

the Unrorean

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Tonight

Tonight's the first of many,
I suppose.
I just tucked-in Billy.
Read him a story.
Smelled his forehead.
Said a prayer.
I know he won't be boy
for long.
I certainly wasn't.
Tonight he made the trip.
Not to boarding school
or college
not even to summer camp
or to a friend's house.
No, tonight he made the trip—
the ten-foot trip—
from top bunk
to bottom bunk.
And I can feel the change.
Blond will soon go brown,
milk will soon go coffee,
backpack will soon go briefcase.
It's not long now,
but I'd still like to know.
How long do I have—how
long till Billy goes
Bill?

—*Mathieu Cailler*

Everywhere

Everywhere
your absence landscapes
from memory of the sea
dwindles in lambent shapes
with intimate wounds
on a horizon of sky,
paints shroud
an intertwined echo
from musical stones
deafens the waves
in your watery throbs
along the sand dunes
of the Cape
half-asleep in the sun
consumed by our voices
by child laughter on rocks
and reefs of silence.

—*B.Z. Niditch*

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The Curve of Arctic Air

Waist deep in gradual treasures,
an oboe ascends the twitch and hush of Finland,
consuming wholly the second air.

Villagers and blue glaciers are prone to forgive,
receiving justice and resuscitation
in an equipoised curve.

A string of gulls reclaims the sky
as deerhounds ponder a mawkish fisherman
nettled, prodigious back high.

Like Quasimodo, he is holding his breath,
waiting for the seasons to change
into a ruby throne and scepter.

—*Richard King Perkins II*

I Am Weary, Let Me Rest

My chassis is weary
I'm backing, lowering the bass boat into the river
and then I stop
The boat floats off the trailer
and since my emergency brake doesn't work
I pray for my transmission to fail
to jump out of park and into reverse
and then I'd be submerged
baptized in the Lord of Carburetors and cracked windshields

My motor oil drifts off like menstrual blood
and I feel the last shiver of
automotive orgasm
then nothing but peace

White swans float at the edges of wild rice plants
Turtles sit on their logs
A two-hundred-eighty-five pound woman in a yellow kayak
rides low in the water

My body fills
I am fully hydrated
My long-term electrical problems are no longer
of concern
The chronically lit CHECK ENGINE light
is finally extinguished

—*Mitchell Grabois*

I cannot bring a world quite round, Although I patch it as I can

—title from *The Man With the Blue Guitar* by Wallace Stevens

She lends him one long hair from the many on her head.
Token to dispel what he thinks is his workday.

This is before everything turns grey and the river
is diverted into a viaduct that runs
between altered fields.

She understands the meaning of the mill
with its great grinding he must attend.

Life is no longer reverie. Still, she lends him
her long brown hair before it turns grey.
He tucks it under his shirt.

Before the day becomes a grind and he's
covered by alteration's veil.

To dispel the notion that dawn is a trap
to draw them into the viaduct at the place
where frogs are swept away.

At sunset, he returns. She draws the long hair
from the sweat on his chest and leads him

by the length of it upriver, viaduct and mill left behind,
into the smell of what men haven't planted:
violets, mugwort, horsetail fern.

—*Grace Marie Grafton*

The Uninvited Guests

I peek over the fence
watch the cavemen barbecuing
a squat triad huddled around
a small red hibachi.

I have seen their leader
watching me sunbathe
over this very fence
a bearded troglodyte that licks his lips
way too often.

the noodle casserole clenched tight
in my hands seems
an equal trade for one
or two burgers.

—*Holly Day*

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Signs

After World War Two crashed to its glorious end and the survivors in England looked around in confusion, a master gardener decided the season had arrived to replant the street signs plucked like weeds to foil a German invasion—the enemy flocking above needed no signposts to find London, which had wheezed and sagged under daily bombings—and in the end the only ones lost on British roads were the British.

Surely there was no confusion in dusty warehouses where signs were held as unbending prisoners, and how simple to plant them like victorious flags on the proper street corners because everything looked the same as before, except all those buildings reduced to piles of children's blocks, but that was no problem because there were still the maps—the ones whisked into oblivion to foil a German invasion.

Naturally the English would never allow even a shadow of error, and all due diligence was observed in empire building fashion, except the honorable rotund gentleman from the highway authority decided through pince-nez and a small explosion of pipe smoke that he would rather live on Oxford Street than Regent Street but without the hassle of actually moving—scurrying underlings dutifully placed signs, postmen adjusted routes, and all was well.

It was an idea at the forefront of logical thought, avant-garde slicing up stodgy English conservatism like Stilton cheese, for what gentle sir would voluntarily reveal his residence as Humping-by-the-Sea in Slopshire (with head held high) when a simple signpost inoculating the wilted grass miraculously spread the healing power of a name like Castle Terrace Hamlet at St. James's Shore?

And what gods of the pagan past assumed this bright onus of the naming of names? Am I not equal in stature?

I enclose a photograph of my new home—it may appear slightly trailerish, but signs are not to be doubted:

I inhabit Buckingham Palace, the Rhine meandering by, Everglades to the left and Serengeti on the right—

In the background you can just make out Mount Everest.

—*Spencer Smith*

Double Take

If you are alive, then so must I be
Your skin pale beige, a tourniquet of hope, perfectly free
For the price of a kiss, the green edge of ash leaves
Flouncing on window glass, guarding us from the sun that grieves

Your skin pale beige, a tourniquet of hope, perfectly free
The green sea of your eyes, the graying curls, fingerprints worn
Flouncing on window glass, guarding us from the sun that grieves
So dark behind its back, it cannot see the world's reaching plaid sleeves

Your skin pale beige, a tourniquet of hope, perfectly free
Wake me if you need me, you say, holding my head securely
The green sea of your eyes, the graying curls, fingerprints worn
From grasping steering wheels, full buckets, picking corn

Flouncing on window glass, guarding us from the sun that grieves
For the price of a kiss, the green edge of ash leaves
Behind its back, so dark it cannot see the world's reaching plaid sleeves
If you are alive, than so must I be.

—*Laura Rodley*

Try Outs

Further than
the outcome
of skipping rope
or hula hoop
explaining chess
or Beckett
frightful
by a first dive
from strange
underwater reefs
astonished like Melville
in the south seas
or on a motor bike
like James Dean
at the edge of a road
or emerging
from hypnosis, analysis
with an artificial heart
for a poet's
initial read,
or overhearing
the blushing neighborhood
gossip about
someone's official summons,
or a first day at school
away from home
with a new backpack
swinging your books
like clouds in the wind
by another skateboard kid
sidled next to you
lost in the big city,
or on a blind date
with someone you know
but cannot relate to,
raising your finger
at the sky
yet finding connections
with resonance
in the same world
and time.

—*B.Z. Niditch*

How it was, Small

Away from the lightning flashes of my mother's anger, striking or about to strike, I took comfort in the small sounds of my first grade classroom: pencils against paper, shifts of cloth as legs crossed and uncrossed, breathing of small bodies, not in terror. I escaped into books with worn edges thumbed by many small hands before mine, their sweaty or jelly-whorled prints a testimony to happiness, no matter how temporary.

—*Martha Christina*

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Exhausted, on its back the sun
—from so far, brought down
by its unbearable weight

not sure it can be lifted
cool, become the moon again
and without stopping, listens

for the darkness, holds on
to all that's left —you look for her
as if every night is mixed with mud

and mountains not yet ashes
though you can make out her shoulders
still warm in this enormous silence

split in two, growing hair
and lips and flowers, holes
madness and nothing else.

—*Simon Perchik*

Drift

A stand of blue spruce humbles a patch of Massachusetts—
bucolic fetish in the hands of dire men, anonymous as
any frozen duck pond or dull wind lost to crystallized hills.

I feel the curve and spin of the world and the light of insult shining
over our heads. Torpid thoughts astound. On frosted glass, I scratch
out a happy face across the silhouette of a winter-berry sun.

In faintest hours, the tilt of night constricts all in its pale and
creatures emerge to scratch upon a familiar life and chime shroud.
Tomorrow, I will make sensible clothing for us both.

—*Richard King Perkins II*

See Through

In Sunday School today Miss Hooker said that everybody sins even though they shouldn't but that they should try extra-hard not to even though they will because since Adam and Eve sinned first in the Garden of Eden the world is *fallen*. It's no good for us to give up trying to reach perfection, she says, just because we can't. She has red hair and green eyes and a mole on her right nostril and freckles I'd say everywhere I see and maybe places where I can't and that's an example of me sinning when I don't really want to because the places on her I can't spot are underneath her clothes and it's a sin to think about naked women. How do I know that? I don't know. Maybe it's in the Bible and on the one or two times I actually tried to read it, it's such a damn big thing and without pictures, I might as well try to read the phone book or encyclopedia, volume A, or a decent dictionary. Jesus

said that if you look at a woman with lust you've committed adultery already in your heart and that's terrible, forget that I don't know what *adultery* is, or *lust* for that matter, but it sounds pretty bad, like hemorrhoids or coughing up blood. Yuck. Maybe it means kissing a woman who's not your wife. Miss Hooker has more freckles than plain old skin. Up in Heaven, she says, we'll get new bodies when we die, bodies for our souls but not bodies like we have now so I wonder if hers will be all freckles or all plain skin or neither. You could see right through one to the soul. If that's not naked I don't know what is and if we're all naked up in Heaven then why is it such a big deal down here on earth? Maybe it's a different kind of naked yonder. Yonder it's not a sin because there are no sins in Heaven, it must be like the Garden of Eden, but see-through. But of course I might wind up in Hell, which is probably what I'll deserve, fair is

fair, and I go to church and Sunday School so it isn't as if I haven't been warned. I wonder how naked folks get *there*. If you burn and burn then maybe your clothes burn all away and the next is your skin and blood and veins and arteries and bones and muscles and fat but then if they all burned away then how could Satan torture you eternally? It must smell bad, too, and I'll wish I was dead but of course I already am, or will be, it's the price I pay for sinning—or is it sinning too much? Miss Hooker says I can't help but sin but she also says I have to try not to so if I knew just how much sin I could get away with then I could sin, not sin up a storm but just enough so I'd enjoy it without being afraid of roasting on one of those damn pitchforks, 'round and 'round on Satan's rotisserie until I'm all tender and juicy and my meat separates from my bones but then just be all put together back again for another go and it will never end. After class I went up to her chair

and asked, *Miss Hooker, how much sin's enough to keep me out of Hell but also have some fun?* She took off her glasses and wiped her eyes with her first and little fingers, I guess to get that yucky stuff out of the corners, my dog has that problem, too, so I have to do it for him, and cleared her throat and put her glasses back on and said, *Gale, you're not taking this in the right spirit*—she talks Bible-y—and I said *Like Hell I'm not*, which made her drop her pen, which is red and almost matches her hair, so I picked it up for her, my good deed for the day, and on the way back up saw part of her leg a boy should never see, which was a sin, so if I'm not Heaven one second I'm Hell the next. Then I dropped it, too, but let her pick it up this time so I wouldn't sin twice in a row. Then she said, *Maybe you should go now*, so I said, *Yes ma'am*, and headed for the door but turned around to look at her as I was passing through and damned if she wasn't gazing into her little mirror and smoothing her hair. And all for love of me.

—Gale Acuff

The Weight of Angels

I'll never go to Sunday School again now that Miss Hooker's said she's engaged, she's my teacher, to be married, because she's my gal and nobody else's because every night I pray she'll be mine for richer or poorer, in sickness and health, and I even have dreams of us in bed and doing what wedded folks do before they fall asleep, at least I think they do, play cards and checkers and munch popcorn and watch TV and have babies, however that goes down, I'm not sure, I'm only 10 and Miss Hooker's 25 but she'll teach it all to me if I don't know by then, if we're married I mean. The lights are out

and the bedroom door's locked and the front and back doors and the cat's in for the night and if it's summer the window's open an inch and if winter it's closed and the curtains, too, and maybe the electric blanket's on. That's how my parents work it and that's how they had me. Now my angel, I mean Miss Hooker, says that she's engaged to be another man's wife so I don't know what to do but pray about it again and ask God how He wants me to manage it and I hope He answers but He doesn't talk much, at least not to me, and if I find out He's been talking to Miss Hooker, helping her when He should be helping me, I might swear Him off, too, like I have church and Sunday School class. And maybe I'll try to bust them up, Miss Hooker and her beau, and show her I'm the better man even if I'm just a boy, it's just a matter

of time before I change and if she's smart she'll wait a few more years until I'm, say, 16 to her 31 and she'll be old, my folks are 40 and that's ancient and Grandmom's 60 and it's a wonder there are people still alive at that age. I guess I'll find something else to do on Sunday mornings, sleep late, maybe, or do my homework for regular school Monday—I kind of hate for love to come to that. And if this guy breaks her heart and they split up, watch me be there to pick Miss Hooker up again, I'm pretty strong for my age and when I'm older I'll heft her like she was nothing, which is what an angel weighs. She'll probably swoon and be so grateful she'll marry me the next day. I won't blame her.

—Gale Acuff

In Crimson Wash

Barbie has taken up painting. A fast learner, she has already plastered the ceiling of the Dream House with images of moulds and assembly lines. Her vision for the story of creation. In a stroke of brilliance (she thought) she decided to cut off her ear in emulation of a true master's hand, but soon discovered hers were cast flat against her head. No matter how hard she tried, she could not get a hold on one. Finally, in frustration, she shaved the left side of her head. Forced a single red earring into her brain, left it dangling. An indefinite effigy.

—A.J. Huffman

Beach

Translated, from the German, by Stuart Friebert

Dead the bird
on the water and black. And black
and dead the dog on the beach.
But the cliffs at the rim
silvery in the evening. In the evening
dead the last shot
of wisdom in the water and dead
wisdom's last shot
and black on the beach.
But silvery at the rim.

—Kuno Raeber

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Yellow Sand

we load up our post-apocalyptic fortunes of flower bulbs and bright-colored beads take to the road. tilted blue street signs of dead civilizations mark the path streets built wide enough for ox-carts crumble under our feet.

sunlight glints through the hollowed-out eyes of battered skyscrapers that loom like mausoleums for headless mannequins wearing scant threads of fashions forgotten long before the end of the world.

—Holly Day

Cinema Dance

Cinema plus dance
 Invocation, fezzes, hot chocolate
 UNESCO barrier reefs
 Unseen Griffin
 Deer crossed with horse
 a hybrid...just like us
 we come from all over the Globe
 shaken like a snow crusted city in a
 Medieval handstand.

We gleefully take towns by storm with our
 Merry Prankster bus selves
 3 and a half days of cameras, ping pong and pivo.
 We compose a shot list from confetti.

We are part speed of light
 Jules and Jim at midnight
 We resist the temptation to crawl into the world
 and pull our psyches over our heads.

In a universe where dance ruled,
 we'd see fewer body bags.

We are Cinemascope.
 Chromakey with chromosomes.
 We are taking back the ozone layer that tries to stomp
 artists out and put them in tiny flowery picket places.

We go where others have gone and others will go.
 Van Gogh and Truffaut danced once.
 It's an everlasting dance.

We are one tin can line away from the sky.
 We need our exuberance more than our math.
 We need to let our lights shine.
 Cinema Dance is the longest magic hour.

Let us leave a bread trail.
 Our bread crumbs are evident.
 Feeding the soul is society's true hunger.

Dobre Chut!!!

—*Ellyn Maybe*

Tanya loved

to
 mess
 with his head.

especially
 after they split.

she knew
 she could count on

her
 tight
 red dress

to
 always
 give
 him

the
 blues.

—*John Yamrus*

caterpillar egg as universe

no one notices a life so small
 a life whose world could comfortably
 fit inside this little doughnut of an *o*
 a life confined by the contours

of a caterpillar egg welcome to the world
 of trichogramma a wasp so small 25
 could line up and can-can across
 their name say *wasp* and people flinch

but no one ever quailed at trichogramma
 o little chalcid little dagger your sting
 meant only for a caterpillar egg you inject
 your own egg into that lilliputian universe

where your young will consume the embryo
 will thrive at the expense of the would-be
 caterpillar will grow and transform
 that space into a chalice of new wasps

who will find more eggs to make more wasps
 10 million stories unnoticed creatures
 whose small lives are as large
 as our ignorance

—*Steve Tomasko*

Found Materials

—after Floyd Gompf's sculpture "*Red Wheel*"

Mocking loss, she collects what flood has strewn. A kind of baseline faith
 she rolls on, like Buddhist monks with their food bowls, but who's in the
 habit of giving now? Still, minutes tick unmeasured, she picks and turns—
 painted board here, laceless shoe, strip of muddied table lined she tucks
 into her wheeled basket, fashioned of stuff she gleaned and nailed.
 Haphazard, mismatched, workable, each part from a past. She doesn't
 just follow the flood, she haunts backyard trash bins, patrols the dumps.
 People's lives teetering at the edge then leaving for Alaska, or the
 coffeepot and discarded TV because family fortunes rose and *better* wove
 its spell. She bets on the salvagability of tossed or partly burned, a ring of
 keys she jingles percussively as afternoon unlocks.

—*Grace Marie Grafton*

Sky Telescopes

That time we waited beside the tracks
 not for Lincoln's body or singer Jimmie Rodgers':
 Across the Divide, the slow clanks and sparks
 brought the Hale telescope to Palomar.

A woman posed, "What am I?"
 Another scoffed, "Are we going somewhere?"
 In dusk a man laughed, "Am I my own enemy?"
 A saint sighed, "We're going to suffer."

In mountain woods, the assembled eye
 drew galaxies to its glass bowel.
 The camera painted extraterrestrial dyes.
 They parsed radiational glare in folders.

Now Hubble finds sky fire. In starry
 order our operas re-blossom,
 where Star Wars rage in the tracery
 and white dwarves and red giants loom.

Sharp contrasts lure us to pinpoints of light,
 the far side of Cosmo's black mask,
 the hunted fleeing further into the infinite,
 daring some finite mind not to ask.

—*Francis Blessington*

Parallel Universe

Editors pick!

Sometimes I wonder if there are one million people
 listening at the same time
 to the same Leonard Cohen song.
 the one that keeps people from killing themselves
 It's a long playing record
 It's a long song

Where do people play each other the songs that will keep them standing when one foot in
 front of the other is more myth than practice?

I once tried to play *Beware of Darkness* by George Harrison for a friend,
 cause its beauty and pain were singular at that moment and
 I wanted to share
 I wanted us to hear as close as we could the same thing and
 make of it what we would

He said he heard that song when it first came out and ran out
 to smoke a cigarette
 We lost something in that moment

I listen to music alone, but I imagine there are sharp notes bending the backs of the universe
 into more flexibility,
 more love,
 more tenderness, more a capella chiropractors

Somebody is strumming 3 basic chords and
 somebody will live through the night.

—*Ellyn Maybe*