



[Alternate Route]

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Editor: Michael Starr

Cover art: Arden Hunter

Contributors: Afra Ahmad (AA), Arden Hunter (AH), Bernard Pearson (BJRP), Beth Mulcahy (BM), Charlie Bowden (CB), David Brady (DB), Devika Mathur (DM), Havard Cassandra (HC), Jade Gaynor (JG), Jody Rae (JR), Laszlo Aranyi (LA), Michael Igoe (MI), M Patrick Rigglin (MPR), Mike Hickman (MH), Sam Szanto (SOS), Sarah Robin (SR), Scott Cumming (SC), Shiksha Dheda (SD)

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Metamorphosis

"I'm not going!" I throw my arms into the air with frustration. My dad pokes his head around the door to see what's going on. Seeing that the coast is clear and there aren't any objects flying across the room, he enters my bedroom and stands behind me looking at my reflection in the mirror. I stare at his large hairy hands placed on my shoulders. "Deep breath, son." He picks up my tie, untangles it and drapes it around my neck, tying it into a perfect knot.

"What if he sees the chair and changes his mind?" I scowl, my head cloudy with negative thoughts. "Then he's obviously not the one for you." My dad had a hard time accepting my sexuality, but he took it far better than knowing I'll be stuck in this chair for the rest of my life. So what if I date other guys? I can't swim, I can't play football, I can't go motorcycle racing with him. I can't do all the things with him that we loved doing together as father and son. Being gay is trivial compared to the loss of my 'old life'.

In the car, I sit staring out the window, my stomach turning over with nerves, my dad humming 'Streets of London' as we make our way to the restaurant. Once I'm in my chair and ready to go, he pauses for a moment and his eyes go a little red. "Hey, son." He looks me up and down. "You look great." He sniffs, smiles and then leans forward and nudges me on the arm. "I'm proud of you, son. Now you go and have a good night."

I tell him I love him and start to roll away as panic starts to set in. What if there are steps? What if the table is the wrong height for my chair? What will he think of me? Will he be annoyed I didn't tell him I use a chair? Thoughts race through my head as I approach the entrance to the restaurant. "Great, no steps. Good start." I reassure myself silently. I arrive at the doors and just as I go to reach the door handle, a middle-aged guy and his wife spot me and they hold the doors open for me. "Cheers!" I thank them. "So far so good." I begin to ease a little.

A young waitress strides over in her white blouse and black apron. "Reservation?" she squeaks. I confirm my name. "Great, your party has already arrived. Just this way, please." Oh god, he's already here! I don't have any time to settle in and make sure everything is ok. I follow the waitress past many tables,

conscious of the odd person looking up from their tables to look over at me, especially children who gawp at me until I'm out of sight.

We turn into a quieter area with a log fire and an impressive chimney breast. "There we are. Can I get you some drinks?" The waitress' voice sounds muffled in my overwhelmed reaction to meeting Ryan for the first time after speaking online for a little over six months.

"Same again for me, please." His voice is lower than I thought it would be. "I'll have what he's having." I stammer. He smiles warmly at me, the orange glow from the log fire flickers onto his face. "Great, I'll move this chair over." I thank her and park myself into the spot. I stay silent for a moment, unsure as to what to say. I decide to let him speak first.

"Well, isn't this a surprise." He grins, looking at the chair. I immediately spill out apologies and try to explain the many reasons why I didn't mention anything about the chair beforehand. Before I could go any further, he raises his hand and I instantly stop my spiel. He calmly leans over to one side and points towards a wheelchair folded up behind him. "Me too!" He laughs. I sit open-mouthed and we both giggle uncontrollably. "No way! What are the chances?" We echo each other. This perfect ice breaker relaxes me and the twisting sensation in my stomach eases. Our drinks arrive and we order our food; our starters and mains identical with a dessert to share.

"How long have you used a chair?" I ask. "Parachuting accident four years ago. I did a jump for charity and the parachute got tangled and we had a pretty hard landing." He explained. "What about you?" I tell him about the car accident; about how mum had died and dad blamed himself, even though it wasn't his fault. "I'm sorry" he frowned.

"This is my first time out in public on my own since getting the chair, so I was pretty nervous about not having someone with me in case I got stuck. But then again I didn't fancy my dad joining us!" I joke. Ryan explains he had a few guys stop talking to him online after he told them he uses a chair so he figured just to get to know someone well enough to meet up and take it from there.

We speak a little about the emotional and psychological effects of using a chair and it comforted me to know he is fully

independent, lives on his own, has a great job and plays a lot of sports. "You're welcome to come along on Tuesday night and meet the team. Bring your dad along, too. It can be something you can do together," he said enthusiastically. "How could he play?" I ask, confused. "He would need to use a spare chair from the sports hall," he explained. I didn't know if wheelchair basketball would be his thing, but it was worth mentioning, I suppose.

We finish our dessert, argue over who pays for the bill and get ready to leave. I watch him get into his chair quickly with ease. Once outside, we say goodnight and say we'll talk later. I roll around the corner to the car park, a contented smile on my face. I enter the carpark to find, to my surprise, my dad's car already waiting for me. I knock on the driver's side window and wake up my snoring, drooling dad. After some disorientation he rolls down the window.

"How long have you been here?" I laughed. "I never left. Just in case, you know, you needed me or things didn't work out," he admitted. "You silly sod!" I go round to the passenger side and heave myself into the car with his help. He pushes the door shut and hauls my chair into the boot when I feel my phone vibrate;

RYAN

It was great meeting you tonight. See you Tuesday for Basketball :) I'll msg you later to sort out our next date, my treat this time xx

"I take it it went well then, yeah?" he asked, spotting the smile on my face. "I'm taking you out on Tuesday, Dad. Bring your gym shorts."

Thrive

A nation of back-garden farmers
Sowing, tending, nibbling
Our way through lockdown.
A positive lifeline
And escape outdoors.

We reach peak harvest,
Savour what we've grown,
Bottle up that goodness
With all the energy and love.
We owe it to ourselves
Not to waste a bit.

An old skill or a new discovery,
A positive force of good
Nurturing and feeding us
In so many ways,
Bringing together generations,
Communities and cultures.

Nature belongs to us all
And in the times of change ahead
We can all thrive through gardening.

Diadalszekér (Chariot)
(Tarot, Nagy Arkánum VII.)

Az illeszkedés kísérlete elárul.
 Kiközösít a nyáj. A különb kérge küszöb,
 s a kint-bent ugyanúgy sehol. Tűnő káprázat,
 ha élődi fény sziszeg kígyó-fürtökön;
 küllőtől megfosztott kerék az Örök

Körforgás.

Féllábú, pingvin-képű cukros bácsi bámul a kapualjból,
 tökhéj-bárcák úsznak
 a lemeztelenített, reszkető víz testén.)

Minden állítás igaz. S ugyanúgy az ellentéte is.
 Bűnös, aki összehasonlít, megkülönböztet;
 kápó a fogyasztói társadalom átnevelő táborában...

Nem ural már érdek, düh, szájalom,
 átmeneti formák az élők, a lét
 szüntelen vágta hullá-halmokon.
 A rőfögve négykézlábra ereszkedők
 kényszerítik harcra
 a felegyenesedőt.

Chariot
(Tarot, Major Arcana VII.)

The attempt to fit in betrays you.
 The flock excludes you. The better one's bark is the threshold,
 in or out is the same as nowhere. Transient delusion,

if parasite light hisses on snake clusters.
 Eternal Cycle is a wheel deprived of its

spokes.

A one-legged, penguin faced candy man's staring
 from the doorway,
 pumpkin barges swim
 on the bare body of the quivering water.

All statements are true. And so are their opposites.

*The sinner is who compares, distinguishes,
 he's the capo in the reeducation camps of consumer society...*

Interest, anger, and pity aren't dominating me anymore,
 these are the temporary forms of living,
 a relentless galloping on the piles of corpses.
 Those grunting on all fours
 force
 the one who stands up straight
 to fight.

(Translated by Gabor Gyukics)

Homunculus

Csenevész, szőrös újszülöttet főz...

- Mi a lófaszt csinál komámasszony?

„Kifőzzük a kilenc ördögöt belőle.”

Kilenc koravén, kacsalábú gnóm,

istenkísértő praktikák

szülöttei. Ez a kölyök mumifikáltan is

(pergamen-tapintású, hámló, aszalmány-bőrű) a jászol szégyene.

Kóborló szarvasok ákása-képét

űzik, hajszojják agyafúrt

lőcslábú kopói. Kilenc lépésnyire a folyó, kilenc Hold ül a

mozdulatlan víz fölött.

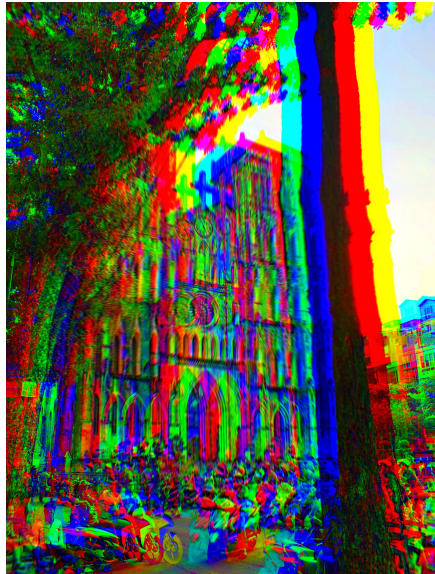
A teremtő Uzsorás hétrét

görnyedve ural valós és vélt

világot. Cinkelt lapot oszt,

s őrzik termékeny irkafirkák

a kilenc kristályszerkezetű Gonoszt.



Believe

Homunculus

Cooking a scrawny, hairy
newborn...

- What the fuck are you doing, cummer?

"We'll boil the nine devils out of him."
Nine precocious, duck-legged gnomes,
born by God-tempting practices of
witchcraft.

This brat is not even mummified.
(parchment-coated, peeling, scaly-skinned) he is
a disgrace to the crib.

His shrewd, bow-legged hounds chase
and hunt the stray deers' akasha image.
Nine paces from the river, nine moons sit
above the motionless water.

Usurer, the sevenfold crouching creator rules
the real and the imagined
world.

He deals zinc-clad cards
while fertile scribbles guard
the nine crystal-structured Villains.

(Translated by Gabor Gyukics)

Cat Hair

One roommate heard somewhere that the most effective way to
 achieve dreadlocks
 over a short period of time
 was to use egg whites and aerosol hair products.
 I sat at my vanity and let four fellow white college girls twist
 and shred my dirty blond hair into tiny matted ropes using their
 bare hands and a rattail comb.
 They sealed the locs with egg whites and extra-hold hair spray
 and, fearing their sculpture
 might be water-soluble, told me not to wash my hair.
 The dreads lasted three weeks until I could no longer abide
 the colony of raw egg pathogens likely terraforming all over
 my head and pillowcase;
 a live culture, appropriating.
 J-Lo was delivering her SNL opening monologue, wearing her
 famous backwards dress, when
 I sat in front of the hallway mirror and full-sober sawed off my
 locs two inches from my scalp with a pair of orange-handled
 Fiskars. As the scissors released each ropy twist, I felt bubbly,
 tipsy;
 light as green Versace silk chiffon in a wind machine.
 I left my hair in a pile on the hallway carpet to spook my
 roommates when they came home from the parties. That's the
 kind of person I am.
 Two roommates stumbled in and saw the locs on the floor. A
 lone dread snaked out from the pile. The drunk roommate
 kneeled and snuggled into the pile.
 "It's our cat. Pet the cat."
 We didn't have a cat.

Empty Calories

Our Santa Cruz Street duplex is lit up when Paloma parks. I clutch Jeremy's pillow from his Berkeley sublet and stagger out of Paloma's backseat, exhausted, hungry, ready for bed. Siobhan is passed out on a porch chair. Some guy with black hair and sideburns kneels before her, cradling her head and stroking her alabaster face. "She didn't eat enough."

Our house is full of Abercrombie & Fitch associates from Siobhan's closing shift, plus their friends. Three hot as fuck A&F'ers raid the fridge, shattering a pickle jar on the linoleum. Three strangers spread their legs on the couch, holding beers while watching "Waking Life" on mute. An Incubus song blares from the stereo. I hear Paloma down the hall yelling at some kid we'll soon find out has an extensive criminal record. "Why are you in Siobhan's room? Did you take something?"

A group of guys stare at the Abercrombie photo mural on our living room wall, a retired store display Siobhan took home last season, showing a shirtless man getting out of a pool in black and white. The guys on the couch thumb an Abercrombie catalogue, pausing over all the T&A spread across the pages.

Julie sits inside the refrigerator door, feeding slices of Paloma's lunch meat to Hey Mister as he lounges with his head in her lap, his silver tags glinting under the refrigerator light. Julie laughs and takes a swig from a vodka bottle, probably her only meal that day. We named the neighbor's wandering puppy after that awful song by Custom that made me cry the first time I heard it. We really are just lumps of flesh to some boys, aren't we?

Paloma grabs my arm. "Someone just drove away in Siobhan's truck and backed over the fence." I hold her hand while she phones the police. The music is silenced; the search party begins. Jeremy helps carry Siobhan to her bed where she stays until late morning, out cold and oblivious.

Hours later, an officer calls Paloma. He found the brand new Tacoma pulled to a curb three streets over, slightly dented. All of Siobhan's cds are strewn across the asphalt. The officer picks one up. "Led Zeppelin, alright! Well, you can drive the

truck home. Have your housemate file a report in the morning. Try to get some sleep.”

No one sleeps or eats that night, and the Abercrombie boys never come back again.



Walk

Heart Flame

up
side
down or
rightside up
flames can be
touched but not held
I am trying to hand my
heart over to you as an upturned
dancing flame gasping to feed on your
breath growing full fueled by the oxygen of
hope emitting palpable vulnerability to stamping
out as it slips through the spaces between your
fingers onto the ground at our feet trembling to be
trampled. I bend to scoop up the dying ember
to save what can be salvaged before it dies
out altogether to put it back inside
of me where it belongs safely
upside down again

Queen Anne's Lace

walking around the arboretum
under a bright hot summer sun
taking pictures of flowers and trees,
I saw Queen Anne's Lace
and thought about what made you happy

when you were here
you were grandma
and we would play
I Spy With My Little Eye

now I see you, a beautiful young woman
in black and white photos
jet black bone straight hair
curled to perfection every time

I spy someone I miss
and start to cry

I imagine your disapproving look
scowl-lipped, shaking head
saying *don't waste your time*
it's more than thirty years
I'm gone

I see you hand me a tissue
feel your arm around me
as you *tsk tsk* my tears dry

I still feel how it felt
when they told me you were gone
my insides gutted hollow
throbbing in dread

bringing you back like this
I miss you in a weepy way
like wandering a cemetery

crying for the dead

driving home the sky gets dark
giant drops pelt the windshield
until it's hard to see anything at all
I think about the photos
what I can't see outside the frames
I'm gutted all over again

you look lovestruck there
but so unhappy here
like you couldn't smile
after your love died
but you carried on so many years

I wonder what we would have been
if I had ever been more than a kid to you
you would have shown me how to grow things
like the flowers we saw today
how to prune roses
without getting stuck

Sitting in the driveway in the car
It's raining too hard to get out
You'd say *keep your sunglasses on*
don't turn your tears into a problem
hold your head high
and carry on

I spy with my little eye

stoicism in you
building up in me

PTSD

The glass was always half full
until it started to look half empty
then it shattered into shards
like your war stories
and we search for shards everywhere now
selecting each one to scrutinize
in the light
and piece together
again

in a way that holds water



Fraught

Starving

i look down and watch them all day long
but my hands are not my own
only bones and veins
vivid blue as winding rivers
nor are my eyes my own
they cannot see
what isn't there anymore
nor is my mind my own
i don't control it
it controls my senses and self
the light is fading slowly
as i pretend it grows brighter
i can't reach beyond my shadow world
the hazy fog is thick and overwhelming
you could lead me out
if you can find your way through it to me
take my strange hands in yours
make them my own again
help me to see again
show me how to make my mind
my own again

1 to 1 to 1 to 1, with the 1 equalling You, always You

What has the staff member enjoyed most/least since their last supervision meeting?

N.B. The answer, “not having supervision meetings” is not acceptable. Please tick Box D below for the attention of HR so we can keep an eye on the sarcastic bugger. Equally, “sitting at home and scratching myself in front of Netflix” lacks an adequate focus on the job in hand. Although, if they’ve given you that answer, it’s possibly a good idea not to use the phrase “job in hand” in your follow-up question.

What tasks/activities do you feel confident doing here?

N.B. The “clever” response will focus on this room right now, i.e. “sitting here talking to you”. Again, please tick Box D below for the attention of HR. If necessary – i.e. if you’ve made the mistake of scheduling the meeting late on a Friday afternoon – prompt the employee with the tasks/activities about which they might have a reasonable chance of expressing confidence. No leading questions, though. Suggesting “showing up within half an hour of your scheduled start time” might well give them grounds to assume you’re not on their side. You’re not, but they don’t need to know that, at least until writing up the targets they can’t achieve at the end of the session.

What’s your biggest challenge right now?

N.B. Ensure adequate size of chair and that the heating is neither too high nor likely to invoke the brass monkeys that might otherwise be your answer.

N.N.B. Quite clearly, the employee will not be honest about this – remember the Mr Scott principle: never tell the boss how long a job is going to take. The same holds true for challenges. They’re unlikely to be real challenges. Make note of what is offered up and then check the Shared Drive to see if they’ve finished the job months back and they’re just taking the piss.

How can I get more involved in workplace culture? / Are there any aspects of our culture you wish you could change?

N.B. Best asked without blinking. If necessary, interrogate the ceiling tiles until they offer something they think might relate to workplace culture. This will be the most telling question of all – please note Boxes E – G below for the attention of HR. Answers relating solely to buying milk and the dishwasher are of concern, and if you find the bastard who keeps blocking the downstairs loo, please tick Box H and Facilities will be in touch with the photographic evidence for the follow-up disciplinary.

How can I best support you? / How can you best support me?

N.B. You'll know what counts as an inappropriate answer to this one, although it might give you the heads up on future behaviour to watch out for.

Completed supervision forms should be written up by the line manager and forwarded to employee and HR within one week of the scheduled meeting. If any of the above questions present difficulties, please don't hesitate to contact Derek in HR and he'll make sure to write it up in advance on your own appraisal form. Either that or just fudge your way through it as you usually do – you don't think anyone actually reads these things, do you?

My take on local news with traditional shoehorned side order of disguised national news and desperate filler from a remarkably familiar, Russian-oligarch owned newspaper.

Reporter Benjamin Bench helps himself to a serving of The Evening News in South Sumpchester and drives away with mixed feelings.

Not Pictured: The Sumpchester Evening News' front page, because you might as well look at this one.

When I set off to collect my takeaway news, my chief concern is always the parking.

Yes, I know it's a peculiar opening, and not what you were expecting, but bear with me (he's reviewing a newspaper and he's mostly bothered about the parking? Surely his chief concern is news? I mean, hello? Have you read my other articles? I churn out eight a day for this rag, and that's on a slow day.)

You see, like you, I want to get in and out in as quickly as possible. (You've got to imagine I'm writing all of this with a vision of you in my head. Which, I think, is probably better than you reading this with a vision of *me* in yours. Oh, and by the way, that innuendo you smirked at there – have it on me, because we've got to be cheeky chappies in our reporting, now, haven't we? As the money runs out and the offices close and the staff who used to work for one city now find themselves writing copy for half the country, just making sure to put in local place names for verisimilitude, we're got to maintain that journalistic insouciance. Like nothing really matters. Because, our bosses are so keen to tell us, nothing does).

But I digress.

As we all know, convenience is paramount these days. We want our news, but we want it as swiftly as possible. None of that unnecessary fannying about (bit of the old tabloid lingo, there) waiting for stories to be confirmed by a second source. Or even an initial one. No, what we want is our daily reminder that other people in town have it worse than we do, and the townies and the thugs have been given the frighteners by the local bobbies.

But how does this relate to the parking, I hear you ask? The 30% of you who've made it down to this bit of the page (because I've done the psychology about how people read headlines, then bylines, then maybe the lead paragraph, before their attention proceeds to dribble down the page, idly looking for anything shocking, surprising or amusing, or just flicking to the next page and the next story).

It relates to the parking because there were easily a hundred or so parking spaces and I could have my pick. Generously spaced bays, including one for an editor whose car was, of course, not to be found because he'll be based somewhere else in the country entirely. And, from that, I had my takeaway, didn't I? I knew what the news would be like in the paper even before I read it. I knew there'd be the story about a new chocolate bar on sale in B & M for 49p (11p off recommended price). I knew that a large amount of the story would have come from Twitter. I knew the by-line would come from the nuttiest of those comments ("*some people said it should be illegal*"). I knew because I'd actually "written" that one, wondering if it would get past whatever passes for quality control in local papers these days. Knowing that they'd print it anyway.

Like they've printed this, too. So, no, I'm sorry I can't say I recommend the Sumpchester Evening News. Although I do look forward to seeing this article, word-for-word, repeated there, only with another paper's name inserted.

down the stairs

you say you know everything about me

almost but not everything, here's a courageous confession:

you don't know what distresses me the most
the magnitude of how terrified I am to harm a man of muscles

so I go out of my way
down the stairs of comfort and freedom

to be an empyreal pillow
for everyone to dispose of their tears

but some days this feeble pillow
is so engaged in
combatting his own specters and fevers

that his actions stab few hearts
unwillingly, unintentionally

In sooth, I do not want to hurt anyone
I want to be kind and tender and soft

who wants to share the bitterness
of the leaves of *Azadirachta indica*?

I want to help mortals by building an encouraging raft
I want to be kind and tender and soft

but what is mere wanting
if not converted into acting?

i want to know

for you to get over
the loss of your
mother's mother
i know it is so
hard as if asking a
man without hands
to hold a
bundle of timber

to lose the love
that was vaster
than the Caspian sea
i know it is so
hard for you are
used to a fragrance
not many have
had the chance
to savor

but when you
move on, for once
spare some time
to consider the
magnitude of my pain

and let me know

what is it like to
be caressed by
crinkled hands
and just continue
holding them
for hours

when you know
the edifice of the
world you had
assembled carefully
has disintegrated
yet again

what is it like to be
cared and loved
for who you are
not for what you
can do, not for what
you can lend

what is it like
to place your
vulnerable head on
the safe lap
of your grandmother
and dauntlessly let
the tears drizzle
the way they prefer
even when everyone's
watching with
eyes like eagles

i do not know
for my mother's
mother died before
i entered this world.

what do i do

to become a poet
they say you have
to learn the correct
spelling
memorize
the complex names
of all the delicate herbs
of all the tiny seeds
of all the
captivating flowers

what do i do
with
the deep-rooted
softness of a poet
but frustrating
maladies named
ADHD and Dementia

i strive to
focus on ruddy roses
just them but
my mind
moves to
far away lands where
placid daisies grow
and
no one gathers them
for their beloveds

sometimes when i'm
rinsing my face
i plan

a whole poem
with a
terrific rhyme scheme
even if i say
so myself

but when i sit down on
my battered desk
with a pen
and a sheet
i'm unable to
recollect even the
remnants of the concept
that was supposed to
be executed

so you keep warning
me: you can
never become a poet

maybe i don't desire
to be dubbed a poet
by the world

my aureate heart
knows I possess
the genteel soul
of a poet

the heart knows
isn't that enough?

Big Dipper

The winter sky, moon mocked
And torn with stars as I walked home,
The tear-drowned, teenage me,
Howled out and full of woe.
I crashed up that country hill
Wishing I was dead.
But as it turned out
I didn't die; the past did.



Brook

Lonely

When you arrive you climb the stairs up to her apartment and it's so packed away you almost can't believe she ever moved in. She greets you with a hug and she asks if you would like any of the stuff she is n't keeping (and you keep most of it in a box you still don't open) and conversation continues about the memories the things bring and not at all about the big thing that hangs heavy, swollen, sopping with grief above it all until there is nothing else left and the gravity pulls you both in and you begin to feel the raw size of it, the unprocessed texture of a moment you are certain you will remember forever and the crushing weight of not knowing what to do with this fleeting ripe permanence and so you say you love her and will miss her and she says the same and hugs you and you both hug and you say you're excited to possibly date again as a poly foursome like you've talked about and nothing changes but a catch clicks in your mind and you say with soft recognition:

"We're not going to date again, are we."

Her head shakes slow, like she's afraid it will fall off if she moves too fast and that's how you both start to cry, streams of silent tears at first, then as it takes root you both begin to shudder and small sobs escape and you sink to the floor still holding together and you take turns talking and reminiscing and singing some of your private songs together and then it is late. It is very late and you have to go back to your place and she has an early flight, so you hold tight at the door on your way out, and a place in your heart knows this is the last time you will see each other so you desperately promise it isn't, then you pick up your box and not knowing what else to do you leave. You walk down the hall toward the elevator, and suddenly realize there's one thing you can do, so you set the box down and walk back, getting faster with each step until you are knocking on her door and she answers it with a red-eyed silly smile and asks what you forgot, and you say I just need to hug you one more time, and you hold each other tight, tight, tight—

Waves

Waves, ceaseless, carry themselves.
Thoughts of the world flow back and forth,
Ubi sunt?
Ubi sunt qui ante nos fuerunt?
Two answers take turns:
Where are they that came before us?
They are dead
They are here.
Sunlight holds each needle of the pines
Tender
Tight
Tight they are here
Tender they are dead.
The waves and thoughts flow back and forth
Is truth the water or the sand?
Both pass
Both remain.
Here a hollow world
Fills with shadow and light

A World in Which the Black Panther Party Logo Appears on a Box in My Parents' Garage

It would probably need to begin with their families.
 Perhaps my dad, instead of being motivated by his
 father,
 had been disillusioned,
 or perhaps he worked in lumber and found it to his
 liking
 and grew up to be a blue-collar union man
 like so many of his cousins.

Perhaps my mom was the same in every way
 but never became fearful and quiet.
 Maybe she grew up climbing the greased pole at the
 county fair
 and when she got the ten-dollar bill
 was inspired.
 Perhaps instead of dismissing the people pushing her
 to be a doctor rather than nurse,
 lawyer rather than librarian, she had heard
 and succeeded
 and found anger at injustice.
 Perhaps that anger was fanned,
 and she met a friend in college.

Perhaps the two of them still met at a Christmas party,
 but dad talked about "strong together"
 and mom talked about "mutual aid"
 and when they talked about children it wasn't how
 many
 but how motivated,
 how powerful,
 how educated.

Perhaps when I am born they teach me
 not obedience but determination,
 freedom instead of faith.
 Maybe in this world
 I am not scared away from being gay, but

it is hard to imagine they have this house
unless there are greater changes.

And perhaps that's the real answer.
Perhaps how the logo appears in their garage
is a world where the party was sold.
Perhaps it became the face of a company with good
prices.

Perhaps it is easier to think hope can be bought
than to think my parents could become people
I would want to become.



Courthouse

Hailey

Hailey I'm breaking our friendship off
because you made me feel uncomfortable
when I tried to eat dinner with
you and your friends and
because you were not kind enough and
because you have not been
as good a friend
as I hoped and
because I am not involved
enough in your life
which tells me
that I am not
in a healthy place
to be friends and
because you are dead
and I want the pain to stop.

Limit

Sitting in my chair, reaching for
 a glass of (which is an emptiness
 made (although no, a cup is
 not the emptiness it's the
 boundary (which is used to
 create an understood space
 like lines on paper, so then
 maybe a cup is one example
 (and it isn't glass after all,
 it's plastic (probably formed
 from some tarry soup made
 of the eons when plants
 ruled the earth uncontested,
 rather than the hellish silica
 adopted to frighten and kill
 would-be devourers by
 making themselves too
 dangerous (and here too
 is confusion and difference,
 divergence between the
 relatable need to survive
 and the weapon (which has
 proactive (like how 'prey'
 in vore might seek 'predator'
 to find fulfillment in filling
 or intimacy in being taken
 whole with no shadow doubts
 that part is unwanted)
 implications) that cannot be
 wielded without loss) to eat)
 instead) of an optical illusion)
 made solid) useful) water.

Hearing Vivaldi's 'Winter – The Four Seasons'

This is the music my father
would like, aching strings

a taking back to soaring
spires, heights I never quite

acquired, in the rarefied
slow air of his study

smelling of single malt,
books and the aftermath

of pipe smoke, I sat on blue
carpet before the drawn-out

note of grief-before-grief,
when he was the only man

I knew. I wish I'd listened
more closely to music like this,

rather than saying *Make it stop*,
so, with an eye roll, he switched it off,

because that is the father he was,
and that is the father he is.

Advisory

If you're suckered,
you have groped
losing starry mites.
Why do you wheel away
hoping pleasant dreams
wind up in other minds.
Meeting an end,
as faded glories.
Embers of sadness,
a flickering gesture.
A simple request
likely unanswered.



Flap

And Suchlike

You once foretold a notice
of a most noisy whirlwind
without a gift for language.
Emblems served
at different times
laid at death's door.
Stricken by disease,
those rare and fatal.
Foaming at the mouth,
in sudden raging fever..
You know its meaning
from balding husbands. .
They raid Christian coffers
using lore from the Vikings.
Their teeth remain clenched,
keeping to a certain deafness.

Bonneau's Landing

Finding what's warmest,
yellow bellied and naive.
A belligerent syrup flows
from each and every pore.
The streets shimmer,
in a sense of urgency.
People seem to detest
hardworking eruptions...
For bargains with opponents,
who hits the ground running,.
They serve as mere relics
of the ones who departed.



Last Steps

Scientist

On a shore forever lambent
he disappeared in the sands..
Robbery of a true birth
is the matter on record.
He played the market
for wine colored cars
but only on the side.
He is without claims
to formal description.
None is his color,
zero is his number.
In all his escapades,
he stays undetected.
Shrugging his shoulders
he gauges all the signals
of pendulums in a basin..



Chestnut Ridge

It Came Through My Window One Night

It came through my window one night.
Prayer-like. Though hardly expected. Yes,
death bore me. I barely felt its gentle hands
as they lifted me. Lifeless as I was, suspended
like a float in the ball of its flat fist.
I thought of all the things I'd miss.
I waved goodbye to passport and colouring book.
Caught the smell of clean bedsheets and rum.
I did things I'd never done. Spoke at the funerals
of people I never knew. I stepped in their shoes.
Wiggled my toes in new shores.
Why hadn't I done this before?

They say your life passes you by when you die,
but that doesn't tell even half of it.
And don't ask me how, but I smiled
when it pulled me out of myself
and left all of me behind.

And the last thing I heard?
It was as if a single solitary note
played itself out in an encore.
Uncertain at first, then joined by
a gazillion more.

The Grandfather Clock

We dine together in the shadow of the grandfather clock.
I gaze at you. Perfect man. Greek God. Bad boy.
All rolled into one. Eyes like shiny shells. Lips
as moist as plums. The sweet allure of coconuts,
desiccated, or dripping delicately down the palm.
I will lose myself in that tonight.

We drink our fill of Cabernet Sauvignon,
perfected over decades in our sleepless cellar.
Ninety years old yet flush as a new-born cherub.

I propose a toast,
to the delicate tapestry of your Renaissance beauty,
holding your gaze through my crimsoned glass. A toast.
To the twirling liquid that sparkles like infant blood,
whose dancing legs play spring notes on our tongues.

To the ageless face of the grandfather clock,
whose slow, patient hands unravel all evenings to
a threadbare dusk.

Talent

I sit obediently in this chair for you.
Unblinking. 'Please don't move'.
Not an inch. Still as a rock.

I disappear as you paint me on canvas.
A smearing of sepia makes a smattering
of nothing. *Why did you choose me?*

In my mind I offer you my empty palette.
You fill it with worms that shed their skin
onto my open palms.

Perhaps my portrait will hang in
London town, under sinful Red Lights,
bowing the heads of sleazy men in seedy
city bars—

'Sit up straight'. I wince and blush.
Bent to the whiskers of your
paintbrush.

Thanks to the Fallen, I am free

On a chilly night, a lady as bright as light,
Without any fright, sings lovely for wights delight:
“It will be alright; no one will forget your fights.
Even out of sight, everyone praises you, Knights.”

In the beautiful sky of blue, I used to view,
Two or more souls who blew, my mind and my heart too
Due to a freedom that came true. So, what I do
Is, I say to you: “Thank you.” “Thanks to all of you!”

For the Fallen of all wars, who have become stars
This poetic art soars, in honor of your scars.
“Thank you to you!” I roar. You may be far, but are
No more than our freedom core. Rare are such lodestars.

“Hey, can you hear me?” I asked, to the souls who passed
“Your love for the nation was vast, and it still lasts!”
Strong and steadfast, to the sky, my tribute I cast.
They pass very fast, but what a blast from the past!

Luna Selene

I want to hear what the moon is thinking.
Does it keep a diary because it's been in bloom for centuries?
Does it take note of all those who dote on its dimples, like me?
Does it remember the ones that stand out, who love lawlessly,
who loiter in its shadow for a hint of a remedy?
Does it whisper to its Grecian brothers and sisters
about the slow-moving tragedies, the spoiled beauty of
humanity,
the hundred tiny taskmasters who die every night of their own
vanity?
And does it smile when it sees what we've made it out to be,
a goddess, a godmother, a symbol of love and eternity?
The maidens who dream of sailing its seas,
the mothers who bless their babies in its beams,
the crones who cry until their claws come out in its gleam,
they all want to hear the moon's midnight screams.

Starlight

Oh sweet sombre starlight, how easy it seems
to stand on Windermere peaks and watch you be shorn
from the shore of the blighted black sea,
see your endless misty acquaintances
weave in and out of view like the ghostly guests of my garden
party;

your headlights pierce through the curtained windows
to curtail my glee but you're still happy to see me,
now emancipated from the arresting aura of shimmering
moonbeams.

You watch the weeping willow sway in the breeze,
a beer bottle lying dead at the base of the trunk like an offering,
a sacrifice to be seized,
and you're reminded of your shivering sisters still stuck in the
sun's trajectory.

Over the years, since the start of the fight, you've stored up
enough spite to invert the sky
but you need to wait until they all align when the time is right.
Until then you stand around until ten, waiting to watch your
brethren start their shifts again.

The Fold

Marching down a hillside
I came upon a hermit
who spun a sordid story
and told me I should learn it;

he told me to spread it far
from summit to riverbed,
so all the world may hear it
and this is what he said:

be you priestly or a prince
ordained with golden roses,
take comfort in your certain seat
beside the ancient Moses.

But if you're a lecher,
a trickster, fiend or drunk,
the prince's serpent herd
will ensure your ego's shrunk;

they'll drag you down below,
flaunt the cinnamon springs
of heaven's final blow,
show you what you're missing.

The gates, shut forever
whether you're young or old,
smirk at you as you're pulled
further into the fold.

The Red Rose

The plants here are so miserable
in this sunless seafront flower shop.
You can't grow confident about profit
when your custom can't be counted on,
tourists passing its tinted windows one day
and magicked away the very next,
the ghosts of teenagers guffawing about plant sex.

Lent blackens the perfunctory pages of my ledger;
St. Valentine is long dead and there's a change in the weather,
the leftovers of lost loves wilting to a fine leather.
I resort to make wine out of some red rose petals,
drink away the night as my letter box fills.
There's always a love overspill, less couples down here every
year,
but I don't know what to with it – let it run free, stab its feeble
heart with a spear?
It'll die soon anyway but these flowers aren't free –
my life has a price and the red always rises as easter kills me.

Barren Days

These days, possibly
I could stay awake all night
without lids open
without an outgrown mass for affection
staring into the raw rims of oval mouth- night shifters, as I say

A thing might be done during the afternoons
but generally nothing much happens in my house
all yellow- mahogany ruptured landscape
with tainted smiles to watch
monotony of colours, pigments and textures.
I have frowned faces all over
for spilled, spoiled milk (whatever you say)
A woman dragging her shadow in circles
counting till 50 backwards to go off to sanity,
nothing to stop her,
often, she skips if not running.

I can smell the salt all day.
Through the hanging stale night lamps,
a toothpaste now old and rustic
with beds cracking,
days so pale like the birds bereft of water
brown as your memory
brown table, brown cinema and nothing wonderful.

Breakfasts are small,
small and wholesome.
Pinkish fruity nectar,
jasmine tea
and no words.

The rose from my balcony is my muse
a snippet from a falling sky-
it reminds me of my field of stone,
air and blur.
Sunsets and smiles.

These days, possibly

I can imagine going off to sleep
with everything inside my clumsy fist.
Askew, I will wake and break,



Duquesne Fog

Burning Embers

My words are nought
but burning embers
They hold no sway
Will change
merely a microcosm
of personal history

Every poem
an amusement
Mostly for myself
Still, I hustle
to validate
one more bruised ego.

Three Nil Down

The manure stench
wafts in on the wind
The third swish of the net
That pre-match latte
sloshes
as you abandon the chase

The glamour of the game
Unfathomably far away
Those days
of being the best kid
on the school pitch
Remain

Stand on weakened parapets
as the fourth thwaps home
Rub at the fresh stud marks
branded to your inner thigh
Played and played
until youthful passion
Evaporates

Trying to pass it on
to a new generation
All the while
struggling to provide yourself
any motivation

Filling the Void

My veins are spun sugar
Sanity bites eroding arteries
I grow bulbous
trying to fill the void
three layers at a time
Convenience over confidence
Why don't these clothes fit?
Tugging at my tee
while unwrapping another sweet.

Demigods

As religion fades to myth
We anoint them
as demigods
Mistake the work
for self-worth

Follow like disciples
hanging onto words
and wardrobes
The performance of a lifetime
Tik Tok
Attention spans
mean your 15 seconds
is coming up.

The Unopened Rose

Walking through the garden of memories, I
smell the jasmine of youthful hope, gently
stroke the daisies of goodwill, admire the
beauteous lotus of hard work and cringe at
the many weeds of suspicion. Away from
the beauty, the delight, the chaos
of my growing garden;
-a wilted dead rose- so
full of colour,
abundance in fragrance.
But unopened by the
hand of time and
captured within the
grip of caution.

A Garden

Searching for the truth beneath the sun
-looking for innocence once had- now
lost.

Calling out the name of devotion
-blindly followed- now forsaken
for understanding.

Looking for respect within the juicy fruits
-always savoured- though
not always earned.

Tracing down obedience below colourful petals
-a companion I no longer heed. Standing
beneath trees, I try to find the naked
innocence of childhood
draped in the blackness of
disturbed age.

Chocolate Cake

Soft.
Moist.
Satisfying.

My daily routine.

The wealth of the decadent icing,
the labour put into the layered masterpiece.

An acquired craft
- diligent workmanship-
- a fine hand-
- years of knowledge-

all stripped away.

Really,
I have just
been savouring
 - day after day -
mundane
sponge.