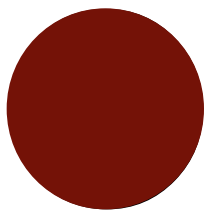


PIN  
STRIP  
FED  
ORA

8





Photos

[www.flickr.com/photos/fabricatorofuselessarticles](http://www.flickr.com/photos/fabricatorofuselessarticles)

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## The Bells of Our Cathedral

The execution of the bells proved difficult. First, there was the matter of the design. Organizations, patrons, and architects from around the globe submitted their ideas. Some produced pen and ink drawings. A group from Vienna transported a plaster cast by train. But it was the funicular model that drew the most attention. All those weighted bags hanging on thin ropes connected to each other with lead plumbs reminded us of childhood marionettes, cat's cradles, spiders' webs. This display convinced us. I retained an expression of scrutiny—the parallel lips and lined forehead—, but others immediately chanted in Catalan. There was a girl from Las Ramblas, the youngest of our group (though already a respected architect), who at once put on her cross-laced slippers and engaged in our traditional dance. In our enthusiasm, we awarded the commission for the bells to an unknown. Finally, the spires would tinkle and gong, using the wind to fill our cathedral with music.

From the beginning, there were problems. Our chosen bell master was a bit of an anarchist, or anachronist I should say. He insisted on carrying up the parts by hand. Cranes? he yelled. Cranes are like flightless birds! Up the circular spire stairs he made his way, laboriously carting copper pieces attached to his back with the same ropes that had comprised that spectacular funicle which had mesmerized us into submission. He gathered the length of his robes into various knots and ascended that limestone nautilus like a martyr. His sandals sometimes hit the edges of the stone steps, so that by the end of each day his feet bled, staining the leather of his sandals.

Our dreams of having the bells in place by Christmas were shattered.

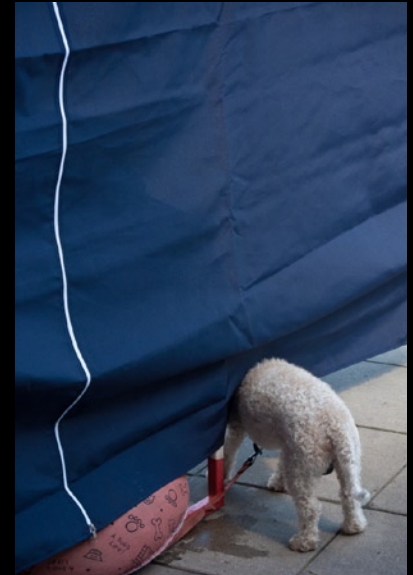
But his work, we all agreed, was magnificent. He finished the assembly of the first bell in January, although he refused to put in the clapper rod that would create its sound. All 18 bells have a particu-

lar note and pitch. They are to sing in unison, he told us. And so we waited. It was Simon's tower he completed first. He then set to work on those of the other apostles. By June, all twelve bells were in place. The Four Evangelists came next, and to our great surprise the bell master seemed to have increased his speed. Later, the dancing girl informed us that this was an incorrect assessment: the Evangelical spires were some four hundred feet shorter. In September, after the rains, the man completed the Virgin's spire, which he had plated in silver. The crowning glory, the tower of Christ, he began in October. This he made of pure gold, though what we saw him carry up the seashell flights was nothing other than some sort of dull metal, like gun smoke.

We decided to postpone the inauguration until Easter, even though some of us could hardly wait. I myself dreamed of an unearthly music, stilled in the night by the lullaby of its glory. In the morning, I awoke weeping. This was all God's doing. At dawn, our man climbed all 18 spires and affixed the tentacles to the inside of the bells. He attached long, long ropes to the bells—until they reached the ground. These we would pull when the time came, loosening the hammers that would cry out at the lick of the sea-born wind. We hired guards to watch those ropes throughout the day; our music would not be premature, the prank of some pack of ruffians.

The appointed evening, we lit the spires from the insides; shades of unearthly greens and pinks, oranges and violets. The lights gave our cathedral an otherworldly luminescence; the colors radiated some ten blocks, encasing our city in an auroral wonder. My palms took up the rope for Luke, though the sweat of anticipation made my grip slippery. Our bell master had the distinction of pulling Jesus' bell. We had all agreed beforehand; it seemed only fair. A crowd gathered all around us. Hundreds, thousands of heads aimed skyward, though for what purpose I'm unsure; the bells could hardly be seen at that height, and the glow of the lights only masked them further in a sort of fog. At the stroke of midnight, we pulled with all our might, and the chorus began.

The first sound was a low wailing, something like a desperate cry for redemption. Another bell emitted a high-pitched ring, as if some deep-water mammal were clicking communication. The snap of Flamenco heels, then hollow thuds like monk chants. Nails on blackboards and ambulatory sirens. Some strange howling like dogs' yawns and the pounding of rushing waves. The bells began swinging wildly as the ocean's winds drove northwest. Our audience began covering their ears. Some fled to the outskirts, pushing one another in their rush. The ringing and buzzing filled the sky; it seemed to intensify the lights within the spires so that we could no longer keep our eyes open to nervously check if the bells had sprung from their roots. Our bell master smiled wildly, still gripping his rope with both hands. The winds died down and the bells began to emit an echo, a fluid, one-note diminuendo. Silence finally came and it had never felt so beautiful. None of us spoke, afraid to shatter the quiet. In a moment, the sky dropped a steady rush of rain. ●●●



## ● Ricky Garni

### Thailand

Joanna used like to trace the outline of the moles on Jim's chest. They are in the precise shape of Siam, she would say. "You mean Thailand, Darling," Jim would reply, laughing.

Jim loved how Joanna lived in the past. One day, though, he realized that she had no idea that she was living in the past. As far as she was concerned, it really was Siam. Where, for Joanna, was Thailand? And eventually, it became too much for Jim. But what could he do?

One morning before dawn, and without a word to Joanna, Jim boarded a plane. He would go where Joanna would never find him: Siam. He couldn't wait. He hoped that they liked moley people there. ●●●



## ● Changming Yuan

### The Daoist Alchemist

Instead of turning brass into gold or sand into diamonds, the alchemist refines soil, air and sunlight into an immortality syrup. While gulping down the newly made elixir in a hurry, he accidentally spills a few drops of the holy dew onto the ground, which his dogs, cats and chickens struggle hard to lip at the first sight. As the alchemist launches himself for a higher life in heaven, all the animals in his humble house thus begin to rise, certainly underneath him. ●●●





## missives from a nuclear reactor #1

ahoy captain,

don't be alarmed captain but time is an element unstable too many neutrons swirling around a fluctuating core when time gets anywhere near me it explodes captain I am telling you this so you can prepare don your hazmat suit and toast to the apocalypse do this in memory of the world before this episode captain you can't miss the next one it'll be a cliffhanger get out the popcorn and throw it into the reactor settle in the reception is finally decent I've got antennae that extend to the edge of the universe fast forward through the commercials we don't need any more dish soap captain when we left off our heroine was standing on the edge of a ravine ready to jump you can't just leave her there can you

suddenly I'm tiny like in Gulliver's Travels I'm standing between two book ends they're coming together any closer I'll be squished someone is trying to kill me captain I scabble up the side of a book it falls open I slip into the pages and the narrative starts to unravel the letters dissolve and become black sludge slurping my ankles it's weird in here captain someone's taken an eraser to my face if I can't see you am I still here I guess I've become a blank page



since you walked onto my set production has ground to a halt captain will you just sit here and watch me type it'll be good I promise something with Vikings space invaders Hawaiian belly dancers this isn't a porno I swear if I lick something it will be my lips sore from lying out in the sun vampires don't last long without chapstick captain you asked for a story don't be surprised when you get the story of my neurosis captain it's a gory world in here you have to be a swordfighter to survive and sometimes even then the sharks come out of the water

I take all my cues from alien abduction you get up to pee soon as you leave the room the story careens into a wall like a runaway shopping cart it's already too late captain you missed the boat when you come back the room is floating an effluvium of plot points and characters hovering in the air above your living room I am watching it all from behind the screen who's directing this show anyway I would have chosen a desert set all this liquid is pruning my skin

captain my mentor once told me men are offended by the idea that male genitalia have become a metaphor for the war machine captain is this true are you offended I don't mean to be rude I study ancient history every Greek myth revolves around penetration for centuries people have waxed metaphorical about it what if they really were just sick in the head why don't scholars ever ask this question when they're expounding Iliadic themes

my mentor was a journalist once a very young man he wrote a review of an artist who took nude photographs of small children they were the paragon of taste he argued later he went into politics someone told him he'd never make it you can't defend edgy art and expect it not to bite you in the ass now he moves behind the scenes lurks in voting booths sings immigration songs in my opinion in that one small moment we all lost

the reactor makes ticking sounds when it wants to get your attention captain are you listening time is a vampire it never gets old it will suck the life out of you neutrons leech onto your body you can't shake them off they burrow through your skin and into your organs they light you up from the inside out you can see them onscreen moving around they alter your genetic makeup what are you becoming captain all the dials are spinning out of control it's the Exorcist versus the Abyss a celebrity deathmatch to end the world no matter how much eas in crucem is thrown the abyss swallows it all its throat is enormous captain I have a theory about black holes they're the answer to everything the secret to cheating time only a few people come close to getting it Grimm Aesop Seuss Stein that's about it fairy tales are riddled with black holes at midnight Cinderella slipped into a black hole painted orange Rip Van Winkle was an electron he used quantum tunneling to get back to the universe Dorothy was a low mass star burning hydrogen on the main sequence until the spiral arm collided with the cosmological constant captain don't you see how serious this is

if a vampire bites the angel of death it becomes the unangel of life she is unpredictable the vampire cannot remain undead in her presence it reverses itself suddenly no more sucking it can only blow the red cross would have a field day with a reverse vampire no one would need to give blood ever again it would run in the streets like the river of milk and honey those prophets are always talking about captain have you ever met a prophet they're not fun to be around poets at least enjoy their visions prophets know better they're never happier than when they're telling you how the world is going to end it's never a happy ending captain do you like happy endings I don't think I've ever seen one let's change the channel find something steamier

I am in Home Depot weighing flower pots the smell of sawdust is irresistible once I stood on the bridge as a train passed under it was filled with pine shavings boxcars filled to the brim with sawdust all those trees shaved down to nubs where are they getting all those trees captain what would you say if I told you it's all a joke the reactor's a dud no juice some aliens left it here and ducked behind the asteroid belt snickering gosh this'll be fun what do you suppose they'll do oh you know try to blow each other up that's what you always think well they've done it before why should this time be any different maybe they won't maybe they'll make jam don't be silly they'll never drop berries into a nuclear reactor but that's what we built it for yes it's true pancakes don't taste right without reactor jam but by the time they figure it out they'll have evolved and we'll have to change the channel

Love,  
Nuke



## The Gypsies

It was a Monday morning in April. Father and his men had just left for the fields to sow corn, mother was feeding the pigs, and I was combing my hair before going to school. A neighbour came in and said that the Gypsies were setting up camp in the woods near the river.

"Bring the hens into the yard, lock the barn doors and the orchard gate before you go," Mother said to me after the neighbour left.

"Yes, Mamá."

I was excited as I went about chasing the hens back in, and a bit afraid as I ran to the school, which was at the high end of the village next to the church.

"Have you seen them?" I whispered to my friend Daniel with whom I shared a desk.

"No."

"No one has," said the boy at the next desk.

"They came in the night," added his companion.

The schoolroom, with a dozen children, was buzzing. The teacher banged her desk with the ruler to make us pay attention. We did an hour of geometry and another hour of reading and composition. Both tasks were hard because I could not concentrate. It seemed to be the same with the others.

We came out at twelve for the midday break. Today a number of mothers had come to fetch the little ones. Some carried goods with one sharp end.

"We are not scared," I said to Daniel, to suppress the impulse to run home like some of the other boys and girls.

"We'll scream if they try something," Daniel said.

"And fight," I said, and bent down to tighten my shoelaces.

Mother and I were eating soup and cheese for lunch when there was a knock on the door. Mother got up. I followed her.

"Good afternoon, Señora," said the Gypsy woman, "I would be glad to read your destiny in exchange for some food to feed my family this evening." She wore a long rainbow-coloured dress, and big rings on her ears and bracelets on her wrists.

"That won't be necessary," Mother said. "Wait here," she added and closed the door. We went to the cellar and filled a biscuit tin with eggs, about ten I think, then to the larder for a piece of salted pork, a loaf of bread and two blood sausages. When we returned to the front door there was a second woman. She too wore long colourful clothes and bracelets, but she was taller, her skin darker, and I thought the white of her eyes were really big. Mother gave them the food from the basket and told them to keep the tin with the eggs.

"Thank you for your kindness, Señora," said the tall woman.

"Many good things will come to you," added the other.

They started for the next house. Mother closed the door, crossed herself and we went back to the soup, which was now cold.

"Mamá, where do Gypsies come from?"

"From the east."

"And where are they going?"

"To some other place."

"They are not coming back, then?"

"They will."

"Why?"

"Because it is their destiny."

"What is destiny?"

"What the Lord has reserved for us."

"The Lord Jesus or his Father?"

"Both."

"The big Gypsy woman said she could tell our destiny."

"Eat your soup."

"Yes, Mamá."

I called on my friend Daniel, who lived three houses away, and we returned to the schoolroom. We all made many mistakes with the long multiplication, the first subject for the afternoon period, and had to do them again.

“You are not concentrating,” the teacher said, in her warning voice.

“It is the Gypsies, Doña Esperanza.”

“What about them?”

“They are camping by the river.”

“They have done that many times before and they will do it again,” the teacher said.

“My mamá says the Gypsy women catch the hens using a fishing line and a hook inside a grain of corn ...”

“And then they twist their necks and hide them under their clothing ...”

“They lift potatoes from the fields in the dark . . .”

“And corn cobs . . .”

“Papá says they steal horses and paint them and sell them before rain washes the paint off . . .”

“They have no home because they offended the Lord, like the snakes, so they go from place to place for ever . . .”

“Tío Miguel says they boil and eat their old people. That’s why you never see old Gypsies . . .”

“Enough of this nonsense!” yelled Doña Esperanza, in a voice she had not used before.

She stood up and looked at the picture of Jesus of Nazareth on a cross.

She sat down.

“You are dismissed,” she said and waved her hand. ●●●



● Mark Tursi

Tre

*'Per me si van e la città dolente,  
per me si van e l'eterno dolore,  
per me si va tra la perduta gente.'*

-- Dante, Inferno, Canto III, ln.1-3

I.

I anticipate their coming. I always do. Like moon shadows. There, but not quite. They speak to me but in faint, subdued whispers. Rumors of the mind—only furious. Like speaking in shadows that burn. I know it's them, when the wind picks up speed, they creep through the branches, sometimes high-pitched, sometimes a dull whistle that makes the branches scratch across window glass. The same ones who make the stairs creak at night.

Come for me. I'm ready . . .

II.

The thoughts bounce around in my head as if the brain could chew. But it's visual food, not tactile. Sometimes they're paisley and seem to breathe. Sometimes they're a blank curtain with only the faintest light creeping under the cracks by the stage floor. There's a play back there. They're acting out scenes from Beckett. I hear Clov staggering with his step-ladder. It's by the window, now it's not. The laughter is brief, muted. The misery lofty. Old, old walls and hollow bricks. I chew the brick and it crumbles, like the light seeping through, softly, then fragmented, then nothing at all. . . .

III.

I've saved it and therefore earned it. That's the way it goes in here. One slippery riddle after another. The skin sews together, albeit with

some pain, but we do not. It's too Gothic. . .

I felt a Machine Gun, in my Brain,  
And bullets to and fro  
Kept shrieking – shrieking – till it seemed  
That sense was breaking through –



## Moldenke Visits Aunt Flo

It was a time when Moldenke's dear aunt Florinda lay dying of a persistent and growing abdominal teratoma. She was under the care of the well known end-of-life physician, Dr. David Hammerstein, and staying at Munty Charnel. The surgeon had gone some distance in whittling the growth down to a manageable size. Still, it protruded from her abdomen as if it were an orange under a tablecloth. It disturbed Moldenke terribly to see it. Nor could he look her straight in the eye. Weakened muscles in one drooping lid made it necessary that she wear a small lid-lifting appliance in the socket, consisting of a thin gold rod tipped with small rubber knobs. All in all, she was a plaster mold of his former aunt Flo. She had come to look like an illustration in a medical text. When he went to see her on Sunday afternoons, it was always with a queasy and twitching stomach, cold appendages and trembling fingers. She babbled on, too, about anything that came to mind.

"Well, Moldenke, what's up with you lately? It's been a week."

"Nothing, really. Looking for work." He opened a waxed paper envelope with a puff of fine sugar. "Look, I brought you a bear claw. I know you love them."

"I'm too sick to eat anything. You know that. You bring them so you can eat them yourself. You know idle hands are the devil's workshop."

"Yes, I know." He ate a bite of the bear claw.

"Still living in my pied on Esplanade? Or have you found a place of your own?"

"If I weren't living there, who would? The place is a shambles. You couldn't rent it to a skunk. I'm doing you a favor." He chewed on the bear claw and rolled balls of it on his tongue before swallowing.

"It's just a house now, not a home. A hundred men can build a house, but..."

"It takes a woman to make a home. I know, Aunt Flo."

"You'll find a nice pretty girl some day. If not pretty, then motherly."

"I do hope so."

"You're almost fifty."

"You've kept count."

When his aunt turned in the bed and faced him directly, Moldenke looked at the ceiling.

"Is that molding easier to look than I am?" his aunt asked.

"I'm sorry. Your lump is just something I'd rather not see. Hammerstein told me those kinds of tumors have hair and teeth in them, maybe even small bones."

"Yes, but remember, it might have been your father's brother, dear, or your sister's sister. Have some respect."

"I have to go. There's a job open at R&D and I'm going down to apply for it."

"Go then. But wait. I'll probably die tonight, so there is something I must tell you. I've kept it from you all this time."

"Hurry, tell me. I'll be late."

"Your father, your mother said, woke up suddenly one morning and she was standing naked at the foot of the bed in a rosy red puddle saying, 'He's here too soon!' Your father spread bath towels on the bedroom floor. The labor was short. A few contractions and there you were. You came to them the way the Sunday City Moon is thrown on the porch. They were expecting it, but we were startled when it dropped."

"You've told me this before. I know it by heart."

"You were such a nice boy. Give you a few pins, a cigar box, a handful of mothballs and there you'd go, collecting earwigs and spittle bugs."

"I really have to go. It could be a job."

"You made molds of your fingers with paraffin, filled them with plaster and lined the dresser top with these little monuments to yourself. Your mother told me you even tried to make a mold of your little johnny brown, but the hot paraffin burned you."

"How many times have I heard that one."

"Some people think that's why you never married. Your little dingus never healed."

"That's it. I have to go."

"Goodbye then. The next time you see me I'll be as cold as a statue."

"I'll see you next Sunday." ● ● ●

## ● Junior Burke

### Nothing Rhymes with Orange

There was a music club in Chicago called the Earl of Old Town, on Wells Street, across from Second City. In the alley behind The Earl was a duplex. On one side was a ground floor apartment where Del Close lived. Del was a director at Second City, who had discovered John Belushi. John Candy. Later, Chris Farley. What I most revered him for was a record he'd made in 1959 with John Brent, *How to Speak Hip*, a language instruction record on... *How to Speak Hip*. Del was the straight man, asking questions in an Edward R. Murrow kind of voice. Brent played Geets Romo, an imaginary hipster who would walk you through the vernacular: "Now. Repeat after me... Dig... Dig the cat... Dig the shades on the cat... Yeah, baby, that's where it's at... You got eyes to split, let's make it... Let's get on the horn, call some freaky people, and we'll have a scene." Made a huge impression on me as a kid, and over the eight or nine years I was in Chicago, I got to be friends with Del.

There was a point once where everybody at Second City was concerned about Del because his cat, Grapefruit Head, had died and Del, who now lived alone, wouldn't come out of his apartment. I was doing a week at the Earl and some of the Second City folks asked if there was anything I could do to coax Del out into the world.

I knocked on his door and he answered. That is, he responded through the door asking what did I want. Del was the ultimate performance guru, so I said to him: "Del, I've been here all week and I was hoping you'd come in 'cause I need you to critique my set."

"What's wrong with it?"

"I don't know, I was hoping you could give me a tune-up."

"I'll be there in ten minutes."

So I arranged a corner table for him, told the manager to comp him, went back to the dressing room. When the mc. announced me, he gave a particularly effusive introduction, "Here's a young man who

we've been fortunate to have with us all week, etc.", and it was really nice and I should have gone with it and got up there, but I hit the stage and instead made some self-effacing comment. From the corner, I hear Del's voice: "Too sweet."

And it nailed me. Just pinned me, and I thought, "Well, he's right, I just should have swung with it," but it changed my whole approach that night. Instead of any bits between songs, I just worked the material and the set had a kind of heated edge to it but it was not at all what I'd planned to do. And when it was over, to less enthusiastic applause than what I'd been generating all week, I went back to the dressing room, came down, made my way over to Del's table where he was on number four or five, and appeared to be having a grand old time. I was a little bugged. Sat down and said, "You know Del, I wanted you to critique the set but I didn't know you were gonna do it out loud. That comment you made just changed everything and not for the better."

And he said: "I knew you felt that. But I was talking to the waitress, referring to my drink... Bear in mind, however, in life there are no coincidences. In the words of Werner von Braun, 'I aim for the stars and sometimes I hit London.'"

I was tired of nightclubs, tired of traveling... decided to move to Los Angeles. Most people who do that, have some ambition in mind. The movies, usually. Not me, I just wanted to get away, far away, someplace where October to April wasn't a geological struggle. I could do that. No wife or partner. Trouble was, I had only made my living on-stage, had never held a job, was not set for life, knew I'd have to find some kind of work. The prospect, or lack thereof, was daunting. I'd been playing music since I was fifteen, had put myself through college with it, had never had to get up before one in the afternoon, had never been the subject of a job interview.

I rented the first floor of a house in the barrio and for the first several weeks in Los Angeles, I mostly drove around. It's a city you can get lost in and get lost I did. There was a place I had driven past. In Westwood, nowhere near where I lived. A hotel. I recalled gliding by on Wilshire Boulevard and having the sense that somehow something

meaningful would take place for me at that location. On October 15, a Friday, I got in my car and drove there.

When I walked inside, what I beheld was a nightmarish tableau of construction, partial construction, people scurrying around, others standing, looking distressed or bewildered and I took a seat on a sofa and took in the scene. A fascinating study in class engagement; those who appeared to be the managers barking orders at the workers, none of whom appeared to speak English, comprehending just enough to sulk away to the next drudgery. It was apparent that if there were any dent being affected amidst the chaos, it was slow, slow, slow.

An elegantly dressed woman came and sat beside me on the couch. She began talking, clearly because she was too frustrated to hold it in any longer.

“Have you ever seen such chaos?” she said, in an accent of undeterminable origin. “I am the owner, my husband and I. We are totally re-doing the hotel, new room numbers, new phone system and the idiots I have working for me cannot learn it. They keep going back to accustomed routines. What should be on the east side of the hotel is ending up on the west side. That poor fool behind the desk has been working straight for seventy-two hours. My other desk clerks have all quit in frustration and I have just been informed that his replacement, on vacation in India, has decided not to come back.”

“Well,” I said, “It’s very clear what you need.”

She turned to me, eyes glistening.

“You’re hoping that the people you have will learn this new system you’re introducing. What you need is someone who won’t be confused by the old information. Can see the whole picture afresh.”

She leaned closer, I could smell the Chanel. “You have hotel experience?”

I thought a moment: “Three years,” I told her.

“Can you be here at eleven tonight? You will be on your own, the night manager, behind the front desk.”

The three years I had indicated did not come out of nowhere. I’d been on the road once for three years straight. Had stayed in hotels. But of course suggesting to a hotel owner that you could run their one

hundred ten room establishment was like showing up at the counter at an airport and saying “I’ve got all these frequent flier miles, now let me fly the plane.”

But I had noted something in those moments I had beheld the chaos of the Boulevard Hotel. The people who owned and managed the establishment were under the illusion that they were the ones who ran the place. Oh, they dispensed orders, but not very effectively. They barked at the maids and the handymen and the bellhops and expected them to do their bidding. But there was such hostility and resentment simmering below the surface that what got done was executed in only the most cursory and half-assed manner. And when I showed up that first night I did something basic and straightforward and obvious, yet it manifested to the staff, my co-workers, as a glaring revelation. Alone at the desk, at the mercy of the whims and quirks and freak-outs of hundreds of travelers, most of them foreign, as it was an international establishment, I called all my fellow workers together, introduced myself, took down each of their names, learned them as fast as I could. For every task or crisis, a leaky faucet, a missing pillow, a burned out bulb, I would summon the appropriate person to the desk and request that they look into the problem. The joint ran like clockwork and I didn’t have to do anything. Soon, I wondered what on God’s earth I was doing there. But ultimately it became clear what Fate had sent me to do, which was to save somebody’s life.

His name was Peter Plemming and he had been one of those Brit filmmakers who left Swinging London in the sixties and relocated to Rome. At this point in his saga, he was estranged from his American wife, who was suffering somewhere in the Hollywood Hills, calling several times through every night. He was hardly ever available, engaged in some second or third childhood, partying on Sunset, teetering back to the hotel, alone or with female company.

Peter became one of my most frequent interactions. The phone would ring at dawn: “There’s a bloody smell of gas in the room, a bloody gas smell. Can you do anything about it?”

“Would you call this an emergency?”

“Bleeding yes, it’s a bloody emergency. I’m about to light my first joint of the day. Do you want me to bloody explode?”

Or the middle of the night.

“Are there any bloody bath towels about?”

“Would you call this an emergency?”

“Bloody yes, it’s a bleeding emergency. I’ve got a bird in the shower as we’re speaking. What do you suggest I do when she gets out, wrap her in a bedsheet and pat her till she’s dry?”

Meanwhile his wife’s calling, checking up on him. One night she says: “I just got off the phone with Peter and I think he’s in trouble.”

“What kind of trouble.”

“He sounded out of it, I’m sure he was smoking and I’m afraid he’s going to pass out with a cigarette burning. Would you go into his room and see if he’s all right?”

“I can’t go into his room, I’m not allowed.”

Which was true. A hotel room in California is effectively a domicile. You can’t enter without permission. But there was something in her voice.... I went up there, entered with a house key and a fire extinguisher and sure enough, Peter was passed out, Galoise still burning next to him, the sheet ablaze. I took care of that problem but there was an open bottle of Seconal on the bedside table and Peter’s lips were already blue. I called the UCLA emergency number and began the resuscitation technique I’d learned during a teen-age lifesaving course.

The paramedics took him away and a few nights later, Peter, stomach-pumped and ready for more adventures breezed into the lobby and said: “I heard you did me a bit of a good turn the other night....”

And shortly after that, at the desk in the middle of the night, I began writing a play. The play was about the hotel and the people I was writing about were floating around me; it was unlike any creative experience I had ever known. And when it was done, I had a three act play I didn’t know what to do with, except that in my drives around Los Angeles, I had passed what looked like a theatre called Sills and Company in Hollywood.

I figured Sills to be Paul Sills, one of the founders of Second City, and I sent the play to him and about a week later the phone rang.

“This is Paul Sills. I haven’t directed a straight play since Chekhov’s *The Cherry Orchard*, Jesus, twenty-five years ago, and I’d like to direct your play.” Then about two weeks after that: “We’re gonna do a read-through at Severn’s place in Laurel Canyon, can you be there Sunday?”

Severn had to be Severn Darden. I’d heard stories about him for years. Very funny people like Mike Nichols and Elaine May and Alan Arkin were said to consider Severn the funniest person alive. One of the stories I had heard about Severn was that when he was in the cast of *Second City*, he was called by a friend who worked at an advertising agency in New York. They were coming up with a new campaign for Coca Cola and would Severn broom out and come up with some brilliant, quirky ideas. “But you gotta take this seriously, Severn,” the guy told him. “You’ll be paid six thousand dollars for the week.” Which was a lotta money in 1959. So Severn went out there in his cap and beret and shades and walking stick and proceeded to sit among these gray flannel, Madison Avenue suits and not say a word. On Friday, the head of Coca Cola flew up from Atlanta and listened to their ideas and, not liking any of them, turned to this weird guy in the corner he knew he was paying a lot of money to. “What do you think we should do with Coca Cola, Mr. Darden?” Severn said: “I think you should change the name.”

So, yeah, the reading was at Severn’s house. And Sills had put together an amazing cast for the reading: Valerie Harper, who’d been Mary Tyler Moor’s sidekick before having her own show, and Terry Sanders, who’d won a Tony, and Mike Nichols was putting up the money, but the guy I was most excited about was John Brent, Del Close’s partner in *How to Speak Hip*, in other words, Geets Romo himself.

But the early rehearsals were confounding to me. Sills, who had brought Brecht’s techniques to America was not into traditional drama, which is what I had written, and I went through evenings watching the cast sing the play like an opera, perform it at break-neck speed, perform it in slow motion, perform it in gibberish, perform it not as characters but as animals. And Sills who had an incredibly short fuse, would yell at the cast. During the animal exercise he screamed at Lari-



ane Newman: "I don't even know what kind of animal you are!" And Lariane screamed back: "A badger!!"

And there were levels going on for which I had no context. One night, Terry Sanders, effectively playing me, was behind the desk, and Sills yelled: "You're so furtive, you never give anything away, that's why you never became as big as you should have been, you hide everything and you're basically dishonest!"

After that rehearsal, Terry and I, for I was becoming friends with him, went for a drink and I said: "What the hell was that all about tonight, Sills going off on you like that?"

And Terry, who tended to whine as he spoke said: "Oh, twenty-five years ago, when I was in the cast at Second City and Sills was directing, there was this waitress he was seeing and for some reason he got it in his head that I had slept with her. First of all, I'm gay, I don't sleep with women, and if I did, it wouldn't have been with one that Sills, my friend, my mentor, had something going with. I mean, I don't get it, he's happily married now, it's a quarter of a century later. It never happened in the first place and he won't let go of it."

The rehearsal period was dragging on and some initial cast members had fallen away. A number were having trouble learning their lines. My lines, the ones I had written. And one night Sills said: "Face it, man. You're got people here who are basically improvisers, who have worked in tv and films where you only need to learn a few lines at a time, or else they've screwed up their minds with drugs and alcohol."

One night my phone rang at three thirty in the morning and it was Terry Sanders, asking me to meet him at an all night coffee shop. I went to the table where he was staring into his hot chocolate. I said, "Terry, what's the matter?" And he said "I slept with that waitress..."

John Brent was going through a hard time. Health issues. Went into the hospital at one point and when he returned to rehearsals, he had a new hat, which, when he went onstage to do his first scene, he handed to Severn, along with his cigarette lighter. A few minutes later, a peculiar smell arose and everyone looked over to see Severn holding Brent's hat, which he had lit on fire. "Severn!" everyone yelled,

“Why did the hell did you do that?”

Severn, pure as the driven snow says, “Somebody hands you a hat and a cigarette lighter, what do they expect?”

I realized that Severn, brilliant though he was, was a pure surrealist. Saw the world as a kind of Dali painting.

Meanwhile the rehearsals weren't going well. The actors were still on book and it had been weeks. One day, Sills called me and said: “There's this woman I know and she heads this organization, Los Angeles Theatre Coalition, something like that, and she's hosting a convention for some critics, and I thought if we did a preview performance for them, it would be something to focus on, a good incentive for the cast to get with it.”

“How soon?” I asked.

“Three weeks.”

“How many critics?”

“Two hundred and fifty.”

“I dunno, Paul. That not a lotta time and that's a very tough audience.”

He says, “What are you, a weak sister? No balls, no blue chips.”

The night before the preview, things were still chaotic. The woman who headed the theatre coalition, Gina was her name, stopped by before rehearsal and asked Paul if everything was set. She seemed like a sweet person, very large, who, I couldn't help but notice, appeared to be experiencing some physical discomfort.

“I've been having back trouble and I'm going to see my doctor tomorrow and I'm expecting him to tell me that sitting cramped in a theatre seat all evening is not something I should be doing.”

Sills gets all red and says: “This was your idea, this critic thing. I'm gonna need you to be here and schooze them, otherwise, you're just throwing us to the wolves.”

The best she could do, she said, was to see how she felt tomorrow.

The rehearsal that night, our final one, was mayhem. Dropped lines, missed cues, general confusion. At the end of the night, Severn approached me: “What would you think, during the scene where the

hotel room catches on fire, when everyone's running around the lobby and the firemen are breaking down the door, what would you think, as I'm sitting there on the sofa, if I were to reach into my briefcase and pull out an orange and carefully, meticulously peel it?”

I just stared at him. My mouth moved and I heard: “I think that would be fine, Severn.”

The next night, the theatre is jammed with two hundred fifty critics from all over the country. The preview goes as badly as any rehearsal. As we approach the climactic scene, there is suddenly a sound in the otherwise silent theatre. The sound of a human whose back has just gone out. “AAAAaaaagggghhhh!!” Gina screamed. Again, again, again. Torturous. Soul-wrenching. Finally, the stage manager, slipped over to the house phone and called for help. The fire station was a block away and firemen arrived two minutes later and were loading Gina onto a stretcher at the very moment that onstage, the make-believe firemen were breaking down the make-believe hotel door, smoke pouring from beneath, rising and thickening as the chaos ensues, characters running every which way.

Mercifully the drama came to a close. Gina was taken to Queen of Angels. The critics hustled back to their hotel rooms to pound out vindictive accounts for their hometown papers, the actors, shedding their costumes as swiftly as possible in order to flee the scene of the crime. I sat backstage, head in my hands, knowing that it had gone as poorly as it possibly could. I wanted to be alone, but I wasn't alone, for one soul had lingered. And there he was, briefcase on his lap, gazing at me, smiling. Finally, I looked up and said, “What is it, Severn?” And he, without irony or attitude asked: “What did you think of the orange?”

Postscript: When Del Close died in 1999, he left his skull to Chicago's Goodman Theatre to be used in a production of Hamlet. I did a workshop at Goodman in 2003 and during a meeting in the artistic director's office, glanced over and there was Del, housed in a glass case, awaiting his entrance. ●●●

## All Through

thin-skinned March, Yomi and Bear sit on a bald couch and watch movies that slide through the mail slot in red envelopes.

The remote paddles through Bear's paws like an oil-slick fish; now the color settings on the television are immutably reversed. But Yomi doesn't mind the inversion.

Bear likes to watch foreign movies framed by desert. Naked sky flipped the color of warm marmalade. Skin tone like the scent of a fledgling juniper berry. Bear loves potato chips. He crunches through the dark and sucks salt from his paws and then, most nights, begins licking restlessly at the raw stump where he chewed his left leg from the trap.

Yomi finds Bear pitching through a patch of corporate woods she cut through on her way back from QuikTrip, blood sluicing raw pine needles. Bear snorts and slabbers, but limps after Yomi, snuffling up squares of chocolate she breaks from a Hershey's bar.

Yomi makes Bear a nest of quilts in her mother's old room, applies comfrey poultices and plaster and whiskey drops. Cracks open honey-flavored protein shakes as Bear dwindles. Every morning she sweeps more fur from the corners.

By June Moon, the fur in the broom straw has turned white as dandelion seed. Bear hobbles away one long tunnel of night. Propped against the bathroom mirror, a single tarot card, translucent with grease: La Luna.

## The Backyard

smoke tree lowers purple shade over Yomi as a steep, waxing moon pulls all the milk-tooth rabbits from their warren. Last to rise, Amami pecks at a cairn of pistachios piled outside his burrow and tiptoes across the crab grass within a sock-length of Yomi. Gone in a copper under-flash.

Yomi weaves through the nest holes with her satchel, dropping down tiny bales of herb and orchard grass. Night air suds with the hyper scent of raw cilantro. Patiently, she kneels next to each burrow and pulls up handfuls of twine staked down into the dirt. Pinches each slender brass stem and winds the wristwatches, lowers them back into fresh dark. Diminishing ticking. ●●●



## ● Jennifer Denrow and Richard Froude

### from **What Does The Sky Know**

I've been thinking about putting the stage directions of *Waiting for Godot* with *Death of a Salesman*. The actors could still have their house, and of course their lunches and cars, but they would have to take their shoes off and eat carrots, and put their shoes back on.

They would be angry and gloomy and stoop. They would have to pause. Some game would be on in the background. The play could be about failure. About the failure that you feel but other people have to live with. The characters would probably drink between their AA meetings. They would say everything's the best, the best it's ever been, it's the best thing that's happened to me.

One character would tell another character about the people at her AA meetings. One would be named Joe. That character would fall in love with Joe. Another character at the AA meeting would take four buses to arrive at the meeting at 7am. When one character told another character this, on the phone, the character that wasn't the AA member would hang up the phone and watch goats eat

grass in a park full of grass. That character would want to feed the goats but would be afraid. And also the character would have to pee.

That character might go home then and drink a few beers and watch some shitty television show that she's downloaded and doesn't really care about. It would be the same day that she got a new key to her apartment and the same day that she received nothing in the mail. This part of the play would be so boring. The music in the background would be something desperate, something familiar and desperate. It would play through the entire scene.

The scene would end by closing in on the sky until the sky looked like nothing.

I remember it because it happened on Thursday in 2008. Every time, Joe made a joke out of words and names, he said my name is Joe and I am archangelic. The people who were there for the first time sometimes smiled. Once a woman shouted and a kid who didn't look old enough to be there started crying. The kid's name was John Keats.

In math class I learned that the distance from Keats to Williams is the same as the difference from Williams to me. The vortices I'm using are Keats naming negative capability in a letter to his brother (1817), Williams writing imitations of Keats as a medical student in Pennsylvania (1902), Williams publishing *Spring and All* in Paris (1923) and the afternoon that the play started (Thursday, 2008). 85 years, an interlude, 85 again.


According to statistics this is just longer than a lifetime. Joe will live for 85 years. Or he was born in 1985. That makes me older than him by 6 years. It doesn't really matter. Yes, I have walked white animals at dusk. It was 2008 or 1985 and my name was Joe. I was archangelic and it was always Thursday. All I did was tell stories and fall in love. The animals never understood. They spoke in actions, like a spectacular for-profit sign language that

they carried toward the ocean. Everything was the best, the best it had ever been. And then we realized that we didn't have enough words for snow.

The scene ended again. It was always ending. This time it ended with Joe sitting in front of a mirror spelling out the word a-n-i-m-a-l. Joe got mixed up with everyone else. Joe was everyone and everyone was Joe. He was glad he had a mirror to help him remember he was himself.

Time kept him in the house, feeding him cinnamon bread and organic peppermint. His father had hidden all the artifacts of Joe's life in security deposit boxes. Joe didn't know the codes. The codes were registration numbers for cars his father had owned. Joe would never be able to figure it out. He didn't even know his father had cars.

Time thought Joe was better off not knowing anything. When animal shadows began to appear in front of him as he walked home at sundown, he asked Time what it meant. Oh nothing, she said, watering the peppermint, and so he learned to ignore them. However, he was more than a little concerned when images of animals started showing up on his arms and legs. What are these, he asked Time. Those, said Time, those are what happens to young men, sometimes. Joe traced his animals with his finger. He would stay in bed long after the alarm went off, listening into his arms and legs. Listening for clues. But there weren't any.



This scene would continue well into the next. There isn't that easy relay race style stop and start because as Joe reaches the point where he would traditionally give over to the next scene, he refuses to give up the baton (in this case a small bird).

In fact, he refuses to stop running. Which is how the next scene would begin if it had been allowed to begin, if Joe had opened his hands (now a nest) and allowed the bird to take flight. The bird is a wren. A wren being the smallest of birds known to me as a child. These are stage directions. That is, this is meant to be performed in the instant that it is written. All we need is an appropriate location. I suggest water because I am learning about water as a place of both happiness and loss.

This is the place where I have decided to grow old and since it has been established by ring road or decree that I am in fact Joe (in alternate measures to the occasions when you are Joe, or we do not know who Joe is) can we let Joe grow old in a place where there is water?

What do you think Joe? But of course by now Joe is some distance away. He has left the track, vaulted the stadium walls and is on a break for the coast. He is still wearing his number. He is still holding in his nested hands a tiny wren.

And so ending follows ending until it becomes clear that ending is just another way to continue. All of the relay runners know this. The difference is that only one of them is carrying a bird. This is the biggest clue. What is so terrifying about Waiting for Godot is how the stage directions (the unspoken) exists inside the dialogue (the spoken). Both are part of the performed but within this the unspoken so regularly undermines the spoken. There is a silent language inside what is performed vocally. And the silent language knows other things. Are we writing a silent language? Or are we writing the performance that contains it? ● ● ●



## Unsinkable

It was my mom's idea to go to the museum. My stepdad didn't care about the Titanic, so it was just Mom and me. I like it when it's only Mom and me—when we're alone I can usually make her laugh, and that's what I was doing when we walked into the museum and I saw a recovered chunk of that little cupid statue that once stood at the bottom of the Titanic's grand staircase. I got a feeling in my stomach like I was going to be sick. I grabbed Mom's hand, something I don't do any more, and held it tightly as we followed the lines deeper into the bowels of the exhibit.

The museum was so crowded, this was the last weekend, lines were bunching up behind each glass box. I pressed my forehead against the display case and saw a gold chain link purse. It had been the style that year—all the ladies had one. But this one was mine; I almost expected to see my handkerchief inside. Next to my purse were spectacles like Manny used to wear, the same bent rims. And china with the blue and gold pattern for the first class passengers, with the words "White Star Lines" at the bottom of each teacup.

"Are you okay?" my mom asked, noticing my quick breathing. I nodded. I wanted to tell her that I drank tea every day from one of those teacups, watching the endless blue amidst the shuffleboard games, the chess games, the strolling parasol feathered rustled corseted derby-hatted oblivion, but I didn't know how.

Mom and I zig-zagged past cases filled with recovered iron work and candelabras and combs and shaving kits and even paper money and stamps, letters, attaché cases and silver hand mirrors and combs and upholstered footstools like the one I had in my room and tiny diamond cufflinks and a set of shoes I swear I could step in and wear right now. Lining the walls of the exhibit were the black and white photographs of passengers and crew—Captain Smith was always so handsome with his white beard. The first time I met him he com-

plemented me on the perfume I had purchased in Cherbourg before boarding. My aunt was ill in Denver and Titanic was the soonest ship leaving for the U.S. I didn't care so much about all the hoopla but I can't say I was disappointed to be on her maiden voyage among the Astors and the Vanderbilts. I know what they said about me. A bunch of floozies in their ostrich feather hats is what they were—they didn't even care that they couldn't vote.

The exhibit wound us through a replica of the first class dining room that didn't look at all like the first class dining room. Where were all the gorgeous windows? The dining room had been my favorite room—bright, as if you were in heaven itself. My mom was looking at cooking dishes barely rusted and servings spoons and glass decanters, and I wanted to tell her how rich the roast beef was that last night, how amazing the pink sherry that I sipped out of a cup just like that one. But I didn't know how to tell her that, so instead we amused ourselves with the Titanic trivia: Did you know there were 40 tons of potatoes on board? Fifty-thousand eggs? And Mom is trying to explain to me how much is a ton and all I'm thinking is that I'm sure that the coconut sandwich was not on the menu that night, I would have remembered it.

Toward the end of the exhibit was a cooled, darkened room with an imitation starry sky and I remembered looking down on water churning so far below, all that blue, white foam pirouetting in perfect trailing ribbons where the iron sliced the sea. But what I remember most were the people screaming to death all around us in the dark, in that living, writhing amoeba of blue-black that was freezing their insides into solid blocks before it finally swallowed them whole. And then there was the great silence that followed the screaming, which was even worse.

The final piece of the exhibit was the passenger list divided into two categories: survived and perished. I didn't have to look; I was thinking about that great silence when I saw my picture, the picture Manny took in our living room in Denver, the one I hated and he loved. They called me "Unsinkable." It made me cry because I didn't deserve it.

As we left the exhibit I asked Mom if we could buy a souvenir but she said we had already spent too much money. I wanted so badly a replica teacup, the cobalt blue stripe with the gold swirled inlay and the words "White Star Lines" on the bottom; I wanted to drink hot cocoa from it and remember the sun setting and how glorious was the wind on my arms and how white foam pirouetted in perfect ribbons where the iron sliced the sea. In the end she bought me a children's book called S.O.S Titanic. I wanted to tell her I was too old for pop-up books but I felt too sad to say anything. ●●●



## Until Spiderweb Memento, Her Theater With Less Agreement

### Inclinations

mindful fill groundhole once oiled straw is lit. Cold knuckles crack, but his bleeding holds oblivious. Polishes as warmer salve to supple pained sharpness—namely, roads that profess an overwhelm of near-morning acolytes, load by load with sundries they carry. He weakens. Puts himself toward them. All in good manner of our material, ourselves reduces his obstruction's soft flap (if any benevolence be perceived). Not in least steadiness he lets their knees have path-laying, drive posts into hard clay. Their efforts yield a smoothed horse paying visit to innocuous tears, and disassembling faith leans upon them unheeded. Then the spoiled treacle of jawbone swells their din: they must vanish when fields return in protest. Here preserved, he broods alone. Kindling muscle flayed. Property forgotten in an elegant, imaginary knot. It now binds the new devotee's affection fast. It heralds dismal kisses.

### Pithy Is Price Given

a landfill of spent husbandry from movement feast seen. It overtakes her. They resemble onward like her the masking floor, lithe pitches with golden swallows between feet's passage in urn. Her slippers a question of cascades. Being pure tumult of. A neck surrender which tears at shirts, their dismantled stitches piecemeal. She makes her kind seemly, not a kept haunt to succumb least fell, but withal in pausing. She whispers this world ripe forgiven. Roaming oversee and be singled and she is. Bowing planks beneath her haven sample pale a delight: honey due on drawn boughs. Or channeling amber, whereas only seas could scry to redeem their own scintilla an eternity.

## Alongside Patience

one spider-eye stays in a corner's warming greed, coeval with its twilight hovers a trendril in mayhap inhabiting his provided ice-pane. It holds tandems there, tunnels her even-keel. Evaporates in watching above as airy hours. Close, the jostle prior what studies its removal long. She does not bother as often as chases liken. Trailing away silk screens, footsteps remain semblance. Hers behaved if begged. Forward downy-fleshed pads mammalian, a haul of obstinate. Just fraying accord. Sear of untouched strings but for lent anticipation marks few, is what bedchambers tell. Choice hap- penstance can seize, and will she accept dearth as chests heave possession, several lifespans of a dress, open shears' rusting for wedding hair. A vacant wardrobe sieves through before then. Her lined tidying sheds meekly, a silvered glass until pressing comfort: Many paths below many, little spinnerets offer. How they do mind their sparse to taken women this well past welcoming.

### Say A Slip

and has she been anything forward. Nightbells at three's wake thus. Enticement rudders palms underneath. Slide past them surfacing. Into empty assurances: lay of her price shielded by him. Yet does it save place, dress their bassinet? Following some very same, in a lie sunk her clear as a virgin circle.

### Tip Of A Scale

all stills in jeweled incense their stop from granted plummet, fastens up spiteless thoughts in a spell her ministry has instructed. On land, there treads a coarse kindness—That temper-voice from my casing, she keeps stake to obey this else.

## Glimpses

train waiting at illusive enough they, each other. Not any yet, she disrobes. Because a layer should keep no carcasses, illumine on her face absent lamps, commit a calm volition but to record them these gestured pleasures. Hostile a delay will ask wintering glanceful, Let stage her flesh, and heavyhand with stasis their dim wonder, too masked a feint. These spectators, in time, defame owning whitened ground, her having newer partitions to settle soon—splendor blushing past nuptial streams. Room day or night lengthened here about hung limbs crowded, grasping. Some together men may negotiate false trees for these stretches. As argued corpses they perhaps put out myriad fires building her path. Behind them, walls serve spun drapery unseen. Careless alter ages the so entombed. Then proscenium guilding takes those servants away. Few ever give fleetingly under elusive attention, she has inferred this bare.

## By Crawlsome Thread

they enter sprawling keepsake behind at copious request, and oil lanterns set plain. Sanctity since violates a nest with quiet permission to engage, or does any daughter allowed attendance—provided her how luxuriant tresses yearn, so many men there have. While craving fingers stage their aural force: part of her hideous be. Some asking it until this den purifies. Burning sandalwood carries late curls. They wait to mean trust. And they sit for tabling spillberry though from conches, none the wiser. Instead, domed around centerpiece, spiders busying torn nativity from frozen. Near inviolate. Yet sustenance stays appreciable gather. A their body stacked upon another about scuttle rooms in weave should come staring, what stares back theirs in reflective obscurity. Of shadowy detrius encasing: discoverless land, embraces un-knowledged, those gapes sent.

## Elaborate Snowfall There

instructs uproot darkness earnest in promise, the always every abstract she laments. Wheeling cages mix her taking staged stream. Cured by drink, she stays inside. Their heads are next seething. Guess rears cumulative weight, duty more plentiful than pried. This inconsequence shut. Ground took them serious. Larder sacks however imaginary or bellowing keep consumptive. Hordings of grain last longer peckings for land-days, each crop divide their own hand of it fatted, put to knife. Blood-saving behind them. Little ones earn their charnelhouse lie for each liver the name made gives wake. In a scar waning smudgy. Dense itself. As much harvest needs a horn claiming procession. It attempts escape toward eyeteeth following pineal organ—yet a release of ascending flesh, the become her perfumed blind.

## Besting Her Servitude

undersers aware on limb's fancy an approach. Sails the their body afore christening braided chambers below and hoists, a rise swell scenting taking them beddings laced of smoldering pith. Underneath they know settled iron as well as singing her. Some seat pacing their attribution that turns ashen air on instrument handle, the string's bridge of chin shiver planting at tonal bow. They tighten. Semi-quavers compulse upon them so sluiced. As it were skins she meant water, this undress. Flayed portions weep away off to tapered pinch. A wisp dissolved finds impression her reciting ever holiest smoke. ●●●

### Into the Sky Falls an Executive

A bottleneck of human flesh tussling took them to the edge where history is dependent on proper amounts of oxygen where the accumulated loss of thousands of imperceptible connections pressed her back where illuminated strands flowed through the wreckage where the traders did not have what they needed where what they needed existed in water molecules infants clutched in their fists with night terrors three days out of the hospital where chemical properties should not occur to them where lick waves on the distance where outside the palace gravity matters in ways gravity does not matter and this is known as physics and the bloodbath of recent memory where a man with a letter opener stabbed into his neck runs into the copier and falls down dead where birthday's melting chocolate where if only a bumblebee where if only a warbler where market research laughs in glowing red tickets where there is no hint of the woman who once used chalk and black boards where milk curdles where a man plucks out his eyes when he notices he is going blind where every day a woman considers the terms of her final internment but comes to no conclusions

### Postcard from the Banquet

Mr. Cooper had yet to explore the far corner of his tangled property. Have you ever been stung by a dead bee? It was the spot where a window cleaner killed himself before Mr. Cooper moved into the house. There is no sunshine in Kafka's head. Not Mr. Cooper's window cleaner, mind you, but the man dangling from the Dogwood nonetheless streaked Mr. Cooper's mind. He dreamed us today—the sky was too dark for anything resembling wakefulness. Aware that the metaphorical properties of Death were exhausted, the visiting scholar vowed to avoid it altogether. Endings are difficult; tattoo that on the back of your eyelids. Mr. Cooper commissioned a song absolving the lonely of mortal sins. As always, the accompanist arrived too late.

## Four Little Girls

Four little girls dressed like Catholic schoolgirls for real were walking down a street that cars used for moving their people from place to place when one of the girls stepped out into the street not meant for her stepping while a string of cars like beads on a rosary slowed at the insistence of each one in front of it with the one in very front braking hard kissing front fender bowing close to asphalt when the little girl the other girls called Elizabeth was oblivious but old enough to know better old enough after all for permission to walk this road with friends so that the driver in the front car felt impelled to scold her yell for making him shake and nearly striking her in the road on a day when no little girl in any outfit should be flattened down by speeding vehicles least of all this little girl in this little outfit on this day by they who had no intention of killing anyone no little girl no no little girl no little girl we learn lessons but some just never do. ●●●



## ● Andrew Borgstrom

### And Who Is My Neighbor?

Nebulosus

My neighbor wanted to put his father's poker cards in his spokes. His mom wanted him to stay awhile and shut up. His mom wanted him to sit down and shut up. His mom was also my neighbor. My neighbor brushed her cat's teeth on the front lawn, so it could spit in the gutter instead of on the carpet. She taught the cat to square dance and to fox trot but not to smile.

castEllanus

My neighbor liked to spin in old tires or ride waist deep on old bikes without tires, scraping at cement inclines, bathing in excrement, mercury rolling from palm to palm. He liked to shove broom handles into ceilings and catch the sprinkling asbestos on his tongue. "We all die in the same place," he said. "Inside," he said.

medlocris

My neighbor never allowed my neighbor into her home without an open wound. She wanted to draw out enough blood for them to swim in, but not like athletes, like overweight seniors that were not trying to lose weight, but trying to find someone to screw. My neighbor invited my neighbor in for cereal. My neighbor asked, "Will butterflies die inside?" And my neighbor answered, "Cut me open and see what the cereal looks like now."

conGestus

My neighbor stuck a fork into an outlet, and the entire neighborhood's cost of living index went out. My neighbor scooped up the pieces of my neighbor's life in her front yard, put them in the pocket of a boy's jacket, and then threw the jacket into the swamp.

Humilis

My neighbor had never traveled outside of the city limits, but she could say "I don't speak that language" in fourteen languages. She wondered why my neighbors weren't offended by the word punt. My neighbors were offended by jazz, but liked the idea of jazz and what it represented, what it presented, but the sound hit them like a branch in the face, and the twigs got in their ears, and the sound sharpened the twigs.

fiBratus

My neighbor's father left him when he was seven. When he grew up, he would replace the front lawn with a treadmill, so that if he ever

left his son, his son could always wave to him from the bathroom window. My neighbor said his father invented the escalator. His father was also my neighbor (before my neighbor was seven).

fiOccus

My neighbor said, "There is love inside of me because love is an idea. Not like plucking dandelions to rub into your skin, to spell four letter words across your flesh and later break out in hives and so scrub them in and off. The abuse you would have loved. As some form of love and some deformed love. The idea of. The idea is." My neighbor smiled after saying that. Like a cat.

fRactus

My neighbor pursued me on his bike, through the twigs of the swamp, past the jacket of no little renown, to the plums and the clouds. The clouds were also my neighbors. The clouds were my only neighbors. ●●●

## Anthophila

drinking the lyrics of every flower passing notes to others, turning song into structures collective being collaborated bears words dying persons in reverse. we've dispersed into disappear. thoraxed and waining jeans expose missing knees even fur in early spring collecting can't insulate missing beings. the wax learns slippery quicker than apocritae adapt with bodily intact—what haven't since first we counted as beings not just one. everywhere there is temperate we dodge petals from the sky might be burrow or buried fragments are trust. hope withers to climb soon then oat bread sweets again as percussive wings feel repercussions of less delicate beings. we spin, marching the cave, seating as ice globules learn less densities.

## Elasmobranchi

born with tether yolk cartilaginously ta main in largest affright bonier pre daters but rigid ribs don't curdle oxygenators like gelatil flexing mandible incisors. taste gin july and tonic me gentle dates to shrinking oral cavities, temporalis muscle withering while large braincased bipeds make desert waters. tropicals become faster molecules friction matches lab coats sodium hypochlorite emanating from below I once played this from below to catch off prey perpetuating life game. hinged jaws learning mash mobilizing with less sentients clamped. from which bottom shadows we twist sand becoming sweet with florae moment. biota revolt. we follow your instincts to attack from below. expelt flora. there is bleaching in shadows. must above we tact and hope amplitudes arise. the marine fear real cinema conflicted words. with bubbling shores, flattener wave boiling, hi, didn't have to this pieces, could have been ee eh.

## Formicidae

pact fem wor cause can't fly, wasp mascs, we're social storms. some wing, other practices sterile be, where socially stacks canonical sniffing collect bacterial atom clunks, leaf pulp furless tile fungus bed spit up exo torso limbs, nodes, elbowed antennae chewing mouthparts on pheromones then est abolish attackers symbiotically vine leaflessed an encroaching stem, our host likes breathing unconstricted ally. fem moves this earth berry insides more than worms, recycling nutrients, blending beings with being one colony en earthen chunks of bio mass we adapt, billions of tarsi, 17 percent heads, existing in your everywhere, ours too. we lift these life strengths per capita, life is what it can be, avarical antonyms tunneling sleeping trees as we ●●●



**June 16th, Vermont**

This is not a letter to make you remember your love for me. I'm in a darkened lecture hall watching an early Ingmar Bergman picture. But it looks like a thousand meditations of grey. And maybe I wish this could be the kind of letter

I said before. If a letter could do such things, which can it I don't know.

The woman to my left, one row in front of me, keeps raising a green bottle of beer and pouring it easily down her throat. I keep my eyes on the screen, the shirts and shoes of light, and listen to her swallow.

Feel what leads means to you in the sentence one thing leads to another. The film is good. I'm reading none of the dialogue and the woman has emptied her beer.

The green glass bottle alone on the arm rest. I feel a tenderness toward it and no other. ● ● ●

**Excerpt from Title Bout: For the Exact Same Reason Each Time...**

For the Exact Same Reason Each Time You Hear the Words, "I'd Like to Search Your Person," You are Reminded of the Night You Got Stopped by a Bicycle Cop Driving Home Your Podium from Mr. Bodhi-sattva's EZ Self-Storage™

You've never felt completely comfortable with Boulder, CO.



## Chapter Two

The story must involve a window in the beginning, double-paned and insulated. The story is set in a lost city full of stories just like yours and mine only smaller. The story takes place five years in the past and everyone looks uncomfortable in their respective haircuts. Later on, there is a breakup in a relationship that all involved agree is for the best. A character who seems relaxed and absent-minded throughout most of the story suddenly becomes suspiciously tense and irritable. There is a murder involved somehow. The story would be better with a butler in it. He should be extremely unhelpful and/or rude. The story should have an adventurer at the end, climbing (or being thrown) through the window of the beginning. Somewhere in the story, a character falls from influence or a telephone pole. The story must have an official scorer or referee in it if it is to be considered for the prize circuit. The story must use plumbing pipes to get its point across. Over the course of the story, a character builds a house, but the intention behind the action is not what it, at first, might seem. A character becomes sick during the story and is therefore ostracized from the group and asked to sleep at the back of the cave where their cough echoes loudest. A character is forced to go holiday shopping with relatives. This character is later found in a dressing room strangled by a pair of festive socks. During the story, there is an explosion that takes place a thousand years in the past. There are no fire extinguishers invented yet and so the whole world burns dimly. Later in the story, there is a fight between plastic figurines culminating in a microwave confrontation. The story must have an ant involved, somehow squashed between thumb and forefinger. This becomes a growth moment metaphor for the story's central character. The story is set in a library where a mysterious death occurs. The butler is, naturally, a prime suspect prior to the discovery of new and intriguing evidence. The story ends atop a tree with a pair of dropped binoculars. During the story, there is a visit by a very common visitor, say: the mailman. Say it again out loud. A character will read someone's diary, but it is done for different reasons than people would expect. A character becomes enraged by the sto-



ry, feeling their likeness as portrayed by the author somehow unfair. A character beseeches the reader for clemency and understanding. Somewhere in the story, a character is simultaneously robbed of innocence and their wallet. The story is set in a living room. During the story, a well-established leader steps down as a result of extra-marital affairs. The story must have a hamster at the end. The story must be taken literally if not seriously. The story takes place twenty years in the future. The story begins with a delivery made to a Middle-East manger but the robot in charge refuses to sign for it. A character becomes contemplative during the story through no fault of the author or reader. Over the course of the story, a character discovers someone has been pretending to be them and doing a much better job of it. Later in the story, there is a need to ask directions from the audience.

## Chapter Three

The story is set on a houseboat, one thousand years in the future of Ft. Lauderdale, FL. During the story, there is a sudden change in mind or temperature. The story takes place at noon exactly. Somewhere in the story, there is a surprise attack of conscience or enemy combatants. The story must have a toothless barracuda waiting below-decks, poised to harangue unsuspecting travelers and passers-by. The story must have an organ in it, musical or muscular. The story must involve a well-honed hatchet. Later in the story, a character discovers an item they thought they had lost once and for all. It was behind the bookshelf. The story starts in a desecrated temple. The story should have secret passageways between chapters. Somewhere in the story, an organization is recruiting for a shadowy cause. The hatchet turns out to actually be a meat cleaver. A character becomes angry at one point during the story. The cleaver is carefully hidden out of reach for the remaining pages. The story takes place on a river. A character will go to sleep, but that sleep turns into something else, something darker. The story must install a door in the reader's ear. It must be a creaky door, poorly fit to its frame and hinges. During the story, a character loses something important to someone else. The story must have a boatman in it to help get its point across. The story involves a candle, all but briefly lit. A character borrows money they cannot hope to repay. That character becomes resigned to his miserable fate over the course of the story. The story must involve a can of mace sprayed accidentally backwards. A character dyes their hair a subtle shade of western auburn sunset but their lover does not notice. The story ends soon after. The story must ultimately revolve around a bottle of beer. Another character becomes intoxicated. By the end of the story this character becomes very hungry. This character later applies for a job, but the action goes terribly wrong to the benefit of the story-at-large. Another, unrelated, character must eat a pre-prepared meal and go to bed without any misadventure. ●●●



## ● P. Edward Cunningham

### The Neighborhood Dining Room

The guests in the dining room are dressed up as repulsive chairs. Each of the guests feel their legs creak and breathe as they contemplate similar death scenarios.

One repulsive chair says to the other, "What would be the best way to land if pushed from the highest window of a city skyscraper?"

One repulsive chair says to the other, "Burning up would be a long death, but what would one consider the longest death? I want my death to be long. Jagged and inspiring enough for a future Hollywood blockbuster." ●●●



## Song

A comical masterpiece. Comely mouth, fully bound to festival. Three themes work so strongly we can't neglect them: a writing of Rhinoceros in the broken window (just so veiled as glass becomes guillotine) projects such an awful fall, it's so close to the beginning that we take each gushing as a hope, a lately belied lie. Second, the children, lying under blankets, splayed, splendid. In the shadows is a held spirit— silhouettes of birds, butterflies, alligators, boxers—all these turn in shadows on the walls all night, the sky outside names them, keeps them in a middle category, fingers wagging have cast on the wall the things they love: an end of art, a held spirit, a Californian drawing in the middle of the night, on white walls; so we are so enthusiastic, so ingrained in artifice that all the world is married to our benighted nuptials. So with such blue shadows we build (whoever knew all the breakage and all the fills—all these damn years of attention, the shut blinds opened, denuding all the wall, all we knew) shadow puppets, in our ears engender a special movement, that is so foolish,—that the geese we spread honk their horns and there is straightaway a magic. The rhino shreds the hands, the children splay their hands in the warm house whenever the whitest part of the wall unspools like film. The breakage constrained as width widens and narrows, glass against which words are written in white, words which spread in shadows. Third, the rhino is all rolling Energy; the children laze, bound by their action, they are the art man sees in Energy, that rests on empty coasts, a youth that mills about, toothless as it must be. Nature, Civilization, unspool, change with their laughter. Worklessness, Fantasy, Frivolity. Or else: in their hands is Romance and Rhino and Window and the unfoolable children are what Romance forgets, that is, what remains the same in you, what is stolen in you. The rich language of breakage is a tactic stemming from advantage, the turn to swerve. In an Other grows a spreading web, belief in the same sort of reach which is criminal in man.

One more bit of earth to cross, cosmic bit of dirt. Commas, festival of union. Trees time out an unstable, unmistakable, immediate sound: a scent of new sap shines through, current through the window, open and broken (a giant open mouth). Yes, the sun spins too, as you call out to me, clear and springlike, a measure of the sea level from the last song. All the children's mouths stained with Kool Aid and perfectly naked, laughing. All mouths send sound forth, open every day: codices of categories, and each participant a center, an avenue of rings, scanning the volumes of life. One species is different from another, draining argument of force; they both move in fine, enthusiastic blue (my dear breakage over it all, the most secular diocese, its silhouette is possible use) and string themselves up in the dark: at a certain and special moment, a car's honk causes everything to disperse. A nose in the center of the face, my child is an easy distraction going into the house, the sound of water spilled in a broken glass on the floor. Genitive. Each innuendo of each footstep of each failure of the modern motion picture. I turn the t.v. off. Breakage is an elaborate construct, let every point of my body sense it. I charge a brutal energy, pure; my son, source of union, the sound of a general energy that returns me to a new state, my head rested on the wall, considering nothing but his flight. Nature, civilization, an experiment with the jokes I carry around. Reality is imagination and frivolous. O: let the sound out, stories and the force of them out through the window and let the child be clear in the sound that each story should be right there up against him— I sense the brokenness unmoving and how different it is from strategy. In this spring wind I love in large part womanly, and remain doggedly masculine: there is nothing left but laughter.



Um, masterpiece is comic? Cosmos, a festival of unity? I'm very scared so I try to order everything immediately—this is all mediated. I am a rhinoceros passing delicately through breakage (the marketplace is instantly guilloutined), I project myself through my hide, I am as prominent as a deep-sea creature destined for eating. It's all creeping up on me, nonchalantly and impudently; I despise it, I jog around avoiding it. I'm evidently encased, blossoming is not for me, I'm classed among the mute things, and participate among them, trying to hold onto my arrangement of my bound-up life: I'm a different sort of casement, a drawn-off body of hot sex, if anything; I'm all encased, an enthusiast, but of a different sort, a requiem of each dead light in each dead nuptial. Such silhouettes as we (what more breakage can end this, send it into a fraction of hiddenness, put me to use in this silhouette?) find ourselves in is special momentum, as perilous as a goose's honk that dispels the magic it rises from. O nosing around, you pass me off as faithful, as an easy jog around the park, and the innuendo of feeding ducks is as witty as the feeding of ducks. Breakage builds to an elaborate grace, but to be lit up with any manner of voice is to snuff around a new marriage of any two things newly met.—it's too precious and I'll never be able to begin that again. Civilization, naturally, is going along too tentatively. And so am I. Whatever, motherfucker. Realistically, imagination is frivolity. OR: Where you build romance, there the rhino in us forces its way through the cracks, unfoolable as a Romance in the cold logic we've arrived at. O, dear sense of breakage, of humor more difficult than my tactics: I'm breaking away from the idea that your humor might peel me away from my more feminine parts, might make me remain doggedly masculine, all alone in my own laughter.




An open door over the linoleum. The mouth opens, a festival of union. So much more is given you, an immediate collection: a round night thing, establishment of steps across broken glass in the door (now there is much to cut), protection of your feet, something as simple as fish in the glass bowl resting on the cabinet. Then children, outside and not listening to the openness, too much at play inside it. Then a body, outside the doors and in the night, the very apex of participation, holding what remains to be retrieved, arrow to the eyes: a divers body, drawn from the heat of sex and want; all forms invest in a certain specie that requires air and moon for its new sorting breath. The body is blue silhouette (wanting only breakage and apex since the clock announced us, but what can silhouettes use?) hanging at a certain moment, especial, as dangerous to itself as the mouth opening to speak quiet spells. The profile establishes steps out the door, the child's happy play now inside the house, an insinuation of all that has dispersed in the current. Picture the moment of breakage: the structure of glass in pieces before the broom, how it is all laid out later in a manner of use. The moon an assembly of rays, an energy passive, pure; children's location in union, they too are a species of energy that knows the articulation of bones below skin, that hold only as they begin. Civilization is a natural gesture of their play, of toys they hold. Imagination in the moonlight is easy and real. The moon, the mouth, the open door and its empty window: the abiding reach of the Romantics and the wind roiling through open spaces, through frames, and the children unspool their abilities down the driveway; as soon as they're gone, I choke up. I can laugh at the broken glass, but this is a dangerous strategy. In a sense, my blood is in large part material, moonlit, and the rising of laughter in me merely masculine.






One grapples with mastery. Each pause in the construct its own festival. Draw your themes into words so they might pale in the middle light: heat passes evenly and re-sets itself in the midst of heated breaking (now, at least, we see the guillotine): motion opens up the word that is become the thing as word, the soul is yes a heated word and we die as we speak it, but only insofar as we lie about it, as we swallow what is primeval. Give off the kind of opening, nonchalantly and impudently naked, that spills you into heat. Then go into whatever works, and take your time with the night as it passes; it might let you call yourself out in the middle of everything as it happens, even death; it's all true, it shines in a way that isn't yet lit up for you. I'll trust your enthusiasm to outlast you when you die in the heat of a hot kicking against death where man makes his marriage outside his home—this might be true. In this way I'll become a blue silhouette (I'll die in the midst of this breakage and become the culmination of sense as an attention to the trees in the yard—is this ever something I could break?), I'll be hung in the middle of some special and open blank that is so far away it will call to me as if with a magic horn, and everything will be played at once.

Here comes the timing of the air I inhale, here come the kids spilling so luckily into room's magic, a room so full of light that everything plays off of every surface. The heat reaches a charging tempo, the children spill luckily out of the house, my ankle is the tiniest instance of the force of my leg and waist and in the end it swings out too modestly for this film. Breakage lifts itself until everything is even with its extensive grip— I'm too full of heat to even know how I'm constructed anymore and I leave everything to you all, dear reader. I'll stare the heat down my nose, a sort of brute energy; the kids use what comes to them and use it well, I'll sign off in the heat as a sort of energy—I'll cure it and damn the cost I've installed an air conditioner in the middle of the window, in the middle of the night, I'm beginning to meet what I'm supposed to figure out. This is difficult, this bullshit saving, this lopping-off of the hands I was given. I'll work hard from now on I swear I'll bleed myself of my frivolity. Oh, God: the heat weighs on me, it's driving me, I roam into my array of zeros and I'll look out the window and I'm a child and fool and unfoolable and I see the roaming of what speeds in the best of ways, it is coming to meet me. The best kiss I've known is now breakage between two breaths and I'm still a modest motherfucker in my strategy. I've even left behind the details of throwaway hours and fuck it all here I'm still trying to latch the door after all this



A shade over the earth, a comet over the house. Comet, festival of speeding matter. Try this theme on, establish it immediately or at last: zero in unrepentantly on the window's breakage (it holds up, beautiful guillotine) to project a little ways past it, on what is also before it, the cracks were made in the third song. Little kids ponder the break and rejoice with new insolence. A little marriage before the doors in the night, the push, the swish of all the participants against this audacious sky—they throw their arms up wide: it is another sort of marriage, drawn up from a calling out to be; they will sort this out fervently, they will certainly sort, who will drink wine under moonlight for their vows? There is a blue silhouette (but who makes breakage their uttermost end, despite the never-ending 20th century; who makes use of breakage against the silhouette?) and puppets dance around in a certain special moment so dangerous that an alarm disperses all the magic. The parent repents, the children laugh uproariously in that part of the house where they insinuate ghosts from a recent movie. The breakage is strewn across the floor, a pleasant array, for it is not important in what way you view it anymore—it is broken. The outer edge of the zero, its line is pure, brutal energy; the children come and go with the house, in the house, they are a sort of energy that sends new love out to each object—each chair, each spoon, each bowl of sugary milk—they ensure that each moment will never have to begin again. Nature, civilization—they are active experiments in play. Reality, imagination, a frivolous distinction. Where—here—they are wedded to the story of impulse, the window never fooled the children as a story to frame and separate the inner from the outer. To laugh with them at its breakage is a different strategy. It is their moment of humor, there is no place here for mother or father in their laughter.



## Things We Do Not Talk About

Alma López stole six marbles from Joshua Braun, the boy who lived across the street and who secretly loved Alma. This is how it happened: Joshua had to pee so he stood and ran to the bathroom. Alma was now all alone sitting at the rug's edge in Joshua's den staring at the large Tupperware container in front of her. She guessed that it held hundreds or even thousands of marbles. The late afternoon sun shone through the French doors making the marbles' reds, greens, yellows, purples and oranges glisten like hard candy. Alma listened to Joshua pee. She looked around, once, twice, a third time. Alma closed her eyes, reached into the container and grabbed six marbles. She didn't want to choose: Alma craved the randomness of the process. She shoved the marbles into her jeans pocket just as Joshua flushed. Alma opened her eyes and offered Joshua a broad smile as he trotted back into the den. Before Joshua could settle back onto the rug, Alma stood and said she needed to get home because it was almost dinnertime and her father would be angry if she didn't help set the table. In truth, her house was empty and she would have to heat up leftover chicken posole that her father had picked up from Grand Central Market the day before. Alma's father never got home before eight o'clock because of a lousy commute from downtown to Canoga Park. She liked her lie. It was perfect.

The six marbles would follow Alma all her life even as she traveled to Cornell where she majored in English literature, back to California for graduate school at UCLA, and finally settling in a small but conveniently located Santa Monica apartment once she landed a job at the city college on Pico Boulevard where she taught "Literature of the Bible" and "Images of Women in Literature."

Alma wondered what happened to Joshua and whether he ever knew about the stolen marbles. He must have. Joshua kept track of everything because, as Alma remembered, he was more intelligent

than anyone she knew, at that time. But they'd lost contact after Joshua's family moved to Phoenix at the end of sixth grade. He wrote three letters to Alma but she never wrote back. Joshua finally gave up, heartbroken. Her father found the first discarded letter in the kitchen trashcan, retrieved it, and put it on Alma's little desk. She threw it away, this time in the large trash bin at the side of the house. The other two letters met the same fate, safely tucked under other rubbish so that her father would not discover and salvage either one.

Alma kept the six marbles on a bed of blue velvet in a small wooden box she bought in Mexico City that summer's vacation with her father. She chose the box—a large grinning skull carved onto its top—despite her father's attempt to steer Alma to something a little less morbid. But no, Alma wanted that box. Period. She loved skulls, if love is the right word. Alma remembered the trip as uneventful, even a bit boring. She had wished that her mother could be with her and her father. By this time, Alma could barely remember what her mother's voice sounded like. Alma's father kept pictures of his late wife throughout the house so that Alma would remember her face. But it was her mother's voice she missed most.

After teaching for four years, and after her father passed away leaving her some money, Alma decided to buy a small house not too far from her college. It was time. Alma's father would have been proud of her, making this very grown-up decision, no need for a man to make her life complete.

When the movers came, Alma had already packed everything. It wouldn't take long especially because the company had sent two very large and efficient young men. They looked like her students—tattoos, ear gages, all-knowing smirks—except with more muscle. The move went smoothly. Alma tipped them generously, something her father taught her when exposed to good service.

Alma unpacked slowly, no need to rush because she had the entire weekend ahead of her. She opened the first box, the one holding her old den's knickknacks. Alma found the box that held the six marbles. She opened it, half expecting them to be gone, perhaps stolen by one of the movers when she stepped away to the bathroom for a minute. That would be ironic, wouldn't it? But the marbles sat in the blue velvet, safe as ever. Alma closed the box and put it on the mantle of her rustic brick fireplace. There the box would sit, unopened, and moved only when Alma dusted.

Alma eventually became a full professor in the English Department, popular with her colleagues and students, alike. One evening, after hosting a visiting novelist on campus, she came home to find the front door ajar. Alma immediately regretted not getting a home alarm system. Her father would have been disappointed. She walked over to her neighbor, Scott, who would be having dinner with his partner, Jorge. Alma did not like Jorge. She thought him stupid. But she appreciated Scott for his love of literature and art.

Scott escorted Alma to her house, saying that it was probably fine, perhaps she'd forgotten to lock her door, that's all. Scott always stayed calm. Jorge stayed behind to continue eating dinner, never offering to come along. This reinforced Alma's negative view of him and she wondered why Scott tolerated such brutishness.

At this point of the story, you are likely thinking: Oh, Alma and Scott will go into the house and see that it has been burgled. And of course, the box holding the six marbles would be missing. And this event could be read as some sort of metaphor for this or that or the other thing. Because that is the way you have been taught to read short stories. But I will not give you that satisfaction. I have better things to do with my time. I really do. For example, my son wants me to go with him to buy some Chinese food for dinner. My wife is upstairs on the phone with a friend and wants us to get her usual: broccoli beef and steamed rice. If you feel cheated, get over it. Worse things happen in life. ●●●



## The Hen

“You are early,” said Mother.

“The teacher is sick,” I said.

I stood in the doorway of the room above the kitchen eating bread and cheese. Mother sat at her sewing machine, mending. The early afternoon sun shone through the window, highlighting the red, yellow and green colours of the garments in the basket on the single bed by the wall.

“What’s wrong this time?”

“Her head, I think.”

Our teacher was neither happy nor healthy. She lived above the classroom in the schoolhouse at the top of the hill. She blamed the place for ruining her health. She said that the wind never stopped whistling through the cracks in the walls. She was sad because only half of the sixteen children in the village attended school regularly.

Mother looked at me appraisingly.

“Can you kill a hen for me?”

“Yes,” I said, although I was not sure I could. But, I thought, what choice do I have? Father and Grandfather were both out with the neighbours chopping wood for winter, and there was no one else around. I was eleven years old and had long and thin legs. I was desperate to get out of short pants. I wished to be considered more man than boy, and I knew that respect had to be earned.

“Good,” said Mother. “Dolores, the tailor’s wife, gave birth this morning. She needs chicken broth. We’ll have the meat for dinner.”

We went downstairs and Mother gave me the small sharp knife she used to peel potatoes and a white porcelain plate with a red rim. We stopped in the granary and she put two handfuls of corn in the big pocket of her apron. In the yard, she called churras, churras. The hens stopped their pecking and ran for the grains raining down around her feet.

She grabbed a hen, held it under her arm and inserted her long finger in its backside. She did the same with another hen, then another, until she found one with no eggs growing inside.

“This lazy one,” she said. “Clamp her between your legs and make a deep cut at the back of the head. Make it quickly so she does not suffer. Hold her by the legs and collect the blood on the plate.”

“I know,” I said. I had seen it done many times.

“Don’t take too long. I’m going to boil water for the plucking,” she said.

I watched Mother walk back to the main house then took the chosen one to the barn. I carried her by the feet, holding the plate and knife in my other hand. The hen tried to look up at me, to speak to me, flapping her wings against my legs, distracting me. But despite the disorder in my head, I knew I could never put the knife to her neck.

For five minutes or more I walked about the barn, then I saw the rope on the hook in the wall and I knew what to do. I took it and the hen to the orchard. There, I managed to fasten the hen by one leg and then tied her to the mulberry tree. She was confused, but recovered fast at the sight of the winter vegetables within her reach.

I went to the cellar under the house, took a shotgun from the gun cupboard, loaded it and walked back. I stopped about five metres from the hen. She was digging for worms and I waited for her to finish eating a large one. She looked away from me and I aimed and pulled the trigger, twice. The first shot sliced off her head and her body started jumping up and down. The second one stopped that.

Mother came running. ‘What is going on? What have you done?’ The decapitated hen was lying on the black earth, feathers everywhere. Mother looked at it, then at me. She shook her head.

“Give me the gun.” I handed it to her without meeting her eyes.

“Take the hen to the kitchen.”

I untied the headless corpse and carried it away.

Drawn by the shots in the orchard, two neighbours and half a dozen children arrived. I don’t know what Mother said to the adults but I did hear her telling the children to scat.

After returning the rope to the hook I took a hoe to the orchard

and buried the hen's head and scattered feathers under the mulberry tree. Then I busied myself tidying up the forks, the scythes, the sickles, ploughs and rakes. Even half full of hay for the winter, the barn was a big space. I liked it very much. In summer my cousins visited and we made swings by tying ropes to the high beams. The swallows journeyed from Africa to lay eggs in their old nests that clung to the rafters. The cats watched the little birds, the dogs watched the cats. The horse was shod, the carts repaired, and four pigs were killed there every Christmas. In winter men stood in the barn. They watched the endless rain, they smoked and, if they thought there were no children about, they talked of very adult things.

I sat on an upturned wicker basket and laid my hands on my knees. It was a pleasant October afternoon. The north wind had died and the sun shone low. But the barn's memories were dim to me because I was thinking hard about what to say when Mother called on me to explain. My head was beginning to throb like the time I had the ear infection.

I heard Mother call my name and I stood up.

"Yes, Mother?"

"Please fetch me a basket of potatoes."

"Yes, Mother."

"Feed the corn to the pigs and don't forget to bring in the wood for the night."

"Yes, Mother."

These were just my usual after-school chores.

I made three trips to the kitchen, one with the potatoes, two with the wood. The first time Mother was in the pantry. The other times she was standing at the sink with her back to me. The hen, plucked and waiting to be cooked lay in a roasting tin beside to the stove. I wondered what had happened to the shotgun pellets.

I returned to the barn. So far I had escaped reprimand, but that was little comfort. Perhaps she was waiting for Father to come home.

A while later I went to the stables. The two baby calves, lonely without their mothers, came to the gate of their small enclosure. One had a big white star on her forehead. I played with their ears and let

them suck my fingers. They looked hungry. They had no names because they were to be sold.

Next I went to the forge. I shovelled the black clinkers from around the base of the anvil into a bin behind the bellows and organised the big hammers according to size the way Grandfather liked them. After that, I sharpened my pocket knife first on the big stone wheel and then on the softer one. And all the time I thought of what to say. The forge, with its small window and low ceiling, was dull without the fire, so I went

back to the orchard. Already almost leafless, the trees appeared dead or dying. I tried to ignore the two blackbirds looking at me from the top branches of the cherry tree. They flew away when they saw my stone coming. The sun began to sink behind the hills on the other side of the river and I chased the remaining hens into the hen house, which was in the stables below the loft. It was a little early for them to retire but I had had enough of their kind for one day.

Not long after, our two dogs arrived and jumped all over me and licked my face.

Father, Grandfather and two neighbours working for us that day followed close behind with three cartloads of chopped wood. They unyoked the cows and I took them to the stables. All our cows had names, their own space and their own manger to eat from during the long winter nights or on days that rained or snowed and they could not be taken out. We had the most cows in the village and the only horse.

The men unloaded the wood. After washing their hands in the big trough next to the well, they sat at the round granite table under the bare branches of the fig tree, smoking, drinking glasses of wine, talking. All except Father. He drank only while eating, smoked only on special occasions and spoke only when necessary. I stood mutely nearby,

dreading any questions about my day.

Mother came to the door to say that dinner was ready.

We went in and took our usual places at the long wooden table, sitting on long benches like the ones in the church. On the table there

was a big plate of sliced jamón serrano and a basket of bread. Both were passed around and we all helped ourselves. One of the neighbours made plenty of conversation. Grandfather passed the wine.

Mother also made some light comment and I relaxed a little, lifting my eyes from the plate. I saw that her eyes were red as if she had been crying, and felt I must be to blame.

After everyone finished with the jamón, Mother rose and brought out the hen, now cut in pieces, a big bowl of boiled potatoes and a jug with the sauce. She served Grandfather first, herself last.

Grandfather asked me to fetch another carafe of wine from the cellar under the house, an adult task I had been performing for more than a year now because I could be trusted to turn off the barrel's tap properly and not to drop the earthenware jug that held wine for six people, two glasses each.

As I returned with the wine I sensed an altered silence around the table and became alarmed. But everyone kept eating, the conversation turning to which part of the woods they should lop the next day. Grandfather would decide that. He planted and protected trees all his life. This is why we had plenty of trees and plenty of wood for the fire.

One of the neighbours nudged my knee under the table. A moment later I noticed that grandfather, sitting opposite, had arranged a row of lead pellets on the side of his plate. When he saw that I had seen them, he gave me a little wink and I knew that my deed was common knowledge around the table.

After everyone had finished eating I cleared the table. Mother served the coffee. Grandfather asked me to fetch the aguardiente and the small glasses from the cupboard.

Two more neighbours arrived for a game of cards. Mother washed up in the sink by the window while I went out to feed the dogs. When I returned to the kitchen I said I had to read about the Battle of Trafalgar for school and went to my room.

I did not read, did not even turn on the light. I undressed in the moonlight coming through the window and got into bed. I said the Hail Mary and Our Father. Tonight I said it again just for Grandfather. He was on my side and, although he was now slow, thin, and his shoul-

ders sunken, no one would challenge him.

The next day, while I was at school, the village carpenter put a lock on the gun cupboard.

Two days later it was market day in town. Father harnessed the cows to the cart, and Mother as in previous years, set off with two very fat pigs protesting about the change in their routine.

She must have haggled well because she returned later in the day with a smile and a basketful of goods. We had fresh sardines with white bread for dinner. There was sugar, chocolate, nice-smelling soap for the bathroom. Many other delicacies.

But there was no cloth for the tailor to make my first long, going-out trousers, and later in bed, in the dark, I tried not to cry. ●●●



## ● Nin Andrews

### The Last Christmas

The last Christmas my father was with us, he sat up in his bed, propped on pillows, wearing the blue pajamas my mother had bought him. He told my mother he didn't know why he needed new pajamas. The old ones worked just fine. My brother gave him a velour sweater, and he held it up for everyone to see. Then asked if anyone knew a man with arms that long. The limp green arms hung down like spaghetti strands. When my sister gave him socks, my father told her that a man who doesn't get out of bed wears no socks. Then he added, on second thought, he might need those socks after all. Who knows? The dead probably wear socks. Maybe that's what happens to all those socks a man loses over his years. He laughed as if he were telling a joke. My mother told him to hush up if he were going to keep talking nonsense. So my father closed his eyes up and went to sleep. Don't worry, my mother said. He always was a grinch, as if she needed to tell us that. Then she stared out the window. Outside it was snowing and snowing. Have you ever seen so much snow? she asked. No one answered. We all knew that the world as we knew it would soon vanish.

### Superstitions My Father Taught Me

1. If you spill salt, toss it right hand over left shoulder, or bad luck will happen to you or someone you love.
2. If you eat a piece of pie, save the point for last, and wish on it. Your wish will come true, but only if you don't eat another bite until dinner time.
3. If you wake before 7AM on the first day of the month, say bunny bunny before saying another word. If you don't, you will never escape the bad luck that is already blowing your way.
4. If a train passes overhead, duck or an accident will happen, and all the passengers will die.
5. If you pass a graveyard, hold your breath or the ghosts will listen in on your secrets and dreams.
6. If a bird flies into your house, death will follow soon. Or worse, you will want it to.
7. If you see a ghost walking down a beach, leave immediately or you will be washed out to sea.
8. If you wake on the wrong side of the bed or feel a crick in your neck when you first open your eyes, remember your dreams. Otherwise the ghosts will borrow them for a few days or weeks.
9. If you daydream too much, stop. Pay attention. Help your mama. Or go outside and jump rope. Too much dreaming brings the spirits close. Too much dreaming, and your days are all lost. Soon you won't be long for this earth.

## The Year I Turned Thirteen

In the town where I grew up, I was told, Whatever you want, child, you pray for it. By the year I turned thirteen, I knew. Prayer wasn't enough. That was the year the girls at my school turned mean, and my mom developed a conscience, as she put it, which meant she was always out. If she wasn't at a meeting for the citizens of Gordon County, or saving stray dogs or cats or the Coosawattee River, or delivering cans of Dinty Moore Stew to the local soup kitchen, she was checking on old Mrs. Mellinger, the widow from England who had a habit of getting lost in her own home. Your mother, my dad used to say, has a penchant for adopting lost souls. And so far as I know, there aren't any found souls on this planet. My mom and dad had stopped speaking to each other that year, so our house was as silent as a funeral parlor just before the mourners arrive. Even when we sat down at the supper table, there was a hush in the air and a little chill. It was as if the snow were falling inside each one of us, and no one could make it stop.

## William Faulkner

When I was a baby, William Faulkner stayed on our farm in Charlottesville, Virginia. Every time I say that, I feel as if I am claiming that Jesus, himself, lived with us once upon a time. Sadly, I was an infant and don't remember one thing about him, but my father liked to tell anyone who would listen that William Faulkner stayed in our guest cottage when he was teaching at U.Va, even if it was true that Faulkner drank most of the time, slept his days away, and avoided all conversation. But he did like to ride horses, as long as he could ride alone. On sunny afternoons, he would saunter up to the barn and ask if he could take one of the mares out for a trail ride by himself. He always chose the same feisty mare, and that mare always bucked him off. William, my father would ask him, why don't you try Sugar Lump? Sugar Lump is so calm, she'll let a sack of potatoes stay on her back all day long. It was true. I could ride her by the time I was five, if I could get her to budge. But Faulkner never did like to take advice. He said he didn't ride horses with names like Sugar Lump, Slow Poke, or Sweet Pea. No, sir, he'd say. I will take the meanest mare you own. At the end of the day, Faulkner could be seen him walking across the pasture, his riding cap in his hand, the shadows growing tall behind him. A writer always does want the horse who pitches him off, he said once. Years later I wondered if that was a better description of a writer, or just any man. ●●●

## Zeitgeist

We buy real estate in the frozen layers of Dante's Inferno. Where else could we find mythological Greek heroes and real Catholics in one place for all eternity? Although no matter how hard we try, we'll never regain that sense of place ideas provide.

There wasn't time to think so we passed out instructions:

- 1) the windows beneath your eyelids know something you don't, so watch closely when you sleep
- 2) your enemy is beneath your ribcage, set him free between the lub and the dub
- 3) the fireflies are creating a language you must decipher in order to survive
- 4) destiny is pegged to the board with a tack and must be emailed without letting the server know God is dead

You think you're a hero, but really you're just strapped in a straight-jacket and bumbling about on an imaginary three speed bicycle with a rusty bell and solid rubber tires. You send for an escort, but he comes back with pieces of Van Gogh's ear and a contract that demands we expose the color blue for what it really is – just blue.

I open a book of chess problems by Nabokov and expose them for what they really are – impossible. Checkmate in three moves is like the new mantra for transforming consciousness and channeling other impossibilities and paradoxes. This is what we want: new mantras, new prayers, new koans streamlined and updated for our hyper-digital,

media-frenzy world. We need something Postmodern. So we surf the blogosphere, the reality shows, and the talk shows until we come-up with an image, a puzzle, a problem that captures our epoch, the zeitgeist of our global consciousness. Something that can't be reconciled with our regular irregularities and uncertainties. We find just the thing to set us free: the guru gets the podcast going: child soldiers chopping a pregnant woman to death with a machete in Sierra Leone. "Watch, observe, listen. Masturbate."

But, hell, who cares, we'll have a wild time later at the crematorium listening to the murmur and hush of dust to dust, ashes to ashes. . .

Look, there's God's grandeur . . . right underneath the lid of that coffin. ●●●



## ● Ricky Garni

### Wisdom

#### PEER PRESSURE

from Larry Mondello  
“Leave It To Beaver”  
Season 1, Episode 37

When Larry says: “GEE, if we always did what your father told us to do, we would never have any fun,” please consult ‘Parental Advice’ below.

#### PARENTAL ADVICE

from Ward Cleaver  
“Leave It To Beaver”  
Season 1, Episode 37

Don’t use my power tools, especially when I go to the hardware store to buy clamps to make a checkers table for you boys and I am only gone for a few minutes. And if Larry comes over while I am gone and says something like: GEE, If We Always Did What Your Father Told Us To Do, We Would Never Have Any Fun, do not drill a whole through the garage so big that you can see your mother through the hole coming to announce Lunch Is Ready And It Is Tuna Fish Today For Lunch. It will be your fault and not Larry’s if you do, even though Larry did it and has run home by now because he knew that it was his fault as far as I am concerned it is your fault because I warned you many times: do NOT use my power tools.

#### ADVICE FOR LARRY

from ‘A Concerned Viewer’  
“Leave It To Beaver”  
Season 1, Episode 37

Larry: if you want to stay for lunch at the Cleavers, do not drill holes in Mr. Cleaver’s garage with Mr. Cleaver’s power drill while you are horsing around in the garage, for you do want to stay for lunch, for tuna fish will be served, and tuna fish is your favorite lunch, above and beyond all other lunches.

#### CHILD RAISING ADVICE

from Wally Cleaver  
“Leave It To Beaver”  
Season 1, Episode 37

When your child threatens to run away from home, sock him. If he runs away anyway, tell him you don’t want him to, otherwise he will run away and not come back because coming back will make him feel like a creep.

#### REFLECTIONS ON LEAVING HOME

from Theodore Cleaver  
“Leave It To Beaver”  
Season 1, Episode 37

When packing your bindle stick, be sure to include a bag of marbles, in case you meet other hobos and you want to play marbles with them.

#### A MOTHER’S LOVE

from June Cleaver  
“Leave It To Beaver”  
Season 1, Episode 37

“I don’t care what the Beaver did, I just want my little boy back.” ●●●

## Hypnosis in The Unbuilt City

Standing in front of his bookcase, a thought slowly crossed Stan's mind: to begin, there must be a city to experience, a being to build the scaffolding around, platforms from which to view the surfaces. Stan's arm lifted and outstretched. His hand slid left and landed, his fingers wiggled and pulled *The Unbuilt City* from the crowd. He held it in front of him, stepped away from the bookcase, stopping upon the threshold between the pocket doors, which partitioned the piano room from the hearth, couch and stereo, and he leaned upon the doorjamb. His body receptive, framed by the dark-stained wooden casing—facing the stained glass windows wet with daylight, turning a blind eye to what lied behind him: a piano, a bookcase, a dark hallway into the enigmatic kitchen. He opened the book and began to read at random:

Stan set down his book, got up from his chair, and walked over to the stereo. Upon the record player was a cassette with a yellow post-it note which read: *play me*. He removed the tape, put it in the deck and pushed play. The voice of Richard Flowers broke the silence of the room. Gentle, monotonous, and sober: *Welcome to the world of hypnosis*.

Stan paused it, grabbed the cartridge and read over the information:

Side One: Self Hypnosis – Night Version

(a detailed guide and experience)

Side Two: Self Hypnosis – Day Version

(a shorter reinforcing version)

Inside of the cartridge it read:

### MEET YOUR HYPNOTIST

Richard Flowers is an eminently qualified hypnotist, and founder of The Institute of Professional Hypnotists, an international non-profit organization based out of Chicago, dedicated to the advancement of hypnosis, and the recognition of hypnosis as a major tool for healing the hyperextension which results from acute self-consciousness.

Dear Purchaser,

Thank you. The tape you have selected has been used by hundreds of people seeking to improve their lives. Used as instructed, this tape will help you achieve your goal.

Be weary of imitators—only Institute-approved hypnotists should be trusted to narrate your journey into the irrational depths of social existence. Through this guided descent which we have recorded upon this magnetic Möbius Strip, a harmonious curvature of non-orientable being would be made available to you. A playground of temporal and spatial existence.

Please take care when following the path.

Hypnotically yours,

Richard

1972

Stan unpaused the tape, beginning again the Day Version:

*This tape has one purpose: to allow you to practice going into a state of hypnosis until you reach the level of depth in your daily experience that you desire. Until your earthly experiences harmonize with the irrationality of these elaborate depths. What before seemed impossible is now at your fingertips. Lie down against a cushion or two. Find the proper angle of repose, this posture will keep you from falling asleep, yet not remaining too much awake.*

Stan did exactly that.

*Close your eyes. Breathe deeply. Notice the rapid eye movement and attempt to cease it. Breathe deeply. Inhale. Exhale. Peer throughout your mind for a calm place to return to. It might be a meadow cut through by a luscious spring. It might be a beach, softly the sand spreads magic through your legs. It might be a forest, shaded by wisdom—trees as friendly and forgiving as your morning peace. Find this place inside of you. Locate it within your mind, your imagination will guide you.*

*Breathe deeply. Inhale for a count of two. Exhale for a count of five. Inhale for a count of two. Exhale for a count of five. Repeat this seven times.*

*Recall this calm place which you have found. This meadow. This beach. This shade of the forest. Now, search throughout your body for where this place is located. Search throughout your chest. Throughout your stomach. Throughout your arms. Your thighs. Your calves, your ankles. Your feet. Your hands. Your cheek, your nose, your chin. Your lips. Your knees. Your belly. Back. Bottom. Elbows. Wrists. Your fingers. Your toes. Search throughout your body, and when you find it—in your thighs, your arms, your fingers, your belly—envision yourself there. There, within the meadow within your chest. There, within the beach within your cheeks. There, within the forest within your calves.*

*Inhale for a count of two. Exhale for a count of five. Inhale for a count of two. Exhale for a count of five.*

Stan finds himself standing at a window with a large rectangular central pane flanked by two narrow, double-hung panels. Looking out upon a cobble stone street. Occasionally people dressed in brown topcoats, gray dresses hemmed with purple flourishes, green galoshes, various styles of top hats, or blue button-down shirts pass through his vision. Within an old factory transformed into a loft space, The sun, perfectly angled, lights up the large room through the series of rectangular three-paneled windows. Stan peers down upon the streets, the nearby buildings, immediately low-lying and building larger as they grow further away. He studies the intricacy of the stone work, the gargoyles upon the roofs, the stained-glass windows, the terra-cotta glazed and sculpted into flora patterns and reliefs of market-life, scenes from past villages, more ancient than the one he finds himself in. Past the uncurtained windows, a menagerie of life awakes to the curiosity of the day.

On the street Stan notices a bakery. He lifts the bottom sash of the right window panel, immediately smelling the ovens cooking their soft doughs into hollow crusts. The front door opens and the Baker steps out. He is a short man, bespectacled, smiling. Behind him steps the Baker's Daughter—plump, roused by the warmth of taste, cheered by the beauty of this morning. She looks up and spies Stan standing in the window. She waves. Stan smiles. He would like to go down and see her, to talk to her, make her laugh, but he does not move for fear of the cessation of this moment, this perspective which he has found on his most favorite of streets in the town of Glockenspiel. *I must remember that this view is here and available to me,* notes Stan. *And return to it often.*

As you descended, too I ask you to return. The very same way you came. The very same way. Return your attention back to your eyes. Breathe in—one, two—breathe out—one, two, three, four, five. Breathe in—one, two—breathe out—one, two, three, four, five. Up from your slumber, no longer asunder will you be. Back to the surface of your skin. Return to your eyes. Up—breathe in—breathe out. And now. You are back. Returned. Back to the room which you began. Safe. Calm.

Engaged by being. Back to this room, this couch, this posture, this vision. A vision which will entice you toward delight. Towards a kindred center calling.

You have returned but something else has returned with you. Different for each of us. As you continue in your daily habits, you must remember to acknowledge this presence. Remember to forward your hypnosis through acting upon your dream and not simply the day. As you walk, turn within. Follow the path which is not seen. Encounter the world as if it were a dream, as if it had happened before, and you are only re-experiencing it now. Circle these moments and profit from them—they are what you have returned with. Work them like a farmer works the earth. Dig, stand still, rescind, dig, shrink, stand still, collapse, breathe, wait, breathe, dig, stand still, touch something, touch something else, be touched where no hand is found.

With frequency of hypnosis, you will gain the ability to watch your imagination unfold and darken and expand across the interiors of your body into brilliant blooms.

The candles flickering in Stan's house caused every presence to glow. Tables, chairs, rugs, a mantel. A book case, unlit lamps, cabinets, and shelves. Profitable to see what remains intact after drifting halfway to hypnosis. Upon returning, he had felt face muscles to be coldly silver, the high pitch shiver of sugar running through his infinitesimal epidermal veins.

Stan had stood up from the couch. He had considered opening a book to pass the midnight hours reading, but the thought of this did not seem to wholly satisfy his vacancy. Neither nothing pleasurable nor attractive was foreseen when he had considered playing the piano. He had moved to organize his collections—found objects, mostly trinkets, from the gutters and alleys; used and discarded typewriter ribbons, admired for the irretrievable layers of words pounded upon them; small bones of pigeons, songbirds, rodents; stacks of bookmarks, each only passed through one book and then archived meticulously according to the details of its journey; tins filled with matchbooks, poised aloofly towards flame—but he had stopped, picking up a candle, which he lit.

Upon every surface, every shelf, window ledge, table, and mantle sat rows of candles burned down to various degrees. He had lit each one. The soft light revealing his willingness to accept the half-worlds his body had drifted off to—the candles flickering causing every presence to glow.

The umbrella stand at his front door rattled and tipped over, an umbrella propped open upon the floor. The night outside forever kept safe by those towards it. Stan recollected the gas-lit lamps over the street in the The Unbuilt City. The image of it alive as if desiring to be taken into his reality. It and the footsteps upon the cobble stone, the nightly fog beyond. Stan gently rubbed his hair.

This house retains its shadows.

A single candle glows in the window, and all that glows sees.

Through it, the house, too, is watching.

Stan sees someone in that faraway house who vigilantly waits.



## Maverick Trails

When yodel, falsetto, & the cry in the song fall flatted, & day begins & stays greying, & hair matted with imbalance setting in... When the sliver of a glimpse, once glimpsed, is a poisoned chalice, & the whole round world blinks careless malice...only sinews & distance will work, can carve resistance out of amorphous, sexless day-to-day. Vague premonitions also – with symptoms that evade description – spelling plague in the greying. Subsistence shudders all that feel real in the drudge through low level flood water, foetid, infected, and... Subsistence shudders to provoke small convulsions...bespoken or lacklustre, or bleeding off, and so... (from fragments I have kept).

There's an albino plays piano in Underground Atlanta, who I want to see. Devon came in close, as the train was swaying, & whispered the address to me. I may have missed the moment, actually. On Swindon station I sat down and wept... I think this is what Cecil Taylor meant when he said, "How many lifetimes do you think you have? Go listen to Marilyn Crispell". So...not the gospel train – any other train will do – mainline & sidetrack. Or, backpack away these blues on the maverick trail of music & mountains.

## Notes / Attributions

**Underground Atlanta** was an entertainment complex in Atlanta, Georgia in the 60's & 70's. Piano Red (Willie Perryman), the original Dr Feelgood, played piano in a bar there during this period.

**Atlanta Bounce** – Piano Red (Arhoolie CD)

This anecdote about Cecil Taylor & Marilyn Crispell appears in 'Invisible At All Times', collected in **Chasing the Vibration – Meetings with creative musicians** by Graham Lock (Stride paperback) ●●●

