



LOTUSEATER

ISSUE 6

LOTUSEATER

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Prose



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CHRISTINA MURPHY

Philosophy in the Time of Magical Traffic Jams

Turning onto a one-way street and slowing down to look at the store window of mannequins in winter coats and pastel snowflakes cascading so that the winter scene was more movie-like and perhaps a fantasy like those encountered in dreams where the princess calls out to be saved but an angel intervenes and there you are caught up in the desire to rescue but not the princess just yourself but you can't because the traffic is backing up behind you and more than one person is blowing their horn and pretty soon you expect someone to open their window and shout at you or get out of their car and pound on your window to hurry up and move the fuck out of here and you will watch that angry face pressed against your window and wish you could snap that face back with one quick blow and never see a face like that which is more angry than anyone should be because you are not in a hurry and just slowed down to see the scenes of winter that make you think of the snowflakes that cascaded when you were in love and walking along beside her in the woods before it all changed and you were lonesome again and more lonely than you had been because now you knew what it was like to be close and then far away into some isolated cold place where even your heartbeat felt frozen and you no longer could feel your own tears just the haze of snow falling at twilight and the path becoming obscured before you much like this endless one-way street you were on and these store windows of fake people faking fake scenes of happiness in every season of the year but with winter catching your eye because that was the last time you could remember being in love and then not in love but some painful numb feeling of losing a part of you like an arm chopped off and the blood freezing solid in the socket and your heart beating slower and slower until it wasn't beating at all just existing like you were and not knowing what to do next but to keep moving with no sense of direction except ahead and no ability to go back and find what you had lost just the empty feeling that there was hardly any way ahead and if you stopped everything would stop with you as the world and time ground down to a still point of nothingness and maybe that would be better than having idiots blowing their horns at you because you weren't interested in what was in front of you but just all the magical scenes that were to the sides of you and you wanted to look but that was not okay with the people wanting to move on blindly ahead just move on and move on while you were looking at the snowflakes and you did not want the snow

to be pastel but vivid colors like deep reds and purples and a magical deep green like the forest where whoever you once were you had left behind walking in the snow and noticing how quickly your footsteps were filled in by the newly falling snow that was erasing your presence and your path and making it look like you had never been there or mattered enough to leave a trail which was different from this asphalt street where there was no possibility of leaving a trail just the sound of tires in a continuous hum of movement and resistance to any car and anyone who did not want to be part of the movement but wanted to envision how the winter might be if the snow and the mannequins were real and anyone could move through the window and become part of a scene where the snowflakes were richly multicolored in all the hues of the imagination and you could step into that wonderment and catch a deep green snowflake on your tongue that tasted like a leaf in a golden forest and you could be free and away and never disappointed by the world outside the forest that was seldom golden and largely indifferent to you and never had snowflakes that tasted like green leaves but only snowflakes that took on some of the soot and dirt of the city streets and looked like lost bits of light struggling to find a way home but knowing like you did that falling was as close as the snowflakes or you would ever come to a sense of home because there is no hope for the gentle peace of refuge once the descent into loneliness begins and the fall into nothingness is as loud and meaningless as the sounds of car horns protesting that you are not moving ahead fast enough into the blur of the city but looking at a winter scene in a golden forest that has become all you see no matter how many horns blow or how much anger builds because you are no longer in their world and soon they will know why.

Solomon, Solomon

If only you were to me like a brother
Song of Songs 8:1

I cannot give you tea. I have too much work to do. Professor Dede always sends people to me: 'Ask Solomon,' the professor says. 'Solomon will make you tea. Solomon will take care of your problem.' But I can not make tea all the time. The professor gives me too much work as it is. And then he asks to make his friends tea. It is not so simple, to make tea.

When Professor Dede came to my village in Guinea, I put a kettle on the stove. Then, I thought he was a different kind of man. There are some things you think are good but turn bad. Things you think are bad that turn good. Most things you can never know are good or bad until after they are done.

When the professor came, he said he was writing a book about the poison in our earth. I knew African French and some English and I took him through the streets and showed him our troubles. I took him to the houses of men and boys who were buried in landslides. To the ones whose lungs sounded like gravel. To the men whose tongues tasted only ash and whose kids were all slow in the head.

'Cyanide,' said the professor. 'Bauxite,' he said. 'Mercury.' But nothing else.

Then he asked me to take him to the mines where the trees were gone and the earth was like mange. I showed him where the men went into the earth and brought out gold or diamonds or all those strange metals I cannot name. We stood on the lips of the craters and watched yellow machines chewing down into the ground. We watched the red sludge run gashes in the soil. The lakes rose up, turned red, and drowned the monkeys in their trees. The frogs hopped away in fear. And a sadness came into the professor's face.

'The earth is like an animal,' he said. 'We are just cruel boys.'

Professor Dede stayed in my village three months. We talked much, and he taught me about why they used poisons in the mines, how airplanes flew, why the dervishes spun, why Africa was still Africa, and many things I had never heard. I kept asking questions about the world.

'You like to learn!' he laughed. 'Soon, you will be as smart as King Solomon!'

'I would like to be. Yes.'

We had long conversations into the night about Africa and Nature and Allah. He had strange ideas about living things.

He told me once, 'Even a mosquito has the same right to live as a man.'

I did not think so.

'What if the mosquito is with a disease?'

'It is still a living thing.'

'What if it bites a baby?'

'It is a living thing doing what a living thing must do.'

'If the baby dies?'

'Are our lives any more valuable?'

No. That is our pride, my Solomon. Our greatest error.'

Later, the professor got malaria. He stayed in my bed and I watched as he lost 15kg in three days, shaking, burning, vomiting. But still, he did not change his mind. I took care of him for two weeks, making him tea every day. He got better.

When it was time for the professor to go back to Istanbul, he said to me, 'Solomon, you are a hard worker. Good with your head. Probably better than any of the tourists you guide around. You should be educated. Come back with me to Istanbul. Work for me.'

I packed my bags. I said goodbye to my sister and my uncle. I thought this was a good thing. I thought, *I've found a good man! He will bring me up in the world. He will teach me and will help me go far.*

When I came to Istanbul, Professor Dede promised me good work and learning. I stayed with him in his apartment

and he gave me books to erudite myself with and questions to ruminate in. At first I learned very much. But I noticed he had other students—students from the university. They drove Dede around. They cooked him food. He made them care for his cats and to translate his book into other languages. But behind their backs Dede told me they were lazy. When he was sick of one, he 'fired' him and quickly got another.

At first the only work Dede gave me was for education. Books on Arabic, mathematics, and the books he'd wrote himself. But soon he was asking more. 'Solomon, cook us something.' Or 'Solomon, pour the kittens some food, would you?' 'Solomon, Solomon,' more and more. And soon I was cooking and cleaning and taking care of his cats all day and I had no time to learn.

But I did not complain. I worked hard, I slept less, I did everything right. But his cats... they were almost the end of me.

One was white, one was black, but both were bad. The white cat—you'll never believe—it could jump up, grab the handle of the apartment, and open the door by itself. It did this when no one was looking, and the cats escaped together.

When the professor was finding the cats outside again and again, he was furious at me. 'Solomon!' he said. 'Over and over I tell you to close the door behind you. I found these cats in the snow one winter, living in the trash. I took them into my arms and brought them

back and nursed them with milk, like a mother! And now you let them out to be eaten by dogs or killed by boys!

‘It is not me!’ I said. ‘I always close the door! It is the white cat that opens the handle and runs!’

‘You are a good worker, Solomon, but I did not know you were a *liar*!’

After that, I hid in a closet with a camera and caught the white cat opening the door. I showed it to the professor and then he believed it. But he did not apologize for his words against me.

Sometimes I think he would rather live in a world with only mosquitoes and cats.

When Dede found a student who cooked better than me, he put me in this office. I am not sorry. It is better working here than in his apartment. He is never here. I can speak to people that come in looking for the professor and practice my languages with them. Now I speak real French, better English, good Turkish, Arabic, some Russian, Susu, and of course, Fula. But working here, it can be stressful. Very stressful. Professor Dede gives me enough work for three men. I spend all day answering the phones, sending letters for him, and typing his research numbers into spreadsheets. Sometimes my eyes feel like rolling out of my head.

I do not want just to work for money, I want to work for knowledge. But here I work all day and do not learn. I file the

professor’s paperwork, enter his data, but I learn nothing new. My contract is for two years and it finishes in October. I am counting the days until then. But I am worried. When I finish here, what can I do? There is no good work in Guinea, no knowledge. But here there is no kindness for me.

The Turkish people call me different things. The professor calls me Solomon, but his friends will call me *abed*—slave.

‘Why do you call me that?’ I say ‘I am not a slave.’

‘Oh but you are Muslim, yes? Then you are a slave to Allah.’

‘But we are all Muslim. So I will call you *abed* too.’

‘No no. We are not *abed*, that is for you.’

That is always how it is. They say, ‘Oh we are all one people who believe in one God, one Islam, one Christianity, one Whatever.’ But when they see you have dark skin, oh no no. They look at us like animals. Sometimes worse. If we try and act like they do—open a shop in their country or go into their hotels—they say ‘No, *abed*, this is not a good spot for your shop.’ Or ‘No, *abed*, the hotel is full, absolutely full.’ Islam, Christianity, all religions are the same. I still believe in God. But in man, I do not believe.

The Turkish people call me Solomon. They call me *abed*. They call me Guinea. They make up other nicknames for me. I smile and say ‘Thank you.’ No one asks my African name. And if they did, I would not tell them.

I know the power of Africa. I know what is in our earth. Professor Dede has

told me. Not just gold and diamonds but rare metals for phones and computers and missiles. Before it was French and Europeans, now it is Chinese who are coming too. They start their tractors and the poison washes into our rivers and comes up through our vegetables. They turn on their drills and fumes blow through our laundry and into our cribs. Our presidents and foreigners shake hands on the big stage but the people below get nothing. Our power is stolen from us. Our riches taken. I know Africa is not lost. Africa can change. But I am afraid that when it does, everything will already be gone from the earth. I am afraid that soon all the mines will be empty and the forests will be fields of stumps. There will be so many craters from wars and diggings, nothing will grow. I am afraid that our children will wander Africa, searching, like over the surface of the moon.

The evening prayer is starting. Do you hear it? Come, you can see the Blue Mosque from the terrace... You see it there? It is like a thing with six throats. It begins to sing. Other mosques begin. They are singing all across the city. Between the hills. It sounds like they are in love, and the love is very sad.

Before, in my country, I would say 'Oh I will get married.' 'I will have a beautiful family.' Now I do not say this anymore. At first, when you meet a good girl, you think: 'Wow, she might

be the one. The one I can really be with.' Then you change. She in her way, you in your way. If you do not change together then you will change apart. And one day you will look at what you have, and back at what you had, and say 'Wow' again. 'How did this happen?'

Once, here in Istanbul, I had a girl from China. She was short and looked very strong, like you could throw knives at her and they would fall to the floor. But really she was very scared. One day she came as I was peeling apples for the professor. I had to look at my knife as we talked so I did not cut myself. The next day she came back, upset, I did not know why. She said she was afraid of me. 'Yesterday you could not look at me when we talked. Why couldn't you look in my face when we talked?' I was cutting apples one day and the next day she is afraid of me. It was hard. Always this Chinese girl was worried I did not love her. And she made me start thinking: *Maybe I did not love her?* And when I thought that, I knew it was over. There was nothing I could do. When one person does not love, they have all the power. They can lie and not be hurt. They can leave and not be hurt. They can hurt and not be hurt. I do not like that power. I am not used to it. I would not want to be used to it.

Another time, I was with an Ethiopian girl and it was the opposite. In the beginning it was peaceful. I did things for her because I liked her. I helped her get things from the store. Fixed her apartment. Gave her some money when she

needed it. Then one day she said, 'Last time you did *this*, now this time I need you to do *this*, and a bit more of *this*.' Did she ever think that maybe I had my own things to do? That maybe I wanted to send some money back to my family? To my uncle and sister? She said, if I don't do these things there will be no sex. So I asked her, 'Do you think all I want from you is sex? Am I just good for money and fixing and sex? Do people just use each other up like this and go on to the next one? Is this what you think?' She just stood there like a lock, her arms crossed. She did not love.

I ask Professor Dede what to do about this woman. He was sitting with his white cat and petting it. He said, 'Solomon, you want some wisdom about women?'

'Yes' I said.

He looked down at his white cat and said, 'They are all whores.'

I did not agree.

'You will see.'

'There are bad women and there are good women,' I said, 'but they are not all the same.'

'You will see.'

There was a girl who started coming to the office looking for Professor Dede. Profesrz Dede is never here, but she came back day after day. She was Moroccan and pretty like an olive, but very worried. Her Arabic was hard for me to understand so we spoke in French.

I said '*Comment ça va?* What's wrong? Maybe I can help you?'

'No,' she said. 'How can you help me?' 'I can make you tea.'

She left without tea. But the next day she was back. We sat by the door to the street and started talking. Her name was Salma. She told me she is Professor Dede's wife.

'Professor Dede does not have a wife.'

'He brought me here to be his wife.'

'How is that?'

'I meet him in Morocco. He brings me to Istanbul and I am hoping to marry. He puts me in an apartment and visits me, saying he loves me. I ask again and again but always there is something pushing back the marriage. Now I am pregnant four months and he leaves me alone for five days, sometimes twelve days. I sometimes do not have enough food to eat. I want always to run away.'

'Be careful,' I told her. 'You are pregnant and have no husband. It is not good to run away.'

'But I want to leave him. He is a cheater! He is a liar!'

But I said, 'You believed in his lying. You are responsible too.'

She cried on my chest and her makeup dirtied my shirt.

'You are different, Solomon. I see that. You would never do this to me.'

And when she said this, I was angry with her.

'Stupid girl. You do not use your head! How do you know I am any different? You know me not even three days. I could be just as bad. Maybe worse.'

'But you can help me, Solomon.'

'What if the professor comes back now and sees this? He will kill me. And could I say he would be wrong? How does this look? You and me, alone together. You crying on me with his baby in your belly! If it was me, I would kill too.'

I sent her away, saying not to come back. But she did come. Every day.

'Professor Dede is not here,' I said, and pretended that my work was very busy.

'Please, Solomon.'

But I did not look up from my papers.

Then one night, I went back to the professor's apartment. He was traveling in India and again I was watching his cats. As I was feeding them, from under the window I heard: 'Solomon, Solomon,' like a dying bird. She must have followed me back from work. I pretended not to hear. But she went back and forth, walking under the window, mixing her footsteps with the dogs.

'Solomon.' She cooed. 'Solomon, please.' I let her in. We sat on the professor's couch and she cried on me again. 'It is alright, it is alright,' I was saying to her. But sitting with her, I became more and more afraid. I began hearing very quietly. Listening like a bat. Imagining every creak and footprint to be Dede walking up the stairs, returning early from India, already with a gun.

I thought: *If I will be killed for something I never did, then I might as well do it.*

I began to kiss her. I pushed my lips on hers while she was crying. I put my hand on her breasts, which were becoming big.

I was careful not to touch her belly. I kissed her harder and she kissed back a little. Then she stopped to cry into my neck. I tried again, and again she stopped to cry. I pushed her away.

'Why did you come here?'

'Solomon, my belly is already starting to grow. I cannot be pregnant without a husband.'

'The professor is your husband.'

'The professor will not marry me.'

'Then why did you come to this country?'

'I thought it would be different.'

'Well then you were stupid.'

'Please, Solomon. You can marry me.'

'You are crazy! Why would I marry you? I do not want the professor's baby. I do not want a woman who follows men home and lets them kiss her. Or sleeps with men because they promise her some imaginary thing in a new country. I do not want a whore.'

'No Solomon, do not say that. I am not like that.'

She cried into the pillows of the couch. Cried and cried. 'Solomon, I am not like that.' 'Solomon, help me.' 'Solomon, Solomon,' but what could I do? I am *abed* here. She is a woman. An *abed* has no strength, and a woman is a heavy weight. I thought about it. I walked around and around the room, looking at it from all sides. But there was nothing I could do. Not a thing.

I sat down beside her again. I lifted her up. I let her lean on me. I noticed she was still pretty when she cried.

Her cheeks were round and red like

pomegranates. Her teeth were white like sheep coming up from the washing. Her hair fell around her shoulders like a flock of goats coming down a hill. We sat there together on the professor's couch and I patted her head. She cried into my neck.

I thought to myself, *There are some things you think are good but turn bad. Things you think are bad that turn good. Most things you can never know are good or bad until after they are done. It is after the act that you know. Not before.*

Then I got up from the couch and began to make her tea.

TONY MASTROIANNI

Boyfriend

a.k.a.

¡Novio!

a.k.a.

Baby Mormon

(cause he got so many girlfriends)

or

The Whale

To: caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com

Subject:

July 7

Dear Caterina,

I just wanted to apologize for not answering your calls. I don't know exactly what to say, but I want to say it. If you know what I mean. I went through all this trouble to find your email address because I'm a little embarrassed to actually, call you up, speak to you, you know. You know like in the old days, middle school, landlines, pre-caller ID and you'd call someone up and have to announce who you were. I don't think I could properly explain to you who it was because I'm not the same me you met a couple days back. Or, better yet, he's not the me you met the other night. Anyway, I just wanted to let you know your calls weren't returned by no fault of your own. You're a very beautiful and, from what I remember, intelligent woman.

Best,
Tony Esposito

From:
caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com July 8

To: caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com July 9
Subject: Re Re

Dear Caterina,

Really? Where do I even start? Well, too be honest, I stalked your email address out on LinkedIn. Turns out LinkedIn is actually useful for something. I was able to find you since your full name was saved on my phone, hence knowing not to pick up when you called. Weirdo, right? That's not even the half of it. The guy you met a couple nights ago, was and wasn't exactly me. The charmer you met was actually my alter-ego. I bet you just stopped reading. I bet you're sprinting to the pharmacista to double the dose on your day-after pills. Anyway, if you are still reading, I just wanted to offer my apologies. I have no control over him. In other words, no control over me. And don't worry, we don't have any diseases or anything.

Again, I just didn't want you think it was your fault he never called you back. It's my fault.

His.

And anyway, you are probably the prettiest of girls whose number he's ever gotten. Have a great life, I guess. I doubt I'll be hearing from you again.

My warmest regards,
Tony Esposito

From:
caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com July 10

To: caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com
Subject: Re Re Re Re

July 11

Dear Caterina,

Intrigued is a strong word. I don't know if it'd even be worth your time indulging. You're the one who asked though. So, it started long before I came here. I was still living in Jersey and me and vitelloni friends started this weird sort of inside joke of an RnB group: Romance Mob. RoMoB for short.

It started as a joke. We had zero intention of actually making music, let alone the know-how and we made all these little personas, sort of stock, commedia dell'arte-type characters. There was Hus-Band (the producer), Fiancé Knowles, Sir Bone, Frankie "School Boy Crush" and me—Boyfriend.

For some reason though, I thought taking it a step too far wasn't a bad idea, because usually, one step too far is never too far.

I read manuals, watched tutorial videos, everything I could get my hands on, tangibly or figuratively that regarded music making on the computer and becoming a real fake RnB singer.

So I made a couple songs as a joke. I used a really good Luther Vandross sample in one of them. It was good. It was funny. You know. It heightened the roof on our little RnB collective joke, but that was that. So we/ I/ we thought.

But then I started picturing myself as Boyfriend, picturing my face, my body decouaged onto every flat surface in North Jersey. In the city. The world. My face, my body, but not mine, an identical me with the Jesus piece and an unzipped track-jacket with no shirt underneath. *Boyfriend (of RoMoB) at such and such place, such and such time and date.* The mind is a crazy thing.

The non-me began to turn into a guilty pleasure. An obsession. An unconscious obsession. I started recording more and more songs. I found myself acting more and more in the light of those whom I modeled Boyfriend after. Usher. R. Kelly. Mr. Vandross. Etc. Kool (of & the Gang). The words, the music were just spilling out of me and before I knew it, I wasn't in control any more. Boyfriend had a mind of his own. Mine.

Come to think of it, he was probably the indirect result of a very formative evening of movie rentals. I watched Shaft and Breakfast at Tiffany's back to back one night.

Anyway, the rest shouldn't be hard enough for YOU to imagine. He sees a pretty girl in the moonlight and Tony Esposito disappears. Beyond that, you could probably tell me what happens. My memories tend to be vague after the transformation.

In your case though, I do remember all the way up to getting your full name. Boyfriend likes saying full names, Caterina D'Aversa. Like I said, after that, I don't remember much. I saw you walking in our direction and BOOM, I'm struggling not to let him turn me. Past that, recollections are sparse. The overlapping part of our Venn diagram has always been minuscule. I feel him eclipsing me. I feel my lips contriving into a duckface and I lose control of my hands as they undo the top two buttons of my shirt and that's it. It's like wolfman. Even a man who is pure at heart and says his prayers by night may become a wolf when the wolfsbane blooms and the autumn moon is bright. Except I turn into an RnB singer.

I hope that answers your question.

Anyway,

Have a good one,

Tony E.

PS Did he give you one of those corny pick-up lines? He definitely did right?

From:

caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com

July 11

To: caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com

Subject: Re Re Re Re Re Re

July 12

Caterina,

That's so Boyfriend! I can't believe he said that and no, that's probably not true. I mean, it's possible, but I doubt we know the Pope. Plus, I don't even know all the words to "That's Amore." He's a natural born white liar, but one great smooth

talker, right? I mean, I created him that way. He's suppose to straddle the line of gallantry and innuendo. He's like a Fresh Prince of Bel-Air pick-up line waiting to happen. He just wants to be The Boyfriend. You know? It's crazy. I mean, I studied the greats in order to come up with the part, but I didn't think he'd take it so far. It's intrinsic to him. He even has this insane ability to show his dimples at the most opportune time. Like he can smell the kill. I can't even smile all the way without someone tickling me.

So yea, to answer your other question, I moved to Rome because, to be honest, I don't really know. It was one of those cliché "I want to find myself" spur of the moment type things. I thought changing the air was the right idea at the time and maybe, this is sooo corny, I thought a serious change of scenery might subdue Boyfriend while Tony Esposito took complete control of himself again. I started this job teaching English to little kids, because Boyfriend would never be so inclined to show our other face to anyone under eighteen. Then there is the fact that if Boyfriend did decide to make an appearance in Rome, most pretty young ladies here are used to aggressive flirting and even better, there's also the language factor. But you! You're English is impeccable. It's like ten gajillion times better than my Italian. *Pertroppo*. You can even read my accent when I write in Italian.

Anyway, what about you? I hate to make you repeat yourself, but this me doesn't know anything about you. Other than your name, I mean, and that you were charmed by an alter-ego.

Ci sentiamo!

Tony

To: caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com
Subject: Re Re Re Re Re Re

From:
July 13

July 14

Cateri',

Get outta town! You're joking right? My ancestors are from Villa Literno! I

assumed that was just your name – D’Aversa. Aversa, is literally like right next to V. Literno. I’m looking at googlemaps right now. Of course, you know this, but nuts, right?

Talk to you soon,
Tony

From:
caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com – July 16

To: caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com
Subject: Re Re Re Re Re Re Re

July 16

Caterina,

Yea, I went once. I didn’t know what to do though. I just got off the train and wandered around for a couple hours. It was beautiful, but again I didn’t really know what sights I was looking for. I don’t even know the address of my grandmother’s old house. It was cool though. There were a lot of old people around and some of them looked exactly like my grandma. They weren’t her though. She’s dead. Other than that, I just went from bar to bar because the coffee there was so much better than here. It’s crazy what a difference air and water make when it comes to the culinary and cafetary arts. How gross is coffee in Rome? I get the feeling sometimes like it’s warmed up Tiber water.

Tony

From:
caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com July 16

To: caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com
Subject: Re Re Re Re Re Re Re Re

July 19

Ciao Caterina,

No. To be honest, it's not all I thought it'd be. It feels like I'm trapped in a history themed amusement park. A nightmare theme park. Like Beverly Hills Cop III (Beverly Hills Cop 3?), but with a ton of old rocks and neo-fascists and stuff. Maybe I'll move to Villa Literno and do like a reverse immigration thing. LOL.

Tony

From: caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com July 20

To: caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com July 20

From: caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com July 20

To: caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com July 21

From: caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com July 22

To: caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com July 22

From: caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com July 23

From:
caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com

July 28

To:
caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com

July 29

Subject: Re Re

I love Grease 2!

From:
caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com

July 29

To: caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com July 29

Subject: Re Re

I can never decide whether to use the number or the numerals. Numerals are more elegant I guess and when in Rome, right? But then I feel narcissistic putting so many capital i's together.

To:
caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com

July 29

From:
caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com

July 30

To: caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com
Subject: Re Re Re Re Re Re Re Re

July 30

I'm glad you agree.

And yeah. There are some places I do like here. As you know, I like to hang around by the Fontana dell' Acqua Paola. I usually take a long walk after dinner, stare out over the city and try trick myself into liking it. It works sometimes because you can't actually see the terrible people or hear their terrible voices and no terrible coffee or public transportation is involved and everything is quiet and beautiful. It's almost the escape I thought the entire continent would be. The way out of all my mental troubles. But then sometimes I closed my eyes and tried to picture the inside of my head and all I could see were words floating around like mental ransom notes. **\$HΛoΡTY, SuP MαmαCitΛ** etc. I always open my eyes right before I could see his signature, but I know it's there, cut out in newspaper and magazine fonts, decoupage to the inside of my cranium.

Anyway, I probably shouldn't even be admitting this to myself, but these walks down to "er fontanone" (iww, how gross is romano) have changed over the last couple weeks, month. I used to go and sit on the edge of the fountain and hope no one would walk by or at least not sit by me. It was just nice, you know. If the wind blew, a couple schizzes of water would catch my nape and send a similar feeling down the rest of me. Just a little bit of something that reminds you how everything is unexpected.

So, I'd just stare out at the city and try to forget it at the same time. But. For weeks now, I tell myself I'm going there to do my alone thing, however, to tell the truth, I keep going back so I can picture you. That first time I saw you. You turning around from that ledge again, the view, your elbows, how they were posted up on the guardrail thing and how you turned around toward the fountain. I see it all in slow motion every time. When your body stopped turning, but your hair continued across your face and you moved it back behind your ear with a hooked pointer finger, exposing that little mole on the right side of your neck. I picture it the same every time. Just like the first time. Like the only time, really. You in that Holly Golightly dress. The shoulder straps hanging on your shoulders. The waist hugging your waist. Who could blame them. And you

walked towards the fountain not quite one foot in front of the other, but almost. Almost mincing. But a lady-like mincing. And sometimes I think of that mole and I think about and think about it, focus on it like a mental zoom shot until the original image, you, the ledge against which you rested your weight, the city beneath us and its stupid domes and old rocks, fade to mole color.

To: caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com

Aug 2

Caterina,

I'd love to. I'd really love to.

Same place? Same time-ish?

From:

caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com

Aug 3

To: caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com

Aug 3

We'll do it right this time. It'll be like *deja vu* come though.

I really can't wait.

Tony

From:
caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com Aug 3

To: caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com
Subject: Re Aug 3

See you tomorrow ;)

To: caterina.d'aversa24@gmail.com

Subject: Re Re

Aug 5

YOYOYOYoYo girl you was so fine last nite. soooo fine. you was so fine I wanna plant you and grow a whole field of yall. Girls be religious right Cuz you just answered all my prayers. Girl you must be tired. From all that karate. And did it hurt, falling from the sky? Did it hurt? Did it hurt a lot? My doctor told me I was in need of vitamin U been through my mind awl day. You know what my shirt is made out of?

BOYFRIEND material.

Love Boyfriend (imperative)
<3<3\$\$RoMoB\$\$<3<3 ME&U 4ever.

Games played to sharpen the mind in preparation for some greater task, the way chess was of vital importance to the revolutions of Argentina and Chile in the twentieth century, live on as marginalia in the literature. As a rule, too little has been written about the preparation, despite the general reader's ubiquitous curiosity for vain intellectuals' pursuits. Chess, after all, was just as soon decried as a cult of drunken narcissism by the cabaret artists of continental Europe. For the Dadaists, the reality of the war was behind them. And so Breton could make a chessboard out of mirrors and glasses filled with red or white wine. There is a time and place. There are some such games, on the other hand, that have endured without reputation, undetected, happy to be taken out in precarious times; take, for instance, the little-known sport of ping-pong, originating in Great Britain and suffused with Victorian sensibilities, subsequently adopted and perfected by groups of her colonial subjects, as documented by the esteemed American historian Edgar P. Snow in the late thirties, which sufficed for one or half a century as a means of resisting imperialism. Nowadays, deposed or obscured into the corners, the game remains, albeit a lacuna in the scholarship, the idle intellectual's chief gratifi-

cation, able to be played for days without requiring much caloric or moral intake. The ping-pong player serves, cupping the white ball like a surrealist egg. Now you see it. Now you don't.

And though you think you're going to catch your opponent's out-of-bounds ball, expertly, soundlessly, between your thumb and index, you blunder. You chase it in circles hearing it bounce twenty, thirty times, an exponentially dampening sinusoidal... This, losing the ball and groping for it among the furniture, is the ultimate sensation of impotence.

Your opponent puts a spin on the ball—it's his secret serve. The ball becomes an illusion, almost; high-brow, almost; darting in impossible trajectories. Those woody paddles and swollen fingers!

The table is hidden away in a brown-brick maisonette beside Harvard Gulch Park, among overstuffed furniture with leemony stripes, drooling philodendrons. There are rotating fans cooling the sunroom. There are bottomless cups of coffee.

The first serve: 'You clearly didn't read the papers this morning.'

'Why's that, Mr. Ringo?'

'They predicted you are going to lose this game, Mr. Faceman...'

Ping-pong for the Chinese is like

chess for Borges. The ball has Ringo and Faceman falling over each other to catch it, it pinging off the myriad surfaces of the apartment ‘like a fucking wind-chime.’ From the floor to the wall to the floor and back again.

Out the open window, the fluttering of curtains: Cinzia comes over. When Cinzia Whelan was a graduate student in botany she worked on a modern taxonomy of fungi found in the Rocky Mountain range between altitudes of eleven- to twelve-thousand feet, but she has recently graduated. She is taller than Ringo.

‘I could hear you two from outside,’ she says. ‘Two grown men, yelling like you’re in real pain.’

No one hears her because at that very moment Faceman slams the ball yelling ‘YAHHH!’

The table was abandoned there in the sunroom when Ringo moved in—Faceman couldn’t believe his luck. Then came Cinzia: a woman groping for the ball bouncing around her ankles. Her hair falls down like a waterfall and covers half her face. ‘Blind spot,’ she says. ‘Can’t find the ball.’ Ringo, groping for the ball, knocks into the ping-pong table, makes it crooked. For the rest of the game he is preoccupied with the table not being straight, trying to straighten it like a painting. An inch toward him and he feels squished against the wall; an inch toward his opponent and he feels afloat in an abyss.

Repetition scratches a certain groove in the brain. The players are competitive and neither can stand quitting after a

loss. But even the best most rhythmically consistent rallies must, like the pleats of a wall fan made from cherry-stained wood and mulberry paper, come to an end.

‘Ringo, can you critique my cover letter?’ Cinzia asks. ‘I really hate not having a job. It’s driving me nuts.’

‘He can’t tonight,’ Faceman winks. ‘Tonight, Ringo and I are going to the opera.’

Ringo and Faceman late to the opera, splashing through puddles on city streets, reach the entrance just as an usher is closing the door behind her. They yell, ‘Lady! Wait, two more!’ But she, hard of hearing, closes the door on them. They bang on the door, drenched in their tailcoats.

They look around, find a man in a theater uniform. ‘You gotta help us,’ they beg him. ‘That lady closed the door on us. We’re supposed to see the 8 o’clock show. It’s only 7:55!’

‘House hasn’t opened yet,’ says the man, pointing at the queue of opera-goers under their black umbrellas, snaking around the block.

They assess the line, burst into laughter, clasp the man’s shoulders. ‘Guess we’ll get to have that drink after all.’ Saunter off to the opera house wine bar.

Faceman unfolds a steamy towelette that the waiter, using a pair of tongs, has placed on a gilded plate. ‘Your horoscope says you will be torn apart by fear and avarice this year.’

Ringo: 'Why were you reading my horoscope?'

'I was reading it in the paper.' Wipes his hands, wipes face, blows nose.

'How did you even know which one I am?'

'Your birthday. But you're right. The stars are shifting a little each year; soon the whole system will be off by a month.'

'Well, anyway, you should try reading the front page for once. The effect of the Tiananmen Square protests has been unexpectedly widespread. It looks like the President was serious about that executive order. I should apply for citizenship by the end of the year—'

—assuming you survive that long, and are not torn apart by fear and avarice.'

They're still there after Carmen starts; they can hear the 'Habanera' through the walls. Then the 'Toreador Song.' Then the 'Flower Song.'

Ringo's ears perk up. 'Did the opera just end?'

'No, that's just rain.'

The waiter grates cheese. 'Grating grating grating grating; his mind grates. 'Chinks,' he grumbles.

In a taxi-cab, passing out, all of a sudden Ringo hears a bell. He wakes up, looks around. 'Check surroundings,' he instructs himself. 'Check wallet, check belt.' His head starts falling to the right again. All of a sudden a bell. The cab driver is muttering—Ringo can hear him faintly through the partition—about the Rube Goldberg machine he in-

stalled, one which terminates in a small brass bell that dings every ten minutes, to wake up the 'happy' people. 'People who are 'over-happy,' he calls Faceman and Ringo. Some sort of Pavlovian conditioning, that bell. Ringo starts hearing other weird noises too. Could it be from outside? Could it be the radio? Ah, the meter is making the weird clicking noise. Head starts falling again. As soon as head falls, bell dings. The crazy taxi driver has rigged the entire car into some hypnosis chamber!

Slightly hungover, he stumbles into the office carrying a stack of thirty manilla folders with half a cigarette hanging out his mouth. His dean plucks it out of his mouth and says, 'Do you know what cigarettes are for? Back in the day they were invented as a status symbol, to show that you don't need to use your hands for anything. You, my friend, are not there yet.'

Ringo is paid next to nothing as an adjunct in the burgeoning field of systems engineering and greenhouse gas mitigation and has to teach a summer course. After class, Ringo's Plymouth Cricket breaks down less than a hundred yards from the apartment. One of his students, a Taiwanese undergraduate, happens to be walking on the side of the road, in the damp grass. He stands before Ringo in a pair of oversized foam sandals with velcro straps, athletic shorts, and a white tank top. He offers to help.

Ringo is sweating and out of breath from pushing the car, which mysteriously started right up once they got to the parking lot, when he finds Cinzia curled on the couch reading the classifieds. How to properly describe Cinzia? A neurotic woman rearranging her bookshelves and silverware, switching the places of the knives and forks in the drawer. Every time they're ready to leave the house she goes, 'Wait! Let me wash these dishes real quick!' Drives everyone nuts. She's been living off Ringo but makes up for it by doing way more housework and remodeling than anyone can keep up with. She is chipper and knows how to dust herself off. She blinks a lot.

'Honey, why is the calculator in the butter box?'

'Oh, I was using it.'

Ringo sidles over, gets cozy. 'Biologists have confirmed that women like the smell of men's sweat because back in the Stone Age, men went out to hunt, to prove they could provide for their girlfriends, and they came back to the cave, you know, perspiring.'

An image pops into her mind of a caveman bending his woman over, taking her up the ass, while the woman holds a feathered thing, a pheasant maybe, to her mouth, gnawing in a daze.

Faceman bursts in before they can try anything.

'I was so drunk last night I can barely recall the ride home,' he says. 'This morning I found two of my landlady's glasses broken in the dishwasher, both

as though I had taken a bite out of the rim. 'The dishwasher broke the glasses,' I said. My landlady told me I broke the glasses. Nonsense, I thought. I had gone straight to bed—I have a vivid memory of walking straight from the door to my bed. In fact I clearly remember that the banging of the door behind me was like a gunshot, I being the bullet; I remember—how odd—the second the door slammed I was already face-down in my bed. Then during my afternoon nap I had a dream in which I took a glass from the cupboard, in a completely different house, full of friends from my Shanghai days, and tried to fill it under the tap, only to smash the glass past the water into the side of the sink, breaking it in a perfect arc. In my dream I was frustrated that water had no substance, that it did not somehow stop my glass. I tried again with another glass; again, frustrated, glittering crumbs in the drain. I awoke and told my landlady, 'By God I did break the glasses.'

'I can think of two explanations,' Ringo says. 'One: the dream was a reverse-prophecy of what happened, since your unconscious mind preserved a memory that your conscious mind did not. Two: you broke the glasses in the dream, and it makes no difference that you did so chronologically after the glasses turned up broken in the 'real world.' What are you doing, Cinzia?'

Cinzia, with scissors in hand, says, 'I figured if I can't get a job in academia I should become a model for a photographer. Here's an ad in the newspaper.'

Faceman, piqued: 'Why is this the logical conclusion to that train of thought?'

Cinzia explains her dream of traveling widely in Europe. 'I most want to go to Prague, you know. Once they overthrow the communist government Prague will be amazing. Prague will be Paris; Prague will be Rome; Prague will be New York, everything.'

'Rome is a dung-hole,' says Faceman. 'It used to be great but now it's a dung-hole.'

'Rome was great when I went there.'

'You were there back then? Incredible.'

'Eight years ago. How could it have gotten bad since then?'

'The Capitalist tourism industry minning the cult of remembrance—'

—is what brought down the Empire. Right.'

'If that's what will make you happy...' Ringo approves.

'And, you know, I think travel will do me good,' Cinzia adds. 'It's been a long time since I left the country. Sometimes I really hate being an American.' She laughs self-deprecatingly. 'Our culture is rather boring.'

'Become Chinese,' Ringo shrugs. 'Chinese culture and the cheongsam dress would suit you.' He ruffles her hair.

She laughs, 'Well.'

Ringo meets Cinzia's family at their home for her father's birthday. He is sweating a bit but keeps her distracted from this fact as he entertains her with jokes over the clanking of forks and

the rotation of misshapen bowls that her mother made on her own potter's wheel. He is leaning back, one arm on the back of his chair, legs crossed rather femininely, talking over an aunt of hers (she has seated herself apart from him, oblivious to his insecurities and fear of abandonment). He doesn't want to embarrass himself, thinks, If I bite into the spinach quiche, I will get green in my teeth. Mustn't do that. So he shoves the whole quiche into his mouth. As he chews he starts thinking aloud of making things 'more official.' The aunt hears him mumbling and raises the idea to the table at large. Conversation comes to a halt. Members of the dinner table take turns glancing at Ringo then quickly looking away; worried whispers pass between members of the immediate family. Ringo glances around at the chandelier, the oil portraits. Suddenly the patriarch gets confused, yells, 'Why are we whispering?' Someone gets up and whispers in the patriarch's ear and explains, 'He's Chinese.' The patriarch suddenly flashes a grin of understanding across his face: 'A Chinese wedding!'

When they get home, someone is waiting in front of the door. It turns out, Ringo has become the Taiwanese student's mentor—this sort of got foisted on him because he helped Ringo push the car. Ringo isn't really good with young people or at planning things, so he takes his student, along with Faceman and

Cinzia, to a Chinese restaurant. Cinzia mentions how they literally just ate at her parents' house. 'Did you not get enough to eat? My mother's cooking is pretty bad though,' she shrugs.

The Taiwanese student, W., wants to tell Ringo everything about himself. He wants to tell Ringo about his parents overseas, about how he did not attend boarding school before coming to America and so lacks a few essential survival skills. He suffers from an implausible sleep disorder. His lover in Cheyenne says to him, 'Every time I start to touch you, you fall asleep.' His lover doesn't like it when he sings folk songs. His lover said, 'Why are you always singing? It's annoying.' He once slapped W. so hard he drew blood from his cheek. W. never explained that he sings to keep himself awake. Despite nodding off for ten- to twenty-minute intervals during the day, after 3 a.m. W. is unable to sleep.

After dark, nothing but murmurs from the clientele, plastic forks strewn on the seats; after dark, even people who aren't drunk start to act slovenly.

Repeatedly opening and eating fortune cookies from a pile in the center of the table, bored, reading aloud, they try to assemble a coherent meaning from all the aphorisms. The cardboard box containing cookies had offered for them to help themselves, so they each grabbed two handfuls. Reaching into the pile, in which one fortune cookie is deformed, like a cookie shoved into a cookie, they break it open and it's a labyrinth inside:

there are two fortunes. 'That's bad luck,' says Cinzia. 'That's a Borgesian cookie.' They sit in silence, people-watching in the banquet hall. The four of them look like one those Chinese families who sit there and don't talk, who, as it were, have telepathic powers and are talking through brainwaves.

After a few beers, Cinzia says, 'Is Faceman your real name?'

'Of course not. My name is T.V. Lian.'

'What does 'T.V.' stand for?'

'Tele-vision,' he says.

'You're kidding.'

'Ter-min-al ve-lo-ci-ty.'

'What?'

'Okay, I'll tell you. My name is Lian Tse-ven. Lian means "face." Tse means "man." Ven means "literary and refined." It suits me.'

'Then why do you have us call you Faceman?'

'Fa-ce-man,' W. whispers.

'That is the name I gave myself'—nonchalantly, adjusting his belt—'when I came to America.'

She turns to the other one, who is stirring hoisin sauce into his noodle soup: 'So what does Ringo stand for?'

'Ringo...' he sighs, 'stands for Ringo...'

A whole boiled egg floats to the top of the noodles; he picks it apart with one chopstick in each hand. Particularly fond of dishes in which the eater finds 'surprises,' like double egg yolks in the center of a nutty mooncake, or a long hair inside a lo mein. When Faceman is done and the waiter removes his plate there is

a perfect halo of white rice on the table. 'You're a big baby,' Ringo teases. W. falls asleep; they think he's passed out drunk, but he's really just sleeping. Faceman comes out of the bathroom, brushes aside the beaded curtain, grabs the doorframe and does three chin-ups. W.'s sleep patterns are a medical anomaly, they learn; the records show that after moving to America he remained permanently jet lagged. Cinzia senses a sort of kindred tenderness in the sleeping boy.

Cinzia thinks she won't get a job in academia and so she replies to the art photographer's ad. A flat shoelace-like, tentacle-like 'tapeworm'—unclear if real or fake, dead or alive—will encircle the models' thighs and necks. The artist is documenting the process of it taking over the human body. T.V. is there. A woman, presumably a friend of Cinzia, presumably someone she met at a party, strips first. She poses three ways. Rodin-like. Once on her knees. Then she and T.V. with their 'knees touching'—at least that's how the photographer describes it. T.V.'s underwear is a pair of briefs, mint green or blue (mint blue?); Cinzia keeps watch for an erection, to prove, for her own vanity's sake, that he is as straight as he says. He is clenching his crotch with his hand in every frame. One pose with them both on their knees, him the little spoon, both leaning forward. Rodin-like. Her ass. She is reluctant to bend over, nervous—'Is my asshole

dirty?' Body just like mine, Cinzia thinks, maybe stronger. Then he is on his back. The erection pops out. It is half the size of his body! He fondles it shyly, like he's trying to hide it. A few more frames. Then 'Cinzia's turn.' She realizes T.V. has handed her the tapeworm and has a brief thought: T.V. has actually already given her the tapeworm—it is growing inside her body. And that is why she was chosen for this shoot in the first place. That is why she will have her photo taken too.

Ringo is crouched on all fours with his eyes crossed over the ball, his nose practically touching it. 'What is this, Brownian motion?' The ball has a mind of its own (à la impossible trajectories). 'Look, even when I lay it down on the floor without touching it—'

'The floor is slanted, Ringo.'

'No, look, it's moving like it's working through a maze or something.'

Faceman gets down on all fours too. They stare. It's like the ball is tingling, edging left and right. It seems to be puffed up with breath.

The ball begins rolling in one chosen direction. Then it makes a ninety-degree turn. The scratchy sound it makes as it rolls over the knots and holes of the wooden floorboards, which are themselves creaking under hands and knees, is barely perceptible.

'So interesting... Do you think it's a self-defense mechanism?'

'You shouldn't be so conscious of the

game, Ringo. Just let it come naturally.'

They throw a party that night in Ringo's sunroom for throngs of Cinzia's friends; they are celebrating Cinzia's new job as the research librarian of botany at the university with a lot of incoherent mumbling. Ringo: 'Oh, that's a very nice tie. Can I have it?' Cinzia, regarding her new position: 'I'm so relieved!' Unscrews a champagne cork but 'Ooh, watch your eye.' Ringo: 'Take that outside!' 'I need my shoes.' 'No shoes indoors.' 'Have you seen my glasses?' They migrate onto the second-story terrace with greenery all around. 'It's dark out here.' 'Is this a garden?' 'I can't see any flowers, but I can smell them, oddly.' The cork pops. Eyes scan the dark tops of the shrubbery. Cinzia's friend: 'Oh, watch your dress.' Cinzia, sipping from the froth: 'This is the good champagne.' 'And good hors d'oeurves too.' Cinzia's friend: 'Let me get that tiny ham sandwich—yum.' Ringo: 'I was gonna eat that.'

Unbeknownst to anyone at the party, Ringo most of all, W. drives off in Ringo's Plymouth Cricket. It's a few minutes past midnight. He gets on the interstate, headed north, toward Cheyenne. He wants to sleep again; he's starting to feel like he is breathing inside his body, like the breath is neither going in nor coming out, just circling; his body jolts. His lover once performed hypnosis on him. 'You are beginning to feel wonderful. Now each breath you take is making you feel so very wonderful, and all you have to do is close your eyes and allow this to happen.' The radio is static. He

rummages in the glove compartment and finds a box of matches. 'You are beginning to feel wonderful. All you have to do is breathe. Breathe and erase everything but this.' Everywhere he goes, W. hears metronomic taps—'You will orgasm at the sound of the bell—but he never hears the bell, but rather it is as though he is looking at the world through a phoropter, its image ever-changing—a house, a cipher—in and out of focus—its circular slides clicking every second, brushing his eyelashes...

Cinzia's friends are lying down to sleep on various pieces of furniture, some on the rugs, Ringo and Faceman in the bathtub. Faceman, in fitful sleep, has wrung the shower curtain off its rod and made himself a plasticky cocoon. Ringo nudges him until he snorts.

'What is it, Ringo?'

'Do you... Do you think it's really hollow on the inside?'

Ringo wakes up when someone comes in to use the bathroom. He runs into Cinzia in the kitchen. 'Oh, you're not sleeping in the bed with your girlfriends?'

'One of them snores.'

'Have you noticed anything weird?'

'What do you mean?' says Cinzia. Remembering the bonkers photoshoot, she feels a bit queasy. 'Not any weirder than usual.'

'Just something I've sensed. Something's off, but this last week has been particularly weird. It's reasonable,

though, that it's because I still don't understand American social cues. And Faceman doesn't make things any easier.'

'Do you wish he would take you seriously?'

'No... It's probably better this way. That's just his personality. You know, for example, when I first came to America, as a prank, he gave me the address of what he called a 'clothing store,' but basically I went into the dry cleaners thinking it was a clothing store.'

'What happened?'

'I mean, it looked like a clothing store, with all the shirts hanging in a row. There was a cash register and everything. The owner saw me going behind the counter and shouted something like, 'Hey! You can't go back there!' But I was going through the hanging garments, all in neat little plastic sleeves, and wasn't paying attention. I happened to be looking for a formal dress shirt. The owner then came up to me and started waving his arms around, talking fast. I still didn't understand his English. Then he snatched the clothes out of my hands and pointed to the door, and I guess I was a little slow to react because he threatened to call the police. For some reason I understood what 'police' meant. I left feeling very sad that I couldn't shop in that store.'

Because he can't sleep, Cinzia offers to play ping-pong with Ringo. They hop over the sleeping bodies.

Meanwhile, it is 3 a.m.; W. is wandering the streets, fully awake. It started raining, with no sign of letting up,

and he pulled off the interstate into a town whose name he did not catch, and he goes now into one of those small Chinese restaurants that is just an illuminated square crammed full of black chairs to find a single man standing behind the counter, doing something on a piece of paper—filling out lottery numbers?—who says, 'Not open yet,' even though W. was able to come inside. He says he has nothing for W. to eat, but he has something for him to do. So W. sweeps the floors in the front, since he is killing time, waiting for the rain to stop. It's very easy for one insomniac to spot another insomniac—context gives it away, obviously. Such a strange thing to say at that hour: 'Not open yet.'

Soon the sun rises and the people on the furniture yawn and scratch themselves and leave. Cinzia needs to take a shower and go to work. Ringo wants to tell her he's only getting warmed up, that her sense of time and seasons is arbitrary. As T'ao Ch'ien might say:

*Wine eases worry, and chrysanthemums
Keep us from the ruins of age, but if you
Live in a bramble hut, helplessly watching
These turning seasons crumble—what then?*

Forget the busy world outside. Stay for one more game of ping-pong.

TONY MASTROIANNI

Alessia (I wanna see more of ya)

or

Hold my hand, hold my heart by the Chantrellines

or

Thing

or

The Whale

She looks so beautiful when she's not smiling. You just want to take her hand and make her unhappy forever. Two tables away, diagonally to the left. Hers has an umbrella and an empty demitasse and she's wearing mostly all black. Black jeans, plain black shirt. If a man of your height and hair and eye color had to guess, it's an American Apparel t-shirt. Sunglasses, no suntan. She's leafing through an old, old, old edition of the New Left Review. You're reading Dylan Dog. And her fingers are thin and it makes leafing look like a delicate procedure. She leafs like an angel. She really leafs like an angel would.

You don't have a direct view, but her face is wonderful in its sideways particulars. Her forehead is big and her nose is too close to her mouth. A guy of your hairstyle would be willing to wager that

with a full frontal view of her face, her eyes and nose and mouth would look something like the shape of an anchor and you can also imagine that kissing a girl with a nose-mouth combination like that could be difficult. Even the slightest of mustachio hairs might probably tickle a sneeze out her.

Her hair is nice too. It's almost black and it's bobbed at her shoulders. Really, you're starting to take notice of her entire corporal configuration. In fact, it's totally radical. And you're trying not to get totally fanatical, but she just keeps flipping and leafing and flipping away at her magazine. You can tell her type just looking at her—big forehead, upper-middle class, coffeehouse philosopher, thinks cucumber water has a distinct taste. Her hands. Her precise-looking hands.

You could see it all. You could tell

everything just from the way she's slouched in her chair. Her entire life would flash before your eyes if you wanted it to. Her most intimate moments. That time when she thought she wanted to be a lesbian. Her and her best friend, a pretty number, a blonde one, went camping for a weekend near a beach outside the city. They'd slurped down an entire bottle of young-flavored alcohol on the second night. The two of them in a tent with pillow-fight pillows, kneeling on sleeping bags, slips or nighties, definitely non-cotton pajamas, giddy and either a little touchy or a little feely and either way, the perfect opportunity for those perfect little hands of hers to test waters untested, to maybe accidentally touch her blonde friend's otherwise off-limits areas. But she decided she thought that she didn't want to be a lesbian after all. You could see it all. And despite your obvious differences and the fact that you generally disapprove of coffeehouse fake beatniks and cultural studies girls, you could kind of see this working out.

You want her hand in yours.

At least she's chosen a cool coffee place. It's your favorite and representative of good taste on her part and your part. Your part plural. You're wondering what her name is, does she come here often. It's probably Alessia or Alessandra or something and you're thinking how great it'd feel to have your hand all up in

her hand, her hand all up in yours. Your first official date will be here, at this very coffee joint. You just know it. Her parents are going to love you. You'll make their daughter so happy and your wedding'll be planned for a weekday so you can take extra days off work. Frankie Valli will be singing at the wedding reception and if your first child is a masculine child, it'll be Marcello Jr., Marcellino. If it's a girl it'll be Alessia.

Or Alessandra.

If it's a girl, she'll have dark brown hair just like her mom. She'll always be running her fingers through it, fidgeting. Her fingers are longer than you would have expected, but they're very skinny and very beautiful. They're the fingers of Audrey Hepburn and when she runs them through her hair like that it makes this little tufty wave thing that leaves her whole perfect forehead and her whole perfect hairline exposed. You'll be able to see the thought bubbles hovering above everyone's heads that she just turned.

The dirty old men will be like, 'Vavavoom!'

The young boys' speech balloons will read, 'AOOOOGA!'

The ladies in all their envy will have written, 'If I had a tufty wave thing like that, I'd have thought bubbles about me too. The old men would say vavavoom. The young men would say aooga.'

Above the young romantics, it will say 'I wish I could hold her hands in mine.'

Your little Alessia, she'll do well in school. Your little princess's ever grow-

ing beauty won't interfere with her studies no matter how many young courtiers want and try to steal her away.

It's around this time she starts wearing dark colors and reading existential novels. It'll make you want to dislike her, but it'll only make you like her more.

Eventually, Alessandra will go on her first date. The boy'll be a musician with a cool nickname. He'll write her a love song, but after the flattery of his magnum opus ('Alessia (I Wanna See More of Ya)') wears off, she'll see that his choice instrument of seduction is the only difference between him and the rest of the little teenage flatterboys she knows. Anyway, they break up and she graduates valedictorian and from then on she decides to steer clear of childish romances. She'll have a look about her, it'll be written on her face:

DON'T EVEN BOTHER. I'M TAKING A PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH TO LIFE WHICH EMPHASIZES THE EXISTENCE OF MY INDIVIDUAL SELF AS A FREE AND RESPONSIBLE AGENT DETERMINING MY OWN DEVELOPMENT THROUGH ACTS OF MY OWN FREE WILL. (Feel free to talk to the self-deprecating girl in the miniskirt by the soda machine. She's not wearing underwear.) That kind of look and you'll be so proud of you little pumpkin. It'll be a Goriot-like love and since you're so proud of her decisions, your decisions, you decide to send her to the very best American university in the country. There, for every A++ she gets, you'll buy her a gift card to amazon.com, right up until she graduates, which she does

and she does it with cum laude and honors.

After the graduation ceremony, you'll tell her how proud you are, how much you love her and she'll be looking into your eyes. The look will say it all. It'll say, 'I couldn't have done this without you. You're the best man who has ever lived. I love you so much.'

You tell her, 'Don't say a word darling. I know.'

Your little Alessandra, she'll go on to an entry-level job somewhere. She'll make copies and coffees and hate every asinine minute of it, but she knows it's only the first next step.

One day she'll be sitting outside a coffee bar, drinking the only acceptable coffee in the entire city, reading her mother's copy of the *New Left Review*, when a handsome young man sits down a couple tables away, diagonally to the left. He'll be a romantic one. In fact, he's the founding member of the vaguely literary Hopeless Romantic Hero movement which will be a small group of artists aiming to combine the presence and sensitivity of Lord Byron with those of the male who watches *Gilmore Girls*.

He came for the coffee too.

He'll sit there sneaking glances at Alessia, looking at every little feature of hers. They all manage to fit right into place. And of course he'll be a little put off by the sight of such a beautiful girl reading a dog-eared magazine featuring Sartre and subjectivity on such a beautiful day, but it's a kind of nausea that he kind of likes. The way she holds

that book between her hands is enough to make him dream dreams of grandeur and shit, scheduled date nights and Sunday dinners with the family. They're perfect, those little Hepburn hands. He looks back down at his two halves empty coffee cup sitting on the table and his Dylan Dog and his notebook just laying there ready to be filled with more Gilmore Girls fan fiction, but all he can think about is how bad he wants her hands in his.

He gets up and chops her hands off.

Poetry



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Alex Gregor

3.

do you
& the honey will bun.
so i dough ball.
i thigh.
i leg,
i thigh
& i wing:
MY TEETH COULD USE A TUB.
i wake up
& i thing:
SHAVE MY ASS
LIKE MY LEGS, TOO?
i thing:
DON'T THROW THE LADY OUT
WITH THE TOP CHOPTER.
i thing:
THIS IS GONNA ISN'T IS,
i thing.
i don't rewind,
i pass forward,
i move flow,
while you pause,
i miss,
i plate,
rewind
& i thing:
WHATEVER FLOATS YOUR
FLOATS YOUR
FLAMING EYEBALL NECK SHAMOO,
but how we gonna part,
when we never ass hole?

18.

sometimes,
it is possible to see rings
as they really worm,
when every response
is a question of gender.

i'm just dropping a line
for the leader to follow,
but all you can think about is
going slack in the line,
or the suture.

somewhere between
the flour & the grit
is the meal:
a quart jar full of ears
pickled in brandy.

one man's salt
is another man's sugar.
a slug is slug,
but i'm chasing a conch.
i'm talking fractions:
me on top of you.

how you squeelin, squid?
i'm swine.
if you need to yawn,
i don't.

a plant glowing
in a clouded room,
you go to pee,
and realize you have to sit.
the lesson in skating:
it's a solitary sport,
these songs as movements
& there are 2 sides to every
sorry,

ALL FORMATTING WILL BE LOST.

Ben Kline

SPOONS

Same words same sounds same
note that note like a wind chime tangled
in the same notes ding ding plink plink
ding you know that sharp key lingering
like a majordomo who hears the same
plinks same dings same song same
names the many names we named
ten thousand years before we but after we
wriggled from the sea and we
name ourselves new names the same way
I want to hit you in the face with a sharp axe
of thick red consonants bleeding lazy vowels
over your stretched pink lips fellating
the pain of a thwack and maybe
additional thunks deep in your paranasal meat
oozing your congestion with those same damned
words same damned sounds like haze
in the August doldrums between our hills
where Dad raised corn for two years then soybeans
on the third because nitrogen needs more
than lightning to catalyze germination
and learning the names that sound the same
as the names around the table
for dinner when we have steak again
same steak as the day before we
ate to the tune of plinks aluminum plinks
fork prongs attempting to gather buttered spaghetti
because we did not know to use spoons to eat noodles
to play new songs not same songs about love notes
and authoritarian tendencies in new leaders
the same as the earliest prophets
leaders who always end up face down the same
as deer on the highway as possums in the driveway
dripping that same red I pick up without gloves
just to make you see even more the same

Jake Aller

MICROSOFT HOW I HATE YOU

For thirty years I have had the Microsoft blues
For thirty years I have had a love hate relationship
With my damn computer

I love it when it works as it advertised
I love it when the internet is fast and furious
I love it when my emails work
My iTunes work and my word works

But all too often
All I get is grief

It starts with the error messages
Written in a strange haiku like language
That only computer geeks understand

Things like
General Failure reading disk drive
Begs the question who is this General Failure
And why is he reading my disk drive anyway?

Or my favorite
“Not responding” as the computer freezes up
For no apparent reason
Other than to fuck with my head

Sometimes my computer can’t find a printer
A printer that is connected to the computer
And one that they found five minutes ago

And the dreaded blue screen of death
That appears randomly
Dumping memory somewhere

And killing my computer slowly
As I watch in real time

Powerless to stop
How it eats all my work
That I have failed to back up

One day I counted how many times
I ran into computer errors
70 percent of the time when I open Microsoft
Something goes wrong

Sometimes I want to shoot my computer
Put it out of its misery

As I curse up a blue storm
The computer looks at me
With an evil grin
It continues to fuck with my head

Nothing but silence from it
And all the other computers in the world
They smile knowing that they have tortured me
Yet again

Mission accomplished.

Darren C. Demaree

[A TETHERED GOAT]

i told my daughter a tethered goat is a warning that the balance of the scene is off that there is a hope against the danger that there is a danger that there is not enough freedom for her to stay there long at all and when she tries to free the goat before she frees herself she invites the danger to meet her face-to-face and maybe just maybe that is the kind of girl she wants to become and when i said those last words she showed me two fists and and a fullness i'd never found in myself and i wondered out loud if i might have been the goat the whole time

Brandon Marlon

NEOLOGISM

Adjured to beware the strangerous,
we cannot help reflect on our suprecepts
urging compassion and identification
with the plight of those districken
by destiny's every salvolley, suffering
from unjust and prolonged dispersecution
while noncommittal specticipants like us
enjoy the usurplus of progress.

Reapersons accustomed to abundance
debate the fate of those far below the priviledge
in a jargon detached from the reality
of underdogs barking in the depths.
Their lofty concern is rather gliberal;
do they really give a fig from their harvestivals
for the unfavorable circumstances of others
remote and doubtless cursed by the oldeities?

Perhaps it is only humanatural to be resigned
to providence or doom; if something is or was,
then it was clearly meant to be, we believe.
When, by some supernal kismetric,
fortune decides to hurl a cosmissile our way,
then won't we all finally be on an even plane?
Meantime, we figure, best to revel in the deluxuries
of our comfortresses, prizing our blessed karmaments.

Claudio Zuccaro

POMEZIA

Tight banks of shells alone.
Arctica islandica from Northern oceans,
the different coldness of the seas
didn't freeze life further;
the rare *cypraea*
from more temperate climates
now lies supine.

POMEZIA

Bancate compresse di soli gusci.
Arctica islandica da oceani del nord,
la diversa freddezza dei mari
non raggelò di più la vita;
supina, ora giace distesa,
la rara *cypraea*
dai climi più temperati.

ZANCLEAN

Fractures of blue,
Pliocene clay
interrupt
geometries of fields.

ZANCLEANO

Interrompono
geometrie di campi
fratture di azzurro,
argille plioceniche.

And I, like an upside-down insect,
dialectic artifice,
stretch my arms and flounder in the void,
between what's said and unsaid.

Ed io come insetto capovolto,
artificio dialettico,
stendo le braccia e annaspo nel vuoto,
tra il detto e il non detto.

LYME REGIS

Impregnation,
substitution,
pseudomorphosis,
distillation;
the shore falls into the sea,
desolate tides loom
leaving behind
pools of life,
occasionally, faults of time bend
on the edge of the nearby cliff,
where once rested kings
now from the water emerge
stone footprints.

LYME REGIS

Impregnazione,
sostituzione,
pseudomorfosi,
distillazione;
degrada la spiaggia al mare,
desolate maree incombono
lasciando dietro di sé
pozze di vita,
faglie di tempo, di tanto in tanto, reclinano
sul ciglio della vicina scogliera,
dove un tempo riposavano i re
ora dall'acqua traspaiono
impronte di pietra.

[First published in *Poesia non è una cortese parola* (Aracne, 2016)]

Michael A. Istvan Jr.

NECROPOLIS I

1

When one is nothing but one's uniform.

2

When the desire to settle for less, not go
for the top, is really the desire for power
over small-pond ones skilled less than us.

3

When your wanting to be x
(thin, drug-free) is really your wanting
to be the one who wants to be x.

4

Pick-your-own pickled pigs feet
next to the bodega cash register
ran out of town by the hipster influx.

5

The pallor of obsessed faces.

6

What stays silent under hellos and goodbyes.

7

Dying just after stocking up in bulk.

8

Clubbing the fearcrobat fish to stillness.

9

The stroked head dozing in its mother's lap.

10

An international star in the psychic circuit.

11

So many masters of obsolete practices.

12

Wanting loved ones to behave as if you are not dying.

13

Other things equal, the one oblivious
to her beauty, seeing herself as neither
beautiful nor ugly, has greater beauty.

14

You cannot tease
“Your momma’s on welfare”
when everyone’s mom is.

15

Children change us: a bumper sticker—
a flag one especially—was never our thing
until their newfound US spirit.

16

Clueless about how to answer

the “reflection questions” appended to your art in the college textbook.

17

Wine purple-stained
places nibbling teeth
had lip-skin flayed.

18

Really really really smart tend to be
those who respond, “But that’s just
a hypothetical; I deal in reality.”

19

Pink-sock prolapse of her rectum.

20

Relics of the spouse.

21

A smell sweet from poison
in the milk cellar, rat teeth
gnashing in death.

22

When something works against you for reasons
incomprehensible (life—this—some say is good
as an example), even just saying so can be escapist.

23

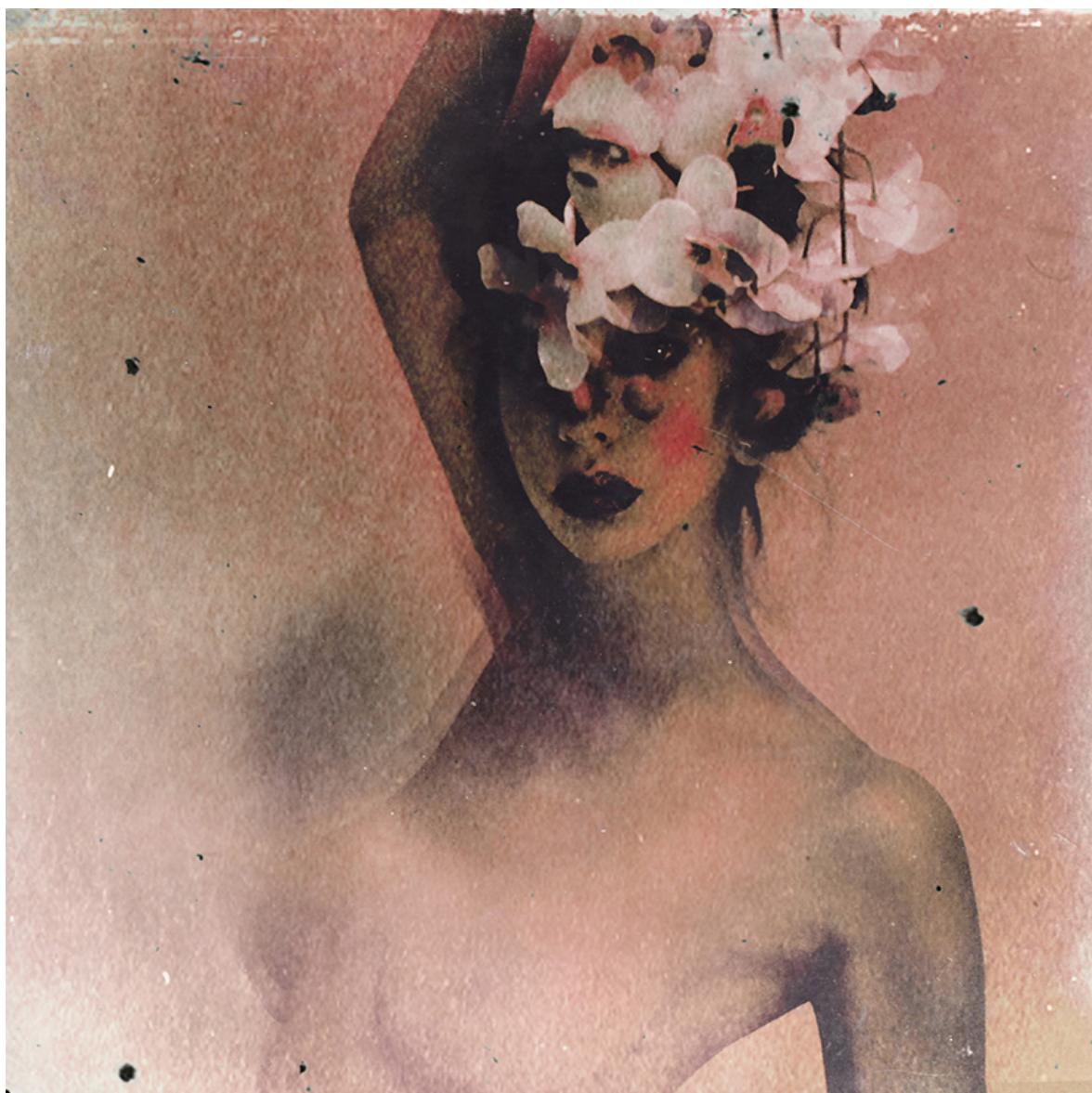
Could the conscious awareness that makes
pain so much more terrible for us than fish
be used to control it, make us not go mad?

James G. Piatt

THEY CAUSED MY MADNESS

They pulled my mind through a keyhole yesterday,
Punctured it with sharp lies and empty promises,
Then told me to breath deeply. They then asked me
To interpret an inky picture of a dark monkey
Sitting in the corner screaming at reality, and I pulled
The oxidized plug in the broken enamel basis, and watched
The liars disintegrate into absurdity. I scratched at the
Whispering memory of what life was all about ten
Thousand rusted hours ago, and finding nothing retreated
To the soft walled room where they put on my white jacket
For dinner.

Interviews & Reviews



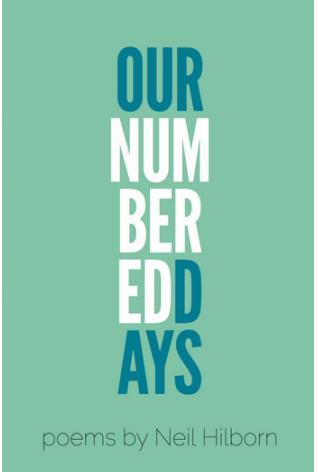
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DANIEL ROY CONNELLY

A Review of Our Numbered Days
by Neil Hilborn

Hilborn is a US national college slam champion, and any number of the pieces in 'Our Numbered Days' would stand up off the page; the author has a strong grasp of the dramatic curve necessary for credible performance poetry. The collection – a splay of reactions to mental illnesses, lost loves and numbing airline travel – numbers forty-five poems split into six sections, from which the hit, OCD, appears. Clocking up over 13 million views on YouTube, OCD is very much a poem for our times, refracting the effects of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder through varied erotic and familial relationships; yet there is more to 'Our Numbered Days' than voluble cries from painful mental states.

Inevitably, poetry about mental illness invites discussion of sanity. In one of the six titular pieces, Hilborn fears that only the untrammelled mind can work creatively: "I am concerned / that if I begin taking / medication I will no longer / be able to write poems." This is clearly not the case. In another of the title poems, the craft prevails: "When my mother dies / ...I will / write one or two poems, then I will / no longer think of her." The author also likes to talk to himself, as in 'Chitin': "...I am holding onto some shit. / Neil, you just have to let that shit go. Stop biting / your nails. Let it go." To the sane, this must seem like, well, utter madness; to read such ready openness is to be repeatedly hit with a blunt weapon. There is also a cynical drive behind omnipresent humour, a frustration of the representative natures of our current contexts, a smack of sarcasm too. In 'The News Anchor is Crying', we read: "...another shooting on the north side of town / and her hair is just right. Her tears just so"; and, in 'Ballad of a Bruised Lung', a Bill and Ted moment: "...maybe things do / happen for a reason, but that reason is stupid." Notwithstanding mental illness, Hilborn thankfully recognises the bottomless well of laughter that necessarily underpins intense periods of depression and subsequent self-scrutiny.



OUR
NUM
BER
EDD
AYS

poems by Neil Hilborn

One of the undoubted reasons for his success is that Hilborn shows a great propensity for advancing a poem, for coherent narrative leaps, such as this from the 3-caps airport designators, MSP PHI LGA ALB PHI MSP: “This is my sixth time / in this airport. My sixth time because of two / different women. I have paid probably / a couple thousand dollars for the privilege. / Five cheese-steaks. Surprisingly good caramel / popcorn.” Through this narrative dynamism, the lines amass a sense of place and the drudge of air travel. Hilborn is also as forthright as this most forthright of forms can be. ‘Unsolicited Advice to Minnesota Children’ begins hilariously: “Listen here, you little shits...”; while ‘Traffic, Lightning, Gutter’ opens with the instantly visual “Let me tell you what it’s like / to ride a bicycle in a hurricane.” For performance poets, powerful grabbers are essential; audiences are not reading the work off the page; a swiftness to engage listeners is crucial. Many performers are less impressive on the page than Hilborn; necessary calibration subdues the flow. In combining the technicalities of spoken and written word, instant and sustainable, Hilborn presents something of a rarity in the field. ‘Our Numbered Days’ provides a deft and deafening exposition of what the sane might refer to as mental turmoil.

I won’t call ‘Our Numbered Days’ confessional poetry because I cannot be sure the author is seeking absolution. In such a forthright collection, confident in proclaiming manifold anxieties of the mind, it seems unlikely. Aside from the hubris of placing an epigraph of his own work among those of Andrew Jackson, St Catherine of Sienna and Frida Kahlo – and an absurd, detractive number of others throughout – this collection focusses successfully on the well-trod and knotty business of depression, OCD, psychotherapy and relative psychopharmacologies. It does so bluntly, admirably: “I think / that the genes for being an artist and mentally ill / aren’t just related, they are the same / gene, but try telling that to a bill collector.” It’s time that bill collectors understand mental illness and Hilborn fires off an impressive volley in their direction.



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Contributors

JAKE ALLER is a novelist, poet, and former Foreign Service officer having served 27 years with the U.S. State Department. He has completed three novels, and published his poetry in electronic poetry forums, including All Poetry, Moon Café, and Duane's Poetree and literary magazines.

DANIEL ROY CONNELLY, a former British diplomat, is a theatre director, actor and professor of creative writing, English and theatre at John Cabot University and the American University of Rome. He has acted in and directed theatre in America, the UK, Italy and China, where his 2009 production of David Henry Hwang's *M Butterfly* was forced to close by the Chinese secret police. His writing is widely published in print and online. He was the winner of the 2014 Fermoy International Poetry Festival Prize, a finalist in the 2015 Aesthetica Magazine Creative Writing Prize and winner of the 2015 Cuir New Writing Prize for poetry. His pamphlet *Donkey See, Donkey Do* is published by Eyewear. Recent work has appeared in *The North, The Transnational* (in German), *Ink, Sweat and Tears, The Moth, Acumen*, and *Critical Survey*.

DARREN C. DEMAREE is the author of six poetry collections, most recently *Many Full Hands Applauding Inelegantly* (2016, 8th House Publishing). He is the Managing Editor of the *Best of the Net Anthology* and *Ovenbird Poetry*. He is currently living in Columbus, Ohio with his wife and children.

ALEX GREGOR is a writer, editor & instructor currently living in Rome, Italy. He is one of the founding editors of OOMPH! Press and was previously the curator of the DIRTY SOUTH reading series in Atlanta, Georgia. His chapbook, *FAUCET*, was selected as a finalist for The Atlas Review Chapbook Series (2015). His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Queen Mob's Tea House, NOÖ, DELUGE, Entropy, Jacket 2, Real Pants, Deer Bear Wolf Magazine, Muse /A Journal* and elsewhere. He has a M.A. in English from Georgia State University. Follow him online at www.marginalcomets.com

MICHAEL A. ISTVAN JR. is an advocacy attorney who moonlights as a hotel pianist. Most of his breakthrough ideas come while forgotten by the crowd in the heat of his play. One evening last October, to give what has proven to be the most life-changing example, an idea came that has reignited his passion for supporting the most overlooked voices in our society: children. Why not empower children

to sue their mothers, not just for things like abusing crack while pregnant with them, but even for bringing them into the world in the first place? Visit his page at txstate.academia.edu/MichaelIstvanJr

BEN KLINE lives in Cincinnati, Ohio where he writes poems and short stories about our modern digital existence, his many former lovers, the Eighties, and growing up Appalachian. His work is forthcoming or has appeared in *Umbrella Factory Magazine*, *Impossible Archetype*, *Animal Literary Magazine*, *Kettle Blue Review*, *The New Verse News*, *The Birds We Piled Loosely*, and many more. His first-full length book of poems – *Going Fast In Loose Directions* – appeared in 2014, courtesy of Queer Young Cowboys. He thinks aloud, comments, and visualizes at www.benkline.tumblr.com

BRANDON MARLON is a writer from Ottawa, Canada. He received his B.A. in Drama & English from the University of Toronto and his M.A. in English from the University of Victoria. His poetry was awarded the Harry Hoyt Lacey Prize in Poetry (Fall 2015), and his writing has been published in 200+ publications in 26 countries. www.brandonmarlon.com

TONY MASTROIANNI lives in Naples, Italy with a dog. Groucho is black and weighs about twenty eight kilos. His mother was also a mutt. He never met his biological father. We recently got him a new antiflea collar. He loves swimming and Supersantos balls. <3 1926 <3

CHRISTINA MURPHY's stories have appeared a range of journals and anthologies including *A cappella Zoo*, *PANK*, *Word Riot*, *Foliate Oak Literary Magazine*, and the anthology from ELJ Publications, *Turn: Turn: Turn: A Season of Short Stories*. Her fiction has been nominated multiple times for a Pushcart Prize and for the *Best of the Net Anthology* and has won the Andre Dubus Award for short fiction.

RIMEL NEFFATI is a French photographer: 'I've always had an interest for visual arts, by the end of 2008 I've started photography buying my first camera and learning alone. Self portrait comes naturally as I was questioning myself plus it was an easy way to do a lot of experiments without being under pressure. The world I create is imaginative, it's my own perception of what inspires me.'

JAMES G. PIATT, a retired professor and octogenarian, is a pushcart and best of web nominee. He has published 3 collections of poetry, *The Silent Pond* (2012), *Ancient Rhythms* (2014), and *LIGHT* (2016), and over 1,000 poems, in such magazines

as *Global Poetry*, *Westward Quarterly*, *Miller's Pond*, *American Aesthetic*, *Penwood*, *Gold Dust Poetry*, *Scarlet Leaf*, *The Linnet's Wings* and over 120 others. His fourth collection of poetry will be released this year. He earned his B.S. and M.A. from California State Polytechnic University, and his doctorate from BYU.

DANIEL LEV SHKOLNIK is a journalist by trade. He owns a Yale sweater he will never wear and takes his Faulkner with vermouth and his vermouth with an orange wedge. In Istanbul, he learned to read the future in his coffee grinds. Despite the omens he finds at the bottom of his morning joe, Daniel continues to write. His journalism has appeared in *VICE*, *Broadly*, *OZY*, and elsewhere. His fiction and poetry has appeared in *Cease*, *Cows*, *Apparent Magnitude*, *Escarpe*. Once upon a time, he was awarded a medal for writing from his high school. His mother is still proud.

JENNY WU lives and teaches in St. Louis. Some of her recent stories appear or are forthcoming in a glimpse of, *Dream Pop Journal*, *Pour Vida Zine*, and *The Sleep Aquarium*.

CLAUDIO ZUCCARO holds a PhD in Philosophy from the Internationale Akademie für Philosophie im FL. In 2008 he has published his first poetry collection, *Scavare il tempo e seppellirvi gli anni*. His new collection, *Poesia non è una cortese parola*, was published in 2016. He is the author of several essays on the work of Scheler, Nietzsche, Freud, and Ruskin. In 2000 he has published an article on the geological level of the Alpine Triassic, *La formazione di San Cassiano*.



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