

before the government got their hands on it

i've been told_____

his name was on my birth certificate/his voice

was on the phone/his lame-ass answer:

i didn't come inside her

i'm about to detonate—

delivery, labor, nativity, confinement, death—pick the order

i've been misplaced, i'm off course, mislaid:

this was a mis-lay—a lay that should never have happened

i'm sort of glad it did—i'm the passing shot, the passion fruit,

but where's the passkey, the skeleton?

passion is a synonym for fervor or rage—

there was a lot of ardor involved in making me, maybe some zeal?

i hope so. i hope it wasn't a lousy lay.

crazed delight—or just another drunk lost night?

then they were looking for the pass-through, the hole

in the wall to shove me—to where?

they wanted to regularize the situation, it was very irregular, but

common. remorse, remorse.

they had to rehouse me, find me a place to be after the body.

a new house with new people to erase what had happened

we went from slap shot to slap-bang

i hope it was slaphappy, i hope it was slashing:

slashing n

1. the illegal striking or swinging of a stick at an opposing player in hockey or lacrosse

i hope there were slats of light everywhere—to see the stars on the other side



Polar Faith

IM Antar

My faith could brake a rake with a shoe string
pole-vaulting with javelins unraveling cause the noose
stings

ink tones fling black cats dialect

swing with me on curtains cause i elect the flirtin of
potions around king Midas's neck

so the oceans can speak to me while i reach for the
starving limbs of the artist tree
the hardest sleeves conceal river mouths and water seeds

my faith is constantly waning
my chest keeps complaining
that the bitterness in my life could fight a kite with a
knife—straining

an emcee's plight is walking with a crooked light, a
walkman,

and a trite little slight of hand trick
talking about you lifting two cards—slick
i see through two hearts
and pick apart the tones of your harp
finish Guinness spend 10minuets in the pursuit of my
art

with strategic expression and a collegiate discretion
i'mma grab the bottle and give it a spin in your direction

show up to the party stag carrying a tardy bag
light the spliff take a whiff and a parting drag
dag, the fag you smoke is full of gas, two stroke
oil and a fencing foil, poke and boil your gin
till it tickles enough to soil Edmund Hoyle's chin

Doyle Brunson is munchin' on a pumpkin
and just got called on a nuts flush draw by a munchkin

or a donkey punch to the back of the throat
a chompy lunch while 9volt batteries float

soak your cloths in marmalade
fight the cunningness of a starving blade
snort a can of Marvin Gaye
before i load up the harvest and i drive the car away

Burying Childhood Dogs

Allorah Wyman

Someone pushed her off the pier. Olivia felt unfamiliar hands grab hold of her shoulders and knock her forward until her body gave out, losing the battle with the gravity. She tumbled over the edge, the ocean cold and vast. Pushing against the oncoming waves, Olivia was certain she couldn't swallow another breath of salt water without sinking to the bottom. She stopped then. Her eyes stinging and her heart surging in the shocking cold of the December ocean. It was then that those rough hands, somehow recognizable, yanked at her wrists and arms until she bobbed above the waves again, wrapped around her chest. Her puffy jacket soaked, ruined.

Olivia washed up on shore like a newborn dog in its mother's mouth. Once she coughed enough water up onto the rocky sand, she turned to meet her failed murderer. It was a boy. He was a couple years older than her, maybe thirteen or fourteen, but with the slender cheek and angry scowl face of a teenager. His jeans were dripping on the sand and they both shivered uncontrollably.

"I'm Seth."

She looked away from him, concentrating on the rhythm of her heartbeat. She didn't want to meet this boy, or any other boy who ever tried to kill her. He held out his hand and she noticed a rip in his glove.

“Was it you?”

“No. I didn't do it. I think it was some kid from school though.” He couldn't even look her in the eyes. She took his lie as if she had no other choice, a lie from a parent or a teacher. “Don't you know how to swim anyway?” he asked, his face darkening.

“I think I forgot,” she said.

Her dad had been a big man. He used to swoop her up in one curl of his arm, squeeze her tightly, his other hand pressing her cheek into his chest, smiling, “Bear hug!” She would squirm and kick out her legs until she felt his grip loosen.

“That hurts,” she said.

“Go clean your face. There's dirt all over it.”

“You're stupid!”

“Olivia.” His voice came from deep in his body every time he spoke her name, quiet like the last trace of an echo.

On the morning of her sixth birthday, he had woken her up dressed in a brown bear costume. It had a mask that scared Olivia. She heard her father's muffled voice but she couldn't see his face. The mouth didn't move so his words seemed to come from another part of the body. She focused on the waving, fuzzy hand. When he went to grab her out of her bed, she screamed, even though she knew it was her dad. He pulled the fabric off his head, peering at her; Olivia asked him to never wear that suit again and he pinkie swore he wouldn't. She kicked at her comforter and sweat beaded on his forehead.

“Let's go get breakfast, kid.”

It was always that way between them, even when he wasn't wear a disguise.

He left notes on her locker. She pulled them off and some of the paint would flake off too, revealing the metal underneath. Olivia was accustomed to Seth's scrawling handwriting, floating unevenly across the page. He wrote about things she would never show anyone. He told her about his mother's Valium bottle, his sister braiding her hair every night after bathing, his last bike race. The notes never had a name,

neither hers nor his. But always by a corner, in the bottom, a tiny stick figure with giant hands dangling by his side. She didn't keep them. She burned them with a lighter she stole from her mom. It was the last thing she would think about at night when she went to sleep. Not about what he wrote but burning them. Watching those confessions lift away into ash that she didn't have to worry about.

It was a month after he pulled her from the water when he first approached her at school. Olivia didn't eat in the cafeteria but during the winter months it was so cold outside that she would sneak into the girl's bathroom and sit on the stall all the way by the window, gulping in cold air between bites of her sandwich and hoping no one knocked on her stall. She waited until it sounded empty, free from the noise of girls blotting lipstick that their mothers refused to let them have and throwing wet lumps of toilet paper on the ceiling, walking out as if she had only walked in a moment before. Seth waited for her. He must have seen her go in and stood across the hallway, one foot against the lockers behind him, his back against someone else's belongs.

“What do you want?” she asked.

He shrugged. “Did you get my messages?”

“I burned them. Don’t write me anymore.”

His face didn’t change. He never showed emotion. It reminded Olivia of her father’s bear outfit, fearful of what was masked underneath.

In February, Olivia’s dog died. She found him, mouth foaming and body shaking by a shed in the backyard. She had called out his name but he didn’t flick his tail or move his head. It was snowing, the wind blowing flurries over his matted fur. She blinked, keeping the cold from burning her dry eyes. Olivia ran up the stairs of their apartment complex. Icicles hung from the railings. She found her mom sitting in her bathroom by the radiator, cigarette at her lips, eyeliner smudged at the corners of her eyes. Her mom smoked French cigarettes: Gitanes, gypsy women. The packages had a wavy, blue silhouette of a woman consumed by white haze. She always left the packs in random places in the apartment: a windowsill, a toilet top, a pillowcase.

“What, honey?” she asked.

“There’s something wrong with Tobey.”

She threw her cigarette into the toilet bowl.

“Where is he?”

Tobey had been a gift a few weeks after her dad died. Her mom brought him into Olivia's room, telling her that her dad wanted to have a dog, a protector. He was a mutt with soft black eyes. His thick nails had scratched her arms and she wished her dad was there to tell her mom she was wrong, that he didn't want a dog to be with them; he wanted to stay with them instead. Olivia wanted to love him with his stupid, nuzzling face, but he followed her mom around the apartment like she carried dog food in her pockets.

They went out to the shed. He had managed to drag himself a few feet further toward the woods; his tail making snail marks in the snow. Her mom went over to his body. Little clumps of ice pocked the ground where his paws had fought for life. Olivia's rainbow scarf scratched her neck. Her mother bent over, touching Tobey's muzzle, wiping his nose with her bare hand.

"Get me the shovel," she said.

Olivia didn't say anything but she didn't move either.

"Ollie, now."

She started back up the slope to the building.

There was a storage room in the basement, sectioned off into equal spaces corresponding to each apartment number. Standing in

front of #305, Olivia squinted through the dust, her hands shaking, the bare bulb swaying in the draft. Their shovel had a red handle. She saw it in the back by her old rocking horse. Picking it up and crawling through the piles of the past, one that included her father, she took in a deep breath of musty air, pulled the light chain and climbed up the stairs to leave. Once outside, Olivia stood by, watching her mother. She had dug out a small hole in the snow with her hands, but she hit ice and had to wait for the shovel to arrive. The tip of the metal spiking into the icy ground sounded like a rock hitting a window. Tobey didn't move. His eyes were rolled into the back of his head. Her mother pushed and jumped on the shovel, her boots slippery with packed snow. She coughed, hacking and heaving until finally she threw the shovel behind her and started in with her hands again. Pounding on the ice and dirt, her hands made hollow thuds and the woods seemed to be watching their every movement. Olivia wanted to reach out her hand, stop her from burying Tobey so soon. After a while, her mom stopped, sitting back on her heels. Olivia took in a deep breath.

“Watch him. I'll be right back,” she said at last.

“Where are you going?” Normally Olivia wouldn’t ask but she was suddenly terrified that her mom would walk away and never come back. Her mother didn’t answer her.

The wind had picked up. Each breath felt like a sharp burning in her lungs. She felt sweat run down her side, her jacket and sweater clinging to each other. Her mom returned with a tarp, crinkled and blue. She wrapped Tobey’s body in it and dragged him through the snow toward the shed. Olivia was too scared to follow her. She kicked the snow until it settled smoothly over Tobey’s body imprint, her hands too frozen to be of any use.

Seth’s house was near her apartment complex. He mentioned it in a locker note and she realized he must have followed her home. She started watching as she walked home, especially after turning corners or when she took different routes. Sometimes, she thought she noticed someone else but Seth lived so close he probably walked the same way she did. She saw him behind her once but never stopped to talk to him.

It wasn’t until he left a note on her door that she wanted to find out where he lived. She got home before her mother since her job in a dental office was across town. It was fluttering on the

wood right above the doorknob. It didn't have her name on it, but the front read "To: Ocean Girl" and she knew it was him. He watched her. That's what the note said. He wanted to come over to her house. She read it three times before putting it underneath her dirty laundry, convinced she'd burn it later but she never did.

It wasn't until the springtime that her mother made her bury Tobey. She brought out the tarp and laid Tobey on the same ground that had been frozen a few months before. The shovel was with him. Olivia looked at his face, his eyes had turned into a runny liquid, ants crawled in and out of his fur, so many of them it looked it he might be moving again. Ants moved over his eyes and he didn't close them. She didn't want to bury her dog. He had left them too long before.

"Can't we burn him up like Dad?" she asked.

"Tobey needs to be buried. We owe it to him," her mother said.

"Dad wasn't buried," she said.

"Your father had his ways and I have mine."

Tobey couldn't be lifted anymore. His body seemed to melt under the pressure of their arms. Her mom pushed on him with the

shovel until his body fell into the hole she dug out of the ground. She kicked the tarp in on top of his body. Then she handed the shovel to Olivia.

“Ollie, finish this up for me.”

Her mom was sweating and Olivia was sure she couldn't refuse. The wood of the handle felt grainy and rough. Her hands were stinging from the effort. Her jacket was thin but she quickly needed to take it off in order to keep from overheating. A few of the neighbors in surrounding apartments were glancing out of their windows from time to time checking on her progress. Olivia wanted to wave at them, shove their faces in this pile of dog and dirt and see what they would do. No one came out. It was only after about an hour, when she was patting down the rearranged earth that she looked over her shoulder and saw Seth standing behind her.

“Leave me alone.”

“Did your dog just die?”

“No. He died in January.”

“But you're burying him now? That's sick.”

“That's what happens when things die. You bury them, stupid.”

“What was his name?”

“I don’t want to talk about my dog.”

Olivia crossed her arms in front of her chest and it reminded her of his arms pulling her out of the ocean. She was staring at his chest instead of his face. He reached over and grabbed her, pulling her chin up, pressing onto her lips. She didn’t understand him; she didn’t want to. Her heart felt warm and exactly how she never hoped to feel again. Next to her dead dog behind the apartment she couldn’t escape. She shoved him away. For the first time, his face looked hurt, confused. She ran up to the shed and threw the shovel inside, curling up in the place where Tobey had laid for the last four months. When she emerged an hour later, Seth was gone.

The notes stopped showing up on her locker. She hadn’t gotten one in over a month. Her mother told her she was going to summer camp. Olivia packed her bag as soon as she found out. She didn’t know what to take but she figured as little as possible would do. Seth would be in high school next year so she wouldn’t see him in the hallways. On the last day of class, she walked to the ocean’s pier. The same one he had shoved her off of a few months before. She wore a summer dress, but the breeze

was making her shiver. The sun reflected off the water and Olivia thought of snow and French cigarettes and hands on her back. She thought of Tobey and her dad and the ants crawling across Tobey's eyes. Then she started to run. Her apartment wasn't far from the pier. She ran around to the back of the complex, confusing the wind with the sound of the waves. The shovel was in her hands and she was digging, digging, digging. Looking for fur and bones and tissue. She knew what was under that dirt; it was in her eyes every time she tried to sleep, hiding in the back of her mind. Olivia tossed the shovel away and started cupping dirt out with her bare hands. Her dress was turning black and moist. She wiped her face with the back of her hands and mud flew up into her eyes.

Olivia's hand hit something. It was soft, but definitely a different consistency than the dirt. She grabbed hold of the object and pulled until a piece of Tobey broke off under all that dirt and she was lying on her back, clenching the bone and flesh to her chest, crying for her daddy and wondering why she hated Tobey's name like the sound of waves crashing against thousands of shells.

from Manatee/Humanity

Anne Waldman

Study density of

maxed out earth-planet-universe

Study our captivity, o humanoids

Zoom in on the bald cypress

or *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* (bald eagle stalker)

Consider our exile, depravity in a strange land

Is it a cosmic contest

who is most backward barbaric bellicose greedy
psychopath?

Or who scrys the future with greatest unsurpassable wisdom

Scrys delicate muscle of land and sea predicts the trouble spots
of flood tempest famine the curling hurricane with its

black and blue eye of all storms

devastating deleterious cyclone

no hiding place down here!

Do I have to choose/compete

Will there ere be a better time, o humanoids

for endangered inhabitants, critically harmed ones

Animalized spirits plead of you out of

inexhaustible (till they drop) eco-dream & delirium
enough enough! Kefaya!

They talk and the dead talk too
Tell of mythic wonder and fragility
in zodiacal light
Tell the meaning of sentience as in
the ability to experience suffering
makes us all kin
Tell of love-making under lindens
weedy glee – remember?
Tell of magical beasts and weeping trees
 cross wounded galaxies like meteors or as crystalline deities
all particles reflected exposed rehearsed
by a magnanimous sunny disposition to survive -
devour destroy yet survive! or....?
you who keep all this going in language,
O language brains
who speaks for the wild universe?
dumb humanoids
Who goes down to the count
O mute promise of dumb bunnies overpopulating the sod
Utopic possibility, burning brain
O cut-throat language!
I am truly on fire
Dear definitive new Darwin, where are you?
Or rather where is she
Hiding in the mandible scriptorium
The slime mold lab?

Standing on a rapidly melting habitat
With the polar bear?
Tell us what we are
Did we do it all wrong for survival mode
Did we screw up?
Can I make it up, try, overcome, desist, resist, blossom again
Buck the system in cyborgian mode
with synthetic flashback mechanism
with military precision techniques
with projectile costume of vamp and dare
and stiletto
the better to enhance you by...
breathe and wait for next hallucination
Give me orders I'm soldiering fortune
Is this not torture trap version of un-fittest world?
With trepanned head my thinking
so weird and complicated now
by end of world scenarios,
end of history dramas where I
can't think straight
mind queered in every direction
genre, gender, zonal, racial as the definitions
bleed together - freaked, torqued
damaged –with this wounded head I embrace the poem
I said I would move from A to Z
Travel all the years with you, millennial

I said I would be all constituents
And ride many continents
I said I would intone my litany of curiosity
I would dance with the language & dialects of bees
I would be mummified to speak the Egyptian way
Out of cranial stuffing, messing with circadian rhythms
Let's agree on the symbols dear partners in sound
To get across this passion and heat
I would keep the syntax of sorrow in April
Grief on every side can't withstand itself
But it must be said in April it must begin in April
Sweet April with frogs and crickets,
 & procession of equinox, O activator ram!
But do with experiment of empathy all I must
identify in empathy - You too
& the light of a hundred thousands buddhas
guide us
A head just barely "on"
held by a gorgeous scarf
of rainbows and galaxies
and the tiniest stars and fireballs
and zenithal projections
and tales of the Zenghe expeditions
when China tried to tie up the world
with trade she would be an example
of reach of time and space

I am no zoologist
But field poet
with a zygomatic arch
with tender love of the manatee
What century are we in that threatens manatee
Please come home to me in this one
my darling, my love my friend, companion
who sings of all this too
and you, manatee, you join this convivio too
Meet me in Broca's area
Wernicke's arena, by the edge
of Supramarginal gyrus, Angular gyrus,
at the Primary Auditory Cortex
I will be waiting
O zephyr o zephyr lily
all the lilies come too
and radiant colors of zither I play
to aid the task of liturgical assignment
arrive
Study humanity's expansion
humanity's destruction
neuroscience's lilt & tilt
& get back to me,
Dear You in our conversation
"unspecified you" or you I'm talking to
Zero growth

Young blood
Youngster theory
Youthful offender
You you you
Yucatec or Yucca moth
You who throb I'm coming nearer you
It's bright jumpy Tuesday
We're hoping some kind of weather arrives
 might resemble spring
Red wings keep up quite a racket
Buds deciding whether it's safe yet or not
hold back?
Keep alert here
If I could see you, masticating humanoid,
 as Siberian Tiger, grey wolf
as Hairy-eared Dwarf lemur
as Cheetah as Blue Whale
If I could but see you morph as snow leopard
Uncia uncia or Panthera?
Track you from Afghanistan to Lake Baikal and eastern Tibet
with your ringed ash-brown spots
and elegant rosettes of black
stalking your prey...

what if

Loneliness: Two Kinds

Kate Gale

There are two kinds of loneliness. The first—the kind that made us invent God.

We are all lonely in the universe. We invent God in the image of man. We say this God person hears us. The compassionate invent a compassionate God. The merciful, a merciful God. Bullies invent a God who bullies. Masochists, a God who likes pain. They're big on descriptions of cross, nails, thorns. Sadists like to think of God having us whipped, tossing us into the lake of fire, flames licking between our ribs.

The second kind of loneliness is what you do to yourself. You yell at your spouse; she takes off with her girlfriends to the margarita bar, that's the second kind of loneliness. When you do shit to people that makes them look at you like, what? They back away. You see yourself in their eyes, your reflection bouncing off their irises. Walk through that door into the second kind of loneliness. Much deeper than the first, like a well of longing from which there is no escape.

Comstockery

Kate Gale

George Bernard Shaw

“Comstockery is the world’s standing joke at the expense of the United States. Europe likes to hear such things. It confirms the deep seated conviction of the Old World that America is a provincial place, a second-rate country-town civilization after all.”

Anthony Comstock

“George Bernard Shaw is an Irish smut dealer.”

Anthony Comstock, crusader for righteousness, convinced Congress to pass the Comstock laws denying anyone in the U.S the right to birth control, knowledge of birth control, to any pictures of nude people sent by U.S. mail including medical text books.

If you grow poppies, their papery petals opening in your flower garden, that is legal. If you know how to make opium of these poppies, it is illegal. If you own hemp seeds to feed to your birds, that is legal. If they fall into the grass and grow, that is a crime.

Anthony Comstock loved his mother who died when he was ten. Married an older tiny woman who wore only black, became the landscape. I imagine them, retiring to separate bedrooms after a frigid dinner of corn, peas, turkey giblets.

We're all subject to God's laws. Anthony Comstock had 3000 people imprisoned. He died a hated man. Except by one young admirer who found his work and methods exceptional... J. Edgar Hoover.

Comstock pored over thousands of pornographic photos. Willing to subject himself to evil to rid the world of filth and purify mankind. A Christ like character, not appreciated in his own lifetime. Unlike Jesus, not deified since. Like Jesus... hated.

My son tells me the world's all haters or players. Which are you? Comstock was a player for the Christian team. If you fail to appreciate someone purifying the world of sodomy, condom usage, oral sex, you're a hater.

Some of you know how to make opium from the poppies you grow, have pictures of naked women, have used birth control and taught others to do so, have practiced sodomy. Same sex sodomy is illegal in Kansas, Texas and Oklahoma.

Some of you are not even Christians. Some of you have medical textbooks in your libraries. Some of you have practiced oral sex. Illegal in Georgia. Reach your hand in your clothes. Whatever you find there is obscene.



Temple

Ben Wilson

I want to tell you about my body. About how beautiful it is. About how it feels to live in this country, this flesh which is sometimes a plain of snow and sometimes a forest. I want to let you into it, and let you feel how good it is to inhabit this skin, these nerves, this blood which is suffused with wine. I want to tell you that my skin, my sex, my being, is a fragment of Eternity that has given itself to me out of love. I want to tell you that my body IS a temple, IS divine, IS a signifier of that which can't be signified.

I am going to tell you about the first time I was paid for sex. It was recent. His name was Paul. It wasn't as awful as these things can be. I wasn't raped. He didn't hit me, or steal the money. He treated me well. It's important to me that you know he was an okay guy. No worse than a thousand men who'd take a guy home for sex. Don't let the money cloud the issue. We fucked, there was an exchange. No different from any other one night stand.

I had always known I was going to be a prostitute. Because I was sexy. Because I was dangerous. Because there is a power in being desirable, and I needed to prove I had that power. I knew I was going to be a prostitute the way other twelve year olds know they are going to be doctors.

But I waited till I was 21, living in my own flat and no longer suicidal.

My parents would not have approved. I tried to become a rent-boy the first time I moved out, but my depression had made me ugly. It wasn't until 21 that I finally got the freedom, psychological and familial, to try the game out.

I put myself onto a dating website. There was a fee of £40 for commercial profiles. I payed it. I also started a novena of red candles for St. Expedite. I promised him a rock cake and flowers if he would get me some interest quickly. I advertised myself succinctly, so as to create an air of mystery; “Beautiful blue eyed boy. Green dreadlocks. Tattooed hips, slim build and Mediterranean colouring.”

I was very deliberate in my omission of a cock-shot. My penis is very average. Beautiful in an understated, organic way, but still average. I prefer my testicles. Though it wasn't shame that kept my dick off of Gaydar.co.uk, it was cruelty. I have always had a knowing, manipulative streak to me. I've understood the language of sex, control, hunger and illusion since I was a child. I don't know why, I had no need to learn them. My childhood was entirely free of the sex games it equipped me for.

But I was equipped, and I have a cruelty in me that I seldom admit to. Provoking desire in others is a dark, dark thing. It relies on knowing their blind spots and their weakness, and exploiting it. I knew that the less I revealed, the more men would fill in the blanks themselves. The more uncertainty I left in their minds, the

more I controlled them. What I kept could become a focus of longing, what I revealed could only be

more flesh on the market.

I waited an hour for responses. I had ten. A quick moment of maths suggested that if I spent only one hour with each of these men I could have a grand in my pocket. My heart glowed inside me. One thousand pounds for sex. My overdraft gone in a week.

Paul was the first person to message me who didn't sound like a serial killer. Not that I was really that bothered about serial killers. I believe, despite logic, that I am immune to serious misfortune. I think it is a common form of arrogance, but for me it has been developed into a shield, a power, a glamour. I have believed in my own luck until others have. I suppose serial killers can't be assumed to have fallen under the same spell that sane people have. But I do not worry.

My sudden headlong plunge into Christianity (rather than the Christian flavoured Witchcraft that, at the time, was my preferred brand of mysticism) hasn't disabused me of this. I get that God's love for me is overwhelming, burning, destructive in it's sacred desire for me. I suppose I'm still having problems understanding why he'd feel that for other people too. I live life like other people are subplots to my own hero-narrative. Interesting, but ultimately secondary to me, i.e. the main character. It is a terrible thing, but I don't want to lie about my motivations.

After receiving Paul's message I rang him on his home phonenumber, to make sure he was real and that his address was as he said it was. I wrote all the details I knew about him in my diary and then passed the same on over to my friends. I explained that if I went

missing, I'd probably been raped and chopped up and so they should give these details to the police. We all laughed.

I washed my dick with water and lemon juice because I wanted to be clean and delicious. Same with my asshole. I suppose lemon juice didn't do any thing good for my intestinal flora and fauna, but it will have made me taste good and sterile. My dreadlocks, short and half finished as they where, I tied behind my head with a star spangled bandana. Not a flag, but a map of the zodiac. With every addition to my body I was trying to create a character who was occult, weak, beautiful. I wanted to be desirable, ownable, and rewritable.

My jeans hugged my ass and tastefully emphasised the bulge of my crotch. The bulge had been carefully engineered by the angle and placement of a slightly too small (always my preferred size) boxer brief. My t-shirt was tight, and cut to emphasize the curves of the woman it was designed for. On me it improved muscle tone, whilst letting me remain ephemereal, soft and penetratable. I was neither manly or not not manly. Completely open to interpretation. Begging to be deciphered. Available to desire.

I felt great. I knew I was sexy because I wanted to fuck myself. Narcissus couldn't touch me, though he would have wanted too. The sun shone out on me. The earth seemed to shine out around me, with me. I felt euphoric, transcendent. Everything in the whole universe shone with desire and satisfied desire and new desire, all at once. I basked in it, and it basked in me.

The truth about being sexy, is that you decide whether or not to be sexy. And I had decided, decided with all that was in me, that I was going to be sexy.

I walked to the pick-up point and waited. When Paul turned up I got into his car with the cool assurance of one who had done this a thousand times. Though I was nervous, I didn't let it touch me. We spoke about him. I “listened”, which just means silence and borderline relevant questions. I nodded a lot.

He wasn't a boring man. He was an artist, and his house was a temple to intelligent, quirky and free design. If he hadn't paid me for sex, we could have been friends. When we got to the house he got me a drink. I asked for water. Old age is attracted to dehydration. I have seen the commercial.

We fucked. Nothing scary. Maybe his cock caught the back of my throat a few times, but gagging is not something that bothers me. I think an artful gag can do wonders to boost a man's ego. The whole thing was pretty vanilla. Pseudo-deviance. Not worth writing about.

But as I straddled him, I had an epiphany. He looked up at me and I felt disorientated. The ego-spell I'd woven round me had swollen, enlarged and suddenly shattered. I was dropped into Mystery, understanding, loss. I saw him and I saw how he saw me. I watched him watch me and I knew something terrible.

I could be this man. His desire, was not for me, but for my youth. He wanted to simultaneously be me and possess me. My need to

be seen as beautiful was the same as his need to be seen as beautiful, only I was young. I could be him, and soon. He was only 40, not even twice my age. I felt the sudden sensation of walking a predestined path, of suddenly existing in the past, present and future all at once. The desired becomes the desirer, and their need is the same, it is the need to be powerful through beauty. I was him, and he had been me, and we existed in a chain of pederastic desire stretching back to Orpheus' first fling with a child.

But the sex was ok. I dealt with the whole thing without a lot of fuss. The money was useful, it bought me some wine and a hat, amongst other things. I didn't feel distress, only compassion. About a week later, that compassion blossomed into a fully formed opinion. Though not an original one. I decided that the body was sacred. This is a commonly spoken though rarely enacted principle in neo-pagan discourse. I chose to add to the speaking.

I didn't really understand until a Marxist friend of mine called me on it. I asked him if I thought I was undercharging. He asked

what price could ever be suitable? What amount of money would ever make

commodifying your body acceptable? Then I knew. And I deleted my hooker account on gaydar.co.uk.

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?

I understood. I understood what Blake understood. I was the grain of sand, I was the wildflower. I don't know how I understood. Maybe it was Grace. I was horrified that I had sold my self for any price.

But being a prostitute wasn't the issue. How was my office job any different? I gave up use of my body in exchange for money. Did it matter whether the body was typing or sucking hot sausage? I am an empire of skin, given only a brief stretch of time to romance Eternity. Did it matter how I mortgaged that off? Did the manner of my self betrayal make it a lesser crime?

I wanted to tell you about my body. I wanted to tell you how this thin cloak of dust has more beauty than almost any of the things I might use it for. I wanted to fall back and glow through these words, to let this meaty divinity sing out in it's Mystery. I wanted to tell you and show you the One who wrote out this love song called the Physical.

But all I have been able to tell you is folly. All I could share is the negative space around the presence. I am dependent on this force, but I can't speak a word of it. All I have managed to share is my mistakes, but all I am is hope. All I am is fire. I'm sorry. I'm grateful. I hope you understand.



Shifting Winds

Nigel Long Soldier

Labeled with another culture's name

My bloodlines been stained

Many ancestors slain

But I don't feel that pain

I believe my mother/ PHOENIX

"SMOKE will rise above the rain"

To watch the ashes of destruction

Nurture life again

I can't sit back and complain of broken treaties

When I have a broken family

And I guarantee they need me

To stand tall

Walk proud

And constantly speak freely

It's usually not easy

To make changes peacefully

We need to show our children

How to compromise reasonably.



SEX DOLL, ROCKET SUMMER

Ben Rawluk

"Come back now, Baby," croon the Beach Boys over the radio as Javier lies in the backseat of his cherry convertible, black leather upholstery squelching against his bare ass. His shorts are peeled down to his ankles. Beside Javier lies the sex doll—hands in the air, praising God. She—it—doesn't say anything, but she's just a sex doll—what does he expect? A song and dance? The stars come out, blinking miserably in the sky overhead. He didn't mean to get stoned with that bastard, Von Braun. Javier could be bowling right now, not thinking about rocket crashes while the sex doll leaks his leftover spunk down her—its—plastic thighs. He hisses, deflating, and runs a wet hand over his black hair, pushing it back, off his forehead. Even with the stars out, the parking lot behind Von Braun's apartment building still swelters. Javier could be walking around in rented shoes thick with foot sex vibrations, listening to Frankie call his girlfriend a fucking bitch among other things, or Ali arguing with his boyfriend over the payphone in the lobby. Balls rolling into the gutter rather than exploding machines powderizing bone into the pavement. Javier squeezes the sex doll's chest.

He pictures—tries to picture, or doesn't mean to picture—Ali sucking on his cock in the backseat of this cherry convertible, what that would look like, and the idea is brief and sick and he rubs the back of his head against the leather, lets his finger wander down the sex doll's ridges to the cooze. Shit. That bastard, Von Braun, and his bright ideas. Smoke a nice fatty up

on the roof, talk about doomsday projects. "One day I'll take you out to New Mexico, to the testing ranges," Von Braun had moaned. Javier opens his eyes and blinks at the flickering

DOUGLAS HOTEL sign across the road. He could march across the street, sex doll under his arm, rent a room for the night, have his way some more—but everything's so heavy! The world pools with gravity.

Javier rubs his bare soles over the edge of the car door. His moccasins are somewhere in the front seat, next to the brake pedal, thrown off in a moment of rising passion. His finger squishes into the wet spunky mess he's left all over her—it. He licks his lips. Frankie will be getting drunk about now, he'll throw a lot of gutterballs, he'll refuse to go home to that fucking bitch. Estelle is not a fucking bitch, Javier happens to think. She puts up with Frankie for who knows why, whatever, she doesn't hit him over the head with a frying pan when she probably should. Javier would, listening to Frankie all day every day going off about everything. "Estelle's got some great legs on her," Javier says to the sex doll. "She walks around in those long cotton skirts that ruffle in the air conditioning—thank fucking god for air conditioning—and she forgets to shave them once in a while." Been known to brush past him with a little stubble down there while ordering Ali and Frankie around kitchen, making margaritas for everybody to keep them cool on the balcony. She doesn't usually give Javier orders, he just reads the baseball scores out from the newspaper.

The sex doll's legs are stubby and straight. Very slick as he paws at her.

Estelle's long legs—she's half a head taller than Frankie even when he's not hunched forward—and Ali's sweet,

cocksucking lips. Von Braun counting backwards from ten, blowing smoke as he does; they leaned back and watched the sunset for a while, Javier coming up on the buzz and then past the buzz. In the backseat of the cherry convertible, Javier wipes at his mouth, dragging cum across his chin. He leaves it there for a moment, aware of the ugly smell, but then wipes it off with his wrist.

It's fucking hot out tonight. He sweats like a bastard.

Von Braun was ugly and smoke-smelling when Javier got up to his apartment and banged on the door as he always does. Von Braun shouted at him to shut the hell up, he's coming right away, while the neighbours shouted other things. The door pulled open and Von Braun's aura crept into the hallway. Those big German hands grabbed at his shirt, dragged him inside. Von Braun was already babbling a mile-a-minute, putting together a little firework ship with parts culled from dumpsters. "We're taking this up to the roof," he said, handing Javier rolling papers and a baggie.

In between hiccups of static, people whisper on the radio—they rise and fall like breathing. Javier imagines it's Von Braun narrating his orgasmonautic voyage for him, can almost hear Von Braun talking low into a microphone up there, against a mouldering wall with mildew hieroglyphics. "Astronauts! Strapped into great tin dicks and fired at Mars!" Javier never knows what Von Braun's saying, really. The voices cut out and then it's the Dave Clark Five singing "Chaquita."

Estelle would hate Von Braun, Javier has no doubt of that. She has a thing about greying hair and Von Braun has enough of that, prematurely grey from whatever it was he did before coming to the city, living in hermitage in that shitty apartment up there—Javier can make out the flickering lights from here, Von Braun in

the midst of lighting matches out of his window or whatever the fuck he's been doing since Javier stumbled away, stumbled down to the convertible his brother built that one summer, stumbled down and let himself be overwhelmed by the sex doll—or by sex, or the idea of sex. Javier should be making tracks by now, on his way to bowling—right, he couldn't stand up, much less lob balls down a lane right now!

Von Braun worked with rockets, but he doesn't talk about why he stopped. Maybe he was a spook and got a little crazy. Maybe it was the loud noises. Maybe something went down and he had to be removed. Still, Von Braun's known for gunpowder and fireworks, he likes to blow things up. "And I want to go to space one day," he said while sucking at the end of the joint. Ali would hate him too, not just because Von Braun would call him shitty names but because there's something very sick about Von Braun, and while Javier sniffs exhaust fumes left to linger in the parking lot he wonders if he's caught it, whatever the sickness is. Ali would hate Von Braun and maybe now he'll hate Javier just a little bit like he's taken pieces of Von Braun into his lungs.

Good god but he'd like to get Ali into this car right now, sucking on his cock, then maybe he'd fuck the shit out of him afterward. What the hell does that mean? They used to spend hours chasing girls—getting chased by girls—through the playground. But Von Braun doesn't think like that, and while it makes him sticky and ill Javier can hold on to that. He doesn't want to be like Von Braun, that bastard. Von Braun's just there for the good weed and some crazy talk. Everybody needs a little of that. Even Estelle and her thighs. Ali and his lips. Frankie and his fucking voice.

"I don't know why I waste time on him either," says Javier to the sex doll, certified therapist. She—it—doesn't bother taking

notes. She barely has a face, just the merest suggestion of eyes and that gaping, fuckable mouth, though it lacks something. Estelle's smile rising like a heat-mirage from the pavement. "Bastard scores good dope, though. I can stomach his rocket talk." He tries to hold the sex doll's hand but she just wants to praise Jesus. "What's bowling going to get me? Three choruses of that fucking bitch and whatever shit problem Ali's having with Dave this week. Fucker's cheating on Ali and he won't do anything!" At least Von Braun's love-life is uncomplicated; his one-true space race craze. There's beauty in lunar landings. Von Braun never talks about aliens.

People carouse in the streets. Javier squelches further down in his seat, drags the sex doll with him, nobody must discover them. There's a hidden passion. He should be at the bowling alley. They should be fucking back at his place, on the couch, not in the back of the cherry convertible while drunk honeys meander by not ten feet away, bumming smokes off each other and laughing about Larry down in Accounting or where the fuck ever.

And maybe Von Braun used to work in rocketry, but now he washes dishes downtown, keeps his head low when he's out in the world, and blows things up on the roof of his apartment building until somebody complains to the super and another screaming match starts up. There's a lot of screaming, like bomb blasts. "Ballistics," breathed Von Braun as he lit another. Liked to aim his little death machines at the Douglas Hotel across the street. Tried to aim for windows with johns fucking whores behind them. Or little midwestern families.

And who the fuck knows how Frankie would feel about Von Braun in between all the whining about whatever the fuck he whines about. Von Braun's just some guy Javier knows from that dishwashing gig last year, smoked too much pot and didn't talk

about some things and talked a lot about other things. Frankie has known a million Von Brauns of all stripes and shapes, buffeting between them at parties and late night drunk spells, talking shit at them like he talks shit to everyone. But he's a good bowler, Frankie. Says he went to jail once for fucking some other guy's woman. Got caught, there was hell to pay. Shouting. Bit of violence. Frankie's got quite the hook on him, though maybe he got them from Estelle. Estelle and her goddamn beautiful pussy—to open her legs up and slide in tongue first, or fingers, and cock—or all at once, somehow. Can you do that, or does it have to be three guys at once, and is that possible, wouldn't that hurt and—rubbing up against some other guy's cock. Maybe just two guys and Estelle. Her tits, the things he wants to do to Estelle's sweet, firm tits! He gets to smelling imaginary pussy as he leans against the upholstery, fumes like snatch, and he's so ready to go again. His hand squishes into the sex doll's rubber. Ready. He's always ready, engines up and burning. He can smell—wants to smell—Estelle's pussy, and flashes angry at Frankie and his fucking bitch talk and what Estelle must sound like when he's fucking her, her legs up on his shoulders, Frankie's shoulders, all of Frankie's stupid grunts and shit talking. Is that what they sound like?

Javier tilts his head to the side and pushes his fingers back down into the sex doll's jelly cooze "Oh. You like that, don't you?" Only he's not sure who he's talking to. She's so soft down there. Milky. He flashes on the heavy booms of rockets going up, breaching the sky, and Javier falls back again, looking into the night with his thumb rubbing the head of his cock. Small circles, like a countdown to ignition.



from Flood Song
Sherwin Bitsui

The song spilling seeds into your mouth
sunflowers a yield sign
crawls onto the roof pinching corn meal,
flickers green
 and quakes into a babble of crows.

It then speaks splintering from a polished clay bowl,
drifts onto the lake's shore—
 apostrophes attached to its hemline.

Obsidian slides over the starling's nest
 backhoes nearing the coal shed sputter awake,
a pebble splinters the tribe into half brothers;

 the pass shrinks to a black dot behind us.

The Treasure

Katy Darby

The others always tut in wonder and exclaim that I must be bored, alone in my chamber all day. They twitter and chatter amongst themselves hour after hour, downstairs in the public rooms, busying themselves as animals might; industriously, furtively. But I am aloof; alone. I need no company other than the view from my tower window, and the prospect of his coming.

Through my casement I can see the river that traverses the grounds, glittering blue in the sunlight, grey and dirty as paint on dull days, and the shining white bridge that spans the torrent. I can see the park, with the summerhouse, the trimmed green lawn, and the feathery rushes beside the willows. I can watch the willows trail their twined, silver leaves in the water, lazily, as though washing their hair.

I remember when I used to wash in such a stream; I would wade right in and splash about, dip my whole head until the water burned my nose and I flung my long hair back, spluttering and gasping, a whip of droplets lashing my companions. I was very young then, though, perhaps eight or ten. It would not be seemly to ablute in such a manner now I am grown to womanhood, so instead a servant comes each week and anoints and arranges my hair for me. I must not touch it myself; it is not done for me to lift a finger; besides, I believe I have forgotten how. Every time my coiffeuse asks me humbly if it is to my satisfaction and, every time, graciously, I nod; I need no mirror, for it is always the same.

I spend much of my time at the window of my chamber, looking out; after so many years, it has become habit, and while the others pluck patiently at their needlework like birds at a worm, or gossip behind fluttering fingers in the summerhouse, I am content merely to watch and dream from my eyrie; to watch and let the verses I learned long ago trickle through my mind, like a stream.

There are many princesses in towers in these poems, and each one is matched to a tall, brave and handsome knight, as ineluctably paired as salt-cellar and pepper-pot. It is evident that without a lady to win, a knight's purpose in life is quite lost; he might as well ride a roan charger as a white, and could with impunity be short, circumspect in battle and not at all attractive.

Equally, it has not escaped my consideration that a maiden's lofty vigil would be somewhat futile if there were not a knight to coax her from the tower she adorns, and although it would be fair to observe that by my reckoning, my own paladin is somewhat overdue, I know he will come and claim me sooner or later. What else are knights – or maidens – for? Besides, I have in my sole possession the greatest treasure of this kingdom, entrusted to me by my mother and her mother before her, passed in a sacred and unbroken line down the generations. Who wins me, wins the treasure. And no true champion can resist such a prize.

With each passing day, however, I scan the horizon with a heavier heart. I have not told any of my companions, but only a week ago I found a single colourless hair on the pillow. Not a hint of gold in it; white as snow. It was not a stray thread of silk; I keep no pets; no old persons are permitted to visit my chamber bar one, and his hair is grey. Could it have been mine? It must be mine. He must come soon, surely?

When I tire of gazing, or when the sun retires behind the tangled willows, I usually sing an air or two, dabble at my embroidery, or perhaps read a little; the subject of my reading being either spiritual contemplations or else chivalric romances of the blameless and exalted type. My mother always said that a maiden must keep her head as pure as her heart, and her heart as level as her head. My mother was extremely wise, and by following her example I, too, hope to become so.

I have had my suitors, it is true; still have on a tediously regular basis. I am sick to death of them, to be honest, and can barely understand a word they utter, but I smile and nod for one must be welcoming, and gracious. Also, it does not do to burn one's boats with potential allies, however dull you happen to find them. There are two or three persistent visitors remaining to me; when I was first sequestered in the tower there were more, many more; but my steadfast lack of forthcomingness has (thank the Lord!) chased most away.

My first arrives on Monday evenings, the last of each month. He is by far the longest-standing, and the most depressing. When I first saw him he was not a young man, but in the few years of our acquaintance he has aged terribly; his blue eyes have dulled, his dark brown hair has thinned and greyed and he seems in the grip of some debilitating, perhaps melancholic disease. The impoverished lord of some failing and sickened realm, no doubt.

At first I would attempt to engage him in conversation regarding the weather, the war, or some such light subject, but his stiff, distracted answers and lack of any further conversation struck us both silent as stones within minutes. Once he called me by my name; an unpardonable impertinence. I struck him in the face with my book and he did not visit again for several months.

These days I will greet him courteously, but beyond that I find it practical to pretend he is not there and carry on as if I were alone, however much he mopes and mopes and moons at me. I sit at the window, perhaps singing, perhaps stitching a little here and there, until at last he gives up and leaves.

Each second Friday I am obliged to share my midday table with a widower of much pleasanter aspect, if hardly any greater understanding; he is a score of years younger, tall and hale, with sleek hair as red-brown as a fox's. He always attends me accompanied by two young pages who may or may not be his sons; they gobble with their heads down, avoid my eyes like slaves and never speak a word. They could be his mute catamites for all I know; he has never given any indication one way or the other. It amuses me to speculate on their purpose during our polite and mutually incomprehensible exchanges.

The three of them always await me at the foot of the sweeping stairs, watching respectfully as I am borne down smoothly, not a foot touching the cold stone. I am treated as though I were made of blown glass in this place; the fussing of the servants is occasionally irksome, but, I suppose, only reasonable. They must be careful not to tarnish or chip their princess, for I am the only one they have.

The widower's accent is as thick and rough as bark and I can barely sketch the pleasantries of conversation with the man. Once, on an early visit, he brought along a youngish woman; whether attendant, daughter or concubine I do not know and does not matter. He should have known better. I will have only my most trusted maidservants and companions about me in my own domain; women, especially the common sort, are duplicitous and

sly. (It is why we do not fight wars, but instead marry the victors). I made sure she did not return.

Rarely – very rarely, these days – there is another, my final suitor. He is always palely and modestly clad, and is the youngest of all; barely shaving, it seems, although it is hard to tell, for his hair is very fair and short, shorn, I suspect, so as not to impair vision in battle. His eyes are grey and there is wisdom in their depths; he speaks clearly and gravely and although we are from different parts of the kingdom, born long miles apart, we are able quite easily to understand one another. We discuss the books I read, and poetry; he speaks of mutual acquaintances and remembers certain long-missed friends to me. On occasion we entertain ourselves by sketching or playing chess or other games. Our audiences together are most delightful, and all too rare.

I confess that I hoped the first time he came that he might be my knight. I followed him to the Great Hall to bid him goodbye and watch him ride away, but he had no charger, nor carriage, at least not that I saw; he walked away as wearily as a peasant. I felt then as though a weight had been tied around my heart; I had hoped he was at least a minor noble, worthy to entrust with my treasure should my long-awaited knight ever lose his way or stumble across some other, still-tenanted tower. It appears, however, that he is either truly lacking in wealth or so humble that he might as well be. Yet he is clearly high-born and well-educated; I tolerate him. We amuse one another. I do not even mind that he forgoes the regal formalities and addresses me softly by my name. I do not mind at all.

I can picture his face as I gaze from my window; the long shadow of the birch and oak forest that guards the far side of the grounds is slung over the vivid green parkland. The sun lowers on

a bank of cloud as bright grey as my poor nobleman's eyes. My embroidery frame lolls in my hand, unnoticed; I have tired of this pursuit recently and the cloth in it sags neglectedly, trailing silks. It is not tight, like the skin of a drum, as it ought to be. Even my romances and poetry have given me no pleasure today. This treasure of mine is a burden growing heavier every day. I ache to be rid of it. There is a timid knock at the door.

“Princess?”

Yet another of my damned staff, always bothering, fussing, interrupting, trampling my reflective solitude beneath their broad peasant feet. There are dozens of gentlewomen in this place to attend to and God knows the doddering butlers cannot do it all, but still the servants will not leave me alone for ten minutes together.

I hurl the embroidery frame at the door with a vicious, inarticulate cry; it bounces harmlessly off the handle and trundles under the bed, but I have carelessly struck my poor fingers against the window frame, and the pain scorches through my hand. I cannot forbear to cry out.

“Princess?”

A black, bowed head inches around the door; Jacquetta, my Moorish lady's-maid, a curiosity to me when I was first sequestered, but now one of my most trusted and intimate confidantes.

“Jacquetta ... my fingers! I hit my hand!” She knows she is allowed to touch me when dressing me or when I am ill or injured and at no other time. She advances and we both examine the flesh for

broken skin and blood.

“No cuts,” she murmurs, “but there will be a bad bruise. You must rest it, Princess. I will treat it.”

Another advantage of Jacquetta is her vast knowledge of her people’s many remedies and unguents; ointments and tinctures that would put the best of our medical impostors to shame. She soothes and binds my wound and I thank her with a nod. Her business in disturbing me is apparently to respectfully inform me that I have a visitor downstairs.

“But it is not Monday,” I say, astonished. “It is not Friday,” (I frequently forget my suitors’ names and refer to them simply by their days of arrival; but Jacquetta understands me).

“No, Princess,” she says, “your other visitor. And he has someone with him. Someone special.”

My other visitor, my pale-haired princeling, my chess opponent, my fellow sketcher and singer and lover of verse! And he has someone with him! Someone special! My mind races; my swollen fingers throb. Perhaps the golden-haired boy was only an emissary? Perhaps my prince deemed it circumspect to test the modesty of such a renownedly beautiful and wealthy creature? Perhaps he sent my grey-eyed noble ahead to woo, to flatter, to charm and cajole me and discover the limits of my maidenly virtue? Well, then, I have passed with flying colours! My soul never faltered from its object; that speck in the distance, armour flashing, raising a cloud of red dust as he canters, lopes, gallops towards me, the hooves of his pale horse thudding out the rhythm of an

impassioned heart.

I have flushed, I am pink and damp; I can feel it. I blot my brow with my bandaged hand and wince.

“Oh, my Lord. Very well, very well; give me five minutes. He may see me in five minutes.”

Jacquetta nods and turns to go.

“Jacquetta,” I whisper. “How do I look?”

She examines me thoroughly; I will not be lied to.

“Princess,” she says, “you look beautiful.”

My visitor is almost as bashful as I when he enters; neither of us knows where to rest our eyes, it has been so long. His customary eloquence has deserted him; he hesitates and halts, clearly excited by something. Impatient, I cut off his floundering words.

“There is someone to see me?” I ask eagerly. “Someone else?”

He nods and smiles; such white even teeth, such rosy lips.

“Yes. Yes. A friend.”

A friend I have waited to meet all my life, I expect.

“Wonderful! One who has come a long way, no doubt?”

He nods again. “A very long way. She’s looking forward so much to seeing you again, Eleanor. Shall I bring her in?”

My mouth falls open in a most unladylike fashion; I cannot help it. She? Again? Her?

“But ... no, no, not yet. She? I don’t know whom you can mean.”

A frown of puzzlement creases his high noble brow.

“A friend. An old friend. From childhood.”

Some Earl's slut, some palace hanger-on – I want nothing to do with old friends. I want my knight, my lord. Where is my husband-to-be?

“Is there no-one with you, no ... male friend? Please?”

I cannot keep the wraith of a sob from my voice; he hears it and advances to soothe me.

“No, no, no-one else. Were you expecting someone?”

What kind of a question is that? Have I not been expecting him all my life? Must my treasure remain locked away until my pillow is littered with white hairs? Then my knight is not coming. I feel the last threads of my resolve fray and snap like rotting silk. If my knight is not coming – I grasp my visitor's hand in my own injured fingers; it is warm and smooth as a boy's.

“Yes,” I say, “yes, but if he is not here – I want you to –” I swallow and blush. My breath is coming swift and shallow; I feel light-headed, clean and empty.

“What?” he says.

“I want you to have it,” I say. “Have my treasure. I've waited so long, it's weighing on me. Round my neck like a millstone. I must give it to someone; it's worthless if it is not shared. Will you take it?”

“What?” he says again. His eyes are narrowed and his expression alarmed, even a little fearful. “I don't know what you mean.”

I look deep into his grey eyes. Tears swim in my own. I raise his hand in mine.

“My treasure,” I say, “every woman's greatest treasure. I give it you. It's yours.”

I lean forward, holding his gaze, and press his hand softly against the hot flesh of my breast.

“Here,” I say, “take it.”

His eyes widen and he jerks his hand away, shaking it as though it is on fire. I utter a little cry – I cannot speak, but he is retreating across the room, calling for Jacquetta.

“Jacquetta! You’re needed! Bring her in, please, bring Eleanor’s friend in!”

I gaze at him. I trusted him with everything and he has betrayed me. No beaten dog could look more heartbrokenly upon its master; no master more hatefully upon his dog. Jacquetta comes in, a small creature in blue following, whether man or woman I can barely tell.

“Eleanor,” he says, “this is Maria. Do you remember Maria?”

Maria is a shrunken and wizened old crone, a snaggle-toothed hag crowned by a halo of dandelion white hair which wafts slightly as her head shakes on its sagging neck.

“Eleanor?” she says. “Eleanor?”

I laugh. Was this thing once my nanny, my wet-nurse? How in God’s name am I meant to know her?

“Who is she?” I demand. “Get her away from me!”

She cocks her trembling, birdlike skull.

“We were at school together, do you remember, Eleanor? You and me and John. We were best friends. Dr. Miller thought it might help you to see someone from your childhood. We used to play at being ballerinas and princesses together, do you remember?”

I am shaking my head. Have I fallen asleep like Briar Rose and slept a hundred years? What is happening to me?

“John?”

Maria aims a worried glance at my golden-haired youth, who is standing in the far corner of the room. He nods encouragingly.

“John’s your brother, darling. He comes every Monday, remember? Or ... well, he used to. He’s not very well.” Maria’s bobbing head shakes harder. “Not very well at all. And it’ll be hard for his Stephen and the boys to make it any more, now. They have to look after him, you see.”

“Maria ...” I say. My voice is cracked and dry. The voice of a snapped twig, a dead, shattered leaf. She smiles so very kindly, her thin lips stretching over thin brown teeth. She puts out her hand and grasps my own; apart from the blue bruising swelling my fingers, they are the same. Miller clears his throat and inclines his head.

“I’m very sorry you had to find out this way, Eleanor,” he says. “We thought having Maria here might soften the blow.”

His grey eyes are dull now, dull as the clouded river. But I know who my knight is now, and that he’s coming soon. He must be. Oh, it’s wonderful. There is something, not tears, in my throat. Something else. Laughter. I try to let it out but it emerges as a low husky rasp, almost a groan. Jacquetta is shaking her dark head softly in the corner. Her voice is a mother’s, consoling her child.

“I’m so sorry,” she murmurs, “so sorry, Princess.”

My heart pounding like hoofbeats. My bridegroom riding his pale horse.

CLOUDS AND MOUNTAINS

Patricia Monaghan

List all common traits.

Consider them.

Ask what is light, what reflection.

Doubt your answer.

Gaze into clear water.

Find no boundaries.

Observe them in their beauty.

Blink in disbelief.

Become cloud.

Float above yourself.

Climb one, fly through the other.

Do the reverse.

Close your eyes. Open them.

What is within, what outside?

Feeding the Leeches

Patricia Monaghan

They are not small cats with eager eyes and curious whiskers who beg for bony tidbits. They are not ample-mouthed horses who wetly nudge for oats. They are not terriers who snap food in the air, breaking a rodent's neck as easily as I snap green beans. They are not doves or chicks who bob and peck.

My leeches must have blood, and it must be fresh. My old ones ate insects and worms, but these soft eyeless ones with their sucking mouths need blood, their three jaws working, working, cutting until they reach the vein. Once each month, when the moon goes dark, they must eat. They drink from patients with fevered minds, turgid with black dreams. Or those hot with inflammatory quinsy. Or those whose hearts grow soft, whose pulses weaken from sorrow. The leeches drink madness and pain and fear from their veins.

When no one is sick, I am the food. I put candles beside the watery nest. I put my hand in the circle of light. They rise and wave themselves in the air, then lie still as rocks. They bite and hold fast. They drink, relax, retreat to darkness. And the moon grows fat again, and I sleep, and no dreams come.

Gone Missing

Patricia Monaghan

First the eyes; in the head one day, the next, vacant staring sockets.

Then the ears. Not dissolving away, just gone.

A head like mine must look odd, not that I could tell, mirrors being useless to the eyeless. I run my hands over my smooth temples

and enjoy the bald sleekness of it. Yes, bald—but don't imagine hair falling out and littering the floor. Nope, just gone. One morning,

scalp smooth as an egg, not even the bump of a vestigial follicle.

Then the mouth, slippery sloppy thing, replaced by tight strong skin.

I suspect the nose will be next, but I could be wrong. There is no necessary

order to these things; it could be legs, naval, arms, fingers.

I hope it's not those last; that would mean you'd stop hearing from me. Touch typing is a gift for those like me—I assume there are others, though I can't see or hear about them—allowing me to send you these thoughts to read every morning.

At least, I assume you read them; I can't read anything you send back.

I don't mind, actually. Truth is, I enjoy talking about myself.

There's really nothing more interesting in the world.

TALKING STICK

Patricia Monaghan

We sought without seeking
many days in gray silence.

Swallowed tears of a man
in a circle of strangers.

Raven calls. Women see
strong wood everywhere.

Four directions, four women,
four buds on an aspen bough.

Strong strands of blue
from across silver water.

When the air smokes,
the world whispers secrets.

Three women enter the sea
in search of nourishment.

Raven, creator, light-thief,
drops a single feather.

Alder cones, hard survivors.
Pussy willows, soft promises.

Two women, two kinds
of small blue flowers.

Glint of rock, raven
talking in all languages.

A flying woman reaches down
and seeds fall into her hands.

Beneath white mountains,
wolf comes to eat with us.

With that, we are complete:
all our ancestors, all directions.

Before, everything was silent.
Now, everything speaks.

Bow to the Sunlight

Juan Felipe Herrera

Bow to the sunlight

See it curl on the leaves and fall and rise and dissolve

I bow to the night dark

How it opens its slender hand and smoothes all things

I bow to the fire inside the heart

It lies there awake for centuries and lives

Until you speak of love for the first time

That is when the life begins

The life without words

The life without places and names

Here life I say

There is no answer

