

fermata publishing

# THE WARM MONTHS



2015

Y28

**THE  
WRITING**

# FLASH CARDS

THE CARS KEEP FLASHING BY.  
COUPLE ARE ARGUING IN ONE ROOM,  
BOY NEXT DOOR PLAYING SOLITAIRE  
ON A BARE FLOOR.  
HEADLIGHTS KEEP THE MAN'S FACE HAPPENING  
LIKE THE VILLAIN IN A FILM REEL,  
DOOMS THE WOMAN TO SHADOW,  
THE BOY TO LIGHT'S CONSTANT CROSSING  
OF THE CEILING.

WORDS SCRATCH PERSONAL  
AS FINGERNAILS ON SKIN  
AS TOTAL STRANGERS PASS RIGHT THROUGH THEM.  
BOY CAN'T WIN OUT,  
NOT WITH HIS FEARFUL STILLNESS  
AND THE MOVEMENT OF ALL ELSE,  
NOT WITH THE SCREAMS  
LIKE SCREECHING BRAKES  
CRYING OUT FOR A COLLISION.

MAN TRAVELING DOWN THE ROAD FIGURES,  
"I DON'T KNOW ANYBODY,  
EVERY HOUSE I PASS IS  
POSITIONED EQUALLY FOR MY  
HEADLAMPS TO BRUSH,  
MY IGNORANCE TO BE TURNED AWAY."  
HE'S GOT HIS OWN ARGUMENTS TO PURSUE  
IN MASHED-UP ROOMS  
OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS.  
HE HAS HIS OWN CHILD  
BABYSAT BY BLINKING CEILING,  
UNCOOPERATIVE CARDS.

CARS KEEP FLASHING BY.  
LIVES KEEP FLASHING IN PLACE.



# HEARING DOWN THE WALLS

A SURGEON OF SORTS, WITH MASK,  
GOGGLES, COVERALLS, LONG SLEEVES, CAP.  
EACH THRUST OF THE PRYBAR,  
EVERY LEVERAGING OF THE HAMMER:  
A SCALPEL'S CUT WHICH PULLS A BIT MORE  
OF SOME ANCIENT EFFORT DOWN UPON MY HEAD.

DESPITE THE PROTECTION,  
MY CHEST WRACKS WITH COUGH,  
MY EYES WATER AND ITCH.  
STILL I DESTROY, SLICING THE OLD AWAY  
SCRAP BY RUINED SCRAP,  
UNTIL I REACH THE BAREST SKIN,  
SCRAPING AWAY FROM THE INSIDE.

THE WALLS ARE HOLLOW,  
A SHELL WAITING TO BE CHARGED  
WITH JUST ENOUGH TO HOLD  
THE WARMTH AND LIFEBLOOD IN.



ANNE  
BRITTING  
OLESON

# THE CHAIR

MY UNCLE HAD JUST LEFT. I COULD HEAR HIM SCREAMING ALL MORNING. IT WOKE UP MY BABY COUSIN. I ROCKED HIM ALL MORNING. SOME SUMMER VACATION I WAS HAVING; THIS WAS WHY I LIKED TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL – LESS WORK. MY OLDER COUSINS, DENNIS AND NELSON GOT CAUGHT SMOKING JOINTS. THEY MOUTHED OFF TO THE COPS, WHICH GOT THEM A TRIP TO THE POLICE STATION AND A PHONE CALL I HAD THE MISFORTUNE OF ANSWERING. NELSON AND DENNIS CAME INTO THE ROOM. JON FINALLY SETTLED DOWN ENOUGH TO PLACE HIM BACK IN THE CRIB.

“YOU NEED TO VACUUM. OUR DAD COMPLAINED ABOUT DIRT ON THE FLOOR,” DENNIS SAID.

“I’LL GET TO IT,” I REPLIED.

AS SOON AS I STARTED UP THE VACUUM, THE BOYS CAME UP BEHIND ME. DENNIS GRABBED MY ARMS AND NELSON PULLED A CHAIR. I WAS PUSHED INTO THE CHAIR AND DENNIS TIED MY ARMS TO THE BACK OF IT WITH ROPE; NELSON TIED MY ANKLES TO THE FRONT LEGS. THIS HAD HAPPENED BEFORE, THIS WAS HAPPENING NOW, THIS WOULD HAPPEN AGAIN – PROBABLY TOMORROW.

“WHAT ARE YOU DOING?” I ASKED KNOWINGLY.

WITHOUT A REPLY, DENNIS TIPPED THE CHAIR BACK. NELSON TIED ANOTHER ROPE TO THE TOP OF THE CHAIR BACK AND SOON I WAS DRAGGED ALONG THE FIRST FLOOR OF THE HOUSE. AT EACH CORNER MY SHOULDER, HIPS, AND ANKLES MADE PAINFUL CONTACT WITH THE WALLS. WHEN THE RIDE WAS EXHAUSTED, THE BOYS UNDED THE ROPES AS QUICKLY AS THEY TIED THEM.

“SHUT UP ABOUT THIS OR IT WILL BE WORSE NEXT TIME,” DENNIS WHISPERED. “YOU HAVE NO BUSINESS ANSWERING OUR HOME PHONE.”

I WAS YOUNG. I WAS STUPID. I SAID NOTHING. DAY AFTER DAY I SAID NOTHING. IT WAS MY UNCLE; THEY WERE MY COUSINS; I WAS SUPPOSED TO WANT TO SPEND TIME WITH MY FAMILY. A WEEK LATER MY VACATION WAS OVER.

“HOW WAS YOUR TRIP TO YOUR UNCLE’S?” MY MOM ASKED.

“FINE,” I REPLIED.



# ALPHAVILLE

MISSED THE BEGINNING  
THINKING THERE MUST HAVE BEEN  
SOME KIND OF EXPLANATION

HE HAD COMMITTED AN "ILLOGICAL ACT"  
(CRYING WHEN HIS WIFE DIED)  
HE KEPT REPEATING WORDS  
LIKE CONSCIENCE AND LOVE  
AND RAN AROUND SHOOTING PEOPLE  
IN ALPHAVILLE  
WHICH LOOKED LIKE THE CITY OF BOSTON  
IN THE INEVITABLE CAR CHASE SCENE BECAUSE IT WAS OF COURSE  
A GRADE "B" MOVIE AND THEY COULD NOT AFFORD A PAPER-MACHE CITY  
SO THEY TOOK THE NEXT BEST THING AND USED BOSTON  
ALTHOUGH IT WAS A FRENCH FILM AND THE VOICES WERE DUBBED-IN IN ENGLISH

SO ALPHAVILLE WAS A COMPUTER-CITY THAT CONSISTED OF  
"FOURTEEN BILLION NERVE CELLS" ONE OF WHICH ASKED OUR HERO  
SOME "TEST QUESTIONS FOR SECURITY REASONS" LIKE  
"WHAT IS THE KEY THAT TURNS NIGHT INTO DAY?" AND OUR HERO ANSWERED  
"POETRY" WHICH OLD ALPH THOUGHT WAS PRETTY FISHY AND  
"DO YOU KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE QUALITY OF KNOWLEDGE  
AND THE MYSTERY OF LOVE?" AND OUR EVERLOVING HERO (WHO CLAIMED  
HIS BIGGEST JOYS IN LIFE WERE WHISKY AND WOMEN) ANSWERED  
"THERE IS NO MYSTERY IN LOVE" AND WHEN HE SAID IT YOU COULD  
ALMOST HEAR THE CAPITAL L AND SO OLD ALPH THOUGH THIS WAS  
A LITTLE SUSPICIOUS BUT LET OUR HERO GO FOR THE TIME BEING  
SO HIS "CIRCUITS" COULD WORK ON THE ANSWERS



# **SIDE WINDOW, VW**

A MEXICAN WOMAN WALKS DOWN A STREET IN MERIDA, MEXICO. THE HOUSES ARE MULTI-COLORED, IN VARYING STATES OF DISREPAIR. THE SIDEWALK IS CRUMBLING. AS SHE PASSES A VOLKSWAGEN BUG, CIRCA 1965, SHE SLOWS AND SMILES INTO THE SIDE WINDOW. SHE'S NOT SMILING AT ANYONE IN THE CAR. THE CAR IS EMPTY, BUT THE SIDE WINDOW MAKES AN EXCELLENT MIRROR.

I FEEL THE HEAVINESS OF MY BODY.

I LEARNED THE REFLECTIVE QUALITIES OF SIXTIES-ERA VW BUG SIDE WINDOWS IN MY EARLY TWENTIES, WHEN I DESTROYED MY BRAIN ON DRUGS, DROPPED OUT OF THE PRESTIGIOUS U AND SPENT MY DAYS WALKING THE STREETS OF OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA. I LEARNED THAT MANY, EVEN MOST, CARS' SIDE WINDOWS GIVE YOU BACK A BLURRED OR DISTORTED IMAGE, BUT THE IMAGES GIVEN BY SIXTIES-ERA VOLKSWAGEN BEETLES ARE TRUE.

MY BODY HAS TOO MUCH AGE, HAS SUFFERED TOO MUCH EXERTION.

LOOKING IN THE VW SIDE WINDOWS, YOU CAN ASSESS WHETHER YOU'RE STILL ALIVE, WHETHER YOU STILL HAVE SKIN ON YOUR BONES, WHETHER YOUR FACE HAS COLLAPSED OR IS RELATIVELY INTACT, WHETHER YOU ARE STILL FUCKABLE DESPITE YOUR MANY DISABILITIES AND LIMITATIONS. YOU CAN ASSESS EXACTLY HOW FAR YOU'VE FALLEN FROM THE MIDDLE CLASS POTENTIAL/PEDESTAL THAT WAS ONCE YOURS. BUT MOSTLY YOU CAN ASSESS IF YOU ARE STILL FUCKABLE.

MY BODY'S LABOR HAS BEEN EXPLOITED AND USED FOR OTHERS' PLEASURE. SOON I WON'T BE ABLE TO MOVE IT.

YOU STOLE GLANCES OF YOURSELF IN THOSE FLAT VOLKSWAGEN WINDOWS THAT WERE LIKE MIRRORS, AND THEN YOU LOOKED AT THE YOUNG BLACK WOMAN WHO WAS COMING YOUR WAY DOWN THE OAKLAND SIDEWALK, AND THEN THE ASIAN WOMAN, AND NEITHER OF THEM WOULD LOOK AT YOU, NEITHER WOULD RETURN YOUR FRANK GAZE, NEITHER WOULD ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR EXISTENCE. YOU KNEW THAT WOMEN WERE SCARED, WALKING IN DOWNTOWN OAKLAND, AND THEIR NOT LOOKING AT YOU DIDN'T NECESSARILY HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH YOU AND WASN'T A REFLECTION OF HOW BADLY YOU'D FUCKED YOURSELF UP.

VIVIAN REFUSES TO SEND ME A PHOTO OF HERSELF. I HAVEN'T SEEN HER FOR FORTY YEARS, AS LONG AS MOSES WANDERED IN THE DESERT.

AND HOW BADLY EXACTLY HAVE YOU FUCKED YOURSELF UP??? YOU STEAL A GLANCE IN A BIG STORE WINDOW AS YOU'RE WALKING BY, BUT YOU'VE FORGOTTEN THAT THOSE STORE WINDOWS GIVE DISTORTED IMAGES, SCARY FUNHOUSE IMAGES, SO YOU QUICKLY SEEK OUT A VOLKSWAGEN BEETLE PARKED AT THE CURB—THERE ARE A LOT OF THEM IN OAKLAND—YOU SEEK OUT YOUR IMAGE TO SEE JUST EXACTLY HOW FAR GONE YOU ARE, AND WHAT ARE THE CHANCES THAT YOU MIGHT GET INTO THE PANTS OF THIS SKANKY LOOKING WHITE GIRL COMING DOWN THE SIDEWALK, AND YES, SHE'S SKANKY BUT MAYBE SHE'S GOT A HALFWAY GOOD HEART, AND TOGETHER WITH YOUR HALFWAY GOOD HEART MAYBE TOGETHER YOU'VE GOT ONE GOOD HEART BETWEEN THE TWO OF YOU, AND ONE GOOD HEART BETWEEN THE TWO OF YOU, THAT'S ENOUGH GOOD HEART TO SUSTAIN YOU BOTH.

PERHAPS VIVIAN IS DOING ME A FAVOR. WE WANT THINGS THAT ARE NOT GOOD FOR US. SHE CLAIMS SHE IS MARRIED

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BY WARTS AND CARBUNCLES, BUT PERHAPS IT IS EVEN WORSE.

THIS SKANKY WHITE GIRL LOOKS LIKE THE KIND OF GIRL YOU CAN GET ALONG WITH, AND SHE CAN GET ALONG WITH YOU, AND YOU FIND YOUR IMAGE IN THE SIDE WINDOW OF A VOLKSWAGEN BEETLE, CIRCA 1965, AND YOU THINK: THERE'S A CHANCE, YES, THERE'S A CHANCE THAT I CAN STILL FUNCTION AS A HUMAN BEING IN THIS SELF-WORLD THAT I'VE FUCKED UP SO BADLY.

PERHAPS VIVIAN'S LA RAZA COSMIC HAS LOST ITS COSMICA, AND ALL A PHOTO WOULD SHOW WOULD BE A GRACELESS CHUNK OF MUD.

THERE WEREN'T SO MANY VARIETIES OF VOLKSWAGENS BACK IN THE SIXTIES. THERE WERE BEETLES AND GHIAS AND VANS, YES OF COURSE VANS, BUT NOT RABBITS OR JETTAS OR PASSATS. ANYWAY, THIS MEXICAN WOMAN WALKS DOWN THE SIDEWALK IN MERIDA, MEXICO. SHE'S A WOMAN NOT VERY PRETTY, BUT NOT UGLY, JUST A WOMAN WITH AN HONEST FACE, A MEXICAN FACE, A WOMAN WHO PROBABLY GOES TO WORK EVERY MORNING AND COMES HOME EVERY EVENING. HER JOB'S NOT SO SPECIAL, BUT NOT SO BAD, AND SHE DOESN'T WANT ANY MORE FROM LIFE THAN WHAT SHE HAS.

VIVIAN IS RIGHT. IT IS BETTER THAT SHE REMAIN INVISIBLE, THAT I NOT BE SUBJECTED TO REALITY BUT INSTEAD IMAGINE THAT SHE HAS AGED AS IN A TELEVISION COMMERCIAL FOR THE ASSOCIATION OF RETIRED PEOPLE, WHOSE MEMBERS SQUEEZE YEARS OUT OF A WATER COLOR TUBE AND PAINT A PRETTY PICTURE.

ANYWAY, I WATCH THIS MERIDA SENORA WALK DOWN THE STREET AND SHE DOESN'T NOTICE ME, AND THIS IS MANY, MANY YEARS AFTER I WAS LIVING THE DREGS LIFE IN OAKLAND, THE DIVE LIFE, AND I'M IN A LOT BETTER SHAPE NOW. DESPITE WHAT THEY SAY, BRAIN CELLS DO GROW BACK, MAYBE NOT AS MANY OR AS GOOD AS THE ONES YOU ONCE HAD, BUT FUNCTIONAL, NOT LIKE I'M EVER GOING TO BE A ROCKET SURGEON OR A BRAIN SCIENTIST. I WOULDN'T WANT TO SPEND THAT MUCH TIME IN SCHOOL ANYWAY. SO MANY HOURS IN CLASSROOMS WOULD GIVE ME THE HEEBIE-JEEBIES, AND I DOUBT I WOULD HAVE BEEN A SCIENTIST ANYWAY, EVEN BEFORE I FUCKED UP MY BRAIN ON DRUGS.

THE BOYS IN BASEBALL CAPS WOLF DOWN ICE CREAM, GRAB THEIR TEMPLES AND MOAN ABOUT HEADACHES.

BUT THIS MEXICAN WOMAN, AS SHE PASSES A VOLKSWAGEN BEETLE, CIRCA 1965, TURNS HER HEAD AND FLASHES A QUICK SMILE, NOT SO MUCH TO SEE IF HER SMILE IS AS DAZZLING AS SHE'D LIKE IT TO BE OR HOPES IT IS, BUT I GET THE IMPRESSION THAT IT IS ALMOST AS IF SHE IS CHECKING TO SEE IF HER TEETH ARE STILL THERE, WHICH STRIKES ME AS WEIRD. WHY WOULDN'T THEY STILL BE THERE?

THE BOYS TOSS REMNANTS OF CONE ONTO THE DULL GREEN LINOLEUM AND RUN OUT THE DOOR.

HER SMILE IN THE CAR'S SIDE GLASS REVEALS PROMINENT TEETH. THEY ARE LIKE THE TEETH OF A BURRO I HAVE RECENTLY SEEN AT THE NATIONAL WESTERN STOCK SHOW IN DENVER COLORADO, BEFORE I LEFT FOR MEXICO, AND I

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THINK IN MY HEAD WHETHER I HAVE THE SPANISH TO GO UP AND TELL HER THAT VOLKSWAGEN SIDE WINDOWS DON'T LIE. I KNOW FROM LONG AND ARDUOUS EXPERIENCE AND, YES, SHE HAS THE SEXIEST TEETH I'VE EVER SEEN.

THE BOYS ALMOST CRASH THE PLATE GLASS OF THE DOOR. THE BELL RINGS MADLY, WILDLY IN THEIR WAKE, LEAVING ME WITH A WHOLE LOT OF QUARTERS. I GET THE BROOM.



# FLOWERS AND BOOKS, SHE NEVER CALLED

THIS GUY GRUNTS IN  
HALLWAYS,  
HE'S A REAL MONSTER  
AMONG THE BEIGE  
WALLS THAT HAVE NO CHOICE  
BUT TO LOOK OUT AT  
ONE ANOTHER PERPETUALLY,  
EACH GLOB OF PAINT IS AN  
EYEBALL OF THE WORLD,  
IS THERE MANY  
OR ONLY ONE?

THE BUILDING IS  
LIKE A MOBIUS STRIP,  
LORDED OVER BY  
MEN IN TRIM DARK  
SUITS,

THEY FEED THE MONSTER  
IT BEGS FOR FOOD,  
BUT EATS TOO HUNGRILY,  
IT'S ALWAYS HUNGRY,

"THAT'S WHAT THEY SAY," SAID  
THAT'S WHAT THEY SAY, IT WAS  
WHAT THEY WERE SAYING  
DOWN BY THE WATER COOLER,  
THE MONSTER DOESN'T GO THERE  
THO THE WALLS DO,

THERE'S A BOOK ABOUT IT,  
BUT IT ISN'T PUBLISHED,  
IT WOULD RUIN THE AESTHETIC,  
SO EVERYONE AGREES  
AND THEY SCRAPPED IT,

"THAT'S WHAT THEY SAY," THERE'S  
ANOTHER BOOK THAT INCLUDES THE QUOTES  
THAT KNOW FOR SURE, SADLY THAT  
ONE IS ALL LIES, IT MIGHT EVEN  
BE A HOAX,

"THE WALLS KNOW," SHE SAYS,  
BUT SHE'S A CRAZY ONE,

THEY TOOK HER AWAY.

I DIDN'T EVEN CRY,  
MOSTLY BECAUSE I WASN'T ALLOWED  
OR CAN'T RECALL HOW TO BE SAD,

IT'S BETTER THAT WAY,

WE CAN AVOID THE MONSTER  
TOGETHER,

"HE WAS A MAN ONCE," THEY SAID.

I HEARD THAT.

SHE SAID, "THAT'S WHAT THEY SAY."

BUT THEY STILL TOOK HER AWAY.



# ADVENTURE

SUDDENLY THE TABLE APPEARS,  
*POOF*, FROM, YEAH, YEAH,  
NOWHERE,  
AND IMAGINE, PORCELAIN!  
AND, UPON IT, THIS BOWL  
OF STEAMING ETRUSCAN SOUP.  
NO SPOONS THOUGH.  
ARE WE EXPECTED TO SLURP?  
ONE MUST, WHEN STRANDED,  
ALWAYS PREDICT WHAT TO ANTICIPATE.  
IT'S OK,  
THEY'RE THINKING ABOUT US.  
AND WE'RE TOO RAVENOUS FOR MANNERS.

SHE SAYS, I WANT TO IMPRESS  
UPON YOU HOW *NOTHING* IT WAS . . .  
THE TIP OF A PENCIL POINT,  
SCINTILLANT PERHAPS, PERHAPS  
THE HUE OF PALE ROUGE.  
THE LOUSY PART IS THEY  
HAVE ROOTS,  
THE HAIRY BARBS  
THAT KILL YOU  
THE WORST.

I WRIGGLE MY FINGERS.  
ABRACADABRA. ABRACADABRA.  
NOTHING YET.  
ALWAYS THE QUESTION  
OF HOW LONG TO WAIT.  
UNLESS ETERNITY IS RELATIVE,  
LIKE TIME, SPACE AND WHAT'S THE OTHER ONE?  
ABRACADABRA.  
LOOK, IT'S HAPPENED!  
SHITTY LITTLE TWITCH  
ON THE HORIZON.  
SOMETHING  
TRYING TO MANIFEST ITSELF.

HERE'S A BOOK  
THAT TELLS US THERE IS NO TIME,  
IT'S AN ILLUSION,  
WE DON'T HAVE TO WORRY,  
WE CAN SPLIT FOR PAGO PAGO.  
SO STOP TAKING THOSE PILLS!  
LOOK, THE AUTHOR'S PICTURE  
IS DISAPPEARING  
FROM THE DUST JACKET.  
THEY CAN DO  
JUST ABOUT ANYTHING  
THESE DAYS  
WHAT WITH LASERS AND ALL.  
BACK WHERE I'M FROM  
THINGS WERE MORE SOLID.  
AND YOU GOT TO HANG AROUND  
FOR A WHILE.

WELL, IT'S WINTER AGAIN.  
SKELETAL TREES, CRYSTALS ON THE WINDSHIELDS,  
HEAVY COATS AND BOOTS . . .  
FUCK, I SAY, GIVE ME THE EQUATOR.  
SHE CATCHES A SNOWFLAKE ON HER TONGUE  
AND DARES ME TO CHASTISE  
DECEMBER AGAIN.  
CHICKEN SOUP AND RICE.  
IT'S A STATE OF MIND, SHE SAYS.  
YEAH, HONEY, ABNORMAL.  
THE UNIVERSE IS VERY COLD,  
SHE SNIFFS – TEARS? A VIRUS? –  
ONLY THREE DEGREES  
ABOVE ABSOLUTE ZERO;  
BUT, IMAGINE, WE'RE ALIVE!  
*WHEN WAS THAT, JEZEBEL?*

CONTINUED

# ADVENTURE

LITTLE TRINKETS EVERYWHERE  
FALLING FROM THE SKY.  
A TINY PLASTIC HOT DOG,  
LITTLE BOOKS OF PROVERBS,  
PAPER UMBRELLAS FROM JAPAN.  
HOW HAS MARDI GRAS  
CAUGHT ME SO OFF GUARD?  
I DEMAND A ZULU COCOANUT  
FROM THE KING OF REX,  
THAT MASKED, SEQUINED DUDE  
ASTRIDE A PALOMINO.  
ANOTHER PARADE, HE GROWLS.  
YOU SOME KIND OF FOREIGNER?  
DOESN'T MATTER,  
I'M ALREADY KNEE-DEEP IN BAUBLES.

EVERY NIGHT SHE DREAMS  
CHE GUEVARA WALKS ON WATER.  
I THINK DEMONS HAVE BESET HER.  
I THINK SHE NEEDS HER PILL  
WITH SOME CHICKEN SOUP AND RICE  
ON THE PORCELAIN TABLE  
THAT, POOF, APPEARED OUT OF NOWHERE.  
ABRACADABRA.



# I'M BANANAS

SOMETIMES I'M JUST ASKING FOR IT. DRIVING TOO FAST WITH OUT-OF-DATE TAGS AND A FAT BAG OF WEED IN MY PURSE. SLEEPING WITH A MARRIED MAN. INVITING THAT BEARDED GUY I WENT TO SCHOOL WITH TO MY HALLOWEEN PARTY AND DANCING AROUND IN MY NAUGHTY DEVIL CORSET AND FISHNETS. GOING TO THAT BONFIRE IN MY COWBOY BOOTS AND TIGHT JEANS AND TALKING TO THE GIRL WITH PHOENIX TATTOOS WHO SAID SHE'D HOLD ME IF I FELL. TELLING HIM THAT I DON'T WANT FEELINGS AND PRETENDING THAT IT'S TRUE. LET'S PRETEND, LET'S PRETEND. I PLEAD WITH THE HEART OF THE WIFE OF BATH THAT I'M SINCERE IN HEART AND VAGINA. MEN BECOME USED UP THINGS. EVEN THEIR BROTHERS. BUT IT DOESN'T STOP ME FROM BATTING MY EYES.

THESE LEAVES ARE RUSTLING AND I THINK OF YOUR FOOTSTEPS. ARE THEY CLOSE TOGETHER – FALL APART? ARE YOUR SOLE'S TREAD TOO DEEP ON ONE SIDE? RUNNING TO ME OR WALKING AWAY? I'LL COUNT ON THEM TO RUSTLE THESE LEAVES.

THERE ARE SOME PARTS THAT BLUR TOGETHER – LIKE YELLOW AND BLUE. THAT TIME I HUGGED YOU ON THE PORCH AND ACCUSED YOU OF HOWLING AT THE MOON. THOSE FOUR YEARS WE FLOATED ALONG AND I CUT MY SKIN WHILE YOU PRETENDED YOU NEVER KNEW. ALL THOSE TRIPS TO THE BATHROOM AFTER OUR MEALS MEANT YOU WASTED MONEY ON MY FOOD.

I'M FOREVER LONGING – FOREVER PLEADING. PLEASE, PLEASE LET HIM BE THE ONE. LET HER TEMPT ME WITH HER THIGHS. LET TONIGHT AND THEIR SPARKLING EYES NEVER END.

I LET THE HOT WATER RUN. IT BURNS AT FIRST BUT THEN YOU HAVE NEW SKIN AND OLD REGRETS – WASH AWAY THE OLD, GROW THE NEW. BUBBLES CLOUD MY VISION. I TURN THE COLD STEEL KNOB WITH MY TOES. SILKEN LEGS SOAK AND CONTEMPLATE THE TANTRIC PATHWAYS OF YOUR BODY. YOUR HANDS SEARCHING MINE, GROPING FOR A FINISH LINE. I'M LEFT WITH A TUB OF OLD SKIN.

I SIT ON THIS BENCH AND LITE A FAG YET ANOTHER COLD WEDNESDAY. I'M WAITING FOR YOU AND YOU AND YOU. BLOW OUT THE GHOSTS OF MY CARCINOGENS AND WISH I DIDN'T HAVE SO MANY SECRETS.

PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES ARE SO HUMILIATING. THEIR EDUCATORS SPOUT PRAISE AND REPRIMAND LIKE ZEUS WITH LOVING THUNDERBOLTS. PAT, POKE, PAT. BUT WHERE ARE THEY WHEN YOU'RE TWO WEEKS BEHIND IN RENT, FORGOT TO START THE LAUNDRY, CAN'T MEET YOUR SALES GOALS AT THE OFFICE, BEHIND IN YOUR OWN CLASSES, DEPENDING ON YOUR MOTHER TO MAKE FOOTBALL PRACTICE ON TIME,

CONTINUED

EXPLAINING TO THAT BILL COLLECTOR THAT YOU'LL BE FILING BANKRUPTCY SOON,  
DON'T UNDERSTAND THE "NEW" MATH, AND FORGOT TO KISS YOUR KID BEFORE BEDTIME?

I THOUGHT I'D HAVE TIME BUT I WON'T. I NEVER HAVE TIME. NEVER HAVE ENOUGH  
TIME. TO CALL YOU MINE AND SIT BY OUR FIRE – STIR THE CONVERSATION OF LOVE. STROKE  
THE EMBERS OF OUR FLAME. EPICS ARE LONGER, LOVE, AND I DON'T HAVE THE TIME. I DON'T  
FIT IN THOSE NICE, NEAT CEDAR DRAWERS OF TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE.

I'M GOING TO KEEP THIS PART FROM YOU. NOT GOING TO TELL YOU THAT THOSE MEN'S  
NAMES YOU GLANCED IN MY PHONE WERE IN FACT DALLIANCES I HADN'T ENDED. YOU  
WERE RIGHT TO WALK PAST MY HOSTA, SAYING YOU KNEW SOMETHING BAD WHEN  
YOU SAW IT. NOT GOING TO TELL YOU THAT MY PHOENIX GIRL GAVE ME CHLAMYDIA. I KNEW  
SOMETHING TASTED FUNNY.

HEY, I SAW AN EX-PROFESSOR ASLEEP IN HIS OFFICE WITH HIS SHAGGY BEARDED, SILVER AND  
BLACK, HEAD IN HIS HANDS. HE GAVE ME A "D" ON MY MID-TERM PAPER AND BORED  
ME WITH HIS DRONING, IMAGELESS LECTURES. HIS OWN DECISIONS OF LATE NIGHTS  
SEEMS TO HAVE FUCKED HIM, AS WELL.

I'M HUNGRY SO LET'S FILL-UP ON THIS MEDICINE. I'VE GOT AN EMPTY  
STOMACH BUT GOD KNOWS I DON'T NEED THE CALORIES. APPARENTLY  
GLUTTONY IS A DEADLY SIN.

THE SIGN READS, "RING BELL FOR SERVICE," BUT THERE IS NO  
BELL. HOW DO I TELL YOU THAT HER SINS EQUAL  
MY SINS AND NOW I NEED A CURE?

FELT A RAINDROP ON MY CHAPPED LIPS. WHO INVENTED THE  
WORD, "RAINDROP?" LIKE SOME ARCHAIC DISCOVERY OF WHAT  
HAPPENS WHEN IT RAINS.

DEFIBRILLATOR IS A NICE WORD. GOT ENOUGH SYLLABLES  
TO CHEW BUT I'M NOT SURE WHAT IT WANTS.

THIS GUY WITH ROSACEA KEEPS TEACHING ME ABOUT EDUCATIONAL LENSES  
AND STATISTICS ABOUT KIDS WITH DIABETES. WHAT DOES HE WANT ME TO DO  
WITH THIS INFORMATION, WRITE A PAPER ABOUT IT? SURE, THAT'LL CHANGE  
THE WORLD.

WE KEEP HEATING UP AND COOLING DOWN LIKE LAUNDRY IN THE DRYER  
I KEEP FORGETTING TO FOLD AND RE-FLUFF WITH HEAT MARKED IN INCREMENTS OF TIME.

I HOLD THE DOOR OPEN FOR YOU AND IT REMINDS ME OF THAT STORY I ONCE

CONTINUED

READ ABOUT SOME IMAGINARY MAN OF VALOR. HE FOUGHT A DRAGON OR DEVIL OR LIZARD AND EVERYONE LIKED HIM. HE GOT NO HAPPILY-EVER-AFTER AND HIS KINGDOM FELL. MUCH LIKE MINE. FUCK YOU FOR NOT SAYING, "THANK YOU."

ANSWERED HIS CALL ONE NIGHT AND THIS IS WHAT HE SANG: "HEY DARLIN', LET'S MAKE A SUICIDE PACT, EVEN THE KID, TOO. WE'LL JUST DRIFT AWAY INTO THE DEEP BLUES OF MY DREAMS AND LAND SOMEWHERE NEW. CONNER OBERST WILL BE THERE, EVEN COBAIN AND EVAN PETERS, TOO. WE'LL BE BEST GHOST FRIENDS AND KISS IN THE MOONLIGHT, EVERYTHING WILL BE ALRIGHT."

THIS NEXT PART IS EASY TO TELL. I KEEP DIGGING UP THE WEEDS FROM MY MULCH BED, SURPRISED BY EACH NEW LIFE, MY NAIL BEDS ARE ANGRY WITH DIRT BUT I CONTINUE TO CLAW. DIGGING UP YOU. DIGGING YOU AND YOU AND YOU UP. REMOVING WHAT'S UNNECESSARY – THE PLANK IN MY EYE. BUT THESE DAMN WEEDS JUST KEEP COMING BACK.

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I'M ON MY BATHROOM FLOOR AGAIN. ALWAYS END UP HERE. SITTING ON THE SINK COUNTER WITH MY FEET IN THE BOWL, COLD FAUCET IN THE WAY, CROONING ETTA JAMES. BAWLING IN THE FETAL POSITION ON THE PURPLE BURGUNDY TWISTED YARN FLOOR MAT OVER SOME GUY WHO DOESN'T SPEAK MY LANGUAGE. BALANCING ONE KNEE ACROSS THE OTHER AND ONE SMOKE BETWEEN TWO KNUCKLES ON THE BATHTUB LEDGE READING MY LATEST LITERARY CRUSH. SCRUBBING AND RINSING AND SHAVING AND PUMICING MY SHALLOW DEEDS DOWN THE SHOWER DRAIN. INDIAN-STYLE ON THAT RUG WITH LAPTOP AND BOOK IN REACH. SLICKING UP, SMOOTHING DOWN, BLOWING, TRADING PAINTS OVER NATURAL BEAUTY, PLUCKING AWAY, SMELLING LESS HUMAN. DECIDING WHAT TO TELL YOU IN THE MIRROR.

YOUR SLEEP WAS TUMULTUOUS. YOU GAVE IN RIGHT AWAY. A FEW SECONDS OF YOUR EYES CLOSED THEN HEAVY BREATHING AND THAT R.E.M. SONG PLAYED BEHIND YOUR EYELIDS. I PLAYED WITH YOUR BEARD AND ALLOWED MY FINGERS TO LOVE ITS CURLS. YOUR LEGS WENT HEAVY ON MINE. BABY, YOUR BODY WAS AT REST BUT YOUR MIND WAS NOT. MY SKIN WANDERED YOURS AND YOUR DREAMS WONDERED, TOO. MUSCLES TOLD ME THAT YOU WERE JUMPING BRIDGES OR ROCKS OR MOUNTAINS. I WAS IN EACH QUAKE. HOW DO I TELL YOU THAT IN ALL MY DREAMS I'M FALLING?

CONTINUED

HE'S THE KIND OF FELLOW THAT COUNTS TO FOUR ON HIS THIRD  
FINGER. OLD KNIT LINT BLACK BEANIE. HE HATES "THE MAN" AND  
THE WORD "CANCER." POETRY – HE DIGS IT.

I LEFT THAT DAMN BANANA IN THE CAR, MAN. THEN THERE WAS SNOW –  
LITTLE BIT OF SLEET. NOW MY BANANA IS CHOPPED UP AND FROZEN  
IN MY MULTI-GRAIN CHEERIOS. CLUMPS OF COLD TRAVELING MY GUTS.





# THE MOTEL ROBERT E. LEE

NO ONE MUCH REMEMBERS THE ROBERT E. LEE MOTEL  
ON THE WEST SIDE OF THE OLD LEE HIGHWAY,  
SPECTACULARLY STAMPED TO ITS TIME,  
A MIAMI OF PISTACHIO BLUE  
AND ROUNDED EDGES,

WHERE YOUNG SOLDIERS JUST RETURNED  
FROM POINTBLANK AND PAPA NEW GUINEA  
STOPPED TO EAT COL. SANDERS' CHICKEN (COOKED  
BY COL. SANDERS) AND SHTUP THEIR WIVES  
BEFORE THEY TOOK THEIR STUDEBAKERS

ON TO RUBY FALLS AND NEW ORLEANS.  
IT WAS A RESTLESS GENERATION, BUT WHOSE ISN'T?  
THE ONE-OFF MOTEL WAS A FAD, BUT DOES THAT MATTER?  
COL. SANDERS' FOOD MAY KILL US ALL, BUT  
IS THAT THE POINT? IS THAT HIS FAULT?

I SIMPLY NOTE THAT IT'S ENTIRELY POSSIBLE  
THAT COL. SANDERS SERVED HANK WILLIAMS, SR.  
A PLATE OF MASHED POTATOES AND MUSTARD GREENS  
(BOTH OF THEM WERE SPOTTED NEAR HERE IN NEAR TIMES),  
ALONGSIDE SOME ANCIENT DEPARTING SEAMSTRESS

WHO REMEMBERED THE MOTEL'S NAMESAKE VAGUELY,  
AS HE TOOK BASE UP IN HER TOWN WHEN SHE WAS LITTLE,  
AND MAYBE GAVE HER A LITTLE DOLL OR LITTLE TOKEN,  
AS EXPLANATION FOR THE UNEXPLAINABLE  
SOUNDS AND TRANSIENT DOINGS

OF THOSE WHO PASSED THROUGH TOWN  
AND UTTERLY CHANGED IT, THEN PACKED UP CAMP  
AND LEFT FOREVER THE STAMP OF DEFEAT; MOREOVER  
THAT SHE MOURNED THE GENERAL, AND KEPT HIS TOKENS,  
AND ATE THERE FOR THE PLACE'S STRANGE NOSTALGIA;

ALSO THAT I INHERITED ALL OF THIS.  
LIKE IT OR NOT, THAT RUSTED SIGN  
AND WHAT THAT RUSTED SIGN REPRESENTS  
IS MINE. I WAS BORN IN THE MOTEL ROBERT E. LEE.  
I DO NOT LIKE IT. I DO NOT WANT IT. BUT IT'S MINE.



# JESUS OF VIDALIA

CLARENCE JORDAN PREACHED THE WORDS OF JESUS CHRIST OF GEORGIA, MAKING JERUSALEM ATLANTA AND ST. MATTHEW AN AUDITOR WITH THE IRS. THEY USED TO HAND THOSE OUT FOR FREE, YOU KNOW, JORDAN ONCE SAID ABOUT A GOLD-TRIMMED CROSS THEY'D LAID ABOVE A CHURCHSPIRE, AND WHICH A PREACHER FRIEND OF HIS WAS PRAISING. DON WEST RODE HIS MOTORCYCLE AND WROTE PINKO POEMS FILLED WITH CORNBREAD AND KENTUCKY COALFIELD BORDERLANDS. IN FACT, HE WAS SO UNDERGROUND HE THOUGHT JOHNNY CASH'D SOLD OUT, AND ASKED HIS WIFE (OR SO I'VE READ) WHY THE HELL SHE WAS DOING HIS PORTRAIT. WILL D. CAMPBELL FAITHED AND THOUGHT BEFORE HE'D HEARD THERE WAS A CONTRADICTION, AND PREACHED FROM A BAPTIST PULPIT AND WROTE HIS BROTHER TO A DRAGONFLY. YOU'RE A HYPOCRITE AND AN OLD SONBITCH, HE TOLD THE SBC CHAIR BEFORE HIS BREAKFAST WITH JIMMY CARTER: PRAYER FIRST, THEN TOMATO BISCUITS. SE HAVE A FINE TRADITION OF HILLBILLIES WHO CAN'T KEEP THEIR MOUTHS SHUT, WHO REFUSE TO SMILE AT THEIR OWN COMPLICITY, OR RIDE THE TRAIN OF SUPREMACIES. BUT ASK A SOUTHERNER WHO WILL D. CAMPBELL IS, OR LET THEM THINK ABOUT A HILLBILLY COMMUNE, AND MORE THAN NOT THEY WON'T HAVE HEARD THE NAME, BEING SOMEBODY SOMEWHERE DON'T WANT THEM TO KNOW. IT'S FINE ENOUGH TO HAVE HILLBILLY POETS, PROGRESSIVE COEDS AND YANKEES PROTESTING, SO ELOQUENTLY, ABOUT HUMANITY AND EQUAL RIGHTS. BUT DAMN, IF THE GOOD OLD BOYS LOSE THE GOOD OLD BOYS, AND IF WORD GETS OUT THERE'S COUNTRY BOYS WITH SENSE – AND A FEW WHITE BOYS AT THAT, PISSED OFF AS WOODY GUTHRIE AND THINKING ABOUT SOMEBODY'S JOB BESIDES THEIR OWN, GEORGIA MIGHT COME IN TO PLAY, AND THE AUTHORITIES DON'T WANT THAT. SO THEY PREACH ABOUT THE NEW SOUTH, ABOUT FORGETTING HISTORY ALTOGETHER, PUBLICLY HAPPY WITH RACIAL PROGRESS, BUT CLANDESTINELY FOMENTING THE THOUGHT THAT IS IF ENGLISH WAS GOOD ENOUGH FOR JESUS, THEN IT'S GOOD ENOUGH FOR THE MEXICANS.



# HIGHWAY

JEREMY WOKE UP BEFORE DAWN. HE SWUNG HIS FEET OVER THE SIDE OF THE BED AND ADMIRING HIS ROOM. COMPLETELY EMPTY. IN THAT BRIEF MOMENT BETWEEN SLEEP AND CONSCIOUSNESS HE HAD FORGOTTEN WHAT HE DID THE DAY BEFORE. NOW HE REMEMBERED AND WAS OVERCOME WITH A WAVE OF SATISFACTION. HE PULLED ON HIS SHOES AND WALKED THROUGH AN EMPTY BEDROOM, INTO THE EMPTY LIVING ROOM, AND FROM THERE HE WALKED INTO AN ALMOST EMPTY KITCHEN.

THE KITCHEN WAS SOMEWHAT LESS SATISFYING. IT WAS A BATTLE THAT COULD NOT BE WON. JEREMY WAS ONLY ONE BOY AND THE STOVE, SINK, AND REFRIGERATOR WERE HEAVY. NOT ONLY THAT, THEY WERE PART OF THE HOUSE. VARIOUS PIPES AND WIRES ROOTED THEM TO HIS HOME'S BONES. JEREMY HAD BRIEFLY CONSIDERED BASHING THE DOORS OFF THE REFRIGERATOR WITH A SLEDGE HAMMER, BUT HE THOUGHT BETTER OF IT. AFTER ALL, HE NEEDED THE FOOD INSIDE EVEN IF HE DIDN'T ANYTHING ELSE. HE HAD TO BE REALISTIC ABOUT THIS. HE COULDN'T REALLY GET RID OF EVERYTHING, NO MATTER HOW MUCH HE WANTED TO.

WHEN JEREMY REACHED THE BACKDOOR HE WAS MET WITH A GRIM REMINDER OF HOW MUCH THERE WAS LEFT TO DO. HE COULDN'T OPEN THE DOOR, AND HE REMEMBERED IT WAS BECAUSE THE BACK PORCH WAS STILL PILED WITH FURNITURE. HE PUT HIS WEIGHT AGAINST THE DOOR AND WORKED HIS WAY OUTSIDE SIDEWAYS.

IT WASN'T TIME TO START YET. HE HAD A SYSTEM FOR THAT. CAREFULLY, HE WORKED HIS WAY OVER AND AROUND THE KITCHEN TABLE AND CHAIRS THAT WERE PILED UN CEREMONIOUSLY ON THE PORCH. IN THE MOONLIGHT IT WAS DIFFICULT TO AVOID THE NAILS AND SPRINGS STICKING OUT OF THE WOOD AND UPHOLSTERY THAT USED TO BE THE REST OF THE FURNITURE IN THE HOUSE. WHEN HE WAS FREE OF THE FURNITURE, HE WADED THROUGH THE PILES OF JUNK AND TRASH THAT HE HAD STREWN ACROSS THE YARD IN HIS HASTE THE DAY BEFORE.

IN THE MIDDLE OF ALL OF THE TORN UP BLANKETS, PIZZA BOXES, AND GLADWARE WAS AN 89' CADILLAC FLEETWOOD. IT HAD SET IN THE BACKYARD ON DEFLATED TIRES FOR AS LONG AS JEREMY COULD REMEMBER. JEREMY LIFTED THE HOOD TO FIND THE BATTERY CHARGER HE HAD FOUND IN THE SHED THE DAY BEFORE. IT WAS STILL CONNECTED TO THE TERMINALS. HE RAN THE CORD FROM THE CHARGER TO THE OUTLET ON THE SIDE OF THE HOUSE. THE BATTERY IN THE CADILLAC HAD GIVEN UP THE GHOST YEARS BEFORE BUT THE CAR COULD STILL RUN AS LONG AS IT WAS PLUGGED UP.

AFTER POURING SOME GAS FROM THE LAWNMOWER INTO THE GAS TANK JEREMY GOT INTO THE CAR. THE INTERIOR STILL HAD THAT SWEET, MUSTY SMELL THAT ALL OLD CARS HAVE. HE TURNED THE KEY THAT, AS FAR AS HE KNEW, HAD NEVER LEFT THE IGNITION. WITH A LITTLE EFFORT THE ENGINE ROLLED OVER AND ROARED TO LIFE. JEREMY FLIPPED ON THE HEADLIGHTS AND THE RESULTING ILLUMINATION CAUSED THE PILES OF TRASH AND CLOTHES IN THE YARD TO CAST MENACING SHADOWS ON THE TREES.

JEREMY SLAMMED THE DOOR SHUT AS HE GOT OUT OF THE CAR. HE WALKED AROUND TO THE FRONT OF THE CADILLAC'S MONSTER HOOD AND SAT DOWN INDIAN STYLE IN THE GRASS. HE STARED INTO THE HEADLIGHTS. THEY BLINDED HIM. THEY MADE HIS EYES HURT. BUT HE DIDN'T LOOK AWAY. AS LONG AS HE WAS STARING INTO THE HEADLIGHTS THE EDGES OF HIS VISION BLURRED AND HE COULDN'T SEE ALL THERE WAS LEFT TO DO. HE IMAGINED

CONTINUED

WHAT KIND OF SHADOW HE MUST BE CASTING ON THE WOODS BEHIND HIMSELF.

WHILE HE SAT LIKE THAT JEREMY PUT HIS THOUGHTS IN ORDER. FIRST, HE WOULD START A FIRE, MAYBE TWO, IN ONE OR TWO OF THE OLD METAL BARRELS OUT BACK. HE WOULD START BURNING WHILE HE CONTINUED BREAKING UP THE FURNITURE INTO SMALL ENOUGH PIECES THAT COULD ALSO BE BURNED. BY THE END OF THE DAY ALL OF THIS WOULD BE GONE. THERE WOULD BE MORE TO DO, SURE, BUT THIS WAS FIRST.

FOR AS LONG AS 14 YEAR OLD JEREMY COULD REMEMBER LORETTA HAD COLLECTED EVERY SINGLE KNICKKNACK AND BOBBLE THAT CAME HER WAY. WHEN SHE WASN'T SPENDING HER SOCIAL SECURITY CHECK AT THE THRIFT SHOPS AND CONSIGNMENT STORES IN TOWN, SHE HAD HER EYES GLUED TO HOME SHOPPING CHANNELS. SHE WROTE DOWN CATALOGUE NUMBERS RELIGIOUSLY AND EVEN CALLED IN ONCE AND GOT TO SPEAK ON AIR ABOUT HOW MUCH SHE LOVED SUSAN GRAVERS' CARDIGANS.

JEREMY HAD NO RECOLLECTION OF THE DAY THAT HE BECAME LORETTA'S FOSTER CHILD, BUT HE IMAGINED HE HAD COME TO THE HOUSE THE SAME WAY ANY OF IT HAD. HE WAS JUST ANOTHER ADDITION TO THE COLLECTION. HE WAS THROWN IN AMONGST THE CATS AND THE HUNDREDS OF POCKETBOOKS AND SHOES. NOW HE HAD RELEASED THE CATS, AND THE PURSES AND SHOES HAD A ONE WAY TICKET TO RIDE HIS BURNING BARREL TO HELL.

THE SUN WAS BEGINNING TO RISE, AND JEREMY WAS ROUSED BY THE HEADLIGHTS. THE AUTOMATIC SENSORS HAD BEEN BATHED IN ENOUGH LIGHT THAT THEY DECIDED TO TELL THE HEADLIGHTS TO TURN OFF. THIS FUNCTION ALWAYS IMPRESSED JEREMY, AND HE WAS AMAZED TO SEE IT HAPPEN EVEN THOUGH HE HAD SEEN IT BEFORE. HE GOT UP OFF THE GRASS AND TURNED THE CAR'S ENGINE OFF. HE LEFT THE ELECTRONICS ON. WHEN THE LIGHTS TURNED BACK ON IT WOULD BE TIME TO QUIT WORKING AND GET REST. THIS WAS THE WAY HE ORGANIZED HIS LIFE NOW.

FOLLOWING HIS PLAN, JEREMY WENT OVER TO THE METAL BARRELS THAT WERE STANDING BY THE SHED. THEY WERE OLD AND RUSTY, THE BLUE PAINT WAS PEELING OFF THEM, BUT THEY WOULD DO NICELY FOR HIS PLANS. FIRST, THOUGH, HE HAD TO PRY OFF THE METAL LIDS THEY WERE TIGHTLY SEALED WITH. IN THE SHED HE FOUND A SHOVEL THAT WOULD DO THE JOB NICELY. ALL HE HAD TO DO WAS JAM THE SHOVEL BETWEEN THE LID AND THE BARREL, RIGHT?

AS IT TURNED OUT, THE LIDS WERE TIGHTER THAN JEREMY ANTICIPATED. HE JAMMED THE METAL TIP OF THE SHOVEL INTO THE LIP OF THE BARREL SEVERAL TIMES WITH ALL HIS STRENGTH, BUT IT WOULDN'T BUDGE. FINALLY, FED UP, HE BACKED UP SEVERAL YARDS AND RAN AT THE BARREL. HE HELD THE SHOVEL ABOVE HIS SHOULDER IN BOTH HANDS LIKE A SPEAR AND COULDN'T RESIST A PRIMAL SCREAM AS HE CHARGED. THE POINT OF THE SHOVEL'S BLADE STUCK DIRECTLY BETWEEN THE LID AND THE BARREL'S LIP. JEREMY LIFTED OFF THE GROUND LIKE A POLE-VAULTER, AND HE AND THE BARREL BOTH TUMBLED FORWARD.

THE LID HAD SNAPPED OFF WITH A CLANG AND ROLLED AWAY. JEREMY WAS LAYING IN SOMETHING GRITTY, AND BEFORE HE COULD REGAIN HIS SENSES HE WAS ASSAULTED BY A SMELL THAT MADE HIM WRETCH. HE SAT UP ON HIS HANDS AND WAS STRUCK BY A GRIM REALITY. "IT'S SHIT!" HE SCREAMED IN HIS HEAD.

CONTINUED

JEREMY WASN'T WRONG. THE BARREL WAS FULL OF OLD, USED CAT LITTER.

“SHE'S BEEN SAVING THEIR SHIT!”

LORETTA'S CATS WERE THE BANE OF JEREMY'S EXISTENCE. THAT'S WHY HE LET THEM GO THE PREVIOUS MORNING. HE COULDN'T HELP BUT NOTICE WHEN HE PROPPED OPEN ALL THE DOORS OF THE HOUSE THAT THEY, TOO, WERE EAGER TO BE FREE. IT DIDN'T TAKE THEM LONG AT ALL TO DISPERSE INTO THE WOODS. HE HADN'T SEEN A SINGLE ONE COME BACK ANYWHERE NEAR THE HOUSE.

JEREMY JUMPED TO HIS FEET AND FRANTICALLY BRUSHED HIMSELF OFF. HE USED THE HOSE TO SPRAY OFF HIS LEGS AND ARMS, THEN HE USED THE SHOVEL TO PUT THE LITTER AND EXCREMENT BACK INTO THE BARREL. HE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO ABOUT THIS NEW PROBLEM. HE HAD NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THE HALF-DOZEN OTHER BARRELS WEREN'T FULL OF THE SAME. THE SMELL WAS KILLING HIM. HE IMAGINED IT MUST BE WHAT DEATH HIMSELF SMELLED LIKE.

FINALLY, HE MADE A DECISION. HE PUT THE LID BACK ON THE CURRENT BARREL AND ROLLED IT DOWN INTO THE HOLLOW BEHIND THE HOUSE WITH ONE OTHER. HOPEFULLY, DUMPING THE CAT CRAP OUT FAR AWAY WOULD KEEP THE SMELL FROM COMING BACK TO THE HOUSE. AT THE BOTTOM OF THE HOLLOW WAS A CREEK, WHICH JEREMY ROLLED THE BARRELS INTO, ONE AT A TIME. HE STRADDLED THE FIRST BARREL, RAISED THE SHOVEL ABOVE HIS HEAD LIKE A REVERSE KING ARTHUR PUTTING THE SWORD BACK INTO THE STONE. HE BROUGHT IT DOWN SO HARD THAT THE METALLIC NOISE REVERBERATED FOR MILES AND SPARKS SHOT OUT BETWEEN HIS THIGHS.

THE BARREL VOMITED ITS CONTENTS INTO THE RIVER. AS JEREMY WATCHED THEM WASH AWAY HE STILL COULDN'T BELIEVE THAT LORETTA HAD HOARDED CAT CRAP. HE HAD ALWAYS WANTED A DOG FOR THIS VERY REASON. SOMETHING ABOUT HAVING A BOX OF CAT SHIT SOMEWHERE IN THE HOUSE BOTHERED HIM, ESPECIALLY IN A HOUSE WHERE YOU MAY LOSE IT FOREVER.

LORETTA HAD LET HIM HAVE A DOG ONCE. A BLACK AND WHITE MUTT THEY FOUND ON THE SIDE OF THE ROAD. HE NAMED IT JEZZA. HIS TIME WITH JEZZA WAS BRIEF THOUGH. HE HADN'T HAD HIM LONG BEFORE LORETTA'S NEAREST NEIGHBOR STARTED THROWING AROUND ACCUSATIONS THAT JEZZA WAS GETTING INTO HIS COW FIELD AND SPOOKING HIS CATTLE. FARMER HYATT WAS AN OLD BASTARD OF A MAN AND ONE DAY HE ROAD BY ON HIS TRACTOR AND THREW A PIECE OF ANTIFREEZE LACED MEAT INTO LORETTA'S YARD. THAT WAS THE END OF JEZZA AND COINCIDENTALLY FARMER HYATT. WHEN AN ELDERLY COUPLE DOWN THE ROAD CALLED THE TOWN POLICE TO COMPLAIN ABOUT HIM CRUISING THE HIGHWAY ON HIS TRACTOR, THE POLICE RAN HIM DOWN ONLY TO DISCOVER THAT HE HAD HAD A HEART ATTACK AND DIED. HE HAD CONTINUED TRAVELLING DOWN THE ROAD ON HIS TRACTOR THOUGH. A CORPSE DISTURBING THE PEACE.

JEREMY USED THE SHOVEL TO SCRAPE OUT THE REMAINING CONTENTS OF THE BARREL AND THEN DID THE SAME WITH THE OTHER. THANKFULLY, THEY WERE EASY TO ROLL UP THE HILL NOW THAT THEY WERE EMPTY. JEREMY HAD LOST VALUABLE TIME WITH THIS UNFORESEEN SETBACK. ONCE HE HAD THE BARRELS SET UP ON SOME CINDER BLOCKS HE QUICKLY FILLED THEM WITH EVERYTHING HE COULD LAY HIS HANDS ON. PIECES OF WOOD, UPHOLSTERY, SHOES,

CONTINUED

TRASH, AND CARDIGANS ALL WENT INTO THE LIGHTER FLUID FIRE. THICK BLACK SMOKE BELCHED INTO THE SKY WHILE JEREMY TOOK A HATCHET TO THE KITCHEN FURNITURE AND BROKE IT INTO PIECES SMALL ENOUGH FOR THE FIRE.

JEREMY WORKED LIKE THIS FOR THE REST OF THE DAY: BREAKING, AND BURNING, AND EMPTYING BARRELS OF ASH INTO THE CREEK. IT FELT SO SATISFYING TO SEE THE ASHES WASH AWAY, OUT OF HIS LIFE, OUT OF THIS WORLD FOR ALL HE KNEW, OFF TO WHEREVER THE CAT SHIT HAD GONE. HE LIKED TO THINK IT NO LONGER EXISTED, LIKE HE WAS DOING HIS PART IN MAKING THE WORLD WEIGH A LITTLE LESS.

THE FEELING MOTIVATED HIM TO ERASE JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING FROM THE HOUSE FROM EXISTENCE. EVEN WHEN HE CAME ACROSS JEZZA'S OLD COLLAR HE ONLY HESITATED FOR A MOMENT BEFORE THROWING IT INTO THE FLAMES, NAMETAG STILL ATTACHED.

AS HE CAME BACK FROM THE CREEK WITH AN EMPTY BARREL HE WAS DEBATING ON WHETHER OR NOT HE SHOULD DO THE SAME TO HIS BED. AS HE CRESTED THE HILL HE NOTICED THE HEADLIGHTS OF THE CADILLAC FLICKER BACK ON. IT WAS TIME TO TAKE A BREAK. ALL AT ONCE HIS BODY FELT SORE, AND HE WAS GLAD THE DAY WAS DONE.

AFTER HE TURNED OFF THE CADILLAC HE WENT INTO THE HOUSE TO SHOWER, EAT A TV DINNER OUT OF THE FRIDGE, AND GO TO BED. HE SLEPT WELL IN HIS COMPLETELY EMPTY HOUSE. EVERY TIME HE COUGHED OR BREATHED HE COULD HEAR IT, FEEL IT, ECHO OFF THE WALLS. NOISES REVERBERATED LIKE A SPRING AND IT COMFORTED HIM.

HE AWOKE IN HIS ROOM THE NEXT DAY NOT AS SURPRISED AS HE WAS BEFORE. IN FACT, IT WAS GETTING HARDER TO REMEMBER WHAT THE ROOM LOOKED LIKE WHEN IT WAS FILLED UP TO HIS NECK WITH OLD FURNITURE, EXERCISE EQUIPMENT, AND NEWSPAPERS.

JEREMY WALKED THROUGH THE EMPTY LIVING AND THE ALMOST EMPTY KITCHEN. THE BACKDOOR SWUNG OPEN FREELY. HE PLUGGED UP THE CADILLAC AND TURNED THE LIGHTS ON. HE SAT DOWN IN THE BEAMS AND STARED FORWARD WHILE PLANNING HIS DAY. TODAY WOULD BE HARDEST OF ALL. HE HADN'T YET EVEN OPENED THE DOOR TO LORETTA'S ROOM. IT WOULD BE FULL OF MORE JUNK THAN ANY OF THE OTHER ROOMS, AND HER BED SURELY NEEDED TO GO. JEREMY DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO CUT A MATTRESS UP INTO SMALL ENOUGH PIECES TO BURN.

FINALLY, THERE WAS THE PROBLEM OF LORETTA HERSELF. HER LIFELESS BODY WAS STILL TRAPPED UNDERNEATH THE PILE OF GLADWARE BOXES FULL OF COOK BOOKS THAT HAD FALLEN ON HER A COUPLE OF DAYS BEFORE. JEREMY WAS PRETTY CERTAIN SHE WOULD BURN, BUT THERE WAS NO WAY HER WHOLE BODY WAS GOING TO FIT INTO TWO BARRELS. HOW MUCH OF A MESS WAS THAT GOING TO BE? WHAT KIND OF TOOLS WOULD HE NEED?

JEREMY WAS STILL TRYING TO SOLVE HIS PROBLEM WHEN THE HEADLIGHTS OF THE CADILLAC FLICKERED AND DIED.





THE

AIRWORK

**TO DEMONSTRATE THE GAS LEAK,  
SHE WALKS OVER TO HER FAUCET  
AND LIGHTS A MATCH. A FLAME  
SHOOTS OUT LIKE A BLOWTORCH.**







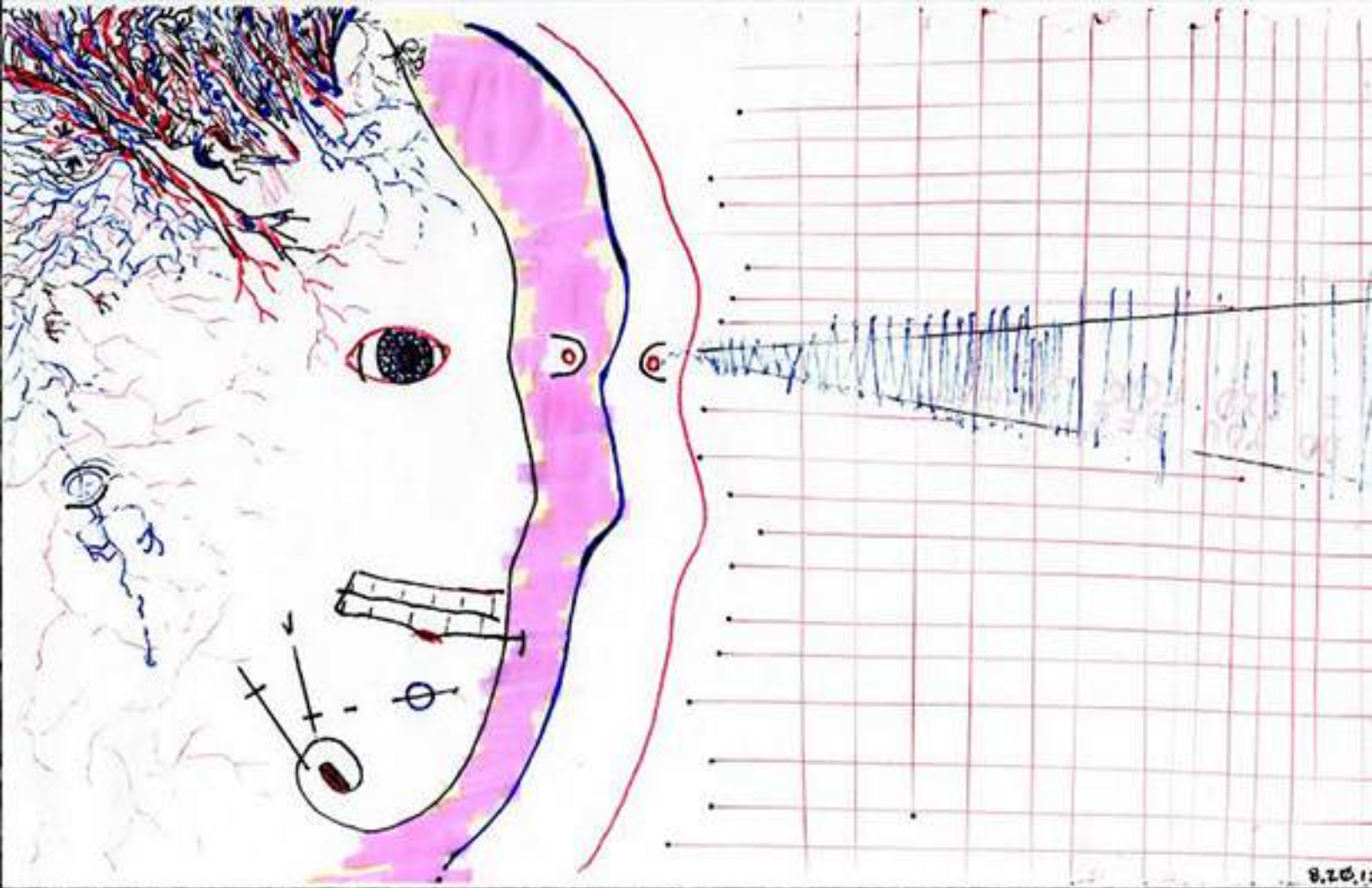
# DESIDERATUM

PREVIOUS PAGE:

**SOMA**

CONTINUED





# BORED AT WORK RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

PREVIOUS PAGE:

THE CONTRARIAN  
WILLIAM BLAKE

D.S. WEST



**SKULL**

**TIMOTHY HARE**





*Handwritten signature*  
2011





# SKELLY KITTY

PREVIOUS PAGES: **BLUE BIRD.**

**LINES, LADY AND THE MOON**

**HANNAH  
CALLAHAN**



JOHN GREY IS AN AUSTRALIAN POET, US RESIDENT. AN ARDENT FAN OF BLACK AND WHITE MOVIES, EARLY EDITIONS OF MAD MAGAZINE (WHICH HE COLLECTS) AND COFFEE TABLE ART BOOKS. RECENTLY PUBLISHED IN WILLOW REVIEW, PLAINSONGS AND MUSE.

ANNE BRITTING OLESON HAS NOT BEEN PUBLISHED IN ANTARCTICA. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT ANY OF HER BOOKS--THE CHURCH OF ST. MATERIANA (2007), THE BEAUTY OF IT (2010), PLANES AND TRAINS AND AUTOMOBILES OR THE BOOK OF THE MANDOLIN PLAYER (BOTH 2015) HAVE EVER BEEN READ THERE, EITHER.

MELISSA DAVIS IS A WRITER AND TEACHER. SHE LIKES TO EXPLORE THE FACETS OF LIFE THROUGH POETRY, FICTION, AND CREATIVE NONFICTION. MELISSA CURRENTLY LIVES IN MIAMI, FLORIDA, WITH A TOOTHLESS MALTESE DOG. SHE CAN BE FOUND ONLINE AT [HTTP://WWW.MELISSADAVISAUTHOR.COM/](http://www.melissadavisauthor.com/).

DEPT OF TRANSPORTATION

STEVE CARTER IS A WRITER AND JAZZ GUITARIST. HE TAUGHT MUSIC AND ENGLISH AT BERKLEE COLLEGE OF MUSIC. HIS FIRST BOOK OF POEMS, INTERMODULATIONS, WAS RECENTLY PUBLISHED BY MAST PUBLISHING ( [WWW.MAATPUBLISHING.NET](http://WWW.MAATPUBLISHING.NET) ). HIS POETRY HAS APPEARED IN MANY MAGAZINES, INCLUDING HANGING LOOSE, CAROLINA REVIEW, STAND, AND CLACKAMAS LITERARY REVIEW.

MITCHELL KROCKMALNIK GRABOIS HAS HAD OVER EIGHT HUNDRED OF HIS POEMS AND FICTIONS APPEAR IN LITERARY MAGAZINES IN THE U.S. AND ABROAD. HIS NOVEL, TWO-HEADED DOG, BASED ON HIS WORK AS A CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST IN A STATE HOSPITAL, IS AVAILABLE FOR KINDLE AND NOOK, OR AS A PRINT EDITION. HE LIVES IN DENVER.

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TOM PESCATORE MAINTAINS A POETRY BLOG: [AMAGICALMISTAKE.BLOGSPOT.COM](http://AMAGICALMISTAKE.BLOGSPOT.COM). HIS WORK HAS BEEN PUBLISHED IN LITERARY MAGAZINES BOTH NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY BUT HE'D BE JUST AS HAPPY HAVING THEM CARVED ON THE WALT WHITMAN BRIDGE OR ON THE SIDEWALKS OF PHILADELPHIA'S OLD SKID ROW.

LOUIS GALLO WAS BORN AND RAISED IN NEW ORLEANS AND NOW LIVES IN VIRGINIA WHERE HE TEACHES AT RADFORD UNIVERSITY. HE HAS PUBLISHED WIDELY IN POETRY AND FICTION.

RENEA GRAY WAS BORN AND RAISED IN THE MOUNTAINS OF APPALACHIA WHERE SHE CURRENTLY LIVES WITH HER SON. ARTISTIC, TREE-KISSER, GYPSY SOUL, FEMININE, TRUE...OH YEAH, AND SHE'S BANANAS.

SP-32E

DEPT OF TRANSPORTATION

FREDRICK BRINDLE GREW UP IN FRIES, A SMALL TOWN IN SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA. SMALL TOWN LIFE'S POTENTIAL FOR DARK HUMOR AND WHIMSY INFLUENCES HIS FICTION. HERETOFORE, HIS WORK HAS ONLY BEEN PUBLISHED IN , "EXIT 109."

D.S. WEST IS A WRITER, ARTIST, AND IMAGINARY SNAKE CHARMER FROM BOULDER, CO. A LIST OF HIS PUBLISHED WORK CAN BE FOUND AT [HTTPS://ICEXV.WORDPRESS.COM/](https://icexv.wordpress.com/)

TIMOTHY HARE IS A DUDE, WHO ATE SOME FUNGI ONCE AND STARTED DRAWING A BUNCH. HE MAINTAINS AN INSTAGRAM @MOE\_THUGGISH

APART FROM FAMILIAL INFLUENCES, HANNAH CALLAHAN IS SELF-TAUGHT. HER PREFERRED MEDIUM IS PRISMA COLOR AND COPIC MARKERS. SOMETIMES SHE STARES AT ANIMATE OBJECTS, BUT MOST OF THOSE HAVE FACES, AND THEY STARE BACK.

DEPT OF TRANSPORTATION