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# AROUND THE WORLD IN 365 DAYS

Hannah Thurman

Ariel returned from the airport on the six-thirty bus one evening in the early summer, and no one came to the door to meet her. She kicked off the clogs she'd worn on the flight and set her purse down next to them on the dirty floor. She had not taken much, just Altoids, her phone charger, and a peanut butter sandwich. She still had half of the sandwich, crumpled in a plastic Ziploc. The bread had begun to get soggy but she did not throw it away.

Ariel ran her hands through her hair and inhaled. The smell of the plane still lingered, flat dry air mixed with coffee and sweet disinfectant. She paused a moment, breathing in, but it soon faded, replaced by the smell of grease. She sighed and walked into the kitchen.

Her half-brother Des was cooking a pair of bratwursts in a smoking pan. At 24, he was two years younger than her, a product of her father and a woman who had worked in a bar near his office. They had not met until just before their father died the year before, and had moved in together soon after to save money.

"How was Tallahassee?" he asked without looking up.

"Nashville," she said. "It was okay." But it hadn't seemed like she'd been in Nashville. It would have felt like Nashville if she'd eaten barbecue or heard music or felt the moisture of the buzzing Southern air. But she hadn't left the terminal. She'd walked through the glassed-in atrium near the ticket counter and the sun had looked the same as it did in New Jersey. Then she'd turned around to go home.

When she'd first won the drawing, people had been eager to go with her. She joined her college best friend in Honolulu, and her post-college best friend in Miami Beach. But after a few weeks, the excitement died down. What had at first seemed like incredible good fortune—for a year, she could fly anywhere, domestic or international, for a dollar each way—now taunted her. She had little money of her own so she took to booking trips each weekend just to fly, arriving in places she'd never dreamed of going just to have to get back on the plane. It seemed like the cherry on top of what had been already been a very unfair year.

She hoisted herself up onto the counter and looked into the pan. The wursts were still pink but smoke trailed up the sides, rising from some crumb trapped underneath.

“Are those all right?” she asked, pointing at the pan.

Des ran a hand through his white-blond hair. “They’ll be fine.”

“So what did you do?”

“Today? Not much. Got a call from Blake, he said he and Louis both got poison oak from that trail near Briarwood. My thigh’s been itching like crazy so I guess I got it too.” Des worked clearing hiking paths near the Wanaque Reservoir on the New York-New Jersey border. He was saving up to go to grad school but it was taking longer than expected. The revelation of their father’s double life had crashed through their own like waves, knocking them off their feet so it hard it had become difficult to stand again.

“Did you put anything on it?” Ariel asked.

“No, it’s not that bad.” Des flipped the sausages. The raw parts sizzled as they touched the hot pan.

She moved closer. “Can I take a look?”

They both paused. This was how it usually began, the caged question that flipped the switch from casual conversation to something else. Des turned off the burner and unzipped his cargo shorts. They fell quickly from his hips, leaving him standing in faded boxers. Ariel hooked the elastic with her thumb.

“It looks itchy,” she said. A rash the size of her hand spread across his leg, bright pink against the pale hairs. They were both blonde like their father, but Ariel dyed her hair and eyebrows black every week. This made her feel like what they were doing was slightly less wrong, and allowed her to meet her own eyes in mirrors without flinching.

She ran her hand upwards along the raised skin.

“Be careful,” he said. “You’ll get it too.”

She pressed her lips against the socket of his leg, feeling him tense. She breathed in deep and for a moment, the smell of the plane came back to her.

“I’m going to Myrtle Beach tomorrow,” she said. It wasn’t directed towards him, it was more of an incantation, a ward absolving her from what was about to happen.

But Des put a hand on her shoulder, pushing her away. “Myrtle Beach?” he said. “Why there?”

“It’s a short enough trip to go to for a day and I don’t know—I like tourist airports.”

“Oh,” Des said. “It’s just funny because that’s where my ex lives. Ex-wife.”

Ariel stood up. “You never said you were married.”

“Yeah.” Des looked away. “Only for a year though. I was nineteen.” He turned on the fan above the range.

Ariel watched the smoke wither and dissipate. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“It was stupid. You don’t tell me all the stupid things you do.”

Ariel frowned. She thought she told Des everything.

“Anyway, we ended things on good terms. We used to e-mail back and forth a lot but I haven’t talked to her in a while.”

She went to the fridge and began opening the drawers without looking inside. “But you’ve talked to her while you’ve known me?”

Des came up behind her and squeezed her shoulder. “Sorry,” he said. “I should have told you before.”

“It’s fine.” She shut the refrigerator door. “I don’t care.” But she did care of course, and she knew that he knew she cared. On the rare occasions he mentioned it, Des explained their situation matter-of-factly: genetic sexual attraction, a modern-day oedipal story, unconscious compensation for the discovery of their father’s double life. Like the trail-clearing job, this too would pass, once he’d saved up enough money to move on to the real world and a real girlfriend. Whereas most nights, Ariel dreamed of winning the lottery and moving them somewhere far away, India

maybe. She'd once watched a program about Indian weddings on an in-flight TV and imagined Des scraping the henna off her skin with his teeth.

"You know," Des said, "I don't have anything else to do tomorrow."

Ariel shrugged. "Do whatever you want."

"I'll buy a ticket," he said. He twisted his head to kiss her wrist. "Let me just eat these first." He let go of her and picked up the pan again.

"Okay," Ariel said, although her heart was pounding with excitement. "No rush."

\*

Although it was only ten after eight when they touched down in Myrtle Beach, the sun was already hot and high. The flight had been smooth and Des had slept the majority of it. Now, as they stepped through the automatic doors of the airport, Ariel watched him flip his scratched phone open and closed.

"Mandy said she'd be right at the United pickup," he said.

*Mandy*, Ariel thought, *Amanda*. Each time he said it, she imagined him whispering it in her ear. "If she's not here, we could take a cab," Ariel said.

"No, she'll be here." He peered up and down the line of cars. "She's very reliable."

Ariel thought of groceries and health insurance and Christmas cards. She wiped her sweating hands on her jeans. "Maybe she's changed."

Just then, a new-looking white car pulled up and a black woman with short, spiked hair got out.

"Dezzie!" She hugged Des, then Ariel. "Is this your girlfriend?"

"Sister. Ariel."

"Oh, right. You said that in your e-mail."



“Half-sister,” Ariel said. She had not expected Mandy to be black. Back in New Jersey, Des did not have any black friends.

“It’s great to meet you,” Mandy said, popping the trunk. “Let’s go to the beach.”

\*

They sat on towels in their shoes and socks and ate smoked oysters Mandy had brought in a tin. The oysters smelled more fishy than the water itself, which lay bright and flat beyond a stretch of busy sand.

“Sorry we can’t go home yet, the house is being cleaned,” Mandy said. “The cleaners usually come Thursdays, but I had a thing last night. Forty-six people. Someone dented the stove hood.”

“Anyone I know?” Des asked.

“Why would you?” Mandy laughed and then they both stared out at the shining sea. It’s funny, Ariel thought, how no one turns their back to the water. She dug her fingers into the sand, feeling the grains slough at her knuckles.

“You should’ve come up a day earlier, you could have come,” Mandy said.

“Ari was in Saint Louis.”

“Nashville,” Ariel said. “I won free flights for a year.”

“I’m so past flying,” Mandy said. “I just take trains now. Did you know Amtrak stops in every state capital from here to Maine?”

Des said he did not and Ariel watched him smile. He didn’t usually smile like this unless he was drunk. She reached her fingers into the oyster tin again but they sunk into empty oil. She wiped them off on her towel.

“Anyway, I’m glad you’re here today. Two weeks from now it’ll be disgusting out. I don’t leave the house from June ‘til August.”

“By choice or by court order?” Des said.

Mandy laughed and pushed on his arm. "Is he this rude to you?" she asked Ariel.

"Worse," Ariel said. She meant it as a joke but it came out flat. Mandy seemed to take it in stride.

"So you guys live together now?"

"We're making up for years of sibling rivalry." Des reached over and pinched Ariel hard on the cheek.

Mandy shook her head. "Was it a reading of the will thing?"

"Almost," Ariel said. "When they caught dad's cancer, it was too late to do chemo or anything, so he went straight to hospice. He'd been having us come in on different days but then I guess he knew he was near the end so one day my mom and I came to visit and there were two extra chairs."

"My mom and I were late," Des said. "He'd meant for us to all come in at the same time."

"You're always late," Mandy said, but her voice was swallowed by the sound of a crashing wave.

"The tide must be coming in," Des said.

"So you had no idea?" Mandy said. "About each other?"

"It wasn't surprising," Des said. "He spent so much time away."

"We didn't know at all," Ariel said. "My mom was devastated."

"I'm sorry," Mandy said. "At least some good came of it."

Des reached over to pinch Ariel again but she slapped his hand away.

Mandy cackled. "I love it," she said. "This reminds me of me and my brother."

Ariel didn't say anything. She watched the waves break higher over the wet sand.

“So this airline contest,” Mandy said. “Where have you gone so far?”

“Hong Kong, Nassau, Auckland... Miami, Hawaii, Mexico, Orlando, Jackson Hole, Toronto, Seattle, Chicago, Atlanta, Nashville... now here.”

“Looks like you’ve been staying closer to home,” Mandy said. “I don’t blame you. I hate flying.”

“I love it,” Ariel said. “But I’m running out of PTO.”

“What do you love about it?” Mandy put her head in her hand and stared at Ariel. Ariel felt embarrassed by the attention.

“I like the free peanuts,” she said. She broke Mandy’s gaze and looked back towards the approaching water. “We’d better move,” she said, “Or we’re going to get soaked.”

\*

Mandy’s house was large and beautiful, a two-story Georgian colonial with pink azaleas growing underneath the lower windows. Inside, a row of picture frames glinted from an impressive mantelpiece. They were filled with smiling pictures of what must be Mandy’s relatives, wealthy-looking people with shiny, flat hair.

“What does she do?” Ariel whispered to Des as they stepped into the cool sweet smell of air conditioning.

“Tech law,” he said. “You know, when Apple sues Facebook or something?”

“Oh,” Ariel said, trying not to sound impressed. The air smelled like lemon and dryer sheets and she wanted to touch all the polished wood surfaces. She watched Des as he removed his shoes and stepped barefoot onto the soft beige carpet. Mandy walked ahead of them, flipping on lights. It was strange to imagine that Des used to know this woman, used to fuck her. Thinking about them naked together made Ariel horny. She wanted to pull Des into one of the darkened rooms off the hallway and strip his clothes off under the perfect white sheets. Instead she just smiled as Mandy pointed out the bathroom and the staircase and brought them into a large kitchen with a marble island and a 6-burner stove.

“Thirsty? I have some punch left over from the party.” Mandy went to open the refrigerator and when she was turned away, Ariel put a hand on the small of Des’s back. He stepped forward, leaving her clutching at air.

Mandy led them to a white sectional couch and handed them tall glasses of punch that smelled like bourbon. “So do you ever see Kent and Marion anymore?” she asked Des.

“No, have you heard from Casey?”

“Only on Facebook.”

“Me too.”

Ariel leaned back into the couch as Mandy and Des talked about people they knew. Mandy had lived in Trenton growing up, which is where she’d met Des, in a community college course they were taking as high schoolers. When Des got up to use the bathroom, Ariel asked what he’d been like back then.

“Smart,” Mandy said. “Would you like more punch?”

“Sure,” Ariel said. Mandy poured the orange liquid with a steady hand. “So why did you two split up?”

Mandy wiped the sweating pitcher with a blue cloth. “We were just kids,” she said. “We were smart and we thought we were so special. But then you grow up and you realize that there are lots of smart people in the world and you’re not so special after all.” She shrugged. “Des is a great guy. I’m sure he’s got tons of girlfriends back home.” She looked at Ariel like it was a question.

“Oh, yes,” Ariel said. “Lots.”

Mandy pursed her lips and Ariel reddened. She wondered if Des had insinuated anything in his e-mails, if Mandy knew she wasn’t telling the truth. But then Des stepped back into the room.

“Do you have any Calamine lotion?” he asked. “I ran into some poison oak.”

“Just now?”

“No, yesterday.”

“Jesus... I think it’s up with the camping stuff.” Mandy set down her glass on the coffee table.

“I thought you said it wasn’t that bad,” Ariel said.

“It’s gotten worse.”

Mandy rose. “You’ll have to help me with the stepladder,” she told Des. “I’m a little tipsy.”

Ariel watched them disappear into the darkness of the hall. She swallowed the rest of the punch in her glass, shivering as the sweet, cool liquid ran down her throat. Light streamed in through the bamboo blinds and the quiet hum of the air conditioning combined with lack of sleep pressed Ariel into her seat like g-force on an ascending plane. She leaned her head back for a moment and realized she shouldn’t be sleeping, but it was too late.

\*

When she woke, her head hurt and her arms felt heavy. Mandy and Des were gone. Embarrassed, she pushed herself up and padded down the hall. She could hear their voices behind a closed door. She knocked and when Mandy said come in, she hesitated before pushing it open.

Mandy and Des were sitting on a large white bed with their shirts off, although Mandy wore a satin bra the color of a pearl. When she made no attempt to cover herself up, Ariel jerked her head away. Her limbs felt unresponsive, slowed by sleep and by the punch. She placed her hands on the doorframe to steady herself.

“Sorry I fell asleep,” she said.

“It’s okay,” Mandy said. “We did too.” Her smooth breasts curved out of the white bra as if they were extensions of the bra itself.

Ariel thought about her own bra, whose underwire juttred out in the middle,

leaving angry red marks in the center of her chest. "It's almost four. We should probably head out."

Mandy and Des said nothing.

"Des?" Ariel said.

"Give us a moment," Des said. "We were talking."

Mandy swung her bare legs out of the bed. "It's fine," she said. "You should probably go."

Ariel blinked to clear her head. The room smelled like irises, some perfume activated by the heat of Des and Mandy's bodies. "What were you talking about?" she said.

Mandy looked down and spread her fingers against the soft-looking sheets. She wore no rings. "I asked him what was going on with you two," she said. "He said nothing was but I don't believe him."

"Oh," Ariel said.

"Fuck," Mandy said. "I'm right, aren't I? How long has it been happening?"

"A year," Ariel said. Her hands slipped from the doorjamb and fell to her sides.

"That's so wrong," Mandy said. "That's like—Jesus. I can't even think about it."

"No one asked you to think about it," Des said, swinging his legs out of the bed.

"Do you think about it?" Mandy asked. "Do you think about how wrong it is?"

"No," Des said at the same time Ariel said, "yes."

"You're taking advantage of her," Mandy said to Des. "You're like a pedophile."

Ariel shook her head. The blood had begun draining back into her limbs and she felt steadier. "No, he's not. I'm older than he is."

Mandy stood up. Her underpants were also shining white and shaped like little

shorts. "Look at him," she said, pointing at Des. "He looks just like you."

Ariel smoothed her long, dark hair over her shoulders. It crackled, dry from the repeat dyeings. "I don't see it," she said, turning quickly away.

\*

Mandy drove them to the airport with the radio on and when they got out, nodded at them through the window. "Let's wait to see each other again," she said.

At the check-in kiosk, the machine wouldn't read Ariel's credit card. She thought it may have been because her hands were shaking, but when she tried again, she got the same error message. She looked over at Des. "It's okay," she said. "This kind of thing happens a lot."

Des shrugged, bent over his phone. He hadn't said a word since they'd gotten out of the car. Ariel ducked under a nearby stanchion rope and took her place in a line going towards the counter. The familiar surroundings made her feel calmer. This trip had been a bad idea, but soon she and Des would be thousands of feet in the air, moving quickly away from it.

Ariel looked at her phone. "We've got plenty of time to board," she said. "And besides, I bet our flight is running late."

"I didn't say anything," Des said.

As the line inched along, Ariel began to feel anxious. They weren't checking luggage, though, and maybe they'd hold the plane for her. It would be bad PR to take off without the winner of a national sweepstakes.

It was 6:15 by the time they reached the counter. Their flight left in 30 minutes. Ariel thrust her ID at the ticket agent.

"We're going to Newark," she said. "Harding. Ariel and Desmond."

"I don't see your reservation..."

"We made it last night. He bought his and I'm one of the Around the World in 365

Days winners.”

“I’m sorry,” the woman said. “I don’t think we recognize that promotion.”

“It’s not up to you. It’s across all United flights.”

“I’m going to have to page a supervisor,” the woman said. “Can you hold on?”

Ariel looked at her phone again. “No, I can’t,” she said. “Our flight leaves in twenty minutes. Look, I have used this code thirty times. It worked in Hong Kong.” She turned to Des for assistance. He looked away.

“Wait a moment.” The woman turned around and left through a back door.

“This is so fucked up,” Ariel said, loud enough for the rest of the line to hear. “We are actually going to miss our flight.”

“Calm down,” Des said. “You’re just going to piss them off.”

“Excuse me, Mrs. Harding?” The ticket agent returned. “We’re still waiting on a supervisor. She’s calling to verify that your code is one of the promotions we currently accept.”

“How many times do I have to tell you? It’s good all year. Look—” She scrolled through her phone and pulled up a picture of the press release. “Around the World in 365 Days Sweepstakes, announced in January. Six winners. See number three? Ariel Harding.”

“Wait just one more minute,” the agent said.

\*

When the supervisor arrived, they had missed their flight. The second woman agreed that they could get on the next open seats to Newark, but that wouldn’t happen until the following day.

“What about Trenton?” Ariel said. “Or La Guardia or JFK? You guys must run up to New York every hour.”



They both shook their heads. "Only first class left. Unfortunately, your promotion is only good for economy. But we'll book you on the 7am to Newark tomorrow morning."

"Do we get a hotel voucher?" Ariel asked.

"I'm sure we can stay with Mandy," Des said.

Ariel turned back to the gate agent. "We'll need a hotel voucher."

The woman began typing on her keyboard with two fingers. "I'll see what I can do."

"Good," Ariel said, scowling. "You do that."

Des squeezed her hand. "Hey," he said. "I'm sorry."

She shrugged him off and leaned against the counter, feeling the coolness of the blue Formica on her bare forearms. The air inside the terminal felt dry and stale, like old cigarette smoke.

"I bet if I were as rich as Mandy, they wouldn't have lost my reservation," she said loudly.

"Maybe," Des said. "Mandy has her own problems."

"Well," Ariel said, turning around. "You should go stay with her, then. I'll stay in the fucking hotel."

"There's no need to get upset," the woman behind the counter said. With a flourish, she handed Ariel a piece of paper with a Days Inn logo printed on it. Ariel took it silently and began making her way towards the doors.

"Hey," Des said, walking fast to catch up. "What do you want from me?"

"I don't know," she said.

They walked through the automatic doors into the thick, hot air. Ariel looked up and down the dropoff lane but didn't see any hotel shuttles.

Des crossed his arms. "Look," he said. "Coming here was a mistake."

She bit her lip. "You told her," she said. "Why would you tell her?"

"I don't know," Des said. "I'm so sorry."

A shuttle pulled up to the curb, but its sign read EMBASSY SUITES. Ariel stepped back. "I thought you were smart. Even a stupid person would know not to tell."

Des closed his eyes. "It was too much," he said. "I've never kept a secret like this before."

"Did you think I had?"

"I don't know," Des said. "I don't know everything about you." He paused and asked again, "What do you want?"

A bus rumbled past them without stopping. Ariel turned away. "I just want to get out of here," she said.

Des put an arm around her. She stiffened, then remembered that they were far away from home. She pressed her face into his neck until it no longer smelled like irises.

"I'm sorry," he repeated. "I'm so sorry. I won't do it again."

Ariel looked down at the gum-stained cement. "Okay," she said.

"Come on," he said. "I'll get us a taxi."

\*

They entered their motel room from a door off the parking lot. Ariel was immediately struck by how cold it was. The air conditioner under the window whirred loudly and its plastic top was covered in thick beads of condensation. She set down her bag and walked over to turn it off. Everything became quiet. Ariel sat down on the bed closest to the door. Des sat down beside her.

“Dibs on the lamp side,” he said. Ariel wondered who he had played dibs with as a child and for what.

She turned down the stiff coverlet and got into the bed. “You know, I always wanted a sibling,” she said. “But I’d hoped it would be a girl.”

“I’ve got a cousin in Morristown,” he said. He paused a moment, then lay down beside her. “You could borrow her for the day.” He began to slide a hand inside her shirt. He never undid the buttons and one or two always snapped off. She woke with them stuck to her legs. “You’d let me watch, wouldn’t you?”

“Yeah,” Ariel said. “Sure.” The coverlet felt greasy and smelled like smoke but she pulled it around her anyway.

Des inched closer, breathing lightly on the side of her neck. Ariel closed her eyes, but all she could see were pictures of Mandy’s perfect family, watching them with disapproval.

“I want a house,” she whispered. “A real one, with a fireplace.”

“And a bearskin rug,” he said, pulling her closer to him. His breath smelled like lemons, sharp and clean. “We’ll turn on the fireplace and I’ll lay you down on the rug—”

“No,” Ariel said. “Not an electric one, a real fireplace.”

Des didn’t answer. He squeezed her nipples tightly between his fingers. When she didn’t say anything, he let go. “I don’t know what you want,” he said.

“I just told you.”

“Do you think we should stop?” he said. He turned to her. “Don’t say you don’t know.”

She breathed in deeply, holding the air inside for as long as possible, then let it out in a hiss.

“It’s over,” she said, trying out the words on her tongue. “Just kidding.”

Des pushed himself up on one arm. “Maybe we should stop.”

“You’re not sure?”

“No.” His voice sounded like their father’s then, muffled like when she called him on the phone from college. He always sounded so serious, as if what she were talking about—her car, her classes, her idiot friends—was the only thing that mattered. Of course that hadn’t been true. During those calls he could have easily been at Des’s house, listening to his stories, nodding.

“Did Dad come to your wedding?” she asked.

“Yes,” he said. “But he didn’t stay long.” He reached for her again and this time she pushed him away.

“Tell me about it,” she said. “Was it in a church?”

He began touching the outside of her jeans, fingers grabbing at her belt loops.

“No,” she said. “Tell me first.”

He frowned. “It was in a banquet hall,” he said. “By the shore. We took pictures on a golf course and the ground was wet so I carried Mandy back up to the reception. Her dress was heavy. Her bridesmaids wore yellow. There were flowers on the cake.”

“What kind?” Ariel said but she could feel Des pressing towards her again. “What kind of flowers were they?”

He put his mouth on the side of her face and she felt his teeth cut into her cheek. “Please,” she said. “Please just tell me.”

His hands moved under her like small machines. Outside their window, the lights in the parking lot hummed. She breathed in the smell of mold and sweat and thought of how bad she would have looked in yellow. Des was hot against her and her stomach felt as if she were falling. She wanted to put her arms around him but she pushed away instead. Then they were staring at each other, and she could see her shape reflected in his dark eyes.

“Fine,” Des said, “They were irises.”

As soon as he said it, she could see them, just as she could see their father standing behind Des in a suit, smiling. The image appeared so clearly she could not imagine a wedding with Des any other way. She tried to call up her fantasies of Indian henna or the sunny steps of a courthouse halfway across the world. They now seemed like cartoons, sketched and unrealistic. She breathed in slowly, wondering if this would make her cry.

“We shouldn’t’ve used irises,” Des said. “They wilted during the reception and stained the cake.”

Ariel’s throat felt open and her lungs full. She wasn’t sad, just disappointed. How many times had her father said that to her? She propped herself up on an elbow. “It’s okay,” she said.

“Don’t ask me anything more about the wedding,” Des said. “We were young and stupid and did it all wrong.”

“Okay,” she said. She straightened in the bed, stretching out her feet so she was almost taller than him. She ran her fingers through his hair, which looked white in the darkness. Her hands felt strong and sure.

“Is that all you wanted?” he said, and raised his pale eyebrows.

“No,” Ariel said, and this time pulled him to her.

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Hannah is a writer living in Brooklyn, NY. Her short stories have been published in *The Brooklyn Rail*, *The Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Brain Child Magazine*, and others.

# THE ESCAPE

Rob McClure Smith

## The Neighbor

The dog knew first.

I was walking her on the ridge of the pasture by the thin wire fence. This was about 4.30, two hours before dark, and she starts up this whimpering, wouldn't go on. I haul at the leash and give it a bit snap and see that the hair on her neck has gotten puffed up and how she's tucking her tail in. I believe weather's coming because I only ever saw her ears lowered and pulled back that way in a thunderstorm.

And then I feel a shiver go up me and know I'm being watched.

On clear days you could see the outdoor pens lined up either side the driveway close to the house, set back from the road a ways. If the light was right you saw movement. Summer nights sometimes a roaring came through the trees. So I knew about his lions and mountain lions and the leopards and tigers. He got them at rescues and auctions I believe. Hell, he probably bred a few, wouldn't put it past him. There were the stories too. People would tell how giraffes just appeared in the fields one morning or how a crowd of camels this time broke loose onto I-80. But those are made up, mostly. I don't believe he had camels. A few times I happened upon him picking deer carcasses off the roads and dragging them on up to his pens. He'd wave. Twice a week he'd load his van with chicken parts from the slaughterhouse and they didn't charge him any, they all liked him. He had a way about him. One time he offered me a boat for half price. "Why half price?" I ask. "Well, it's only half a boat," he says, laughing. And it was. He did have a heap of junk about his place.

So I see a black shape, the hump of its back, over behind the crest of that wasted field slopes down from his farm. Then I see the rest of it. It was an African lion with a big gold mane, like on Discovery Channel, twenty feet away, pressed against the wire, flat on the grass with its head up, watching. Looking dead at me with cold yellow eyes.

I didn't know much about lions generally, but supposed it might be unwise to challenge them by staring them in the eye, and that if you ran away they might have a tendency to chase and eat you and so on. So I scooped the dog up and settled on a brisk walking pace, which is not that easy carrying a dog. I suppose I was as calm and steady as any person being watched by a lion can manage. I lit out across a gully that was sodden from night-before rain, and my boots started slurping in the muck till one got sucked clean off. I'm hobbledy-hoy now and wondering if I maybe appear injured and easy prey. I'm halfway when I get the urge to look back, like Lot's wife, and see the lion's in the same place, still on the other side, though it's obvious to me it can get over that fence just anytime it wants to. That fence had six strands of wire strung between its posts and that lion's back ran parallel to the second from the top. I do believe I commenced praying at this juncture. I don't even recall getting to the door. I might have crawled the last 50 yards, like a worm. First thing I do after latching up is call him, as the closest help, like I did to come get his pit pony when it pushed through the fence that time before. This is different of course, with the lion involvement. It was just the answering machine picked up. Next I called 911. I'm recalling him telling me how this time a leopard sneaked out and his wife lured it back by laying a trail of vanilla-cream wafers. "You'd never think a leopard would go for that," he says, grinning at me. "People just don't understand animals."

## The Dispatch

911.

Yes, this is John Embury on Hillier Road. I live next to Dyson's and there's a lion out.

Could you say that again, sir?

There's a lion got out.

Did you say a lion, sir?

Yes. A lion. I did. Right. . . right up behind my property.

What's your name?

Embury.

What's your first name, sir?

John.

And it's behind your house?

Pardon me?

Is it behind your house?

The lion?

Is it behind your house?

It is.

Can you describe it?

It looks a lot like a lion.

Can you still see it?

Well, I don't especially want to, ma'am.

### **The Sheriff**

Two hours into my shift, I get the call he has an animal out. Didn't seem that big a thing. I'd been out there before, for loose horses. I pull up where the fence narrows into a pipe gate secured with big looping chains and massive padlocks like hearts and looped bicycle links, none of which I discover is actually attached. Beyond, the road starts out straight then curves into an alley of junked cars, a blue Volkswagen bug, a yellow Mustang, a '68 Studebaker rusting out. There's a burnt-up wheel-less trailer, an upright piano filled with rainwater and a couple of boats sunk in a field, moored against dead trees. That's what got me about him: how he would never sell anything. If he liked it, he kept it. And none of it got took care of. There was a beautiful '57 Chevy with a half inch encrusted dust and chicken crap all over it locked in a barn with his kangaroo. It breaks my heart how he could never let anything go. Off behind the dead car junkyard are woods run down a



slope to the highway before the washboard gravel slopes right, up an incline. There's a barn, half-caved in, and an ancient Duesenberg with a broke plank stuck through its windscreen and this is where the pens sit, like a gauntlet either side the driveway. There's that idiot sign he put up also.

So I see a wolf loping away casual as you like and I know this is something more than what we had before. When I notice the pen doors are open I get the full gravity. I radio in 'everything is out' and tell the dispatcher to get me JW Morris up here and put a call in to the zoo lady whose name I misremember. I run through a mental list of the best shots in the department and request all of them be in the vicinity asap.

The house is a big brown-brick that was a doctor's before, and there's a fetid pool out back. Place must have been something before being given over to the animals. I parked out front and laid on my horn, having decided not to get out. No answer. Then I see a figure back on the diving board. It was stupid of me ever to get out the car. I don't know what I was thinking. Soon as I turn the corner I see the leopard, sitting in the sun. Basking, I suppose. It might as well have been lying in a lawn chair with a margarita in its paw it looked that relaxed. We stared a while at each another and came to an understanding: *I don't bother you if you don't bother me.* I got back in the car sharp after that. I was thinking to myself no other law-enforcement agency in the world has faced this and there is no manual for what is going on here. I was also thinking that other things will happen to me in this life, but this is never going to happen again.

Ten minutes after, DS Bob Dawson pulls up in his Chevy Silverado with JW strapped like a bomb in the passenger seat. Bob is the first person I'd want in a situation like this. He's an ex-marine, tall, a hunter, can handle an assault weapon. Today he looks like the cat got the cream.

"I shot a lion," he says, nodding. "I didn't have any choice," he adds.

"You had a choice," JW says to him, face like a bulldog chewing wasps.

"You did what you had to do," I say, giving JW a look.

"Fucking lion," says Bob, breathing heavy. "Hard to believe."

JW is the babysitter did the feeding when he was out of town. I don't believe JW has a job can be called regular. He's a twisted little homunculus actually. I ask how

many there are by his reckoning.

“Between 46 and 50,” he says, “depending.”

I don’t know that I could tell you everything that I was thinking at this point.

“What you all got up here?”

“Lions, tigers, leopards, wolves, a bear, some monkeys.”

“Lions and tigers and bears, oh my,” says Bob.

“I don’t consider the monkeys will be around long in this current environment,” JW tells me.

Well, it was 6 a.m. after they were all accounted for and laid out that we went inside there. It had been considerably let go and was a place of filth, stunk up with rotting food and bin-bags spilling garbage and dung. I found a pair of pants and the belt was a bit of twine. It was sad to see and think about how the person lived here had lost their mind. I found him in the back bedroom near a pair of green bolt cutters and a stainless steel Ruger .357 magnum and called it in as a Code 16 possible 58. You could tell he had lay at one spot for a while and then was dragged, it looked like by the arm that was gone, and his pants and stuff were pulled down, and he had been chewed on some. There were scraps of raw chicken round the body, which led me to believe he wanted to be eaten. Also a burned-up old notebook, without much sense to the pages left.

I still think about finding him like that. Maybe it’s worse that I’m retired, with more time for thinking. I feel sorry for him. I mean, I’m mad at him obviously, but I feel sorry too. If you weren’t there, you can’t ever know. I was the one had to go find that arm. It was beyond anything you would ever want to experience. I for sure don’t need to be made to feel worse about something I already feel terrible about. It’s easy for others to have opinions about what should have been done and be all self-righteous and high and mighty.

But just this last weekend I was driving my granddaughter to soccer practice. The field is out on 40 and on the approach you drive down a tree-lined road. Anyway, I caught myself scanning the woods, keeping an eye out for any shivers in the grass.

See, after all this time, I was thinking they might still be out there.

## The Dispatch

99 Traffic

Seriously?

99 Traffic.

What's going on?

We have an exotic animal caution on I-80. Please confirm you see the signs.

Copy.

## The Tranquilizer

*blinding signs flashing flicker highway flicker CAUTION EXOTIC ANIMALS big  
moon up new white an apple half mournful as me yes chalk star clicking broken  
fields*

*rack of black clouds troweled up in the sky now storm coming in and no stars  
or moon and leaves scattering at the car like poured coins out the dark*

*town too small to be called a town Minaville the other side the highway a nursing  
home & McDonald's & A&W & gas station & what's so super about a Super 8  
mile down 40 a school enclosed by pines CAUTION EXOTIC ANIMALS a  
school god help me trees everything is out so throw on a stupid yellow raincoat*

*he said ever been this close to a killer tiger pawing cage which of you is that  
and he laughs i live a very normal life besides the fact i have alternative animals*

*what can we do then exasperated red face nothing i say nothing it's not illegal if he  
doesn't charge admission its unregulated in ohio sheriff this is such bullshit  
this is ohio is what it is*

straight math Kris listen up listen big cat eats fifteen pounds meat a single sitting  
you can't be pushing five hundred pounds of flesh into those pens every day i  
don't doubt you love them him and them both your heart has outstripped your  
means

sad look well-black pupil of an iris this six months before she left him them.

sky flooding the trees mixed feelings little man apoplectic they had to restrain got  
a stainless steel plate in my head shitforbrains and by their count only one left  
deputy thinks he's Hemingway heard something from out a stand of trees  
behind the barn a wicked noise he said and I knew then a tiger nestled in a  
thicket pocket of thorns yards deep in brush you couldn't see her just the  
blades she shifted

redface sheriff says save it enough is enough says this such bullshit deputies  
disappointed a train faraway liquid clicking and shunt

eight eyes maybe ten I hope not a curious watching black bolt-action with a  
scope looks like a tackle box Miss and medium darts 3cc filled loaded that  
lecture i do not forget panicked animals have be known to resist the tranquilizer  
for fifteen minutes more also allow for the wind also find muscle.

oh walk without crushing the trees drops of rain watery coins such lapping,  
lapping water's somewhere fifteen feet lying head up is called sternal  
recumbency actually didn't you know that injured exhausted both no eye  
contact which is good as difficult emotionally i couldn't lean gently enough  
when i moved coldslicked

aim for flank but how she's spread in the grass scope find a patch of orange in a  
tunnel of green and squeeze is all i have come so far to gather you from clocks

flinch for me girl

you hit it he said too loud snagged in tangles clawing shoulders die here rain  
spattering trees windslap come on shhhh its dead i know its dead

no i said no i shouted

*so slow her labored breathing blowing drops of water like the woods were feeling  
with rain never did see eyes no body settle in soft ground sinking deeper each  
breath stopping the clock of her*

*for fucks sake*

*why youre just a slip of a girl why it looked like looked like looked like*

*came as soon as i was able the survivors should be taken to the zoo i say crying  
please don't take my children please insisted on removing the baby leopards  
herself said she spent \$30,000 buying them used to sleep with them and before  
unlatching sang them a lullaby Too-la-roo-la-roo-la irish lullaby I believe my own  
father to me them clinging her sweater as she lifted one by one to carriers paws  
round her neck little heads whiskers rubbing on breasts fuck those fucking  
policemen she whispered me by a clothesline a red shirt on it*

*the dead will be buried on the property she says chose the spot here  
crickets make a curtain of sound smudge crows on cornfields white dots of daisies  
sun slipping down a here slit in the earth where a big digger dug and your  
heart has outstripped your means scooped by the bucketload warm the dirt  
backhoed over them.*

**CAUTION**

*hello my role in life is to care for animals and to educate and inspire about them*

## **The News**

Warnings issued as erotic\* animals escape

Minaville

AP

People in Minaville, Ohio have been told to stay indoors after dozens of exotic animals escaped from a wildlife preserve. Police killed 30 of the animals but warned more were on the loose and that they were “mature, big, aggressive.” “These are not your typical wild animals,” Sheriff Matt Newsome warned at a press conference. Motorists reported multiple sightings of exotic animals along interstate 80. Currently police are patrolling the preserve and the surrounding areas in cars and armored vehicles, not on foot, and are concerned about animals

hiding in the dark near forested areas. Armed deputies had gone to the preserve in response to a 911 call. The deputies saw a number of animals outside the main compound and others that had escaped the property, and commenced euthanizing them. There have been no reports of injuries among the public, but Newsome urged people to stay indoors. Staffers from local zoos are also on the scene, helping to tranquilize and capture the animals.

\*corrected later

## The Hunter

You had an M4 assault rifle and an MP5 submachine gun, with about eight thirty-round magazines stuffed in your cargo pants, a Glock on your leg.

The Sheriff's Silverado was idling at the pipe gate when you got there. He was shook up and said you were going to be alone and you were going to have to shoot every goddamn animal you saw. Deputy Dubino was a sniper on the SWAT and had, you believe, a nine-millimeter H&K. Deputies Miller and Frey had assaults. You all got in the truck and locked and loaded and it couldn't have been more than ten minutes when just all hell broke loose. It was like Noah's Ark wrecked. The first tigers were within eight feet when you opened up. There was a wolf at one instance. These chicken parts scattered everywhere.

You kept right on pouring bullets into the dark. The back of the truck and the cab was all filled with casings, so you had some trouble keeping your feet. One got up inside your collar and you could feel the hot metal sliding down your back. Your hearing was well blasted out by now and everything got muffled, shouting and muzzle fire all just a watery ringing. You must have burned through 220 rounds. The perimeter was totally littered with brass. It was just a firing range. You couldn't hear a thing.

Worth noting how Glaspell is this tiny person, a few inches over five feet and slender. It's a thin line between brave and stupid and there are some just don't mark it. She was stuck in thorns and trying to pull herself out. The tiger was lit up in the headlights, the beams spilling onto a patch of fur. A tiger is a beautiful thing to see, you saw, a sort of gleaming wet orange. Then it was up and somersaulting kind of and you never did see anything like that in your life. You have read all about Kenya and hunting the big cats of Tsavo and all, but this is as close as you'd ever want to get. You heard Glaspell shout 'go' and still remember looking at the

shadow of her hair against her yellow raincoat. What was drilled into you at weapons training kicked in: Shoot what you see. So you did. The muzzle blast blew out a lens from your glasses so it was through just the one eye you saw the column of white rip up from its spine.

After that of course was the whole scenario with her and Jaydub screaming blue murder and that was the start of the whole 'dumb small-town law-enforcement brigade murders dozens of noble beasts because they're too retarded and trigger-happy to think of a better alternative' type deal. People still say you must have been sick, shooting those animals, because true enough they didn't ask to be there. But neither did you. It wasn't like you were happy about it either and, in all seriousness, you consider yourself a major cat person. But you've taken more grief over this than you could believe.

### The Sign

Do not taunt, mock, imitate, diss, nag, jeer, insult, tease, needle, offend, outrage, sneer at, revile, upbraid, impersonate, deride, slander, razz, pester, satirize, rib, agitate, alarm, badger, disturb, upset, vex, incite, torment, browbeat, displease, scare, irritate, distress, provoke, bully, kid, snub, confront, laugh at, infuriate, threaten, disparage, scoff at, gloat, ridicule, or inflame my friends

### The Babysitter

Q.

A. I began a count in my mind, trying to remember each face, each pair of eyes. There were seventeen or eighteen tigers, as many lions.

"Forty-six," I told him. "Maybe fifty."

"Holy shit," Deputy Dawg said, loading up, practically creaming his pants.

That's when I knew they were going to kill them all. It didn't need to happen, but it did. Like they were all out on some fucking dream safari. I couldn't look. I relate to animals being one-sixteenth Cherokee.

Q.

A. I may have took a swing. I believe this was right after said individual commenced singing the weemaway song. You know, about how the lion sleeps tonight.

Q.

A. "But," Newsome tells me, slaughtering done, "thing is, you know the inside of that house better than anyone, being a caretaker. The geography of it."

"Yeah, I'll take care alright," I say. "I'll scratch your back you knife mine."

The fan was all the sound there was in there. It didn't make the air any cooler just a little more lively and I was sweating like two rats fighting in a sock from the heat and fearfulness of it. I mind the awful stench. The bedrooms were tidy, but the rest was taken over by the animals. Floors covered in dirt. In the kitchen two monkeys kept up a screaming and a shaking of the bars of their cages. Three leopards, two spotted, one black, and a small bear were still locked in, crashing around. He had let the rest go, cutting their cages. Then he set his fire, burning his secrets away. I often wonder what he didn't want found. All that was left was gibberish, but I kept it anyway.

Q

A. I reckon he just put the gun to his mouth and blew the top of his head off. The white tiger I believe was the one took to gnawing at him and dragging him around, for his throat was seriously punctured with the teeth. The top of the head was missing, other parts of him, must have been a few pints of blood soaked in the floorboards since it was sticky to walk through. I have seen some bad things in my time.

Q.

A. Saw a woman hit by a tire iron on the head round back of the Harris Lee Parcus rest stop in Arab, Alabama. Kept right on talking as if nothing happened, as you might always suspect a woman might. Also saw a cat light a man on fire once, on



accident. But I think this event would have to be the worst, seeing as I knew the man.

Q:

A. Ten years ago, after the first heart attack, he had a bypass. He had just gotten a Bengal cub and when he got back from hospital he wasn't willing to displace it. In general it's not ideal to have a tiger jumping all over someone has just had major heart surgery. So what he did was build a fence around his couch and T.V and that's his recuperation: in a cage inside his own house looking out at the tiger looking in at him.

I said, "What's wrong with this picture then?"

He thought that was funny as hell.

Q.

A. I said to him he was well on the way to being a regular old cat lady.

"With larger tastes, JW," he says. "With considerable larger tastes."

He never seemed to have any sense of 'Okay, this is too many.' I asked him why he needed that many.

"Because I can," he told me.

He shook his head when he said that, like he knew but didn't know.

Q.

A. Vietnam it was did him in. He wanted you to know he'd been there, came back upset with the army because he'd seen some ugly things in a helicopter. He was a machine gunner with an M60 and did a lot of emergency evacs, which involved dragging bodies and wounded into the chopper. They could only get so many on and he had had to pry the fingers off the metal so they could get off the ground. Never got over that. Like the man said, we might be through with the past, but the

past isn't through with us. He wrestled with the biblical thing too: "I guess I'll never go to heaven because I killed people." He wasn't religious exactly, said how he had all them Baptists to die for his sins anyway. He'd say his philosophy was the same rain falls upon the just and the unjust, but mostly upon the just because the unjust had most likely made off with their umbrellas.

Q.

A. From way back. Back in high school he was always laughing and would be pleasant, smiled a lot, bit of a ladies man. Came back different. One of those never left there. Locals were wary of him, a Second Amendment man, kept wild animals, ran his bike loud, was the type of person you weren't real sure what he would do. I think that was a lot of it. I'm not saying he wasn't reckless. But he had an honest to god heart of gold. Just couldn't keep his brain on the right track.

Q.

A. No one knows the story of him. What I figure is when a man's life explodes in a shower of sparks and shrapnel, those left sort through the remains and see what suits them best, so he's whoever you want him to be now.

## The Dispatch

911

Yeah, my name's Shane Matthews and I'm from Melbourne Australia and I think you're a shower of murdering scumbags. Just saying.

Do you have an emergency, sir?

I'd shoot the lot of you. It's you don't deserve to live.

Please keep this line clear sir. Thank you.

- - - - -

911

Hello? I'm calling from Manchester, England. About what you people did to those poor animals.

### The Doctor

The subject may have suffered from a variety of psychological disorders. The hoarding of objects is a relatively new area of study, and even less is known about the sub-category of animal hoarding. It is probable that a variety of conditions can ultimately result in this pathological behavior. In this case, I'd follow DSM-IV and characterize the behavior as symptomatic of obsessive-compulsive disorder and obsessive-compulsive personality disorder. Since hoarders are typically resistant to psychotherapy and commonly used medications, my professional advice would have been institutionalization or placement under some type of protective care.

### The Journal

[move in utter silence, except the shelly clicking of their claw]

[to causes a feeling of chill despondency and despair]

[opens from ear to ear, with ridges of bone instead of teeth, and the head is so heavy]

[king them useless for defense, although if pursued it can expel its dung a great distance (as much as two acres)]

[red pustules and vomits from its mouth a milky liquid; if this touches any part of the human body i]

[olive complected with short bro]

[as physical sensation, and without a true physical form]

[sensations of this type include vast dark blurs obscure the sky]

[and strange crunching noises whi]

conceive at the mouth and give birth through the ear (though it is the other way  
arou

[so poisonous even its breath]

[opped in half the two parts immed]

[crawls backwards to keep sand out its eyes]

[venom the source of a love-charm and a spell to slow litigation in courts and to  
stop  
fluxes of the womb in]

## **The Spouse**

I loved him so, but I couldn't live with him. At the end, I just couldn't. No one could.  
I had to get away.

Oh, that man. He had such a personality, this charisma. If he'd said to me the moon  
was made of green cheese or that the sun came up in the west I'd have believed it.

I can still see him slouching in our front yard. He didn't look too copacetic standing  
there beside the chickens. He had a ducktail hairstyle then, listened to Fats, Jerry  
Lee, wore Levis, penny loafers, had a leather jacket. He was something.

Daddy was sizing him up. Daddy wore a white short-sleeved shirt, black slacks,  
funny argyle socks. Immovable object.

That blue dress wet glued to my body in the hot sun.

"I don't care," I said. "I'm going to marry him, bad or not."

He told me once he'd rather live a day as a lion than decades as a sheep.

I'd always been a bit of a dreamer, falling in love with movie stars. I was crazy  
about James Dean, had heard the phrase 'falling head over heels' but never  
thought it'd ever happen to me. But he looked at me and smiled all his teeth my  
way and that's what happened. I wanted to sleep in his pocket.

I was a perfectly normal girl until I met him. I was a May queen.

And I loved him more than anything in this world, all his little ways, and then when he came back from there he needed holding, needed protecting.

We never had kids and he wanted kids.

We had the animals.

He wrote me every single day when he was gone. He told me he had befriended a monkey. They lived in a tent near the jungle and it took to coming and hanging out with him. And I think that monkey planted the seed of caring for animals. He took care of it most of the time he was there. He wrote me how it kept him sane.

I don't know what happened to it when he left.

--

Rob McClure Smith's fiction has appeared in *Gettysburg Review*, *Manchester Review*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Barcelona Review*, *StoryQuarterly* and many other literary magazines. A story collection *The Violence* is forthcoming this Fall from Queen's Ferry Press.

# DO YOU PRACTICE ASHTANGA, TOO

Claudia Apablaza (trans. Toshiya Kamei)

I sat at the dining table in my brother and his wife's house. It was New Year's Day. We said goodbye to 2012 and hello to 2013, left behind all the theories about the end of the world, and celebrated that nothing had happened. Then you sat in front of me, I stared into your eyes, and I wanted to ask you, not just you but everyone who sat at the large table that night: Do you practice Ashtanga, too?

I had wanted to ask you that ever since I saw you come in. I felt like asking you if you practiced Ashtanga because of the way you walked, and because of the way the muscles in your body aligned as you sat at the table, long firm muscles, not those balls that pop up when you work out on weight machines at a gym. Not those balls of fat and fiber and muscles that curl up in the bodies of those who don't know what to do with their anger and anguish, and end up keeping it there, in those disgusting balls.

I always admired well-toned bodies. All of us knew that a beautiful body was the reflection of a balanced soul and a fairly pleasant life. That's why I thought only about the one thing. It was the only thing I expected that night. I was hoping to find someone to spend the rest of my life with. Obviously, not only did he have to be someone with no fat or anguish stuck there in gym-built muscles, but also he had to be integral, balanced, and someone who, of course, practiced Ashtanga.

That night I left my brother's home around one-thirty in the morning. The dinner had been most delicious: cheese, whole wheat bread, seeds, and sauces. I would have stayed longer to be with you, but my brother said no, I shouldn't dare, because you were very shy. I asked him right away: Does he practice Ashtanga by any chance? My brother made a face saying *W, what's that?*, turned halfway around, and kept talking to his wife.

Before I left, I said goodbye to you and shyly asked for your phone number, and you too asked for mine. You hesitated, and I felt silly. My brother was in the balcony staring toward other buildings, so he didn't hear us, thank goodness. What would he have thought? Next to his wife, he kept watching people celebrating the New Year with champagne in other cubicles in the air. Those other buildings looked odious. Those cubicles were like illuminated matchboxes, very

high floors with large signs of real estate companies wishing us all a happy new year and brainwashing us into thinking that their matchboxes were spectacular for family life. I suppose none of them practiced Ashtanga. I left the apartment, and in the elevator I fixed my panties. As I reached the hall, I looked at myself in the mirror and retouched the rouge on my lips. I was beautiful.

I reached Plaza Ñuñoa. I was going to walk home, from Manuel de Salas to Bustamante Park, about twenty blocks. I wanted to walk. Maybe on the way I would meet someone who practiced Ashtanga. When I was going down Irarrázaval, I realized that the world would change completely in 2013 if everyone decided to practice Ashtanga. Would it be possible that all of us Chileans practiced Ashtanga in 2013? Maybe everyone was already doing it, but I just hadn't noticed it. Maybe no one had told me about it. Or everyone kept it one of their great secrets. I wasn't telling about it either, because I felt ashamed. But during this walk, from Manuel de Salas to Bustamante, no one seemed to have those fatty muscles in their arms. Maybe all Chileans only ate vegetables, seeds, and low-fat cheese, everyone recycled, and no one consumed ice cream, beer or Coca-Cola. Everyone drank water or wine and ate seeds.

I continued on my path. I was thinking about a man, searching the streets for some man, as I didn't want to spend the night alone. I wanted someone to lift me up in the air like acroyoga or pirouette. Suddenly I started wanting it so badly, and then I ran into a very handsome guy, with beautiful arms, entirely tattooed, and light blue eyes.

Do you practice Ashtanga, too? I asked.

What? he said.

I don't know why now everyone practices Ashtanga, I said. It's strange. I looked at him, but he paid no attention. Then I kept on my way with the attitude I had cultivated in recent days: If a man has no interest in you when you like him or you find him attractive, keep on walking, because the universe has someone else in store for you, so don't insist, don't be stupid. I kept on going. I continued on my path with my new theory on the universe. Then suddenly, my cell phone beeped, notifying me of a text message. It was from you.

Hello. I'm your brother's friend. Would you like to have a drink with me?

OK, where?

Where are you right now?

I'm going down Irarrázaval toward Bustamante.

But how far along are you?

Near Holanda.

Oh, you're right here.

Yes.

Then go back. I'll wait for you at the corner of the plaza.

Which corner?

Northeast.

OK, I'm on my way.

Then I started going back and saw the handsome guy with blue eyes again. Now he didn't even look at me. I kept walking toward where you were. I saw you at the corner. I saw you in the distance and walked toward you. I don't know why, but I glanced at your arms right away. I stared and scanned for tattoos. I didn't find any. I wanted to find one, but I couldn't.

Hello.

Hello.

We started laughing. Both of us found the situation ridiculous. We had seen each other only for a few hours in my brother's place, but we broke the ice right away. You were well balanced and that's why you were laughing. Surely, you practiced Ashtanga.

Were you on your way home? you asked.



No. I just wanted to go for a walk, to see if I would find something around here.

Oh. What kind of thing?

Anything. A posture.

What? A posture? About what?

Well, let's go for a drink, I said. Or do you prefer a party?

I don't go to parties, you said. Smoke bugs me and so do people screaming. The lights at night clubs are disgusting. Besides, people at parties stink. They put on too much perfume on, they reek of cigarettes.

I looked at you. I stared at you. I hated you for a moment. I don't know why, but I was mad at you for a few seconds. I saw your muscles again and found some tattoos, which were beautiful. I wanted to ask you something. Also I imagined you lifting me up with those arms in an acroyoga move. I felt terribly sad. Things were not the way I'd expected. I didn't know how to ask you. I stared at you. I didn't know how to bring it up. My chest hurt. I felt nostalgia. There is nothing like something I want exactly when I want it. I didn't even know how to ask if you would lift me up that night.

I want to ask you, I was going to say. But I didn't.

You looked at me. Maybe you sensed that I wanted to ask you something. Something, I don't know, just anything. I gave you a strange look. I stared at you imagining you lifting me up in various positions to reach together the balance of postures and in the end everything felt sad.

My chest hurt, from my stomach upward. Everyone passed us by for a while. The waiter brought us glasses of water. People shouted, screamed, Happy New Year. They gave thanks as trumpets blasted. The New Year is terrible, I remembered. The cops gave us an evil look, as always, as if we were hiding something, as if we were bothering someone. Would they ever practice Ashtanga, too?

I'd like to ask you something, I was going to tell you. My chest hurt. I felt a weight pressing down on my chest.

Are you going to order something? you asked.

Yes, a glass of white wine. Or, no, a glass of cava. Sparkling wine, sorry. That one, yes. That one, champagne.

OK. I'd like a glass, too, you said.

Listen, the thing is that I was looking at your arms and wanted to ask you something.

Oh, tattoos...! I got them some time ago. A few years back. Look at this... And this... And this... And this...

OK. OK. But, besides that... Ehhh, I wanted to know if.... Do you practice some regimen?

What do you mean?

I want to know if you do something with your body.

Ah, no.

You don't? I don't believe you. You're lying to me.

I don't know what you mean...

I mean, your arms are very long and sinewy. You're lying to me. What do you mean you don't practice anything?

Hey, why are you asking me? I don't get it...

Forget it. I just wanted to know, but... Just tell me the truth.

OK, yes, I'm telling the truth: I don't practice anything. Why?

I stood up, grabbed my glass of water, gulped it down. Ciao, I said before banging the empty glass on the table. You remained there, looking dumb, serious, I don't know. Maybe you thought I was a fakir. Everyone thinks so at some point. You just made a stupid face, nothing more. You raised your arms as if asking for an explanation, but it was too late. I was gone. I don't know if you were lying to me or you were an idiot who didn't really practice Ashtanga. Most likely you were an

idiot. I hated you at the moment. Why weren't you going to practice Ashtanga if everyone was doing it? Why weren't you doing it?

My chest hurt when I looked at you for the last time.

I started to walk. You had let me down even before we got to know each other. I thought you were very stupid. Why didn't you practice it? You stupid idiot.

I kept walking down Irarrázaval. One, two, six, twenty blocks. Sorrow faded away as I walked, so did fear. Pedro de Valdivia, Antonio Varas, Manuel Montt, Infante, etc., etc. I didn't give a fuck if I had to be alone for one more year. You stupid, stupid idiot, I kept saying as I walked. You stupid, stupid idiot.

I arrived home, tired. I had trouble finding the keyhole. It was always difficult. I had one of those security doors with locks that moved from one side to the other, which were confusing. I managed to get inside. I threw my purse on the chair, washed my hands with soap, dried them, took off my shoes, peed, turned on the shower, put my feet in the water, washed them, dried them, put on my pajamas, and crawled into bed. The tightness in my chest was gone. My bed always protected me.

I turned on the TV. I flipped from one channel to another... Everyone did Ashtanga on TV. No one was shrieking or hawking matchbox houses. On every channel everyone did Ashtanga. They assumed more exaggerated postures each time. Then I went to bed. I dreamed about yoga positions. I dreamed about extensions of the body. I dreamed about a long beautiful body. Heads on shoulders. Knees behind arms. Contortions. The flexibility of the mind placed there, in its totality. Legs put one over the other. In my dreams everyone did Ashtanga, various contortions, legs over heads. They had hearts and minds open, which showed in their bodies: heads set over fingers, fingers placed on backs. Sadness was fleeing far away, just like that, with the body contorted. When I woke up, the same thing happened. It was great to see something like this. The body controlling emotions. Lovely. I opened the balcony window and let in some fresh air. The bodies in other buildings had functioned as air purifiers all night. The bent body purifies the air, my instructor said. My neighbors were quiet inside their homes. I looked toward their windows. They were all there, looking gorgeous. Everyone was flexible in mind and body. My neighbors were inside their homes with their windows open and the curtains pulled back. Everyone practiced postures, hands, legs, fingers, and forehead. They looked beautiful. Everyone did Ashtanga. We all did Ashtanga. We breathed a new air. At last.

--

Claudia Apablaza is an award-winning Chilean writer. Her books include *Siempre te creíste la Virginia Woolf*, *Goo y el amor*, and *Todos piensan que soy un faquir*. Translations of her fiction have appeared or are forthcoming in *Gargoyle*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, and *St. Petersburg Review*. Her story "I Think I Made You Up Inside My Head" has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Toshiya Kamei holds an MFA in Literary Translation from the University of Arkansas. His translations include Liliana Blum's *The Curse of Eve and Other Stories*, Naoko Awa's *The Fox's Window and Other Stories*, Espido Freire's *Irlanda*, and Selfa Chew's *Silent Herons*. Other translations have appeared in *The Global Game*, *Sudden Fiction Latino*, and *My Mother She Killed Me, My Father He Ate Me*.

# CRANE GAME

John Thornton Williams

See, the problem with the Crane Game was that the claw was basically impotent. Vern mashed the button, and the claw dropped and rested limp on the pile of stuffed animals. Then the claw retracted before the pincers began to pinch. That wasn't how a real crane worked. Vern knew that.

Vern operated a real crane. Last year, *The Birmingham Metro* had voted Landry's Construction "Best Bang for Your Buck!" For the most part, Vern's job was raising crossbeams to upper stories. He had a battery-powered fan suction-cupped to his crane's windshield. He wore an FM headset that usually picked up Braves games without too much static. When the opportunity presented itself, he'd attach a wrecking ball and hop on a demo crew for a little extra under-the-table coin. But that opportunity had presented itself rarely as of late.

Now, in the lobby of the Piggly Wiggly, Vern worked the Crane Game joystick, his daughter's forehead squashed against the case. Her breath fogged up the glass. She was ten years old.

"Fuck, Dad," Maddie said. "You were really close that time."

"Honey, don't say fuck."

"Shit, Dad. That time you almost had it."

"Don't say shit, either. How about crap?"

"Crap, Dad. That time was so fucking close."

"Sweetie."

Vern worked his tongue around the corner of his mouth. He squeezed the joystick, his dry knuckles bulging around the smooth plastic. The *release* button blinked red. He pressed it. The claw dropped square onto the head of a purple ladybug—the one Maddie was ogling. Vern held his breath. The claw began to clasp, but before it took any purchase on the stuffed animal, it started to rise. It opened over

the chute, releasing empty air.

Vern flattened his hand against the glass. He drew another wrinkled dollar from his pocket and ironed it against the edge of the case. The machine ate it up, and the gears began to turn.

Today was Sunday. Vern had just gone to church with Maddie and her mother. They'd gone to one of those mega-churches with a rock band up front and plasma screens everywhere, everyone wearing T-shirts with Bible verses on them. Things hadn't gone well. This was not good, especially considering he had forgotten Maddie's karate promotion last week.

Vern rarely went to church with Maddie and Shawna, even before the divorce. Staring another workweek in its face, Sundays he'd kept to himself. Now he spent them almost exclusively on the sofa in his underwear, football on the boob tube, remote tucked into his waistband. Depending on the state of his hangover, he sometimes took his Cheerios with High Life instead of milk.

This morning, as badly as he'd wanted to see his daughter—Vern sensed that Shawna was trying to keep Maddie from him, though she swore otherwise—he found himself longing for his cool, dark living room as he drove across the church's sprawling campus. He parked behind the man-made pond, beneath the half-ton sign with the hulking digital display, missing all the while the comfort of his threadbare couch—how well it held his shape.

In the worship hall, the Botoxed pastor had kissed Vern's ex-wife on the cheek. He practically crushed Vern's hand when he shook it, a stupid, toothy grin plastered across his face, then zipped across the aisle to hug a woman in a wheelchair. Vern responded by sulking. He made a show of not closing his eyes when it was time to pray. When they took communion, he went ahead and ate his cracker and drank his juice without waiting.

Maddie and Shawna hadn't said much while they ate hotdogs afterward at Sonic. Vern started to feel like he should've made a better effort.

After the hotdogs, he'd taken Maddie to Piggly Wiggly to pick out her favorite gum. Now Shawna was waiting in the parking lot, where the October air was turning sharp. Now Vern was playing the Crane Game.

He tried again and failed. This time the ladybug shifted deeper into the pile of

stuffed animals.

“Are real cranes this hard?” Maddie asked.

“Well. They’re different.”

Vern could’ve just bought Maddie a purple ladybug. He considered how easily he could break the glass case. He might rip that fucking claw from its flimsy rigging, sparks flying from the machine, and they’d grab as many stuffed animals as they could carry and run through the lobby’s sliding doors. But then it would be over. Someone would catch them eventually—there were cameras—and Shawna would take Maddie home. He’d never see them again. Still, for a moment Vern let himself wonder how far he and Maddie could get.

He thumbed a twenty from his billfold. “Why don’t you ask that lady at the register for change?”

“You’ll wait until I get back to play, right?”

“You bet.”

Vern watched his daughter skip across the store. He watched her little mouth form soundless words as she looked up to a woman leaning against the counter. His daughter, with the foul mouth. As she bounded back across the lobby with a wad of bills in her hand, she seemed to Vern so perfect, so pure. He allowed himself to wonder which parts of her he might have contributed.

She retook her place at his side and leaned against the glass, her eyes wide as the crane began to move. One day, Vern knew, Maddie would come to understand that the game was rigged. There was no way for Vern or even Maddie to win the ladybug. But Maddie didn’t know that yet, and Vern wanted to keep it from her as long he could. So he went on feeding his lottery change, his beer allowance, his lunch money—dollar by dollar—into the Crane Game.

Every time someone left the store, a woman’s voice sounded over a speakerbox. *Goodbye*, it said, cheerful as could be. But somehow, now, the sliding door had gotten stuck. A breeze from the parking lot blew dead leaves into the lobby. They scuttled loose circles, lifting and liting and always coming back down, their brittle edges ticking against the tile. Maddie turned from the Crane Game to watch, and that voice kept sounding: *goodbye, goodbye, goodbye, goodbye.*

--

John Thornton Williams is a recipient of *Glimmer Train's* New Writer Award and the Tennessee Williams Scholarship to attend the Sewanee Writers' Conference. His fiction is forthcoming in *Glimmer Train* and has recently appeared in *Story*, *Witness*, *Joyland*, and *The Masters Review*. He is an MFA candidate at the University of Wyoming.



# THREE POEMS

Taylor Daynes

## TWIN LANGUAGE

A hematoma is a blood field. A meadow that has a fence is a blood yard. What is a blood yard but a test-field for our toleration of other types? The neat blood of meters and the odd blood of English. The blood in the basin and blood spillage and terrorists. Blood drones and red queens. Clubs. Cups. My stars. A water foot. Twelve. Long lost bodies and their missing bloods.

My brain, too, and it as an enclosure similar to a sun, fusing a private energy to outlast, be out last and still outlast the corpses in the statued field, the blood then maggot blood long since vapor—outlasting in my unnumbered black plane.

The only bother was my big chest blackening like a melanoma is a reminder that the sun is poison.

I can't tell the difference (can you?) between a beautiful woman and the foreshadow of annihilation. I can't tell the difference between a drone and a berry. I want to eat them both. I hate the stickiness but I love its sweet burn.

I can't tell the difference between my own love and my own brain. I can't tell the difference between a penis and a broken heart. Likewise with my hormones and my heart.

There are things like faith I understand but can't explain. For this reason, they seem equally to belong to everyone, so I give mine away to

whoever is greediest.

I perceive the fence at the edge of the meadow,  
and you are claiming it is not there. I perceive that  
my body is my own fence. I perceive am full of  
fear.

I walk the world the picture of complaint—I walk  
in this barbed dress. You do not recognize nuns  
when you see us. My sisters and I are singular. And  
we have no claim on authority but our voices. We  
are abandoned mistresses. Nobody believes us  
because we can't talk lines. We can't talk lines. We  
jazz in a world hot on emoji. I, we, are angry at you.  
Why, dear God, why, can't I follow?

And God replies: take a vacation from fear.  
Swallow the pills no one prescribed. They were a  
gift from your mother. Vacation is a construction  
of capital. Trip, take a trip. Evacuate your little  
fiefdom and tell a penis of your love.

This is a poem to the world out there. Stop having  
opinions. Stop needing order. I am also a  
frequency, a frantic trough, an energetic seizure.  
Where to go but deeper?

I am telling you, my friends, there is something  
lovely in your desire to connect. I know I am a hard  
case. I don't want to be forgotten. My silence, it is  
a kind of gravity.

Depressives who dream with their country of  
cancer. This need to hold every tragedy between  
my lips. Pluck the drone like a berry and feel its  
awful sting down my throat. Vomit up the  
anonymous massacre. That's one practice. I wish I  
could understand it. It's this barbed dress. It's this  
fearfulness. It's you, outside, it's you. I am so  
jealous of your fluent energy.

Sun, star, blackhole. I am the gravity inwardly  
collapsing. I am a twin-language spoken in silence  
with myself. I am a sister with no sister. My sweet  
big brother. Keep me from falling upward with  
your mass. Keep me from smudging the ceiling  
glass.

## IN POSITION

: Fact God holds all the rumor : me all that :

Her twisted brilliance her intellectual stutter

(a sign : tiny brain stars crippling

mind-constellatory arrangements!)

All that I gave : the universe All that there collected :

A sacred mill : gossip I grew

so tired : being grist : others' Eyes :

being abnormal : a double-headed copper Minted I :

Tire : having so and doing so

little I wanted a leader and Jesus was that man

He was the only One : understand

how great I was The only one who believed

I was not the sum : my skin

His Finger : my scar that mirrors his

That is what I is

## PRAXIS

Cloistered women of the 13th century invented  
a *sacré-cœur*, the Christ-vision in which  
he braces a dripping sword between two mounds  
that are the right and left atria  
of the upper heart. The mutual piercing  
of spirit and flesh brings about an ineffable pleasure  
that emanates from the core and infiltrates  
the blood. These holy women likewise  
located orgasm at the center  
of their body, though I do not know  
if celibate sex enters by other cavities  
than the opening through which  
you have penetrated me.  
I do not know how we've come together  
or where or even if.

--

Taylor Daynes grew up in Wenham, Massachusetts. She holds an MA in Religion, and completed her MFA at Johns Hopkins in 2015. Her poetry has appeared most recently in *Sixth Finch* and *Incessant Pipe*. She lives in Baltimore.

# TWO POEMS

Carolann Madden

## IN THE GREAT BASIN

I saw

in the sliver-moon's  
half light

the cactus  
of his body

planted deep

in the desert  
washed white

by the gypsum  
I walked steep

steps down canyons

round boulders  
and dug it out

by the root  
took it home

took it

to bed  
I didn't care

if my skin scarred  
from its spines

I wanted it so

I took it home.

## YOU GET ONE PLUM HEART

you get one  
plum heart  
one long  
diaphanous  
breath at death  
one first  
bowl of camellias  
one hottest cup  
of Moroccan mint  
one pull off  
grandmother's  
cigarette one  
last hit with  
a closed fist  
you get one  
best winter  
soup one best  
ocean day one  
night of watching  
burning paper  
lanterns float  
high in prayer  
for your sister  
you get one first  
one last one beloved  
blanket handmade  
for your birthday  
by a girl you  
once loved you  
get one finger  
tracing your clavicle  
in the Cloisters  
you get one perfect  
goodbye in

the Cloisters  
but you get  
as many husbands  
as you need

--

Carolann Madden is a Navy brat who grew up primarily in the San Francisco Bay Area and the Texas Panhandle. Her work has appeared, or is forthcoming, in *Town Creek Poetry*, *Cactus Heart*, *Women in Clothes* (Penguin, 2014), *Souvenir*, and elsewhere. She obsessed with languages, is a PhD candidate at the University of Houston, and is a co-founding editor for [Locked Horn Press](#).

# TWO POEMS

Grace Shuyi Liew

## CARRY

If there is a plea, there is a white man kneeling, neck exposed to prayer. His hands are folded at his lap. He wants the sounds in his head to inhabit one, two, three, four, ... bodies, each a vehement replica of the previous, ad smooth infinitum. He confesses he owns you. Says your tail was molded after the ease of his walk, your reek the breaths he expels.

He instructs you to stretch your arm out ahead of you. He instructs you to slowly bend each finger. He instructs you to watch every quiver. He watches you remember the mark of your own construction, of having been made so.

## DISSIMILATION

They grew up sharing  
a tail

whose soft unworn end could cut a



sharp line across the  
smallest winds.

With the years they fell, tail first

Down a captive country netting loosed faces  
Two pairs of hands sewn to two pairs of cheeks

really just another myth-made victim miring  
among indigo clouds

another sand angel flailing the white desert

\*

After years, months, days of assurances pouring in  
from all over the realms the sisters  
finally embrace their nationlessness / The crassness of  
discussing nations must have left a mark she and she  
has to bear / on any given face /  
soft addiction hemmed inside  
sworn fantasies

Some have said ashes to white ashes

Some have revealed the realizations of foreign women

The fissured coats she drapes  
over  
Her sister's stitched body / billow like weak  
Emblems

\*

Before long the sisters learned  
the privilege of sucking on a single, lucid name

Mouth on mouth.

Misty vapor  
gathered around their snaked bodies,  
snaked tails, the world's first

Wild blue matrimony. Outwardly,

there is nothing  
obviously fecund about their tail

Carrying all the life to come

All the life to be decided

at a later date or strewn  
the way conscience  
releases itself from bough to  
white bough as a

Wild thing uncoiled

--

“Carry” and “Dissimilation” are parts of a chapbook that won Ahsahta Press’s 2015 Chapbook Contest, forthcoming soon.

Grace Shuyi Liew’s next project is on spaces. Her work has appeared or will appear elsewhere in *PANK*, *Bone Bouquet*, *West Branch*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Twelfth House*, *H-ngm-n*, and more. She is from Malaysia.

## TWO POEMS

Brandon Shimoda

### A GIANT ASLEEP IN FORTUNE'S SPINDLE

The child immigrant has a parasite  
 The child immigrant cannot travel  
 The child immigrant was going to travel  
 The ocean parasite  
 A small nerve weaving proofs  
 Through purpling organs  
 Delight The child immigrant pulled out  
 Inspiration, I thought  
 The oceans I am  
 Going to travel  
 The ocean together  
 For the parasite's homebody  
 The child immigrant drinks the ocean  
 Not that banishment would be the price of satisfaction  
 Small nerve implantation  
 House is burning House was already burning  
 The moment I left I recognized nothing  
 Does that mean to the ground? Burning, burning  
 Mirror-like salutations before the future  
 I will reach and pass into  
 Refraction of burning  
 Hosts consummating

I must be a child, there must be a boat  
 I must be a child getting on a boat  
 The sun must shine, must it be the sun?  
 There must be a home a parasite shines  
 Circles about and out of my head  
 Flooding circles out of my head over the ocean  
 Shadows of circles out of my head over the ocean  
 On the shadow of my head moving over the ocean

## A GIANT ASLEEP IN FORTUNE'S SPINDLE

In the morning I buy pineapple  
The first relief  
I feel coming again  
When I get home, there are five pineapples  
Shame. I am ninety. I stay away  
With pineapple on the sand

A uniform comes along. I put it on  
There's no blood standard as the moon  
Downcast in purple water  
Want to live inside my shoulder?  
Demure between us  
Pineapple's fetus

I stick my fingers in the fleshes  
Heartier than mine, though what's the smell?  
Pineapple soaked in petrol sun  
And salt to set the table  
Legs swinging underneath are more than  
Heat off the convulsion

I look at my breasts in the mirror  
My breasts belong to father's mother, mother's to great-grandmother  
Brother's hair belongs to father  
He gets the hair, I get the breasts  
Does that mean I have to have a granddaughter  
For these breasts to be my own?

--

Brandon Shimoda is in between—ages, books, countries, houses, people, places ...  
His book *Evening Oracle*—poems written in Japan, plus excerpts from letters  
to/from family and friends—is new this Fall from Letter Machine Editions.

# CHARACTER LIMITS

Tyler Gobble

The twittering is one spiritual mishap    In my throat  
     I blurt a liquid    post-beer gulp before the guttural  
 arrives solid    hunked like a horse's butt    like heat  
     escaping the crust of the pan    Here the floating  
 questions are validated urgent    What is under consideration  
     is that limited character is that beep-boop investigation  
 into it as reaction    as the throat embodying the whole  
     like a cake brimmed with blood  
     There are points where spillage is something  
     There are points in every click & blurt  
     There are points along every fragmentary axis  
 cataloging the dinner    sketching the renderings  
     It is never a layer in    & then pause    Another layer future  
 tensed & tumbled    tumbling & we cross    fields of meaning  
     We elaborate hoaxes & jokes    cups of hot chocolate after the snow  
     We multiply the means of family making    the meaning of making a farm  
     We embed fissures into the key    We cross fields of horses  
 Excuses for a poor showing    include geographical estrangement  
     meager access to fresh fruit    & high quality accounts of abuse elsewhere  
 as in baffling practices    like faith, marriage, etc.  
     The scientist says    these are vibrations    of tending the lot  
 Blah-blah    What if I am the notion    of the midst    of the missed  
     A fully entrenched rendering    of living beyond discretization  
     A list of what you won't find    among the digital blur  
 The beginning & the ingredients exiting their union  
 The meaning of becoming a historical objection  
 The feeling of grappling hooks & meat cleavers  
 The shining of the lunch counter  
 The physical manifestation of "to unravel"  
 The gesturing of every gesture from the rogue to the moon  
 The beginning of erosion & accretion  
     i.e. this makes the Opposite the It  
 Note to node to pressure to again to gesture  
     & from Minnesota comes vegan cookies

from Florida the vigilante wends through the rhythmic  
excess with his cat    In Carolina we enter  
in any several directions    a body ruptured first & further  
an explosion of tongues    In Texas a fluctuating nerve  
From Oregon we learn    how to say legality    without demonizing  
what is important    about eggs  
    The meaning as tending a timeline's trajectory  
    The meaning as roaming  
    The meaning as the care-giver way over here  
    The meaning as the clear maroon hat in an otherwise fuzzy photo  
& in time    we are the oddly conjoined construction site  
    Time is shot over the disrupted sidewalks  
Perhaps it reaches the dilated moon    each of us    the circulatory spaces  
    & it is the meaning one translates    the statuses    the states  
The potential is the here

--

Tyler Gobble is the host of Everything Is Bigger, a reading series in Austin, TX. He is currently a poetry fellow at the Michener Center for Writers. He has plopped out a chunk of chapbooks, and his first full-length collection, [MORE WRECK](#) [MORE WRECK](#), is available from Coconut Books. He likes disc golf, sleeveless shirts, porches, and bacon.

# FROM 'YOU'VE GOT A PRETTY HELLMOUTH'

Michael Sikkema

Are we the last  
one standing? Is  
there room in  
that car? Is that our  
blood? There are only  
two reasons to be in  
these woods and I want  
to fuck them

\*

I'll die right after  
the first joke, the second  
jump-scare. I'll die all  
the way through

\*



The flat tire. The distant  
window light. The upskirt  
with panicked breathing  
The empty train car  
The cabin porch after hours  
of walking. The warehouse  
party pitch black. The deserted  
whatever

\*

To walk away alive, burn  
it down. Don't mind  
the frame. Breathe. Burn it  
down. Don't  
wait around to scatter ashes

\*

All the expected plot  
twists assure that we're  
the killer again, the detective  
tracking ourselves up  
the mountain, into the ghoul  
forest, away from the street  
lights, out past cell reception  
Probably our skirt is torn  
the camera angle's soft  
dominance, probably  
we're white as money, we're  
understood as food

\*

Cicada synth. Rusted  
hinge. Floor creak. Engine  
stutter. Steel roof rain  
Your own teeth. Your  
own heartbeat. Someone  
else's too shallow  
breathing. All  
the warnings on  
a tight loop

\*

Are we  
still alive? The fault  
lines and our  
weak punches. Our  
savior, transparent  
albino-bright, 3-pieced  
blue-toothed, buying  
out the ground from  
underneath  
the killer  
Bugs Bunny style

\*

We're running through  
the fog where space is  
a woman where we are  
knives cocks sticks axes

hands burst through  
the stitches the slits in  
light stuck again stuck  
like the camera is  
a sewing machine

\*

You think  
the daylight's different  
but bleed the same. A  
better shot of the sexy  
grave. Tourists  
flock around  
decorative holes

--

Michael Sikkema is the author of 3 full length collections of poetry, *Futuring*, *January Found* (Blazevox Press), and *May Apple Deep* (Trembling Pillow Press). He's also written several chapbooks and collaborative chapbooks, most recently *Time Missing* from Grey Book Press. He is the editor of Shirt Pocket Press. He believes in you and enjoys correspondence at [Michael.Sikkema@gmail.com](mailto:Michael.Sikkema@gmail.com).

# THE BOOK OF REPULSIVE WOMEN

Carrie Lorig

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There is a Devil inside me  
There is a Flower inside me

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He got Love \*\*\*\*\*

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Blood and rags /\*\*\*

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She filmed them \*\*\*\*\*

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\*\*\*\*\*There is a Devil inside me

\*\*\*\*\*There is a Flower inside me

She filmed them\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*\*burning

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in the snow\*\*\*\*\*

with their arms up\*\*

*Corpse A*

For you though they Took you they hurled you

Out of space

Half strangled In yrLace You'd lip the world to madness

On yrFace Plunging grandly out See you sagging down

with bulging Hair to sip Plunging grandly out To fall on

yrRip yrGrip To fall on yrFace / yrBelly bulging Stately

Into space

*Corpse B*

*For you though they Took you* B wrote me a letter asking me if I had any poems with the word corpse in Them *they hurled you Out of space* I thought to myself, Don't I? Haven't I seen / corpses Many horse corpses / when I wrked at the barn / Dead from Colic *Half strangled In yrLace* The delicacy of the horse The delicacy of the dying body is the corpse / but isn't the corpse I keep thinking / of Hiromi Ito's *Wild Grass on the Riverbank* when it goes, "Mother said, / 'A growing, laughing, living body' / Mother repeated, / 'A growing, laughing, living body'" When I read this or heard this I was immediately struck by These Chiseled Moon by the thought that This is a corpse This is the inexplicable movement of a corpse *Half strangled In yrLace You'd lip the world to madness On yrFace* What is a fucking girl, Djuna, What is anger, Djuna, to a fucking girl in a girl's corpse body How is anger a BLKSEED a BLKC a BLKSEIZE ripening glistening fluttering in the fire / tissue / script of the corpse's spreadgirl body, Djuna, *Plunging* I bought your book made of construction paper *Plunging grandly* I bought The Book of Repulsive Women, Djuna, I felt it choose me *Plunging grandly out To fall on* The book that chose me and a Thunderstorm To fall on *yrRip yrGrip To fall* and I read the last poem in yr book / The BLKSEED some powder or color on my Fingers / The last poem in a BLKC of Women Dying Women in New York City They hurl They See you *sagging down with bulging Hair to sip* The last poem, "Suicide," possesses a movement from Corpse A to Corpse B a movement which Sees you *sagging down with bulging Hair to sip* a movement which Chooses you / Sees you *yrBelly bulging Stately Into space* And I know that the corpse is rupture the corpse is rupture I am a corpse a corpse's spreadgirl body a girl's corpse body when on St. Patrick's Day a group of white college men demand that N kiss me for them / that he take me home and fuck me for them / *For you though they Took you* because I am just an unrecognizable instance *they hurled you Out of space Half strangled in yrLace* A nightmare / grown suddenly real but only / to myself *See you sagging down with*

*bulging Hair to sip* How lonely Driving myself On the way home The corpse The Rag and Bone felt until it went / into a Panic Attack How lonely It shredded itself into the BLKC *You'd lip the world to madness on yrFace* *Plunging grandly out To fall on yrRip yrGrip To fall on yrFace* C (who is currently in California) explains what it means to understand exactly what is happening / how that is the corpse's powerful capability That rupture The deaths of those disappeared and murdered by the State / and the bodies of those still living / but forced into silence, or those who must bear the weight of testimony by the fact of being survivors *yrFace / yrBelly bulging Stately Into space* Or, when the poems were thrown overboard, the corpse could finally identify the senseless brutality all around it It was much worse than a nightmare, it was real In that moment the corpse sees how endless that realness is to become Through the corpse's growing, laughing, living body the book never ends The book can only start again and again The Book of Repulsive Women The Song of Our Disappeared Love and that is only revealed in the rupture *yrBelly bulging Stately Into space* The immutable bulging The speakinggore that comes from beyond The Devil inside me The Flower inside me The spreadinggirl or the bit of contact filling me unwrapping my mouth\* with An Offering my mouth with A Horror

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Art - Hosted by No Wave Performance Task Force

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\*\*\*\*\* \*\*There's a Devil inside

me There's a Flower inside me There's a Devil inside me There's

a Flower inside me //// She does not kneel low to confess A little conscience no

distress

*Corpse A*

A loved bad word And those who have  
their blooms in jars Over-hearts

left oozing Even vases in the making are uncouth Yet some wonderous thing within  
the mess Was held in cheek / The site of decimation / We've worshipped you a little  
more than Christ What turn of body What turn of body You pay her price and  
wonder

why you need her still And those who have  
their blooms in jars Over-hearts

left oozing What turn of body You pay her price and wonder why you need her  
Still /

She does not kneel low to confess / It means her powers slip away / It means she  
draws

back Even vases in the making are uncouth What turn of body What rag of wrong  
It means her powers slip away / their blooms in jars Over-hearts left oozing And  
you

we valued still a little more than Christ

*Corpse B*

There are these flashes / These This female sentence-ing /

These flashes that cover the lawn don't shelter,  
Lily Briscoe says / inside the waves / inside the sick  
or murmuring white / around Woolf's lighthouse<sup>1</sup>  
The Unpredictable Pattern The Volatile Faults  
/ wavering in the gauze in the entire ocean contracting  
around What turn of body What turn of body /

Oh, I say, looking at the flower inside Woolf's bleeding ghost,  
/ I read that wrong I blurted out an interpretation contracting around / *Blooms in jars*  
*Over-hearts left oozing* What Lily / the Painter / describes Today or a Million Years  
ago

while imagining the table up in the tree like a cheek or a Crown  
while imagining the vacant cross with countless bleeding  
bodies contracting around it or *some wondrous thing within the mess* /

is what it feels like to have to  
"take shelter from the reverence  
which covers all women"

Lily / the Painter / She continues / is the waves / these  
flashes / *The site of decimation* Love has a thousand shapes contracting around the  
vacant cross that covers the lawn The cross that covers the lawn doesn't shelter *And*  
*you we worshipped a little more than Christ* Oh, you look like a moaning star  
contracting around the entire darkness I think / while listening / to Lily speak from  
The Flower inside me The Devil inside me *She does not kneel low to confess*

"Let him gaze; she would steal a look at  
her picture. She could have wept. It was  
bad, it was bad, it was infinitely bad!"

I read Lily as she continues / as she is the waves and immediately think of Ariana Reines I look up the quote / the Hunted Body I'm thinking of and it's so much closer to Lily / The Flower The Care Package Corpse A The Fish Moon The Hunted Body Corpse B *What rag of wrong* / This poem called \*\*\*\*\*Hagstar\*\*\*\*\* than I ever could imagine

"I want to say something about bad writing.

I'm proud of my bad writing.

Everyone is so intelligent lately, and stylish. / Fucking great.

I am proud of Philip Guston's bad painting,

I am proud of Baudelaire's mama's boy goo goo misery.

Sometimes the lurid or shitty means having a heart, which is something you have to try to have.

Excellence nowadays is too general and available to be worth prizing:

I am interested in people who have to find strange and horrible ways to just get from point a to point b."

*Lily continues from the flower inside Ariana Reines' bleeding ghost / She does not kneel low to confess* She continues having found the strange and horrible ways to get to her vision / It's twisted through the hole / contracts around / her indisputably

"She could have done it differently of course;

the colour could have been thinned and faded;  
the shapes etherealised;  
that was how Paunceforte would have seen it.

But then she did not see it like that.

But *It means her powers slip away / their blooms in jars Over-hearts left oozing*

She saw the colour burning on a framework of steel;

the light of a butterfly's wings lying on the arches of a cathedral"

*You pay her price and wonder why you need her  
Still You pay her price and wonder why you need her  
Still You pay her price and wonder why you need her  
Still You pay her price and wonder why you need her  
Still You pay her price and wonder why you need her  
Still*

I sit in the classroom and listen to us talk about Virginia Woolf / the flower inside her  
 bleeding ghost / the murmuring sick gently washing around the Lighthouse / the  
 Lighthouse which is the opposite<sup>2</sup> of Lily's vision / The Lighthouse which is so far  
 from her / It is enveloped inside her / She contracts around A Literature So Polluted /  
 I think when I sit in the classroom / trembling with excitement / with the realization  
 or notes that are / an incredible texture / of discussion / I sit in the classroom  
 trembling with the realization that maybe I have no idea what I'm doing / writing  
 about these women writing / I sit in the classroom trembling with the realization that  
 my experience of reading Woolf / of reading Djuna's The Book of Repulsive Women /  
 a book I read she Hated / is not touching a Still woman in the portrait / My experience  
 of reading Woolf / of reading Djuna's The Book of Repulsive Women / is touching a  
 bleeding ghost The Flower inside me The Devil inside me / Ana Mendiata collapsed in  
 her blood on the pavement below / No One Knows How She Got There / Only That  
 She Screamed / She Screamed The Entire Outline Of Her Own Body A loved bad  
 word/ Oh, you look like a moaning star I think when I sit in the classroom and feel Lily  
 or Ana painting / their bodies contracting around the entire darkness The energy of  
 falling /into a spell This one particular life The outline of its body tracking Charles  
 Tansley or Carl Andre when they are remembered multiple times in the story in To  
 The Lighthouse for saying, Women Can't Write, Women Can't Paint, but Woolf never  
 actually lets Charles Tansley say it / She only lets Lily / Ana / The Painter remember it  
 being said / It is enveloped inside her when she says,

"Women can't write, women can't paint—what did it matter coming from him,  
 since clearly it was not true to him but for some reason helpful to him,

and that was why he said it." *And you*

*we valued still a little more than Christ* Today or a Million Years ago Love has a  
 thousand shapes contracting around the vacant cross that covers the lawn The cross  
 that

covers the lawn doesn't shelter Love has countless bleeding bodies contracting  
 around it

The body that writes / that contracts the bodies of writing

It must become Dirty too / I am Dirty and Bleeding

Dirty Critic Dirty Critic Dirty Critic Dirty Critic

Dirty Critic Dirty Critic Dirty Critic Dirty Critic

Dirty Critic Dirty Critic

Dirty Critic Dirty Critic in Love with the countless bleeding bodies

She contracts around An Art So Polluted / She filmed them burning / in the snow / with  
 their arms up / She filmed them burning / the outlines of her body / in the snow / with

their arms up

—

1. “But how long do they leave men / on the lighthouse?’ she asked. He told her. He was amazingly well informed.” *To The Lighthouse* ^

2. “I believe that all novels begin with an old lady in the corner opposite,” says Woolf when she speaks in “Mr Bennett and M Brown.” ^

Carrie Lorig is the author of *The Pulp vs. The Throne* (Artifice Books), which is her first full-length work. Her chapbooks include *nods*. (Magic Helicopter), *Reading as a Wildflower Activist* (H\_NGM\_N), *stonepoems* (with Sara Woods, Solar Luxuriance), and *Labor Day* (with Nick Sturm, Forklift Ohio).