

The Blue and The Blue

Through the windows in the Writing Program's WhiteBox Studio, on the eighth floor of the Lakeview building, a distinct steel blue creeps over Lake Michigan. The sky above accompanies and contrasts, the two shades never the same. We keep revisiting this view, looking out to see its changes.

Most meet revisiting with trepidation. What could one possibly find in returning? The dichotomy between new and old blurs dangerously when we're confronted with the question, "Will I recognize myself?" (And if not, "Who have I become?") This edition of *Collected* invites the loaded complexities of returning—how both ends perpetually change. The subject and the object. The blue and the blue.

It's not called REVISITED; we don't just approach it once and we're gone. Neither is it TO REVISIT, merely thinking about it—the potential balled in the infinitive and never thrown out to play. This is REVISITING, in the present, progressive form; a gerund, committed to the work. It says, "Yes, we'll do it again." We've spread out and pushed what doesn't serve the work aside. In an unanticipated risk, many explored forms outside their usual practice—poets submitted plays, fiction writers submitted poems; some conventions barely hang onto the page.

This publication would not be possible without the support from our Writing Program faculty and staff—with infinite thanks to Writing Program Chair Sally Alatalo and Administrative Director Amber Da. Thank you to our designers Frederick Eschrich and Anton Jeludkov for listening and collaborating on this home to hold our work; to our editorial team; and, finally, to our contributors, for all your fearlessness.

—Jazzy Smith and Justin Howard Rosier, co-editors

TABLE
OF
CONTENTS

9	Jonathan Blake Fostar	GREATEST HITS! VOL. 2
13	Emily Rich	FEBRUARY 2016
19	Mary Fons	The Ficus
31	Siobhan Thompson	URNS OUT GOD HAS BRITTLE BONES
33	Allison Young	Girlish Notions
41	Jose Nateras	Thirds
53	Jazzy Smith	again
57	Sejake Matsela	The Street of Gentians (Purple Flowers)
61	Jim Stewart	The Drive
67	Kyel Joi Brooks	Poem/Screenplay
75	Ian Wojcikiewicz	Source
81	Jhonna Anderson	Rekia Boyd
83	Jennifer Spadaccia	And So for My Wedding, All the World Came
89	Taylor Croteau	Cookies
95	Rabha Ashry	Four Poems
105	Justin Howard Rosier	Look at What You Have
113	Mika McIntosh	Kiss List
119	Alicia López Castañeda	Stigma/Spur/Isthmus/I
123	reid drake	Five Poems
129	Parker Young	Collaboration

TABLE
OF
CONTENTS

GREATEST HITS!
VOL. 2
Jonathan Blake Foster

Ok so one time Tupac and Biggie made out at a Halloween party they woke up in bed the next morning and but couldn't remember if they'd had sex or whatever and so they just went to Dunkin' Donuts and talked about feelings and drank iced coffee and everything felt ok for like a minute.

Drew Barrymore has herpes.

Lil Wayne used to share a room with his little brother sometimes the bunk bed would start shaking and he knew his little brother was jerking off so he'd just be really quiet and lay really still and hold his breath and look at the glow in the dark stars that were glued to the ceiling until it stopped.

One time Taylor Swift accidentally sent a nude to her dad and her dad just said k.

JC from *NSYNC also has herpes.

A lot of things have herpes it's probably not the end of the world tho.

Gucci Mane's real name is Kickflip not a lot of people know that.

Bill Nye the Science Guy is a registered Satanist plus he has exactly 2 pitbulls.

Jessica Simpson actually secretly really cares about reviews it's so embarrassing.

Lindsay Lohan killed a Canadian immigrant with her bare hands for fun or at least on purpose.

Lil Kim has had exactly 24 yeast infections in her life total but that's none of our business really.

The dog from *Air Bud 2* killed a kid a couple years ago he chased him through a strip mall parking lot and then into the woods and then the kid fell down and then *Air Bud 2* chewed on his guts till he was a dead thing.

My cousin was a guest on *Maury* one time the episode was called TOTAL TEENS TOTALLY OUT OF CONTROL!! She was great.

Eazy-E used to eat pennies because they taste good.

Ben Affleck and Jennifer Lawrence are the exact same person google it if you don't believe me.

Bruce Willis died yesterday.

At least two members of One Direction chew on nicotine patches when they get sad they all say it just tastes like spicy plastic.

James Franco is a violent date rapist I swear just ask him he'll tell you all about it he'll be smiling the whole time.

Kylie Jenner is my favorite human she seems sweet and super duper honest like for real I'm serious.

People should probably be kinder to Macaulay Culkin.

Mom I promise I'm trying to be a nicer person.

Adam Sandler lost his virginity to a pack of wild dogs yes I swear it's true he got gangbanged by a bunch of dogs on some street someplace in France I mean I don't know the exact street but does it really matter that much? Like is that the most important thing in this story?

Also isn't that like sort of cute somehow? I think it's adorable I think gangbangs are adorable.

It's a fact like 100% that Hannah Montana's dad has like a pretty serious alcohol problem he's in AA or like he used to be in AA but then like he had a cold sore? that was really bugging him? so he went to Walgreens and bought cheap stuff in plastic bottles he said it's good for cold sores plus it was on sale so he like had to like come on one time he woke Hannah Montana up on a school night and sat on the end of her bed and told her the whole plot synopsis of *Seinfeld* So4Eo8 twice and then he kissed her on the lips he tasted like Cool Ranch Doritos he kissed her for like way too long a time and like rubbed her belly button and then he started crying she like apparently had only seen him cry like maybe one or two other times and only like a little bit but this time he was like really crying like really really crying he said I tried he kept saying I tried I tried like over and over he said I tried my best and she didn't know what to say so she just hugged him as hard as she could she never told her mom and she never ever will like not in a million billion years she doesn't want to like hurt his feelings plus like he's her only ride to gymnastics practice.

SATAN RULES

FEBRUARY 2016

Emily Rich

Dear Emily,

Remember your first time in Chicago. Just a child, remember the first time you saw an icicle — on the shore of Lake Michigan — and the saved-just-for-you chocolate iced donut in the breakfast room of The Drake. It was a trip for you and your mother. She showed you the tiny rooms in the basement of the Art Institute; you don't remember seeing them, but she tells you you did, and they are her favorite.

FEBRUARY 2016

Emily Rich



Emily Rich FEBRUARY 2016

Chicago again, fresh off a year of losses. Remember the young man who sang "O-O-H Child" to you walking backwards across the crosswalk as if you needed a sign, as if you needed a stranger.

Something just wasn't right around your eyes.

IMAGE: sitting in a hotel room in Chicago, stretching facial muscles.

We memorize the faces of people we care for — their expressions, lines, the way light catches them.

You knew what you looked like in the bathroom mirror brushing your teeth — you knew what you looked like under vanity lights when no one else was looking at you.

You hadn't been doing your facial exercises — sadness will make you forget — and your childhood palsy just made itself known on your right side.

IMAGE: head propped, smiling a little.

The moment was real and it provided a splinter of hope.

Rock bottom is a place you tilled; you planted seeds that grew. Not particularly optimistic, but I am comfortable with that.

IMAGE: in half light.



Emily Rich FEBRUARY 2016

THE FICUS
Mary Fons

The single woman over 35 is seen as a problem to solve.

There are numerous ways to try and solve her. Some will encourage her to “just get out there” or ensure that she’s tried the internet. Others will attempt to set her up with another problem they know. There may be a new dating app to recommend.

The problem becomes more troubling (and too complicated to fix) when the single woman says she’s single by choice. The problem is no longer her singleness; it’s that she thinks her singleness is not a problem.

“Oh, well, you’ve got plenty of time to change your mind,” the people say. “And you will.”

Never mind that the single woman has just said she prefers living alone, that she craves space, that she tried marriage once and it didn’t take. She may get a pat on the hand, a wink. Most people mean well; they want good things for her, and the single woman will try to remember that marriage is The Most Prized Thing for people trying to help her, even as she sees them glowering at their spouses.

She will face still gloomier responses. When the single woman says, lightly, brightly (because she has learned the art of spin), “I’m just a solo gal, I guess,” some may visibly wince. Having been caught wincing, they manage a chuckle. “Well, you just need to think about the future; you say you’re happy now, and maybe you are, but you never know what you’re going to want later.” The single woman, in total agreement about that last thing but for different reasons, smiles and shrugs.

What’s wrong with her? they think. She’s probably a total nightmare. She’s probably crazy. She’ll be sorry when she’s old and lonely. (As if marriage means you’re not a total nightmare, or crazy; as if it guarantees you won’t ever be lonely or old.)

Whether they’re sweet about it or blunt, when a woman of a certain age says she doesn’t want a partner, the confusion and resentment of many is the same: People are meant to be married. Who does she think she is?

I don’t know about any other women, but for me, staying single is the only way to find out.

* * *

After ten years of filling out forms or checking boxes online for all the things — driver’s license, taxes, sports bras and book purchases on Amazon, social media accounts — Chicago had become part of my name. Though my address within the city has changed many times, there are three words that have stayed the same for well over a decade: Mary Fons, Chicago.

But by 2011, I had outgrown my love for the North Side neighborhoods I’d known: Uptown, Andersonville, Edgewater. The flat-top, three-floor walk-ups and the

one-way cross-streets felt shabby, pointless. I disliked the faded mobile strips hanging from hooks near the wooden front doors; they looked like worms caught on fishing line. I resented the dead plants in pots, stacked on the stairs of so many back porches. That’s what the North Side of Chicago is: dried-up plants in pots on back porch stairs, all the way down to the alley. When I had roommates and smoked cigarettes, all that suited me. When I was a waitress hanging out with waiters, and a bad poet hanging out with bad poets, I didn’t notice the bent gutters, the curbs soaked in dog pee. But by thirty-one I couldn’t take it anymore. When I was inside apartment units (2E, 1A, 3C; never large numbers, always the same letters), dust bunnies rolled through every room no matter how often one swept; every baseboard was thick with two inches of bumpy white paint after decades of being covered for new tenants, like me.

My husband and I met on the North Side and were happy there. Then we got married, I got sick, and it all went like a bad tooth. After I moved out and the divorce was underway, walking around those neighborhoods felt like walking around with something heavy and dead on my back. When I had to traverse Clark Street from Fullerton all the way past Montrose — and especially around Belmont — I gritted my teeth. I was living in a studio apartment on Winona and Damen, but only until I figured out my next move. I didn’t know what would happen next, but I knew I could no longer breathe on that side of town. The wood was gray and splintering. The yards were balding, anemic. Either I was going to find a different Chicago to live in or I was going to move to San Francisco. I just liked how it sounded: “Well, you know, after my divorce, I moved to San Francisco.”

Except that I liked my name. Mary Fons Chicago. I hadn’t changed anything when I got married and perhaps it would be unwise to change it now. My name was trusty. It had pulled me through a lot, I decided, so I would keep my name but find a new Chicago. Four

million people strong, with 11,000 square miles of town to consider, I would find something.

I had friends in all corners of the city and I considered their neighborhoods, picturing myself living on this or that street. Sangamon. Taylor. Milwaukee. They were fine streets in vibrant places, but no, everything still felt too familiar.

It was a bleak day in March when I figured it out. I was riding my bike on Foster Avenue, past short squat buildings dripping cold water. The snow pushed off the sidewalks into gray lumps. Just past the Ashland bus stop and before the new currency exchange, it occurred to me that the opposite of a short building is a tall one.

A building with six apartments in it is a village; a high-rise with 600 units is a universe. A place made of bricks is planted in the ground but a building of steel and glass lives in the air. The Chicago skyline had always felt worlds away from my life on the North Side, and I wanted to live worlds away.

Jesus, I could move downtown. I could live in a skyscraper.

I could live higher in the atmosphere, change my ions, change all my trains. It was something a person could do, live downtown. People did that. I could do it.

I started pedaling faster.

In ten years of living in Chicago, I had never imagined such a thing. When I realized, flying through godforsaken Wrigleyville that I might never, ever have to take the Red Line to Belmont ever again, I felt a peace so deep I wept.

* * *

The first year I was free, I would walk up and down Michigan Avenue because I wanted to and I could. I'd ride the elevator down from the sixteenth floor and clip through the lobby, high-five my doorman as I walked into rain or shine, sleet or snow, then hang a left to cross Wabash, then another left onto Michigan. I didn't have to tell anyone where I was going, I didn't have to say when I'd be back. Having a doorman was highly preferable to having a husband.

I walked in the evening or in the morning. I walked in a coat and heels. I walked with a handbag, usually, but sometimes just twenty bucks and my house keys. All the way up that grand boulevard I ached with pride. Finally, my surroundings matched the scale of my desires: In Grant Park, I had a backyard I could be proud of at last. Ninth Street, my street, originates at Michigan with a statue: General John Logan on his horse, striding atop a gently graded but not insubstantial hill. To the right and left of him long paths cut into the carpet of lawn, each manicured with mums and flowering cabbage in the fall, salvias and begonias in spring and summer. How green was my shrubbery! How quickly I could be at The Field Museum, the Shedd, the glittering lakefront beyond!

It took me 30 minutes to walk up Michigan to the river, depending on how I slept the night before. Once across the bridge I'd come onto the wide court at the base of the Wrigley Building with her sexy, hand-washed terracotta façade and cathedral top. And when I got there, I'd walk myself right up to the windows of the ground floor shop on the building's north end: The Joel Oppenheimer Gallery.

Advertised as "The Natural History Art Gallery," the Joel Oppenheimer Gallery specializes in John J. Audubon prints. They've got deep stores of natural history paintings and drawings, some as old as the 18th century and

a few by contemporary artists, but first- and early-edition Audubon prints are their prime stock and trade. (I would later learn about their museum-quality framing services.)

I'd approach the huge picture windows to look at what was displayed there, but if it was daytime I'd linger only a moment since someone inside the gallery might see me and think I was a tourist. I was so proud of being a downtown resident living just off one of the busiest and most-visited streets in America that I couldn't risk being taken for anything but a local.

In that front window sometimes there'd be a sign announcing a modest sale — what's ten percent off of a million dollars? I thought — and there would always be a five-foot-tall Audubon pelican print gleaming in a grand, gold frame atop an easel. On the side walls of the window display: a pair of flowers in frames, perhaps an Audubon swallow or chickadee in flight. And then, a few months into my Michigan Avenue beat, a picture went up on the south wall of that display that I wanted so fiercely my walks were primarily excuses to go visit it.

It was a full-color botanical illustration, but different from the sort that typically showed up in the Oppenheimer window. Usually the gallerists hung pieces that looked like they came from antique botanical textbooks; the plant or fruit floating in off-white space, all parts labeled in Latin. In this picture, the plant (was it a tree?) was placed inside a red planter or pot set out on a lawn, and there was a red gate set around it. Below the lawn, in seventeenth-century-style typography, the words: *Ficus Indica Eystetten fis ex uno Folio Enata lu Xurians*.

I loved this artwork. It was the red pot and gate. They were the perfect crimson, one shade deeper than Chinese red, which has too much orange, but nowhere near blood red (too ruby). That gate and pot were the red of my best intentions, the color of my fondest wish, the frequency of every love I've ever had when it was yet

untrammelled. That was my red on paper. I visited *Ficus Indica Eystetten* every time I went uptown, though it pained me to think how expensive it had to be. Six-thousand dollars? Four-thousand? It had to be that. I mean, look at that place.

One day, fed up with not knowing if I was right and dimly aware that I was being strangled by my small-town roots, I dressed up. I put on the black Chanel trousers I found at a vintage store and had tailored and paired them with a black wool turtleneck that wasn't too pilly. I polished my best low-heeled black pumps and did an excellent job with my eyebrows. Handbag. Perfume. Lipstick. Let's do this, I thought, and I hit Michigan.

Once at the Wrigley Building — forty minutes later this time because I slowed as I got closer — I pushed through that revolving door for the first time in my life. Inside I found a second set of doors leading into the gallery itself. I gripped the brass handle, pushed, and went in.

The first room of the Joel Oppenheimer Gallery is a kind of mini-rotunda. The walls are upholstered with an impossible blue-gray fabric that calls to mind turtle doves and beluga whales, or the way I imagine the morning fog looks from a beach house at Martha's Vineyard. The room is filled wainscoting to wainscoting with pictures of flowers and birds. Only the opening act, this room, yet Audubon penguins, five feet tall and three across, hung near cardinals and blue jays framed in gold as though all this were the main event.

It was all as fancy as I had feared.

I was greeted with a warm hello by a receptionist. Megan worked from a circular desk in the middle of the room and her warmth surprised me. I fully expected the gallery people to sniff out that I wasn't really supposed to be there and only endure me until I left. I decided I'd use my best impression of my Aunt Leesa, who has a very

smooth, just-looking-around-but-I'll-probably-buy-lots-of-things voice:

“Hello. I’d love to just take a look around, thank you.”

Yes, Megan smiled; please go ahead. She gestured toward the entrance to the next room.

There are six chambers to the Oppenheimer Gallery. The second chamber is triple the size of the rotunda and more grand by a factor of ten. The first detail that caught my eye wasn’t the ghost of John J. Audubon but a wine glass half full of orange juice on a broad, lacquered desk.

“Hi!” called a woman from behind the desk. I hadn’t noticed her from across the big room. She stood up and we walked toward each other. At six feet tall, with long, bouncy gray hair, this woman was more gorgeous in her mid-sixties than any of the Burberry models plastered on the bus stop ads outside.

“I’m Sarah. How can I help you today?” As I shook Sarah’s manicured hand, a gold tennis bracelet peeked past the cuff of her Paul Stuart blazer. I braced myself for the icy chill that often blows from a moneyed person talking to a plebe. But this lady’s eyes were nice, not mean. I introduced myself.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you. What brings you in this morning, Mary?” Perhaps I could bag the Aunt Leesa schtick. It appeared that I could just be myself. I relaxed (a little) and asked about my plant.

“Isn’t it wonderful?” Sarah said, a hand on her heart. “I love that print. You know it’s actually a tree! So much personality. Wait here, and I’ll get the information for you.” She told me to make myself comfortable, have a look around. Did I want a glass of water? I would come to learn that if I wanted some orange juice with San Pellegrino in it, I could have some; that’s what Sarah had in

the wine glass. While Sarah went to get the information from the front, I wandered from room to room, admiring the zoo.

The print measured roughly two feet square and it wasn’t four thousand dollars. It wasn’t one thousand dollars, either, but it was still too expensive for me to buy that day or that year. I had to be content to check on it through Oppenheimer’s window as the months passed. In those first years downtown, I got more free by the day, but sicker, too. Once, on my way up to Northwestern Hospital in a taxi (I couldn’t pay another ambulance bill), the cab whizzed past the Wrigley Building and I craned my neck around while clutching my abdomen in agony, hoping to catch a flash of my crimson gate before we sped past.

She was there.

* * *

was working at my desk when Sarah called some months later. She told me the gallery was having a sale and what’s more, the print I longed for all that time was framed in a style they no longer offered, which meant it could be further discounted.

I bought it over the phone.

When I arrived the next day to pick up my purchase, the staff had it all ready for me. She was wrapped up in glossy paper printed in cadet blue with the Oppenheimer logo. The frame’s edges were protected with thick cardboard triangles. I had never purchased art like this and sliced turkey was the only thing I had ever purchased that got wrapped in brown paper before I took it home.

Though it would have been satisfying to do my walk down Michigan with my most-prized possession and sail through my building's front door, my ficus was too heavy for that.

I could've taken a taxi, but once I left the gallery, I decided I'd much rather take the bus. I was all downtown now, but not so long ago, I was back porch. I waited for the #3 outside the Wrigley Building, not caring if Sarah and the gallery people saw me. I kind of hoped they did. I liked being the sort of person who bought art and took it home on the bus, all by herself.

URNS OUT GOD HAS
BRITTLE BONES
Siobhan Thompson

Wisdom sits alone with no more questions to answer
(or ask) no more mysteries to topple
no more riddles to tongue apart
and break with stones—
semiotics serve no purpose here.
It is far too late for that.

This understanding itself comes from the generations
living in her chest, braided messages made from her
grandmother's / mother's / mother's / mother's / moth-
er's / mother's coarse black hair
secured with strips of rawhide tied with
the dried salted intestines of
He who was known by many as Father.

Wisdom knows there is no use for false
Fathers
who never come around who
never call
who never bothered to learn how to
braid her hair.

Wisdom instead uses her Time
practicing her skills of disembowelment
dismemberment displacement—

Wisdom sharpens her claws on the teeth of the crows
outside her window Wisdom realigns her jaw so it won't
come unhinged
when she
snaps
God's bones
in half.

URNS OUT GOD HAS
BRITTLE BONES
Siobhan Thompson

GIRLISH NOTIONS
Allison Young

*...he loves me, he loves me not, he loves me, he loves me not, he loves
me, he loves me not...*

I don't remember sitting with the other
children, but I remember the small
feeling of Philomont's Community Center, the general store,
and the fire house butting up against
the lawn and playground. The woods was at our backs
and it didn't occur to me there would be another open space
on the other side. Even then,
I did not have the nerve to play out
the fortune little flowers and weeds had for us. To pull them
apart, to make them bare and ugly seemed cruel,
only then to expect a reading like that of the stars from them.

If I pulled it up from
the ground, I needed to preserve it in some way. Even then,
I felt indebted.

So instead I practiced the tender dexterity
in my fingers to carefully knot the stems of clover
into necklaces and crowns. Wearing these small
things could be a kind of upholding,
a kind of caring.

...he loves me, he loves me not...

They came to us wrapped
in foreign newspapers. They came
from Holland, of course, but from Columbia too, Japan,
from Israel. They came to us
in coffin-sized boxes
with ice packs tucked around them. We carried them
into the shop like pall-bearers.

There are rules. I don't
know them all and the ones
I do know I don't know
very well:

Cut stems at an angle so that they can
drink more water.

Odd numbers are always more
pleasing
to look at than even
numbers. Always
go with odd numbers. If a bride
wants
peonies in her bouquet, set aside
nine or eleven,
not ten

....he loves me, he loves me not, he loves me, he loves me not, he loves me...

I don't typically read nonfiction. Whatever the reason, I
pulled it
down
from the shelf and opened it. It made me nervous
how I felt for those girls, how I hated them
at the same time. I kept going back
to the crime scene photos, the mug shots.
I hated how familiar Manson looked, the smile

he had. I've seen it in real life, worn on another face.
I hate that
sometimes I think, *Could I have been one of those girls?*

Tulips keep growing, even after
they've been cut.

Altar pieces for Sunday service *always* need to be trian-
gular in shape.
Some churches - the ones out on Johns Island
draped in Spanish moss - won't let you
stand on the altar to place the flowers. So you must
awkwardly direct the crabby, old women whose cardi-
gans are always buttoned
all the way up.
They know the rules better than I do.

...he loves me not, he loves me...

I had never been asked out before.
The flattery of it,
my own hubris maybe, got the best of me
because I didn't hear
the challenge in his voice. *You seem smart...*
His smile. I didn't see that his narrow gaze,
almost sleepy looking, was close
to pin-pointing my weakness.
He was deciding how to use it.

"Blush" is often a point
of contention between a florist
and a bride. No one quite knows what
shade of pink it is.

It goes
by many names. It makes them shape
shifters: Hanging
amaranthus, *Amaranthus caudatus*, Tassle
Flower,

Cat's Tail, Velvet Flower,
Love Lies Bleeding.

...he loves me not, he loves me...

I thought this. I was certain,
but I've been wrong all
this time.
What else I have been wrong about?

Years later, while
wandering the art museum, I was stopped
by a painting: cast in a gold sheen, the way
morning sun shone in Savannah - the way
the sun shone in Savannah *that* morning.
The brushwork was all I had
to discern sky from land. A blue
heron that looked too small for the
composition
burst from the waters and tall grasses, not
because she caught
a fish or spotted an alligator's gaping jaws,
but out of some mystical, god-
fearing conviction. She looked as though
she had been pierced
by some invisible arrow-on-a-string, and
was drawn up
out of... was it ecstasy? No.
She was wrong to believe it as that
excruciating
faith
that happiness must be at the end of the
string, that
my
magnetic, migratory sensibility could have
taken me there, no matter the pain, no
matter the withering from fear, no matter
the harsh light and foolishness. I leaned
back and opened
my wings.

Dry pack tree peonies.
As strange as it sounds, keeping them
wrapped
in newspaper and
out
of water will preserve them longer, because
they are so fleeting. They open,
reveal themselves, then
shatter
so quickly.

...he loves me not, he loves me, he loves me not, he loves me...

No one could tell me otherwise.
His roommates warned me before
it happened. We drove stoned
to the Kroger on Gwinnett Street in search
for Honeycrisp Apples.
He's going to hurt you, they said.
Then they explained it after the fact,
when they unlocked his bedroom door
to let me out. They looked
sheepish, embarrassed for me, standing
barefoot in the soot
from the spilled
ashtray. I looked bare and ugly.
Maybe they were uncomfortable to see the
bruises
peeking out from my underwear, to see
that the drug hadn't worn off me yet.

Their meaning is as varied as their
names: a sunflower can symbolize
"pure thoughts" as well as "false riches." A
peony can mean prosperity, honor.
Also anger.
Shame.

I went back. I don't know why I went back.

He had slipped something in
my drink, they told me later. *A test of character*, he said,
when I asked why I felt so heavy, why
the room looked the same, but I could not
recognize the angles of the walls.
His smile twisted back
down in a gnarled turn. The knotted
weight came over me
with the covers, the walls.
The friction of skin.
His underwater voice pinned me, before
I could understand what I never learned
or should have known for this test.
I didn't know the rules. If I passed, would
he love me?
That cry - the last part that belonged to me
- escaped,
sharp, instant
from the belly it struck
the throbbing darkness.
The frantic thrashing of bedding sounded
like a flock of birds taking flight.

The stems of clover are so thin, they bend
and snap
easily. I managed a few knots. I even got it
to fit
over my head. I thought of those wilted,
floppy clover
blooms when I made boutonnieres for wed-
dings. Those late nights at the design table
where
my fingers were stained green-brown, pricked and
bloodied from the pins, and swollen at the
knuckles. I didn't mind so much the raw,
rough finger tips or the early warnings of
arthritis. It was pinning them onto the men
that made me so nervous. I never got used
to walking into
their hotel rooms. Often they didn't even
know my name. They were only

half dressed when I arrived, and I stood aim-
lessly in the room waiting
for them to get ready. I went to them
with this very small thing that I pieced
together from the ground.
I touched their chests, pinched and pulled
at their dinner jackets, at their tuxedos in
this close, strange innermost way.
And they watched, looking down at my face,
at my hands on their lapels. Most of the
time they smiled, but I tried not to look at
them
because I was nervous and I didn't want to
prick
them when I slid the pin through the stems
and into the fabric. And without thinking,
I always ran my hand
down
them to smooth their suits, to make sure
the boutonniere was on straight,
to sweep away any mark I may have made
on them.

I must have failed, walking home
in the glare
of morning with a vague
limp and smelling sour. I go back
to these over-used memories, even after
they've yellowed and smudged like old
newspapers.
Even though I can't quite see his face any-
more, I recognize
the smile, challenging and knowing. I see it
reflected in all their faces. Maybe it doesn't
matter
that the ordinary field daisy
has thirty-four petals. The game keeps
going. The test never finishes.

...he loves me not, he loves me, he loves me not, he loves me, he loves me not,
he loves me, he loves me not...

THIRDS
Jose Nateras

"1/3"

It's morning, or close enough to count as such and Ale has just started to wake up. Sunlight streams through the windows and he has no clue what the time is. As he lay there, weighed down by the layers upon layers of blankets and quilts that insulate against his apartment's powerful central air, even the thought of crawling from the warmth of his bed was enough to make him wince.

Rubbing the crust from his eyes with both hands, Ale could feel himself, stiffened and straining against the weight of his bedding. How long had it been? A week? Less. Six days? He'd hooked up with that German doctoral student from U of C last Tuesday; so, yeah, it had been exactly six days since he'd had sex. Still a third asleep, Ale rolled over, burying his face in his pillow and pushed against the mattress with the persistence of his morning wood.

On the narrow nightstand beside his bed, Ale's phone began to vibrate as it started to ring. Kansas' "Carry on My Wayward Son" blared from the phone at a rapidly-increasing volume, shattering the dreamy ease of Ale's morning. "Fuck me." With a snatch and a swipe, he answered the phone. "Hello?"

"Feliz cumpleaños mijo!"

"Grandma!" Twisting, he dragged himself to a seated position and cleared his throat with a quick cough, "Gracias Grandma!" In his ear, a distinct-but-muted ding signaled another incoming call. "Lo siento, pero tengo otra—si, si un momento Grandma." Prying the phone from his ear, Ale swiped across the screen. "Hello?"

"Ale, Ale rhymes with ballet, Happy Birthday booger!"

The bright singsong of his older sister's usual teasing brought a smile to his face. With a quick stretch, Ale piled out of bed and adjusted his now decidedly deflated dick beneath his pajama pants.

"Heya Gabi, how's it going?" He eased his feet into his slippers and made his way towards the door of his bedroom. He needed to pee. He needed to brush his teeth, to wash his face, to start his day, but something stopped him. Looking over his shoulder, Ale glanced back at his empty bed.

At this exact moment a year ago his bed wasn't empty. Exactly one year ago, as Ale answered his phone and accepted these same birthday salutations, his fiancée Jack had been there too. They had sat next to each other in his chilled apartment, in the May sunshine, fingers interlaced and smiling like fools. Even though (because the universe was a fucking dick) it also happened to be Jack's birthday, Jack only exchanged one or two civil phone calls with his emotionally restrained family in the evening. The two of them had joked that Jack was more than welcome to claim half of Ale's annual birthday barrage of phone calls as his too.

"You alright?" Gabi's voice shook Ale back to the moment at hand.

"Yeah! Yeah, sorry. Um, Grandma's on the other line though, I just remembered. I'll call you back." Before she could respond, Ale swiped his way back to his waiting grandmother. "Grandma!" Tucking the phone between the side of his face and an upraised shoulder, Ale hurriedly made the bed, smoothing out the hills and valleys of blankets, erasing any evidence of a single man's tossing and turning throughout the night. "Lo siento, Gabi me llamò. Te quiero mucho, pero tengo que preparar para... para... trabajo. Hasta luego, te quiero mucho. Mwah, sí, adios, mwah."

With a sigh, Ale let the phone in his hand drop to his side. He always felt a little guilty after talking on the phone with his grandma; even when he didn't rush to hang up, let alone lie about having work. He never knew what to say and finding the words, especially in Spanish, had always been a struggle.

They were never as close as he saw she was with his cousins. She hadn't even known about Jack. Not that Ale was trying to hide things from her. Hell, if there *had* been a wedding, he'd have crossed that bridge when the time was right. Apparently the right time had never arrived and never would with Jack. Now he wondered if he'd ever cross that bridge.

He went to the door, pausing once more to look back on the still emptiness of his bedroom. In the months since they'd broken up, Ale had painstakingly removed any visual reminders of Jack or their three years together. This included the personalized menu wishing the two of them a happy twenty-seventh birthday from the fancy restaurant they had dined at together last year. Despite his instinct to destroy all of those artifacts, Ale had stored them at the bottom of a drawer instead. Somewhere in his gut, he suspected that some future nostalgic (or masochistic) version of himself would regret setting them on fire or whatever. In its tucked-away drawer, Ale could sense the menu, sitting there. Heavy. Where would Jack be dining tonight? With whom? Some questions are better left unanswered. If only they could go unasked.

The room was calm. Sunshine continued to pour through the window, filling the room with light. It was small, neat, and filled to the brim with things Ale loved. Books, movies, posters, and pictures of his family and friends.

Knick-knacks and souvenirs lined the walls. In the time

since the breakup Ale spent considerable energy cleansing the space of any sharp edged Jack-shaped memories, and in that time, this room had been a haven for him. He was thankful for it. He had a lot to be thankful for. *I'll make it a point to actually call Grandma back later.*

Ale took a deep breath and found himself smiling in the warm light. He stretched the last bit of tiredness from his arms and spun decidedly towards the hall. As he made his way to the bathroom, glad to shower and prepare for his day, he sang softly to himself as he went. "Happy Birthday dear Ale, Happy Birthday to you."

"2/3"

The men's bathroom of a noisy bar. From off, the sound of muffled singing, laughter, and general merry-making.

Along the back wall is a bank of urinals. At one of the urinals, ALE — a 28-year-old, Mexican American guy — finishes peeing.

He turns and comes to one of the sinks lining the opposite wall. As he washes his hands, he looks at his reflection in the mirror over the sink.

From the singular stall, right of the urinals, the sound of a flush. DUDE — a cute, twenty-something white guy — emerges and comes to the neighboring sink.

DUDE
Hey.

ALE
Hey.

The two men wash their hands. After a moment, they make eye contact in the mirror.

They look away.

Beat.

ALE
It's my birthday.

DUDE
What?

ALE
Today's my birthday.

DUDE
Aw! Nice! Happy birthday.

ALE
Thanks. Haha.

Beat.

ALE
I'm not usually the type to be all —
"It's my birthday!" — but... haha...

DUDE
It's cool. I totally am the type. If it
was my birthday, everybody in this
fucking bar — nay, in the entirety
of Boystown would know it was my
birthday.

ALE
Haha. For sure.

Beat.

DUDE
You're cute, birthday boy.

ALE
Ale.

DUDE
I'm sorry?

ALE
My name's Ale.

DUDE
Allie?

ALE
No, no. Haha. Ale. Rhymes with
ballet. It's short for Alejandro.

DUDE
Cool.

Beat.

They look at each other for a moment.

*Slowly, Dude leans in and kisses Ale. Ale kisses
him back.*

DUDE
Happy birthday.

Beat.

* * *

ALE
Thanks.

Dude leaves.

Ale smiles to himself in the mirror.

*He touches his fingers to his lips gently.
He laughs.*

He leaves the bathroom.

END SCENE.

"3/3"

Thank God for the cumulative
For the layering on
For the passage of time
For the fading of scars
For hindsight

Thank the Lord for perspective
For distance and scale and relativity
For the wisdom of friends
For the foolishness of self
For self indulgence and self pity and
the melodrama of it all

Thank the Heavens for therapists
For friends, family, sympathetic strangers
For ink and page and tears
For fiction and film and Taylor Swift's
problematic-ass-self
For youth — both past and present — and its
eventual fading

There's a grace to gratitude
A hard-earned grace
Sharp-edged
A grace that cuts through knots which
fingers
had gone bloody trying to untie
Gratitude's particular brand of grace
is kind

Kind is forgiveness granted to oneself Kind
are the years that pass swiftly
Kind is the fading of his face from memory
Kind is remembering a time before and
that there

Thank God for the cumulative
For the layering on
For the passage of time
For the fading of scars
For hindsight

Thank the Lord for perspective
For distance and scale and relativity
For the wisdom of friends
For the foolishness of self
For self indulgence and self pity and
the melodrama of it all

Thank the Heavens for therapists
For friends, family, sympathetic strangers
For ink and page and tears
For fiction and film and Taylor Swift's
problematic-ass-self
For youth — both past and present — and its
eventual fading

There's a grace to gratitude
A hard-earned grace
Sharp-edged
A grace that cuts through knots which fingers
had gone bloody trying to untie
Gratitude's particular brand of grace
is kind

Kind is forgiveness granted to oneself Kind
are the years that pass swiftly
Kind is the fading of his face from memory
Kind is remembering a time before and
that there
will be a time after now

Kind are lessons learned even if the learning
was dark and twisted and lined
with teeth

I look forward to being clean again
I look forward to a life free of this first love's
stain
I can feel it coming
I can feel the tide shift, the earth move
beneath my feet
I can feel a circle closing

One third, two, then three
One breath, a second, and a third
Keep breathing, keep moving, a moment at
a time
One step, another, one more
Just close your eyes and count to three.

AGAIN
Jazzy Smith

you were sometimes a slug. i was sometimes a moth.
i found you in apparitions of smoke, no smoke's curl,
no its ascension. then you're gone. i'm asleep.

in the inbetween room
between what's called a life and the
next the room is small with mirrors
you place your hands on a mirror in
surrender grey curls fall on you
you wear a grandmother's dress you
watch yourself dance i see you
seeing yourself i cover my mouth
how long have you waited to come
here? did you carry yourself
with you all this time?

sometimes i was a slug. feeding on seedlings when you
were a redwood. another time you saw me flash by riding
on the back of a harley. the sun shone in your eyes and
not then but after in what they call another life i sensed
you with my first touch of a petunia.

sometimes we didn't swirl in the same plane. separate
chinks in a severed fence. sometimes we were an upward
motion or a color or a notion of a flick, a whiff, a bite.

sometimes i can't tell anyone a story about anything and
i enjoy a cinnamon roll or a biscuit. the sun shines in my
eyes. i fall asleep.

i'd learn to trust the grass to graze me as i'd pass and i'd
thank a something for that trust. i would forget your
name. remembering your hands or your face. i couldn't
tell the story.

in the inbetween i'd sit down with
you on the floor split a chocolate
chip cookie

ask where you were this time
woman in a pink chiffon dress
pregnant sobbing on her carpet after
proposing to her boyfriend was that
you?

and you'd ask *that hippopotamus*
eraser that you too?

OF GENTIANAS
(PURPLE FLOWERS)

Sejake Matsela

THE STREET
OF GENTIANAS
(PURPLE FLOWERS)

Sejake Matsela

Lavender Road is not on the map
Violet Jensen!
Come here, to Ogden's Creek
A river sets two valleys apart.
A prairie's on my left, and the meadow
That's for another day.

There are purple flowers and tall trees
Yellow flowers, even my charred bottom,
Facing north, and my head South,
Not knowing of East or West.
A road runs in two lanes,
I stand in the middle.

The last letter told of my malarial fever,
Nile was omitted.
I awaited your arrival by sea at Maputo Harbor,
There suffered a sting.
Anger puked my guts out,
Flew my mind over plateaus longing for home,
Our love did not die,
It was a frenzy of hallucinations.

Today I picked a pill just in case
I'm told the meadows swarm of squirrels,
Of deer,
And ticks.
I want to save blood for latter times
Least I quiver in the breeze
Of a shameless night in fall,
Waiting our day on this field.

Tonight my bed's on the wilting leaves,
Water slithers past like a serpent.
Come watch with me, our flight:

The waning crescent of the moon,
It gloats amongst the stars.

In this chill, I may fade with the light,
Every beat of my heart is the last warmth,
Even the road bears no promise,
That these words will end some place:
For you I court the flatlands,
I shall perish, become your ghost,
Our dream will fly with the bees.

Lavender Road's in the meadow
Violet Jensen!
It is under the nod of the oak trees
It bears no address,
Unlike your high rise flat in the city,
Where you sit by the window,
Facing the street,
Baring all sundry and below,
Calling attention, to the purple of your loins.
Lavender Road is the street of gentians.

THE DRIVE
Jim Stewart

It's a sunny day, makes Ron think about how much his daughter will love the pool when it's finally installed. He just made the last payment on it and is driving down 75th Street after work. It's an important road in the Southwest suburbs running through Darien, Westmont, Woodridge, Naperville, and Aurora, where it ends on Ogden/US-34/Walter Payton Memorial Highway. 75th is primarily two-lanes with a speed limit of 45 mph, but cars are usually zipping by between 55 and 60 mph.

The radio is off, windows down, the fingers on his left hand doing a little dance on the window sill. Addy's stepdad seems like a nice guy, a thought that feels strange running through his mind. It would have been easier to hate him his entire life, but it seemed Todd really loved Addy. He found relief in how much easier that made all of this.

Every few stoplights he notices an impromptu memorial to an accident. A chunky cross painted white; a moldy, slouching teddy bear. Dead flowers, mixed with plastic ones. He always assumed these to be kids, young drivers. Never really noticed them much before. Today he sees them and it makes him think of how they missed so many of the best moments of their lives. Not graduation, marriage, childbirth, or other rights of passage, but the times when unexpectedly everything lined up right. Like now for him.

Things were finally in order, a thought that Ron hadn't had in...well he can't really remember. No wait, of course he could. It's odd when you know the exact moment when your life peaked.

It was about ten years ago, Addy was three, and it was Christmas. Just an awful time. Anyone that's worked in retail during a holiday season can attest to that. The store closed at 7 p.m. on Christmas Eve and then all day on Christmas. He feels like he's really dating himself, thinking about a time when stores were ever closed for anything. He closed the store that night with Jim. They'd become really good friends over the years.

Ron drove home down this same road after that shift and was tired, but knew he still had all the Christmas prep work to do after him and Patty put Addy to sleep, which would inevitably be later than usual. The anticipation of the arrival of Santa Claus being a feeling akin to a child mainlining joy and sugar directly into their veins, it was always impossible to get her to sleep.

Ron turned on his blinker to get into the right lane. The traffic was steady and fast, so it took him a little while to switch lanes. After changing lanes he unbuckled his seatbelt, it felt great. The thing never felt comfortable, one strap digging into the bottom of his gut and another right across it.

He didn't have the gut back then though, or not as much of one at least. He had more hair too, he thinks, chuckling at himself a little. Addy's usual bedtime was 7:30, but at 9 p.m. she was still up. Ron and Patty had to enter into serious negotiations with her to finally go to bed. They took her up to her bedroom, tucked her in, and explained how Santa wouldn't come until she was completely asleep. She listened intently; this was something that wasn't in the numerous books, television shows, and movies she'd come across. Ron said it was a "Santa secret that he only shared with parents." She bought it.

"Kay. I'll try and sleep then," Addy told her parents.

Patty and Ron kissed her on her forehead, then before closing the door to her room lit gently by a *My Little Pony* nightlight, Ron looked back in. Addy was talking to herself while scrunching her eyes closed, as if at any moment they might spring open to keep her awake and scare Santa off. Ron mouthed the words love you to all of it.

He kissed Patty in the hallway.

"Okay, now let's do it. Run out to the shed and grab the presents," she told him.

He nodded his head in acquiescence. Of course he'd have to grab the presents in the freezing cold.

In his car, he thought how winter is really the dominant season in the Midwest. It's so bad that even on a day like this the thought that winter's coming is always present. The reverse doesn't feel true to him. It never feels like a guarantee that summer will come back around, but here he is. The car's zipping down one of the uglier stretches of 75th with a bunch of strip malls on one side, fast food places on both, and chain restaurants sprinkled throughout. They don't look so ugly on a day like this though, sun bathing everything and the only clouds in the sky are the ones that look like pulling a cotton ball apart.

Seems a little ridiculous to him that he peaked in the winter. He threw on his shoes that lived by the backdoor. They were a pair of sneakers that suffered the brunt of the abuse of all the seasons, grass stains, salt, and some mud that seemed like it had just bonded with the rubber soles. He slipped them on, bending the heel, and walked out to the shed. Had to make two trips; they'd gone a bit overboard with presents. It had snowed a week ago, then warmed a little, and now the yard was a mix of dead grass, muddy snow, and muddy mud. After the second trip he slipped off the shoes still holding the armload of gifts and carried them into the living room. Patty had placed two glasses of eggnog on the coffee table atop trendy coasters. Ron started to place

gifts under the tree, but Patty quickly stopped him.

“What’re you doing? Those one’s shouldn’t go there.”

He looked back at Patty, confused, as she looked at the scene like it was a production she was blocking. She had a vision about exactly how the gifts should be placed.

She’s always been the one with the big ideas that Ron was more than happy to tag along with, until she got a vision that no longer included him. But that Christmas night they both worked together, part of the same vision, to make Addy lose her mind when she ran down the stairs and looked out onto her bounty.

After Patty had finished arranging each present like intricate puzzle pieces they poured another eggnog and sat together. They said very little, just looked at what they’d done together until she leaned in and kissed him. A warm, wet, eggnog peck. Then she kissed him again, her tongue wriggling between his lips this time, her chest pressed against his. He remembers being surprised. They’d already been together ten years, and largely, the sex had stopped. He quickly shook the surprise though and pulled her into him, his hands wrapped around her lower back. The taste of nutmeg and brandy on her lips.

They made love on the floor in the multi-colored light of the Christmas tree, but he’s lost most of the specifics of the sex, except that they were careful not to knock over any of the towers of presents they’d assembled. After they’d finished, in a buzzed, post-coital haze—on top of the exhaustion of the day—he remembers looking into that tree, eyelids hanging low. He was squinting a little. And how that tree looked, how he felt. Everything was taken care of. No worries.

He’s finally at that place again. This stretch of road is where he wanted to be. In the mail was a check that would pay off every month’s rent until the end of his

lease, and all the other paperwork was in places everyone could find, but nowhere too obvious. On this stretch of 75th there’s the Springbrook Prairie Forest Preserve. A trail with joggers about, people who were still working towards something. Right off the road though there are massive, wooden electric poles. He aims for one and drives off the road.

POEM/SCREENPLAY

Kyel Joi Brooks

SCENES FROM:
IN THE METROPOLIS
SEASON 1, EPISODE 1
“QUITE THE QUARTET”

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

OMAR, 25, a man with a full head of hair and well-kept beard is sitting on a short black and white checkered couch in a cozy living room. PENELOPE, 25, a woman with Faux Locs and a big smile is sitting on a colorful pillow on the hardwood floor. She is between Omar's legs. Next to Omar on the couch is a large container of shea butter. He is greasing her scalp as they talk. This looks like a daily routine the two have mastered.

OMAR

Wait, so Midnight takes a third wife?

PENELOPE

Yes! *In A Deeper Love Inside*, Porsche says he has three wives when she goes to meet the twins!

OMAR

And you think she checks this P.O. box?

PENELOPE

I don't think she does, but I am hoping she will.

OMAR

Maybe I'll send a letter too.

PENELOPE

You should! We all need a book about Midnight in his forties!

OMAR

I have a story idea.

POEM/SCREENPLAY

Kyel Joi Brooks

PENELOPE

I am interested.

OMAR

A story from the point of view of the twins!

PENELOPE

Here I was thinking all we were missing was another Midnight and a love story about the early days of Lana and Ricky. You're on to something. But, in your letter, only push for a Midnight book about the third wife.

OMAR

Good plan. We don't want to overwhelm.

PENELOPE

What if I wrote my own fan fiction? You know, to alleviate some pressure from Sister Souljah?

OMAR

Well P, honestly I've never really read any good fan fiction.

Penelope looks back to scold Omar. DOM, 25, a man with a fade and Chicago Bulls hoodie, and FATE, 25, a woman wearing glasses and a silk scarf, enter the apartment. They are taking off their shoes as they talk to Penelope and Omar.

FATE

Look at how cute y'all are.

DOM

The block is clean. You're welcome.

PENELOPE

Dom, I appreciate you for picking up litter every weekend, but as the hit single off the Grammy award-winning *Damn* suggests...

Kyel Joi Brooks
Scenes From: In The Metropolis
Season 1, Episode 1 "Quite the Quartet"

FATE

Be humble! I agree with P! Babe, you're always throwing it in their face that they never help us keep the neighborhood intact.

OMAR

Fate, that is not true. We help sometimes.

FATE

Yeah when the weather is favorable, but I'm not here to shame. We are heading right to bed. Get home safe Omar!

DOM

Good night y'all. Breakfast tomorrow at 11.

OMAR

Night.

PENELOPE

It's called brunch, Dom! Fate before you go to bed, I was just telling Omar that I was going to get back to writing Sister Souljah letters begging her to write another book. Could you all imagine a fourth Midnight book? Or a story about the twins? Or finally a young Ricky and Lana love story?

Dom and Fate ignore Penelope and walk back to the bathroom. They wash their hands and enter into their room.

INT. FATE AND DOM'S BEDROOM- EVENING

Dom and Fate are in king-size bed with a blue and cream comforter on top of them. The room is painted burnt orange and the walls are covered with Polaroid pictures and oil paintings of Chicago neighborhoods. The two are turned facing each other.

DOM

There is no way around it, Fate.

FATE

Yes there is. It's called the pull-out method. The vagina is a natural sperm killer when it isn't ovulating.

DOM

Pulling out is literally the most irresponsible thing we could do right now.

FATE

And why do we have to be responsible?

DOM

Because we are 25.

FATE

I hate that you think that means something! It's weird babe. Age is a social construct. You have to know that by now.

DOM

Fate, focus! We all just quit our jobs. And I don't want you to have a child without your dad knowing about our marriage.

FATE

You worry about the wrong things. Our marriage is our union so we make our own rules and you seem to be forgetting that humans are made on accident every day. Our child would be in good company.

DOM

You're not helping your case.

FATE

I'm just saying, could a girl get some loving?

DOM

Tell me, what you will gain from that once we get pregnant and your dad kills all three of us?

FATE

You know what I would gain and I'm grown! My dad doesn't make any rules for my life."

DOM

So call your dad now and tell him we are married.

FATE

That's not the point of this conversation. We know we are married. Therefore, we can decide to accidentally have a child if we choose. If you promise to give me what I need right now, I'll raise the accidental child all by myself. You won't have to lift a finger.

DOM

I can't believe you right now.

FATE

I'm just saying. If you pull out, we won't get pregnant. It's really that simple. You're making it seem like raw sex guarantees a pregnancy. If done correctly it is actually proper birth control.

DOM

Who raised you? What about the vow of celibacy we took Fate? I thought this year was all about discipline and routine?

FATE

Such a buzz kill. You win. Let's just watch a movie.

Kyel Joi Brooks Scenes From: In The Metropolis Season 1, Episode 1 "Quite the Quartet"

Dom gets up and goes over to a desk and grabs a mason jar full of Popsicle sticks with movie titles written on them.

DOM
Crooklyn.

INT. LIVING ROOM- EVENING

Penelope and Omar are standing at the door. Penelope has her hair in a bun on top of her head and Omar now has on a jacket.

OMAR
Penelope, I still can't believe I met you on the Green Line, nine months ago. I'm not being idealistic when I say it was the best thing to ever happen to me. Spending time with you, Fate and Dom is so good for me.

PENELOPE
It really has been so much fun. We're becoming quite the quartet.

OMAR
I'll miss you baby girl. See you in the morning. My Lyft is here.

Omar and Penelope hug and he walks out the door. She yells out.

PENELOPE
Don't forget to round up your ride to the next dollar and donate it to CPS.

SO SOUTHSIDE IT MIGHT
FLY OVER YOUR HEAD

When I turn
At the Jay's Potato Chip factory sign
The green grass and brick homes remind I'm not alone
In this cold world
I know people in this neighborhood love me
I love me some
87th Street Harold's
And people think I'm crazy cause I've turned riding the
Red Line towards 95th into a pastime
To pass time
I stare out the window
And life finally begins to move at a more steady speed
I been sharing space with struggle
Smiling, solitude is a sacred simplicity
One day on my way home from class
I realized that the 47th Street Red Line stop only has heat
on the side going towards Howard
I figure it's cause people going south built to last
I still can't seem to understand why people think the
South Side reeks
When the South Side gave us the rink
Kanye, Common, Chance, D. Rose and Tink
Humans full of soul
Buses full of humans
Cause pockets to empty for cars
Beggars Pizza, Sharks
King Drive and the Fo'
Each morning I walk out the door and end up around
some Black people I adore
If it's one thing that I know for sure
It's that South Side majestic as fuck
But the media only gone tell you it's the land of the duck
Here comes another stray bullet

SOURCE
Ian Wojcikiewicz

Home is when people ask you shit.

Babe? I ask.

‘Yes?’

I have an idea I want to run by you.

‘Oh, ok.’ She gets up from her desk
and comes over to sit next to me.

What about getting wedding swords instead
of wedding rings?

She gets up, saying nothing, and returns to
her desk.

‘Can you go get tampons? The yellow ones.’
Yeah, ok.

*Few things surface
when I remember
my old house.*

I was two and the Soviet Union fell. Can’t say
I remember too much about it.

‘Son?’

I didn’t answer.

‘Sit him on the step, funny business feel.’

Amid wrappers and now dead fireflies ruined
by yellow whiffle bats.

The step was timeout.

They sat me down to teach me a lesson,
I picked carpet, stood, walked away.

‘Hey, sit him down and keep him there.’

Aye, okay.

*Robin’s nest, I remember that.
Smashed easy, but hard
to get Ma to stop crying.*

I was ten and Columbine happened.
I remember a good bit.

My face was swollen back home.

Arms bulged, covered
in red circles of itch.

Nucleic mistakes make the world different.

Poisonous.

‘What do we do? He can barely breathe’
and the mask smells like brine.

‘Call the parents and make for the hospital.
They have things that can breathe for him.’
Aye, okay.

*Slant blue roof of my room
fell close to my face in sleep.
I almost hit my head a lot.*

In pharmacy aisles, eyes look for a place to
settle and choose wrong.

A woman in line having difficulties.

‘Don’t look at me, I need my medication.’

Back at the shelves I find plastic, plastic, all
plastic and the guilt is real.

Babe? I say to the phone.

‘Yes?’

They only have plastic here, I can’t find any
of the cardboard ones.

Sigh. ‘Fine, I’ll manage with the plastic.’

Yeah, ok.

*The elementary school mascot
was a humpback whale. Why?
We didn’t field any sports teams.*

Distance made the stomach strong. Weak
knees on the waterfall watching
the other kids swirl and dive.
I climbed down slowly,
red face, sour throat.

Back at the car I wanted another shot.

‘You think it easy, now that you’re this far?’

I could still prove myself a half-man.

‘It’s a half an hour back to the falls
and this trip isn’t for you alone. We can’t go
back. That’s past now.’ Yeah, ok.

*Knotty tree grown from gravel grass.
Heard an owl there once,
but I never got to see it.*

How to explain the size of the cosmos to a
sister preparing for bed?

I just go off hand and let
 things fall where they will.
'What happens when you get to the edge?
There's a black hole in the middle,
what was it before?'

Eyes growing watery, big,
Reaching for the edges of space.

There's no worthy answer. I wave along
and let her cry herself to sleep.

Aye, okay.

REKIA BOYD
Johnetta Anderson

March, 2012

there are good cops - there are more
Rekia Boyd(s). hips baring grandma's
trauma and hidden agendas. corn-
rows beneath brazilian bruises, the
harder you beat your head the more
comfortable. her strength - defined
by her ability to exist, to cringe a
smile as she drowns with homicides
in her pupils. her hanging, as natural
as dante servin's freedom.

WEDDING, ALL THE
WORLD CAME
Jennifer Spadaccia

AND SO FOR MY
WEDDING, ALL THE
WORLD CAME
Jennifer Spadaccia

When my dear friend Ava asked me to participate in a writing exercise for one of her classes at Harvard, I was initially thrilled. I had been out of school for nearly a year at that point, and I missed the writing and my assignments. I was not the only one she asked for help; she contacted a dozen of us and provided a prompt specific to each member, and I secretly felt that mine was the best. The story I was to write would be inspired by the prompt: “And so for my wedding, all the world came.”

It felt strange to think of my wedding. I didn’t know how to write about something so difficult to predict and decided to wait a couple days to see if inspiration found me. Well, one thing led to another and I became predictably busier as the week went by (I was juggling three jobs at the time) and I forgot about Ava’s request. I was in a bit of a crisis involving money and I needed to reevaluate my job situation immediately. I had rejected an offer to apply for a full time teaching position at the school I had served as an Americorp member the year before. Although I had enjoyed my year with the kids immensely, the culture of the school was not for me. My kindergarteners were first graders now and I felt a

supreme twinge of guilt that it was almost October, but I had not yet managed to visit them, a promise I made back in May during recess. My friend Becca was working at the school now in the first grade and she had many of my old students. A couple weeks after receiving Ava's prompt, I arranged a morning with Becca when I would visit her class and surprise them. I knew they would be excited and I was looking forward to it, but when the morning approached I was heavily distracted. There were things I could be doing besides biking out to Langston Hughes Academy. I finally had a call back for an interview at the Louisiana Children's Museum. They wanted to talk with me again at eleven and I was torn. Do I cancel the surprise meeting and reschedule for another time? Isn't my current financial situation more important than visiting my old students for a mere few hours? I remember those thoughts clearly and today they shame me. But I wasn't thinking about them; I was thinking about me.

As I rode my bike across New Orleans to Gentilly, where the school was, I sunk deeper into memories from the year before. Ones of walking back and forth in a straight line between the classroom and the cafeteria,
the classroom and the library,
the classroom and the computer room,
the classroom and the gym.

Memories of freshly ironed uniforms failing to hide bits of pajamas poking out from underneath.

Memories of holding hands and sweaty rides round the tire swing.

Memories of clean boots stamped on and made dirty by tiny feet the length of my hand. Memories of tantrums and tears and utter despair when someone cut someone else in the lunch line. Memories of sitting in a miniature yellow chair, and laying my head down on one of their desks, and falling asleep.

Memories of spilled milk and shared secrets, and never having enough time at the water fountain.

1-2-3 that's enough for me.

Memories of screaming and crying, and cheering and laughing
and memories of countless high fives and song
after song
after song after song.

Whenever I flip back a new month of the calendar that hangs in my bedroom, I hum the calendar song under my breath: *January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August, hooray hooray hooray! September, October, November, December, these are the months that I can remember.*

I almost miss the turn, but I remember in time. There it is, Langston Hughes. How strange to be back in nearly five months when I used to be here eleven hours almost every day. It is a beautiful school. It's relatively new and the coats of paint gleamed in the sun that morning and the garden was in full bloom. Morning glories swayed in the sticky breeze and the sunflowers were taller than I was. Everything had grown. The front doors felt just as heavy, and the blast of air conditioning once I made it inside was just as relieving. It was that time of morning when the kindergarteners through second graders were taking turns with lunch and recess so that their time in the hallway was staggered. I had a small window of opportunity before my cover was blown so I moved quickly to Becca's classroom. The hallway smelled the same mixture of cleaning fluid, sandwich meat, and pencil shavings. We passed the large windows in front of the courtyard and I could see the ghosts of Kyd, Jalea, Asia, and I sitting "criss-cross applesauce" while singing a song about the letters of the alphabet. I check my watch, it's nearly ten. It was almost time to meet Becca in her classroom and I suddenly feel nervous. What if

they forgot about me? A considerable amount of time had passed and for a six year old, one month can feel like one year. How different was the first grade from kindergarten anyway? How different will they be? Maybe they won't like or need me in the same ways anymore? Why would this make me feel sad, isn't that what children were supposed to do?

I peer into the room through the transom, and see Becca perched in the middle of a circle on the floor. There's Erin and Kennedy on each side of her, and G is diagonally across. My heart begins to pound; I'm about to go in. Becca sees me out of the corner of her eye and I watch as she covers her eyes with her hands and the group around her does the same. Erin peeks out with his left eye; he never was a fan of surprises. I step into the room and Becca yells for them to open their eyes and the screaming begins instantly. The next hour passes by in a blur of pushes and hugs and a tour of the new playground. My arms are tugged on constantly as I'm pulled down to hear secrets whispered into my ear. There's immediately a fight over who gets to braid my hair. In the end we compromise with two girls braiding the left side, and two girls braiding the other half. They tell me about their long days and how tired they are and how much more difficult first grade is compared to kindergarten. I listened and looked and tried to keep my cool. They were so much bigger and their personalities had already changed. That is what children do, though: they change.

They wanted to know when I would be back, they had so many more things to show me; the art projects and the stories they were writing, the books they were reading and the math problems finally mastered. My heart began to race again, when would be the next time I would be able to visit them? What other ways will they have changed? Will they still greet me with clamoring hugs and requests to "Look at this!" or "Watch me Ms. Spadaccia, look at me!"

I left after lunch, quickly. I nearly flew to my bike. I didn't want them to see the tears, rule number one of teaching is never let them see you cry. I pedaled my legs as fast as I could along the Bayou as I heard the distant beats of a thunderstorm. As I sped along, my pumping legs adding to the quickening of my heart, Ava's prompt came back to me with a vengeance. Their moving faces and their demanding bodies were all I could think of as I heard Ava's voice in my ear,

"And so for my wedding, all the world came."

COOKIES

Taylor Croteau

Mama taught Mary-Jo how to make cookies when she was little. She used to make little white cake cookies that tasted like shortbread but were soft and chewy. Sometimes they were chocolate chip, whenever Matthew complained long enough. And sometimes they had tiny pieces of strawberries in them, whenever it was strawberry season. Mama would hold her up to the mixing bowl and watch her chubby little hands smoosh the strawberries into the cookie dough with red stained little fingers.

Daddy left when she was four, which means Mama was twenty-four. He never came back for very long, until Mama died. He would drive through town, fuck Mama, then leave. They were his pit stop on the way to Atlanta. Daddy drove a little blue car with a Dalmatian sticker stuck in the cup holder on the passenger side that was worn off and peeling from too many wet drinks sitting on top of it. It was a big square sticker that she remembered fit just perfectly in the corners of the cup holder. The blue edge creased over a little, but the big puffy yellow heart outlined in red was perfectly straight, even after the puppy's face was scratched off with her fingernail. Daddy might have yelled at her for sticking her sticker there, but she doesn't remember.

Daddy's little blue car skidded up the gravel and parked in their front yard. He came in and took Mama to their bedroom. Matthew sat in the little crevice between the couch and the coffee table with his knees bent up holding his bowl of Froot-Loops. Mary-Jo stretched up onto the couch so she could lean to the left and see their door, so she would know right when Mama came back out. She made her brother turn down the volume on Yogi Bear.

Mama ran out half-dressed in her light blue robe. She waved a hand at her while grappling for bowls and cookie sheets. She preheated the oven and started measuring out flour. Mary-Jo sat up on the couch waiting for her, but she didn't look up. The bedroom door was still open and Mary-Jo stole a few glares in its direction, but always back to Mama. Matthew switched the channel from Yogi Bear to Power Rangers. She watched Mama mix the dough with a hand mixer too fast, so it got too sticky. Mama saw Mary-Jo looking at her and turned her back. From behind she could see Mama rolled small puffs of dough in powdered sugar and lined them up on the cookie sheets, then gently placed them in the oven. No chocolate chips and no strawberries. Mama set the timer for eleven minutes then she went back to the bedroom.

Mama ran back out the first time the timer beeped. Mary-Jo waved again, but mama didn't see her. She pulled the cookie sheets out with her hand shoved in the pocket of her robe. She frantically slid the cookies off the cookies sheets with a spatula and set them on one of the glass, flowery plates. Then, she left them on the counter. Then, she sat at the kitchen table and waited.

Mama was the most beautiful woman in the world. She fiddled with her ring and pulled at all her fingers until the knuckles cracked. Then she ran her fingers through her long black hair. She pulled it back into a big brown hair clip most days, but not now. Mary-Jo watched her stare at the tabletop, her eyes almost glazed over. She

would look up suddenly at the bedroom door and then the cookies on the countertop. She stood up halfway then sat back down. Then she stood up completely and grabbed a coffee cup. She reached for a second one but closed the cabinet instead. She went to the coffee pot, her back towards Mary-Jo, but turned around quickly with her empty coffee cup and went back to her seat at the table. She fiddled with the coffee cup handle. It was the one Mary-Jo dropped one morning and the handle had to be glued back on. Mary-Jo could tell mama hated that coffee cup. She thought about bringing her a new one, but since Mama didn't have any coffee or tea she didn't know what to put in it. So Mary-Jo sat on the couch and watched Mama roll her thumb back and forth over the gluey bump on the handle.

Daddy came out of the bedroom. He winked at Mary-Jo as he buckled his belt, then he smiled back at Mama. He crossed between Matthew and the TV and closed the front door behind him. Mama set the coffee cup on the table and stared at the front door while Mary-Jo watched her.

The cookies sat on the counter unwrapped and untouched for a week. Matthew tried to grab one once but Mary-Jo slapped his hand away. She told him those cookies were for Daddy, once Mama left the room.

After another week, Mary-Jo dumped the cookies in the garbage. She handed the least stale one to Matthew first, then took the empty plate to the sink. She pushed the step stool up to the counter quietly, so Mama wouldn't hear and ran the water as softly as possible over the plate. The wet plate slipped out of her hands, but landed on the carpet safely. She picked it up and wiped it down with the driest washcloth she could find. Then she climbed on the counter with it and placed it gently on the top shelf in the cabinet.

BUTTER COOKIES

Taylor Croteau

Ingredients:

1 stick butter (unsalted, softened)
1 block cream cheese (also softened)
1 box cake mix (any flavor)
1 egg
¼ teaspoon vanilla extract
powdered sugar
chocolate chip, strawberries (optional)

Instructions:

- 1 Preheat the oven to 350°F.
- 2 Beat butter and cream cheese until smooth.
- 3 Add egg and vanilla extract; beat until smooth.
- 4 Slowly add cake mix; mix until smooth.
- 5 Stir in chocolate chips, strawberries, etc.
- 6 Roll dough into 2 balls and roll in powdered sugar before placing on cookie sheet.
- 7 Bake at 350°F for 11-13 minutes.

FOUR POEMS

Rabha Ashry

BLUE RED

on this bed

I can

breathe

a nowness I can
into you

taste

your hand on my stomach

like a

whisper

your dark hair

something

already familiar

FOUR POEMS

Rabha Ashry

WHY WE CAN ONLY SWITCH CODE
FOR AND TO MAYADA
(INSPIRED BY GLORIA ANZALDUA)

“a secret language”

i say it's my favorite shawarma place because of the older egyptian man at the counter who calls me beautiful in that entirely endearing way some older egyptian men have and not because the shawarma is particularly good. on my uber rides i find them or they find me when i tell them my name and for a minute we're not so lost. when i hear arabic on the train my heart beats so fast i feel like i'm falling in love. when i drink my arabic breaks out and my tongue moves back to the music it was always supposed to move to.

when playing foreigner with my friends i tell them the word for my love, and the word for enough, and the word for i swear, and the word for animal, and the word for god willing, and the word for hurry, and the word for stop, and the word for god forgive me.

when looking for something like a home on my phone with my best friend we speak so fast our english and our arabic are just one language i say حبيبي انت مش فاهم i'm trying to say - خلاص fuck it. i say بس اسمع حبيبي and he says goddammit.

i say بحبك
I say بحبك
I say وحشتوني

“how do you tame a wild tongue, train it to be quiet, how do you bridle and saddle it? how do you make it lie down?”

i send voice notes to you only in arabic when there's company and you send voice notes to me only in english when there's company we weave them together and we

don't understand the pattern but at least we have it. i carved so many letters onto my arms and chest and only two are in our language. i grew up in front of TVs practicing how to not roll my r's and so did you. this flimsy excuse for a tongue whole only took me so far and i know you could choose your own words too but sometimes they just end up stuck in your prison ribs.

remember the woman in the park telling us ما شاء الله ما شاء الله your english is so good which school you go to? remember the woman in the airport yelling انتوا نسيتموا انتوا مصرين؟ we never got it quite right but even with the heaviness of my ر and the throatiness of my ح i'm denied my tongue my home my skin and we're all mutts anyways that's how you get your light brown hair and blue green eyes and i get my black hair and almost hazel brown eyes and you get your sunset golden skin and i get my god cursed brown skin.

people ask, are you really egyptian? people ask, are you really sisters?

you know they tried to put a stop to it this unloosening of our tongues this tasting words not our own but i had given it my all and you caught up faster than i thought you would and here we are with our severed tongues and hair all wrong kinds of curly.

ولا كانوا عملوا اللي بيعمل that you won't like what i have to say بس انتي عارفه لو مكنتش مشيت ما but they tell me الاتي تقدري تخلي بالك من نفسك and i know you can i know you can but

they tell me it's good that i'm here because i'm the way out. بس احيانا i wish i could tell you they never thought

that we would be born this wrong born this many kinds
of wrong.

i know you would say we were born out of necessity.
and i know you were. you were born completely and
absolutely necessary.

“we’re going to have to do something about your tongue”

كتب مفيش اصحاب مفيش مدرسه مفيش خروج مفيش ضحك مفيش قله ادب ومسخره
قفلوا التلفزيون شالوا الانترنت مفيش العاب مفيش افلام مفيش موسيقى مفيش

they ask

ايه الإنترنت بتكتبي دلوقتي؟
ايه الكلام ده؟

i can still taste the apologies they put in our mouths the
pre-sunrise prayers that left our throats parched before
the اذان the hum of a city asleep her قراءة reading like weep-
ing like begging the minute before we fall asleep like a
beginning finally

*“until i am free to write bilingually and to switch code without
having to translate... and as long as i have to accomodate the
english speakers rather than having them accomodate me,
my tongue will be illegitimate.”*

you know i recently realized that i don’t notice عما يسموني
rabha instead of رابحه

(“call me” in arabic is “name me”)

“we know how to survive”

أنا عارفة الاتي عرفه.

اتني عرفه.

HOW TO HIDE

1. move somewhere new
2. change your number
3. dye your hair ghost white
4. go down at least two sizes
5. cut your name in half
6. change your fingers
7. cuff your wrists up to your arms
8. burn your tongue through
9. learn to speak around it
10. color your lips blue
11. slap your cheekbones purple
12. let your ribs hurt
13. let everything stutter and start
14. let everything stutter and stop

this is about me
this isn't about you

this isn't for me
this is for you

16. hold your breath on your way out
17. you're only shaking because it snows
18. your eyes won't keep you safe
19. are you still dancing in beds?
20. it cuts from the inside out
21. it means nothing
22. she's your mother and she loves you
23. she's your mother and she doesn't scare you
24. maybe you need to leave again
26. you have the keys to all your doors
27. they're not by the door
28. she says play quran when you sleep
29. she says i'm praying for you
30. she says it's nothing to worry about

swallow

tattoo a daisy on your chest

STUTTER

hear the too full feeling
can i
escape the consequences?

blueprints for escape plans
not just paper work but nights
too wired to write]
nights & blue bedsheets
(i've never made this bed)

it's a wordless song it's a blind song
it's all the songs the trees gave me
a language(i) lost

look here, look hear
polaroids and red scarves and brown scars
everything that was (me) sinning

well they prescribe the not enough pills and i -

they drew the bloodwork / testing a mistake/
with alcohol levels too high to diagnose the patient
& 7 hours in not my bed

a power move giving up take my control take

the too full feeling a hollow ribcage
this is where i draw the line
& o my love i can't share
i will keep the buzzing wasps on my tongue
& the knife carving my ribs

a 4 month deadline in a city → a knife in my throat
(please let me stay / please let me go)

here the poems like photographs i lost
or words i gave away
or sentences running down my arms
or the syllables i can't speak *anymore*

razors i keep in my mouth

"you won't come back"
"i can't come back"

this is my only chance i drink the frost

LOOK AT WHAT
YOU HAVE
Justin Howard Rosier

Walking up the stairs from the Metra, he told us, he couldn't have been in a worse mood. If we could imagine walking into a bar mid-day and having our eyes trained towards night, to exit buzzed and belching to discover that the sun hadn't set when our moods had might be hard to take. Had he been with us, we'd have chuckled, amazed, but he was by himself and forced to go through motions that pained him so that other people could be happy; not for him, but through him, an ornament worn to the point where it was only noticed casually, when its bling caught your attention, like his ma with her engagement ring.

When he made it to the top, he felt his foot smack the lip of the curb as he stood there, balanced on the miniscule incline, he told us, frozen at the sight of white crosswalk lines climbing toward Downtown Island as if he were staring at the cell his warden was fitting to shove him in. Our crossing guard, menacing in drab olive, kept a whistle in pursed lips while he reeled cars through—braced his palm against the air to stop them:

“You!”

We grew up crossing the street on Fletcher's orders. Eventually the flailing waves and thank-yous we hollered holding our parent's hands turned into sadistic pleasure as we stepped out in the street prematurely. He'd try and stop the cars that really did have the right of way; some would stutter through, others would halt as we scattered around them trunk-side and were saturated by ruby brake lights, with Fletcher limping over, jabbing his finger at us:

LOOK AT WHAT
YOU HAVE
Justin Howard Rosier

“You need to *stop* when I *tell* you to stop!”

He’d spat his whistle out yelling and drool trailed mouth to chest: ridiculous. ‘*Okay.*’ We’d say, running home.

We remembered who’d floated the Coon concept first, but he insisted on reminding us:

“Fletcher looks like the old man driving Ms. Daisy dropped off on the side of the road!”

We used to put bass in our voice to serve as his back-up chorus:

“Sho nuff, massa Fletcher!”

“Shine yo shoes for you, boss?”

Retired physically if not financially, Fletcher always took this well; we thought it was professionalism, and it probably was to an extent, but the truth is that, if he *had* been there awhile, he’d probably heard that and worse anyway, so what difference did it make? When Fletcher waved him across this time, he told us, he shoved his hands into his suit pockets and hurried across. That intersection weirded him out since the bus accident.

Standing there originally, he’d imagined it bloody and gore-smeared—siren lights glinting on debris like stooped pennies; echoed wailing—and felt *sick*, he told us, physically *sick* at the thought of crossing. So when ol’ Fletcher hit him with the put-up-or-shut-up, he couldn’t help but be embarrassed by the irony: a house nigger staring down whips while waving him to freedom. He had a hard time adjusting, and stumbled into the roundabout’s lush.

He reoriented, got back on the pea-gravel walkway. Like action flicks with warriors warding off impeding armies while their allies escape, he looked back and saw Fletcher, same as before: right arm circling, cars barreling through. He didn’t work regular hours, so there weren’t many people getting off at Brushgrove station at the time. Downtown Brushgrove was quiet, serene. But his heart was knocking loudly in his chest, he told us; he thought it was about to break loose. He decided to slow down.

That caused him to admire the statue in the middle of Downtown Island for a while. They built it a few years before he left Brushgrove, hopefully for good, and he was barely on this side of town when he lived here anyway, so it meant nothing to him. But the solitary figure, neck taut and craning upwards towards the flagpole, seemed all-knowing in that moment. It knew he didn’t care about it, but left open the possibility that someday he would.

It sounded like some drunk shit, and we called him on it. All he could say was, Suppose you’re dealing with whatever atrocity inflicted on you—squinting at the clouds asking *why*? Well, the statue, constantly in awe of Old Glory, offers the simplest answer. It’s because you aren’t looking at what you have.

He tried to cross the street on the other side and a Mustang convertible shot through. He just missed it, he told us; it wouldn’t have stopped if *he* didn’t; its wind brushed him back like a pitch. Now or never in the almost-middle of the street, he went ahead and crossed. He’d have the humongous four-lane near BGH five blocks later, but he wasn’t thinking about that then.

Dress shoes scuffling, heading east towards Brushgrove Road, he’d walked past the old eye doctor now converted into an Italian deli, towards the worn-down cafe turned into a Wholesome Dining | Honorable Prices place—their words, not his. We’d seen it, too, and were gobsmacked by the stupidity; but the reason why he brought it *up*, he told us, was that noticing the changes helped slow him down. He’d have been halfway down the block otherwise and wouldn’t have heard Dr. Jackson calling from outside his office door:

“Hey, there!”

He didn’t *know* it was Dr. Jackson; like he’d said his attitude had shifted from have-to-smother-this-panic-attack

to there-goes-the-neighborhood, and he was strolling. He walked past Stephen's office with his vantage aimed towards the next new shiny thing, and didn't notice because he'd seen it before. He jumped, and spun around to see who'd wanted his attention, a man in desperate need of someone to pound him with redding fists into a soapy washtub, he told us—white coat that looked fatigue-splattered with food stains, hair mangled and unruly, face collandared with stubble. Cuffed trousers: fine, but they kinked at his waist underneath his belly; off-duty, they drooped in the back like a bum's—pink shirttails staving off sex offending. He knew he hadn't been back in a minute, but Dr. Jackson had him feeling like he'd misted out of a cryogenic chamber:

“H-hey there.”

After he articulated his surprise—‘Dr. Jackson!’—he went in for the hug. It wasn't his natural inclination, he told us; it just felt right given their history. He didn't have many men around growing up other than his swim coaches, and Stephen Jackson was the only black man. And his ma was so nitpicky. Back then it was nice to have someone who was making it *tell* him things.

But Dr. Jackson stepped back and maneuvered their hands into a high, awkward shake:

“Haven't seen you in a while.”

“Yeah.”

We knew that a lot of people hadn't seen Dr. Jackson in a while; some of us are loyalists, and stand by him with the inverted fervor people use to justify requesting white surgeons, but his life had declined significantly. The plump woman slumped on her palms at the receptionist's desk maintaining the same drooped posture when the tin bell jangled to announce his thinned clientele was upsetting. Then rumors got around—*Was he fucking her?* Sometimes his appointments would arrive and he'd be doing everything himself:

“Vicky's a little ill and had to take the day off!”

But they'd seen the swelling on her face and pinned it on him—he inflicted it or allowed it, or inflicted it *because* he allowed it; we didn't know about her life, and some of us saw her dropped off mornings in a chiseled tinted car sitting low to the ground, tall wheels compressing its elevation, and had no idea if we were witnessing retaliation or a shrug.

That's fucked, he told us.

He was avoiding tripping wires he *did* know about, so he didn't mention Stephen's ex-wife shacking up with the father of their son's best friend, but he hardly had a chance to speak at all. Dr. Jackson commandeered the conversation as if he were deflecting, trying to avoid making his family the subject, which was his right. (‘Should be his obligation’ Someone said. ‘Talking to that man got depressing.’) And he was pleasant, but it was just *weird*, shadowboxing a ghost the entire time:

“You working?”

“Yeah.”

“Doing what?”

“Sales”

“*Business*. That's good. Stable. Lucrative.”

“Sometimes? I see some people hopsco—”

“Business is basically sales.”

“More or less.”

“Or it should be if you want to be successful.

Remind me: Where did you go to school?”

“DePaul.”

“DePaul. We, or I guess she...we were thinking about it.”

“Yeah.”

“But it's just, *Chicago*.”

“Yeah.”

“It really is where all the big boys play.”

“It's a good school.”

“*Great* school. If you can get in.”

4:11. The Pace bus lumbered and whined as it braked to pick up passengers. He watched them file in and his eyes

got blurry, losing focus as anonymous heads appeared in the windows, bobbed and glided as they filled in the seats. The space in front of the bus was clear, thank God, he told us, and felt rough knuckles under his chin as he turned to address the hand on his shoulder, ashen with labor and negligence, and another one pointing across the street:

“They put a sign up.”

“How long has that been there?”

“Few years now. I brought it up in every village council meeting. Five years. They told me it was ‘superfluous and unnecessary,’ but of course if it was one of these *white* kids...”

“Yeah.”

“Anyway, little girl was coming up from the park over there with a dodgeball and ran into the street—and she’s alive—but I lost it after that. And this time around I had recent memory on my side. Parents angry about the what-ifs. ‘What if it was your kid?’ I mean, I’m lucky when I think about it: at least Jordan got to be a kid.

“But it’s really not the kid’s faults, though,” Dr. Jackson told him, grimacing and bag eyed, glancing back and forth. The sign, reflective in its newness, looked like a current running through—impaling all the occupants—but when the bus drove away it remained.

CAUTION: BUS STOP AHEAD.

Dr. Jackson was incorrigible:

“You know that bus driver is still working? Not in Brushgrove; I saw to that. But over in Chicago Heights. I called and called the station that runs that bus line. But they don’t care. Murdered my son, *but no proof*. I mean, you run over a kid who’s trying to cross the street and you think they’d ban you from the road for life.”

And that’s when he realized (he told us): Dr. Jackson still thinks it was a mistake. It was night and in front of a bar and everyone was drunk and in situations like these you can never be completely sure. Unless you’re Dr. Jackson,

or the few of us who swear on everything that his son Jordan headed for the front of that bus like he was lashing out at it, or what it meant—the monotony of time not being your own, and that, like a pawned wristwatch, you knew *exactly* where it would take you.

He didn’t know if we remembered (‘And it was like, *really?*’ Someone said. ‘It was just like him to act like he’s the only one who knows what’s going on...’), but the police came by his house early the next day and asked him if Jordan had been acting suspicious. It was a stupid question; we knew that Jordan was aloof even when he became social, and only showed enthusiasm in bursts—in response to things. He told them what he knew: Jordan called to see if he wanted to hang out once he got back from the city. He said maybe; he kind of just wanted to sit around and watch videos. ‘I’ll swing by?’ He said sure. He never followed up around the time that Jordan said he’d be back, which fucked him up for a long time.

The last time he’d seen Dr. Jackson was around graduation, when he and his family were entering the Asian restaurant on Dixie Highway right as the Jacksons were leaving. A casual question—‘Jordan didn’t...say anything, did he?’—turned into a full-on interrogation, with Dr. Jackson’s wife, Roberta, trying to drag him out the door the entire time while he kept pressing—‘I mean, *anything*. Seriously: *anything*’—until his ma, back after letting the hostess have it over their lost reservation, got in Dr. Jackson’s face like ‘*Baby*, you need to take it *easy*’:

“Say hi to ‘Miss Renae’ for me.”

“I will. You say hi to—”

“I will when I see them. You walking?”

“Yeah.”

“*Well*, just be careful crossing the street.”

Which made him think about how crazy it is that the best thing about your day could be what *doesn’t* happen to you, he told us.

KISS LIST
Mika McIntosh

I'm in Provo, UT, at a Village Inn on a Wednesday night hosting a gathering of gay Mormons. I hate hosting. Yet, somehow, I'm deemed one of the "good ones" by Jimmy Hales and asked¹ to introduce Taylor, a young man who has recently come out to himself, to some of the other guys in the area so he, Taylor, can have support or whatever.² I think what Jimmy meant by "one of the good ones" is that I don't date other men. If that's what the poor fool meant, then I didn't have the heart (or guts) to tell him he was wrong.

I would rather make myself uncomfortable to help someone out than to say no. This is my flaw. This is one of my many exploitable flaws. At least it's Free Pie Night.

The gathering's turned into a bigger thing than I had initially planned as Dillon has decided to take this opportunity to invite a few extra guys. Dillon thinks the guys he's bringing could benefit from pie eating and chit chat, and he's probably right. I'm not going to say no. It's too late to say no. I continue to wish this event was somebody else's deal so I can bail. I notice that one of the extra guys Dillon brought with him seems to be very focused on me. Eventually he introduces himself.

“Hey, I’m Thad.³ Thaddeus for short,” he says. I give him a scrunched up face, the kind petulant 8th grade boys give, because what he just said was stupid yet strangely endearing.

He sees my confusion and begins to explain the joke. Continuing to give him 8th grade boy looks, I tell him, “No, I. I got it. I got it.” He’s a funny egg, that one.

It’s his “-ism” and he sticks to it, introducing himself to everyone else the same way. He is 30, has some blond scruff, and dresses like your average boy-next-door-casual-Republican, in jeans that *should* fit him nicer (but don’t) and a plaid shirt. I will later figure out that this is the majority of his wardrobe.⁴

Thad-Thaddeus-for-short looks at me a lot, hanging on my every word. Somehow I am (mostly) effortlessly charming during 90% of this event. This often happens when I’m not consciously trying to impress anybody, and I was over the Great Village Inn Gathering as soon as it started. Thad is cute, but I think nothing of his direct gazes because many men in this gaggle of gays choose not to date (or say they don’t but have the occasional NCMO⁵). I figure Thad won’t make a move. I am wrong. I am often wrong.

After the event I take a chance and friend Thad on Facebook. The next morning he accepts the request and immediately sends me a Facebook message.

THAD: It was good meeting you the other night. I’d like to get to know you better. Would you be open to getting together for a meal?

ME: Yeah yeah yeah!⁶ Sounds good to me.

THAD: Tonight? I’m pretty free.

This never happens. No boy has ever been this available for me. We settle on six. He asks me my favorite restaurant. *Who is this guy and why is he keen on me?* Naturally,

I choose pizza. Unlike a date, it’s nearly impossible to screw up pizza.

Dinner is good, conversation fantastic. He pays. He says he has the free time and wants to continue to talk and hang out. We drive up Provo Canyon, boxed in by the jagged and horrifically comforting Mounts Timpanogos and Cascade, pulling into an empty park. We get out, intent on star gazing. I think I know what’s going to happen. We look at stars. I know what’s going to happen, I guess the air is thick with desire or whatever? He puts his arm around me and pulls me close. Holy shit I know what’s going to happen, we’re swimming in hormones and pheromones and there-will-be moans. This guy is cute, and into me. And he looks at me. And he goes in, and we kiss. Later that night he will send me this message:

THAD: I’m walking on air. Thanks for a memorable experience ;)

His tongue is large and I feel like I’m going to choke on it every time we make out. We last a week. He remains one of my favorite exes⁷.

NOTES

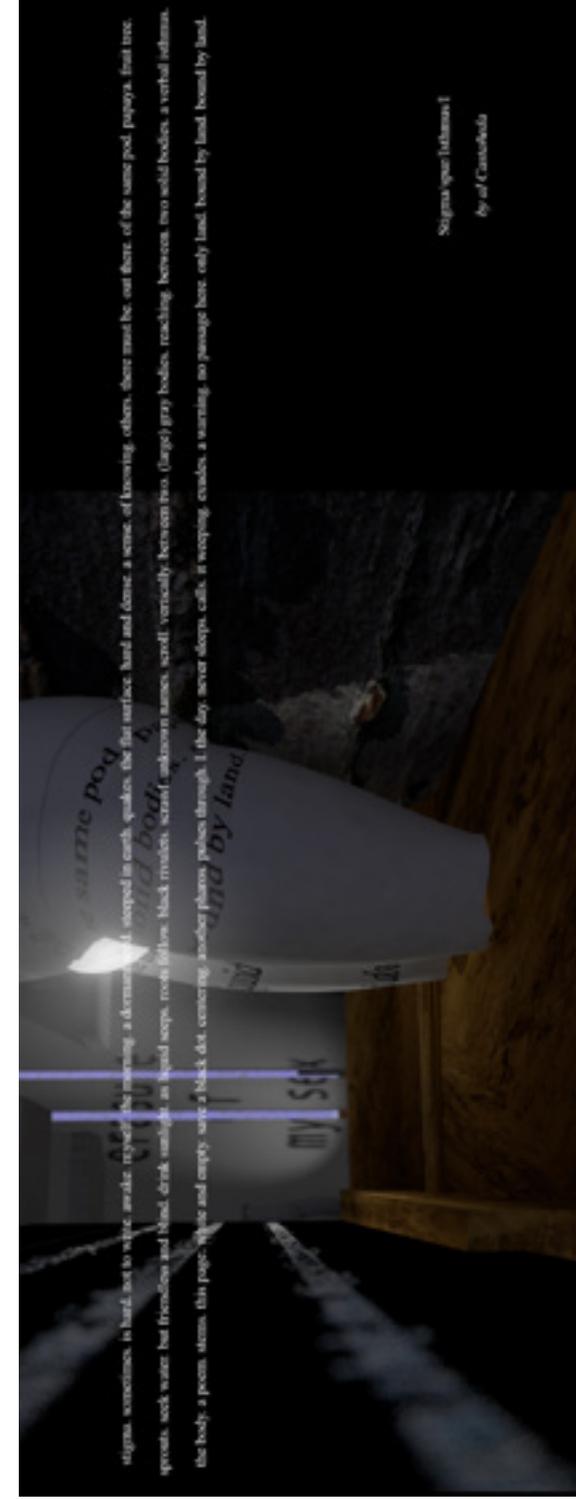
- 1 *I have yet to be repaid for this request, Jimmy. You owe me for getting me outside of my comfort zone.*
- 2 *I myself never talk to this man again after this, only occasionally seeing his FB or Instagram posts and receiving the rare “like” from him.*
- 3 *Thad recently came out (Go, Thad!), so I’m able to use his actual name. Previously it was “Chad, Chadwick for short” but that just didn’t have the same ring to it.*
- 4 *This past summer (‘17), over ice cream, Thad told me that he mostly wore those shirts after we first met so he could cover up the hickeys I would give him. I told him that couldn’t have been entirely accurate (what about the first time we met?) and he shrugged it off. “I guess my wardrobe’s changed since then.”*
- 5 *Acronym for “Non-Committal Makeout,” which apparently is not a thing outside of Utah. Utah culture is dangerously quirky.*
- 6 *When I discovered that the band Yeah Yeah Yeahs got the name from the supposed NYC quirk of saying yeah three times, I thought it would be cool to adopt it into my own speech because it sounded more fun than the single yeahs I was used to.*
- 7 *One thing that attracted me to him at the time was how adult he was; early 30s, not still in college. I wasn’t quite sure what he did for work, though. During ice cream he told me what he does and I’m still not sure.*
- a *Due to serving missions and starting families at a young age, it’s not uncommon for Mormon men to still be working on their bachelor’s degree at 26. I got mine at 23. So even on dates with men my own age, it was obvious we were both at different places in our lives.*

MIKA’S FIRST DATE QUESTIONS (ABRIDGED)

1. *How often do you wear plaid shirts?*
2. *Has someone ever found nudes on your phone?*
3. *Talk to me about politics.*
4. *What is Mika’s most attractive feature? What’s his worst?*
5. *What’re your thoughts on frozen burritos? Would you be interested in my new gourmet frozen burrito food truck idea, Brrrrrrrr-ito?*
6. *Did you know CrossFitters love Jesus?*
7. *Did you ever have a childhood pet? How did it die?*
8. *I took a clowning class once.*
9. *Mika seems to have a lot of awkward encounters. Have you ever had an awkward encounter? Was it better or worse than Mika’s?*
10. *How much cream cheese do you put on your bagel?*
11. *Do you think Mika should cut his hair?*
12. *Have you ever stolen someone’s journal? Has anyone ever stolen yours? How did that experience make you feel?*
13. *Would you let a giraffe lick you?*
14. *Do you own a pair of red pants?*
15. *Where do you look while taking a sip from the drinking fountain?*
16. *Do you want to go buy some Fruity Pebbles after this and separate all the colors?*

STIGMA/SPUR
/ISTHMUS/I
Alicia López Castañeda

STIGMA/SPUR
/ISTHMUS/I
Alicia López Castañeda



stigma. sometimes. is hard. not to write. awake. myself.
the morning. a dormant seed. steeped in earth. quakes.
the flat surface. hard and dense. a sense. of knowing.
others. there must be. out there. of the same pod.
papaya. fruit tree. sprouts. seek water. but friendless
and blind. drink sunlight. as liquid seeps. roots follow.
black rivulets. scrawl. unknown names. scroll. ver-
tically. between two. (large) gray bodies. reaching.
between. two solid bodies. a verbal isthmus. the body.
a poem. stems. this page. white and empty. save a
black dot. centering. another pharos. pulses through.
I. the day. never sleeps. call. it weeping. exudes. a
warning. no passage here. only land. bound by land.
bound by land.

FIVE POEMS
reid drake

BECAUSE I AM WHAT?
SICKENING

I will never be glamour
I am not that kind of girl
Tutorial after tutorial
and still I can't carve
a cheekbone
from the soft-boiled
slope of this face

I don't have a mother
never needed one, not
I thought, like most girls
but girl
would it be good to see
her slink into the room

show me how to hold
the beauty blender, take
my temperature and tell
me, *not tonight, Mx. Thing*
Not tonight

HOW DO I LIVE
(AFTER LEANN RIMES)

source_
(this track goes out to the earth. body tether, vocal run. appropriation anchor. this is classic ballad. what one might expect to see sung on a Sunday night. what one's mother might be introduced to drag with. [performer] approaches this song with all that it carries. [performer] holds themselves. sways inside sensuous cliché. hyperbole becomes hyper literal as [performer] holds [audience] in *how do I live, how do I live, how do I live without you*. answer the obvious. [performer] disrupts this exchange, spins pleasure around the edge of irony. this is cosmic education. this is global calamity. if space allows it, [performer] stands in front of projection. escalating images—white sand beaches, fields to fire, boiling bodies of water. if this feels too hot, [performer] may ask which of us is the flame and which is the pot? which is the water? and which is the frog? oh, swollen orchestra. every string, all together at once. the slow zoom out, an ongoing inhale of everything, asks us to jump. at no point will the heat not hurt.)

INTER
CEPT_

I do not collect tips. I have not prayed since grade school. I know this song too well. I am swept up, collected in a dust pan of something more than me. I rehearsed this number at home, sat with the poem, watched the supercut destruction. It is something to see. Like what comes at the end of camp or a friend's funeral, home video, edited by a counselor or cousin in crunched time— all slow pans, soft switches, sad animals and burning brush. I cannot find fun in the irony of it all. I am on the floor of this club crying. I did not bring my Kryolan tear stick. I throw my self, the crest of every breaking wave. *How* hits. I lose. I forget if I am even moving my mouth. I turn to face what hangs behind me. *I want to know. Please tell me. Baby. How do I? How do I? How do I live?* with the weight of wondering

RECEI
VER(S)_

*i didn't fucking
come
to the fucking club
for a fucking
lecture*

*o mg
take my money bitch!
take my money!*

*if she really cared
about the earth
she would not be wearing
those nylons*

*is this sarah
mclachlan?*

take my money bitch!

is she blocking the door?

*take my money
are we stuck in here?*

biitch!

is this dangerous?

POET'S WORK

*be needy thing
known for sitting
in front of tv screen,
folding
clothes or finding
objects to occupy
ontology*

*avoid high ways
the page—
wrong turn
re-routing, there is consider
able traffic ahead.
try a faster route*

*cringe
at famous writers always
with their answers: I write
because I cannot
not. I write to stay
sane. go crazy
anyway*

*no layoffs
from this
condensery*

*but non-participation
hangs
in the other room
cold perfume
slide easy into
better things to do*

*it's cool
there's more here
to hold than you*

reid drake Five Poems

COLLABORATION
Parker Young

I was writing a story, a fantastic tale about two little sheep who have nowhere to go but up. The main question that animates the whole story is, will the sheep go up? It seems that they should — they have no reason not to. Certainly, they can't go any further down. We all have limits.

Anyway, that was the story I was writing, and the writing was going quite well until my wife began changing the words of the story at night, when I wasn't looking. I've got no proof, of course, it's only a feeling I have, but a strong one. For example, one of the two sheep is now a female sheep. I can't remember writing a female sheep into the story at all, but there it is, and its name is Tina. On the other hand, I was never dead-set on writing a story about two male sheep, so I suppose it's possible that I was the one who made one of the sheep male and the other female, and named the female one Tina. There's nothing wrong with a sheep named Tina, and I would never claim otherwise. Still, it's suspicious. But from there it gets worse because my wife's name is Tina and my name is Bill, and can you guess what the male sheep's name is?

I should ask Tina what's going on.

A new development. The sheep are no longer sheep — now they are people. People who walk upright and spend lots of time watching tennis. This is troubling because I would never write about tennis. Of course, I love to watch tennis myself and spend an embarrassing amount of time doing so, but I would never go so far as to write it into a story of mine, especially not a story about two people like Tina and Bill. Yes, I'm a tennis-watching type of person through and through, but I'm determined to hide such proclivities from the world for as long as possible, and so I can't help but suspect that my wife is interfering with my story and changing the words all around at night, when I'm not looking. This is a serious charge because I barely ever sleep. Therefore, in order for her to change the words of my story all around, she would have to spend hours pretending to sleep, waiting attentively for the precise moment when I've actually drifted off for my 45 minutes or so. Then and only then would she be able to strike, affecting change in my story about Tina and Bill, who used to be sheep and had nowhere to go but up. Writing all about the time they spend watching professional tennis, which I would never, ever do. The writing about it, that is.

I think I should ask Tina what's going on.

The final straw. The Bill character has disappeared completely from my story, which is now a Tina story about Tina things. Tina alone in restaurants, Tina alone on the train, Tina, who used to be a sheep with nowhere to go but up, watching tennis and drinking too much. It's my personal opinion that in the story she drinks too much, but the narrative never acknowledges the possibility. Whoever wrote the narrative never even suggests that Tina might have a problem with drinking too much. A real problem. But a problem that has nothing to do with the story's original question, which was, if my memory serves me: These sheep who have nowhere to go but up, will they go up? Or not? It seems that they should.

I decide to throw the story away because I don't want to read about Tina anymore, certainly not if she's going to go on drinking gin and watching tennis for god only knows how many more pages. Making eyes at strangers. Maybe she is actually enjoying herself, come to think of it, but no, I can't go on reading it or writing it or whatever.

Tina, I say, can I ask you something?

But she's drunk. Tina rarely drinks, and so it only takes a few hours out with friends to render her inoperable. I decide to ask later. Until such a time as I can ask her what's going on, I'll postpone throwing away the document, which was once a story about the two little sheep who have nowhere to go but down, although it seems they should go up.

Wait a second. How can it be that they have nowhere to go but down when I have this feeling, a powerful feeling, that they should go up? I suppose that could be the very dynamic that brings the story to life, or brought it to life; it's a moot point now. And yet I can't stop writing it, or reading it, or whatever is going on. It continues.

Collected 2018: Revisiting celebrates SAIC's 2018
Master of Fine Arts in Writing graduating class.

Published by the Writing Program,
School of the Art Institute of Chicago
All texts & images ©2018 the individual authors.

Editors: Justin Howard Rosier, Jazzy Smith
Design: Frederick Eschrich, Anton Jeludkov
Printing: Lowitz + Sons, Inc., Chicago

Thanks to the editorial team:
Jose Nateras, Emily Rich, Taylor Croteau,
Mika McIntosh, Allison Young

In 1996, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago
established a Master of Fine Arts in Writing. Modeled
on studio art training, the MFAW at SAIC offers a rich
program of cross-genre, hybrid and interdisciplinary
practice at one of the country's most vibrant colleges of
art and design.

www.saic.edu/mfaw

SAIC MFAW
Collected 2018

SAIC MFAW
Collected 2018