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bellevue

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for the degree of Master of Fine Arts of the City College of
the City University of New York”

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Giant Blue Eyeball Washes Ashore in Florida

--breaking news story

"To live is not necessary; only to sail"

--Gnaeus Pompeius, who, during a severe storm, ordered sailors to transport food from Africa to Rome

As my brothers and I
gathered around the immense insect
that had alighted on the sandbox,
we began to name
all the African countries we knew,
as if when we had hit upon
the creature's homeland
he would give us a sign.
Before we'd gotten south
of the communes of Kinshasa,
he flew off over the fence
and into the fictive glory of myth
that seemed more mythic
before the internet.

Gino Covacci was out for his usual
perambule along Pompano Beach
when the eyeball stared back up at him
from under his metal detector.
He first kicked at it
with his socked Crocs
before picking it up.
Understandably, we are most willing
to cradle in our arms
what we know cannot hurt us.

We wanted to know
where the eye had come from.
Had it been dislodged
from the socket of a giant squid?
Was it the severed oculus
of a six hundred pound swordfish,
the victim of a cruise ship's motor?

Or perhaps, a token
from the fabled progeny
of the Nordic kraken discovered
by Hans Egede, Bishop of Greenland.

Melville's inspiration for Ahab's foil
was Mocha Dick, a sperm whale
that survived over a hundred attacks
from whalers off the coast of Chile.
With each new laceration,
the barnacles gravitated to him,
forming a bulwark from the harpoons--
but not the anthropomorphic jabs--
of warmongering men.

In middle school, we were all given
a sheep's eyeball to dissect.
When my scalpel became stuck
in the frozen purple orb,
Mr. Winters kneeled down
as if to extract Excalibur from its stone.
During recess, the sky opened
and miracles befell the tetherball spheres.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife worker
who poses for photos with the eyeball
cribs it in her latex hands,
the cerulean gleam of the aqueous humour
humbling the shamrock tattoo
on her inner wrist.
A man named Santiago,
having trekked all the way
from Kissimmee stands beside her,
wielding a fishing rod
on his bare olive shoulder.

Some things will never come close
enough to land for us to touch.
The Great Pacific Garbage Patch
that forms a vortex

twice the size of Texas.
The Northern Fur Seal that sleeps
with its eyes open and will abandon
even its own children
at the first sight of sand.
The satellites which monitor
the most minute of our pantomimes,
and wink down at us from their apogees.

When my brother was bitten
in the eye by a dalmatian,
the right side of his face swelled shut
and he slept on frozen peas for weeks.
People side-stepped him
at the supermarket as if his face
had gone from bruised to an object
in Tolkien's inky legendarium.

People pack into cars
and drive hundreds of miles
when a massive egg washes up
on the shores of Japan or
when the Montauk Monster
emerges on a beach in the Hamptons.
When a steel structure from
the *Waterworld* set surfaces
off the coast of Brazil,
the local Wapishana tie
cassava to the camera welds
and watch from their roofs
as their offering drifts out of view.

When the mysterious eye
is sent to a lab to be tested
it is quickly forgotten.
In a newscast weeks later,
a Laysan Albatross has died
on the wayward wing of an airplane
after having ingested flotsam,
leaving behind two large leg bones.

Long after his stomach dissolves,
a pile of plastic remains
as a memorial to his spine.

Bachelor

At twenty-one I was pulled
 over by an entourage of SUVs
in the middle of a first date,
headlights swarming
 the asphalt prairie.

Spotted hyenas also
make their rounds in packs. Because
 they devour all parts of their catch,
 no proof of their acts ever remains.

Shining his flashlight into
my date's eyes, he explained I
was changing lanes too often without
 signaling.

 If you think
 it uncaring
 that I hardly remember
 her facial features
try
to describe one person you passed
on the street today.

We've all had that daydream where
 we pull the gun
 from their holster
 spin it
on our finger and
hand it back while saying
the British
aren't coming.

The local Irvine police would often
 receive complaints
 in the middle of the night from residents
 in the newer housing communities,
where the cries of displaced coyotes

were mistaken for newborn
babies.

From the window of my Dodge Neon
she watched him administer
the field
sobriety test,
slender feminine hand pressed
to her cheek,
the two stones of
her purity ring gleaming
like a father's far-off
watchful eyes.

Completing my ninth
heel-to-toe step,
I looked up at the towers
of the business complex,
the statue in front of the Ayn Rand Institute
glowering down on us.

He let me go with a warning,
the three black suburbans racing
away from us into the night,

the gas sloshing in their huge tanks
like a memory
of going to bed
on an empty stomach.

Lazy Hemingway

The post I'd put up online
requested someone who was
a "grizzled suburban vet"
and "over the scene."
I should've known when I clicked
on his name in the subject heading
what a terrible roommate
Bukowski would make.
Sure, we leer together
at the new exhibits
in the hip galleries of Echo Park,
pass back and forth a brown bag
as we watch the Roller Derby Dolls
barrel into each other.
But he wears cigarillo smoke
like a cape around the apartment,
the dishes in the sink leaning
like some stained Pisa.
We cruise over to Santa Anita
to blow his book advances on horses,
take the Amtrak just to look
out the windows and decry
how ugly the world is getting.
He shows up for the release
of my new book of poems
The Teenage Pregnancies of Mexico City
drunk with some cadillac waitress
and after he passes out,
I glance into his journal
to steal names for future books.
Outside a reading up in Frisco
he gets into fisticuffs
and I drive up the next day.
I'm gonna make that pretty Kerouac
into a pugilist yet
he repeats the entire ride.
That word's dropped out
of the vernacular, I tell him

as we climb the Grapevine.
Out of respect for the dead,
I never tell him
that the aftermath of his women
reek like the leather inserts
of sweaty ghosts in heels.
You can't call them *whores* anymore
I remind him.
And anyway, have you looked
at yourself in the mirror lately?

Greetings from Lovely

My sister lives at the highest point in the city.
The Transamerica Pyramid peaks above buildings
like a Voyager bath toy. It needs more bubbles.
Give the window washers the day off
and dangle them from the sky like baby mobiles.
In the dream I was giving myself a spray-on tan.
I ask Father Houlehan what this all means.
He recommends fruit snacks, but only from the kids on the subway.
Instead I ride outside streetcars all the way to the Castro.
I arrive not at Mrs. Field's but Hot Cookie.
There are no girls behind the counter in felt hats.
I grow anxious under a menu of Comic Sans.
My synesthesia nosedives through paper plates.
Houses are painted like vowels: mauve, lime, gamboge
and streets sound like Hawaiian islands.

My gaydar is broken. I leave it with Joe in the shop.
The gringos in the Mission look like cannibalistic burritos.
A stranger scoops me ice cream called Secret Breakfast.
Bourbon vanilla flowers my eyes, my tongue lines oak barrels.
I want to smoke homegrown with a girl named Fiona.
The wooden fire escape is perfect for this.
After I want to return to a home where all of my mothers love her.
Embarcadero means pier in English.
Can you sense the manatees spooning under Market?
Their bodies leave marks like puff paints.
It's requiescat in pace not rest in peace.
That's hella mean to call them sea cows.
Fiona keeps asking me what's wrong.
I cannot speak from the pass-arounds.
The whisky ice lunges at me like a banker from Nebraska.
The taxi that got me here is idling on Saturn's rings.

Long Island City

We look up
at the peopled windows
of the highrises,
miming to them
as if it's the 6th inning
of a Mets game
and they have the t-shirt cannons.
We will take what we can get.
They are mamma bird.
But if they come down from their towers,
we cannot promise anything.
Rome, San Francisco
were founded on seven hills,
but this city was built
on the valleys between us.
We round up all the lap dogs
in a circle and say
this time it's serious.
This time it's for Chekhov.
Laid out on the grass
we undress and dress ourselves
ad infinitum
never achieving nudity
or Latin.
When a butterfly lands
on your dress,
we pray for a long tongue
so that self-fertilization
can be avoided.
After we fall asleep
the fishermen approach,
pinching us
to see if they exist.

Bellevue

I wonder what will become of Vanna White
and Summer Bartholomew.
Will the sex of their children
smell like cake batter forever?
The girl on TV
had lipsticked the straw.
If you're interested,
teases the nurse,
they're called rainbow parties.

My first night in the ER is between
an open-throat emphysema
and the survivor of three bypasses.
Nurses go by with garden shears
and couscous.
Convicts blow kisses
between rosaries of handcuffs.

As I come to, gasping for air,
the surgeons are concluding their debate
of Whole Foods versus Trader Joe's,
an assistant yanks out the breathing tube,
and my appendix looks up at me
like some deflated anemone.

Once I get out,
I recultivate my weakness
for headbands and baked goods.
I order pad thai just to look at the shrimp.
I walk down the hills of Harlem,
looking for virgins with Guadalupe.
My Nation of Islam name
is mistaken for Glaswegian slang.

I gather round children to tell them
the story of the mad scientist Yakub.
I have nowhere to go.
I have no health insurance.

On my way home I pass
Hasidic women atop the subway stairs,
mournful as midnight hens.
Enclosed in a moat of hybrid Escalades
are the Marcy Projects.
I dream about contacting an African prince
to help with the bill.
My boss wants a sick note.
The ambulance dead interrupt my phone calls,
tearing down Flushing Ave. for Woodhull,
where the hair of the women on TV
shines like bushels of wheat
at the gates of Heaven.

Autosuggestive

In the middle of a sleepless night
my father turns to that nocturnal flower,
self-hypnosis.
Asleep next to him
in white gloves,
my mother
like some misplaced curator.
There is grayscale
and sheet-swish.
Also his voice.
Undertones lobbed like moths
into the hand recorder.
Unemployment at fifty three
haunts him like a B-side
from Elvis,
what could have been.
He seeks out rest
in the highball trefoils
of his Midwestern childhood.
He is distracted by the books
on attic shelves,
their Old English remedies in verse.
Reciting facts calms him.
When Marco Polo entered his horse
into the dressage competition,
the audience went mongrel.
When Satie asked to be buried
in his instrument,
he knew he'd be making the perfect
prepared piano of our breathing.
When my father lost his job
he drove to the ocean
and sent me pictures of redwoods.
Lightning fringed the coast.
The dog ran ahead.
His *heel heel*
lobbed back like an inside joke
between him

and the bandages of thunder.

The Glorious Ninth

John Cage was right
about the space between sounds.

Before Eno was even born
he was wading his flotilla
of electroacoustic compositions
into the swells of Puget Sound.

Look at him in '39
writing computer code up there
in the lighthouse.

When you are unsure
of what to say
first chant your thoughts
into a whisper.
In your head I mean.

Bob Ross senses this as well.
As he stands
on the rings
of my REM sleep
he hardly even speaks.
When he does
it is as a trail's end.

For Heidegger, silence
was the genuine mode of speech
deathless as the universe.

Camus knew that a man
is what he is
not from what he says,
but what he
keeps to himself.

Kierkegaard, as we all know
hated the tongue.

If *love loves to love*
is it any surprise I'm so silent?

With all his inventiveness
Joyce could never divorce himself
from English grammar.

Basho's haiku were clouds
in a weather system
without syntax.

The most intense form
of listening is anticipation
but try telling that to
Ludwig van.

For All Mankind

*We will travel to Mars
even as folks on Earth
are still ripping open potato chip
bags with their teeth
--David Berman*

Obama, you blue-eyed devil,
you canceler of moon programs.
How will the wives of the Gulf Coast
pine for the cosmic distancelessness?
Did you consider how we,
the calligraphically challenged,
will be learning the characters
for *sky* and *noodle*
as the Chinese maneuver their satellites
with the skill of an Arirang choreographer?

Consider the total silence
of 25,000 miles per hour.
When the hatch to Apollo 11 opens,
the claymation astronaut dangles
by an umbilical cord *ex nihilo*
over the blue womb of the earth.
And all he can say is *Hallelujah, Houston.*

In the control room of buzz cuts
someone is shouting
Existence precedes essence!
in a Kennedy accent
while on the monitors
baggies of thermo-cheddar
levitate through the rooms.

Scott and Irwin got to drive
the lunar dune buggy first.
You can see Armstrong

in the background of the footage
already slouching toward reclusiveness,
kicking at the tumbleweed rocks
as he hums Merle Haggard's
I'm a Lonesome Fugitive.

These unmanned men
how they would love to high five Galileo,
but content themselves
with visions of the far-off bonfires
of Saharan Bedouin tribes,
the eerie weightlessness
of their lyres in open tuning.

While shaving in a window
overlooking the earth
it is natural to go back and forth
between college football scores
and the desire to be God
versus the need to be God.

The Bedouins believe
that in the afterlife
we are given back our umbilical cords
to suckle the divine like milk.
Until then, repeat
after Eugene Cernan
every night before bed:

The stars are my home
The stars are my home
The stars are my home

The Supremes Backstage at the Apollo, 1965

Diana lies sideways
on a metal bunk bed

facing the camera.
The ladder is in shadows

and thus she appears to float
by virtue of her own diaphanous,

composed gaze.
A Candy Darling gaze.

A lifebed deathgaze.
This is her face before

and after, and some nights,
during the concert.

Her heels are lined up
on the ledge above her,

the length of a white dress.
A newspaper at her curled legs

bears her image.
Florence is face down

on the bunk below.
She is twenty-one,

but has just ten years left.
She doesn't know this.

Even Diana doesn't know this.
An effaced penumbra

to the right, Mary's arm
is an accidental gray wing.

The camera's flash bulb
pops at Diana's kneecap,

but she is very calm.
She isn't looking

into the lens or
at the photographer.

Her eyes are far off
in the hand-clap continuum

from which no soul diva
has ever escaped.

Mussels & Fries

“But refuse profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise thyself rather unto Godliness.” --The Apostle Paul to his young protégé, Timothy

The last time I made mussels
I cut off the tip of my middle finger.
We never found it
among the cutting board’s lamina of shallot.

One of the crowning achievements
of French Middle Ages cuisine was roast peacock
sewn back into its skin, feathers intact,
the feet and beak rose-gilded.

On tour in Africa the rapper
demanded a watermelon carved
into the shape of his wife’s breasts.

Up close the erect nipple is rarely beautiful.

As a child I stepped on a nail in the yard.
My mother soaked the wound in a bath of bay leaves
until I passed out.

A relative had been a member of The Bloody Tubs,
a group of nativist thugs known for their method
of dumping their political enemies
into slaughterhouse tubs.

Have you made love with one hand?
In the bedroom her hair smelled
as dark and sweet as pennyroyal.

In his next studio session
Otis Redding had intended to write a final verse
for *Sittin’ on the Dock of the Bay*
but his plane crashed days after the initial recording.

Some people go there whole lives
without ever learning to whistle.

Drukqs Triptych

"I'm quite a people person, actually. I hang out with strange people a lot. I like mentally ill people. I've always found schizophrenia fuckin' excellent. I think it's the next evolutionary stage of humanity" *--Richard D. James of Aphex Twin*

Jynweythek Ylow

The dream of
Miss California
is on auto-loop.
The harpsichord
in the background
is being played
all too well.
The royal family
transferred to the Tuileries.
Powdery men
preparing for the Pavane.
The stiff lace
in the drawing rooms
of Combray.
May I have this...
a voice
trailing off shyly.
In an hour
she will wake up.
This will never
have happened.

Btoum Roumada

Dear song,
play me like a church
where Gaudí
is the window washer.
In the film version
of this emotion,

four nuns skydive
while holding hands
their habits as blue
as the heavens.
Looking up
from the floor of the nave
you hear glass bells,
see the columns
rise and branch
into the canopy.
A cathedral forever
at dawn.
La Sagrada Familia
crusting from the earth
like mounds of old honey.
An organ pedal rising
to its former position
and the foot
that left us all here.

QKThr

This is the day
you learned to walk.
The grand piano
played by a computer.
That way the musician
can circle his instrument,
placing found objects
on the strings.
Tiny microphones
in the piano's body
record this secret machinery.
The sound of a thousand
small hammers striking chords,
the weightless drone of hands,
the notes unclear,
the pitch unidentifiable.
Like when you

had learned to walk
but still could not speak.

Hallucinations, Age 7

In the tub
there are Lusitanic icebergs
and torpedo freeze pops
On the walls
there are Cheeto cornflowers
and potato chip crucifixes
I am in the tub
I have a fever of 103
I am convulsing
from Celsius conversions
I am so hot and cold
I am concave
My mother
is reading my last rites
from the sink
with palm branches
like wings
She is fifteen years old
with an overbite
and flowergirl tiara
My father
is a negative Superman
He comes in and out
He is the Devil's baritone
I want him out
If he is Mephisto
I am boy-Faust
If my mother
is Lois Lane
I am positive Clark Kent
When he leaves again
I will grab my towel
and lead her out
I will fight off
his hirelings
this Holofernes
Her name is Judith
I will translate her story

into Latin
I will find some way
to take off
her handcuffs

What We Have Learned from Duels

Thomas Benton & Charles Lucas on Bloody Island, Missouri

The duel happened twice.

Benton already had a history,
getting into a street brawl in Nashville
with General Andrew Jackson.

The courtroom medieval in its severity,
the two lawyers huffing and frilly,
epaulets dangly like corners of a pool table.

Real men stab each other in the front.

When Lucas encountered Benton at a polling barn
he questioned his right to vote
for failing to pay taxes on three slaves.
Benton's rebuff? To call him a *puppy*.

The next evening, Lucas was rowed
off the island, the musket ball in his chest
rising to kiss the carmine crater of entry
with each slowing breath.

On the powers of underintimidation,
sprinkle a little more powder under your wig.

David & Goliath, the Valley of Elah

Understand this:

David declined all offers of armor.
He waded into the brook
before selecting five stones,
the rubber of his sling
hanging from his waist like tendon.

In his dream the night before,
no matter how high he held
the decapitated head above the crowd,
it never ceased to cling to him
like an extension of his own body.

The hosts of the sky circling
a backdrop of black onyx,
weightless as a hangman's conscience.

From his days playing the harp
for King Saul,
David knew of his true calling
as an artist:

The projective canvas of Goliath's forehead,
a ceiling in a chapel yet to be built.
The chance of taking down a philistine
as bittersweet as the grapes of Bethlehem.

Yosemite Sam & Bugs Bunny, Pirate Ship

I do pursue
By struck match or by dagger
These white flags worn through
Thy unchecked swagger.

From upon the lookout perch
Does our wake tarry,
Our records besmirched,
Scarlet heavens un-marry.

Pestilent hare,
Face bravely my cannon
And resign thy care
To this seafaring Montanan.

Alexander Pushkin & Georges d'Anthès, St. Petersburg

Natalya wouldn't remarry, would she?
But the way she disappeared
into the drawing room with Czar Nicholas...
The wax still warm on the envelope.

Tell me
I didn't mean to shoot Lensky.
The way the scope opened and then narrowed
like an artery before a stroke.

They laugh about my Ethiopian blood
and offer me the lowest court title.

I'll silence them all with my pen,
quaff ink for months.

Natalya,
I can buy the prettiest dresses.
My hand a constant loom of pretty dresses.

If I survive this gunshot,
Oh Doctor,
I will wear my reflection
on the gray marble of the river
like a medallion of the absurd.

Miyamoto Musashi & Sasaki Kojiro, Ganryu Island

Imagine your arrival
at the gateless gate.

If you encounter Buddha
on your path, kill him too.

Clap: you know the sound
of two hands. But one?

Absence allows for the presence
of the other.

Musashi fasted on a steady diet of koans
leading up to the showdown.

In one hand a curved sword
and in the other, jittery hunger.

Show up an hour late.
Melt your opponent like the glaciers of Fuji.

Wield your sword upon your shoulder
like an oar of the sea gods.

Wait for the angle of sun-blindness
and move swiftly.

As you are paddling away
stop and look around you.

In Kubrick's *Paths of Glory*

the French soldiers
leading the hopeless charge
against the Germans
don't speak French.
Or a pickle of German.
The generals pace about
the Napoleonic palaces
of Culver City,
articulating that high
Ohio River vernacular,
drowning our suspension
of disbelief every time
a character speaks.
Kirk Douglas resembles his son
all too well,
dodging the carrion
of Wall Street trenches.
For each of the 68 takes
of the *last meal* scene,
the director demanded
a new roast duck.
You, Mr. Cobb!
You, Herr Kubrick!
are to be courtmartialed.
Like the families
of the innocents executed
you shall be given
a franc each.
Yes, we are moved
in the final scene
when a captured German girl
sings to us in a tongue
we do not understand
and we hum ourselves into oblivion.
Instead of leaving it
a Broadway bomb,
a lesson in Roman decimation,
you brought it

to the shores of Hollywood.
Plutarch in a no-man's-land
of palms.

“Whether or not they exist, we’re slaves to the gods”

*“These are Fortunate Islands/
These are lands without a place”*

--Fernando Pessoa

The first time the inhabitants
of Vanuatu saw a stream of B-52s
serrating the low clouds above their tiny
island, they prostrated themselves
in the yam fields where they stood,
arms stretched toward the sky.
While carbon snowflakes fell on their shoulders
the elders talked about what they had seen,
sipping gourds of psychotropic kava
around the black lips of a volcano.

When men in Navy uniforms
began to emerge from the jungle
they congregated around them,
accepting with two hands the gifts
the multiracial deities generously offered.
Years after the GIs
had gone, they continued to perfect
the rituals they had seen carried out
by their clean-shaven demigods--
clearing the emerald chaparral for landing strips--
raising the state flag of Georgia
into the cake-yellow canopy of bananas.

The Thuggee of India would watch
their victims approach from caves
the wind had carved into the mountain,
posing as travelers as they
descended on the weary pilgrims.
Once they had gained their confidence,
they strangled their countrymen as they slept,
silk handkerchiefs threading
the quiet crackle between bonfires.
They loaded their cache of jewels

into hidden caravans as they waited for
Kali, the Hindu goddess of time
to appear on the horizon,
from which point they would gaze up
at the divine under the cover of her feathery skirts.

Before chasing shots of phenobarbital
with mini-bar-sized cans of pineapple
juice, members of the Heaven's Gate cult
donned Nike trainers and purple shrouds.
In interviews, they had referred to themselves as *vehicles*
and often cited cave paintings in Italy
that resembled the extraterrestrial astronauts
they believed they would someday be reunited with.
As the Hale-Bopp comet neared the earth,
members placed a five dollar bill and three
quarters in the pockets of their sweatpants
for the cosmic fare they thought would transport them
to the spaceship trailing the fiery meteorite.

Epicurus invited even women and slaves
into the secluded gardens bordering
his commune. The hesitant Stoics watched like deer
under the olive branches
as dust motes eddied around the torso
of the first lecturer of atheism.
He alleged that religious fear
was the main cause of human unhappiness.
That the universe was based on chance events
and that even if the deities existed,
they were probably uninterested in our affairs.
Because they believed in only atoms and the
void, they knew our souls were safe in the afterlife
because they wouldn't exist.

The followers of John Frum go to bed each night
with cobalt paint gleaming on their chests.
Small boats are moored to the clay
piers that sulk off the coasts of their island,
the tins stacked in their homes like rusted bullion.

Can you see them dreaming
in their radio towers made of bamboo,
the transistor radios hemmed in close
to their folded arms?
The way they wake at dawn
and walk down to the beach,
waiting for our promised cargo to appear
undulating on the waves like a tattered
messiah?

Réka's Dream

She dreamt that I was living
in the basement of a cathedral.
To visit me,
she had to climb through a window
and then through an air duct
with Rabelais' catacomb bones.
The church was actually
a monastery in the Tatra mountains
where the monks made
ale and goat cheese.
No, that's not right.
I was being held
against my will
in the basement
of a megachurch in France
and I was getting
the Hansel & Gretel treatment.
One day during her crawl,
she overheard
the women in the laundry room.
They speaking in English badly.
They cackled in French.
They were anti-Semitic in Hungarian.
They got tricky and discussed my fate
within the cult in Slovak.
She saw one hooded auntie open
the washing machine door,
but what the woman dragged out
was not laundry.
Angelology is the study of angels
she said, lowering herself
into my cell.
But those women are not angels.

Aegina

The archipelago was strung out like a necklace.
You wore a necklace.
The sunset fell from within us
like a premonition.

You wore a necklace.
Children swam naked
like a premonition.
It was populated with cats.

Children swam naked.
My love was a water organ.
It was populated with cats.
On each hill lived an abbess.

My love was a water organ
with no hands but your own.
On each hill lived an abbess.
You watched me naked.

With no hands but your own
we walked arm in arm.
You watched me naked
unconscious of living.

We walked arm in arm.
You were dressed in my perception of you
unconscious of living.
The small of your back was knotted.

You were dressed in my perception of you.
You were naked.
The small of your back was knotted
with my desire.

You were naked.
The ferry was empty
with my desire.

We swam conscious of death.

Kharms

You die of starvation staggering
through the fields of a blue notebook,
carrying chrysanthemums like an infant.
And the vegetables are mute.
And the old men play chess backwards.
And Stalin perspires
like an emptied glass of vodka.

The old women only speak
in the simple present.
This way, they remain eternal.
And the dead laugh like children,
except when they remember
their tetanus halos.
And there is no end to the beauty
of Georgian girls tanning in the sun.
And the universe is always only
a god's gaze beyond our comprehension.

The girl in front of you at the bakery
buys you black rye
and invites herself over to drink.
And Russia disappears
because it was never there, poof.
And those with no teeth
are reduced to vowels.
And we are all uneasy with thoughts
of careening greyhounds.

Natalya, Marina, Tatyana.
They are all good women.
They embrace you
with the chastity of turnips.
Slowly your heart and their aprons
become of the same fabric.

And the sky is noded
with the eroticism of white nights.

And you lose your mind, blindfolded,
eating endless beets.
And you forget her birthmark,
a drifting continent between prison bars.

You sit at your desk,
inhaling Pushkin and extolling Gogol.
And today you wrote nothing.
And yesterday was white contemplation.
And tomorrow has no memory.

Budapest is for Haters

I buy a pastry at this bakery every morning. Though I attempt to speak their language, the women behind the counter never smile, wielding giant sheets of strudel. They don't know how old I am on the inside. When I step into this tram car it is 1965. There are two kinds of slacks in the department store. Outsiders called this Goulash Communism, but even I find this offensive. The Erasmus students are the only ones not shadows at night. They are young. Their rented apartments have high wooden doors and interior courtyards that distract from their endless sexing in dark bedrooms. They will bear children red as Cataluña. The Prime Minister sleeps in the Parliament's dome, holding his hand to his heart as nationalists descend on the square. Everyone is smoking. Inside a bar as invisible as an alley. I want to dance with her but the music is distracting. When we did mushrooms I had no thinkings only feelings. Girls with hooked noses are great. Girls with no chin I want to hold under the street lamp forever. The nightbus is so South London. The land lost to Slovakia hurts like a lesion on my grandfather's war jacket. Everyone introduces themselves saying their name backwards. No one speaks English. I grow angry seeing they've translated Shakespeare's first name on the cover. Every time we look at the map this country gets smaller. When my father visits I take his picture on the green bridge. His faded jeans break my heart into seven childhoods. Old men play chess in the thermal baths. The sauna smells of cedar. Don't laugh, this is my baroque Speedo I tell them. I am either hiding everything or nothing. St. Stephen's finger is on a pillow in the Basilica. When I ask for basil in the supermarket I get laughed out. Strawberries go bad in a day. After a dozen my mouth is a lilting velvet. A nursery school takes over the opera house and no one notices. I hop metro turnstiles. Mine becomes a life of cheap thrills. The kebab carousel disapproves and we agree to part indefinitely. I recant and eat a pound of meat, falling asleep in the basement of a Turkish restaurant where I cling to the lamp of a hookah. My heart is a room where the mayor holds a döner knife. He wouldn't dare. I'm the last beacon on this side of the Danube.

Rayleigh Scattering

I

Gainsbourg's grave is covered with flowers and panties. The paths, like the bones in the ossuary, are unmarked. How lost the living can get. In Père Lachaise we are safe from the Roma, but not in Montmartre. The arms of their ultraviolet children coil and nip as if trying to center their catch in plasma globes. Their mother speaks in tongues. I want to curse her but am unsure how to scream Octomom in any other language. Contrary to what the folk songs would have you believe, gypsies haven't been cool since Django.

II

In the club last night I held the ten-Euro caipirinha above my head and channeled the father delivering cough syrup through the hall of his disco days. But after that many, what gets spilled is not only the drink. In flashes, we watched a couple grinding and placed bets. Epilepsy versus levitation. I was hoping they would play Kanye and Jay-Z. What we got were Koreans holding hands in Notre Dame, marrying each other on the thirty-seven bridges of the Seine. Back in the day, only women wore wedding rings.

III

The macaroons are overpriced but at least you got to eat the whole box. I eat the smear of bone marrow your dad serves up on toast while the table cringes and the American actor who I can't name leads two women out of the restaurant. At 2am, the lights of the Eiffel Tower sparkle and then go off, making our sex organs more obvious. Maman grows embarrassed. In duels, our seconds never arrive. When the individual is disconnected from the physical world the ego refracts wildly and at will. *I* is many others.

IV

Walk away from the crepe stand without paying. Don't interrupt your wife. Let her finish about the paint swatches. Tell into every beggar's cup *lacrimosa* means weeping. Imagine how they feel, the rugby hooligans hijacking the metro. Stop. And imagine how they feel now. Proust, I'm sorry your apartment is now a fucking bank. Let's blame the wandering Jew. When we made love, the opera singer said not *I'm wet* but *I'm watery*. Even in daydreams we never correct each other. I have forgotten why the sky is blue.

Frankie's Hill (Ferihegy)

They put bars across
the airport benches
because they don't want you
to sleep here.
No Bake-ancy is the name
of the snack bar that closes
when the currency exchange
runs out of money.
Up above, the tanning bed
of fluorescent lights
is never turned off
and you nod in and out of sleep
listening to Eno's
Music for Airports.
In the afterlife,
airplane talkers
will have no armrests
and thus will float off
like Texan astronauts.
You stand with the other specters
on the tarmac
at 5 in the morning,
the sunrise filling your eyes
like a spiritual grenadine.
A visual choir
of reds and oranges
echoes into the horizon.
By 6 all is orange juice,
even if our bodies
are more than half liquid
watered down by our mothers.
If they'd played this album
over the loudspeakers,
no one
would be boarding the plane.
Translated from the Hungarian,
the name of this airport
sounds like a Carpathian dive bar.

The Merchant of Venice

An aura. An aura emerges
from under the bridge
where gondoliers appear
with their millionaire smiles.
The pigeons in the Piazza San Marco
have developed beaks
that allow them to eat ciabatta,
and they often choke
on whole crumbs of air.
A crucifix is centered on a house
above a ribcage of bricks
to remind you that even if
the devil is in the details,
the foreheads of old women
will always smell like God.
A cat in the night market
sleeps in the saffron peaches,
sneezing from the opium pollen.
The centripetal power of camera flashes
rings an outdoor string orchestra
wrapping up the third movement
of *Souvenir de Florence*.
When the violins swing
into the opening notes of *Single Ladies*,
every tourist shits
2-Euro coins into their hand.
Across the lagoon,
the cranes of Porto Marghera
prick the double horizon
like ugly reality holograms.
Sunlight is a drying marathon
on a bar countertop,
where a middle-aged woman
blows limoncello kisses
at the teenaged bartender,
lips round as a shotglass.
Two Madonna-babies cry
outside the location

of a future Starbucks
next to elderly men who
put out their gray chatter
in local dialectical ashtrays.
Drapes are painted onto the walls
of hotel rooms and Baroque come
fleck the water of bathroom faucets.
The men that sell
imitation bags and watches
are folding up their blankets,
speaking French in Arabic italics,
laughing in the low waves
that come with the territory
of spending all day near the water.
The terraces at sunset
fill with tomato-nirvana and
Prosecco corks like fists.
No one eating
notices the vendor
who climbs to the top of the tower,
replacing the sun with a fake Rolex
as a giant fuck you for his lot
on the gaudiest star in the universe.

**For Bernard Loiseau, Who Killed Himself
Out of Fear that He Would Lose a Michelin Star**

*“The French have enormous faith in it [the Michelin Guide]. French civilization...is now cynical. There’s no faith in the church, everyone assumes politicians are corrupt and spouses cheat. Michelin is the one national symbol of unimpeachable rectitude”
--Rudolph Chelminski*

You dropped out

of gymnasium at fifteen to become a sous-savant in the kitchens of La Maison Troisgros, and we, your growing cortege of foodie gastronomes, assembled nightly to witness the miracles.

Piles of julienned

carrots kindling pearly plates. Scallop with fennel and tangerine buoyed to a froth of puréed parsley. Poached pear hearts aspersed in a bath of Burgundy.

After decades

of devotion you were knighted with a third Michelin star. You crafted a line of anise-scented perfumes, your smile garnished every box in the freezer aisle and you became the first chef to be traded on the stock exchange.

You

were skeptical when the Asian-fusion craze trended from the coast of California to the Gold Coast, when our tastes forced you to mar your menus. And then there were the rumors of an impending downgrade in *Le Figaro*.

There was the nervous

breakdown in Kobe, the manic depression, the accumulating debt. The Prozac beading your breast pocket as you looked out onto the dining room. The torture of seeing an unfinished plate.

Despite your nigiri

like meticulousness, you were no Picasso. The laboratory kitchens of Ferrán Adrià metastasized in your dreams, forming a nightmare labyrinth of nitrous oxide chimeras speaking in Catalan.

His six

hour dinner menus of carefully plotted chemical reactions were the

future-present of cuisine. Cubist cocoons of lettuce and syringes of balsamic to balance pH after every bite. Nitrogen ice cream crafted by blindfolded alchemists.

We

didn't find any note in the bedroom where you took your life, the shotgun on the floor in the February half-light. We blamed the journalists, the guide books, the elitism, and occasionally, ourselves.

Every time

we see a man dining alone, we assume he is one of their detectives. They only open their mouths to chew, as if the air might corrupt their infallible palates. Like impassive deities they are silent, dressed in gray suits.

We watch

their fingers glide over the menu as they order, recalling our catechism books bound with the Sistine Chapel fresco, the way Adam reached across, the finger so close but still never touching.

The Last Laugh

"...all but the bones of them has gone out to the world as Durham's Pure Leaf Lard"
--*The Jungle*, Chapter 9

They will play back our drive-thru orders
in slow motion
to pinpoint the moment
when human and machine
became Americana.
They will ask questions like
Where did they put the feeding tube?
Which army did the Surgeon General
lead into Iowa?
What about Upton?
Or should we call him Mr. Sinclair?
They will imagine
the posture of our forsaken prophet
atop his lardbox, decrying
The Beef Trust is an oxymoron!

They will comment on the marbling
of the air, the pickle slices gone hoary.
American Gothic. Or,
the daughterless wraith
of the last independent rancher.
They will claim they can still taste
the xanthan gum.
From the sky
empty and endless as cornfields.
The landscape malling into the distance.

They will play the training video
in a loop.
The line of cars waiting
seven miles long
outside the first franchise
in Oman.
Lean finely textured beef
glowing like crushed beetles from Mexico.

*How else do you think
they got the strawberry milkshakes
so strawberry?*

The coins behind the freezers.
A million head of cattle
glinting through the glass chambers.
White for purity.
Castles for forever.
They will pull the mascot prototype
from the closet.
The red wig draped over
the collapsed form,
sagging like a sad Pogo.
Similarly the condiment udders
hanging down from the ceiling.

When they are done
they will take our soft bones out
with the tub of chicken breast,
their protective suits
brushing against the broiler.
*Imagine what they would've done
with four stomachs*
one of them will suggest
with a psychic shrug.

Salvage

Just as astronomers calculate
the age of the universe
by examining the oldest stars,
we would gather around
Great-Great-Uncle Gordon.
The stiller he stood the better.
Face as flaky as pink oak,
mesh hat atop
a full head of white hair.
Next to him in the picture
his wife Bess, sad and touchy
as an Apache bride.
Neither of them stand over five feet.
Some say it is not age
we shrink from, but guilt.

Mount my terror on driftwood.
As a three year old
my young overalled father
left me to sleep
in the taxidermied room
of animals hunted in Alaska.
Lime cabinets and sulfur hallways.
The unornate tin ceiling.
My cheek on the bearskin rug
as they talk over the Mets game
in the living room, sipping cans
of Genesee Cream Ale.
Boars, antelope, and elk blanket
the wood paneled walls.
Though how they gleam,
we have a way of only
closing the eyes
of our own dead.

This is the first time I met him.
He stands on the riverbank,
fishing for eels under the moonlight.

Here in Columbia County
is where the Hudson pools
before heading for the southern lights.
The flames of the bonfire already
lick the rags of the trees
as someone winds up
to toss in a Roman candle.
A horseshoe clangs against a post
as a fish is thumped against the earth.
One of the most quixotic invertebrates,
the freshwater leech sets out
for a heartbeat in darkness.
Though he has three mouths,
having had his fill of love
he always knows when to let go.

After the family reunion
we mine the cemetery
for the flat gravestone of my grandfather.
After thirty minutes, dad sits down.
Gordon is reading the stone faces
of his brothers who died as children.
Why must the specters of appendicitis
forever wear pageboy hats?
During the war he'd built bridges in Italy.
His only son who committed suicide
months after his wife died of cancer.
This child of the Depression
picking coal that had fallen
from the passing boxcars.

Once, he'd caught me trying
to throw out the ends of a bread loaf.
He eyed me from across the room,
placing the stale morsels
into his mouth in silence.
What we cannot save
by taking into our own bodies
waits for us downstream.

The Three Types of Nothing

If we are to follow
the logic of Parmenides,
some form of the Texas PTA
has always existed.
The next volleyball match
between them
and the cosmologists
will be held
in the Milky Way.

The unmoved mover
is at the helm
of the stuffed animal crane
and his stack of tokens
never diminishes.
The four-pronged claw
of time immemorial.
How it wavers
before descending.

The plush Galápagos finch.
That's the negative pressure
of knowing that
we don't know.
The force of dark energy.
That's the chest that expands
and contracts like so many
guttering breaths of universe.

However it needs must be
that if nothing
is our past and future,
our dreams will at once
be sucked out of the cosmos.
The tongue at the bottom
of the ice cream cone.
The lips eclipsing.
That's the suction of love.

*But you doth protest
there is the problem
of solitary power.*
And how does
that make you feel?
asks Plato,
paring his nails.
*What about
the problem of evil?
the empirical problem?*
Heidegger can't hear you.
His backstrokes splash water
in your lather of face.

Under the microscope
God is twitching,
the bands of DNA
flowing as if from a child's
sanskrit hand.

He is spoken:
First there was
empty space.
But even this
shivers with energy,
invisible walls
of particle board,
and endless vibration.
This does not
keep you up at night.
In the nothing
without space and time,
entire universes
spring into existence
like so many sheets
of sudden bubble wrap.
This does not
frighten you either.
But in the free-for-all

that is the multiverse,
the laws of physics
are absent
and the pages
of our grammar book
are darkly unwritten.

At four years old
you would go
into your parents' bedroom
at night and ask
*Where will I go
when I die?*
I watched you
my child.
My child
I watched you.
This kept me up
at night.
What to say to me
if when you see my face
a palimpsest of tears.

Marriage Proposal from the Dinosaur Exhibits at the Museum of Natural History

If you think I have been kneeling for a long time in front of the mammoth fossils, remember that the longest prayer in the Bible comes from the book of John and spans twenty centuries. What the brontops and I have in common is that we have both spent time against our will looking into the shale formations of South Dakota. The first wedding bands made by the Egyptians were hemp and lasted a year at most. In the sixth grade, Lindsey Pearson broke up with me because I was too shy to call her. It is staggering how natural selection informs even our tiniest decisions. The mating rituals of flying pelycosaurs are said to have been more elaborate than those of peacocks. Whereas the latter is able to shed its plumage once a year, our more distant ancestors were born to wield giant fins on their backs as if as a testament to love. If it seems odd that the pubis bones of ornithischian dinosaurs faced backwards, consider that the male bowerbird will construct a dwelling of various brightly colored objects to attract a mate. The females back step into the bower, testing the fidelity of the walls, becoming more monogamous every year that the structure does not collapse. At my first winter formal, I held my date's hips, arms forming a broken ring around her snowy dress. As we revolved to Boys 2 Men's *On Bended Knee*, cosmologists were fighting for the right to name their respective books *How to Slow Dance to a Long Song*. If you have ever walked through the deserted arcades of Union Square station on Christmas Eve as the peal of a saxophone softens even the hardest peach stones forgotten under the stairs, you know what I'm talking about. There are so many things frozen in ice that are now beginning to melt. By the time we discover them, it will be too late to put them in museums. The fossils produced from the Hells Creek digs in Montana were enough to fill dozens of train cars. A better word for my posturing on the museum floor would be genuflection. The first time I saw my fiancée, I didn't. Because its originality is so foreign to our experience, we never recognize beauty at first glance.