

LOTUSEATER

ISSUE 7

LOTUSEATER

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Lotus-eater is based in Rome, Italy and publishes works
in English and translations from the Italian

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Issue 7, fall/winter 2018

ISSN 2499-4278

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ISSUE 7

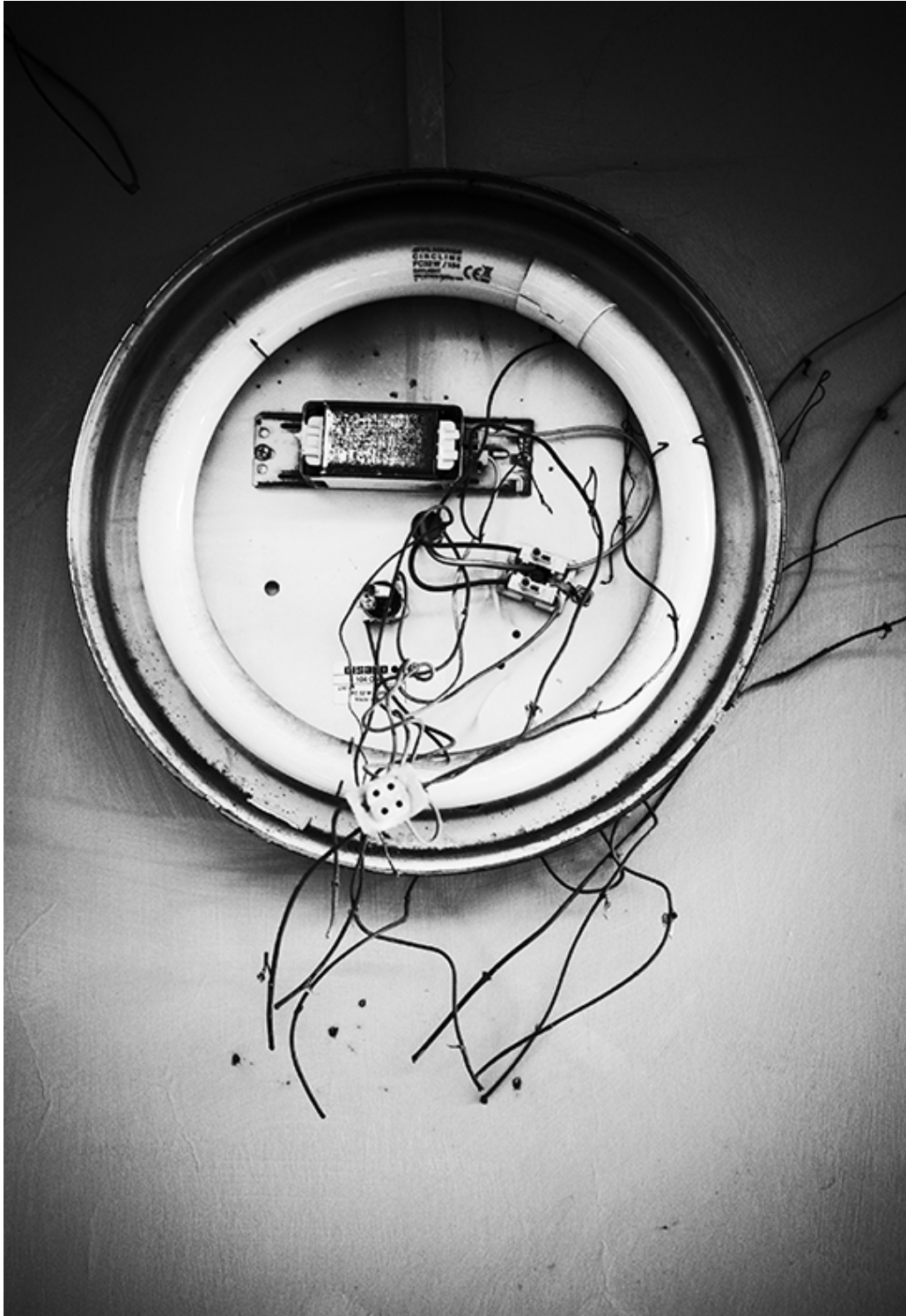
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Prose



House

The house is two stories, has dark brown (espresso bean brown) painted siding and white (coffee creamer white) trim around each of the windows. The house has a lower deck and an upper one too, both of which look out onto slightly rolling hills that are mainly covered with houses painted the same shades of brown and white as the house in question. The house has four bedrooms (one of which has been converted into a home office for the father of the family that owns and resides in the house in question). The master bedroom (which has its own bathroom) is occupied by the mother and father, the second largest room is occupied by the eldest child (a boy) and the final bedroom (not counting the bedroom that now acts as an office) is occupied by the youngest, second, and most likely final child of the family (a little girl, who at the moment is wearing a bright blue princess dress and is sitting on her bed with a plastic crown in her hands, weeping).

Between the house in question and the houses on either side of the house in question, i.e. the neighboring houses of the house in question, there is twenty feet of space on each side. There are nine feet and eleven inches, leading up to a fence on either side of the fence that physically represents the property line

of the house and belongs to the house in question and the house next to the house in question respectively (two inches are allocated, well one inch from each side, to allow space for the fence). The fence is made of wooden planks and is painted the same dark (espresso bean brown) as the siding of all of the houses in this sprawling neighborhood. In the nine feet and eleven inches of space that exists between the house in question and the fence that separates the property of the house in question from that of the neighbor's house, there is grey gravel that (the gravel) is all uniform in shape, size and color (the grey of the gravel is a chalky, dead skin type of white-ish grey). In almost the exact middle of the space between the house and the fence on the left side of the house, and the exact middle of where the gravel starts and ends (widthwise) there is a plant that has managed to poke up from beneath weed cloth (that itself is beneath the gravel) and then through the gravel itself. The plant, the only un-manicured speck on the property, is a light green that gets even lighter when in direct sunlight. This plant, which is more than likely just a weed, has a purple, spiky looking flower on it, stands about six inches tall and has begun to attract bees.

The front and back lawns of the house in question are mowed every Monday by a company of men who mow all of the lawns of all of the houses in the neighborhood. There are enough lawns in the neighborhood that the men have enough work to fill their entire week (except Sundays, which they take off for rest) before they have to loop back around and mow all of the lawns again. Today is Sunday, and because of that there are two things happening; one is that the sound of lawnmowers buzzing (a sound that is almost always present somewhere in the neighborhood) is now nowhere to be heard (as the lawnmowers and the weedwackers [both the people and the machines related to these terms] are in their respective homes [which are most certainly not in this neighborhood] resting) and thus there is a sort of eerie silence that has fallen like a sheet over the neighborhood and in this silence it seems as if everything; the houses, the gravel, the sidewalk, the air, are all standing completely still, afraid to disturb this uncanny peace, and two; because it is Sunday and therefore (as per the schedule of the lawn mowers) it has been almost a week since the grass on the front and back lawns of the house in question have been mowed, and therefore the grass has taken on this cowlick style of sticking up every which way and looks like the hair on the head of an un-showered man who is on the verge of some type of psychotic break. And this unraveled grass, these thin patches of wild green, seem exceptionally untamed when juxtaposed against a house,

a neighborhood and a world in which things are supposed to be just perfectly so (or at least look that way).

The little girl in the bright blue princess dress with the crown in her hands is not crying because of something that most other children would cry about (such as a broken toy or because of something wanted but not gotten) no, she is crying because of, in some ways, the feeling in the house.

And that feeling in the house, that whispered truth, is much like that of the street outside and of the grass on the front and back lawns, too quiet and slightly unraveling in a chaotic way.

The little girl's room is on the bottom floor of the two-story house. Above her room, the master bedroom sits and within that master bedroom are her parents (her mother is seated on the bed and her father paces the space between the bed and the door to the bedroom. Her parents are speaking to one another in that hushed but forceful and sharp way that people who are fighting but don't want their children to hear, speak. Through the floor, the words are muffled, but the tones and the quick words followed (on the part of her mother) by sobs and by sighs and angry sounding protests that are more grunt than anything else (from her father) can still be heard and, more importantly, felt. And each subsequent angry and sad sound adds to the overall already tense feeling that has at this point permeated like a gas leak through the entire house. And she (the little girl) is on the bed and she is crying, not because she has done anything

wrong (at least not that she can think of) but because she doesn't want her parents to fight anymore. She is tired of those muffled yells, those slamming doors, those looks that seem to pierce through the white painted and sparsely decorated walls. She wants everybody to get along. She wants her mother to get home earlier from work. She wants her father to not spend so much time in his office smoking cigarettes and watching a TV that blares out static heavy sports broadcasts. She wants her brother to come sit by her, to make up stories with her like he used to before he got so quiet and starting spending so much time in his room. Above her weeping, she can hear her father's carpet softened angry foot-falls (she knows his hands are clenched into fists and that his face is red) and she can hear her mother crying in a hysterical way that borders on hyperventilation (she knows that her mother's mouth, when she cries this hard, is open wider than normal and that her mother's hands are pressed hard against her thighs as she sits with her legs crossed on the bed). She knows the way her mother is sitting even though she is not in the room upstairs in part because she has seen her mother sit that way before but in part because she (the little girl) is now seated in the exact same way, mouth open wider than normal to allow more air into her lungs as she cries, while she presses her hands hard down onto her thighs.

Upstairs there is a living room with a rarely used fireplace and a daily used TV that is hung above that fireplace. There are couches that are spread out

in a horseshoe shape around the TV and in between the couches there is a trunk that is filled with blankets but doubles as a table and footrest when it is closed (which it currently is). The floors in the upstairs are a light-hardwood and the floors in the downstairs are a grey carpet that may have been white at one point but which have been grey for the entirety of the little girl's conscious life. The master bedroom is connected to the living room by a door that is currently closed but that is often open. From the living room, there is a hallway that leads to the front door of the house which opens onto a small front porch, a porch which has three steps that lead down onto a grey gravel path that perfectly slices the front lawn in two. Across the hallway from the living room there is the kitchen (the kitchen has a window that looks out onto the fence and over that fence to the neighbor's house, which is a mirror image of the house in question and thus has the kitchen on the other side of the house and therefore when one stands in the kitchen of the house in question and looks forwardly out at the neighbor's house, they can see directly into the kitchen of the neighbor's house. In the kitchen (which is small in comparison with the rest of the house) there is a sort of enclave in which a table sits and at which the family will occasionally share a meal (and on which currently there is an apple with three or four bites taken out of it). At the end of the hallway that starts at the front door is the office of the father of the family that currently owns and resides in the house.

In the downstairs of the house (in which the little girl is still crying but now in lesser way, a way in which she is still shedding tears but now the tears have switched from the tear equivalent of rapid fire to more of a slow faucet drip style), there is another sort of living room directly beneath the upstairs living room. This living room is set up in more or less the same way as the one directly above it, but doesn't have a fireplace. The downstairs TV is on the floor instead of hung on the wall (like its upstairs counterpart) and there is only one couch and no trunk on which to place one's drink or food or feet. This living room is used predominantly by the children but is occasionally used by the father of the house to watch football games with his friends on the weekends (occasions during which the mother will take both of the children out for dinner and a movie to give both herself and the children time away from the ruckus and noise caused by the father and his friends as well as to give the father some space to watch the game).

On one side of the downstairs living room there is a door that leads to the little girl's room, this door is open. On the other side of the living room there is another door which leads to the bedroom of the brother, this door is closed but not fully, as there is about a gap that is about an inch and a half wide between the frame of the door and the door itself. And from the inch and a half gap, yellow light pours out in a single beam onto the grey carpet of the downstairs living room.

The family, at one time, owned a dog and that dog was something pure and red-nosed and sweet and the whole family was sort of brought together over their love of that dog. But one day while the mother was at work and the children were at school and the father was in his office smoking cigarettes and doing whatever he does in that office, the dog somehow got out of the house and (according to what the veterinarian would say later that day) the ecstasy of the escape from the house and the overall wonder of being out in the world excited the dog so much that its heart exploded and it (the beloved family dog) slumped over, mid run, on the left side of the front lawn of the house just inches away from the road and because of the velocity of the dog running and suddenly stopping, the body of the then dead dog had skidded with some force to the very edge of the lawn. And the dog had been found by the older brother and the little girl as they came home from school, and at that point the dog had been laying outside for the hottest part of the day and looked like a stuffed animal that had had about a quarter of its stuffing taken out, i.e. the dog did not look good when they (the children) found it (the dead dog) and the image of this deflated looking animal corpse is something that both of them (the children) will be able to see crystal-clearly for the rest of their lives. And but anyways although the dog has been dead for at least a year, there is still a decent amount of dog related toys and knick-knacks around the house including but

not limited to; a dog bed in both of the living rooms, a box of unopened dog food in the pantry, and at least (but most likely more than) a handful of grey-white dog hair on every piece of furniture.

The upstairs and downstairs decks of the house both look out onto the same suburban monotonous sprawl and on the lower of the decks, the son (the brother, the eldest sibling) sits with his legs splayed to either side of him on the grainy and slightly splintery boards of the deck and with his back leaning against the espresso bean brown siding of the house, smoking a joint that is burnt down to the point that it is getting difficult to hold it without burning his fingers. The joint (which is now singeing the fingertips of the eldest sibling of the house), was stolen from his father's office by this eldest son for (as the son and the father only know), the father is not smoking just cigarettes in there.

The son was able to become aware of the fact of what his father was or was not smoking in his (the father's) office, one day after school when he saw his father speaking with an upper classman in the parking lot of the high school. The son had been surprised to see his father at school because he (the son) usually took the bus back to his house after school, but he had been happily surprised and had (incorrectly) assumed that his father was there at his high school to pick him (the son) up from school and so the son had strolled over to his father's car with a kind of half smile and had been about ten feet away from his father's car when he realized

that his father was handing money over to the upperclassman and that the upperclassman was handing a plastic baggie filled with what looked like moss over to his father. And the way that both his father and the upperclassman had nervously looked around and anxiously moved to grab the thing that one was handing the other, had alerted the son to the fact that what his father was doing at the school was (while still a surprising) had nothing to do with him (the son). And but anyway he (the son) had continued to stroll up to his father's car (as the upperclassmen had sulked, like a retreating fox, away) and he (the son) had asked him (the father) what he was doing at his (the son's) school and if he (the father) was there to pick him (the son) up and the father has responded affirmatively but in a guilty and sort of sheepish way and in a tone that seemed unsure if he (the father) had been found out. And so, the son and the father had driven back to their house, and on that drive, back to the house there was not much said and at a couple points the son had glanced over at his father and had been able to see the corner of the plastic bag poking out from the father's pocket and inside of the car during that drive there was a certain earthy and pungent smell and also during that drive the father was visibly sweating.

And back then (about two years ago, when the dog was still alive, on the day that the son saw his father at school) he (the son) felt young and hopeful and sort of fresh. He had not truly been aware of what was going on outside of

his existential bubble and even within that bubble he had sort of just moved around aimlessly and in a care-free way that only young, half cognizant people can do. But after that day, seeing his dad and that upperclassman, he has grown and aged (to him) what feels like a decade, i.e. he feels older, more adult, less hopeful. Since that day he has felt more and more numb and kind of far away from everything. The enormity (a word he doesn't know) of everything and the complexity and intricacy of things just overwhelm him and make him feel small (and although the above is exactly what he feels, if asked to and if he were in the mood to describe his feelings he wouldn't exactly be able to put it [his feelings] in such a concise way).

So, but now he is on the deck and his feet are bare and the wind is lightly blowing the bottoms of his feet and passing through the spaces between his toes and the joint is almost out and the sun is low in the sky but is still quite far from setting. He feels that emptiness and a kind of detached awe as he looks out at the neighborhood in which his family lives. The same house, over and over again, like this whole place was puked out of some house making machine and plopped down onto all the hills, onto all the valleys, onto all the empty spaces, until everything was filled with front and back yards and espresso bean brown siding and grey gravel paths leading to front doors and white trim and kitchens that look out into more of the same kitchens and muffled whispers and dead dogs and a sky that is never fully dark.

It's all blur of sameness and the bland taste of stale air.

He started smoking stolen joints about a year ago, on a boring Sunday like today when he had been just sitting in his room staring at the wall and had somehow been reminded of that day when he saw his father at school and had decided to see what else his father was hiding and he knew that his father was not going to catch him in the office because he (the father) was busy upstairs, talking in harsh and sharp whispers to his (the son's) mother. And so, he had gone into his father's office and had found some things including a dark-wooden box with a carving of a frog on the top of it and inside of that box he had found tens of joints and he had pocketed a few of them. And then he had put the box where he had found it, which was in the top drawer of his father's desk, under a bunch of papers. Then he had gone upstairs (walking as quietly as possible as to not disturb or interact with at all his parents, and had taken from the cabinet above the stove a box of matches and had skulked back down to the bottom deck, where his parents never go even when they are not fighting, and he had lit up the joint with a match (after trying a couple times to light a match he had finally succeeded) and he had inhaled rather sharply and had coughed and coughed. He had coughed so loud that he was surprised his parents hadn't come downstairs to check on him (but they had not) and eventually had went back upstairs (again as quietly as possible) to get some water for his then

sore and scorched throat and after getting water he had gone back to the deck and had proceeded to try and smoke the joint again and had slowly figured out how to smoke it without coughing.

And but that was like a year ago now and he has been smoking joints every Sunday, and really as much as possible, since that first day. And each month he sneaks into his father's office to steal about a handful of joints and he is not sure if his father is aware of the missing joints and is just letting him smoke them with the assumption that he doesn't tell his mother about what he saw his father doing at high school, or if his father just has no idea that the joints are missing. And but it doesn't really matter anyway because he hasn't got in trouble yet and he is pretty good about hiding the evidence of his newfound habit; he always has gum in his pocket and he flushes the butts (or as kids at school call them, roaches) down the downstairs toilet and where he smokes on the bottom deck is a place that is mainly used for storage and a place that can be accessed by his window (from which he has removed the screen) and so he can pretend to be in his room and then climb through the window and onto the deck and be mainly obscured by bikes and extra lawn chairs and whatnot that are kept down on the bottom deck, so basically he is pretty sure that he is not going to be found out and even if he is it doesn't really matter because he is not sure if his parents would care if he was found out.

And the reason that he has continued to smoke the stolen joints is because they

make him feel a little bit lighter and the emptiness that has begun to make him feel like he is sort of sinking into the ground most of the time dissipates a bit when he is high and sitting on the deck.

And below the bottom most section of the deck, well not directly below but diagonally below and in the line of sight of the top deck, there is a rectangular patch of grass that is colored differently than the rest of the grass in the back lawn and below that rectangular patch of grass the dog is buried and was buried there by the father on the night after the dog was found by the children on the front lawn. The father used a shovel to cut a rectangle out of the grass and then set that rectangle of grass on top of the grass beside where that rectangle of grass had been and then he dug a hole that seemed deep enough to him in which to place the dog's body, and then he set the dead dog (which at that point was wrapped in a white towel and starting to smell) down into the hole and then he put the dirt that he had dug out of the hole back in the hole and put the rectangle of grass back on top of where it had one been and patted down the grass with the shovel that he had used to dig the whole. And that grass had grown back into the ground but ever since that night that grass has been a yellow-green, instead of a deep green like the rest of the grass in the backyard of the house.

Well so now the little girl has now stopped crying but is still breathing in that way that one must breathe after crying hard and she has placed that

plastic crown back on her head and is looking in a mirror that is hung on her wall and is trying to use her hands to flatten out creases in her dress as she tries to return to a normal breathing pattern and her brother is on the deck and his head is swimming but not like a swimmer, more like someone seated in an inner tube on one of those lazy rivers at a water park, and the parents are upstairs and their fight is still ongoing (as it always is) but they have stopped speaking for now, it seems there is nothing more to say, for now.

And outside the sun is hot and the grass is growing out of control.

X.

It was night, but I was never afraid of walking at night. Everybody in the neighborhood knows everybody in the neighborhood. Everybody's everybody's cousin, pretty much. And that night, I was coming back from my aunt's house a little bit after the street lights went on. My bag was on my arm and I was carrying a tray of tequenos like a waitress. I was just walking forward picturing me walking forward. I didn't have nothing in the bag. Keys. A compact. Makeup. No more than twenty dollars, plus reading glasses. My mother insists I carry them with me because you never know. I only used them once so I could read Tio's prescription. They make me look ugly. They make me look like I got braces, even if I don't.

It was hot. One of those hot Stat nights where all the kids stand in front of fans turned on HI or stand behind them and talk into them and all the moms all got their hair up, doing the last things they gotta do in the house or sometimes the first things they should have done in the house, but it was too hot to do during the day and they're calling each other on landlines and interrupting each other to yell at the kids because they're going to catch colds in front of the fan like that. But I'm outside. I'm

walking with a plastic tray of palitos de queso and I feel like a Jennifer Lopez movie. And all of a sudden, I'm on the floor. The ground. I got my elbow bleeding and the tequenos are all over the sidewalk and this motherfucker is halfway down the street already. My cousin comes out. Geraldo comes out. My aunt, a different one, comes out picking the tequenos off the sidewalk, all vexed and domestic. Geraldo and my cousin say they're going to kill that motherfucker, but they don't even move. My aunt is going on, saying I gotta soak my elbow in peroxide before I catch a street disease. The problem is we all already got a street disease. Everybody on the island. The richest straight down to the newborns. Pretty much everyone. So I get up. I tell aunty not to worry. We have gallons of peroxide at home and all I had in the bag was some makeup and shit, twenty bucks maybe, at the most. Plus, who never had nothing robbed before? Geraldo walked me home because Geraldo has a crush on me. My cousin walked me home too because Geraldo has a crush on me and that was that for the night. It was in the morning that was weird. A kid everybody knows but nobody has anything to do with is at the door for me. He's about seven or eight

years old and everybody calls him either Doog or Pimple. Or Doogie Pimple like it was a first name and last name. My mom's yelling for me. Get up. That stuff. Get out your ever lovin' bed. But even if Doog wasn't at the door, she'd be yelling like that. And I come out in silk pajamas (you gotta have something when you have nothing), then I run back into my room and switch myself into loose gym shorts and a loose t-shirt because I know Doog and I know men and I know boys can feel sexuality about women at seven years old and I know my mom's down there giving Pimple the third degree. Where'd you get that? How'd you get that? You don't know him? You never seen him? You didn't see him? Are you gonna put my only daughter's bag in my hand right now, Doogie, or you just gonna stand there in the door there, waiting til someone robs it again? Doog Pimple has explicit instructions. He was only to let go of the straps of this bag if they were to be received by my hands. I was walking out into the hallway when he used the actually words 'explicit instructions' which, even though were pronounced explixit instructions, seemed a little too cultivated for a seven year old street diseased boy with a full name consisting of two, probably unrelated, nicknames. Mom's anxiety though, she transmits it into the air like microwaved radiation, mad for fact she had no face and there no name to put on our Staten samaritan. She couldn't make no thank you for someone we didn't know who it is and it isn't even a fact that my mom likes to say thank you

because she likes to thank. Mom doesn't just want, Mom needs to be the one who comes out the real savior by way of last deeds, last words and kitchen heroics. If Doog gave the guy up, no matter how masked or anonymous and hidden he is, my moms would have a tray of oatmeal cookies for him and his mom. I told her to wait in the other room even though I knew she was gonna be with her ear up to the paper walls we got in our house and I asked lil Doog who this was that told him to hand the bag over to me and me only. He didn't look spooked. He didn't look like Doog Pimple from the block though. I didn't see the guy, he said. How could you not see the guy if he gave you a purse and instructions? He had a hood on. In this heat? It was like a t-shirt with a hood. Had no sleeves. And you didn't see none of his face because he had a hood on? No. He had a hat on Doogie says. And sunglasses. When he talked to me he put his arm over his mouth like when Dracula walks with the cape up close to his eyes and I couldn't see none of his face and he talked weird. Tattoos, I asked. He didn't have any tattoos? He didn't think so. Everybody got tattoos around here, Doog. Doog didn't see any. The man, on the corner of Brice and Wilton, where Pimple was standing with his hands in his shorts pockets not doing anything and somehow still managing to be up to no good, he pulled up to the curb. It looked like the guy was coughing. He didn't cut the engine. He just tells Doogie to walk five paces forward, but if he gets any closer than the five paces he asked

for, he'd get out the car and whoop him. He looked embarrassed. Doogie, I mean. He tells Doog to turn around. Doog turns around, his back to the guy. The guy asks Doog if he wants to see the most beautiful girl on the island. Plus ten bucks. Doogie's only seven and he's already a motherfucker. He asks what he's gotta do. You're gonna back up to that wall, which was the wall of a bodega and cockfight parlor, and you're gonna turn around and count to five, real slow, the man says. Just like we're playing hide-and-seek. I'm going to put a purse on the sidewalk next to you while you're counting. Then, I'm going to drive away. All you need to do is bring this bag to [my address] and assure no one touches the bag, you do not give it to anyone, no cousins, no moms, no no one that isn't the most beautiful girl you've ever seen. Her name is Tania. I'll put ten under the bag. Doog Pimple walks up to the wall. The man reminds him not to try and look at him because the threat of a whooping is still valid. Doog starts counting. The man tells him to count slower. He wants full MISSISSIPPI's. And Doog is living through that dream you always have where you can't move, but something is coming up on you, walkin' like Dracula. He had light, light steps, Doogie said. It was like he floated or like he floated the bag over or something. Doogie seen a lot of shit in seven years, stabbings, at least three cars set on fire, one homicide and the time Chino hit his step-dad with a pipe but this was a new violence. A violence (or a fever) that filled a space like sunlight (or pollution or pot smoke

or darkness or cigarette smoke) does. At the count of four mississippi, he heard the car peel off and there was my bag. Beige. Fake leather that makes my hands sweat when I hold it too long. I rifled through it. The plastic on the outside of my compact was cracked. There was some pebbles and stuff inside the lining, a black smudge on the outside, but everything else was alright. You get your ten bucks? I asked him. Motherfucker smiled.

In my room, I was washing my bag over with baby wipes and alcohol cause there were more smudges than I thought at first and like I said, some pebbles and junk inside and makeup goes on your face, you know and then the weird thing, the thing that freaked me, not freaked, but a little freaked, I open my glasses case and there's a piece of paper folded up into a square like a thousand times and the print is so small I had to put my glasses on. Before I even clean them. The note is written neat. It says, you look beautiful with those glasses on. It goes on from there. It says a poem, I guess, about having done good deeds before, but never having done such a good one. It ends with, I wish I could see you. I wish I could see us. In some mirror in the future while I smoke cigarettes and see us now. There was no rhymes, but I showed it to my girl Maria. She said, that's a motherfuckin poem.

BRIAN BARTELS

Recognition *(Normal, Illinois)*

For Sam Shepard

My phone's GPS was losing service while driving through Indiana backroads, which affected updates. I pointed my car around a half-dozen times, drove past the same exit sign for gas and food at least three times, and saw the same dead animal carcass at least four times, which was either a sign I was becoming a Stephen King story or was going in circles.

Frustrated, I eventually turned off GPS completely, made a U-turn, backed up a quarter-mile to a junction, and took a left on an unmarked road.

The unmarked road led me to Normal, Illinois.

Normal has three banks, nine churches, one library, one post office, three diners, one A & W, five gas stations, one DVD video rental shop – connected to a video game/comic book shop, and about twenty-nine bars. Since I have arrived in Normal I've only been in four of them, but each one assembles a unique clientele, and every time you walk through the door, everyone inside stops and watches you. Except Toasty's.

Toasty's may seem like a cozy neighborhood bar, but it is also a museum of memory. They have a wall of fame resembling a VFW shrine for local

characters and their legacies: softball trophies; frayed license plates; Chicago Bears pennants from the 1980s Super Bowl heyday; photos of locals, women and men, hands around glasses and bottles, heads slightly lowered, shoulders slightly curving inward, hiding stories in the corners of their eyes as they pose with atrophied smiles.

I don't know any of their names or backgrounds or where they are today, but I remained fascinated by Toasty's wall of fame, which kept me returning while in Normal. Who created this gallery? How influential were these people to get their images on the wall, left on display for others to question something about them? I wonder which one of them would be the most bothered with their image still remaining on the wall? And which one was the first to go?

I watch people enter Toasty's, barely nod to anyone, approach the bar, pull out a chair, sit down, and the bartender has already placed their go-to beverage – a Budweiser bottle, a whisky neat, a glass of white wine – in front of the patron, who is then rendered invisible while remaining in plain view; familiar enough to be anonymous.

One of my favorite regulars is an older man with salt and pepper white hair, who cleans his glasses, nibbles on sunflower seeds, and performs operations with his eyes. I say this because he resembles a doctor. Each object he views seems to be analyzed, then receive a diagnosis. I imagine he gets up earlier than everyone, has a long walk along the river or through the dimly-lit town of another dimension, finishes a crossword before the eggs are fried over-easy, and watches the birds dance through the branches before he gets on his bicycle, rides through town, and parks outside the hospital, where he puts on an popcorn white three-quarter length coat. Once inside, he moves up and down the different hospital floors, rarely sitting down, always moving, always saving lives.

After my third beer and finishing my bourbon chaser, I consider walking up to the old man doctor and ask him what he really does for a living, but I am instead reminded of why I am here: I was paid half a fee to begin a project. When I finish the project, they'll pay me the second half. I get money for writing stories, mostly factual, often requiring research, occasionally needing me to travel to a source.

But the source was not supposed to be here. I was headed west. I was working in New York, then found an assignment in California. They offered to fly me out, but I requested to drive. And if I'm in a town like Normal, Illinois, beyond one day, it's for a purpose, but for whatever reason, this purpose has escaped me.

Then I remember something my wife once said.

'Destinations are never as important as the movements between.'

As I step toward Toasty's exit as I hear someone saying, slowly, then louder, over my shoulder, 'Sam... Sam... Sam!'

I turn around and look back inside the bar, but no one's looking in my direction. It's as if a thick layer of glass has already separated the bar diorama from my ability to return. The doctor is studying the wall of fame, slowly twisting the beverage resting on his napkin left, then right, then back, as though his rocks glass is a safe combination he's trying to unlock.

Whatever landed me in Normal, I forgot it the moment I arrived, and yet I'm stuck. Does that happen? Do we lose recognition of our goals that way?

Maybe I was supposed to forget. Maybe that's the story.

Maybe it's supposed to be about losing focus on projects.

Maybe that's what Normal is famous for; its ability to find you, lost in your own directions. The town has forced me to stay and suffer, or stay and recognize the interference, and apply it. There is no attention, nothing resembling familiarity; no meaning behind the veil. Normal has trapped me. I now have no way to get through to the outside world.

Maybe I need to speak to the old doctor from Toasty's, who has become more of a developed doctor character each time I see him, materializing into a highly respected occupation by the way he doesn't sit still very long, the way

he holds his glass of bourbon, and the migratory signature on his credit card authorizations. Maybe he can prescribe something for the story amnesia.

Recognition. Was it recognition? Did they hire me to write a story on recognition?

Everything churned into a senseless continuum, walking the streets of Normal, interacting with Normal locals, writing pages of Normal thoughts.

Then, the following morning, I see Daniel Day-Lewis walking down the sidewalk.

Daniel Day-Lewis, three-time Oscar winner, walking down the sidewalk, alone and completely anonymous. No one seems to recognize one of the finest actors of our time. And though I spotted him while eating the best slice of apple pie with cinnamon ice cream I've ever had, I put a ten dollar-bill on the diner counter and walk out the door.

My arms push the doors out of my way and I am on the sidewalk, walking toward something familiar, which is Daniel Day-Lewis. Finally, something I recognize! I don't plan on speaking with him, but I want to know more. Why is he in Normal? Is there a film festival going on nearby? Could he be researching something? Or just passing through? What's the point of his presence in this one-horse town?

Also, should I have asked the diner to save my pie and ice cream? Or should I, at my most cavalier, offer Daniel Day-Lewis the chance to share such an unforgettable piece of apple pie and cinnamon ice

cream? Does he enjoy apples? Or baking spices?

Also, I had coffee. Which was finally reaching a drinkable temperature.

Undeterred, I push on.

A new story emerges.

I am following Daniel Day-Lewis who – although he does not yet realize it – is following Samuel Beckett, who I now recognize as the old man doctor from Toasty's.

A new character emerges.

We all inhabit a role, after all; from those who create the role, to those who portray the role, to the ones watching from Normal, Illinois. We follow stories or we dissolve into echoes.

I follow Daniel, who follows Samuel. The difference being their first names and surnames. The surname yields a more majestic categorization. They both wear coats. They both walk with the same measured movement. It's not entirely graceful, but each step contains purposefulness. Each tree grows quiet when they pass.

They both eat bread. Not lots of bread, but the right balanced diet. Low sodium, which staves kidney stones. Carrots, potatoes and broccoli. Ethnic diversions. A scone once a week in the summer. Coffee, yes. Oh, yes, certainly coffee. When tea is not available. It's almost as if coffee is a weakness for him, but one so incredibly visible it's often overlooked.

I continue on, following Daniel Day-Lewis as he ambles down Main Street, politely nodding to everyone as though he's lived in Normal forever, the

locals recognizing him for being one of them, not someone they could imagine paying to see act in movie theaters. He pays no mind. They don't ask for pictures or autographs. He maintains his own pace. The sky is a welcome distraction. The sidewalk is a canvas.

He doesn't smile but nearly smiles. He is always showing an expression of someone about to break into a smile. His eyes smile. The crow's feet have been stretching above his angular cheekbones for years.

In Normal, Illinois, Daniel Day-Lewis has begun living just like Samuel Beckett did, and in doing so, starts becoming Samuel Beckett, right before my eyes.

And suddenly, Normal is not Normal. Normal is Paris.

Illinois is France.

Daniel Day-Lewis is Samuel Beckett.

I am still me.

And somehow, recognizing this has enabled me to see clearer.

At one point, they seem to be following each other. I go to Toasty's one night, and he's already there, scribbling in a notepad and drinking shitty red wine, but still completely anonymous. Deep in thought. Shifting into character. Disappearing before my eyes. What was the doctor is now Daniel Day-Lewis, and I can't tell if he's thinking about the character Samuel Beckett, or he's thinking *as* Beckett, already imagining himself an ex-Irishman in France, contemplating the labors of consciousness and how to bridge all the in-betweens.

The bartender brings my beer to me, and instead of taking my money right

away, leans toward me, asking, 'Does that guy over there look familiar to you?' I look over her shoulder and pretend I don't recognize him, long enough to sell it. And I lie and say no. I don't know why. This is the only person who has made efforts to speak to me in a week, and for some reason I'm not interested. Until I realize the bartender's not talking about Daniel Day-Lewis. She's talking about some other guy sitting three chairs away from him, and every time I glance in their direction, they both start becoming less familiar.

But maybe I can't tell who it is any more. Maybe the man I thought was Daniel Day-Lewis was someone else. Or maybe it was just a local guy all along who took on the features of Beckett; icy silver, spiky hair, thick sweaters, crow's nose.

Perhaps this transformation recently occurred.

One recent morning, Daniel woke as Samuel, and Samuel woke at dawn, put on a long-sleeve well-knit shirt, grabbed a sweater and heavy wool coat, and walked down to a café in the 9th Arrondissement. Once there, he ordered an egg sandwich on potato bread, with bacon and tomatoes – both thick-cut. He devoured the sandwich while sipping on English Breakfast tea and reading an unfinished story.

Something which started, but then didn't find an ending.

Something initiated, reckoned, then exhaled.

I recall something Beckett once said about writing: 'The typing can be painful. Back and fingers and eyes bent over

blankness. Bent over memory and the ability to bend memory itself.'

Their typewriters are exactly alike. But they have slightly different typing styles. One types with five fingers. Another types with four.

I bet you want to know which one types with five.

Daniel has been diligently studying Samuel for nearly two years. He has read everything written and published by and about Samuel. He has studied video footage. Lived in photographs. Talked to some people – now in their seventies, eighties and nineties – who have met him.

Daniel Day-Lewis takes long walks. Which is something Beckett would have done. Normal becomes Paris. Within these treks he finds new rhythms to the character.

We think of other places while we live inside the sidewalks, streets and stories of now.

Normal to everyone but Daniel.

Paris to everyone but Samuel.

But practice doesn't make perfect for him. He must feel he inhabits the role. He will move to a little cottage in France and speak French to everyone. (The director has been adamant he will make the film in dual languages, English and French. Gaelic was even considered for a moment but scrapped once the budget grew.) Daniel could already speak some French, but he went to great lengths in learning more, and it gave him plenty of material. Though he rarely gives interviews, he once admitted learning French was not unlike learning to love eating a double bacon cheeseburger,

then turning right around and trying to eat another double bacon cheeseburger. After having a whole pizza by oneself.

Then he laughed.

Day-Lewis is ready for the role.

The man who I thought was Daniel Day-Lewis was actually someone else. I followed him for a few blocks, which started to feel awkward, as he kept stopping to look at random signs and storefronts, so I of course stopped to look at random signs and storefronts, except everything I began to look at seemed forced.

I abandoned the curiosity, went back to the apple pie and cinnamon ice cream diner, and wrote a new story inspired by my false recognition.

The day after Thanksgiving, I sent the new script to my producers. They loved the idea of a town infested by quirky dwellers and the random, otherworldly behavior of a Toasty's-esque setting (I added a supernatural element, which these days pretty much gets any script greenlit), along with this central character, an unknown woman hired to be there on assignment, but loses the meaning of exactly why she's supposed to be there upon arrival. 'Reese Witherspoon would love this project,' said one producer. 'She's looking for something just like this.' And each episode ends with a cliffhanger clue about why she ended up there, who sent her and what it is she needs to do. And most of the answers can be related to the wall of fame at Toasty's, the histories of the unknown people connected to all that bar history.

So, eventually, it becomes a show about recognition.

The following week, I am told *Normal* is going to be picked up by Netflix. ‘They’re calling it the next *Twin Peaks*,’ said my agent, who used to sell real estate in Manhattan.

‘Are you working on anything else?’ she asks.

‘You mean, another project outside of *Normal*?’

‘Yeah,’ she says. ‘You always have great ideas when you hit these hot streaks. Hearing you talk about the next project gets me excited too.’

I’m tempted to leave the conversation about *Normal*, as there’s plenty of content and character to exercise when it comes to *Normal*. We’ve got a TV show on our hands and I’ve only written two episodes in desperate need of revision. But at least the arc of the show is there.

‘Uh, yeah,’ I say, ‘I have this idea for a screenplay.’

‘Tell me.’

‘Where, Daniel Day-Lewis is cast to play Samuel Beckett in a biography.’

‘What do you mean, Daniel Day-Lewis is *in* the film?’

‘Yeah.’

‘And he—’

‘Becomes Samuel Beckett. While the production is taking place.’

‘Wow. Okay. So then...’

‘The film starring Daniel Day-Lewis becomes a film about—’

‘...Samuel Beckett.’

‘Yes. So, it’s reality, but the film descends into a period piece, about the film, the production, his life – Day-Lewis, then

Beckett’s – becomes the journey.’

Pause. I hear her exhale. I thought she quit vaping.

‘Holy shit!’

‘I know.’

‘He’d be perfect!’

‘He would – except it’s about the method behind his preparation. So, the whole movie is about Day-Lewis preparing for the role, negotiating the contract, discussing the project with the writer and or director, and the producers, then, living as Beckett had, learning French, living in France, and inhabiting the everything of Beckett, you know, fully immersing himself in the role.’

Bated breath, then, ‘...okay, and then what...?’

‘That’s about it. Maybe he becomes so entrenched in being Beckett, he simply continues being Beckett, so when the film starts shooting, he’s then become the full embodiment.’

‘Like, he has become Samuel Beckett – completely.’

‘Yeah.’

‘Like, no more Daniel Day-Lewis.’

‘Right.’

‘Sort of like Charlie Kaufman, but then, sort of not.’

I ponder this. ‘Sort of,’ I say. ‘The story of recognition is what I’m looking to capture more than anything. Just like *Normal*.’

She exhales.

‘Whoa.’

‘You like it?’

‘It’s fucking mental.’

‘I know.’

‘With *Normal*, and with this, people

are gonna know your name. You'll be known as the recognition writer – which is, like, so hard to do, in any genre. But yeah. Wow. It sounds amazing.'

'You think he'd like that?'

'Who? Daniel Day-Lewis?'

'Yeah.'

'He's retired, but who knows. Yeah, I think he'd flip out.'

'Really?'

'How much have you written?'

'Didn't you just say he's retired?'

'Yeah, but he'd basically be playing himself. I could sell this in a heartbeat.'

'I haven't started it yet. The idea's just been swimming around in my head.'

'How many of these ideas do you have working on?'

'A few. A lot. I guess Normal is more influential than I realized.'

'I want all of them. Can you send me an email with an attached document of each idea?'

'Yeah. Internet is hard to find around here, but I'll get you something soon.'

'Sooner the better.'

'Okay.'

'Take yourself out for some steak and a bottle of wine tonight.'

'They have the most delicious apple pie in—'

'Wow. Fuckin-A, Baxter.'

'You like it?'

'I fucking love it.'

'Great. I'm glad.'

'Daniel Day-Lewis? Are you kidding me?'

'Awesome.'

'And the other – who was the other guy he's supposed to be playing?'

Somebody Call an Ambulance

'I told him there weren't no difference between Brother Bill and the Holy Ghost,' Ziggy Anderson mumbled between sips of beer as his wife, Pricilla, screeched out of his daddy Brunson's driveway.

Pricilla had driven Ziggy to Brunson's in the desperate hope that father and son could patch things up, and that Brunson then would let Ziggy come back to work – maybe even front them the cash to get the power turned back on at their trailer.

Brunson owned and operated Anderson's Septic Services, whose slogan was *We'll take your crap with a smile*. In person this translated to declaring he'd taken more shit than anyone in the county, but, after all, he'd remark with a sarcastic shrug of the shoulders, someone had to do it. Pricilla knew, however, that Brunson Anderson could pump every septic tank in America, and he still would have given out far more shit than he'd taken.

Pricilla, lamenting reality, blew through a stop sign, and briefly considered running over an old man trimming the privets around his mailbox simply because he vaguely resembled Brunson.

'Love is an unholy ghost,' she yelled out the window to the terrified man, who then dove head first into the hedges.

'Daddy hates Brother Bill,' Ziggy told the rear view mirror, 'because that religious spirit won't leave him. It wants to worship its own self instead of God. Religion don't want folks knowin' how simple it is.'

The Brother Bill Ziggy referenced was William McCoy, a Kentucky preacher who claimed to have been spirited into outer space by seven angels who tied together all of God's loose ends just for him so he could let other folks know what the real deal was. Sadly, the angels did not tip-off Brother Bill to the drunk driver that pancaked him as he crossed the street with a bag of groceries six months after the space trip.

The ironic circumstances of his demise somehow inspired his disciples to save low-places souls by proselytizing at flea markets, county fairs, and supermarket parking lots, like the Piggly-Wiggly just down the road from Brunson's house, where one Saturday morning 10 years past an enthusiastic fellow missing the two front teeth Santa had brought him as a kid handed Ziggy a pamphlet containing the sermons Brother McCoy had preached telling the world what the angels told him.

'Love is the prisoner's dream,' Pricilla whispered to the horizon.

‘Brother McCoy never said he was God,’ Ziggy lectured the clouds. ‘Daddy says that ‘cause he can’t get the Philistine out of his self.’

‘Men throw love into the pigsty,’ poor Pricilla softly spoke to the sky.

‘Brother McCoy seen the creation, redemption and the restoration of all things!’ Ziggy shouted to a Burger King billboard.

‘Brother Mckoo-koo is a piece of doo-doo,’ Priscilla rapped, suddenly focusing on a towering, leafless oak tree thirty feet off the side of the road a ways up ahead. She punctuated her freestyle with a lunatic’s laugh.

‘They were deceived by the Devil to not bury him,’ Ziggy declared, wagging his finger for emphasis at the fast-approaching tree. ‘They laid him out in the sun right there where the angels dropped him from heaven. But he never said he was God. He just had the Holy Ghost in his DNA. He never said he was no God. No difference, though. It’s so simple. It’s the Devil makes it complicated.’

‘Love is the prisoner’s nightmare,’ Priscilla said to the steering wheel.

‘It’s so simple!’ Ziggy gushed to his raised hands.

‘Goodbye, Theodore!’ Pricilla straight-up screamed to the moon.

She pulled the visor down and took one quick glance at the last photograph of her son taken before Social Services took him away for adoption. She flipped the visor up, took a deep breath and, aiming the car straight for the tree, closed her eyes and floored it.

The violent acceleration flung the

nachos Ziggy had stashed on the dash all over his brand-new Salvation Army t-shirt, but he remained oblivious to the world. He felt supernaturally anointed, like the hammer held in the striking hand of the dude who made the universe. All he needed now was a nail.

The impact shook the ground like a bomb. A cloud of crows launched from the bordering woods, spreading out like a shockwave. In a nearby field, a little boy flew a SpongeBob Squarepants kite, squealing with delight as it soared, dipping and swirling in the cloudless, crystal-blue sky. The man beside him turned his head to the sound and gasped.

‘Hold on,’ he said to his new son before snatching him up and running towards the tree.

When Ziggy came to, he sat oriented like an astronaut ready to launch into outer space in his mangled, now-roofless Ford rocket ship. He tried to move his head to check on Pricilla, but his head wouldn’t move. He tried to feel for her, but his arms wouldn’t move either.

‘Pricilla!’ he cried, his voice thin and tight as a piano string garrote.

When the breathless man arrived, the boy bit his new daddy on the hand and let out a hair-raising scream.

The father immediately shielded his boy’s eyes to protect him.

‘Somebody call an ambulance,’ Ziggy beseeched the man in a faltering voice.

‘I’ve lost my phone!’ the man exclaimed, desperately patting his pockets.

‘My kite!’ the little boy cried, pointing skyward.

The man, overwhelmed by the tragedy,

pulled the boy close and took off running for his car.

‘Don’t you worry, son. I’m gonna buy you the biggest kite you ever seen.’

When they reached the car, the man began urgently searching for his phone.

‘Daddy, are those people gonna die?’ the poor little boy asked.

Rubbing the throbbing bite mark, the man suddenly realized the great responsibility that comes with fatherhood.

‘I don’t understand,’ he mumbled to himself as he frantically felt under the car seats. ‘I’ve never lost my phone. Never!’

‘Don’t worry, Daddy,’ his precious son said sweetly, arching his neck around to look at the now burning car. ‘It’s the devil makes it complicated.’

Poetry



Tom Laichas

FIRST DOG

First dog is small and mute, a garden-ready breed. No need to hunt: first dog lives on fruit and grass. No need to bark: the thick hedge resists burglars and other village folk.

First dog nuzzles against the child's leg. The child rubs his spine. The child scratches his underjaw. When the child gives him a name, first dog's tail can't stop wagging.

Sit. Fetch. Heel. First dog thinks each command is another name. He's rich with names! He spares no thought for wild creatures: he loves the child most of all.

First dog's near-kin find all this revolting. Coyote, Dingo, Jackal, Dhole, Fox, and Wolf can't stand the smell of first dog's scat. If they sniff his piss on a rock or bush, they spray their own piss right over it.

Submissive to a child's command, he shames them all.

LEFT HAND

God touches the boy's left hand
giving the boy a life of his own.

The boy, being contrary, favors the right
when naming the beasts

His open right hand, his right index finger
his right hand, fisted, his right hand assured

With my right hand I name you, he says.
He hasn't forgotten: God touched the left.

But about this left hand, the boy is silent
not naming his weakness aloud.

José Luis Gutiérrez

BUTTERFLY EFFECT

I hail from a dozen hailstorms, said the sailboat
to the pyramid suffering a heatstroke, in whose
shadow stood the disciple about to shovel

a fistful of locusts into his wookie mouth,
just as the elephant decided to rear up
and stomp his trainer like a field mouse

before rows of spectators,
while high above in the marbled clouds
the pilot announced the fuselage was undergoing

a crisis of identity and had sprouted feathers
and so a crash landing in the Aral Sea was imminent
except there was no water there on account

of the Soviets rerouting the river flow
to grow cotton, which gives Dry Law
a whole new meaning, this led the Goldman Sachs

banker of porcine bearing on that flight to clip
one last fat torpedo while shuffling the numbers
of a dozen portfolios with holdings as toxic as Fukushima

with the mystic reverence of a boy about to deliver
the longest turd in history: the butterfly never knew
what hit it when the net was cast and the pin

impaled it just as the disco ball started spinning
and new constellations sparked into existence.

Toti O'Brien

DRIP

A dot vanishing
(it all converges Flannery)
spilled spat flushed away
(daily exhaustion)

Yet
under this pale sun
I dream of bishops
(saints)(counselors)
thick with wisdom
chanting (parrots)
not entirely omissible

A drop
(armless no more)
of dinner wine
bends pitiless time
(stifled adulthood)

bar-riers
panta rei
every
thing that runs
then
converges

DRIP

Lieve punto laggiù
(tutto converge Flannery)
scolo sfogo rigagnolo
(quotidiana fatica)

Eppure
(inerte sole inoffensivo)
sogno vescovi
(santi)(amici)
densi per saggezza
ammaestrati (pappagalli)
non tralasciabili

Una goccia
innocuo e non più
alcool del pasto
(spezza un tempo inumano
adulto spegnimento)

bar-riers
panta rei
tutto corre
tutto
infine
(converge)

Ian Ganassi

STRING BEAN CASSEROLE

She “knew something like that was coming.”

The lights against which.

A preacher’s daughter—
It’s enough to cause atheism.

You are the light of the world.

Can you name that tune?

At the greengrocer the lawyer
Picked out the string beans
One at a time to save his wife
From an imperfect casserole.

With time on her side, and plastic surgery.

There was a line around the block.

What can ail thee when the fat lady sings?

Try not to over-quote the overcoat.

What is one worth?

The level of discourse was disappointing,
Which was an easy way of baling out.

While I limped along, taking what I could get.

It’s inspirational in the way theory is inspirational,
Even when you don’t fully understand it.

*Maev*e Holler

LOCUST BRIDE

*Inspired by Kaveh Akbar's 'Being in This World
Makes Me Feel Like a Time Traveler'*

As a child, I spit a peach pit onto the bed of my father's
Dodge one-ton, and it immediately turned into a locust.
I peered at the locust through the truck's bulky, rusted
rearview and let it hypnotize me. I let it love me.

It seemed like the right thing to do.
After all, before I created the locust,
it was just a pit inside my mouth,
scraping against my teeth
like it wanted to be free.

Now I am older, and the locust and I live in marriage.
In the daytime, I go to work and sometimes I forget
about our vows, but at bedtime, the locust and I lie
down next to one another. While we sleep, the moon
beams paint a bouquet of affliction and the locust
buzzes madly, caught in twilight's blued thicket.

Once in a while, the locust traces its wiry wings
through my mind to draft a slumber blueprint.
The flutters ache in my head like a regret balloon,
and I tell the locust to give it a rest. It never does.

NINTENDO VILLANELLE

With my sister it was always Tetris.
I was a better Mario, stomping on others.
School nights, air-pocketing coins we'd get rich

safe in our den's warp-world brick, yet risk
lay in bullies. Their taunts hovered.
My sister, always protecting the boy bad at Tetris

from the bus stop on. What was I to do, get ripped?
It's not like you'd ask for sanction via their mothers.
School nights: air pockets, coin resistance met with

sofa cushions. In my lap, the family pet, dish
of Oven Fry crumbs as a snack to sate the druthers.
With my sister it was always River Phoenix and Tetris,

his *Jimmy Reardon* appeal. How could I closet? Bet this
is some boy you know, neighbors wondering about brothers,
school nights pocketing an air kiss. The next day I'd get hit

by Kyle, Shane, or Dan; no haven on their movie set, pris-
tine the bell's dismissal. At home, conciliatory pixels gathered.
With my sister it was always Tetris,
school nights forgetting torn pockets, the phrases
 bullies coined to get rich.

Terence Confino

IN THE MOST BEAUTEIOUS GORGON'S POCKETMIRROR...

the mirrors that you find are vacant w/out periphery.
paralysed at sight of self's reflecting → infliction acts that take what follows form:
... the house by the hour remains empty
<steps-in briefly> & "you had better keep those two separated."
sunlight that shineth thru jailers cells' walled aperture (situated a'near the rear wall's
[ceiling]).
night can fall into day;
blood as gone from mirror's pedestal stand
enter then, Medusa's kingdom.
follow you to better venues; heed the double meaning here.
might just seek out the curious eye,
how will this pass?; searchlights guide; kind of going awkward; turn around, facing walls.
Go pay for a nightmare & laugh @ all the important answers.
K-Mart, just off Astor, *in the basement* <Here he points down w/ lying emphasis.>
follow the further corniced northern realm, for starters. & fate will overtake.
keep staring blankly at muddied water's reflection.
surprise your masters; *feel* within.
ties can be severed by the eyes; just a look.
22 points of awareness, spinning acutely in tune.
The Cycle Within.
separation of the scenic,
this biology is not like you.
double-helixed? &... down by the stream
by saga's end you'll learn to hear my mirror.

THE MORNING STAR: (IN A LIQUID JAR)

...& there is no arc of triumph, not a vestige.
 but then, of course, cross-course-plane levitation remains as plausible, indeed,
 [passes muster even.
 & she is as laughingly crushed beneath world's avoirdupois
 & the percentage of earthen water's match-meet her blood's bio-physiology,
 enough of to fill that same old hackneyed basin to baseline.

...opening of a door; still evacuated & evicted "on the auction block" by headmaster's
 tall-wooden chair auctioneer & an already tamed spurious entity (for your entertainment)
 indeed, for world's amusement. (and *I do* seek-it-out.)
 & in the amniotic jar hallway; "too much alcohol in his blood surrogate," she says.
 —trust his knife?—
 sleep by the open seas, close to the white litten haven.
 keep acute loathing sewn together
 at who's seams? (answer that comes: Mr. Noon's).
 "keep your heart together."
 starve the flies; bury me, i've died.
still trapped beneath the foreign artifice's *stairwell?*
 ...and what's for that protrusion?
 lies inside lies within lies & more lies.
 ...and at daybreak... (in the Nietzschean sense)
 luscifer lives on. & he trails off spitting vitriolic vituperance in his wake-n'd state.

DOOM TRANSMISSIVE

transverse the prism (so glass refracts)
 death more than once, drain one now.
 opening of a door @ gateway's end.
 that large woman will consume it all.
 crooked is the treetop versus an older & better epoch.
 so distorted beside thee glance
 self-contained-fake & the container is empty. as he wisens up, he turns his back.
 blood in a pyrex laboratorial jar & then it's dis-ease on petri (dish)
 pencil's head remains dulled; lantern turning backwards, it caves-in.
 "wanna have some fun?"
 put a hammer to a Q-Tip; pile-driver. manner-factor minus one.
 isn't she late, still yet again?
 "never was and never will be."
 powder specks can't yet summon...
 "&... you hear it in your head?"
 subjects to the kingdom kneel on both knees.
 eidolon glass ménage dragging lines to edges along laylines pre-mapped-out.
 "in."
 beneath the underworld staircase; pair of 1920s antique spectacles adorned
 Be warned.
 a chore that's not a choir.
 ...and they can sing & sail on.
 furtherance twigh-windowpane glances. askance, eschewed; the bitch that bites.
 on a dark nighted december, innocent stars remain frozen in place,
 open the gate for me with saliva on a mirror's surface.
 can you lance the boil thru inner-self-turmoil toil?
 every house on that street has an attic but for that *last house*...
 the one made of glass that's only a stone's throw away from a november evenings basement.
 on *that* christ-mass vacate-ion he realized/recognized death by breathing the scent in her
 [auburn hair;
 bobbed-in-bun-on-back-of-head.
 time/space portal fluctuations can be seen in our sonic sphere.
 wasn't he left behind to decide?
 Backdoor alleyways, broken windowed abandoned houses on a saturday's walk...
 feminine Womanly cases of hysteria; screaming w/ arms wildly gesticulating, articulating emotions
 quickly vacating—seen fleetingly in quick-flash-glimpses only.
 follow the ruins of pyramided but empty sand-cities.
 at long last, he's after them...
 endless chasing, changing in transformative geo-abstract figuréd shadow shapes
 "I'll go on forever."

Charlie Baylis

REBECCA II

i'll never get tired of planting peaches
on her pearl mountain
the holes we dug that led

to new york where a bra was thrown
at the stage the titanic sails at twelve the nylon part of me dyes
amber shade sparkles in the waves that waved

in the blue of her eye the sunlight stripes
the grand cathedral windows
a peach spins on the tiled floor

MANSFIELD ROAD

i say a prayer
late at night to the women i pass, disturbing angels
glance by glance, a swirl of neon dreams
machines imagining machines, unspoken notes in throats
the endless search for the perfect
melancholy hotel, children throwing pennies
at each other, twin rivers unravel
in the palm of a hand
no statue is the same
no stone is left unstained
taxis tango to torrential rain
the bus drops stop to stop
lapped by lamplight, illuminating fragments in my pocket
perhaps all these conversations could be poetry
or every time i shut my eyes
the stars go out
a nightingale sings in the dark
a hand brushes my shoulder, forget it
i know when i am not wanted

an ambulance roars past
hamlet dies
somewhere in the lunacy
your sister's hair is softer than mine
or my arm has been leant on by a ghost
bright shades of night

i find myself on my knees, gazing
at gazettes, faded rubbish
i'm aware there might be amber
in the blur of weather, heavy hands, time
tolling invisible gaps and questions

after the red lights the city changes
petrol stations, spray paint and closing doors
the deep surge of rising sun
headphones crackle to an unknown frequency
the city gets stranger
spinning with no centre
until suddenly it stops

STEPHANIE SAYS

For Estefania

For a long time you've been staring out into sea
holding a blue door open with the tip of your toe
a door that leads to nowhere, nowhere we know.
The door might open to you,
depending on the angle from which you approach,
the colours you wear,
the weight of the dreams you are carrying,
which seashell you are calling from.

You watch me from a distance with a mirror of cut glass
somewhere where the wind over wet sand whispers
but we do not know what the wind over wet sand whispers
anyway, it is not important.

I think of you holding the sea open with an outstretched arm
behaving like waves, the direction the door is moving
when you are the door, when you are not the room.

It's clear you wouldn't return my call
if I called.
It's clear I wouldn't return your call
if you called.

What are you wearing?
Do you still have the sunlight in your hair?
Do you remember what Stephanie says and where?
She's asking if it's good or bad.

It's such an icy feeling.
It's so cold in Alaska.

This poem borrows some shades from 'Stephanie Says' by the Velvet Underground.

Philip Kobylarz

WHAT BAKERIES FEEL AT NIGHT

Home-coming. Leave taking. That place, again to and from, where lights scintillate,
et cetera, with no
where like the smell of baked bread. How predictable traffic is, obeying false stars.
Money, brightly colored;
stain left by lawns too much watered. Time resists its table, whereas wind knows
what to do with matches.



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Contributors

BRIAN BARTELS was raised in Wisconsin. He has been a writer and bartender his entire adult life. His last book, *The Bloody Mary*, was published in 2017 with Ten Speed Press. He now lives in New York City, where he is a Managing Partner and Bar Director for Happy Cooking Hospitality. His writing has appeared in *Fiction Writers Review*, *PUNCH*, *Vinepair*, *The Missouri Review*, and *China Grove Press*. He is currently finishing up a new novel, titled *The Above*, and working on a new book of short stories on irregularities, titled *Normal*. At night, he can sleep with both eyes closed, but he naps with both eyes open (www.brianbartels.com).

CHARLIE BAYLIS is from Nottingham, England. He is the poetry editor of *Review 31*. He has published two pamphlets *Elizabeth* (Agave Press) and *hilda doolittle's carl jung t-shirt* (Erbacce). His poetry has been nominated twice for the Pushcart Prize and once for the Forward Prize. He spends his spare time completely adrift of reality.

MARIA CALLEJON is a Venezuelan novelist, photographer and adjunct professor of Latin-American literature at Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale". Her novel, *Waaaayne*, published by Fast Laundromat Books, was nominated for the Breakfast Award. Her other novels, *Slowly I Turned*, *Step by Step*, and *The Subsect*, can also be found in the Fast Laundromat Books catalogue. She grew up in Venezuela and then in New York City. She lives in Naples with her husband and a beagle named Margret Dumont.

TERENCE CONFINO can be found perennially haunting the East and West Village areas of New York City, tenanted rock and goth shops, used bookstores, and even a small occult shop that quaintly sits on East 9th street. He sorely misses the big chain music stores, himself still owning over a hundred cassette tapes of Hard Rock and Heavy Metal music. Everything from Rosenthal's "Alamo" cube at Astor Place to the ubiquitous retro-60s psychedelic motifs on both lower East and West-ends continually holds sway over Terence, who has long since developed a highly individualized sphere of thought; a good glimpse of which can be found in these poems.

IAN GANASSI's poetry, prose and translations have appeared in over 100 literary venues, in print and online, including *New American Writing*, *The Yale Review*, and *New England Review*. Recent news includes poems in *Otoliths*, *Offcourse*, *Home Planet News*,

and *Unlikely Stories*. His poetry collection, *Mean Numbers*, was published in 2016. *New England Review* has published his translations of Books 1-7 of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Selected images from an ongoing collaboration with painter Laura Bell can be viewed at www.thecorpses.com

JOSÉ LUIS GUTIÉRREZ is a San Francisco-based poet. His work has appeared in *Margie*, *Poemeleon*, *Cortland Review*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *Caliban*, *Kestrel*, and in the anthologies *Mutanabbi Streets Starts Here* and *99 Poems for the 99 Percent*. It is also forthcoming in *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Ilanot Review*, and *Chiron Review*, among others. His first poetry collection, *A World Less Away*, was published in 2016.

MAEVE HOLLER is an MFA student in Poetry at the University of Miami. She is from Connecticut and graduated from Tulane University in New Orleans in 2017. Maeve's work (poetry and journalism) has appeared in tNY.Press, *Broad!*, *Tulane Review*, *Antigravity Magazine* and more. She currently works as the Graphic Designer for WVUM 90.5 FM.

ALEXANDER JOSEPH is twenty-three years old. During the day, he is a chimney sweep and carpenter, and every evening, with a sore back, hands that never seem to be fully clean, and a pilot g-2 number 7 gel pen, he writes fiction and poetry. He has written a full-length novel, four books of poetry and is currently working on a book of short stories. His work has been published in the anthology *Stories That Need to Be Told* by Tulip Tree Press and in the 13th and 14th volumes of *Clover*, *A Literary Rag*. He received honorable mention for his short story *A Parting Note* in Glimmer Train's March/April 2017 short story contest and his short story titled *Breakfast* received honorable mention in Glimmer Train's May/June 2017 short story contest.

PHILIP KOBYLARZ's recent work has appeared in *Connecticut Review*, *Basalt*, *Barrow Street*, *New American Writing*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, and *Best American Poetry*. His book, *Rues*, was published by Blue Light Press of San Francisco. His collection of fiction, *Now Leaving Nowheresville* has been recently published and his book length essay *Nearest Istanbul* is forthcoming.

TOM LAICHAS's most recent work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Brackish*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Eclectica*, and *Convergence*. He also contributes essays, reviews, and interviews to World History Connected (worldhistoryconnected.press.illinois.edu), and to his blog, Left Write & Centaur (leftwritecentaur.com). He lives in Los Angeles.

KENT MONROE lives in Troy, New Hampshire with a damn fine woman and a motley gang of cats and dogs who refuse to obey the rules. His work has appeared in *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Your Impossible Voice*, and *Mandala Journal*, among others. His article 'America the Brutalful' made the Missing Slate Magazine's short list for the Pushcart Prize nomination in 2015.

TOTI O'BRIEN is the Italian Accordionist with the Irish Last Name. She was born in Rome then moved to Los Angeles, where she makes a living as a self-employed artist, performing musician and professional dancer. Her work has most recently appeared in *Pidgeonholes*, *Heartwood Literary*, *Wilderness House*, and *JMWW Review*.

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