The Alembic

Spring 1993
The Alembic
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The Alembic represents the distillation of artistic and literary talent in the Providence College community.

On the cover: “Island Man, Ice Man, Adam Man,”
by Mary Susan Kirkpatrick.

On the back cover: “The First Ballad,”
by St. John of the Cross.
Translation by Forrest Gander.
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April Avila

Blank as the face of a child
the paper cries
in many different voices
that are all mine.
I could not reach the music in the wood.
It did not find me. I scratched
the bow across its neck
like someone scouring a pot. The screeching strangled angels. Apes in distant
forests pulled their ears and stamped harder into
the earth. But scraping out the “twinkle”
of “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” I somehow saw a gypsy
woman sweep and slide her skirts across
the floor. Skirts of purple satin with red goblet-
jewels studding her throat and black hair in
torrents streaming as she swung her limbs
like panthers springing down
a mahogany tree. I played for her and
she did not disdain me. Only the cries of my
sisters broke through. Then when I ran into the kitchen
to play the “little star” for my mother I jammed
the bow, snapped it in the door jam.
I never played again.
But the gypsy comes and goes.
spermacetti candles flicker
"reek of greasy soot" will not leave
my hands smoothing
the ivory with great white grey
sinking with the carcass
Egyptian eyes will support
these scarred remains
burwhale's horn's ridges will stay
adding to anecdote my children will
hear along with the jewelry box and lantern
but the busk
will stay in my trunk
tired with longing she
left me "on such a day- very much a sweetness"
bittered my soul
to return to the sea
where I am embraced only by arms of scrimshaw
Six o’clock. The orange-red sun over the hill. The hill on the horizon far away from where I stand now, in the field near my house.

Feet are tired from walking all the way from that hill on the horizon where the orange-red sun is now sinking. All the way from the hill to the field near my house. The field where the brown grass grows up past your knees.

Half a sun sinking slowly beneath the hill leaves the air cool, and I pull my red-brown jacket close to my body as the wind blows across the field near my house where the brown grass grows up past your knees. The wind tickles lightly across my face and in my ear. It’s like the breath of a girl who I can almost feel hanging on my shoulder.

Hopping the brown wooden fence I step into my front yard where the green grass barely grows up past the sole of my shoe. My eyes begin to adjust to the darkness left by the shadow of the hill on the horizon, so I focus them on the orange-red glow coming out of the kitchen window of my house.

Crossing through the doorway the air is still and warm and filled with the smells of cooking coming from the kitchen. It brings color to my cold cheek. Katie stands working in the bright room. Red-orange hair cut short, bangs falling out of place across her forehead. She looks up and smiles.
Her hair is the color of her cheeks, flushed with the heat from the kitchen. Her brown autumn eyes look tired like they had walked all the way from the hill on the horizon. She hangs on my shoulder and her breath tickles my cheek and my ear. It almost feels like the wind that blows across the field near my house where the brown grass grows up past your knees.
The water is forced to rise
and then cling, roll
and drip onto my hand.
It is on these mornings,
when the walls distance
the warmth from the chill,
the careless humming begins.
Thoughts that prodded the mind
to spin and ache at two in the morning
now mix with the steam in the hot shower.
The questions of last night's sleep,
dampness on moldy tiles.
Brian Clark

I.

It all came down today. Everything. Early today. The sky fell on my head. My leg was trapped under a pile of ozone. I woke up 45 minutes after it happened, and I could feel large chunks of tree, and sidewalk, and memory slipping up and out my nose with every breath. I tried to mumble for my mother, but all I could hear was the far-off whisper of an old man who said repeatedly, "That was a damn good sky... A damn good sky..."

II.

The men rebuilt the sky yesterday. We all stood out on the lawn, looking up at it, and admiring the fine job they did. My leg is still in a cast, but it will heal. I hope it's soon because I joined the committee in charge of rebuilding the cliffs and mountains which will hang menacingly over the sea. I can remember how the ocean crashed into the walls. Maybe that will happen soon. But right now everything is quiet, except for that old man cursing the stars that aren't there.

III.

The old man down the road died today. He went quietly, in his house. I don't know what they did with him. Everyone else is doing real well. Everyday my mother makes bread out of dough and passing dreams. I guess yeast is hard to come by. She looks good and healthy like the world never collapsed. I heard that a baby was born in a nearby town— perhaps newspapers will be available soon. The joke in the old days was that the old man down the road never gave the paperboy a tip.
IV.

Today I was out by the brick wall picking up pieces of secular saints. There is still a good deal of satellite bits on any rooftop. A small girl passed by. Her arm was in a sling, and she had wonderful dimples just below her cheeks, and yellow hair. She handed me a tiny rock. It was pinkish in color with tiny little grey spots on it. Then she ran off down the road. I held the rock in my palm until that afternoon. I was standing on the rebuilt mountain and I threw it up toward the sky—as high as it would go.
Brian Clark

Monologue

Writing is beyond writing. It is a practice, an actuality, a growth, a song, and a picture. It is a semiotic enterprise. It is a documentary. And it is a performance.

I am a performed documentary. This means that I must stop at stages. Nothing stops with me. But I must stop to arrange once in a while. I would like things to stop with me. Everybody wants to get everything in its entirety. It could be December as I write this. On the verge of January. Or February. I find that important. It gets lost in the wash.

I am myself as I write this. And I am Tom, or E., or any unnamed protagonist. One places himself in environments. And one finds himself in environments. These environments are performances.

I struggle with the control of what I am experiencing. And I struggle with the control of how to project such struggle. I am interested in this struggle in other people. In performative environments.

I don't know why people say that a picture is worth a thousand words. It is a different relationship.

I make jokes pretty often about getting a big computer to do all my talking for me. But I know that even if I had one, I probably would never use it.
Ann Tilly Williams

It was like a bucket of spring water
splashed on the grim and rigid visage of
the jagged rocks that split the flow
of lonely sentinels adamant against the elements.
Even an army on the offensive would be
welcome company. The black child writes No!
on the sidewalk with white chalk
and spits into the O's middle. Blood and dirt
and blood and dirt, it won't come clean.
The specks of pebbles in the scrape
on his knee. Absolutely. So
I'm experimenting with tangerines,
oranges and peaches, and one
big, huge, prickly zuccini. Floating
above my bed, a bird has the best
job in the world. He sings to
mortality and builds a home for the kids.
Maybe a crooked home with holes in the floor
which open and swallow the dancing chairs,
the table. Twisting and writhing,
they fall down the narrow throat
scratching, clawing their way along
though there is no hope. Some will give up
their struggle and pee in the corner.
Erin Tierney

*Slight Misunderstanding*

How about if I press my fingers into the fissure running through your skull and crack open your head. Then tear the grey matter from its neat little socket, all wet and slippery and slimy with stuff, and pop it into my VCR to see what's going on. "Oh," I will say, "that's what you have been thinking!"

And when the credits are through I will take a straight razor and slice a neat H on its side into the flesh just below your nipple. Pliers will be needed for the rib cage which is oh so stubborn! Crack, crack, crack. Those spongy pink slabs which are in the way will also have to go. One snip and another, aha, here we are a thick juicy muscle nice and shiny and red. Into the slicer it goes. Then I'll have transparent sheets to hold up to the light. "I see!" I'll exclaim, "I guess I was wrong. I haven't looked close enough, it's been me all along!"
Cut to the scene
of the pond with
the dancing moonlight;
edit the prowling dog
serenading the
seven sisters.

This is quietude:
in its simplicity
I submit.
But still I want to scream.

My mouth a line
and my ears trying to
fight their way into my skull,
sealing themselves.
Eyelids shutting,
circuits closing,
audio freeze.

Orders of the highest power
to which I respond with a struggling stretch:
I refuse, but lose, for I am weak.
That’s a wrap.
I always wanted my own 120 watt sun.
I had been flying in darkness for so long
that even 60 watts would surely make me drunk and giddy.
And one day, while banging against a frosty pane,
I saw it.

It was a soft-white beauty,
peeking out from under a cardboard shell.
The glow was a balloon, and I was hair,
so I had to flutter nearer.
I circled the shell in order to prolong my goose bumps
before diving under the larger oval.

Instantly, I was blinded.
I thought my eyes would adjust eventually,
but all I could see
was the voltage,
white fudge that was too rich to taste.

I tried to leave, but collided with the shell
hard as a new year helmet.
Just as I started to see dust,
I turned
and was made sightless again.
Teeth biting my wings.

I did this for countless cycles,
until I finally found cool, dark air.
I rested on tinsel.
I looked back
and saw the soft-white beauty, bright as ice.
I will go back.  
I'm just waiting for my eyes to adjust.
If When Leaving the Theatre You Smile

And I don't mean Triple-X-Rated Kiddie-Porn right hand pumping slimy goo-jism pants half-down wild-eyed overcoat covered half-crazed Jack Nicholson hold the chicken between your knees Robin Williams pup-tented skip and a hop Pee Wee Herman's Playhouse kind of shit-house grin... it's more a two week beard encrusted face just back from deer hunting 6 p.m. Sunday night after driving twelve hours down from Portage, Maine in a '38 Cadillac twelve cylinder 85 miles an hour on a two lane blacktop road half-crooked I'll love you forever kind of grin... you're falling off the 65 foot-high staging some pot-crazed laborer from the Bronx put up half-ass some frigid Monday morning in February his cock shriveled like a dried out Hershey's kiss you found in the glove box 4 months after Christmas as you fall remembering your sleeping wife's face her nose slightly upturned her cheeks soft, relaxed, half a smile, half a frown, you can't tell which... you step off the curb avoiding the puddle the traffic is relentless everyone vying for your attention to be paid to them with dollars or plastic you snake through the quadruple parked white, white, silver, black limosines, trying to light a cigarette you turn away from the wind cupping your hands around your mouth, throw back your head you want to howl and run on all fours hump the leg of the sequined blonde two feet away and piss on her master's left rear tire, only as you turned you watched her tumble into the back seat the same wind you turned away from giving you a glimpse of her garter/nylon combination she looks at you you look at her now leaving the theatre you both smile as her Rolls shoots forward the wind is suddenly harsh against your neck your frayed Cashmere muffler incomplete in the protection it offers you rounding the corner it is darker the lights are fewer steam is floating up out of the sewers somehow this gives you a peaceful feeling the Mounted Policeman does not acknowledge your mere presence his stead's nostrils trailing wisps of breath the horsey-leather smell giving you an erection something about your uncle's barn in Minnesota that summer your family took
off in a rented Winnebago to visit all those long lost cousins you peer back after entering the park the 18 foot-high wrought-iron gate and fence all that remains of some robber-baron textile giant’s pomposity you notice the paint is peeling a job it would take 20 men and as many months to do your cigarette a fading beacon you’re now into the second growth forest in the center of this stinking-smiling-lying-through-its-capitalist-teeth city you hear noises you’d rather not you are wondering what it meant when you read on the program notes the old Chekoviain adage “A gun displayed early in a drama will be fired at its climax.” The glint of highly polished nickel silver you stop your heart beating till you can hear you heart with your own ears your mouth is dry you keep your head down and keep walking but you look up automatically when your body senses the shot you smile.
I walk down the well-lit path,
moonlight pointing out glass, pebbles and shiny cans.
I don't trip,
but long stems of grass brush my calves.
I think lyme disease and poison beetles,
and beat on the fabric of my shorts.
Jennifer Cunnane

*Storm Rising*

Cool river, mirrored surface,
calm, sedated, unstirred.

Gentle wind, a zephyr whispering
through the stern pines.

Tickled branches sway, soften,
succumb to the gentle push.

Waves softly lap the bank.
The bordering grass dampens.

The gentle breeze becomes a whirlwind.

The neighboring pines lose their polite,
statuesque stance,
as their branches flail,
catching on one another, grasping,
locking together,
clinging to each other in an unbridled frenzy.

The shore is saturated.

Waves pound their natural course
into the sand.

The clouds burst,
raining Life’s blood all over,
soaking the earth and air,
releasing every drop of energy
held tight within their dark expanse.
The river smoothes.
The trees recline at a refreshed tilt.
And the shore lies back
as a delicate breeze brushes
the corners of the mouth of the river.
I pulled my Jeep off the deserted highway into a dust-covered, rusty gas station, the bold Arizona noonday sun making the flesh of my legs stick to the melting leather seats. I had just driven hours through the desert, passing only two trucks the entire time. I jumped out and went over to the attendant, kicking up dirt as I walked.

"Can you fill me up?" I asked.

He blinked up at me, nodded slowly, and pulled himself up off the stoop. If I was back in New York, I would have beeped from my car and yelled, "Hey, Fill 'er up!" But here, in Arizona, these were quieter people. More reverent. I had just spent four months living on an Indian reservation, and I know that's what happens when all you ever hear is the dust in the wind and the sound of your own voice.

"Can I use your phone?" He sighed and pointed to the pay phone on the side of the building. I dialed the area code and seven digits, collect, releasing a deep breath as I waited for an answer. I had a vague notion of what I was in for.

"Mom, hi... fine... yeah, Arizona... did you get my postcard? ... yeah Mom, I'll be home in three weeks."

"Great honey, but you'll have to sleep on the couch, you know. Full house, as usual."

I paused. "Mom, can't someone sleep in David's room?"

I remember being seven years old and crying at the top of the stairs as my thirteen-year-old brother packed his bags and announced that he was running away. I was the reason he didn't walk out that front door. He picked me up in my feet pajamas and put me to bed with a glass of water and his favorite hat. It had "Budweiser" labels printed all over it.

My mother didn't answer me. "Maybe you can sleep in your sister's room. She falls asleep on the couch with the TV on half the time anyway."

"I thought she moved out." Chronic question in my house, along with "I thought she got a job at___," or "I didn't know she was fired."

"Look Mom, I just want to get a good night's sleep. I haven't been
home in eight months and I want to enjoy the holidays.”

“Fight about it with your sister when you get home. It’s not my fault you haven’t been home in eight months.”

Holidays were a big hassle for my mother. I often wanted to ask her why she gave birth to six kids.

“Well, at least you won’t have to put butter on the table this year,” I said bitterly. My brother wouldn’t eat margarine.

The last time we were all together for a holiday was seven years ago when my parents decided to spend Christmas at our beach house. On Christmas Eve, all my brothers and sisters and I went sleigh riding on the golf course. My mother had hot chocolate for us when we came in and my father rubbed my frozen toes in front of the fire while everyone else played Monopoly.

I could hear my mother’s hurt even through the static on the phone. “I know you feel you have to stay away from us to do whatever it is you have to do to feel better, but if you so much as bring up your brother’s name in this house especially in front of your father, God help you if you ever come home again.”

That was a big problem in my family. Either you never came home or you could never leave. Either way it drove you crazy. I knew that when I got home the pictures would still be on the piano and the cross would be hanging in the front foyer, my parents’ bed would be unmade, and a pile of mail would be sitting on the kitchen counter. Nothing would be changed. Except that there would be no butter on the dinner table and there would be one less place setting, and I would be leaving again in four or five days.

“I’m sorry if I upset you Mom. I’ll see you in three weeks. Give Daddy a kiss for me.”

I hung up and walked to the front of the building and paid the attendant. I got back in my Jeep and watched a tumbleweed blow by. On an impulse I chased it and picked it up, throwing it in the back of my Jeep. Maybe I would keep it in a fish tank with colored lights on it when I found a place to stay.
Take me, he says, beyond the veil
And into the mortar and pestle of truth-
I long to dwell in the stomach of the night.
Jade

W.J. Good

A newspaper pageant parades around me,
Pigs which whistle like tea kettles,
Geese with extra heads, and goats
With turnips, or short, dull scimitars
Jutting out of their skulls. They are children
On a playground. (And a real child nearby
Dances on the gazebo- swings on the May pole-
Hugs the pole like a ballerina. She grins,
Showing chain link teeth.)

And the vegetables beckon like harpies inside.
From the door peachfragrance:
I smell the eiderdown before I touch it.
Pristine rhubarb stalks stand erect,
A painted fence, and carrots lie beside,
Green weeds hung, umbilical cords.
The bounty of the beans seems impossibly large,
Numbers I have seen only in paintings,
Documentaries, or rarest imaginings.
The attendant smiles waxily like a mannekin
And I wonder whether, within her,
A star sapphire lies:
There is jade in her eyes.

Out of doors again, the subtle sunset,
Lavender and pastel pink instead of amethyst
Or ruby, entices only me. The hands
Have turned a traffic sign into a blackboard,
Hammering away to prove their points
And pick the future president.
But I look to the firmament,
At best, a sketchbook, too infirm
Or incomplete to be painting,
And try to divine its nebulosity.
The folks here prefer lucidity.
There is jade in the skies.

My eyes grow fuzzy like the peaches,
And breezes tug at my sleeves.
It is cold and the sentries admonish me,
Compel me to evaporate back to my dwelling
Like a djinni.
Blackbirds
gathered raindrops.
Ferns colored like olives
nodded, keeping time with the east
wind. The stone arrow-head fit
neatly into the wood, and

had been there, resting
for years. Once, there may
have been a deer, like
a bull, defiant. And the young
man would have lowered his
bow after he missed: ferns
colored like olives, nodding:
rairdrops gathering
blackbirds.
Amy Hayden

*Epitome?*

a peroxide blonde,
cherry lipsticked,
pseudo-gold wearing,
cobalt blue contact sporting,
hand talking
chick sits with her tight panted leg propped up by a desk.

I can see the sole of her color-coordinated shoe.
Black rubber, it dipicts
in rude outline
the planet earth.
On the heel, a round insignia:
“World Peace”
with a dove and stars.
Smug, silent, Socrates.
No wonder they poured hemlock
down his throat.

Follow the leader.
Take the threads of your generic apologies,
twist them into a rope,
and go hang yourself.

Watching a wounded diatribe,
words soon lost meaning.
Only their audible quality remained.
Unbridled babbling,
like an awful language.

You are the king of the land
where it is spoken.
I am the refugee from that land
thrown in jail for trying to flee.

Crime and punishment is a lie.
Criminal and punisher is the truth.

Finger shaped welts
circle my neck,
my shoulders
red
purple
yellow-grey
the colors faded.
But their imprints seeped into my soul.
Indelible, invisible, unfading.
Every man since,
I stare at his hands
and wonder:
when I am naked,
could his fingers fit
the outlines
and be a perfect match?
When I fell
the ground loomed
up to meet me
with its pull:
sucked to sand

gravity gone mad,
its lure brought you
with me.

A soft thud.
Sand twisting beneath my hair.
Hands twisting beneath my clothes.

Bodies leaving erratic imprints
in the sand,
like children molding
fallen angels
in the snow.
This was the first time we had seen each other since I was seven years old. I wanted to know what she had done for the past twenty-five years, but I didn't know if I really wanted to hear her answer. I had been having nightmares for over a year about my mother. They were horrible nightmares about her dying all these different ways, and I was always there trying to rescue her, but never quite succeeding, and so I finally decided to try and find her. After about a month of searching, I discovered her in Harrisville, about an hour from where I lived. I wrote a letter to her, and asked if I could see her. She wrote back and agreed to a meeting, and we made arrangements in our next letter. As I drove to Harrisville I wondered what it would be like to see her again, this stranger, my mother.

When I finally found the apartment complex that she had given me directions to, I felt sick, and I drove by it a couple of times before I finally parked my car. I went up to the main door and reached for the doorknob, but there was just an empty hole where the knob used to be, I shoved the door open. It was a heavy old door; I could tell it had probably been here since the place was built, and it probably hadn't been painted since then either. Inside the main hallway, I found a dingy staircase that led up into darkness. The main hallway smelled like a mixture of rotting food and dirty diapers. I wondered what kind of swines lived in this place. My mother's apartment was number 204, so I fumbled my way up the unlit staircase, and squinted to try to read the numbers on each door.

Finally I found door number 204, and paused for a moment. I thought about leaving and just forgetting the whole thing, but instead I knocked on the door. A minute later, a large woman filled the doorway. She had this strange cloth wrapped around part of her face, and I wasn't sure if this was her. Maybe this wasn't the place; she hadn't looked like this in my dreams. Then she spoke and there was something about her voice that seemed familiar. She moved herself
from the doorway and told me to come in. We were standing in her kitchen and she motioned me to sit down at a card table in one corner of the room.

I sat down and watched her slowly maneuver herself into a seat next to mine. She had a stiff walk, and used a cane to get around. Her clothes were drenched with the smell of sweat, and I wondered how often she washed them. I couldn’t help but notice the netting over her face. There was cotton poking through in a few spots, and the cotton was flush with the rest of her face, almost as if it was growing out of her.

As we talked, she told me about the operation. She had her right eye and right facial bones removed because the doctors had found cancer. She stuffed the right side of her face with sterile cotton, and covered the cotton with a white netting that wrapped around her head. The bandages had turned yellow because she refused to change them every day like the doctor had told her; she always was lazy. She showed me the face-piece the specialist had made to fit in the empty cavity. The skin and the eye looked real, and I wished she had worn that instead of the dirty netting.

At first, I felt sorry for her, but the longer I sat with her the angrier I became; she deserved this. She deserved every moment of pain that she had gone through. I didn’t even begin to measure up to my years of suffering. She wouldn’t wear the face-piece because she said it irritated her. I ran my fingers over every inch of the face; I wanted to feel her discomfort. I wanted her to feel the slight irritation of it all the time.

When I drove to Harrisville today I had remembered the days right before she left. A religious group had come to visit her. They had talked to her about the true “God” and the one true way. That was all she talked about those last few days. When she left she said God had called her to do her part and that someday I would understand. I just knew that this religion had robbed me of a mother.

I looked around her small apartment, and saw signs of the religion everywhere. She had written on small pieces of paper sayings
and quotes from the religion, and they were taped up everywhere.
The papers had yellowed over time and were peeling at the corners.
She had given all her money to the religion, and had suffered because
of it. Her apartment contained only a small kitchen area, a bedroom,
and a bathroom. The people of her religion had allowed her to keep
enough money to afforded this run down apartment, and that was
about all. The wallpaper was gray from a thick accumulation of dirt,
and was peeling at every seam; her kitchen table was this card table
that we sat at with mismatched chairs. As I looked around, I found
myself still running my fingers over my mother’s plastic face. My
fingers pushed harder and harder; my fingernails dug into the rubbery
skin and clawed at the eye.

The eye seemed to be looking at something behind me. I
scanned the room, and those strange words of “God” kept catching
my eye. They surrounded me, I hated them for that. They had taken
my mother’s life away. She would never have needed this face-piece if
they had allowed her to have an operation right away. Instead, they
made her wait and suffer to prove she was worthy. She didn’t see it as
suffering though, she called it waiting for a sign. She believed it had
made her closer to God. She told me how they almost had to let her
die in the operating room because the religion refused to allow her to
have a blood transfusion; it was against their beliefs. She was so
proud of that, and she said that sometimes she wished she had died
that way, so that she could have proven her devotion to the religion.

My pulse began to quicken, and I clenched the face with such
a force that it seemed like it might snap under the pressure. Suddenly
I was wild with rage. I flung back my chair and began to tear down
the yellowed papers. She pleaded with me to stop, said something
about destroying God, and I paused for a moment. Looking down, I
saw the face-piece clenched tightly in my hand, its eye looking disap­
provingly at me as I stood there angry and confused. My mother had
turned away from me, and I couldn’t tell what she was thinking.
Without looking at me she spoke in a clear and righteous tone, and told me
to have some respect for God or to get out and never come back.
I had suffered too much to let it end like this. She thought she
was going to get out of it again, but I wouldn't let her! She didn't
know what suffering was, what it was like to not have a mother, and I
wanted her to feel that pain. I gently placed the face-piece on the
table, and heard a voice, my voice, asking her to come over for dinner.
I wanted her to see my family, and see all the things that she had
missed. I wanted her to see what a good mother was, see me with my
children.

I brought her home with me for dinner that night. She wore
her face-piece, and she didn't seem uncomfortable in it at all. I won­
dered why she hadn't worn it when she saw me. Before dinner, she
sat on the couch with my son and daughter, and gave them each a
shiny half-dollar, and told them stories about her childhood. As I
listened, I tried to recall the stories she used to tell me, but I couldn't
remember any. When dinner was ready, I placed David and Jill's
plates on either side of mine, so my mother could see how close I was
to my children, but the kids moved their seats so that they could sit
next to their grandmother. I sat at the table and pushed my peas
around on my plate, and gouged a hole into my mashed potatoes.
Suddenly I wasn't very hungry anymore. I just sat there and listened
as my mother rambled on about some man who owned a candy store
and used to give her free candy every Friday when she was a young
girl. For some reason my husband and kids seemed really interested
in her story, and I continued to stab at my potatoes.

After dinner, I wanted to take my mother right home, but
everyone else wanted her to stay. The kids brought out one of their
favorite books, and asked her to read to them. I tried to hint to her
that I wanted to take her home, but she ignored me. My husband
turned on the television, and sat in the living room with them. I
stayed in the kitchen and cleaned up the supper dishes. From the
other room I could hear them all laughing.

Once I was done in the kitchen, I brought out my mother's
coat and told them I was sorry to ruin their fun, but that I had to
bring her home now. The kids were mad that I made her go home,
but I didn’t care. I got the car warmed up, and helped her into the passenger seat. During the ride home my mother asked me when she could come over again, and I just kept my eyes on the road and didn’t answer. The rest of the ride was pretty quiet. She had more to say about tonight than about the past twenty-five years. I dropped her off in front of her apartment house, and drove home. Everyone was already in bed when I arrived, I got into bed, but couldn’t fall asleep. That night I woke up in a cold sweat. I had a nightmare, but this wasn’t the usual nightmare. This time my mother was there with my family, but I couldn’t get to any of them. I was trapped, and they were all just looking from somewhere outside.
W.J. Good

The Subordination of the Magi

I might try to peer beyond the edges
Of this familiar daVinci to see
If another cherub lurks above
The Madonna of the Rocks; I might repair
With my eyes the arms of the Aphrodite
Of Melos (for my eyes must always follow
The Praxitelean curve); or, as well,
I might peel back the corners of my mind
In search of an equally fleeting memory.

While our parents bantered in the cabin
We searched the forest aimlessly
For anything to kick about.
Potato chip leaves sounded beneath our feet
Like the bones of the slain Jews.
I kicked about a milk jug football,
And although my companion explored
Listlessly, I insisted we keep trudging.

He found, at last, a fascinating branch,
Picked it up, and looked at me.
It seemed to stave the woods in two.
I took my side and together we tried
To divide our quarry, but it would not yeild,
And he would not yeild, and I would not yeild
An inch of ground- so the ground itself did.
We slid in the leaves, foundered like flipped-
Over crabs until filthy. “I’m dead,” he said;
But I submerged him in the dirt
And commanded, “Stay dead!”
Breaking the branch was my notion alone,
As old as the lands grown cold over the oceans.
I have gone back as far as I can go-
Back through my memory as if
A salmon ascending a waterfall-
Back to the rise of time for us all.
Paul Trainor

amazed

you know
word flips
aren't
coin flips

mere probables

learned behaviors
of minds in a maze

'cause reckoning
can't reckon with

music
in the wing-eyes
of butterflies
When Jesus Christ walks on green water
When lightning-bolts emanate inside a glass lamb
When the sky glazes grey and the trees hack each other into pieces
When the bathroom stalls get together and talk Nietzsche
When the sewers sell like the fragrance of wild orchids
When the dogs dine for a $100 a night
When you see yourself through
The little hole in your finger
Holly Thompson

Lunar Eclipse

his sinewy hand lights the black candles
rawhide drums chant
as chains dance, wood's voice cracks
in the circle of fire where tree silhouette's
pale faces fall
in the flicker of the flames
incense veils whirl around the highpriest's robe
satan's pope kneels lifting his sights
to the sun shadow covered moon
he lowers the knife to carve
lucifer's star into the victim's
heaving chest
louder the beats
vibrate through our bodies
Holly Thompson

*Anal*

allergic to cotton and probably water
she would find fault in heaven
turning the knives pointy side up
they do not get clean the other way she says

she would find fault in heaven
a mother hen with canine fangs
they do not get clean the other way she says
her moods, piranhas on the rag

a mother hen with canine fangs
confronting her is insane
her moods, piranhas on the rag
the knives keep stabbing my hands

confronting her is insane
allergic to cotton and probably water
the knives keep stabbing my hands
they do not get clean the other way she says
I’ve never seen elephants roaming ocean shores, whistling bawdy sailor’s tunes through wrinkled trunks. Luckily, I’m still young, and the coastlines lurk nearby; and while I hadn’t thought about it, travelling the world’s coastlines- around every mass of earth- could result in profound, enriching experiences. A bottle of cheap tequila, an ounce of homegrown and a battered leather hip satchel might get me by. I’d disappear for three years, and I’d grow a beard. I’d write long love letters to far away women with a felt tip and a pad of loose-leaf, and mail them in recycled beach bottles, signed Infinitely Yours...
As with any summer afternoon in Jasper, it was difficult keeping a beer cool at two o’clock. Stanley always returned the second half of his bottle to the ice box, and replaced it with another. This particular beer was exchanged for the rechilled second half of an earlier bottle. The heavy door of the ice box clicked shut and the thick soled boots clapped on the hardwood floor as Stanley returned to the porch.

He picked the newspaper up and re-opened it to the section he was studying. A few seconds passed before he placed it back down and moved his seat so the shadow of the porch column fell across his lap, where the paper would be. At that moment, the red truck came to a stop in front of the house.

The passenger door opened and revealed a man whose belly pushed against the plastic of the dash. As the man maneuvered himself out he raised a hand to wave, but said nothing as he concentrated on the placement of his feet when they touched the pavement.

“Hey Barney, you fat bag of shit,” the deep voice called from the porch.

“H-hi S-Stanley,” he said softly in response to the usual greeting, still not lifting his face from the pavement.

Barney loved Stanley. Besides his brother, whom he lived with, Stanley was Barney’s only companion. His brother worked twelve hours of the day, so Barney got dropped off at Stanley’s house by his neighbor at around two o’clock every afternoon, except Sundays.

Stanley worked evenings. He woke at noon, and left for work at six. For four hours of that time, Barney sat with him. Barney couldn’t work, and for him, this was the day’s activity.

Stanley’s younger brother had had the same disability as Barney, and the two disabled men had been fairly close friends. When a stroke took his brother’s life two years earlier, Stanley found himself watching after Barney in the afternoons. Stanley had not
been particularly close to his brother, and watching after Barney helped him cope with his knowledge of this.

“What the hell you got a long sleeved shirt on for, Barn?”
“I don’t know.” And he really didn’t.
“Gonna sweat yourself to death.”
“I s-s-suppose,” he replied, not really considering it. The steps had his concentration at the moment, and he could take questions when he was through with them.
“Grown man’s got to know what kind of clothes he’s to wear.”
“I’ll, I’ll be fine.” He took the last step onto the porch and let out a smile. He lifted his head for the first time. “Brought this one today,” he said lifting the thin book above his head. He walked towards his seat and gave the book a little shake, “Like t-this one,” he said loud enough for himself to hear.
“That will be fine then, Barn,” Stanley said acknowledging the book. Barney rarely arrived without one; he was more likely to leave the house without his shoes than his book.

Barney adjusted himself in an old couch in the corner of the porch. But despite its size, he always had trouble getting comfortable.

“Saw c-c-couple rabbits this morning.” Barney’s comment went unanswered. “Course, that’s n-nothin to- You see any rabbits this morning?” He looked at Stanley, then looked back at his lap.
“No, I guess you w-wasn’t up yet,” he said, answering his own question.

Barney began the difficult task of searching in his pocket. He leaned back in his seat, and tried to make his body straight. Then he jimmied his hand into his tight pants pocket. “Got some...” he struggled some more. “Got some licorice,” he finished triumphantly pulling a spiral out and lifting it to his head. “Stanley, you want some l-licorice?”

“No, thank you, Barn. Let me just finish reading through this here paper,” Stanley said, without any notable tone in his voice.

“Yeah, guess you gotta- guess you gotta read that paper,” Barney said understandingly. “I’ll - I’ll watch f-for squirrels.”
And Barney began to look off the porch, very carefully. Ten minutes later the search was still very much underway. He thought he had counted four, but they circled around trees so quickly he thought he might have counted a couple twice.

"Hey, Barney. Do me a favor and grab me another of these beers. Should be a bottle open in there. And fetch yourself something to eat or whatever you like."

"Okay Stanley," he replied as he pulled himself from the couch. "Should be one open," he said quietly to himself, confirming the instructions. His shoes dragged with little noise into the kitchen. He returned with a container of ice-cream, a spoon, and a full bottle of beer.

"Opened, Barn," Stanley commented, not lifting his head from the paper.

"R-right. Opened," Barney replied as he pulled the opener from his back pocket and popped the top from the bottle.

"Thank you, Barn," Stanley said, leaving it at that.

"Got me some ice-cream," Barney said to no one as he returned to the couch. After a few minutes of lifting the spoon to his mouth, a majority of the ice-cream had made dark patterns on the front of his shirt. He concentrated carefully on the container, paying no attention to the two squirrels chasing each other on the grass. Then, without warning, the spoon dropped into the container and Barney grabbed his temples as he moaned in pain.

"What is it Barn?" Stanley said, sitting up in his seat.

"Oh, ow. Ice cream headache. Ow. Ate it too f-f-fast." And Stanley sat back in his chair with the smallest of grins.

The eating continued within a few minutes. A blue truck stopped in front of the house and Stanley lifted his head from the paper. Barney did not seem to notice. A man in a uniform the same color as the truck approached the steps.

"Here to read the meter," the man called out to Stanley.

"Fine. Its in the basement. Go on in."

"T-T-Those are n-nice p-p-pants," Barney said to the gas man
When he finally noticed him on the porch. Blue was his favorite color, and he decided it would be something to have pants as blue as these.

"There a problem with these pants, partner?"
"N-N-No. I l-l-li," and the gas man shook his head and walked off before Barney could get his sentence out. Barney stared at the blue truck for a few minutes and then turned towards Stanley.

"What's he r-reading?" Barney inquired.
"The gas meter, Barn. We've been over this."
"That like regular readin'?"
"No, Barn. Its got dials and stuff. No words."
Barney seemed satisfied with the answer and resumed eating his ice cream. Then he looked back over at Stanley. "That readin' hard too?"

"Nothing you gotta worry about, Barn."
The man returned from the basement. Just at that moment Barney's right hand began to twitch, as sometimes it did.

"Be back in a month to read it again," the man told Stanley.
The shake in Barney's hand became violent and the ice cream container shot onto the floor. The melted portion spattered the blue pants of the gas man. Barney just stared ahead, as his right hand shook.

"Just great! I got four more hours in these pants!" the gas man called out staring down at the stairs, trying to wipe them off with his hands.

"S-S-S-Sor-r," Barney was trying to talk, but the situation only intensified the shaking, making the rest of his body tremble.

"Can you at least get me a wet rag or something?"
Barney stared straight ahead with his eyes wide. His shirt was becoming instantly damp. "I-I-I'm s-s-sor-"

"Hey, what's your problem?" I don't think a rag is too much to ask for! Hello! I'm talking to you." Now as Barney's jaw shook only quick breaths came out. "How about getting off your ass and getting me something to wipe these pants with? Hey, are you listening to me?"
Barney’s eyes focused on nothing. He just sat there and trembled, with sweat beginning to mat his hair to his forehead.

“Hey, look at me you fat fucking retard! Get-” but his sentence was instantly cut off. Stanley gripped his left arm with such intensity that it squeezed in like an hourglass. Without a word Stanley led him off the porch and pushed him towards the truck. He then returned to the porch and took his seat.

Barney was still sweating and his body still trembled.

“Gonna be alright, Barn.” Stanley said in a quiet voice, putting his hand on Barney’s knee. He held it there for a few minutes and the trembling began to lessen. When it had stopped Barney looked over at Stanley.

“I-I-I’m s-s-sorry.”

“Not to worry, Barn. Not to worry.”

Stanley lifted the book off the porch and opened it. He began to read to Barney the story of the monkey and the Man with the Yellow Hat. Barney was now comfortable on the couch and just sat, as he always did, and listened. And Stanley took warm sips from his beer.
Lee Todd Lacks

Preamble

We, the
People, in
order to form
a welfare state,
establish capitalism,
insure domestic conformity,
provide for the white man, promote
hatred for the black man, secure land
from the red man for ourselves, do ordain
and establish this Final Solution for all humanity.
April Avila

The shadow of my foot is tapping
A dustball on the rug. I’m sinking
Into the chair and I kill
A spider on the chair’s arm
With my thumb. It stains
The creamy linen with deep purple specks of blood

So my finger is like a candy apple coated in blood.
Angel fingers in a tree branch outside tap
On the window. I flick the spider off the stain
And lick my thumb. My heart is sinking
And it beats in my knees. I gaze at my brother’s arm
Covered with bruises and purple tracks. I want to kill

Him, then God can take his soul and kill
The damned thing too. And he’ll be gone, body and blood,
Soul as well. Then I can put an arm
About his waist without him hurting me. My sister is tapping
Her greasy boyfriend. I hear the sinking
Of the mattress on its springs. Later I’ll see white stains

On their way. Oh! Ouch! The acid burns my tongue. “I will kill
Him if she gets pregnant,” my brother says. And the sinking
Springs stop squealing. My brother picks at his dried blood,
Then I see him tapping
The bubbles out of the needle; he stabs his arm.
I get up to leave and he grabs my arm.
“Where do you think you’re going?” I strain
Against his grip. He takes pleasure in trapping
Me. Someday I will kill
Him for this. “Get away from me... please...” Blood
Pounds through him in victory and I feel him sinking

Inside of me. (He thinks I like this.) I see him sinking
Into hell, good enough. “Get off me!” I swing my arm
Up at his face and blood
Spurts from his mouth as if it were breath. It stains
My shirt, my lips and mostly my soul. “I’m going to kill
You, you bastard! Get away from me!” I hear the tapping

Of the headboard upstairs. HELP ME! please. Tears wash stains
From my face. “Someday I will kill
You John!” At the window there is an angel tapping.
Missie McCoombs

*The Masterpiece*

Childly ween, childly headed
ween, childly coulisse
otic deathless
thence, thence! boxing bedder, day laborer, bloodfin
ITALIANIZE
notion doorprize childly
IAM
youngling IAM, IAM

coulisse, coulisse.
Today the body is tired. 
It needs rest from the things 
it has planted, 
watered, fed.

Yet 
it wants 
to take 
a walk 
to familiar waters,

watch the sun turn orange 
as peaches 
left to ripen in a bowl,

attend those things 
neglected,

sip a cream soda 
under a maple,

feel its skin 
browning,

or the rain 
in mid-afternoon.

Today the body is tired. 
It will abide.
the moon casts a shadow across my room
the light is
yellow
grey
i am remembering
something
i learned
as a child

your
face

yes

your
face

with two
eyes

deep

within
it

deep
within their sockets
deep
within the earth
The First Ballad

In the beginning the Word went on He was of God
In whom His happiness Infinitely He possessed

The same Word God was said to be beginning
Beginninglessly in the beginning He went on

Who was this same Beginning who did not Himself begin
And the Word Son at the outset

He conceived who always was conceiving
Surrendering His Substance and gleaning it

For the glory of the Son possessed the Father
And all the Father's glory He gleaned in the Son

Lover in beloved in the other one went on
And that love which entwined them was the same

Value, three persons, one beloved
Among three and in them each

One love rendered them one lover
That love, the beloved, in whom they lived

As three possess one being each alone possessed it
Each of them at love with He who had this being

Whose being each one twined around the other
Beyond the realm of words an ineffable knot

Such infinite love entwined the three together
In one love three possessed whose essence was the Word
The more that love was one the more of love there was

--St. John of the Cross, translated by Forrest Gander