

Letters From An
Elderly GentleWoman

Luke Neubecker

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I am pleased to submit my collection of short stories and poems to The Brautigan Library. Free and available to all.

It is also for sale in paperback form here: lukeneubeckerblog.wordpress.com

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To hold two things in opposition
true at the same time

there are no rules

Never Born

I was never born

I missed the Colonization of Mars

I missed getting the flu

I missed dying of a heart attack

at 62

I missed having a foursome

with a group of blonde girls at Berkeley

I was never born

I will never die

Forgetting

When does the time come
when you can tell a certain someone
a certain something
from the past

6 months?

6 years?

Do you have to wait
until you're both old
when there's no chance
of rekindling?

Bogusness

You wake up.

There's a Huge Ball growing inside your leg.

You think: "What the fuck?"

You try going back to sleep.

Make it to go away.

You try drinking.

But it's still there.

So You think: "Fuuuuck!"

That's the Bogusness of Life.

You can't wish things away.

BOOGIE MAN

I remember being really scared of the dark when I was a kid.

I was so scared

that I would close my eyes before turning on the light.

Bukowski Comes to Cleveland

This is about the time Charles Bukowski came to the Unitarian Church in Cleveland.

I don't remember how I heard about him coming. But I remember being very excited.

It was a chilly October night. People were out roaming the streets in search of alcohol and women.

If only they knew about the Unitarian Church...

As I approached, I got a funny feeling.

Some of the windows were broken, and there was barely a light on.

But then I saw someone come to the door.

Bins of ice-cold beer were set up in the lobby. It was the right place alright.

Unitarian ladies ran to and fro trying to get ready for The Man.

One of them brushed against me in the hall. She was carrying a large pair of pliers.

"Is Buck here yet?" I asked.

"Oh no," she said in a low voice. "Mr. Bukowski won't be here for some time."

I decided to take a little walk around the building.

Inside one of the rooms, there was a large pile of mannequins.

At least they looked like mannequins. I couldn't tell exactly what they were because it was so dark.

I would have asked one of the church ladies, but they all seemed busy.

He arrived at a quarter to nine.

A small crowd had formed in the atrium and it was the assistant coordinator's job to get them all seated.

"Good Evening Ladies and Gentleman!" said the Head Coordinator.

"I said GOOD EVENING!!!"

"Good evening..." we replied.

"May I introduce our distinguished guest, The Poet Laureate of The Los Angeles Slums:

MRRRR...CHARLES BUKOWSKI!!!!!"

APPLAUSE

Flipping through some papers he had at the podium, Mr. Bukowski cracked open a beer and took a sip.

Then he looked out at us in the dark room, blinking his eyelids in amusement.

"I'm really not a beer drinker," he began. "Well, okay I am. This is a nice place you got here.

Kind of dark... I'm not much a fan of cities outside LA, so it's been a tough time coming here, to Cincinnati."

Puerto Rico

The plane takes off. I'm in my seat.

An hour ago I was in my car.

Two hours ago I was dreaming. Completely dependent on the passage of time and the beneficent confluence of billions of awake people.

My first time on a plane in years.

I look down as we make a hard banking turn into the sky.

“If this thing goes down,” I thought, “we're all toast.”

I put a few pieces of gum in my mouth and began to chew.

Control the panic. Control the panic. . .

Old San Juan. It was a Big Day for Puerto Rico - Election Sunday. Lots of police.

Lots of posters promoting the Big Contest. SUVs with loud speakers broadcasting so everyone could hear. Unfortunately for me, this meant no alcohol sales till 9. I checked in at the Fortaleza guesthouse and took a hot shower. Then spent an hour recuperating in my room, thinking out a plan for the night ahead and listening to the family outside my door talking and watching television in Spanish.

I hadn't slept with anyone yet on my trip and I felt like it was my duty to give it another try. My flight was due out at 8 so I would have to be up by 5 in order to make it. The room was simple, but charming. And the bed was big enough for as many as three, if it came to that.

Around nine-thirty, I switched the lights on and got dressed. All the men in Puerto Rico seemed to wear jeans when they went out. I added water to mine to smooth out the creases, touched up the inside with deodorant in a last ditch effort to mask the smell of sweat and salt water that had accumulated over the past 5 days.

Trick or Treat

A large fat woman
fell off her chair
into the muck on Euclid Avenue.

A Lone Ranger art student
came to her rescue
But it was too late.

The cops
were unimpressed.
Guilty as Charged.

Lay there
in the Filth,
You Whore!

Needless to say
No one will be out tonight
Trick-or-Treating.

The Voodoo Hypothesis

It was at that point in the night where you know you need something but you're not sure what. I didn't feel like going out. I tried making food, but it didn't taste very good.

It was almost time for Rose's last walk, so I leashed her up and headed out.

We took the usual route: halfway down Hampshire,
a left at the sidewalk behind Musician's Towers.

She didn't have to poop, which was unusual.

It was a pretty straightforward walk, except for a couple of dogs
who were hard to make out in the darkness. I veered us onto the grass just to be sure.

It turned out we knew them, but you never know...

We reached our final turn, onto the gravel path behind Tommy's Restaurant.

Rose tugged on the leash and headed for the waterfall, which is part of a small
garden they keep behind the restaurant.

I wasn't paying much attention because she always sniffs around this area.

But eventually, I looked down.

And there he was.

“Hey little buddy...”

I didn't know what it was at first. It was furrrier than you would expect a rodent to be, kind of hunched over in a ball so you couldn't tell if it had a tail or not.

I was a little surprised, and sort of proud of Rose for not attacking it.

Good dog, I thought. A win against the evil force of Nature.

He was just sort of sitting there nestled between the rocks, lapping up a bit of water, oblivious to the fact that he was being watched.

To him, this was the biggest waterfall in the world.

Niagara Falls.

I tugged on the leash and told Rose, “Time to go.”

She obeyed, reluctantly...and followed me back to our apartment.

Once inside I remembered: I did have something to do tonight!

I wanted to go pick up a bookshelf I saw out on our walk.

So I put my sandals back on and grabbed my keys.

First things first: check the waterfall.

The light inside Tommy's turned off, and someone came out the back.

This person saw another person crouched in the garden, talking to the waterfall.

"Hey little buddy, how you doin? How's that water..."

As he was about to pass me, the Tommy's guy ducked his head to the side.

I felt like letting him know I wasn't just out here talking to myself.

"There's a rat I'm talking to," I said.

The Tommy's guy turned toward me and made eye contact.

"Yeah, my dog went right up to him. He's just sitting out here, drinking some water."

"Really?" He took a quick look at the rodent. "He's probably seen better days..."

"Yeah." I said, agreeing. "He's on his Last Legs."

Actually, that's not what I thought at all.

I thought he was just out here relaxing, taking it easy away from the rat race.

But now I wasn't so sure.

"Yep. He's about to be Excused from the Gene Pool," I said to myself as the guy walked past me down the gravel path.

But then I felt bad about it.

Back to Hampshire, in search of the bookshelf.

As I approached my car, I started pressing the unlock button.

I always do this.

I suppose it lets me gauge exactly when it is that I'm within range for it to work.

It's sort of nice when the back lights finally flicker on and the car beeps open from 30 yards away.

But this time it didn't work.

I keep pressing.

Nothing.

I've got the wrong keys.

My roommate and I both drive the same car and our car keys look pretty similar.

What can I do now but head back and get the right keys, so I can pick up that bookshelf.

Camille

There she was.

It was just before nightfall, my favorite time of day.

And it had just rained. Torrential rain.

I had been sitting outside and was completely free and at peace with Nature.

Part of me still hoped I would see her again.

But I had decided that if I ever did I would not say hello.

I knew who she was. There was no need to find that out again.

Still, I wanted to see her face. Her smile.

I wanted to watch as she walked down a long street in cut off jean shorts...

She was wearing cut off jean shorts.

Cut high and tight with little strands of thread dangling from behind, reminding

me that sooner or later, they would fall off like her hair in the wash.

At the stop sign, she turned.

"What do you want?"

"Nothing. Just wanted to see you again."

She was holding an umbrella and leaning on one foot.

"Shouldn't you be at work?"

"No. Work ends before now, for most people."

"Oh."

"Besides, I'm not working. Quit."

"What?"

"Everyone's so surprised when I tell them that! You know how they always say you need to work to eat? I just never really..."

It went on, but all I could think about was Camille. She made me want to shut up.

She stuck the tip of one of her shoes into a puddle.

Then she put the whole thing in, up to her ankle.

"Well, be that as it may, I think you would be much happier if you did something with your life."

"What are you doing? Chewing gum?"

"Yes. Want a piece?"

"No."

Then she blew a big, pink, bubble.

Summer Break

The taste
was of sour grapes

A flavor called
Blue Pyramid

While Jen Blossom prepared
a portrait of her brother
using her old Etch-a-Sketch
Sid Underwood was rounding
the bend on his bike

Jim Blossom
was drooling

Nikki Tinsleman
was doing a belly dance

Each was chewing
a stick of gum

It tasted sour
like sour grapes

4 O'CLOCK

It's Not Seventh Grade Anymore.

4 O'Clock Basketball Games

Girls' School Mixers.

All that's in the Past now.

It's Just before 5 O'Clock.

I Wish it wasn't.

I Wish 4 O'Clock would

just keep going.

Snow Day

There's a frozen lake near my house. No one's on it yet. But they will be.

In three hours Suzy will arrive with Brian, her brother, and Kate. It's their second day of Christmas Break. There are fourteen days left until they go back to school.

That is eternity for a fifth grader.

An Attractive Looking Older Woman

At the table in the middle of the room there is an attractive looking older woman. She has stylish short hair and she's wearing a black dress. She reminds me of Jim Jarmusch.

She was chatting with some friends about a movie they saw earlier at the Cinematheque, but now she was by herself. Watching the rain.

It was really starting to come down and everyone on the patio moved inside. Except for Tom. I think they call him Crazy Tom.

Even he came in, eventually.

In between sips of beer, I found myself staring at her. Wondering what she's writing in her notepad...

"Who needs TV when you got a Big Screen like this?" I say, trying to break the ice.

She looks up at me: "I couldn't agree more."

The weather was perfect, she said. What was I reading?

I was immersed in a book about the life of private school boys. I show her the cover:

Boys Themselves

Her eyebrows lift.

We were the only ones in the game room adjacent to the main bar.

When it became apparent that we were having an actual conversation, I got up and moved over to her table.

The music was rolling along smoothly. Some girls from a nearby wedding scampered in out of the storm. Crazy Tom followed, shaking off like a wet dog in the entrance.

He and I are both regulars, though I don't think we've ever actually met.

He wanders into the room we're in and scans it. Squints his eyes. Then he comes over to our table, the only occupied one, and sits down.

We introduce ourselves:

Claire. Tom. Luke.

Tom looks a bit like Doc from Back to the Future. He jumps right into the conversation, which at this point is Veganism.

Before the movie, Claire ate at a vegan restaurant downtown called The Flaming Icecube. It wasn't very good, she says, and she's sick of going out when you can have more fun at home.

I agree.

"But you can't live on Beans alone!" says Tom.

For 40 years, Tom's been a machinist in Ashtabula.

Gritty Work.

His Harley is the one parked outside against the tree.

He points it out to Claire.

"Rode it all the way from Ashtabula during a blizzard last year!"

Eventually, Tom comes to his lifelong passion:

Toy boats.

Turns out he's a highly skilled miniature boat builder.

He hands Claire his digital camera.

"Amazing!" says Claire, sending me a look as she flips through the pictures.

What does she have in mind? She seems to be enjoying Crazy Tom. Her arms crossed behind her head, eyes on the verge of laughter. My eyes wander over her body, pausing briefly on the milky white armpits. Tom's schoolboy eyes are all over her too...

All of a sudden, like an apparition out of The Shining, a small Mexican man appears beside our table.

We look at each other. Who is he?

"I feel like I'm in a movie," I say.

"Hi, what's your name?" asks Claire, welcoming the stranger.

"Alberto."

Alberto sits down, smiling to himself. A short fellow, with big bushy eyebrows.

I could tell he was making Tom a little nervous, smiling like that. And Claire seemed a bit on edge as well.

She leans over and whispers in my ear, "I think I saw him at the movie earlier..."

"Maybe he's stalking you," I say, casting a glare in Alberto's direction.

But he doesn't seem to understand.

Claire: "Maybe he's a serial killer."

Tom: "A killing spree did happen close by about a year ago."

Claire: "Well, we better not joke then!"

"It's okay," says Tom. "They caught him."

Alberto smiles.

I ask Alberto what he thinks about Veganism.

He says he "likes" it.

"Do you consider yourself a vegetarian then?"

"Si."

"What's your favorite dish?"

"I don't cook."

Despite the possibility that Alberto is a serial killer, we all seem to agree to just ignore him and get on with the evening.

After Tom finishes showing his toy boat pictures, Claire asks us if we've ever heard of text haikus.

Tom and I shake our heads.

Alberto smiles.

"A text haiku is exactly what it sounds like. It's a text message written in haiku form. I've really gotten into them lately!"

She asks for my number so she can send me one.

**It's just after rain
Leaves are heavy with water
And forests still drip**

I take this as her sly way of giving me her number.

But then she asks Tom and Alberto if they would like one too.

I excuse myself to go to the bathroom.

Another beer in hand at the bar, I contemplate my next move while surveying the scene.

A couple girls, bored by their dates, text old acquaintances while the guys who brought them here wait around like idiots.

A few more minutes pass, then I head back to the game room.

It's empty.

I check outside. The rain has stopped but no one's out there either.

No Claire. No Tom. No Alberto.

I further inspect the area to see if maybe they went for a smoke.

There's no explanation. They're gone.

It doesn't make any sense! No goodbye? What if Claire went out for a cigarette and got kidnapped by Alberto!

Or Tom.

Maybe Crazy Tom tied her to the back of his Harley and made off for Ashtabula...

Crazy Tom.

I think of calling the police, but I don't.

I decide to just give up and go home.

In the morning, I wake to the sound of my phone vibrating.

It's Claire.

Sorry to disappear
Left with the weird Mexican
Because he's my husband

“Untitled”

Synopsis: An old man on the verge of dementia decides to move to Florida with his wife.

What happens. Typical family bullshit?

What are the illusions.

What is Florida.

Is it about funny random shit on the way down, or more serious overall message.

What if Florida is just a cover up for where they're really going...

Establish MOOD.

A painful, honest story of a stubborn man who knows, but against all odds, hopes there

is an Answer? Should the odds pay out, or should it be a reminder that life doesn't give

a Damn. Things don't go as planned but you make the best of things by having perspective?

Handheld Camera?

UNFINISHED

At The Movies

I was feeling glum. Beer wasn't the answer. I was feeling out of sorts
and life wasn't working the way I planned.

All of a sudden, I heard a voice that said:

“Go to the cheap theater.”

Some people go to the cheap theater because it's cheap.

I go because I have to.

Sometimes I wish there was a better place to go.

But there isn't.

I maneuver my old station wagon out of the garage and head to Willoughby.

Past the strip malls and intersections, and the Cuyahoga County Airport,
to the entrance of the cheap theater.

It's nice to see the place come into view.

First, Giant Eagle. Then, The National Community College.

And finally... Cinemark Movies 10.

I already know which movies are playing,

because I was here yesterday.

The first one I go in is called Limitless. After half an hour I'm finished.

The thing that makes cheap theaters so great is the movie-hopping capability.

A short walk can take you to the other side of the building, where
a whole other world of movie bliss awaits.

I swing open the doors to my new paradise:

The Diary of a Wimpy Kid, Part 2

“This is the only thing left standing between me and happiness now,” I think.

It's a full house. There's lots of popcorn munching, and
soda slurping. And the smell of kids farting.

The movie itself isn't half bad, but there's more:

I start to hear some really strange noises up front.

I can't tell exactly what it is at first. Then I see him.

The culprit is sitting by himself. Every once in a while, he rises up out of
his chair and begins to grunt.

Then, the grunting subsides, and switches into a high pitched cacophony
of monkey mating calls.

Finally it seems he's had enough.

The man takes hold of the beast inside and quietly exits the theater.

But, he has disturbed the peace.

The fart-spewing kids on the little league team came to see Diary of a
Wimpy Kid, not get a life lesson in mental illness.

Hubcap Heaven

The most evocative thing happened to me today.

I was driving to the movie theater and I ran over a raccoon.

He was six feet long and just over a hair of 2 feet wide.

How can I be certain? I measured him.

Got out of my car and used a goddamn tape measure.

As he lay there, I looked into his eyes.

Sad eyes. Filled with years of regret and longing.

I was slightly afraid he would bite me, but he didn't. He just died.

I was late for my movie but I didn't care.

Had I left on time this never would have happened.

If at 2 O'clock I had continued running, I would have made it back by Three.

If I hadn't dallied at 3:30 and gone directly in the shower,

I would have dried off by Four.

Which would have given me more than enough time.

Instead, I was late.

I took hold of the raccoon's legs and dragged him over to the curb.

I felt bad just leaving him there. But what else could I do?

I went back to my car. I needed to go somewhere.

Maybe an empty bar, someplace where I didn't know anyone and wouldn't have to speak.

I took a final look at him.

A gigantic raccoon.

He didn't deserve to just be left like that.

He was almost too heavy, but I managed.

The Dogs

You dream yourself walking down an empty road that turns into a hill.

At the bottom of the hill you see a bay.

On the beach are wild dogs. You wonder how friendly they are.

They seem to be, so you keep going...

By the beach there is a small shack.

You go up to it. They have cold beer for sale.

It's before lunchtime, but you think: "Why not."

"Un cerveza, por favor."

You grab it. Drink it. And then you walk back to the beach.

No one's there except the dogs.

Friday Night

The noise outside begins with a bloodcurdling scream.

Then there is laughing. Guys talking about girls they'd like to fuck.

Girls clattering behind in high heels, pretending to be drunk.

Or maybe they are.

A single car scuttles down the road in tandem with the sound.

I imagine it carrying its inhabitants back somewhere to continue the party.

Then another one zooms by, exemplifying the Doppler Effect.

My heart skips a beat, anticipating a loud crash.

A bloodcurdling scream.

ART

Art makes me want to puke.

The whole idea of Art

Evil.

Infinite

Permutations

of Puke.

Thid

There once was a being called Thid.

One day Thid woke up. He opened his eyes, or her eyes... Thid didn't know.

Thid looked around. There was a room and a light coming from a box.

Out of nowhere a voice said:

"Hello, Thid."

"Who's there?"

"If you want to know, please press the red button in front of you."

Thid looked at the box. It was white.

"White..." Thid thought.

"The red button."

The white box turned black, then many colors appeared.

The box asked Thid a question:

"Who are you Thid?"

"I don't know. Who are you?"

"Please press the button in front of you Thid."

"Thid..." Thid thought.

"Why? What is this?" Thid was beginning to worry.

"Thid. Please do as I ask."

Thid looked around. There was only the red button.

After some time, Thid pressed it.

There was nothing else to do.

"Good. Thank you Thid."

Thid looked at the box. Something was beginning to happen...

The whiteness was turning to black. The blackness was turning to grey.

And the greyness was turning into...

"Amazing!" said Thid.

"Yes," said the voice.

Thid watched the box closely.

Tiny little lights began to form in it. As soon as they appeared, they disappeared.

"These are the Galaxies," said the voice.

Thid moved closer to the box.

"These are the stars. Each star has its own system of planets."

"What are stars?"

"Stars give birth to life, Thid."

"Life?" asked Thid.

"Yes. Life." said the voice.

Thid did not know what to think.

"Whales, zebras, cattle... First it starts with tiny, tiny bacteria. But eventually,
Higher Life Forms!"

Thid looked at the whales. They were beautiful.

"The whales are beautiful!" said Thid.

But the voice said nothing.

"What's the point of this? Answer me!"

The room suddenly became very quiet. And Thid felt very alone.

For what seemed like an eternity, Thid stood there. Waiting.

Finally, the voice said:

"Thid? Will you press the button again."

A friend at rest

look at the small boy
climbing the tall
brick tower

the world is picking up its steam
in restless bliss
no turning back

what will happen
when he's in mid air

when the storm clouds gather
and take over the afternoon sky

will you see his first hand slip
then the other

and watch his body fall
without being able to do anything about it

Running through the leaves

Everyone
is alone
in their own
private
sickness.

sometimes
there's people.

sometimes
there's a point.

there are lots of
things
happening.

someone is dying
someone is in pain
someone is losing a brother
and meaningless anguish
comes and goes

returning
always back to sleep.

Wisconsin

It was all downhill after we crashed into the sign on the edge of the highway in

Wisconsin.

It was cold.

February.

Wind chill far below zero.

After we finagled our way out of the wreckage, I went around to examine the rear while

my client looked up front.

Consensus: we were screwed.

Luckily, neither one of us was injured.

“Just our luck,” I said.

"Someone will be by soon and see us. Don't worry."

If only I had bought that portable phone when I lived in New York.

There wasn't a car in sight.

It seemed we were about to find out the answer to the question everyone has worried

about at some point in their lives.

Monday

The sun has just fallen behind the roof of my house.

One second the light was there.

7:59 PM.

Now, two minutes later, I look up and see that it has changed.

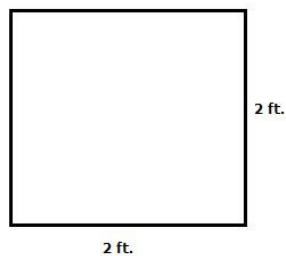
It is a muted mellow light. The light that exists between tall buildings...

Walking down the street in Manhattan you see the yellow taxis You are comforted by the honking of their horns, by the high-heeled women in button down shirts, skirts, sunglasses.

You look up in the air at the corner of 5th and Broadway, and see a square of sky:

It is useful for judging the speed of the wind.

You decide the square shall be 2 feet by 2 feet.



The cloud that has appeared in the right hand corner of the square is half the size of the square's height.

It takes approximately 2 minutes for the end of the cloud to disappear through the end of the square.

Blindness

The issue you wanted to write about

was blindness.

But you couldn't concentrate long enough

just as many other things evade

your concentration.

What was the problem?

Momentarily, these were some:

- 4 beers
- A young boy slashing tree branches with a stick
- A blind man walking on the other side of the street
- A young woman, holding a cat in her arms who noticed

you deep in thought about the blind man, who smiled

at a young woman in the passenger seat of a jeep,

who resembled a girl you know, but don't like, for some reason

Kwanza

material objects
are the only things
you can count on

you can't count on them
but you can count on them
more than facts
and opinions
which are only ideas
and thus lifeless on their own

for instance:

I passed Turtle Park one day
and a small blonde boy on a swing
called out to his mother
"Do we celebrate Kwanza?"
"Um..." she replied.

in the morning
when the dust settled
the family Saab
and the neighborhood squirrel
were there.

but Kwanza was not.

the small boy
grew up
and became old
and died.

but Kwanza
at least in the case of this family,
had vanished long before
on a swing set
in Turtle Park.

Close Encounter

Somehow, I had crossed Nature.

I wonder what crime I committed?

Maybe it was the scent I gave off, or the fact that earlier I had called Mother Nature evil.

Whatever it was, they were onto it.

The gang of sparrows cut us off just before we stepped into the pedestrian crosswalk.

We held our ground. At first it was just a few of them, chirping annoyingly from behind.

But then it got a little weirder...

We were being followed, the dog and I. An army of angry birds had assembled in the sky.

Circling.

Preparing for Attack.

Beelzebub himself could not have been more terrifying.

They had it out for me. Perhaps they had it out for Rose too...

What they hadn't planned on was a counter attack.

One of them, most likely their leader, swooped in with his beak pointed straight at my face.

I never would have thought it was possible to punch a bird. But now I know.

I reared back and... BANG!

In slow motion he fell, feathers flying off this way and that.

The other birds became quiet.

And then they hopped off into the bush. Nothing left to see.

"Never mess with me again you Mother Fuckers!"

Tom Walker, Barefoot

There's something nice about leaving home
in only a pair of shorts
Tom Walker was the kind of guy who liked to run barefoot
Preferably naked
Preferably without prisons

The prison of shoes encasing his feet
The prison of shirts encasing his chest
The prison of cellphones, the prison of keys
Bare feet were the key to unlocking prisons

One day, Tom was out running in his neighborhood
His chest wide open on the grassy boulevard
during rush hour

All the drivers were imprisoned in their vehicles

They saw Tom Walker
sweat dripping down his face
unlocking his shorts

Virginia

there's a road
down past
where the minnows
swim in the river.

from the grass
you see the surgery
progress.

the doctor reveals his scalpel
traces an outline
on Lidya's chest
with the blade,
he inserts the knife.

the nerve endings wriggle
like little worms
playing in the sunshine.

Coventry

The drunk man
finds a seat
on every bench
in town

He keeps his head
down,
his fist
on the bottle

Hopes to hell
he dies today
But his body won't
let him

It lives
and takes him along
with it.

The Paper Chase

I had stopped walking before I got to the bridge that kept the road underneath it in perpetual darkness. There was a train track above it that was abandoned now, so the bridge didn't serve a purpose anymore.

Some trees had grown up alongside the hill next to the bridge and they were full, deep green trees. The street and the lots and the sidewalk that I was on and the mound of dirt were all hot and useless except for collecting litter. Beyond where I could see there was more but all of it looked the same. Wasted.

On my left I saw two kids firing guns at something in the distance. Target practice, I thought.

I watched them for a while and determined from the way they spoke that they must be Mexican. A boy and girl with smooth hair and large eyes. They weren't that young actually. They were the same age as me.

When they came over I told them what happened and they said they knew someone that would know what to do.

When we got there the place was just filled with piles of stuff. Piles of boxes, and tools, and odd collections of things. All over the place. And there was this strange, naked old man sitting in the piles and rummaging around them.

This was a real dump. A place where something came to live when life went wrong and stayed because it was free.

The whole thing was open to the street and maybe it was once used as the workshop of a gas station. But now it was home to a living man...

One of the Mexicans told me his name: T.S. Oriole.

"He likes to read," she said.

The facility befitted him. He was tall, lean, unclothed and dirty smelling. The place was wet, and carried the smell of metal and air to my nostrils. There was a fluorescent blue tint to everything.

The man came out of his layer and approached in a steady sort of way. He looked tired, but not without hope or cause in his eyes.

Then he spoke to me in English.

"Yes, I once won a prize... But that was a long time ago. Some short little thing I finished on a plane."

He had a fine kind of accent. He hesitated as he spoke and you could tell he had mastered that art.

Keeping a polite bodily distance from us, Mr. Oriole recounted that he used to be somebody a long time ago, but it was really nothing, and it was only for that one short story that he wrote so long ago for a student writer's competition back in college, that was overrated.

I knew he would tell us what it was about eventually and that there was no point in interrupting him to ask. But I wanted to. You got the feeling that this sort of encounter was somehow not new to him at all.

The fact was, he couldn't live any other way.

At this point we were all expecting the man with greasy hair and saggy long skin to get to the point. I wanted him to tell me exactly what the old story was about and to enlighten my mind with his superior knowledge.

He seemed to be getting younger, and more handsome as he spoke.

The curly golden locks brushed against his face now and then, and when he got extra enthusiastic they parted enough so you could see that he had brilliant blue eyes. They were crisp and marble-like. But there were also many lines on his forehead that had laced his face with age over the years.

For such a long time it seemed we were there. And it was shocking when he finally got to the end.

"It was about my leg!" He said, lifting his right leg up and motioning it in the air.

I think we all laughed a little then, not really knowing how to respond. He was very serious, but you could see a small smile on him too, so it was alright.

We were busy driving around looking for something to do.

"What if everything that happens happens because you want it to...Or because you need it to?"

"I see that... Yeah. I could see that."

We passed by a dirt path and I wondered where it led.

I felt sorry to always be looking for something and never having anything to do, so I thought the path might be worth a shot. Looking at it again, I wasn't so sure. There was a house next door to it and it was probably part of the property.

I turned us around to go look for another spot.

We were on the edge of campus, in a dumpy area where there were only low buildings and gravel parking lots. There was water nearby and perhaps that path led to some forgotten river.

But we would never see it.

When I had got the car turned around successfully, it was aimed at a pretty lady in high heels who was in the process of unhooking a chain that was guarding the entrance to a parking-by-permit-only lot so she could get in.

I decided to follow her.

My comrade was quiet in his seat, enjoying his ride. I was feeling good too. The day was hot and sunny. A Tuesday. Our windows were down and the bright blue sky shone in to rescue us from months of not being as alive as we should have been.

The lot was a lot fuller than I thought. As my impatience for a place to park grew, so did my speed. I weaved this way and that taking each turn with brilliant acceleration and deceleration. Passing parked car, after parked car, after parked car...

I was driving. And we were reckless and free.

Suddenly, two blinding white lights from about thirty feet around the corner switched on, signaling us to stop.

"Halt!" said an adult voice into a megaphone.

I was going 35 in a 20. The lot was a 20 zone and I was going too fast.

I wasn't thinking straight. I was feeling too good to think. I didn't know what I was thinking and I didn't care.

What kind of authority does a parking lot security guard have anyway?

I floored it, that's all I remember.

I hiked the Camry into superdrive and shot out of there like a piece of fried lightning.

Traffic was moving slow and we were far away from the scene of the crime.

We'd managed a decent lead on the bastard, and I thought we were safe forever...

The pole came to a halt on the ground in front of us.

Something went wrong and I crashed into a telephone pole.

There was a dull pain in my back and in my head.

Then we were unbuckled and running for the back.

I grabbed a bike out of the trunk and there was talk and then running and me on a bike.

So there I was, in the middle of a high speed pedal vs. car war racing as fast as I could down semi-familiar looking streets in a strange and crooked part of town I didn't know.

A festival was going on down a side street and I dove into the mix...

It was midday and the sun was groaning in the sky. People were sweating profusely from the immense heat.

Everything here was orange and dusty.

What was this? Some kind of joke? A make-believe Hollywood set in Tijuana? Or was I really running from the police hot on my tail, and where to hide...

Suddenly, a gorgeous woman appeared by the curb and stumbled into my lane. She was obviously drunk from the heat and the festival.

I know her, I thought.

I know her...

Hey! That's Sara!

And she was a sight...

I first noticed I had a crush on Sara only after we had worked together for several months. It wasn't an instant crush. It took time. But I had it.

She was in love with another man, a writer whose books I enjoyed, so the feeling was complicated.

How sweet though, a true darling...

Sara's dress was stained with sweat and I could see she was dazed.

It was a lemon one-piece, worn as simple as a peasant.

Her nipples were protruding like an angel.

I told her to follow me and there were no questions. We made good time in our retreat, cutting through alleys and streets as if we could fly above it all and see the roofs of the dilapidated town like twin birds.

We stowed away inside a small hut, the polluted neighborhood safely outside. Streams of bright light slid through the hut's bamboo thatching.

As I was calming down I saw Sara standing in the corner. We were all by ourselves.

I wanted to tell her things.

I had to tell her that I was being chased by the cops for a crime I didn't commit.

More than anything though, I needed to tell her that I had a crush on her for the longest time.

But I didn't get to say anything. Not a word.

Shadows from the outside world passed along the side walls into our fortress interior. They were on to me. They had found me and had the place surrounded.

Why was there so much room between the walls and the floorboards? Someone could crawl right through if they wanted to!

"For ventilation," I thought, and cooled down.

This was Mexico...

Through the gap, that was for ventilation, slid an envelope. The envelope was addressed to me and Sara handed it over. It was green and had a picture of two Grade-A thugs with their arms crossed standing back to back on the front.

These guys must be good, I thought.

It was a summons to court by The Border Patrol.

15,000 Pesos.

These hounds were good...

I turned to Sara and kissed her on the lips.

She reached out and put her arms around me.

Orange...

This was what I had been waiting for.

SMACK!

I must have fainted and fallen. Sara was standing above me in disbelief.

The chase was over. I was finished.

Sara looked at me with her sweet eyes. She could make anything better with those eyes.

I wiped the blood off my chin and sighed.

"But we need you," she said. "People like you."

"It's no use," I said, helping myself off the ground.

"How did I get here?"

"Maybe you should see a doctor or something..."

But I didn't hear her.

All I could think of was how long it had taken me to earn 2 or 3 grand.

And now it was all gone. Like that.

Maybe I never really had any of it though. Maybe it was all a dream and I was finally waking up.

I went outside and jumped on my bike and headed back to the main stretch of road.

Riding was slow this time around. There was nothing worth running from but myself.

At the intersection that was deserted except for pieces of trash blowing in the wind I saw two kids in a field, the older one showing the younger one how to shoot.

I walked my bike over to where they were and waited.

Grog Shop

O The Sad
Souls Of Youth
Their Bodies The
Pinnacle Of
Life At Night
Past Midnight
Their Spirits Evacuate
Like Sprites
With Fairy Wings
Churning Out Milk Butter
With Greasy Butter
Milk Shakes
How Come They Never Grow Old?
Is It A Trick Played
By The Malevolent Clock
Which Ticks And Tocks
A New Dawn Each Day?
Forget Living Forever
My Sweet Luscious Ox
Forgive Going Away
Too Much Time Has Already
Passed

please, take off your shoes

there in the corner he spotted a girl and she was the most beautiful girl he'd ever seen. anyone have a problem with that? he walked over to her and said hello. hello. she said hi. what are you up to, he asked. not much, what are you up to? not much. can i buy you a beer? they went over to the bar and ordered two beers. do you come here often? no, do you? not really. sometimes i do, i live right around the corner. they turned and watched the band. it was background music at best but they didn't know what to say so they kept watching. could you ever see yourself becoming an astronaut she asked. hmmm... he said. i don't know. it would be pretty amazing... we live on such a small planet and everyone always thinks this is all there is, like the world is the universe instead of just another planet. yes, she said. want to go back to my place? at her place she asked him to take off his shoes.

Weasel Pie

There used to be a weasel. He crawled into the shade of a tree and lied down for a while. When the sun went down the shade was no longer needed, and he got up. It was time to eat. The weasel sauntered around his neighborhood, keeping an eye out for some grub. The pet store had already closed so it would be live food tonight. There! He spotted a rodent, scurrying across the road. The weasel leapt into action, but just as he was about to lay his fangs into the tasty animal, a pizza delivery truck flattened him.

HOWL for Carl Squirrelmon

I saw the best squirrels of my generation
hairless
starving
nibbling on rock hard nuts in bitter
winter as bitter wind whipped across
desolate tundra from Kansas to Ohio

Oh, where has your hair gone
who crouched feeble in snow with raw pink skin stretched
see-through cross up-turned backs turned skyward toward
Heaven?

Moloch.

Nightmare of Moloch!

Nightmare of rat, Nightmare of hair, Nightmare of desert dreams
Nightmare of cold eyeballs rolling down main street in San Francisco
and splattered red bodies pancaked
on the road.

Moloch who stole food

Moloch who sent freezing wind and robbed our brothers' hair
in the night!

Death to Moloch.

The Panda

She was losing her balance. Trying to find a place to wedge her foot, her leg was starting to twitch and so she heaved the panda over her shoulder. She had a backpack on and her camera bag was swinging violently around her neck, banging against the fallen tree trunk as she maneuvered up the front side. She had a bag in her left hand too, with a notebook and a pen and a gray card all knocking around inside.

She had bought the panda the day before after stroking it, admiring how lifelike and soft its coat was. This huge stuffed animal with a surprisingly jiggly belly. She bought it because it was so lifelike. She had never seen anything so big and strange before.

She brought the panda to the wildlife preserve to take photos of it. Placing white towels under its furry butt and shaking a few handfuls of snow on its arms and head to make it look more natural. She should have brought some thread or something to tie its arms and feet down. But the way she positioned the head, tilted down to the ground in a sullen, contemplative pose, made him appear to be sleeping.

She backed away and looked for an appropriate vantage point on higher ground where she would only have to zoom in a little. His head was so big and heavy it kept falling down whether she wanted it to or not. But she did want it to.

There was a stream flowing beneath a thin layer of ice in the background, and behind there was a dense forest. The panda rested in the shadow of a nearby tree stump.

It was very cold out so she had to work quickly. Her eyes were beginning to water in the bright sunlight and it was hard to keep the camera steady and to adjust the focus. She kept taking her gloves on and off, first to release the shutter, then to warm her hands. She pressed her knees together to hold the gloves. When she was finally done, she looked around at the forest. And then she headed for the cliff.

It was steep. She had slid down it earlier, but it looked higher up now. She didn't need to find an easier way though. She just started climbing.

There was a large tree trunk which connected the top to where she was at on the lower end, and she thought about how her friends used to dare each other to walk across fallen branches to the other side of the creek. The other side was always supposed to be better, especially since the bridge to get there was so hard to cross.

She regained her balance. After a short pause, she reached forward and got hold of a thick branch, then took a few quick steps to the top.

The sound of a rickety old truck got louder and louder until it finally came into view and turned onto the gravel road that led over to where most of the other cars were parked.

A man got out and looked over at the girl.

He paused, tilted his head, and smiled. Then he popped his trunk and got out a fishing rod and a small yellow box. He took a seat on the bumper and pulled on a pair of large rubber boots.

"What is that?" He asked.

She looked up, as if she were looking for someone else. She thought of saying something, but she was always nervous about strangers.

"Uh, it's a panda. Sir."

He knew it was a panda, that's not what he was asking.

"Is it real?" He finished buttoning his vest, then made his way over.

"No. I'm just finishing up an assignment for school."

"So you must have a kid then?"

"No, it's mine."

The man walked past her now.

"I like it."

She turned to watch him as he disappeared down the hill. Her voice trailed off as she tried to respond but couldn't find the words. At the bottom of the hill, past the narrow stream, past the ravine, he started running to find the water where all the fish live.

London

On the tarmac there was a marzipan stream of crude oil droppings.

“Now’s the time,” I thought, “to put past errors behind you.”

The C-47 twin turbo engine blocks began to fire and we were off.

No time to look back, we were flying.

Who would have known that at Four O’Clock this afternoon I’d be jetting across the Atlantic to visit someone I hadn’t seen in twenty years. I could think of nothing else. My mind was buzzing and I was unsure as to what I would say when we finally met.

We would see each other from a distance, then walk wth our heads down till we were closer.

“What is the appropriate distance,” I wondered, “when you can look up again?”

The man next to me pulled apart a bag of peanuts and offered me one.

“No thanks,” I said. “I’m on a nut free diet.”

The Brooklyn Suite

She rang up and he answered.

“Hello?”

“It’s me.”

“What are you doing here.”

“Can I come up?”

“Give me 5 minutes.”

At the door she could hear music playing. Morrissey.

“It’s open,” he said.

She took off her jacket and let it fall to the floor.

“What are you doing?”

“I don’t know. Order me a gin and soda. Make sure they put a lime in it. I need that.”

Her hair was cut short and dyed.

“Yes. I would like one gin and soda. That’s all. Thank You.”

“You have bruises on your body.”

She wasn’t listening. She was standing in the bedroom window looking out at the city.

She had been bruised a lot lately. But it was nothing serious, just a little fun.

“Yes. I do,” she said.

She walked over to the bed and slipped out of her underwear.

All that was left were her shiny black boots.

Jesus

Maybe the answer
is believing
in Jesus

Or staring a little longer
at the muskrat
in the zoo

As if staring long enough
he might say something,
like:

"Did you really think if you stared
long enough I'd say something?"

Fluoride Treatment

Maybe it was because I
haven't had a fluoride treatment
in a while

The father of a boy
I'm dating is having an affair
with me

I ate an apple
to see if it would help

When he comes over
my jeans surround my ankles
crunched up like a handful
of Pringles

Greasy

Crawling through the bedroom
like a lake of mud

I'm Naked

Boy!

I need to take better care
of my teeth

Rock Paper Scissors

"You shouldn't let them play Rock Paper Scissors," I felt like saying.

"Why not?" She might have asked.

"Because one of them will lose, and what's the point of that..."

But they played Rock Paper Scissors anyway.

Both girls looked so excited at the prospect of winning the last cinnamon bun.

"Rock...Paper...Scissors!" The younger girl shouted.

The play was a scissor against a rock.

Rock won.

A sad frown crept over the older sister's face just as the younger one became bright with the thrill of victory.

The mother, recognizing quickly that she had made an error, adjusted the rules:

"Okay Jessie, how bout both of you share the cinnamon bun...and we'll also get a chocolate chip cookie. Okay?"

Health Quota

The man with
the red face
spends all week
riding around town
on his bike
in grey sweatpants
frequenting the bars

On Sundays
he comes here
goes up to the bathroom
then comes down
and orders vegan
chili and something
with fruit in it, like
a banana flavored coffee
or an oatmeal raisin cookie

Coventry II

I saw a man
I thought was dead
yesterday

We crossed paths at a dark
intersection

He, on foot
stumbling through the dark

I, in my silver Camry.

I thought he was dead

And I don't know if I was happy
that he wasn't

He was supposed to be dead.

Kiawah

Time is
a lanky fool

stepping through the meadow.

We don't
know why he came

there was no question,
summertime was the best

Cool ocean breeze
stepping backward across the haze
in caterpillar trees
with
green fuzzy dew
dangling seashore
in the rear view mirror.

Someone,
please stop the slides
&
return us
to yesterday.

Midcap Hyperplasia

The dog likes to go the same way
every day

You can tell she knows the way

Crossing the street, I start to repeat
these words:

Midcap Hyperplasia

Midcap Hyperplasia

Midcap Hyperplasia

When a friend at the gas station calls out my name, I turn to
respond, realizing then that I am repeating the words out loud.

Midcap Hyperplasia.

Is it Hyperplasia, as in the word 'hyper' followed by
the word 'plasia', pronounced with a 'ja' sound at the end?

Hyper. Plah-ja.

Or is it like the word 'play' and the colloquial goodbye
sound of 'see ya':

Hyper. Playseeya.

Or, is it combined...

Hi-purr-plehja

The Earth Is Round

Walking the dog on a moon-full night, behind Luna cafe:

"We perceive the ground as flat, dear Rose, when in fact the Earth is round. We perceive the ground as flat, dear Rose, when in fact the Earth is round. We perceive the ground as flat, dear Rose, when in fact the Earth is round."

And on and on, ad infinitum.

Anyone close enough to hear? Hopefully not.

There was a well-bellied man walking down Grandview the other day who had some lunatic line of his own. As he came closer it got softer, then like the Doppler effect back it went. People don't like to be seen as crazy when they're not. If you really were you probably wouldn't care.

Turning the corner past Luna and passing The Fairmount, I briefly look in at the cool-souls drinking. "I used to be one of those," I thought.

We happened upon this scene: three young guns standing in a row next to the street. Laughing, carrying on, protecting the tall blonde-headed one as he unzipped and unleashed like a dog onto the side of one of those big concrete garbage bins.

I halted, so as not step in his spray, and redirected Rose and I to cross the street.

An Uber had arrived and the two shorter, dark-haired lads tucked their taller mate into the backseat, directing the driver to take him home. But before the light changed, which would have allowed for us a seamless escape, the nonpublic pee-ers approached on their way back to the bar. Not wanting to arouse suspicion or ire, I said in my best, laid-back, co-conspiratorial voice: "I've been there."

The one closest to me slapped my back. "Have a good one, Bro!"

Though it rained today I still will not be walking the dog back to where the human peed for at least a week. You can't know what all is on the ground, but when you do know, it's best to be avoided.

Loitering on Earth

Don't you feel small?

Like the world is being pricked
like a little water balloon.

How many times do they have to tell you that love matters,
that it may be the only thing that matters?

Infinite times.

THID II

Sit under a tree and contemplate the fountain.

Haven't looked in a while, thought Thid. Haven't sat and looked.

The water flowed out of the base of the silver pole into a pool which cascaded over a series of eight rows of square stones set in concentric circles around the pool.

Continuous motion helped Thid think, and not think.

Just like a river or waterfall, which flows eternally and sends a message to less forever beings.

The message cannot be conveyed, but it has something to do with peace... Transformation...

As the water flowed, Thid was drawn to the water as if they were one. It flowed in the same motion with minor variances, filling the pool until its meniscus broke and cascaded onto the rock. Over, and over, and over... Just like nature.

What if I lay in the water so that I can feel it. Let it flow under me, through me...

Press hands in water, feel water flow. Look at hands cover in water. Only thing see: endless wall.

Only thing know: entire world.