A rushlight flickering and small, is better than no light at all.
RUSHLIGHT

FALL 2016

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**Too More**  
Audrey Dubois

Too many dishes in too small a sink  
In a kitchen too cluttered with half-consumed drink  
And too many hours I’ve spent unasleep  
Reliving promises I’m too tired to keep  
Glass constellated by too many flies  
Like too-noisy stars in too-lowly skies  
The too-timely clock tells me too often how  
It’s too late to change into real clothes now  
Too soon to recover, too late to go back  
Too short a rope to keep on cutting slack  
And yet this rope’s too tangled up to unscrew  
One aspirin won’t do much, I’d better take two.
Alone
Juli Mikush
“sorry I can’t I have a doctor’s appointment”
Christine Evers

1
her name reminded me of a bird
I ate lunch in her office every day
she ate somewhere else
her husband was the band teacher
and her eyes sank deep into her face
she didn’t know what to do with me
so she had me draw pictures to decorate
her walls

2
there was a basketball hoop
and a picture of a city skyline
her initials were spelled out on the sides
of her glasses
in rhinestones
she had a whiteboard
and I wasn’t even supposed to see her in
the first place

3
I only saw her once
there was a lot of plants
they never called
maybe they didn’t like me

4
she always had a clipboard
and worksheets
she was convinced that would help
we played board games
she went to Stanford
the diploma was on her wall
she sits down right next to me
I don’t like that
she reminds me of things I already know
I don’t like that

one time she had a piece of food on her chin
and I didn’t tell her for the whole hour
she has a slide puzzle
I solve it every time
I draw diagrams and write out lists
and she gives it to me straight
no clipboards
I like that

“sorry I can’t I have a doctor’s appointment”
Untitled
Emma Garcelon
Can I tell you something?
Jimmy Russel

Remember my name
Like your mom’s
Pinky toenails

Wear your old cami
Watch a rom com
Don’t be so pale

I grew up and we never had ice cube trays in my house
Ablasse leans one shoulder against the door of the dryer in the laundromat on Congress Street and tells me this is not what he was expecting.
The dryer door shudders and threatens to spill a load of dress shirts & socks & ties recently retrieved from The Salvation Army along with a backpack’s worth of dirty t-shirts and sweats, stale from their stint at the city shelter.
Ablasse tells me people in Africa think everything here is so good. They do not hear about homeless shelters, he says, or people living on the street.

I ask him what he knows of the upcoming election and we somehow speak calmly about American politics, as though his future and the fate of his family do not hang in the balance. There is no balance, I find, between justice and reality.
We stuff his dry clothes into new plastic bags and fill my car with the soap-scented sacks. I speed back up Congress and Ablesse asks if I am religious. I tell him that I am and do not elaborate on my liberal notion of religion, preferring to live in a shared understanding of grace.

Outside of his apartment Ablasse tells me thank you. He tells me God bless you.
Biomorphic
Charlotte Middleton
Soft Names
Jordana Joy

An infinity exists
where the light does not hit.
A flick of the lamp,
and my mortality flashes here
and there, if only for an
instant. Light fills, seemingly
slowly, molasses in a hurry,
the night agitated by its
business. There is
nothing outside a you or
a me. All else exists within
a bump of a toe, the bruise of a shin.
You give a small smirk in
the privacy, where you wish to misplace
the black and blue.
I see the pinkness of
your lips from across the room.
I stand for a moment, my stagnancy
made warm by thoughts pacing.
Cowardice makes an infinity
out of me, and I wish
to turn off the light.
101 Ways Not to Die in the North
Angela Hyde

Let the North remind you of the world’s violence, in harsh hail and wind, 
let it remind you of the world’s softness, 
in the growing of perfumed lavender beds, 
seek the faerie circles, and 
sit in the middle and make your wishes, 
blow the dandelion tufts and let the seeds 
fall like snow around you, remember t
he weeds grow inside even if you don’t swallow.
Camouflage yourself, wear a hat, dress warmly, 
be accepting of the traffic jam, beware half-frigid hearts, 
don’t breathe too heavily, save your oxygen, leave alone 
the frozen silence that the forests create, the wild animals hear all.
Go birdwatching, rent a kayak, float down a river, but 
heed the coming of the dam, don’t go out without a flashlight, it gets dark 
without warning, here where the sun tricks you, 
don’t think it will melt your cold away.
Don’t eat the yellow snow, save a stray cat while avoiding the black ice, 
pick flowers while you can and save them in your grandma’s vase 
cherish the growth in the dead of winter, feeding your soul 
while the wild things starve and freeze under white layers.
Remember not to tempt the wind, remember she’s a bitter mistress, 
layers are for the ones who live, long underwear is worth the panty-lines, 
don’t worry if he doesn’t look at you the same, 
everyone is starved of ultra-violet 
ignore the silence of the nights, and don’t forget 
the birds can take vacation flights for free.
Say bye to the friends who go to Florida, feel free to cry till you taste it, 
salt is good for your heart, 
eat much, gain weight, look at yourself in the mirror 
and remind yourself you’re just stocking up for the cold, 
the heat of spring will help you shed your weight like a winter-coat.
Cuddle with your safe place, leave the sadness on their front doorstep, 
hurricanes don’t touch these waters but blizzards can bulldoze the mainland, 
stock up on soup, keep tissues in your pockets, 
here we unstuff the noses like hearts.
Don’t let him in again, keep your doors locked,
remember that you didn’t like his love,  
write a novel, don’t run from bears, remember to feed the cat,  
water the plants they’re dehydrated, water yourself you’re dehydrated,  
put new batteries in the flashlight, the light is growing dim,  
and you need a shine on those ghosts that follow you to bed at night.  
Go outside, breathe the crispness  
and exhale soft puffs like a small dragon,  
make a snow-friend out of frozen water, watch them melt,  
know that squirrels will  
eat their carrot nose and sneeze for them,  
sled down the unbuilt brethren of your fallen friend,  
and say you have no regrets, regret much,  
breathe more and keep breathing.  
Eat apples and thank the tree for their sweetness,  
visit a farm to see how humble pigs  
live and watch the simple lives of things  
not advanced enough to know pain, contemplate  
dying while roasting marshmallows,  
decide to kill something beautiful and pick flower  
in its prime, know it’s okay; we all need to destroy  
something better than us to survive.  
Fall asleep under a pillow-fort, watch movies that make you cry,  
warm yourself with  
sweet alcohol, make the choice to push down the black days with pills,  
make the choice to leave the door open in case the cat comes back,  
made the choice to throw the flowers away.  
Make the choice not to die today.  
Make the choice not to die today.
Nordhaven
Connor West
A “Hero” in New York
Nevin

It was hot. Then again, it was always hot in August. But this wasn’t the kind of hot that prompted a trip to the beach. It was the kind of hot that led to afternoons complaining with a cold cloth on your forehead, trying to get your parents to turn on the AC while you sweat in places you didn’t know were possible. But our hero did not care for such things. His problem was much greater than the weather. At approximately 10:23 AM on a particularly hot Tuesday, he was called into the office of the man he worked for, Mr. Brayden. As he talked, our hero picked up words like downsizing, and stock value, and knew what it meant.

“I hope this doesn’t come as a shock to you, Kenneth.” Mr. Brayden said, and Ken, who hadn’t been called Kenneth by anyone other than his mother since the third grace, looked up at Mr. Brayden, trying to contain just how shocked he was. How couldn’t he be? He thought over his morning, to all of the moments that stuck in his mind. Alarm going off at exactly 7 AM, rolling out of bed and looking in the mirror, seeing the same brown eyes and curly black hair, the same pillow marks on his face making his skin look like brown corduroy. Heading out the door by 8:05 he had made his way to work, his morning routine intact just the way he liked it.

Walking down the street he stepped up to his first morning stop, “How are you today, Peter?” He asked the vendor, “How’s Annie?” Annie was Peter’s wife, a pleasant woman, despite being married to Peter.

“Good.” Peter said, “At her mother’s this week for one last mini vacation before the baby comes.” Ken handed over two slightly crumpled one dollar bills and Peter added sugar to the cup. “There you are.” Peter dropped $0.37 into Ken’s palm, and gave a rare smile. Ken continued down the street dropping the change into the same homeless man’s Styrofoam cup as he did every other day, rounding the corner to his next destination. The small newspaper stand that had promised to set aside a copy of the Times every morning.

“Here he is!” Dave the newspaper vendor said, “Same time as always.” Ken put his sunglasses on top of his head and looked at his watch, 8:24 AM. He was right on time. He asked Dave about business, and if his daughter had made the honor roll at school, before using the coffee he had bought only minutes before to salute him. Turning on his heel, he continued towards the subway that he had been taking for years, walking underground to where it was cooler. The subway was particularly crowded today, full of people who normally walked trying to get out of the sunlight as much as they could. Ken stood reading his paper, after giving up his seat to a young woman with a swollen belly. She thanked him, dropping into
the seat with a sigh of relief, opening up a copy of *Vanity Fair*, while using another magazine, *Parenthood*, to fan herself. He overheard a conversation between two women who had just moved into an apartment with a third party named Michelle, whose mention always prompted an eye roll from both, as they discussed how they’d tell her that while they loved when she had parties on Wednesday’s, they had jobs and needed sleep. He watched as a woman spoke in rapid Spanish on the phone braiding her young daughter’s hair.

Ken’s stop came before theirs, and he left them, allowing himself to be led by the throng of people making their way to the financial district. He walked through the station, listening to the mechanical voice that echoed the tunnels, telling everyone to “Stand clear of the closing doors please.” As he made his way to the top of the steps he pulled his sunglasses on, his world transforming into a blend of earth tones as an almost audible sigh escaped him, opening his eyes from the squint that the daylight had reduced him to.

He had made it to work on time, catching an elevator heading to the 16th floor, squished between a man who smelled like beef jerky and a woman filing her nails. When he made it to his floor he was engulfed with the sound of telephones and boring conversations, most of which had nothing to do with investment in any way. He walked through the office, making his way to the small IT department that he shared with two other technicians. He spent at least an hour watching them trying to build part of a computer out of car parts until a secretary rushed through the door, phone in hand, eyes panicked.

“My phone’s broken!” She said, “Can you fix it?” She held it out in both her hands, as if it were sacred.

“Did you try turning it off and back on again?” The response he gave to everyone and that worked most of the time.

“Oh.” She said, “No I didn’t.” He watched as she forced her phone to shut down and then turned it on. “I can’t believe that worked! Thanks!” She turned away for a moment before backtracking, leaning on the doorframe. “Mr. Brayden would like to see you.” Ken didn’t know what to expect from his meeting with Mr. Brayden, but he didn’t imagine that it would end with his dismissal from the company.

“We just don’t have the resources we used to, and we don’t need three people working IT.” Mr. Brayden said, “We felt that you have been falling behind recently, and that it would be better if we just let you go now. No hard feelings, I hope.” Mr. Brayden stood up and straightened his tie. Before holding out his hand, his sad smile only somewhat genuine. Ken shook his hand and returned the smile, in his mind going over all the things he wanted to say to Mr. Brayden but knew he never would.
Instead he collected himself and walked away, heading back to the small IT department that had been his work for three years. He picked up the name plate that sat on the desk, Kenneth Todd. Never in his life had he felt like a Kenneth. That was a name for someone who had accomplished things, someone who had moved up in the ranks of business and had their own office. He was just Ken.

Cleaning off his desk was easy. All it contained was his name plate and a stapler. When he had wandered into the building three years ago he had no intention of staying there. Fresh out of college and looking for something to pay the bills while he looked for the kind of job he wanted, one that would let him help people, one that would make him a hero. But he had fallen into a routine that was safe and comfortable, just the way he liked it.

After putting the belongings in his bag he headed for the elevator, looking away from all of his ex-coworkers, denying them the satisfaction of knowing just how upset he was. He instead held his head high and sang “Bohemian Rhapsody” to himself all the way down to the first floor. Exiting the air conditioned vacuum, and entering the humid and horn-filled world that awaited beyond the doors of unemployment.

Ken found it hard to see the good that could come from his current situation, but he had decided to make the best he could and take his usual route home. At least his routine wouldn’t be too altered. Heading away from the building and wandering toward the corner that always had his favorite donut stand. There was usually a line of high school and college students, just finishing their intern jobs for the day, but at 10:24 in the morning, they were nowhere to be found, and much to his despair, the donut stall was gone as well. Ken decided he would not be thwarted so easily, and shrugged it off.

He continued on and looked for the hot dog stand that sometimes served as his dinner, deciding today it was the right choice. He found himself whistling, watching the people around him more closely than usual. He made his way to the corner where Carl’s Hot Dog stand always was, but on this particular day in August, much to the dismay of Kenneth Todd, there was instead a stand with the name Margaret’s Homemade Ice Cream in place of the hot dog stand.

“Hi!” The girl at the stand said, “Welcome to Margaret’s Homemade Ice Cream.” She smiled, “I’m Margaret, and what can I get you today?” She seemed cheerful enough, but Ken had been denied his job, and a donut, and was not in the mood for her smile.

“Where’s Carl?” He asked.

He’s not here yet.” Margaret seemed a little taken aback, but her smile didn’t waver for even a second. “He’ll be here at three. I have
the corner until then.” She stared at Ken, and he did his best to return her smile. She didn’t deserve his bad day. It wasn’t her fault he got fired, it wasn’t her fault that the donut stand had been nowhere to be found, and it certainly wasn’t her fault for doing her job. He looked at the sign. Ice cream did sound good.

“What flavors do you have?” He put his sunglasses on top of his head and listened as she listed them off.

“I’ll have some salted caramel.” He said, “In a dish if you don’t mind.” She nodded, and got to work, Ken taking out his wallet almost reluctantly. He was without employment now, and wouldn’t be able to afford snack runs everyday as he did now.

“There you go.” Margaret said, handing him a dish with a spoon sticking out of it.

“Thank you.” He paid, looking around at the city that existed before 5:00 PM. He saw nannies with small children, families on vacation looking around and taking pictures of everything, the everyday hustle and bustle of the city that he always missed. He stood next to Margaret’s stand a little while longer, eating his ice cream, taking in the city, letting the caramel and salt melt on his tongue before continuing on towards his apartment.

The next morning when his alarm went off at 7:00 AM Ken got up, showered, and headed out the door, stopping first for his morning coffee and then for his newspaper. His transition to unemployment came easy he found. It was a simple routine to fall into, and for this he was grateful. Spending his days leaving his apartment at 8:05 AM, and reading the classified ads in the morning newspaper while riding the subway trying to find anything that looked like IT work. Stopping at Margaret’s for ice cream everyday was always the last thing he did before heading home. It was usually around 11:24 AM, and by day three she knew his order.

“Salted Caramel again?” She asked when he walked up, and he nodded, taking out his wallet again, and pulling out some of the last dollars he had left. A few days before he had calculated that he could be unemployed for another month before having to cut anything from his routine. Ken had never been a big spender, and now that he had no income he was grateful for this.

Margaret handed him the bowl of ice cream, spoon sticking out of it as it had been everyday for two weeks, the same smile as she made change and handed him a small printed receipt. Ken stood a few feet away from the stand as he had been everyday, noting that even this small part of his day was now routine, loving the simplicity of it, when a man dressed surprisingly similar to himself walked up.

“Hey sweetie, just stopping by.” He said, and put his hand on
Margaret’s shoulder, giving her a quick kiss on the cheek. Ken watched as Margaret began to prepare another bowl of ice cream, listening to the man talk about his new business.

“Things are going better, but the teenager in Queens I told you about won’t leave us alone. He’s broken into our system four times this week.” Ken listened with curiosity as the man described his predicament, using terms that Ken knew well, and knew how to fix.

“What kind of Security do you have set up?” He asked, causing both Margaret and the man to look at him, as if they had forgotten there was a third party standing within ear shot.

“I, uh, I don’t know.” The man said, “We just started business a few months ago. I thought it would be years before anyone tried anything.”

“What have your IT guys done about it?” Ken asked, intrigued by the situation this man was in.

“We don’t have IT guys, it’s hard to find people these days who know that Firewall isn’t an actual wall.” He turned to Margaret and rolled his eyes, sharing a joke that only they understood.

“I’m Ken, by the way.” Ken held out his hand and the man gave a small smile.

“Daniel.” He shook Ken’s hand, “Tell me, Ken, what line of work are you in?”

“I’m an IT guy.” He said, “If you want I could come take a look at the kind of damage this guy has done and see what I can do to fix it.” Ken said, biting the inside of his lip, had he offered too soon? He just met this man!

“Would you?” Daniel asked, “That would be fantastic. I’m not sure if I can pay you for your trouble because you’re not actually our employee, but if you can fix our problem I’m sure the other members of the board would be willing to consider hiring you to work IT at least part time.” After discussing the problem Daniel’s small business was facing the two men exchanged contact information.

“I’ve got to get to the office, but I’ll text you the details tonight.” Daniel said, shaking hands with Ken again before turning to Margaret. “I’ll see you tonight.”

“Go get ‘em, tiger.” Margaret said, laughing as he kissed her nose. She watched him go, hands on her hips shaking her head, playful smile still present on her face.

“What kind of business is Daniel in?” Ken asked, and Margaret turned to him.

“He started his own loan company.” Margaret said, “Daniel used to work for a huge corporation and he hated to see how they took
advantage of people by adding interest to their loans. So he decided to start his own company that would help people who didn’t quite have the means to take loans from bigger companies. He put everything he had into it and if it doesn’t work out he’s going to be back making ice cream at our apartment all day.”

At 1:24 PM, Ken opened the door to his apartment, dropping the newspaper on his kitchen table, the pile that laid there starting to reach new heights as he made his way through the small rooms, settling down on the old couch, sinking lower than ever before as the springs groaned. Ken opened his bag and took out the name plate he hadn’t bothered to take out from the day Mr. Brayden had fired him, looking at the name engraved on it, wondering if he would ever do something worthy of the name Kenneth, and if this opportunity with Daniel could be it.

At 5:37 Daniel texted him, an address, and a time. It was later than he was used to, and Ken wondered if this was going to ruin his routine. Would he still be able to leave at 8:05? Would his coffee and paper be there for him when he wanted it to be? His thoughts kept him awake much later than his preferred 11:30, and when his alarm went off at 7:00, he really thought about hitting the snooze button, but his routine meant too much to him as he pulled himself out of bed, and began his day, but today he got onto a different train, making his way to a smaller sector of the financial district, being pulled through the streets by a smaller crowd of people.

When Ken made it to the address Daniel had texted him, he walked inside immediately knowing he was going to like it. Small and dimly lit, the main room gave off a warmth that seemed both professional and sincere, as he looked around and found desks with couples holding hands as they told their story, hoping to get a loan for their first house, a new car, trying to start a business of their own, all while a secretary took notes, before passing it on to whoever made the final decision. Ken looked around, and saw Daniel walking towards him.

“Welcome to our little loan company!” he said, shaking Ken’s hand, “I talked to the other two members of the board, and while we can’t get anything in writing just yet, they’re willing to use this as kind of an interview. If you can make this problem go away, we’ll consider hiring you full time as IT and security.” He led Ken through the office, taking him past the elderly woman who gave lollipops to anyone who asked, the broom closet that was used for office romances more than storing brooms, and eventually to a small office with a single computer sitting on a desk.

“You can get set up here, and I’ll go tell the other board members you’re here.” Daniel left him for a moment, and Ken opened his bag, looking again at the nameplate that he still carried with him. Daniel came
back a moment later, followed by a man and a woman, both of whom introduced themselves and shook Ken’s hand.

“We have decided as a group that if you perform well now, this will be your interview as I’m sure Daniel told you,” the woman named Celia said “He can show you the problem we’re having.” Daniel nodded and turned the desktop on, explaining to Ken what was going on. Screens flashed before him, his brain worked faster than it had since college, as he wrote out in his head how he would fix the problem. The soothing sound of typing rang in his ears as he began to fix the problem, fighting his way through the virus that had taken over the hard drive.

It took him over an hour, it took two cups of coffee and one bathroom break, but eventually at 11:37 AM Kenneth Todd had fixed the system. He ran a few tests, and sat back, looking up at the three board members who had all been sitting across from him while he worked.

“It’s done.” Ken said, smiling at them. Daniel was the first to stand up, moving to see what the screen of the computer looked like,

“Heard it, looks better than it did before all of this started.” He shook his head and looked up at the other board members, “So what do you think?”

“Well, it might take a few days, but we’ll draw up the papers to make you a full time employee.” Celia said, turning to the other man who nodded.

“You can start work tomorrow, fixing some other bugs in our system, and updating software, however we won’t be able to pay you until next week.” The other man, who was named Brian said, “But I think for all three of us when I say welcome to the team.”

“Thank you so much,” Ken said, shaking hands with all three once more.

“I’m feeling some ice cream, how about you?” Daniel said as Celia and Brian left, “Margaret needs to hear the news.”

The next morning Ken left the house, his bag in hand, sunglasses on his head as he made his way leisurely down the street, taking his time as he made his way to the subway. He still stopped by Peter’s for coffee, and still got his paper from Dave, but as he made his way into the financial district, he didn’t even look at the building he used to work at. He walked into the building he would soon officially work at, and made his way to the desk that Daniel had shown him the day before. It was small and a little worn, but it had a view of the rest of the office, and the families that came in everyday, with their own plans for the future. It allowed Ken to witness the happiness they expressed at hearing that they now have the resources to do all of things they dreamed of.

Ken sat down, putting his bag on the floor and opening it up
and taking out his stapler, placing it on the desk, before smiling and taking something else out of the bag as well. A picture of him and his parents the day he graduated college. He pulled out another, a picture of him and his little sister the last time she visited him. He smiled at the pictures, and realized happily as he looked around, he was going to be here a while.
Cart Comely Cot
Anonymous

Cat. Motorcycle. Cat. Motorcycle. Cat. Motorcycle.
Cat. Motorcycle.
Cat vs. Motorcycle vs. Cat vs Motorcycle.
Cat. Motorcycle. Cat. Motorcycle.
Meowtercylce. Cat. Motor sigh.
Coat. Matter style.
Cat. Motorcycle.
Black-Necked Grebe
Haley Gamel
In the dorm bathroom at 1:42 am, there are things to notice
Angela Hyde

There are doves on the shelves around you, perched, and waiting, to be used up and have their fragrant juices spread amongst the coarse hairs of young animals too desperate for approval, for money, for future, for another minute of unabashed darkness to sleep before the alarm bells and birds and that distinct smell burning distant and permeating the spaces between at the blurry-eyed hours of the morning.

The doves are encased in white, tan, magenta and pearl shiny, and waiting, almost empty from overuse, as is your neighbor soaking their teeth with mint froth like a hygienic rabid animal, washing the blood of the day from their gums in an attempt at civilization and the mirrors are stained deeper when you look and don’t recognize the equally rabid animal in front of you staring unchangingly with eyes like the centers of sun-flowers, dark and deep and you take the dove to your baptism water hot enough it feels holy, that sometimes boils on your winter-whipped and sin-scratched limbs rebirth is too hot and too cold and comes with the threat of athlete’s foot.

The spread of doves into your hair soothing, and waiting, washing the day out, washing the sun-dried trees washing the stain of last night’s mirror off your skull wash with care, don’t scratch too hard and step out with prune feet wrinkled in a way you are always surprised can be achieved by skin that is yours, that you’re told is yours, or something metaphysical in between and at an hour past decent you look in the mirror at the face of a rabid fox, with black-running eyes, and wonder who she is and what the dove on the shelf behind her smells like.
Untitled
Arianna Dilios
to care for graves
Nicholas Gagliardi

1
first, take your grandmother’s car.
cross the river in it.
she will bring two plastic gallons of water
even though it has started to drizzle.
the streets of the city of the dead are winding
but she remembers the way;
she was born here.

2
you will not remember how to pray.
confession was always done for you
and words will always fail you.
vavo knows how, though.
anoint the evergreens and lilies
and speak from shame to love

3
memories are fermented to white.
to remember, consume it.
bread, milk, cheese at a funeral:
there is a reason, an old reason, for this
blood runs but never thins.

4
“do you like to speak?”
no, father.
i can barely remember when to kneel,
and i’ve never done it off my ass.
you genuflect womanly, defiant,
but it is out of tiredness.
understanding will come later.

5
the LORD made special men and women
who were born to fix themselves.
this is a prayer you remember
scrubbing your nails as mom looks on
digging graphite from your hands
anointing yourself with foundation, eyeshadow.
it is clumsy, but it is a start.

6
there are elders and there are teachers.
the ones who are both are not around.
george lives in san francisco,
where he is easier to take in.
the other’s name you still don’t know.
his love went viral, buried him.
grandpa remembers in white,
and you remember you will have a ghost someday.

7
seventh, consult the moirai.
clotho laughs with his whole belly,
stands outside the shed to smoke at break.
he shows you the son whose fate he wove.
lachesis is ever present,
his skin leathery, his form wiry.
for his work on the pond you hope he is remembered.
atropos is not mean, yes,
but stubborn? always.
he shoos clotho, for he hates nicotine,
he derides lachesis for his harpyish ways,
but he lends what you ask.
there is not a shred of doubt in your mind
that these three men would kill you if they knew.

8
love is written in mom’s white knuckles
as she grips the steering wheel in silence.
you knew it would hurt,
but it still does.
fear is graven on her lips,
and you can read it clearly.
in the end, we agree to hide it,
as love goes viral in many different ways,
and other words can be written in fists.

9
ninth, hold yourself at night.
your form is forever marred with stubble,
caked in fat and gristle,
baritone, unwieldy, unlovable.
this will not change.
this may never change.

10
you would never cross the river again.
vavo would shun you as a dead son
your grave will already be dug.
so anoint your eyelids in secret
that others like you will know –
oh, to find others!
to see eyes that read the script of regret
for a word we never wrote!
- that you might love in a way
that only your eyes can see.

11
eleventh, take the shovel.
every death ends with the breaking of ground.
you dont bury them yourself,
rather, give that privilege to the mourners:
there is no better place for tears than shoveled dirt.
push the headstone.
the moirai are used to it, but it still makes you feel something
flowers can only stay for a month.
keep the grass around it trimmed.
teach the children that some of them will
have to do this,
to keep blood thick and memory white
for ever and ever,
ao infinito,
mundo sem fin.

12
“is this love, boy?”
not like this.
love is in lemon across my ass
i take this sacrament in desperation
that i may fuck and be fucked
that my blood might be wine for just one night
that the statue i am might melt for a moment
that my smells that sculpted me take pity and mold me
so my ghost is no longer synarthrotic with my cock.
have mercy upon the dickgirls, LORD;
LORD have mercy on us.
Untitled
Arianna Dilios
A Faerie Tale
John Segal

It was a warm summer’s eve in the town, and the people were celebrating.

Kegs of beer, mounds of vegetables, and the rare bits of game caught in the forest crowded the tables. The townspeople were laughing, shouting, and singing.

Winter had been long and harsh, battering the doors with her icy fury, and the town was only just beginning to recover. The snow had melted with the arrival of summer, but the wounds left by winter’s ravages took longer to heal. Barns had collapsed. Fences had fallen. Repairs had proceeded quickly, and the lord decided that a feast was in order. Tables were brought out to the green and set up below the spreading branches of the great oak. Lanterns were hung and food prepared.

As night fell, people began crowding into the square. The last few children raced to their seats, and the lord spoke.

He spoke of the harshness of winter, and the people nodded gravely. He then congratulated the people on the speed of their repairs, and they cheered. The speech was short, and the feast began. He was a good lord.

Now it so happened that the lord had a son. Energetic and kind-hearted, the boy was beloved by all who met him. A lad of sixteen summers, he seemed well-suited to his role as heir.

As the feast continued and the dancing began, he had no shortage of partners. Women of all ages sought his hand, and he willingly obliged. Yet there was one who did not approach.

She stood alone at the edge of the lanterns’ light. Dark of hair and eye, yet pale of skin, she stood alone and watched the boy as he danced.

He found his eye repeatedly drawn to this strange girl. Why did she not approach? Who was she? For the boy had learned the faces and names of his future subjects, and hers was not among them. She simply stood and watched.

The dancing came to an end, and the people began to return home. The lord bid his son good-night and returned to the manor-house. The torches were doused, and the tables put away. Still she remained, illuminated by the moon’s thin light. The boy found himself entranced, hardly noticing as the others left.

Soon they were alone.
He made as if to approach, and suddenly she was gone, swallowed up by the night. He dashed to the spot upon which she stood, but she was nowhere in sight.

There, suddenly, a flash of white at the forest’s edge! Could it be her? He rushed to follow.

His heartbeat pounded in his ears as he reached the trees. Where had she gone? Into the forest? But why? It wasn’t safe among the trees, the townspeople said, especially at night. When the hunters were deep in their cups, they whispered of strange sights and sounds in the wood, odd lights and wispy voices.

Was that her face behind a tree? It was! He could barely see her eyes against the bark, and it was only by the light of the moon upon her face that he knew her. Again, he was struck by her beauty. She was unlike anyone he had ever seen.

Come out of the wood, he called. It’s not safe in there.

She laughed, the tinkling of tiny bells, and smiled. Then she turned, and began to walk deeper into the forest.

Wait! he cried. Fearing for her safety, he ran headlong beneath the boughs of the trees.

Ferns brushed his ankles, and branches whipped his face as he raced to catch her. Roots tripped him, and brambles snatched at his clothing. She seemed always to be but a few yards ahead of him, walking calmly through the wood.

His breath began to catch in his lungs, and his legs grew tired. As he drew to a stop, she too paused. Glancing over her shoulder, she favored him with a smile.

Giving up the chase so soon? she said. And I was just beginning to have fun.

She pouted, and promptly disappeared.

He stumbled towards the ground upon which she had stood, only to collapse within a ring of mushrooms. The world seemed to shiver around him as his eyes closed.

When he awoke, he found himself gazing into her eyes. Falling, drowning in the depths of a dark sea, slipping beneath the crashing waves. He blinked, and suddenly they were only eyes. Unusually dark, perhaps, but only eyes.

I thought you wouldn’t make it, she said. Would you like something to drink?

Puzzled by the quick change of subject and still dazed from his sudden collapse, he accepted. She handed him a silver goblet, filled to the brim.

Drink, she urged.
He brought the goblet to his lips, only to gag at the taste. What is this? he cried. Are you trying to poison me? He dropped the goblet and stumbled to his feet, eyes searching desperately for some escape. Iron coated his tongue. What is this? he cried. Are you trying to poison me? He dropped the goblet and stumbled to his feet, eyes searching desperately for some escape.

He was no longer in the forest. He stood atop a stone tower wreathed in budding ivy, and the sky was awash with red and gold. Strange plants carpeted the ground at the tower’s base: roses with thorns the size of swords, trees twisted and gnarled with hate. He turned to the girl, seeking some kind of explanation. It was only then that he realized his mistake. For her ears were pointed, and her eyes were old, and her smile held too many teeth.

By my blood you are bound, mortal, bound to me until your bones are dust, and life is but a fleeting memory. By my willingly consumed blood, I bind you to my service, she said. As she spoke, the clouds came down out of the clear sky and wrapped her in a cloak of rain, shadow and storm. Only her eyes remained, deep pits in the tenebrous haze.

He tried to run, but his muscles refused to obey. He stood, frozen, as she approached.

The boy came back to town the next morning. Gone was his good cheer and gone too was his gentle heart. His face was ever hidden in shadow, and his nature grew to match the darkness of his visage. He disappeared at times, and his eyes became narrowed with paranoia and hate. As the lord grew older, the people became more and more fearful. On the day that the lord drew his last, shuddering breath, his son walked into the forest, never to return.

The town washed its hands of him.
Sick Woman
Jordana Joy

Sick woman,
your skin the
gray tree rings
of years that
others will live
after you. I have
reverberated
through your time,
a pattering of
bare feet like
the stones we
skipped long,
long ago.

A chest freckled with
spots of age,
rising again and again
in an ancient way,
an ashen sea that
whitens the walls
with patience. To heal here,
there is a slow ticking.
Everyone has their own,
but do not wish to hear
it. Yours, filling the
room, a pond of
pulsing.

Hands gone blue,
eyes pooling,
a brief puddle,
a sea of passing.
Some storm
caught you wrong.
You live with this
expansiveness.
The ocean knows
when we reflect.
Your hands must have
been cold and salty.

Sick woman,
your small
house smaller
and smaller,
the hollow within
an apple in which
the seed lies. Now,
orange and inflamed,
brought back to be
born again.

Weeds, I see them
already: arisen,
small heads of
no substance,
tall with lack of
trimming. Absence
allows it. The cat
will pad by,
timid and black,
a stomach hanging
a little less low, a shadow
slimmed by the stasis of
the sun. Its warmth has passed
and dried, gone in the paint
of the house or clothes on
the line.

Sick woman,
lavender drier sheets,
wet dog after it rains,
a drag of fingers on damp tables,
glass smelling of seaweed and fish,
the rolling of prescription pills on napkins,
the firs and the pines and the wires and your raw red fingers-

The divine do not count
these months of absence
like we do. They can still
fit on our fingers.

Sick woman,
you fit in your
small black box.

This was not the
way I wanted to see
you when you go.
Untitled
Emma Garcelon
On Coming Out
Caroline Dyhrberg

The kitchen in my house
is covered in flour and butter,
which is to say
that my house only serves to thicken
this stew in my body.
The walls cave inward when I reach for the eggs,
or the chocolate,
or the nasturtium leaves.
I can not reach my roots anymore.
My silence is spinning
and spinning
and spinning inside of my
white kitchenaid mixer.
I think it was making some sort of cake,
or bread,
or something that families can enjoy together,
but now it is hard
and dry
and looks like
raw sourdough that has been sitting out
for too many days.
It lines the inside of my mouth
and balls itself in the back of my throat.
Soon I will not be able to open my lips.
For dinner, my dad prepares tomatoes from the garden.
They are red and orange and yellow and look
like one of those sunsets
that shows at the end of an emotional TV episode.
My eyes roll in their sockets like heavy marbles,
which is to say
they are always falling towards the ground.
But I force them to stop spinning,
to look into my parents’ eyes,
and let out the flood.
Falling
Juli Mikush
Faulty Human
Audrey Dubois

I considered myself a faulty human.
My head was dizzy and tired.
My shoulders rolled in and my ankles turned out.
My joints cracked, my muscles ached, and sometimes my intestines didn’t work as they should.

One day, I went to the dealership and said, “I am a faulty human. I am young; I am still under warranty. I want a refund and I will pay for an upgrade.”

I named my price and the dealer slipped a few bills over the counter. I slipped the bills right back along with the entire contents of my wallet, including a library card, a coupon for a small cheese pizza, and a photo of myself from eleventh grade.

The dealer wheeled in a shiny new metallic body, I signed a few papers, and I fell asleep, dreaming of all the things my new self would be able to do.

When I woke up, I was not dreaming any more. I opened my cybernetically-enhanced eyes, thanked the dealer with my solar-powered voice box, and walked away on my shock-absorbent feet.

I read books with my increased reading comprehension (I didn’t enjoy them).

I never had digestive problems again (I couldn’t eat).

I ran around with my new steel-braced legs (I had nowhere to go).

One day the steel legs took me back to the dealership and I saw my old body there behind glass. It was like looking into a mirror, but my hair was parted on the other side, and my eyes were closed, and it did not look like me at all any more. It was for sale.

The description tag was an oddly long list of bulleted points all punctuated by an exclamation mark:

Healthy Fingernails! Passable Color Acuity! All Thirty-Two Original Teeth! Can read! Can write! Can play music! Excellent diaphragm to support inimitable laugh!

(My new body didn’t have a diaphragm. My new body didn’t have a laugh.)

I thought to myself, perhaps this faulty human was not so faulty after all. I should buy it back. My cybernetically enhanced eye caught sight of the price tag; it was worth over a hundred times what I sold it for.

Though my internal processors calculated I did not have enough money and probably never would, my arm reached for my wallet. My hypersensitive digits detected nothing.

My old body had also had the good sense to wear pants with pockets.
Three
Charlotte Hall