

# the Unrorean

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## *Descended Angel Caught in Midtown Traffic Taxies Uptown*

hunched over in back  
seat, face pressed flat against

smearing safety glass,  
fragile wings enfolded in

confining space, rucked feathers  
and torn multi-colored silk shift;

the clicking meter running out of time.

—Alan Catlin

## *Roadwork*

He comes with the load of gravel  
gray and thick-shouldered in denim coverall  
linking cables under the dumpster's bed,  
unhooking the tailgate latch, reaching  
into the cab to jam the shift that locks gears  
in place to tilt the load. The rocks  
sing out against metal and dirt,  
dust sifts sunlight as it rises and falls.

Still strong-armed, sinewy, he moves  
with a slow grace: his heart failed him once,  
his body lulls it, the strands of muscle  
connecting spine and ribs to turn the torso's cage  
around the organ of attachment as one  
in contemplation of pain, aware  
of the sudden leap and drop,  
the precocious *ah* of each breath we take.

—Kirk Glaser

## *Each morning the clock mislays one second*

Each morning the clock mislays one second  
and another as I wind back its hand.  
The sunlight upon its face  
is beginning again  
to haul timber from the deep forest.  
I am wearing its undress.

Of all sinking things  
only this moment will be saved—  
my fingers choked back in my mouth  
and the song of an old brass instrument  
out over empty seats.

—John Sibley Williams

Devin McGuire, Editor  
Cynthia Brackett-Vincent, Managing Editor

## *Cervantes*

Those begonias are apt to fill their name but not the vase.  
Weeds subjugate the fantasies of water  
And diesel rainbows.

I ride a donkey with a flowerpot on my head.  
I am not Don Quixote.  
I am the laughter of my first recognition that there  
Is craziness in this world

—David Lawrence

## *Arsis*

*the accented syllable in a poetic foot*

Hamlet knifed Polonius  
right through the arsis.  
I once saw a farce called  
Old Lace and Arsis.  
In a spring garden,  
you can pick bearded arsis.  
The skating was bumpy.  
We fell on our arsis.

—Margaret A. Robinson

## *Threadbare*

The river is the skin I slip into to get away from myself,  
my clothes draped on rocks to wear their shape  
and leave my body alone. Droplets, filaments I fling  
from my hair, sprinkle onto lime colored grass,  
scatter like broken pieces of mist.  
Birds are my slow awakening, my arrival.  
Shadows brush my face, a pair of gloved hands  
I towel and dry off. This is what loss must feel like afterward,  
what memory wears. I remember that favorite coat  
you didn't want to surrender until you'd worn holes  
in the elbows, unraveled its unruly sleeves.  
Where the aberrant thread started is still a mystery to me.  
I miss the button's tiny pearly mouths,  
the rush of cologne inside. The way you lay  
on the bed, limbs on snow. Though sex was never  
much part of it, I forgot how much I appreciated our silence,  
flipping the remote for something to watch on TV.  
Who held the power was irrelevant,  
bargained away for a trip to the refrigerator.  
Time passes without the strings of an orchestra,  
without the exquisite French horn.  
I realize what I'm asking for is something  
that I can never get back, something permanent.  
Isn't this where God comes in, the fix-it guy,  
a solace of sunlight waving a wrench through the trees?  
I notice him cracking the veil of mid-morning frost,  
spreading open the leaves.  
But even this is too much language to bear.  
These days, I follow thoughts through a sequence  
of doors opening out. There are words I remember, of course.  
Certain ones used, particular as glass, cut both ways.  
Others, mutual misunderstandings.  
Others, a lifetime of hands.

—Mitchell Untch

## *ash cinquain*

what's left  
after setting  
the old self on fire but  
to bury the ashes in the  
back yard

—Bryce Emley

## *Another Odyssey*

A lightning flash  
catches the luminous sky  
a poet is metamorphosed  
in the home harbor  
by the fevered crew  
war-weary  
ever to welcome applause  
from bronzed youth  
aching to celebrate,  
piratical winds  
pull on a ship's oars  
toward the nearest shore,  
the sea walled poet  
between meshes and dunes  
climbs up to watch  
the returning flotilla,  
fiery sand quivers  
beneath him  
hearing Achilles' voice  
amid the siren's song  
lamenting his own voyage

—B.Z. Niditch

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***Nek Chand Rock Garden: Chandigarh, India  
Seashell-Eyed Schoolgirl***

Daydreaming while tying my shoes  
before school in the foothills,  
I pulled my shoestrings  
into a giant swing suspended by sky  
flying over the snowy Himalayas.  
When I brushed my hair, I imagined  
it as the Great Shiva, changing into a river.  
I, a small schoolgirl,  
was a cliff and my hair, a waterfall.  
Of course, there'd be no more school uniforms!  
Today, I wore a sundress of shimmering Eucalyptus.  
Tomorrow, a sari made of rainstorms on the Indian Ocean.  
Delayed due to daydreaming,  
I whispered to palm and bougainvillea.  
Nature swirled walkways and mazes  
which left the rest late, too. The bell rang.  
I decided to skip away from time altogether;  
square buildings changed into strange courtyard mosaics.  
Back in class, my head filled with infinitely open ceilings:  
Lions slept alongside human beings.  
Untouchables became deities.  
The teacher, Mr. Chand, gave more homework  
and, after falling asleep in my desk,  
I asked monkeys and elephants  
to carry him away to where he'd have to do *my* work:  
A true teacher, you see, must transform  
time and space into a garden for dreaming.  
This last dream came true  
but, for the moment, has turned me to stone.  
As soon as we seashell-eyed schoolgirls  
learn what we need to, however,  
we promise to dismiss ourselves,  
awaken as real women,  
and take our sweet time walking home.

—Matt Schumacher

***The Slip***

When there's one more step in the stair  
than you thought, when you bite, full  
force, the inside of your mouth, or zip  
the skin on your neck in your zipper.  
When you know the very familiar face  
but the name's erased, and you choke  
mid-sip so the vitamin clogs crosswise  
in your throat like a lumberjack's log—  
it's here.

It's driving wrong on a one-way street, the final  
exam you forgot, the recurrent dream of a coffin  
that's lined with flocked red silk. It's using  
words like *flocked*. With your three-layer cake,  
you show up at the party a day ahead. You're  
simply not at the top of your game—under the net,  
you've lost a step—and the distance you miss  
in height has found a new spot around your hips—  
it's here, it's here.

When you mention the Second World War  
and eyes go blank. When nobody whistles  
the songs you like. When you think someone's  
dead, and they're not, or vice versa, and this  
happens a lot. When the mirror reflects less hair,  
more scalp, and a curlicue, as thick as a thread,  
sprouts from your chin, which used to be one  
sharp edge but has slumped and cloned itself—  
it's here, it's here, it's here.

—Margaret A. Robinson

***Red's Dog***

Back in Louisiana, Red walked into a bar and shot dead the two men who had raped his sister. And then did ten years at Angola for that pleasure. Red lived next door to me in Ruidoso, New Mexico. He had a pit bull named Bones. Red kept Bones in the bed of his pickup to protect his tools. I never saw any affection between Red and Bones—Red would lift Bones up by his collar and toss him into the bed of the truck when it was time to go on duty as one would a spare tire. One day, I stopped next to the pickup and foolishly reached out to pet Bones—in an instant, he went for my hand—just as I remembered and pulled the hand back. Had that dog gotten a hold of me, I would have been in a world of trouble—it probably would have taken a shotgun and a crowbar to free me. Looking into that dog's eyes, cold and ancient, you knew you had a natural born killer there. Some kind of mean dog, Red's dog. Red was a good neighbor. I think ten years for shooting two rapists was a little severe, though—by about nine years and eleven months.

—John Sandoval

***the survivors***

*"The terror of the front sinks deep down when we turn our back upon it; we make grim, coarse jests about it... we are in a good humour because otherwise we should go to pieces."*

—All Quiet on the Western Front by Erich Maria Remarque

The day my father dies the room is a suffocating diorama. The walls are thick and I exist inside the cogs of a watch. *Fine! In fact getting better* I say to someone the evening before the end.

I am curled into a chair disheveled as a schizophrenic manuscript. My brother screams—voice against his throat a sword grinding into bones. Grief is uglier than lips of sneering gods and he is broken like a remembering soul.

They wash his body still wearing red and black flannel pajamas. *He's handsome cleaned up* the nurse says. I hate her for pretending there is loveliness in a world deteriorating as a ship embedded in a squall.

When they bury him the air is dry my make-up flawless. Nothing sensory remains the memories like survivors scattered across a moment. After I tear the shirt I wore with scissors then beat it senseless.

Years later I do not enter the Holocaust museum because cancer is a garment that drapes the same as Auschwitz Buchenwald Treblinka Dachau (where the world *had* gone to pieces). I am not afraid of death—I am afraid of what it looks like.

—Anna King

***Nightfall***

Fearsome response from bloodshot eyes  
silence travels in red and green stops  
in dream shadows,  
you are the cipher in alembic alphabets  
swept up in orchards of speech  
in the strata of your nature  
eyeing each wave, tree, wind, rain  
through revisions of a mirror's spectacle,  
that winding tunnel visionary scam  
of far-sightedness in the blue random hours

where beneath stray starlight  
in asylums, prisons, altars, platoons  
the lost are seeking cognition  
and guardian angels go for a swim.

—B.Z. Niditch

***Goats***

I pull off the road to watch  
some goats so deep in the tall grass  
their backs are barely visible,  
  
not grazing but searching  
for something one of them has lost...  
Or so it seems.

Now and then a head comes up;  
a goat looks around and bleats.  
It's hopeless.

Those unblinking yellow eyes meet mine,  
both of us wondering why—  
why we even bother.

And then we get on with it.

—Don Thompson

***Jerk Soup***

I'm sorry to give you so much trouble about my resume, but job gaps go back to soup lines where I got trouble if I complained about a small helping of the potato water the jerk called soup, and I can't forget my girlfriend, Eve, who said, when she heard the lid hit the pot, "I thought I heard someone crying." "That's just your belly growling," I snapped. "Spiders in my veins," she'd say, needing a fix. I'd smile and hand her a brush for her ransacked hair.

Things worsened. Her slow step began on the stairs, going down to the basement apartment. Another syringe of joy. And then the sun dropped below the trees, and the moon, slender and white, hung shyly in the west. Taking a proofer job at an L.A. law firm, had I changed or was I the same? Truth is, I didn't speak Eve's language anymore, and I'd simply put my fingers in both ears and refused to listen, even if she begged "Don't leave." But if I said, "Don't shoot up again,"

I don't think she heard me for the beating of her own charged heart. That's why moving commas around, explaining semi-colons again and again, putting a vise on legal jargon, makes me want this literary journal editing slot. And this isn't on my resume: We stole a lawnmower and sold it for food. I gave blood until I was too tired to jump up and change channels on the black-and-white we lifted from a curb. And the last time Eve smiled, we had slipped into a Mexican feast at a park and stuffed ourselves on tacos. When a girl, blindfolded, broke a piñata, everybody cheered, and someone over the telephone wire threw a straw hat.

—Charles Cantrell

***Little Scabs Picked At***

My poetry teacher at the junior college has this little sign on his desk which reads simile and he would tell me and tell me jargon about the bold world which he himself had slurped in Peter, he would begin there was so much I needed to know even now long years after and being so sad having been to the moon, Mars with its grim late night pizza parlors and coffee java huts girls with dark smudged eyes you could sleep with if you managed to intricately unlock their gold cases, I in the midst of releasing and being awake savannas full of running animals the dark spots detectable on the moon not making my bed for months at a time reading letters in a book someone wrote to someone once.

—Peter Layton

***Plight of the Night***

Bad aftertaste of cracking open irises to stare upon ceiling malevolence—so rectangular and white—if only like a kite kicking up, strung out, to catch a smooch,

yet yawning scruffy morning moods. Required by the bitter battery of humanity to exhaust the charge of hands in the expanse of space among mini mountains in the ruffles of restless

sheets, starch and sweat stained of spires with the crevasses of the unconscious as fluid as a water bed, we emerge. Effortlessly the alarm goes off again and again to surface another loss

of another day shuffled nearly useless to extravagant abuse. We waste away these pits for eyes to blackened sags beneath insomniac design to complete the final reverberating wire.

—Cary Lee Babcock

***My Friend Angus Got a Tattoo***

In blue, on you for always, 'Arcady': A bravery writ not on paper breath But flesh, to wither on you until death Consumes your efforts in eternity. Starkly shiver skies blank as the pages Of the artist blinking at the dark sea, Uncaring and yet filled with poetry. He, forgotten in the ceaseless ages, Just as the tide relentlessly makes plain The palimpsest of the white, moonlit sand. Everything is washed away the same Despite writing in bold, unshaking hand 'Arcady' in a steady, solid blue. Thought not immortal, it will die with you.

—Jack Nicholls

***Mama's Suitcase***

It wasn't really hers: Someone's discard she picked up at a yard sale, circa 1985, one summery Saturday in fall while out stalking bargains with her sister. Hot pink. Seashell-hard Samsonite. Doris Day movie prop, circa 1960.

And here it is, in her cluttered closet, where I sort through pieces she will need there compromised by a prosthetic hip broken in a fall: I swab mildew stains spotting its musty pink-satin lining, pack it with nightgowns and slippers, underwear bleached and threadbare.

Your stay will be brief, they tell me. Like touch. Or stars, or wind, or echoes. Or the creek gurgling sweetly outside this opened window, relentless overlapping of gush and hush. So I switch off lamps, unshaded in the hall, with a quick flip of my finger. Flick. Flick. Close the lid. Check the locks. It's time to go.

—Gary Thompson

***Editors pick!\****

***My Father's Discipline***

I remember the sound it made: almost inaudible. Almost: the hushed sound, the shush of his belt sliding through the waist of his pants, sliding through each loop, a quiet feather's sound, one loop at a time, one constant, deliberate sound: a feather displacing air, a feathery sound,

and I, helpless on his lap, staring at the floor except for the vision out of one eye's corner: Father's arm, raised high, the belt hanging loose from a taut smith's arm of muscled iron, ready to shape my life, to hammer it into a shape, into something you could recognize, to beat the molten boy, not yet formed, pliant, the soft skin of a child's back, waiting to take shape, to take on the discipline of form: the hammer raised, poised, the form holding molten metal, held by iron tongs: ready for the hand to fall, to take shape: to be.

—Tim Napier

***Heaven***

I cannot imagine that I won't look out forever on this lake, wavelets tipped with sunshine small black ducks foraging along the shore two Canada Geese waddling in the grass with clumps of snow still left from Winter.

Does dreamless sleep end this lovely play or do I quaff a stein of mead and gnaw a haunch of venison before a roaring fire? Forget boating on the River Styx or angelic bliss singing on a rosy cloud.

I prefer this: Iowa in Spring not much happening Christ and Buddha out there paddling that canoe sharing a sandwich and a bottle of beer in the cool sunshine. Mohammed and Lao Tzu join the picnic in another boat and they all throw bread pellets at one another like children and laugh uproariously.

—Dennis Ross

***Sister***

A hole runs right through this heart holding onto, containing nothing and it hurts you know? My heart's not my only concern because my brain seems broken too We won't go near my soul I haven't seen it since you died It's out there running on the beach drenched in the sinking afternoon sun

—Devin McGuire

*To Someone I Almost Loved*

A summer breeze in chimes will bring you back  
to arms once spread like wings to guard your heart.  
These freezing seaside winds can't numb a fact:  
A summer breeze in chimes will bring you back.  
Should glints of unrequited love detract  
from truth, forbid the bitterness to start:  
A summer breeze in chimes will bring you back  
to arms once spread like wings to guard your heart.

—Gary Thompson

*Sick*

Multicolored specks;  
those we drew when we were young.  
Cajoling them to leave with a drug,  
but their presence remains.  
The balding castigation,  
the nihilistic cells.  
The sadistic, haunting lump.

—Claudia Khoury

*Fletcher's Art*

They used to take the  
straightest saplings,  
strip them of their bark  
and split their little hearts  
right down the middle.

Then they would place  
a stone tip, sharp and  
biting, there and secure  
it with pine sap  
and leather twine.

Finishing it off  
with a halo of fine  
white feathers cropped  
tight to the shaft—  
ensuring that it flies  
straight to its target.

When you let loose your arrow,  
I realized that the Fletcher's art  
is not forgotten even in these  
modern times.

Your single sharp and  
biting word struck  
my heart

—Samantha Noll

*Writing Class, Syracuse Winter*

write, he said looking  
like an even caggier  
Lincoln, your impressions  
the next 4 days, details  
of a walk across campus.  
Even now I remember I  
wore a strawberry wool  
skirt, matching sweater.  
There was bittersweet  
near the Hall of Language.  
I curled in a window  
ledge of a cave in Crouse,  
an organ drifting thru  
smooth warm wood. I  
could let the wine  
dark light hold me, slid  
on the ice behind where a  
man with a blue mole  
picked me up, my notes  
scattering up Comstock.  
Torn tights, knees snow  
kissed the skin off. I was  
hypnotized by that  
huge growth, said yes  
tho I only half remembered.  
Upstairs icicles clotted,  
wrapped glass in gauze.  
There must have been some  
one who didn't call. Blue  
walls, ugly green bedspread,  
Dorothy popping gum, eating  
half a tuna sandwich before  
we'd lie in bed with the  
lights out wondering what  
it would be like to have  
Dr Fox with his red beard  
go down on us as we  
braided and rubbed our  
mahogany hair dry and I  
tried to figure out what to  
do with the bittersweet,  
torn knees, ragged maples,  
didn't believe I'd ever  
have anything to write about

—Lyn Lifshin

*Capricorn:*

*The Scream*

*The terror of life has pursued me ever since I first began to think.*

*Edvard Munch*

Munch has her standing on a bridge, her hands  
held up against her head, her mouth an O  
of ungodly silence: her scream, louder  
for its silence. The solid world is no match  
for her, or what she sees:  
Has the sky just opened?  
And have a thousand mouths screamed back in silence?

In his painting, form runs into form; color, into color.  
Heaven, blood-red, overarches the blue-black sea,  
wavers, unsure of what it should do.  
The girl stands, an unsteady ess.  
Great ships in the harbor are matchsticks beneath the fiery sky.

Typhoeus has escaped.  
Capricorn, crazy goat-fish,  
sees great Jupiter attacked  
by the hundred headed monster.  
Understanding the value of silence,  
Capricorn sounds his mute whistle, silent  
but for the beast: dissolving, screaming, melting  
into nothing. Who among us can say that they have saved their gods?

—Tim Napier

*Our Lady*

A couple of gargoyles lurk  
on the roof of the apartment building  
across the street  
less than eighty feet from my window  
as the crow flies.

I see them from time to time:  
the woman gargoyle  
and the man gargoyle.

The man usually lies  
on his side like an ocherous cashew,  
wrapped and incubating in the gauzy flesh of his wings.

He nestles in a cubby of shade  
provided by a white stone balustrade  
that lines the cap of the building's crown.

The woman, however, perches on that very balustrade,  
and dries her peach wings by fanning the sun,  
wringing water from her drawn sable mane down  
the napes of those who pass below.

When she finishes, she whips her hair  
around her face, covering it completely,  
spreads herself and dives down blind into the concrete  
jungle like a hairless and headless flying squirrel.

What gets me is this: nobody ever seems to notice  
my neighborly imp and her wicked kisses on the lips of their world.  
They just go on eating and drinking, not a single fly  
in the ointment, only an incongruous wind  
from an open window, blowing  
the napkins from their laps.

—Craig Englund