Nexus

Journal of literature and art

Volume 44  Issue 1
LETTER TO THE READER

We hope you enjoy the new layout and design of NEXUS. It is our wish to bring you a journal that is crisp and readable, a design that is understated and promotes the works contained within without overwhelming them.

Setting out on this particular issue, we did not have a specific theme in mind. We were simply looking to collect a group of works that moved us, whether intellectually or emotionally. However, as will always be the case, images recur, moods repeat, patterns emerge.

The photography included in this issue is especially formal and presents the world quite literally in patterns, whether patterns of light and dark, or patterns of texture and line. But these patterns themselves create distinct tones; tones that can be seen in much of the poetry and prose included.

Photographs and images of the past appear to haunt many of our contributing writers. The ethereal, ephemeral moment seems a central motif in this issue. Perhaps in reading, some important memory will be jogged and you will be as moved by these works as we were.

Sincerely,
The NEXUS staff

Editor: Michael Ward
Assistant Editor: J. Ashley McGinley
Copy Editor: Michael Gray
Design Consultant/Content Editor: Angela Bates
Cover Design by Jacinda Bridger and Angela Bates

SUBMISSIONS

Nexus publishes poetry, short stories, flash fiction, novel excerpts (that can stand on their own), memoirs, photography, graphic prints, drawings, digital art, and paintings. Each piece is evaluated for its effectiveness in style, detail, mood, and content. We neither endorse nor prohibit any particular genre or stylistic approach.

Each submission should include a cover letter with a brief biographical statement and the following contact information: artist’s name, address, e-mail address, and telephone number. Please note that we do not return submissions.

Submit!
Nexus
016 Student Union
Wright State University
Dayton, OH 45435
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WHAT A FRAGMENT IS

You ask me how I could get through high school.
Without learning what a fragment is.
Go east. Across the foul-smelling river.
To where the refineries belch and defecate.
Passed the boarded-up Dollar Store
on the corner where kids go get high.
Passed the greasy windows of Al’s Bar and Grille
Go north a block and turn left. Passed the houses slouched on
their lots
like tired whores and used-up crack heads.
That joyless-looking sagging building with three busted-out
windows?
With them ragged shrugs? That one there. Where you got a B
by showing up most days, and A for staying awake.
That’s my school. Where we went. With our broken lives.
Where I never did catch on. To what
a fragment is.
TAPS

As three volleys poke a hole
in the chill still air, birds are startled
from the trees. A fatherless infant’s wail
can be heard above the assault.
With practiced precision,
the flag is folded-
patted flat-
presented to the widow.
Her head snaps
forward like a spent
flower broken from its stem.
The notes of Taps shriek
from a bugle, grazing the ears like raw wounds.
He would have been twenty-three
next week.

GETTING OVER HIM

Don’t change the litter box for two days
(Trust me on this one).

Wait until you emerge intact
for some trial by fire or other,
say,
attending solo your twentieth high school reunion
or undergoing a colonoscopy
or, if you have a really strong stomach,
trying on swimsuits in the mall.

Step into your new layer of thick skin.

Prepare a stiff cocktail. Swallow.
Repeat.
Repeat.
Repeat.
(That’s enough).

Stagger to the bedroom.

Dump the contents of the dresser drawer
where you’ve stashed
photos of his lying mug,
his drivel-stained letters and cards,
and assorted rubbish like stub saved
from the movie you two saw on your first date
(the adulterous Heartburn. How prophetic).

Cram the entire contents of the drawer
into two thirty-gallon Hefty bags.
Shari O'Brien

Pour half the litter,  
cat crap and all,  
into each bag.  
Close and tie quickly.

Drag bags to the curb.

Stagger back into the house and phone  
having endured hundreds of marathon soliloquies  
during which you whined and sniveled about him.

Ask what's new with her and mean it.  
(Try not to slur your speech).

Convince yourself the best revenge is  
living happily ever after without him.

Now apologize to the cat.

Shari O'Brien

A BATTERED RAINBOW

red fists pound her flesh  
as charcoal clouds fill his eyes—  
purplish green bruises  
and twelve yellow roses yield  
next day's kisses and white lies
ANOTHER WORKING DAY

Starlings,
a whole tree of them, it seems
- or are they black birds -
squeaking like dozens of fingers over Styrofoam,
cutting through the engine,
frost covering all but
the scraped patch on my windshield. I am waiting
for green, late for work.

It is warm,
at least for late December,
reaching almost 50 when the sun comes up.
For now, dawn and one of the first frosts I can remember in weeks-
light cracking the clouds behind me, in the lines
defrosting across my rear-window.
The birds call into the glare-
starlings, or maybe blackbirds, clattering at the forecasts,
rain this afternoon
and almost New Year’s and
this
light
won’t
change-fumes are fanning out, streaming over the rear-
window hasn’t cleared yet.
Blackbirds should be further south this late in the season.
Starlings would make more sense.
The light finally turns.
I make my left, cut the tail pipe’s umbilical,
leave my offering for the sky - now
focused on my driver’s side
glittering fresh eyes in my window,
the birds still frantic,
MONTANA

A man can only take so much and then he has to go
to somewhere in the middle of nowhere, take the job
of fry cook at a lonesome roadside diner
and the small room upstairs as the only perk.
A man has to play solitaire knowing it’s his destiny
to be solitaire,
learning lines from his few esoteric books
as if words held sad secrets meant just for him.
A man must cultivate the within and tame his rage
or he’ll blow somewhere—and it wouldn’t be fair
(or would it?)

if it happened on your busy street with its siren screams
where you can’t see sky.
Todd Posehl

**SILO**

She spent a week at the face on Mars—
learned her fate from an alien race.
Move out west, away from the city’s grind,
her hosts convinced her, find

a shack near the missile sites. And listen

She spent a week at the face on Mars—
learned her fate from an alien race.
Move out west, away from the city’s grind,
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**ROADSIDE PARK**

Water won’t lie down
but breaks against walls & boulder rip-rap
the size of small cars, without pause.
And gulls—who told the gulls
they were perpetual and God-like
ominiscient & everywhere at once,
screaming the gospel of hanging low over freshwater surf,
rocketing headfirst into steely wind,
squawking the cacophonous hymns of Revelation?
Not me, but I’m listening
Kneeling into that stony northern wind
lurching off the lake, brick-heavy & whippet-quick.
I stole the grief from every grave I visited,
then spit it, bitter on my tongue, into that wind.
It came back in spray, diminished,
with a prism racing through it.
The lone heron that flew before my face,
piercing the colors, carried a lump in its gullet:
a soggy fish, or, my soul.
It shot straightaway
skyward into heaven, stopping my heart.
I choked, the loose stones rattling inside me
fell apart and I spit again into the wind.
A mouth emptied of sand, grit and dust.
I walked to my sleeping room
shivering & saved, alone.
James Proffitt

WATCHING AN OLD WOMAN DANCE

To the air I ask just one thing:
Let me open you up inside me.
Or, if you do it inside me—somewhere.
To the septuagenarian in the skin-tight bodysuit
and Swarovski crystals: please don’t stop dancing.
And if a lone hawk made a gliding pass just now
that would be good, too.
If you’d mention me in your 12-step program
it would work for me.
But if not, forgive me and buy me another drink.
More importantly—do not let this afternoon end
and autumn come on, then winter.
Don’t let winter set its claws into me,
weather gray and stone-cold.
Bitter beyond words I know in English—
though my native tongue is silence.
That I’m proficient in.
Don’t let language and winter settle on me again.
Not together against me, all at once.
Not again, ever, this way.

Katybeth Mannix

OENOLOGY

Three-thirty in the morning, between the 5th Avenue and Grand Central stops, it began with the gust of air from the back of the car that blew his tie out from its safely-tucked spot inside his blazer. Scott noticed the girl walking past him but didn’t acknowledge her. He kept his head lowered, pen poised for action, staring into the Sudoku puzzle he hadn’t yet started. She was a flash of colors in his peripheral vision, a whiff of something vaguely sweet that might have been rum. He could never tell with anything stronger than wine; that was all he knew, and it had been six years, at that.

"Leaving?" He looked up and saw her standing there, her arms circling around the pole in the aisle in front of them. She nodded her head toward the suitcase beside him. Her gaze was partly on him, partly on the windows as the car whizzed through the tunnel, moving back and forth like a small child on the Park carousel who didn’t know what to fixate on as the world spun. "Hello?"

"You—you shouldn’t cross cars like that while they’re moving." The girl had pink streaks in her hair, maybe, or was it just the lighting? He rubbed his eyes.

"Psh. I know what I’m doing." She leaned her head on the pole to steady herself, the beads woven into her hair tapping in succession against the metal. "You going somewhere?"

"Sure, I guess." It was easier than the longer version. Easier to explain than how he had already left, how he was returning now to leave again for good, perhaps.

"Where?" she asked. She could have been comely, he thought, underneath her tie-dyed pretenses of bohemia. She was very young. Nineteen, twenty. The way her tiny
hands gripped the subway pole, fingers exposed through the tattered ends of cut-off gloves, had they wrapped themselves around a man’s bare shoulders?  

“California. Napa Valley. Got a flight leaving from LaGuardia in a couple of hours.”

“I want to go.” The comment startled him. He could see her inviting herself up to a man’s apartment, but this was forward. “Man, someday, I’m gonna go out to San Diego. Get a studio, sell my work.”

Oh.

“You’re an artist.” It was not a realization, only a verbalization of the stereotype he’d already pegged the girl into. An art student, no doubt, restless, unsure of whether to allow herself to have dreams or act as if life had already trampled them. He had seen her kind in his time working at the gallery—never inside, but always around, cursing those who were successful enough to be on the inside for defacing the name of art with their Upper East Side sensibilities.

He entertained the idea of bringing some young plaything home with him. Not now, not her, just the premise. What would Janine do if he came back to California with some kid on his arm? Anything at all? Which would seem more desperate—the actual act, the fucking someone almost young enough to be his daughter, or the need to flaunt her like some tacky brass hood ornament?

She sat down in the seat beside him as the train began to slow on its approach to the next station. “Man. This city’s gonna fuckin’ eat me.” Her skin was pale, eyes bloodshot. Or was it just the reflection of his own eyes that he was seeing? “How do you do it? I can already feel it.”

“You get used to it after a while.” The doors opened, let in the air, closed, slow and methodical. “You realize the city doesn’t care enough about you, personally, to have it in for you.”

She let out something of a reaction, too reflexive to be genuine laughter. Her knuckles were raw, shaking so slightly next to the curve of her hips on the orange plastic seat. “Why California? What’s out there?”

The girl turned and looked him in the eyes. It occurred to him at once that he was the one in the situation to fear, a forty-something man on an empty subway car in the middle of the night, not the other way around. Having that sort of control was odd, contradictory to reality, but comforting enough to allow him to open up a bit.

“My father,” he said, “had a stroke.”

The night when everything had happened, the night before he left, he now realized he had seen it coming. At the time, he had attributed it to his father’s anger—the way he ran his hands over his face when he spoke, the inarticulateness lurking under the surface of his outburst—but looking back on it, he felt certain these were the first signs that something inside his father was cracking. Scott felt it cracking, too, every time he attended one of those tasting events or discussed distribution. The version everyone knew of the events that had brought him here was twisted, causes jumbling over each other and becoming effects in their confusion. It wasn’t Janine’s affair that precipitated the fall of his seemingly perfect world, nor was it the argument that night at the wine tasting that led to one last bitter exchange between father and son. The inevitability of his leaving was there all along, whenever he smelled the bitter, sugary must of fermented grapes and felt the crack deepening, whiff by whiff.

The two sat in silence as the train continued along, underneath the East River by now. He waited for the “I’m sorry,” the “I didn’t realize,” but none came. She did not, perhaps could not, feel pity for him. He would realize later that this was what had confirmed his attraction to her. He wanted to ask her about her art, or her family, but in the process of trying to form the words, his thoughts
got lost among the unsteady whirr-whizz-click, whirr-whizz-click of the wheels on the tracks.

"My stop's coming up," she finally said. The strap of her tank top had slid down her shoulder. He watched as she tugged it back up, the fabric pressing against her breasts. "Hey, my roommate's got a car. We could get a smoke, then I could drive you the rest of the way to the airport, if you want."

The proposition was tempting. He still had almost two hours before his flight took off. Two hours that would lead to what?

"Nah, I'll get a taxi," he said. The doors of the subway car opened again. His response didn't quite seem to bother her, and he decided it shouldn't bother him, either. She stepped out of the car and onto the platform.

"Wait," he said. She turned back, lingering in the doorway. He pulled a card out of the pocket of his blazer and handed it to her. "Listen, I work at Rosenberg Gallery, 86th, near Lexington, you know where that is? I just thought—if you ever wanted somebody to look at your artwork"—was that any less desperate?—"or anything. My number's on there."

"Thanks, I guess." Half-smiling, she stared at the card for a minute. "Hey, if you don't find a taxi"—her turn to hesitate—"I mean, just have a good trip, okay?" she said, and turned to leave.

He stayed in the doorway, watching the folds of her skirt wrap around her legs as she walked toward the stairs. As the subway doors closed, he saw the card clutch in her palm, tiny fingers wrapped around the corners, and then she was gone. The train started again, leaving him to return to the role he had come to know—the one who left only to be left behind.

In the short time he had been gone, August had become September in the city. The trees in the Park, or at least the ones Scott caught glimpses of down 86th when he looked out the gallery windows, were starting to settle and sag, not just from the heat. Now, in the empty late-night glow, they were a formless blob of grey looming beyond Madison Avenue, a low-lying cloud dissolving into sky and skyscraper.

"Same crowd over and over, huh?" Charlie gave the last hors d'oeuvres tray a once-over with his towel and stacked it on the counter with the others, metal clicking against metal. "Less and less interested in the artwork." He tossed the towel on the counter and assumed an exaggerated pose, leaning against the window and stroking his fingers across the base of his chin. "Might as well just put up signs in the window for the people walking past"—he adopted a mock British accent—"'Why yes, I'm at an art exhibition and therefore better than you will ever be.'"

Scott laughed at his old friend. Charlie's puckish humor hadn't changed a bit since college; his morph from literature club president to art gallery owner was a surface change at most. "Don't even make a secret of it," he said, tearing the banner down off the window. "Don't I know the type." They were all the same, whether their focus was the canvas in front of them or the fluted glass in their hand. He sat the banner on top of the stack of trays and put them into his sack.

"Looks like they missed a few." Charlie looked back at the unopened bottles of Merlot on the shelf behind the countertop. "You just store the trays this time, I'll take these back home with me," he said, without turning to meet his friend's eyes.

"Oh, come on," he said. He didn't want the pity. "You know Melissa wouldn't want you bringing all that alcohol home."

Charlie examined a stack of plastic wine glasses for any signs of use, then stuck them in the cupboard under-
neath the counter. “I know, but—well, considering.”

“It’s not a big deal,” he said, pushing the bottles into the base of the bag. “I’m sure there’s some back cupboard I can stash it into.” He grabbed the bag’s handles and unclenched his teeth, slowly, a child finally releasing his breath after driving past a cemetery. He glanced around the room. “Well, looks like we’ve got the place back to normal.”

“Have you heard anything more from Nate?” Scott could tell his friend’s concern was genuine, even though he tried to shake off the awkwardness of the topic by leaning his back against the counter.

“Not this week,” he responded. His brother had seen the way the trip had gone; both of them knew it was best to spare Scott from the day-to-day of his father’s condition. “I guess it’s pretty much touch and go right now. Won’t know anything for sure for a while.”

“I know you don’t want to dwell on it.” Charlie grabbed his blazer from the coathanger, leaving the implied ‘but if you ever need to talk about it’ in the space between them. He hadn’t had to say it back then, when Scott moved out to the city without a job, after everything had exploded, and he didn’t have to say it now. Scott knew.

“Well, I’d better get home before Melissa thinks I got mugged or something,” he said, throwing the jacket around his shoulder. “You know Museum Mile. Neighborhood’s going downhill, full of gangs and hoodlums.” He winked. “Well, I won’t be in ‘til noon on Monday.” Charlie put a hand on his friend’s shoulder. “Get some rest.”

“Will do,” Scott said.

Charlie took his briefcase and headed out, leaving the door unlocked behind him. Scott sat the bag back down on the counter and walked out into the gallery. He hardly ever noticed the colors and forms on the canvases around him in a conscious way. Strange how you could become so numb to things that were a part of your everyday life, even stranger how new they seemed when you finally allowed yourself to take stock of them. He wandered into the rotating exhibit section. This latest artist’s work—Adrienne something-or-other, he had gone through all the motions of the reception earlier that night and still couldn’t remember exactly—would be on display through the end of next month. The selection was split just about evenly between charcoal portrait sketches and more colorful Cubist-style pieces. The women in the charcoal ones were mostly nudes, some reclining, others with their backs to the viewer, their hips overaccentuated. It seemed to him that they were not representations of actual women, but of shadows of women, of as little interest to him as he was to the cold curve of their shaded backs. He paused in front of one of the abstract pieces, a bluescale impression of a man playing a clarinet. Abstract art was a mystery to him. Did the artist intend to convey some greater truth about the subject by presenting it in a distorted form? Or did the subject jumble itself on the way out, a disconnect between thought and action that couldn’t be overcome by the brush?

All the overanalysis made him feel lightheaded. He headed back to the front of the gallery, picking up the sack on his way over to lock the door and flipping the light switch off. As he reached for the doorknob, he glimpsed a figure wandering outside on the sidewalk, obscured by the reflection of the streetlights in the glass panel. As his eyes adjusted to the dark, they made out the form of a brightly colored skirt swirling around vaguely familiar curves of hips. Against his better judgment, he opened the door and stepped out onto the street.

“Hi,” was all she said.

“I was just locking up for the night,” he said. The cigarette between her fingertips was unlit, but the suggestion of smoke curled around her. Her pupils were smaller
Oenology

than he remembered, he noticed, her eyes still far away. "If, um, you want to swing by next week, I can set up a meeting with Charlie, he's the owner. You can bring by a few samples of your work, or we could..."

"I didn't think you'd be back yet."

He paused. "I didn't go," he said. "After all that. I couldn't do it." It was a lie in circumstance only.

She sank down and folded herself onto the sidewalk, beside the tall windows of the gallery. "Goddamn it's cold." He didn't ask if she was alright.

"You always wander around at night like this?"

It was the first thing that came to mind to combat the rising tide of sweat collecting around his collar, but it sounded like a cheap pickup line as soon as it came out of his mouth. No better than a second-rate college barfly; he even looked the part, as he loosened his tie and leaned against the window.

"Nah, I stay here," she said. "Everything else keeps wandering." She took out her lighter. "My roommate, she met this guy. He stays three or four nights in a row sometimes, and he works for some company that makes telemarketing calls." She rolled the switch over and over, enthralled by the tiny bluish flames half-igniting beside her fingertips. "Maybe I'll get an apartment in Manhattan. You live in Manhattan?"

"Upstairs here," he said. "There's an apartment on the second floor. My friend—Charlie—he wasn't using it anyway. It was full of boxes when I came out here."

Across Lexington, a car slowed to a stop, letting out an older couple. Scott's watch read eleven-thirty; he figured they were coming home from the theatre district. He watched the car depart, and the older couple walked around the corner, their footsteps soiling the sidewalk with sophistication.

When he and Janine had left the wine tasting that night, after all the mess, she had only said one thing to him the whole car ride home. He wanted her to tell him that she didn't love him anymore, that she was ashamed to call him her husband. He wanted it all to explode. He'd throw everything back in her face, tell her he knew all about her and Jack Kernan, even though they both had known for months and just let it linger in the space between their backs underneath the sheets. But all she had said was, "God, Scott, couldn't it have waited until after all the people had already left?"

"It's getting kind of late," was the best he could come up with to break the silence. The girl ran one hand lazily over the fabric of her skirt and took a drag off her cigarette. Do you want me to set up an appointment with Charlie for Monday, his mind asked.

"Do you, um, want to come up?" He felt the warning flares going up just behind his eyes—no. Ask her what kind of media she uses, sculpture, canvas. "You can catch the subway in the morning." Her bare shoulders, her fingertips on his back. "The station's right down the street from here."

She kept beside him as they made their way back through the gallery. Their shadows mixed in the glow of the city lights through the windows, separating as two forms and then coming back to one again. Scott studied her in their shadow on the wall. She seemed unaffected by her surroundings, none of the childlike envy of the pieces of art around her, or the disdain for high culture he might have expected. They passed around to the side of the rotating exhibition room to the staircase that led up to the second floor. He didn't even know her name, he realized. He tried to find the right way to phrase the question as they walked up the stairs, but gave up upon entering the apartment.

He flipped on the lights. "It's nice," she said, empty as the words themselves. How often did she think he did this sort of thing? The apartment felt anything but lived-
"Home, I guess." He took off his blazer. The girl picked a picture frame up off of the end table, staring at the laughing boy inside holding a red balloon. "That’s my nephew, Andrew," he said. "That was his fifth birthday."

He had eaten dinner with his brother’s family only once during his trip back to California. Staying with Nate had been much easier than he thought it would be. With Andrew at school and Nate trying to restore order at the business in his father’s absence, most of his time was spent with him and Dawn, Nate’s wife, maneuvering their way around each other in the open spaces of the house. The second-to-last night of his stay was Andrew’s birthday, though, and Dawn cooked Andrew’s favorite meal for everyone. All three of them did everything they could to make the conversation as natural as possible. Andrew’s high school debate team had made it to state and would be traveling to Anaheim over the weekend; Dawn was reading a fascinating novel she thought Scott should pick up for the flight back home. Between bites of chicken parmesan, Scott realized his brother’s hairline had receded a bit since the last time they had seen each other. Even though Nate was outwardly understanding of his decision to leave California and the wine business behind, Scott couldn’t help but wonder what had receded on the inside between them.

The two had made their way to the bedroom, almost methodically. The girl sat on the edge of the bed as Scott slipped his shoes off in the corner by the closet and draped his tie around the doorknob.

"So, you lived in the city long?" He felt like an idiot, trying to make small talk. *I’m not very good at this,* he wanted to tell her, *I don’t know how to start this kind of thing.* She had laid on her side on the bed, on top of the bedsheets, low enough that only her hair hit the pillow.

"Long enough. Long enough to know I wanna get out." She laughed, the same sputtering cough, like the first night he’d met her. He laid down on the other side of the bed, facing her. "Why didn’t you go out to California, anyway?"

He thought for a moment about what he could tell her. That night on the subway, he’d thought he’d seen something of himself in her eyes. They were two vagrants looking for a way out of, or into, their self-imposed hells, in a city at the center of the world. But looking at her lying across the bed from him, her eyelids already beginning to droop, he realized all he’d ever seen was his own eyes reflecting back, mirrored in hers.

"I don’t know," he answered. "Sometimes—you get so close to something and you just can’t."

"Huh," she said. "I dunno, if it were me, I wouldn’t miss a chance to get the hell out of here." The end of her sentence trailed off in a mumble.

He reached out across the space between them and touched her forearm, the fragile blue veins on the skin jumping slightly at the touch. "You—you never told me your name," he said.

"Davia." She stifled a yawn, and Scott drew his hand back as her eyelids closed.

Scott lay watching her, watching as her breathing became steady and even. The way her eyelids twitched and twisted, she seemed to him like a small child he should find a way to protect. He pulled the bedsheet over her and sat up.

Only once had he gone to see his father in the hospital while he was out in California. Nate and his wife had left the room to get coffee from the coffee bar downstairs, leaving him alone with his sleeping father. He didn’t recognize the twisted, sickly face he saw lying on
the bed, hooked up to beeping machines and clear plastic tubes feeding into the needles in his bruised hands; he could no longer see himself in the swollen cheeks and lips. This man ran a wine company; he ordered people around until he pushed them to their breaking point. He did not lie broken in a hospital bed. Scott sat for fifteen minutes in the hard plastic chair, listening to the sounds of fluids pumping through tubes and nurses’ shoes squeaking on the linoleum outside, and he made the decision to see if he could bump his flight home up a few days. He told himself that reopening the wounds between the two of them would only be bad for his father’s health, would set back his recovery time even further, but in honesty, the concerns had hardly crossed his mind. He just couldn’t bring himself to wake the man who was not his father anymore.

Scott found himself heading back downstairs into the gallery, half-conscious. The bag of reception leftovers was still sitting on the counter, where he had left it earlier. He opened several drawers behind the counter, squinting in the dim light, before he found the one that contained the corkscrew. He pulled one of the plastic wine glasses out of Charlie’s stack in the cupboard, set it on the countertop, and uncorked the wine. His hand shook with fear—was it anticipation as well?—as he poured, a few drops missing the glass and splashing off of the counter. He stared at the full glass, a completed work of art, and raised it to eye level before taking the first sip. Then he let the long-suppressed burn of the past six years, and everything before, soak into the back of his throat.
SECOND SEATING IN THE AMazon

At anchor in the jungle
dining on veal marsala, frosted Napoleons
we almost forget
those canoes swarming the hull
like minnows
waiting for us to toss overboard
leftover croissants, spare pens,
used T-shirts, dollar bills
fluttering from deck merrily as
bon voyage confetti
but snatched before they touch
the over-creamed coffee surface.

Earlier we shuttled in to cross
the village’s log pier. Fretted
over broken heels, dropped lens caps
were met by scrawny turkeys, dogs, chickens,
children who’ve learned how to pose
and what to charge.
We waved more dollars like flags
constitutionally buying off the guilt
had no time to ponder equality because
Second Seating was starting.

Later maybe a nap, bingo
except for a few who will return to the shore
to watch a man wrap a pet anaconda
in a stole around his neck
or tour the school hut, maybe
glide igarapes, avoid looking
at dugout holes stuffed with pitch,
IF YOU REMOVE THE L

Teutonic Knights routinely ordered men to tithe
their lives in the name of gold
suspended others from iron trapezes
hung them in the name of God. Just
added a consonant to justify plundering.

THE YEARS

Have the years done this?
How have the years done this?

More and more they put themselves between us.

On the beach I picked up a circular shell, once an animal.

The shell, I remember, was filled with years, years
like ours. But was that a beach or was it a cliff in the park?

Was it the rock we were lying on?
The men on motorcycles just below us.

We were naked and scared.
That I know for certain. No mistake.

We gripped each other.
Somewhere there was a circular shell.

Once an animal, it was filled with years, years that poured like sand.
MORNING

Waking
cricket chirrups;
embers stir in ashes,
slowly flames rise from the cold
fireplace

A SNOWY SPRING

A snowy spring-
chilly nights,
frilly dew,
cold violas
in frosty glass

A winter-bare sky-
no moon or stars-
dark shadows
in an icy wind
blown through leafless trees
Beneath a Bridge

Her name is Lily:
named for the flowers
that bloomed
outside her door
when she was born,
come in from the roadside
to her sidewalk stoop
where she sat as a child
waiting for the moon
to come out ...
while her parents
drank wine in their
small front room ...

Lily ...

She hears her name
in the trembling leaves as they
fall along the river’s edge
where she walks each afternoon
collecting cans for money,
the small silver locket around
her neck a reminder of her son
born twenty years ago today.

She takes it off at dusk
as she sits beneath the bridge
listening to the pigeons
come back for the night,
opens it slowly as if it is
LA PRIMAVERA

Huge stalks of sunflowers
make me believe in a story
that is not fiction,
where rains slips down clearer glass,
touching the leafy, slender feet of plants,
where the sun is a shimmering wand
poofing the world back
to voluptuous springtime,
sending women to windows
because they sense the magnitude
of what is there.
In the garden
will you walk where the honeysuckle grow
and let their halo of pink trumpets
surround you with a sweet fragrance?

Do you want to hear the orioles caroling
hew-li hew-li hew-li hew-li
their mellow notes strung together
to form a song as delicate as lace?

Birds flutter about on the trellis
and bow to you when they land
the way I bow to your graceful presence
and then kneel.

I am humbled
to hold your hand in mine
and ring your finger
with this band of gold that will last a lifetime.

Rising up to face you,
I hear your rhythmic breathing.
I want to draw you closer still
until your moist lips can touch mine.

Orioles loop in orange and black blurs
and float to perches on the trellis,
blending their voices together like a choir
hew-li hew-li hew-li hew-li
**MARDI GRAS**

All you can do is cycle back,
hope you forget the way.
Champion pancake tosser
won what was left of my heart.
He could read the future in
the burned spots. A car flattened him
one night coming from the pub.
I saw through him long before
that but I'm a sucker
when it comes to the heart.

We scattered his ashes in
the stream above the duck pond.
Sometimes, standing on the edge,
I watch the swan sink its neck
so deep, I think he'll never come up.
Then he reappears, goes rat a tat
with his scissored beak.

**A TIMELESS, MISTY SIGH**

There lies a realm, where
the wind sights a soft lament
it rustles the brown leaves
of early spring
passing about the low ground
a soft and pensive, muffled sound
there the plaintive fog does lie
there the forgotten spirit cries
and it speaks with a timeless
Misty sigh
Rock Shadow Wall

Far Shadowed stream
That runs at the foot of the mighty wall
Rock spires, Wyoming sun-set
To rival the Gods in their halls,
Timeless descent of the orange rock
And time well spent
Where the spirits walk
Among the spires
Both Mighty and tall,
Along the jagged rock shadowed wall.

Darkest Dark,
Lightest Light
A WALK IN THE PARK

On a winter's day in the park
two sparrows died,
one pigeon,
and a squirrel wasn't feeling too well.

The usual order of things-
mid-life excisions,
revisions

Snow, starched and crunchy underfoot,
did the decent and blanketed them.
(Nothing like Nature for decorum.)
The foul and the squalid
were veiled and wafted
in due course into otherness,
into another whatever
in an economy of thrift
to the benefit of chick and crocus,
cub and bud.

A walker in the snow
took up his life in his hands
and considered it:
an occasional streak of color
in a mass of mostly gray;
some long unoccupied stretches;
a few jagged edges here,
a smooth run there.

Sum it up, he mused,
give it a value:
HOPE

Cold here,
wind riding the sky hard,
whipping the ragged branches of trees,
slipping through cracks,
under the door.

Thoughts huddle for warmth.
They know the drill, having been
through such times before:
gathering possibilities and an improbability
or two, they burnt them alive.

His Photo

His combine rusted years before,
his crops are so many times turned over,
even his conversation fades into
the picture I hold in my hand.

Can't smell the diesel on his fingers,
the gravel and the haymow in his breath,
see his truck light shining
up dark country road.

Time scrubs a photo clean of corn-field,
steers and hogs, of one man
in his fields checking gates one last time,
all but the one the years slip through.
**ALL THIS COMPETITION**

Her little shop
was losing money
to the supermarket
on the town’s outskirts

Her customers were
never strangers now,
just people she knew,
and she knew less and less
with each passing year.
Her shaky pen
marked more prices down
than it filled out receipts.

Her ex-husband seldom called.
She imagined his life now
was like that supermarket,
shiny and soulless,
but full of stuff
people wanted.

Money was scarce.
Her daughter was having
a growth spurt.
The taxes on the house
and land were due.

She imagined a better
life somewhere,
new and inviting,
also like a supermarket.

It would drive
the life she was currently living
out of business.
There’d be sale tags
pinned to many
parts of her.
She’d mark herself down
to a price so low
every future could afford her.
We undertook restorations
When no one else would,
begged alms for the love
of an unarmed Venus,
who longs for hugs from
saviors to this day.

Forklifted to the new
museum’s antiquities warehouse,
she stays encased in a
wood crate, hushed by
hospital-like corridors.

What the statue stands for
is anyone’s guess. Turn back
time to the hands of careers,
before the world stood still
for humiliating mutilators.
Then stone stood for flesh.

We detect dedicated lover
Who threw his heart and soul
into the sculpture.

Who whacked Winged Victory,
idol of the ancients?
Amputated torso, she’s the
standout among a stolen stash,
believers will worship
like Satan’s saint.
MODERN TIMES

i wake walking
but i bet before my feet
hit the floor
legions of other rats
have raced to work
my side of the sewer.

i picture them
squirming at their desks
squeamish over the cans of worms
opened before breakfast
writhing now in their grey matters

poor fish
all hooked on lucre
as i arrive too late
missing the torpedoed boat
that left without me
already sinking on the high seas.

i am swimming in a world
turning into a crazy place:
grandparents gone,
nuclear families fusing
into pathological atom bombs
wired to explode
at the drop of a dollar.

everyone romantically involved
in the meat market
buying and selling bodies
Faced down in the dirt, his body becomes engulfed by a crimson lake. All my concentration is focused on the red liquid barrier forming around his body. I take note that it is slowly being soaked up by the thirsty ground, but the pool is replenished. The cycle continues. Sound reverberates in my ears. What is that screaming? My gaze slowly shifts up from the ground toward the modest home. There is virtually no contrast from the dusty terrain to the walls. There in the doorway a woman on her knees is clinging to a young, terrified child. I wonder how old the woman is. She’s fully covered by black cotton as not to reveal anything to the world. I can see only her hands and eyes. Those eyes cry out with extreme pain and agony, they tell me everything. Reality rushes over me, and I feel the weight of the gun in my sweaty hands. It all hits me at once. She’s the only screaming, this is my gun, that’s blood, and he’s ... dead.

I wrench my eyes open, and my hands clamor toward my chest as they pulse in rhythm with my pounding heart. They are empty now. With caution, I sit up in my bed as not to wake the other thirty-nine men from their peaceful slumber. They sleep sound, and I have yet another nightmare. Not just another nightmare, the same one. What is this, the second time this week? It’s getting more frequent. I stare out into the blackness trying to settle the things ricocheting in my brain. There is no sense in trying to go back to sleep, I never can.

I swing my lower half over the side of the bed and hunch with my arms dangling between my legs for a moment longer. Finally I gather enough strength to plant my feet and stand. Damn, the floor is cold. It always is, and being that it’s metal it’s always gonna be. Stepping carefully, I make my way to the bathroom and back. Once I return from my morning ritual, I methodically change from pajamas into my daily uniform. Navy slacks and a blue button-down shirt with “Fordham” stitched in white lettering over the left side of my chest.

I neatly fold my pajamas and place them under my mattress in the coffin rack with the rest of my clothing. It takes me two tries to even out my sheets and get them smoothed and in place. If my memory serves me right, we aren’t doing drills and chores today. We were supposed to come into harbor overnight, and we should be permitted at least a day onshore. By now the coast should be in sight. I crouch down beside my bed and open my footlocker. I let my hands do what my eyes can’t and glide through what in the dark seems like a sea of paper: envelopes, photos, postcards, and my own personal notes all thrown together. I’ll be lucky if I don’t have a paper cut before I am through. Ah ha, there it is. I put the camera around my neck and turn to make my way towards the iron staircase. My footsteps echo loudly. No one ever said these shoes were meant to be discrete. I place my hands on the railings and ascend the stairs as rapidly as possible. If it is going to make a racket it may as well be over in a timely fashion. No sooner does my head clear the deck than I see it, the Tokyo shoreline.

It’s all crammed into the little glass box. Everything is shrunk down and isn’t all that clear. There are splotches of light taking up most of the hole and reflecting off the tiny plastic walls. I pry the camera from my face and open my left eye. Now I can take in the splendor with my own two eyes. The city is already awake, or maybe it hasn’t gone to bed. The sun has yet to creep up from behind me, but it is already announcing its entrance. Enough light has preceded it to make the sky a brilliant deep shade of blue.
A soft mist mingles with the exotic and elaborate skyscrapers that line the horizon. Neon lights accent the towering buildings. It's as flashy as Las Vegas but not as tacky. Everything is tasteful. Well, to an extent. I guess an LCD screen going down the side of a building displaying a flash animation Coca-Cola advertisement isn't exactly fine art, but it sure grabs your attention and make you think nonetheless. The ocean water separating the ship from the shore glistens with the flecks of light. It reminds me of the disco ball at the old roller rink back in Indiana. Why in the hell have I always been told to turn off the light when I leave the room so that on the other side of the world Tokyo could use the energy I saved? Oh well, I sure don't regret seeing this. There is no doubt in my mind that I have been lucky enough to see Tokyo at its most beautiful moment. Good think I brought my camera up.

I can easily say I wouldn't have anticipated my reaction to this sight three years ago. More than likely, I would have criticized it and made reference to "those crazy Japs" instead of seeing the wonder in it. Saying that I was a bit of an asshole in high school could be seen as an understatement. Two and a half years ago, I was sitting in the vice-principal's office giving him a knowing smirk while he made empty threats. Mr. Shautz thought he could punish me for conducting my own little experiment in chemistry. My opinion was if they didn't want me to try to light rubber glue with a flint lighter they shouldn't have given them to me in the first place. I felt good and comfortable mocking him from across the table where I sat, because I knew Coach Woolf would walk in at any moment and tell Shautz he would handle it. Of course, I was right. Growing up in a small Indiana town where basketball is life, being the team's star guard makes you damn near untouchable. I was good ol' hometown basketball star, and I was arrogant enough to play the part.

Being a hometown sport hero seems like such a far-off concept now. I don't feel that way anymore. Hell, I don't really even have a home to be a hero of anymore. Home has become more a feeling than a place. Kind of like when my parents and sister drove to Texas to see me get off the ship. Running down the pier towards their bright and perfect faces to meet their embrace was better than any place; that was home. I probably wouldn't think that way if I hadn't joined the Navy. That's how I figured out I had been such an arrogant prick in the first place. I thought joining the Navy would be the safe and easy way to make big money right out of high school and a way to be military without seeing combat. I was wrong on both counts.

After we had settled into our hotel rooms for the weekend on shore, Jimmy invited me to go have a late lunch and a drink with him and three of his friends. Jimmy is one of those guys everyone just knows was class president in high school. He fit the mold at least—big goofy smile, polite as hell, and tried to be everybody's best friend. Charity case or not, I didn't mind when he asked me out with his buddies; all I wanted was a beer. We went about a task that we all assumed would be like a monkey screwing a football. You know, something that makes everyone else laugh, but just gets the monkey frustrated and worn out. We had to try and track down a place that served American beer without speaking a word of Japanese. I anticipated fumbling around this enormous and complex city for at least an hour making a mess of translations; but wouldn't you know it? The first place we found serving alcohol had any kind of booze we could have imagined, and all of it posted on the wall.

Now, ten minutes later, the five of us are sitting comfortably around an overly small table, or as comfortably as we can. In front of us now have our sandwiches, Coors Light, Budweiser, and Sam Adams, respectively.
I'm not too sure what sort of establishment this place qualifies as. One would assume it's a bar, but it's just too small, and there is a family with small children sitting at the table to the right of us. Not to mention there are no televisions. Being from Indiana, I sure as shit have never seen a bar without a TV. I turn in my chair to look behind me at the door for a clue. Right, I don't know Japanese. No matter, I've got my beer. I take a long pull on the bottle. It's so smooth. I haven't had a Sam Adams since we left the States. I had to drink that skunk piss Bud Light the last time we docked.

The door opens behind me and I've got the distinct feeling that whoever just passed through it has their eyes focused on the five of us. This is no surprise being that we're a bunch of US Navy shipmen sitting among the locals. It isn't until I see whose eyes are piercing my back that I actually care. A middle-aged man walks past me first with his left arm extended behind him. Clutching his left hand is a little girl in a blue-and-white school uniform. He must have picked her up from class for an afternoon snack. She looks at me as he passes casually shifts her gaze straight ahead. I watch her father's footsteps with her back to me. She's wearing knee high socks with her blue skirt and white polo shirt. Her braided pigtails come just past her shoulders. She looks to be about six or seven and is cute as can be. Her father helps her onto a stool next to him at the counter with her back still to me.

I refocus my attention on the conversation around the table. Jimmy and his friend Nick are talking about their girlfriends, again.

"I can't believe she's written you every day," Jimmy says playfully, nudging Nick.

Nick quickly retorts, "Yeah, the way I figure it..."

I remain silent and pick at the label on my bottle with my neatly trimmed fingernails. My girlfriend started dating some jerk three months after I shipped off. I reckon that doesn't make her my girlfriend anymore. Normally, I would allow myself a little time to dwell on that sad situation, but I can't. I can feel those eyes on me again. As I look up at the little girl, our eyes meet and lock. She has no facial expression; she just sits turned around in her chair fixed on my eyes. Hers are a lovely chestnut color and they tell of her innocence. Staring into those dark pools gives me a slight feeling of hope. I smile at her and, immediately, I am filled with regret. Fear comes over her face, and she hurriedly turns away from me, making certain not to glance back. Her eyes of purity have judged me; she looked and saw all that is dark and sinister inside me. She's right to be frightened. Even I feel a little less than human. My heart is racing now and a chill comes over me. Here it comes ... all of it, but this time I can't wake up. I jump up from my chair, pushing it backwards, and knocking my beer over onto the table. The liquid pours onto the floor. I shift my attention away from it. A silence comes over the establishment and all eyes are focused on me, all but one pair.


It's Jimmy, but I am unable to open my mouth. Perhaps I would just rather not. My hands are sweatmg now, and I wipe them on my chest.

Jimmy rephrases his question. "Hey, are you alright, buddy?"

Words come to my lips. Before I can utter them, I look past him and fixate on the small back refusing me the comfort of her stare. I am even more isolated. Without looking away from the petite angel, I answer the private.

"We're all right." I take two steps backwards and stumble on my chair. People are shouting English and Japanese at me in a panic, but now I can't make out any of it. My eyes linger just a moment longer. I am sorry. I turn and burst
through the door like a raging drunk who’s just been bounced from the bar.

I stumble into the street and try to remember which direction we came from, but my memory is taking hold. We shouldn’t be here is all I can think about as I help set up camp in this barren land. The Navy should not be playing the role of the Army. I understand we were the closest, but why do we have to fill in until the new unit gets here? We’re not trained to do this. I don’t remember choosing a direction, but my body is now running. Which way do I turn? My brain seems paralyzed by the memories, and my body has taken control. With the gun in hand I patrol the outskirts of town with Garrison. Reports came in that there was some trouble out here. What the fuck do I know about any of this? It seems as if all the systems in my body are shutting down. Yet I am still running and I don’t know where. Strange buildings tower over me, and I think everyone in these crowded streets is staring right at me. I pray they can’t see my thoughts. My legs continue to surge forward. He came out of nowhere. I was just so scared. I shot at him. He was crying out to me and I shot him right in front of his wife and child. His blood is pouring out onto the dirt. Why? Lord, why me? What do I do? I try to stop myself, but I throw up. How much more disrespect can I give this widow? I murder her husband and throw up on the same ground he lays bleeding on not ten feet away. Murderer. I just filled an innocent man with my bullets.

Tears fall down my face. I wipe my eyes and by some miracle I am standing in the hotel lobby. The concierge is shuffling towards me with a curious look. No, stop. Don’t come near me, please. Again my body is propelled forward, but this time I know where I am. I pick the right and sprint towards my room. The concierge shouts down the hall after me in Japanese.

Three of the tiny room’s walls are mirrors, mirrors

from top to bottom, side to side. I can’t bear to look at myself. The screaming and crying is ringing in my ears. It is an all too familiar sound. I haven’t been able to rid myself of it since that day. My body aches and begs me to collapse on the bed in return for its services. No, sleep isn’t safe. I can’t sleep. Damn these mirrors. I search the walls for an escape. A patio door on one of the mirror walls or the bathroom door on the wall painted red?

I choose my refuge and violently slide the bathroom door open. I walk straight into the shower fully clothed and turn it all the way to hot. I deserve this scalding hot water. I rest my forearms against the wall and lower my head. I can taste the sweat and tears as the water flows into my mouth. I spit and close it. The sounds of screaming and crying are becoming more distant in my head. Soon they grow silent, and my entire mind’s right here. I stay stationary until the water runs cold and my arms are numb. I turn the handle and the stream of water subsides.

Opening the shower door, I walk straight into the bedroom. The water streams off of me and my clothes onto the rose-colored carpet. Puddles form and soak into the carpet just as quickly. Sluggishly, I peel the drenched uniform from my body and drop it in a pile on top of the soggy spots in the carpet. I am naked and still unable to look into the surrounding mirrors.

I trot over to the bedside dresser and open the top drawer. I reach for a dry uniform. My hand hesitates, and I push it shut. Bending down, I slide the bottom drawer out. These are my clothes. No standard issue in these drawers. I grab a pair of red-and-white Indiana Hoosiers shorts and step my legs through them, leaving the drawer open. I take a look in the mirror and I run my hands over my shorn hair. I really need to call my sister to see if the Hoosiers won yesterday. It was a Big-Ten game; those are what counts. She said she would send me tapes of all the
games, but I can’t wait. I walk to the patio door. I stop and slide it open just enough to poke my head outside for a glance. I assume it will be the generic cement patio with a white plastic lawn chair, just like every other hotel. Damn! In front of me is a magnificent garden boxed in by other hotel rooms. A shallow pool made of a carbon-colored stone takes up a majority of the area. In the middle is a black obelisk. Water trickles smoothly over it and carefully drips into the pool. As I examine the stone further, I see that the pool drops off into a lower one creating a miniature waterfall. The vibrant grass looks like it has been finely combed into place.

I shut my eyes and the sound of the flowing water fills my ears, and a sense of pleasure calm creeps through my entire body. It feels like home. It’s a feeling I desperately want—no, need to keep with me. Abruptly, I open my eyes and jog back inside towards the open drawer and shuffle through until I find it. I scampers back to the patio door and stare out at this beautiful garden. Then I lift the camera to my face with a half smile and close my left eye. Maybe I can keep this.
NOTE TO AN ANTIQUARY

If, on a far-off day,
you were to poke around
a cluttered junk shop,
musty with old sighs,
and come upon a camera
that once was mine
and buy the camera
and, to your surprise,
find in it a roll of film
brittle with age,
and process the film
and find on it a single image,
that image would be
of her, at 18, living
safe from time,
her eyes still burning,
her lips about to speak
my name.

STONE

after stone
after stone
he hauled
and set into earth
believing
we are redeemed
by toil
and bloodied knees.

At path’s end
he rises to find
he’s right
where they wanted him
to be.
EYES

lidless and reptilian
see everything we do.

Scan streets
lurk in Nuts & Bolts
even the Aisle of Beans.

Wriggle up our veins
barge into every orifice
without a blink of decency.

Bathrooms aren’t secure.
Puddles peep
to capture upskirt art.

Lips are read
words weighed
for impropriety

Retinas scanned.
Noses measured.

Sudden moves
set loose
snarling robodogs
and prosecutors.

Coming soon—
more knowing eyes
to bore into our brains

loose the dogs
at our feeblest thought,
smart-ass or seditious.

But we’ll be free
to do what we please
as long as we don’t
think about it.
FADING CURVES

THE NEW AQUARIUM

There are these phrases
Of the ocean
To console us.

Eavan Boland

As if a window opened
directly on the deep

we watch huge tuna
propelled by the raw heat
of cold blood

flash past jellyfish
luminous as jewels
drifting silently

in the aqueous firmament
of our birth.
Rotten Boughes

Never try to marry a Literature professor, my dear. And especially not one who has read too much about courtly love. Let me tell you about being in love with Alan. He specialized in poetry of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—not Shakespeare, oh no, too obvious, or even Herrick or Marvell who pleasure me, but Wyatt, Sidney, and Surrey. Obscure? Well, perhaps to you, but I assure you, in them he found all his delight.

He would occasionally insert a line or two in his letters to me—can you believe he would use MLA documentation in a love letter? But he did. Once he wrote to justify his pallid fidelity to Margo, “For goode is the liff, ending faithfully” (Wyatt 2) and at the end of the letter there was a full citation.

I replied: Had we but world enough, and time, / This coyness, Alan, were no crime. He was dreadfully upset: not only hadn’t I provided a citation but I’d also bowdlerized Marvell (who nevertheless didn’t, he said, deserve his reputation). I was guilty of careless documentation, sloppy thinking, and dubious literary taste. There are worse faults, surely?

He managed an ounce of passion once. He said I, and not Margo, was his “loadstar of desire.” (Yes, he did cite it. Sir Philip Sidney’s “Astorphi and Stella” Song 8, if you care about sources.) But, good as that was, I wanted something less chaste, less of this obedient adoring from a distance. I’m not a cruel mistress—I’d say “yes.” My Petrarchan lover was the one saying we must be obedient to honor and be faithful. A twist those sonneteers never provided for, I’m sure.

I wanted something more along the lines of Herrick and his Julia—none of that pure suffering. Throw off the yoke of Margo and ravish me, you fool. I needed poems written to my breasts (Have ye beheld (with much delight) / A red rose peeping through a white? / Or else a cherry (double graced) / Within a lily centre-placed?); I needed my distracted state noticed (A sweet disorder in the dress / Kindles in clothes a wantonness); and I needed my skirt lifted (Whenas in silks my Julia goes, / Then, then, methinks, how sweetly flows / That liquefaction of her clothes). Ah Herrick.

I do believe Alan reveled in his situation. He liked being married to Margo and being worshipped chastely, if unwillingly, from afar. How his complacency enraged me; I’d have slapped all those coy mistresses. He claimed he suffered too, but if he did then he delighted in it. And he provided me evidence yet! He cited Sidney again (a poet for whom I have conceived and enduring displeasure). Here is his lapdog-letter: “As Sidney said, my dear, you must learn to appreciate your suffering and use it to be strong: ‘I call it praise to suffer Tyrannie; / And now employ the remnant of my wit, / To make me s:}fe believe, / That all is well’ (Sidney “Astrophil and Stella” Sonnet 2).”

Well, really. Praise to suffer tyranny indeed. He may have enjoyed torturing himself with little frissons (his sort of word) of guilt and fear at the idea of Margo finding out (as though there was anything carnal to discover...) but I wasn’t finding this unrequited love stuff remotely delightful. I told him he had to make a choice. Oh no, not leave Margo, but sleep with me or cut me loose.

And this is where I began to wonder if he had any words or sentiments of his own, for once again I received an excerpt from a sonnet in reply. Alan still imagined himself enslaved to Love and Fidelity, if not to Margo. “For my lorde gylt thus fawtles byde I pyine; / Yet from my Lorde shall not a foote remove: / Sweet is death that taketh end by love: (Surrey 4).” He pedantically pointed
TWILIGHT ZONE

The sheer drop
From dusk
into darkness
its fall
as muffled
as footsteps;
shades of light
clubbed
& dragged
into the bush.

eyes like
slits
of lighted windows
between the sill
and the drawn shade
red embers
of a cigarette
flare
and scatter
into dark
in his grip
the curve of a bottle
cloaked
in crumpled
paper bag
fingers clasped
to the glass neck
like hands
on a slender throat
THE ALDEN

they sleep all day
to wake each night

music pulsing through plaster walls
at 3:00 a.m.-

strange thumpings of another’s life

PLASTER WALLS
ON BOSTON COMMON

A restless red ant
brushes against
the shirt collar
whispers my initials
not knowing any better
in a storm of branches
on a hundred year evergreen
filled with mirrors
of dew and rain
in a vacant, sunless dawn.

The road ahead
is hushed with bones
of cumbersome memory,
on a daybed path of sand
with the stone of refusals
you remove your sandals
in an awkward shyness
afraid of pine cones and glass.

The earth offers us light
under a statue of Quaker
Mary Dyer by the gold dome
where a solitary hand
writes in invisible silence,
dazzles my feet
in a frog pond
and ascertains
by marathon runners
a trembling echo.

BOSTON FALL

Feeling rootless,
you gather wood and logs
watching a harvest of students
taking to the Athens
of America,
then you spin around on your blue bicycle
with an offhand modesty.

Discovering dangerous leaps
you feel the recent rain,
quoting Thoreau
from the city landscape,
wondering if the warm sun
will make you forget
the yellow and red autumn
breathing toward the day.
Road Trip

Whether the driver was a Marine who was AWOL or a dealer trying to outrun a warrant, he was determined to get us there even if we knew so little about here—drinking underage at The Knights of Columbus and then walking across the concrete lip of the Stars & Stripes mural’d dam without falling off—

-we were still determined to crash a border that—

-let’s see

One AWOL Marine or fugitive drug dealer

one trade school drop out with a cool comic book collection and living

in his parent’s basement at thirty

-one

18-year old girl who could not escape a reputation that she earned but did not add to since the age of thirteen And one kid who loved to read was always trying to be tough

-and was always getting beat up

And between them all

a half dozen tapes of recent live Dead concerts one and a half joints of bad Mexican marijuana and twenty-six dollars and maybe more with the coins we could dig out from the car seats—

-enough to make it to this lawless legendary place called

-there

*
Kenneth Dimaggio

Funeral

Cod liver oil-flavored
morality tale
as the drunk driving old man
that killed his son
wept from a body
alcoholic long enough
to become its own
brewery while the priest
eulogizing how Salvatore
was not dead but safe
in the bosom of Jesus
gave us one more reason
to turn against religion

And turning next to you
Kenny O'Brien with
a half way smoked
and unfiltered Camel
that with one drag
you almost gave away
with a cough that was soon
camouflaged
when half of grade six
coughed or cleared their throats
loud enough for Sister Marie
to turn to us and "Shhh!"

And that is how none of the adults
knew that Salvatore Carpino's
11-and-12-year old classmates
smoked what was for many-

their first cigarette-

-which was how we collectively
eulogized him -at his funeral

And the people who taught
and raised and blessed but mostly
killed you
were for once dulled by the stupor
of a morality

that they now pretended to believe in
Collect the Day

Collect the day and recollect
the nights when you saw her in all her lunar frolics.

Gather now these lines before the horse
stops on his tracks, before
this moon and paper light dims for good,
and you're left in the cold dark.
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