



a journal of politics / prose / poetry / pictures

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# Editors' Notes

--Mike / [mike@noojournal.com](mailto:mike@noojournal.com)

**DEAR MIKE CIRCA 2005:** You feel too close to the sun. But you're in graduate school, so you've got health insurance. Which means you walk across the parking lot of the campus in Maryland where you're working at a summer camp, and you waltz right into the ER. They snug a surgical mask on your face. How do you feel? they ask, also masked. Like I fell asleep inside a cave, you say, except the cave is also sleeping inside of me. You get bedded and quarantined. Sniffed and poked. They make you breathe in and out of a blue smoke nozzle, which might make you a little lightheaded—unless, they wink, you're used to the how-to. Saline solution slurps through the IV, which you're a little embarrassed about, that IV, since you've always associated IVs with people who are sick as a cliffhanger—or, you know, old. But the IV is necessary and fast. That's what they say. Their daughter moved to North Carolina, got mono, and they sent her a blanket in the mail. How far away did you move? they ask. Across the country. That's a pretty little leap, they say, and you nod and let them wheel you around in a ridiculous gurney. They give you pills that look like tiny boats and cough syrup they've yet to invent a new flavor for. On your lungs, they find a dollop of pneumonia, an éclair of bacteria. Well, bacterial means not contagious, right? Sure, says the doctor. If my influenza test came back negative why do you need to send it to the state? Sure, the doctor says.

During the next few days spent in mandatory domestication, you write one song about breaking into a mill and one song about a mustache even fish can see. You also finish, finally, designing **NOO [ten]**, which is the magazine you just started with Kyle. It's ten issues deep, yo. They read it all over the freeway system and on a mountain, probably, if mountains get wi-fi. Hey, those brushy swoops you fuck around with in Illustrator have scooted into an aesthetic that people recognize and even copy. Your hair is more casual. You own four new cowboy shirts.

These days, you co-edit **NOO** with this dude Ryan Call, who sort of colonizes his nervousness when he smiles, just like you. Slick. For this issue, he wrote about The Greying Ghost, which is an awesome chapbook press out of Boston, which you've been to. You've seen Jesus of the Ozarks and shouted poetry on the El. Your favorite Brooklyn train is the J. In **NOO [ten]**, you're publishing people like Kim Chinquee and Ron Padgett—I know, right?—and people you haven't heard of yet but whose work will knead your face plenty deep, like Karen Gentry and Rebecah Pulsifer. Once you read this issue, you'll realize that you're more open with the weird, pickier (but just as fierce) about the sentimental, suspicious now of the overtly gestural, and still friends with Bryan Coffelt, even though living together in an apartment on Garfield Street will make y'all want to sandblast each other.

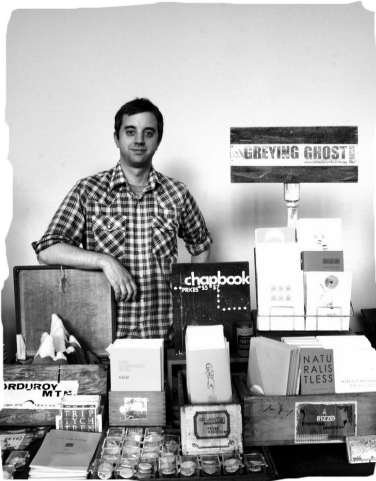
Your parents still take issues to Mug Shots in Oroville. But now other parents read issues too, in Georgia, South Dakota, Portland, Williamsburg, and more. Someone in France taught **NOO** in their online literature class; someone is translating pieces from **NOO** into Hebrew. Oh yeah, you met Tom Waits. Though you won't shut up about it. Really, you still have a lot of problems with shutting up. Snow is something you've walked through for the sake of either girls or deer: you still can't tell the difference. In Vancouver, you ate Jamaican pancake stew. Off EBay you keep buying new sunglasses. You and Jack play a lot of tennis. You and Rachel analyze your friends. You make chapbooks and books through Magic Helicopter Press, like Daniel Bailey's book *The Drunk Sonnets*, which people can now preorder through [magichelicopterpress.com](http://magichelicopterpress.com). Dan drunk-dialed you last week and left you a voicemail of him and a whole bar screaming MIKE YOUNG until it morphed, of communal volition, into LIGHT CHUG. All you ever drink is coffee, whiskey, and orange juice. Wait, Jeff Mangum is back! And you've got your own band! With an oboe player! And, dude, it *is* called The Cinnamon Urns! People are too nice to you! They give you money when you run fundraisers to print this thing! You can't thank them enough, but you should try.

Listen kid, you should learn to grab a nap. But you won't. Shucks. People are still carving amazing wordthings and giving them to you for the share-forth and you still feel proud about that. You still get a rush from this little hock up of staples and pulp and saying Here, see if you feel better after you read this. What do you remember from the past five years? A laundry bag full of apples and a fog of mosquitoes. Oh, and in case you're wondering: 1) She never did, 2) Mustard greens, and 3) Kind of like a rice field on fire.

# NOÖ Presents: THE GREYING GHOST

Reviews of independent literary projects

--Ryan Call



Carl Annarummo

**I**N SEPTEMBER OF 2007, Carl Annarummo's *The Greying Ghost* ([www.airforcejoyride.com/gg](http://www.airforcejoyride.com/gg)) began as a roadtrip idea borne of the long hours he and his wife spent in the car while honeymooning through the midwestern United States. Annarummo had recently dropped his previous project, the former online journal *Pettycoat Relaxer*, and looked forward to taking a break from the whole publishing scene. In his words, the process had grown "too formulaic and repetitive." However, he also missed working with the various writers he had met online—writers, he says, "who were doing this really creative and zany and sophisticated writing." So publishing a chapbook series, then, seemed like a good way to reconnect with these writers and print work he admired, while at the same time allowing him to break away from that online publishing formula. Annarummo says, "I decided to create a press that writers would be excited about." So, after the honeymoon, Annarummo contacted a few authors to see if they had anything to send along to him, and shortly thereafter, in March of 2008, Peter Berghoef's *News of the Haircut* was printed.

For many reasons, *The Greying Ghost* is a press to be excited about. First, the quality of the chapbooks, both their construction and content, is excellent. Annarummo makes each chapbook himself, and he consults his wife, a graphic designer, if he feels unsure about a particular design choice. He takes a month or longer to release a standard print run (now between one hundred and one hundred and twenty-five copies) due to the amount of work involved: he must lay out the text, design the cover, and then print, fold, cut, and mail each chapbook. Although the process may seem tedious, the freedom Annarummo has with each newly accepted manuscript is refreshing. He will often spend several weeks with a manuscript, reading it on the bus to and from work, before exploring different ideas as to what the chapbook ought to look like. "The style of the poems and the type of

poems," Annarummo says, "really influence the design in most cases." For example, Berghoef's *News of the Haircut* comes packaged in one half of a small manila mailing envelope.

The press is also exciting for its range of authors and massive catalogue, positively surprising for such a small, young venture. Annarummo has published or will publish words by Zachary Schomburg, Thomas Hummel, Kathryn Regina, Colin Bassett, James Iredell, Mathias Svalina, Julia Cohen, NOÖ contributors Jack Boettcher and Brooklyn Copeland, and others. As of this writing, fourteen chapbooks have been released by *The Greying Ghost* and fifteen more are planned.

Here are three mini-reviews of three early chapbooks from *The Greying Ghost*: the previously mentioned Peter Berghoef's *News Of The Haircut*, Brian Foley's *The Tornado Is Not A Surrealist*, and Shane Jones's *I Will Unfold You With My Hairy Hands*. Enjoy, and please consider visiting *The Greying Ghost* online at [www.airforcejoyride.com/gg](http://www.airforcejoyride.com/gg) and picking up a new chapbook or three.

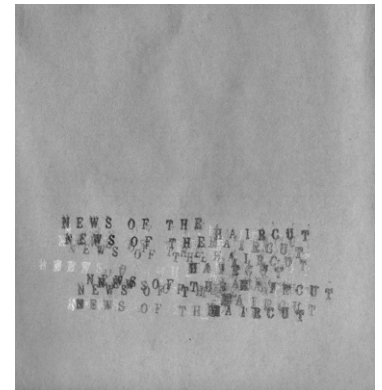
**P**ETER BERGHOEF'S *News Of The Haircut* is a collection of seventeen tiny poems, the longest of which is only sixteen lines, that gather short, lineated phrases of images and actions into what you might call small transmissions, dispatches, greeting cards, advice columns, reports, and brief explanations of mysterious happenings. Remarkable is Berghoef's method of placing together seemingly incongruous groups of words line after line to create a series of interesting turns in each poem. "Welcome Back Students," the poem from which the chapbook gets its title, is a good example of this:

handcuffed to the chair  
other victims running their mouths  
transmitting maths  
through satellites  
news of the haircut  
the impending registration  
over a few drinks served

Especially interesting in this poem is how Berghoef handles the clichéd "running their mouths" bit. It leads nicely into the oddly plural "maths," which echoes the "mouths" of the previous line, and then begins the "through" of the following line. I really like this because of how the poem seems to grow from a rather empty phrase. And although the simplicity of the language maintains throughout, the oddity of the situation, the combinations of words, the loose associations from one line to the next, create an interesting and violent sort of welcome.

"Welcome Back Students," nearly entirely composed of nouns and modifying phrases, is representative of most of the poems in the collection, in that it conveys quite a lot of activity, both figuratively and literally, despite the minimalism of Berghoef's writing.

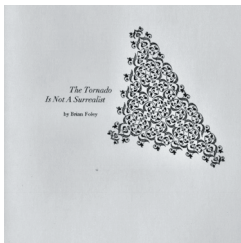
*News Of The Haircut* is pleasantly frustrating, then, because of how the gaps between each line, in combination with the spare language of the poems, do not easily make way for a solid interpretation. There seems to be so little to grasp onto in these poems, and for that reason, the poems change a little bit with each reading.



**WHAT:** *News of the Haircut*  
**BY:** Peter Berghoef

**SAYS:** other victims running their mouths  
transmitting maths





**WHAT: The Tornado Is Not a Surrealist**  
**BY: Brian Foley**

**SAYS: Sometimes these ballads were known as Aurora Borealis**

A group of icebergs conspired in the cold arctic water. They were on the prowl for a ship. They had seen one once and had not liked it. In their anger they discovered their purpose. Before that they had believed their purpose was to write romantic ballads composed in the sky. Sometimes these ballads were known as Aurora Borealis. Other times they were known as the flu.

But perhaps more surprising are the few small points of sadness in the poems, which Foley seems to expose almost accidentally. In “How You Find Out,” a couple happily picnics in the country, innocent of their awful future.

They had bought corn by the roadside, which they now enjoyed. It was a date to be remembered as warm light. A vestal anniversary. He had yet to lose his legs in the crash that night on the way home. Had he lifted his mind from what stuck in between his teeth, he would have noticed his wife sneaking tears into her napkin.

Despite their scarcity, moments such as the above add necessary weight to the chapbook, revealing a horrible reality beneath Foley’s creative renderings of dream-like states.

**A**FTER READING *I Will Unfold You With My Hairy Hands*, a collection of six short stories, I know that I can trust Shane Jones. He understands the importance of sentences, not only how multiple sentences combine to make stories, but also how a sentence on its own can often be a site of great emotional activity, as in the story “Messengers,” in which the narrator waves goodbye to her lover.

I wave goodbye to you from the roof. I can wave goodbye up here for longer than from the door. I watch you disappear into the long armed curtains of the pine trees.

The second sentence above is a simple sort of explanation, but one that is moving for its logic. It makes sense that the narrator would desire to keep a lover in view as long as possible, for the story takes place in a town in which direct communication between people is controlled by a crooked group of messengers. Intimate conversations can only be achieved through the illicit touching of another’s foot to your ear. Punishment for circumventing the messengers’ power is severe: your sense of language is scrambled.

The pursuit of meaningful intimacy is a common theme throughout the chapbook: a hair monster desires a handicapped woman, but struggles with his feelings of inadequacy; a woman falls in love with a moustachioed con man; a narrator tries to explain her whale dreams to a lover. But, in these stories, intimacy is never completely attainable. It is as fleeting and precious as the fantastic images of the whale dreams.

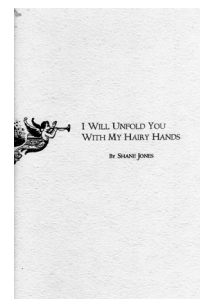
Playing an accordion I convince the sparrows to move the whale. They use pastel colored strings to hoist up the whale. Their wings flutter, they look like hummingbirds, and the whale is only a foot in the air. The whale is too heavy.

This is Jones’ sentence-making at its most delightful pitch, and fortunately *I Will Unfold You With My Hairy Hands* contains many other combinations just as pleasing.

**I**N BRIAN FOLEY’S *The Tornado Is Not A Surrealist*, icebergs quietly conspire against passing ships, a man’s knotted muscles become ocean liners upon his skin, other men threaten various narrators with shovels and steal their breakfast eggs, and two neighboring counties wage war over their inclusion in the national almanac. It’s a pleasure to see Foley’s imagination at work here, the way he introduces fantastic elements into each text, one on top of the other. We see this technique at once in the very beginning of the first poem of the chapbook, titled “Ahem:”

I woke up with a sore throat. It developed into a cough, which later turned into a lantern. I emanated light while eating corn flakes.

Foley’s habit of pushing the situations in each poem as far as possible leads to some interesting emotional notes. For example, *The Tornado Is Not A Surrealist* contains plenty of clever humor, as in “A Glacial Parade,” the characters of which are disgruntled icebergs. Here’s the first stanza:



**WHAT: I Will Unfold You With My Hairy Hands**

**BY: Shane Jones**

**SAYS: I watch you disappear into the long armed curtains of the pine trees**



# Come Away With Me

-- Bonnie ZoBell

“**HEY BUTT WIPE!**” my boyfriend says to whoever has phoned.

After a pause, he says, “No shit, dickhead. I need some exercise, too.”

I laugh and pick up some of his underwear the dog has dragged in from the laundry basket. From what I can hear through the receiver, it sounds like Jason’s friend Mark at the other end. Jason is wearing swim trunks with no shirt or shoes because the heat is licentious. Even with fans going in our little Spanish *casita*, we’re panting, the dogs are sweating, the cats have curled into tight little balls trying to sleep through until evening.

“If you say so, anal,” Jason says before hanging up. “I’ll be ready in twenty.”

“Was it Mark?” I ask.

“We’re going to play basketball.”

“Riveting,” I say.

He sticks his tongue out at me and stands from the country dining table—blond wood, we’ve moved it with us three times. His thighs peel off the brushed cotton seat and sweat drips from the phone. In the kitchen, he sticks his head all the way under the faucet until his sun-streaked hair is sopping.

“Didn’t his girlfriend leave him not that long ago?”

“That’s what he told me. Who knows?”

“Well, geez, don’t you ask him? Seems like a kind of big thing.”

“Guys don’t talk about stuff like that,” he says, his brown lanky body halfway through the hall as he speaks.

I listen to him rustle around in his closet for tennis shoes, no doubt taking one of the sweaty t-shirts he’s left to dry over the top of the door. No need wasting another, though he won’t wear it but carry it with him.

“Quite a last minute thing.”

“Why sit around?”

He doesn’t bother closing the door to the bathroom while taking care of his last needs.

We smooch and hug before he runs out the door, pinch each other’s behinds, and I watch him retrieve the ball from the trunk of his Corona, the palm trees overhead stationary in the sultry sun, not a hint of wind in days.

Finally Mark arrives, and they screech off, two bare-chested men in a hurry.

Norah Jones and I sing “Come Away with Me,” she

from the window, me out back trying to figure out what to do with the tomatoes. They have fungus, but there is nothing I want to spray on them and then eat afterward.

I decide to call Suzanne instead. She’s crying.

“Are you sure you don’t want to get together this afternoon?” I ask. “I can meet you.”

“If he doesn’t leave his wife, I don’t know what I’ll do,” she says. She can’t get together because she has to paint her nails green. Tomorrow is St. Patty’s and she might see the guy.

“You need to get out of this, honey,” I tell her.

“But I love him. He’s the only one who understands how my mind works. He doesn’t judge me. He’s always so nice to me.”

“He has to be nice to you, Suzanne. He’s married.”

I sigh, not sure whether this is helping.

“You’re beautiful, Suzanne,” I tell her. “You’re smart. Anybody would be lucky to have you.”

After that, she takes a huge breath of air, and sobs so loudly I have to pull the phone away from my ear. When we hang up, she’s still crying.

I replay Norah. *In fields where the yellow grass grows knee-high.* I walk back outside through my own knee-high yellow grass to look at the tomatoes again, deciding to spray them with diluted dish soap, like I saw on TV. I don’t mind eating a little dish soap when it’s a homegrown tomato.

I’ll have to remind Jason for the third time to mow the lawn.

When he finally pulls to the curb, I can hear the two of them yukking it up. He walks in the door smelling of brewskis and sweat, and I ask him, “So is he doing okay?”

“Who?” He peels off his shirt, throwing it back over the bedroom door to dry.

“Mark, dummy. Because his girlfriend left him.”

“Ah, we didn’t talk about that.”

“Then what did you talk about all that time?”

“Nothing. We played basketball and went to the bar.”

I roll my eyes.

“What’s with you?” he says, then smiles. “All you want to talk about is that boring stuff.”

“Nose cheese,” I call him.

He pulls me by the arm, farther into the bedroom. “C’mere,” he says.

And I do.





# Emerging Like Nymphs



-- Beth Thomas

**J**OSH TAKES A RED WHIFFLE BALL BAT AND WHACKS at the shells covering the house. Laura watches her son from the porch, an area that has already been cleared of the dead. She bites her nails and tries to fill the hole in her gut with banana bread.

A live cicada exits the willow tree, flying low. "Swing!" Josh yells, and knocks the insect out of the air. "Got it!" He hunkers down over the thing to study it.

His father is away at war. Laura brushes crumbs from her shirt and thinks about how you get everything to align, finally, and then suddenly you are missing one of your favorite socks. The hole, the one in her gut, it feels like that but deeper. Two months down, six to go.

The boy plucks the bug from the overgrown grass and holds it up. "You have to take off the wings," he says. "But careful, so you don't break them." He pulls off the right wing and holds it up to the sunlight. "There's a W," he says. "That means war for 17 years."

"War?" Laura asks, rising. She crosses the yard in four steps.

"That's what they say," Josh says, shrugging. "If there's a P on the wing, it means peace for the next 17 years." He drops the wings in the grass. The sun setting behind the house casts the yard in shadow.

"It can tell the future, huh?" Laura asks. She turns her back to the empty windows. "What else does it say?"

"What do you mean?"

"The wings say war," she says. "But maybe this part says something else." She pokes the fat abdomen, the drum-like tymbal, the thorax.

"No, ma. Just the wings, I think." Josh grabs his red bat.

"Oh," she says. "All right." Laura picks up the wings with the tips of her fingers and lays them on top of the cicada's body. She scoops up the whole pile and takes it to the cement driveway, where she shakes the pieces and rolls them out across the surface as if they were chicken bones.



Untitled / © 2009 Lucy Diamond Phillips ([www.flickr.com/photos/superbomba/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/superbomba/))

# at the end of this story ← three months will pass



-- Crispin Best

**T**HE SUN COMES IN THROUGH THE WINDOW. It is teamwork.

The end of things comes just after a backscratch. A yellowing light, of course, for the end of things. It is sunlight doing predictable things, probably she looks almost yellow and smells of coffee and meat for the end of things. Probably.

He can still stand at this point.

At the end of this story three months will pass. He is standing there. She is yellow. He looks at her. His stomach is an attic of pigeons.

His arms are moving. He thinks stillness is probably important for the ends of things, but his arms and his hands are moving in small circles. He can't help it. Also his eyes. He looks at her. She is looking at her fingernails and biting her lip. He thinks: maybe she is what vibration is to eardrums. Maybe she is crying. He is not sure.

Stillness is probably important with the end of things. He stands there. He is too much movement at the wrong times, always. He is tapping his foot and swallowing. She tells him to leave. But stillness is important with the ends of things he decides and so he stands there.

She is looking at her fingernails or crying. She looks up at him. If he's looking at her in the sunlight he can only think of one thing: he can only think about how she can make the towel stay up when she ties it on after a shower, and he can't; he has to wear it like a scarf, naked. He doesn't want to leave.

Things swim against the white wall when he looks. Now she is standing nearby, he notices. She is beside him. He wonders how he would feel if her body was full of worms; still her, still the end of things, but full of worms, behind her eyes and skin.

He looks at her and thinks: she has been talking. She is nearby. She said he has to leave.

His heart feels large and worse.

He stares at far-off birds made big by sunset.

She is nearby.

He thinks saying things is important, probably, with the end of things. Saying things like:

Oh

And

I will always think you are nice.

Or

What is happening?

And

I still want to kiss you on the downstairs.

And so on.

He does not want to leave.

They are standing there. Outside something is happening with the dustbins. A black cat is flirting with a wicker fence down in the garden. He doesn't want to leave. He watches the black cat.

He is very still because it is important. He looks down at her ankles there beneath the knee socks. He looks at her. Maybe she is crying. She has a nose hair he wants to pull.

She is waiting for him to leave. He doesn't know what to do. His face feels heavy. He starts to move slowly and she goes and puts one hand on the front door to open it for him. She opens it. She stands there. She smells like coffee and meat. He looks once more at her and thinks about breathing. Then he moves and then he moves and pretty soon he has left.

She pushes the door closed behind him. His head falls off and rolls down the stairs. It hits each step on the way down. It comes to a stop at the bottom. He is surprised.

He walks down the stairs. He steps over his head and he is surprised. He is not in pain. The mouth of his head is open. His head is lying on its side. One ear is pointing straight up. He wants to go back up and show her, but he doesn't.

The weather outside is thick air and almost frost. He starts to walk home. His shirt, trousers and gloves flutter and land in a pile that three hedgehogs will use for some time as a nest.

His skin slides off intact. Muscle disarticulates and lands with a sound. A group of foxes approach, sniffing. They tear his skin to pieces. They weep.



He feels unhappy. He walks and his kneecaps fall off. He stops. Some kids run over and pick his kneecaps up. They hold them above their heads. They smile and run toward the river to skim them. It is a race. One of the children wins.

He starts walking again. His shoulder blades are next. They fall and land in a delicate way. Later on, hobos find and sharpen them for axes. They chop down the 'For Sale' signs outside houses for firewood. They open busted cans. They swing his shoulder blades at pigeons and cats.

The foxes are following. They are growing confused. They fight over his organs whenever they fall. They follow, stop, follow.

Flecks of cartilage drift down all the time like crumbs of dandruff as he walks. The foxes weep. One of them sneezes.

An arm bone breaks perfectly in half when it hits the pavement. He makes a wish. He feels unhappy. He wants

to go back.

His ribcage softly uncurls. It lands on its back, upturned. He wants to come back.

He still has his feet. He still has his shoes. He still has his spine. He still has his pelvis. He still has his shins.

The weather is the sun and no clouds anywhere and cold. Moving becomes difficult.

He walks. His shins wobble and sigh. They fall like lumber. Foxes are still following, but now only the weakest, the most bewildered.

He is still walking. He starts up a hill. His shoes step one in front of the other. He is two shoes, a pelvis above them, and a spine. That's all. The foxes, mangy, weep.

His spine begins to lilt. It teeters forwards and falls, vertebrae scattering like teeth. A dropped tray of ice cubes.

His pelvis floats for a moment. It shivers. It falls. It lands and sits, a cow's skull in the desert.

His shoes keep going. His shoes stop. It feels finished. He thinks so.

His shoes start walking again. They are still slowly going. Up the hill but they want to come back.

His shoes walk. They reach the top of the hill. They want to come back.

They were going but they couldn't. They wanted to come back but they stopped. There.

At the end of this story three months will pass. He left her house for the last time. She was yellow nearby and made him go. The dustbins. A black cat. His head fell off.

At the end of this story three months will pass. He made a wish. His shins fell like cabers. The foxes wept. He wanted to come back. The foxes followed and they wept.

At the end of this story three months will pass. His pelvis fell. His shoes were all that was left. He wanted to keep going. He wanted to keep going. He wanted to come back. They couldn't. And you know now. Now you know what to think. So now you know, two shoes in the road.



# one Below

NOO!ten!

-- Kim Chinquee

**A**MY AND GRETCHEN AND I rode around in Gretchen's parents' Explorer, sliding over slick spots on the road, trying to find things to do. We'd already been to SuperAmerica, waiting for other classmates to show up to spread the word about a party. But there was nothing, so we had a few beers in the lot until we saw a cop car driving by. Then it started snowing.

I was still fifteen, but Amy and Gretchen were sixteen, and Gretchen had a fake ID. The drinking age was nineteen, and we looked it with our chests and heavy make-up. Tonight we had our hair teased up with hairspray. Gretchen put dark liner on her eyes and spiked up her hair. Amy's hair looked blonder, and she wore pumps to make her look taller. I tried my best to have a special look, wearing loads of pastel on my eyelids. I dyed my hair really blonde that summer with peroxide, which dried up all the ends. Now I wore it in a big banana clip.

Gretchen drove to the lot of Boomers as a last resort. She shuffled through the lanes, trying to find a spot. "Looks packed," she said.

"I bet there's lots of guys," Amy said, looking in the mirror. She reapplied her lipstick.

I sat in back, and popped my head between the two front seats. "You think they'll let us in? Don't they check IDs?"

"Remember, I dated Taylor, Mr. Big Head Bouncer?" Gretchen said. "I'll vouch for you guys."

I said, "Should I bring my coat?"

"Like, yeah," Amy said. "Unless you want to freeze your ass off."

We went across the lot. Gretchen slipped, then caught herself. Snowflakes fell, caking up our hairspray. I could hear the music booming from inside. We stopped around the corner by the entrance, getting in a huddle. Two guys passed, staring, moving on. Everyone had frosty breaths, red cheeks, and my lips felt chapped. It was one below.

We sat at the bar, drinking screwdrivers. It was packed, people moving all around.

"I feel funny," I said.

"Be confident," Gretchen said.

"Being scared is useless," Amy said, sipping on her

straw.

Gretchen said, "I told Taylor I'd give him a little something later, so you guys really owe me big time."

I thought about doing shots. "Let's do shots," I said. "I need to get relaxed."

We did Absolut. People were up and bumping at the bar. The bartenders couldn't keep up. Smoke was everywhere.

"Let's dance," Amy said.

"I'll stay here and save our seats," I said. "I feel a little queasy."

Amy and Gretchen danced with all the other people banging hips and elbows, getting hot and sweaty. Amy flung her body all around and Gretchen twisted her waist, rotating her hips, clapping with her hands up.

I sipped and looked at the rows of liquor bottles behind the counter, the bartenders shuffling from the fountains to the fridge, filling cups with ice, uncapping bottles, mixing drinks, ringing up the register. Customers left money on the counter.

Amy and Gretchen were crowded in the middle of the floor, dirty dancing with a bunch of old guys. Amy's hair flung everywhere. Gretchen's shirt jumped up, and her skirt was hiked, almost showing off her panties. Her partner crouched lower, bending his knees and swaying his butt, his eyes even with her belly. Some big hit was playing.

I thought about getting up. It was a big collage of people, all moving around, yelling and singing, flailing everywhere. I stayed in my spot. I had to watch the coats and purses.

A tall guy with big dimples and dark lips stepped up, holding his money over the counter. His hair was shiny. He looked in my direction, and I looked at someone's cigarette that was burning in an ashtray. I pretended not to see him. He patted my shoulder.

"Anyone sitting here?" he said, pointing to Amy's chair.

"Um, no, go ahead."

"You alone?" he said. He sat.

"My friends are out there dancing," I pointed to them. He finally got the big-haired bartender's attention and



ordered a martini. He left a tip and ate the olive. "Well," he said. "I'm here alone. You want a drink?"

I wondered if he was old enough to be there. I'd had enough so I said no. He got me a Budweiser, telling me I had to at least hold on to something. He said his name was Pete and that he lived in California, where he went to college. Now he was home for Christmas break, visiting his family. He asked me what school I used to go to.

"I'm not really from here. Me and my friends went to high school in Chicago."

He nodded, sipped on his martini. "Not nineteen, yet, huh?" He smiled.

I looked at the moisture dripping down my bottle's neck.

"It's OK," he said. "I used to do it too when I was younger."

I looked at his dimples, then studied the rest of his features: his squinty eyes, his little nose, his clear thin face. "OK," I said. "I go to East. I'm almost sixteen. My name is Eileen Laxson."

"Pretty name," he said, unwrapping his scarf. "My sister is Eileen."

A bearded guy with curly hair almost fell on me. He spilled his drink on my skirt, then apologized.

I said it was OK, and wondered where my friends were. I saw them on the highest speaker, dancing like they sometimes did when we were alone together with the stereo turned up. I laughed a little, knowing they were

having fun. "Those are my two best friends," I told Pete, pointing to them.

He turned back to look. "They're having a good time."

"It's our first time here. Gretchen used to date the bouncer."

"You must feel awful in that skirt. I can get you something dry. Looks like they're having fun without you."

I looked at Pete. He seemed nice enough. I said, "I'll have to tell them. I have their coats and purses."

I got off the chair, almost falling over. I shuffled through the crowd, stepping to the platform, hopping up, standing behind my friends while they danced around like strippers.

"Hey!" Amy said. She spun around.

"Here's your stuff." I set their belongings on the floor behind them, then looked down at all the people. "I'm leaving with someone," I said.

Amy screamed. Gretchen asked what was wrong, dancing in a circle.

"She found a guy," Amy said.

I looked down in his direction, pointed, said, "Over by the bathroom. In the jacket."

Pete took me to a wealthy subdivision where my mother had driven my sister and me the week before to look at Christmas lights. I remembered my mother admiring his display.

His BMW crunched over his drive. He said, "My parents are in Austria, but my sister's home, so we have to tiptoe."

His room was in the basement. It was huge and glorious. Everything looked crisp and clean and neatly placed. A big screen TV was angled in the corner and a stereo lined one wall. The floor looked almost marble and the walls looked like silk. His bed was centered in the middle, as if on display. I thought I was in heaven. The only thing that was a little off was that I felt a little tipsy. Things were spinning just a bit.

He gave me a pair of navy sweatpants and a California t-shirt, said he'd find us some good music. I went to the bathroom and changed, smelling the freshness of his fabric softener.

I sat on the bed and told him thank you for the sweatpants. He picked something by U2, then sat next to me. We talked for a little while about school and college, and then he leaned over, kissing me. He undid the banana clip and tossed it on the floor. We made out, then lay on the bed.

I had goose bumps so he turned up the heat. I looked



"Danc 'n Illinois" / © 2009 Gregory Lamer (rabbitcatastrophe.blogspot.com)

at the ceiling, thinking everything was spinning, so I sat up and he sat next to me.

"You're not a virgin are you?" he said.

I felt a little awkward, sitting there without my shirt and bra. "Well, no. No, I'm not a virgin."

"Good," he said. "I wouldn't want to, well, you know, do anything to hurt you."

I looked at the smile on his face, at his big cute dimples, and I smiled back. We made out a little more and took off the rest of our clothes. I noticed how big his penis was. He told me I was little. He touched my breasts, then touched between my legs and I tried looking at his eyes. He lay on top of me and I wasn't sure exactly where my hands went. I touched his back. He tried to push himself inside me. I stopped kissing, hoping to get his attention, but he was too into it to notice. I tried sliding from under him. He finally was still. "Is something wrong?" he said.

I said, "I don't think I'm ready for that yet."

"Oh. OK," he said.

I thought that was pretty easy and was glad I said something. Then we kissed, and after making out a little more, he tried again. I got tense and nervous, so he backed away. "I thought you might have changed your mind," he said.

Things were back to spinning, so I closed my eyes. Again he moved his penis up against me, pushing in the space between my legs, and I was tired of saying no and I wanted him to like me, so I closed my eyes tighter – I suspected it might hurt, like it had the first time. But this time things didn't work. He was too wide.

We lay there, listening to drumming from the radio, then the words. "Sunday Bloody Sunday." It was my favorite song. He asked me for a blow job. I hesitated, telling him I didn't know how.

"Just don't use your teeth," he said.

I guessed there couldn't be any harm in it, so I moved down and sucked his penis, and he tugged on my hair, moving my head just the way he wanted. It didn't take long for him to come and when he did, he held my head against him, forcing me to swallow.

I gagged, so he finally let me go. I spit up on his stomach.

"You did good for a first time," he said, then got up and fetched me a towel from the bathroom. I guess it wasn't too bad. I said thanks, wiping my mouth, then asked for something to drink. He put the towel in the hamper and got me a glass of sparkling water.

"This stays between us," he said.

"Oh?"

"I'm twenty-three," he said.

"And?" I said, taking a sip.

"I'm an adult," he said, taking the glass from me. "You, you're technically a child."

I woke up hung over. Pete was up already.

"I hope you don't get in trouble for being out all night," he said, getting his keys.

"My mom won't know," I said.

We rode in silence, and I felt like throwing up, so I tried to avoid looking out the window. When we got to my street, I gave him directions, and as he pulled into the driveway, he laughed a little.

"Something wrong?" I said.

"Ah," he said. "My parents own this place."

I told him goodbye and wished him well in college, hesitating, debating whether to offer my number, or to wait until he asked, but he didn't, and as I stepped out of the car and watched him drive away, I thought maybe he forgot.

My sister Jill was sitting at the table, and my mom was making coffee in the kitchen. "Who was that boy in the nice car?" my mother said.

"His parents are our landlords."

"How'd you meet a boy like him?"

I started for the bathroom, and yelled to my mother down the hallway. "A stupid party at our school," I said, then shut the door and leaned into the toilet.

I took a nap and later woke to the ringing phone. It was Amy. We decided to go to Kroll's to discuss the night before. Gretchen picked us up, but we didn't talk until we got there.

"How was your guy?" Gretchen said.

"Fine," I said, thinking I was better off keeping some things to myself.

Gretchen and Amy talked about the men they'd met on the dance floor, who bought them drinks at bar time and walked them to the car.

When the waitress came to take our order, I ordered coffee. Amy and Gretchen ordered eggs and toast. They talked about their men, saying things like phenomenal, fantastic. Kissers. I sipped. I looked. I heard them giggle.



# Sadie

-- Jen Gann

“YOU’RE SO PREGNANT,” my brother said, when I tipped forward to ease into the diner’s booth.

It was August. I had huge ovals of sweat on my dress. My chin dipped close to my chest in a way I hated. The women in my family get fat in the face; it can’t be avoided. I was seven months along.

I said: “How else should I look?”

I opened the menu. I thought about roast beef. I thought about the way it’s sometimes pink in the middle, glistening like scales, nearly green or grey in some spots. I thought about how I hadn’t asked the ultrasound technician and secretly didn’t want to know. All the relatives bought me gifts in banana-yellow. What else were they supposed to do?

My brother wrinkled his thin, pointy nose. He was skinny from the coke then. Staying up all night to make custom suits for rich people in his studio apartment. I thought about how scary it must look, just him jangling around like a skeleton, prodding the mannequins with pins plucked from his mouth.

He said, “You’re not going to order something bacon and cheesy are you? I cannot stand the sight of that much grease.” He crossed his arms. “That’s why I didn’t want to come here if there was no outside seating.” He grimaced, glancing at the other tables, mostly couples murmuring over plates of eggs. “It’s like a heart attack in here.”

“I can’t take the heat,” I said without thinking.

My brother cracked up. I got the roast beef after all. No cheese though. He said his fruit platter was too pretty to eat, so he rolled the melon balls around on his plate instead. I tried not to watch. I told him I was thinking Sadie, if it was a girl. He told me it sounded like a saintly dog’s name. He paid the bill. Outside, he steered me down the heat-stricken streets by my elbow. Like gently nudging a large, blow-up boat. Beside me, he loomed thin as a paddle.

We saw that movie about penguins, so I could have more air conditioning. My brother was gracious, asking for two tickets. The sum of the season hit me, there, in the theater, listening to that grave narration and its testaments to love, death, instinct. My heart broke in its sparsely-padded seat. My brother sat stiffly through the sobbing. At some point, he patted my plump arm and

whispered not to worry. Someday I’d find a new man to be a father for my unborn child. He was sure of it.

When the movie ended, he wanted me in a taxi but I insisted the subway. I felt crazed. We got in a fight on the platform, sweating and with no place to sit. He wadded up his collared shirt so I’d have something to cry into. He squeezed my shoulder and told me he was trying to get a handle on it, really. Definitely trying, he said. When the train finally came a middle-aged man got up so I’d have a place to sit. He smiled when I sat with my hands folded over my stomach. But then the middle-aged man saw my brother. The man glanced between us, frowning, like we weren’t who he thought we were. My brother held onto the pole, wavering. He leaned down and kissed me on the forehead just before his stop. It was almost an I’m sorry but not quite.



Illustration © 2009 Irana Doner ([www.keeppinmind.com.ar](http://www.keeppinmind.com.ar))

# you wouldn't believe me if I told you but me and theodore built a time machine

-- Mary Hamilton

**B**EFORE THE WOOD ROTTED. Before the elms suffocated and starved. Before the looters stole our hubcaps and copper wire and cabinet doors and doorknobs and canned food and toilet seats. Before the sky got low and touched the ground and the neighborhood got small and fragile and the storms came through and tore trees apart and threw them onto houses and garages and split cars in half and pulled away the swamp grass and cat-tails and roof shingles, and rope swings, we spent our days in play.

We acted out cops and robbers in the neighbor's yard. Our neighbor was this old woman with hands like SaranWrap encased electric wires and smashed grapes. She sat on her back porch swing and watched us run in zig-zags between the cottonwood trees and lawn furniture. And when the cottonwood bloomed all the fuzz got in our hair and eyes and covered the screens on windows and doors. The cotton was like a million dead dandelions had been turned into wishes and we ran through it like mounties through a blizzard. And when it got hot, the cotton stuck to our skin and sweat and made red rashes, it made us burn. On these, the hottest days, the old woman neighbor poured us full glasses of sour lemonade. The kind that is almost as clear as water until you put the big chunks of lemon in the glass and spoon in plenty of sugar when you drink it. Even so, our lips puckered and our eyes closed and we tried very hard to smile and say "Thank you."

He played cop and I played robber and he shot me dead nine times out of ten. When it was my turn to die, I would stumble around the entire yard, my hands clutching my chest. I'd hobble left, I'd hobble right. I'd settle into a wicker chair and then I'd gasp and rise again all sudden-like. I'd stumble some more, bumping into trees and a bird bath, slumping over the porch railing and exhaling a final, willowing, singing, gagging breath. But that tenth time, when I would be the one to make the fatal shot, he would just drop to the ground, splayed out like some kind of fallen bird and the old woman neighbor would clap the

soft pads of her hands together and cheer.

Sometimes I would have dreams about the games we'd play. In the dreams, he cheated. He stole my lemonade and stepped on my gun and I woke up very angry. Sometimes he would show up at the front door of our house the next morning, all decked out in his fringed white vest with sheriff badge and big white hat and matching white cowboy boots with plastic spurs, having walked four blocks in the complete outfit, and I would stand behind my mother while she told him I wasn't feeling well and I saw him look around her hip to see me standing there, my gun aimed at the curious wrinkle that had formed like a bullseye between his eyes.

It is true, that sometimes after playing cops and robbers, the old woman neighbor would invite us in to wash the cotton off our hands and faces and necks and arms and it is also true that I once took a tiny little seashell from a dish on the back of the toilet. It is certainly true that he made me return the shell to the old woman neighbor. He held my elbow like he was a real cop and I was a real robber while we stood on her front stoop and my head hung low and the old woman neighbor took the seashell and put it in her apron pocket and went back inside her house and closed the screen door, and all the bits of cotton caught in the mesh of the screen shattered in the wind that got pulled up and turned around and told us a branch breaking, flood making, basement hiding kind of storm was coming our way.

I am a bullet and I am very fast. I make a sound. I make a spark. I cut through metal, air, I burn fabric, I shred skin, I splinter bone, I settle into the muscle that makes the heart. Not quite inside, but close enough to do serious harm. Close enough to slow the pumping of blood. Not enough damage to make a spill of red, but just enough to create a kind of plug to the natural order of things. Just close enough to make everything stop. An involuntary and violent action that is just enough to make it all my fault.



# TREASURE ISLAND

-- Karen Gentry

**I LOST MY SON LAST SUMMER.** Friends offered me a gift certificate for a pedicure, a little lamb figurine, a coconut cream pie. My boss gave me a key to his cabin in Wyoming, told me to think things through for a month, after which I'd need to begin applying myself anew. I drove forty-something hours to a ranch as remote as an island, found his hunting cabin slumped against a rock hill. It had a front porch, a door I opened. I unfolded his cot and fell asleep.

Afternoons, I counted lightning strikes from the porch. Mornings, I kept to the cot, yelled my son's name sometimes. Most times I didn't, because the whole thing felt like a movie-camera on top of me—the loss, my working through it to meet a deadline for healing, the knots in the cabin ceiling. Nights, I lay on my back with my hands on my stomach and counted the number of times blood rushed to my gut. I never really slept, it's just that sometimes I counted things and sometimes I didn't.

One afternoon, nearing seventeen lightning strikes, a man cantered up on a horse. He wasn't handsome—this isn't that kind of story. He was old and so was his horse and they were both carrying a load. The horse carried the man, who carried, on his back, a pile of banjo clocks wound together with twine. I knew that's what they were right off because he asked, "Can I interest you in a banjo

clock?"

For weeks I hadn't said anything but my son's name.

"How much?" I asked.

The man kicked his horse closer, dismounted on the porch. The banjo clocks chimed out of time on his back. He smelled like a saddle, paced the floorboards stooped over, quoted a price that was nearly half of the cash I had.

I told him I just couldn't.

He said I could. "The actress two ranches down just bought seven."

I gave him his money. He tied a string around it and put it in his saddlebag. I asked for a banjo clock from the top of his pile.

He shook his head. "You misunderstand." He pointed over his shoulder. "These are for display only. Like a dessert tray. I'll come back after winter to deliver the real thing." Then he jumped on his horse and rode off toward the east, disappearing in a dip that I had thought was a body of water.

The next day I found a stack of wood behind the cabin. I decided to stay through winter. In no time, I ate through the jerky. I roasted all the marshmallows. I found a cupboard of anchovies. Before spring, I discovered that a good broth could be made from the skeletons of anchovies boiled in snowmelt. I named the soup after my son.

At some point a man rode up from the east. I was on the porch, sipping some Indian Paintbrush Anchovy Coffee, and he was driving a red Land Rover. When he got out, I almost didn't recognize my boss. He wore a pair of tight jeans, boots and a belt from town. His black t-shirt read *I'd rather be Kung-Fu fighting*. He was handsome, a little old for me, but this isn't that kind of story.

"I had to fire you," he said. He opened the Rover's back hatch, pulled out my banjo clock, and set it in my arms.

The movement trembled in my lap. A map of an imaginary ocean stretched down the neck of the clock to a door set in tiny hinges. In detail, three pirates plundered buried treasure, their boat waiting just off the coast. I found the latch. I found, inside, a key tied to the chime. I lifted the glass to wind it. I went counterclockwise first. I found it wouldn't budge. Then I tried clockwise and found it wouldn't go that way either.



"Boat" / © 2009 Ali Aschman ([www.aliaschman.blogspot.com](http://www.aliaschman.blogspot.com))



# The Breakfast

-- Rebecca Pulsifer

SOMEONE SAID "NICE ASS" so I got in his truck. That's how I operated. We drove around a while and listened to the Spanish-language radio station. There's just something about an accordion bouncing to a ballad that uses my one Spanish word. My one Spanish word is *corazón*, just like everyone else's.

The guy asked me if I wanted a cigarette. I think he was nervous. We had parked behind the liquor store but I said no, so he smoked alone. He shook his leg so that the truck twitched slightly. I looked out the window and saw into the back of the liquor store, where two boys were kissing behind a stack of silver kegs. They were about sixteen and each of them had black sweatshirts and thin mustaches. The kind that make a pattern of ivy along the face.

I touched the guy's leg and he jumped. "Why did you say nice ass," I said. He asked if I was going to charge him money. I said why. He said he didn't know. His cigarette had gone out because he was holding it outside the truck and tapping the end against the door. I left my hand on his leg and he didn't move.

I think the two boys came closer then, touching each other's arms, but I wasn't really watching anymore. I looked to see if the man knew we had company. But he was looking out the window at his dulled cigarette. "Are you going to get that," I said. "What," he said.

Everyone says the heart is the shape of the human fist but I think it's more like a bullfrog. Inside the ribs it shivers like a bullfrog's throat. Its skin is like the fabric you could sew from a bullfrog's skin. Anyway, I might know something about it, since I saw you split in thirds with the doctor's grinning saw. One side of you was your skin, the other side was your skin, and the very middle was your panting, bullfrog heart. You were all spread out like a life-sized buffet.

I moved my hand up his leg and patted the guy's narrow crotch. He pushed my hand to the gear shifter like I was scratching into him. "Where do you live," he said. He was still looking out the window. "I'm not going

there," I said.

"I have a daughter," he said. "And a wife." He was breathing hard like I was sucking his dick. "Is she beautiful," I said. And he said, "Both, yes."

So then I sat there and watched the two boys touching each other inside the pants. One was a few inches shorter and he moved his head back so I could see his Adam's apple nodding in the middle of his neck. The other boy was turned away from me and his hair was the color of gravy.

"Why did you say nice ass," I said. "I'll drive you home," he said. "How old is your daughter?" I said. He didn't answer and started up the truck. He had on a long-sleeved plaid shirt and he pushed up the sleeves once the ignition caught. Then he looked at my face for a second and I saw he had brown eyes. He looked back out the window, then dropped his cigarette outside.

Once you were lying in your eggshell-white bed there wasn't a reason why, but I still didn't drive to the hospital. "You can't walk here at night," said the nurse, but I had my ways. You smelled like the inside of a hand that wasn't washed after cooking. You smelled like our pans after breakfast.

If you had seen my heart instead, you might have said it looked like a fist, or you might have said that about your own, but you didn't. If you had been driving instead, I might have been lying there, turning grey for weeks while my bed turned whiter, but you weren't. Scenes last longer if there's a better way they could have been. I guess that's why it took so long for me to wake up, to get from the front seat to beside your bed.

"Drive me to the hospital," I said. The guy looked up quickly and started to say something. "I eat breakfast there on the weekend," I said.

We drove away and I think the two boys looked up for a minute from the back of the stack of kegs. One had been kissing the other's chest. Right in the crest of the sternum—the weight that pins the heart to the rest of the body.

# BROTHER, THERE IS A FIELD

-- Matt Bell

**A**ND IN THAT FIELD are rows and rows of tomatoes growing on radio wires, the wires twisted into vines and leaves and tiny buds, each plant leeching life from the dark dirt to suffuse the copper and lacquered cotton braids with something more, something rising above the materials of its construction. Moments after you enter the field you're unable to see its edges, but do not believe that you have reached the middle, that you have gone as far as you need to go. You are surrounded by nothing but wire-stalked tomatoes as far as the eye can see, but still there is somewhere further, something up and over. Keep moving.

The tomatoes are softly glowing, pulsating, their flesh almost rippling before you. They're so healthy that you can see them ripening, the fruit filling with nutrients you never knew you needed. You keep moving, until your feet hurt and your legs ache, but when you look around nothing has changed. Everywhere there are tomatoes and radio wires like a puzzle, like a test. You shade your eyes from the indeterminate light with the flat of your hand, struggling to pick out any object on the horizon worth heading toward. You give up looking for direction and just keep moving.

You have to walk until you get hungry enough to steal, to take what is not yours, to convince yourself that the deep magic of this place will not miss one tomato out of its thousands. You have to walk until the lie of this becomes your truth, until it compels your hand to reach down, to grip one tomato, to twist it against the vine until

it snaps free of the wires that bind it.

You do not taste the tomato. Despite the fruit between your teeth, you do not experience it with your tongue but with your ears, the fruit filling you with its music. It sounds good, it sounds healthy, it sounds exactly how you needed it to sound. You take another

bite, and juices drip from your lips in minor chords and crescendoing flourishes. The tomato does not sing to you, not exactly, but if it did the lyrics would be something like, *Keep moving*. Something like, *Up and over*.

The tomatoes are starting to make you sick. They are like a drug, you think, because the more you eat the worse you feel. You take the next bite before you've finished chewing the last. Already you know your first thought was wrong. The tomatoes feel less like a drug and more like sex, more like the morning after something you never really wanted. You're chewing so loudly you can barely hear the song. You want to stop for a long time before you do.

Sit down in the dirt. Put your head in your hands.

Put your head in your hands.

Put your head in your hands. You can't stop thinking it, can't stop wondering at its meaning.

Put your head in your hands. It's a koan, a thought problem.

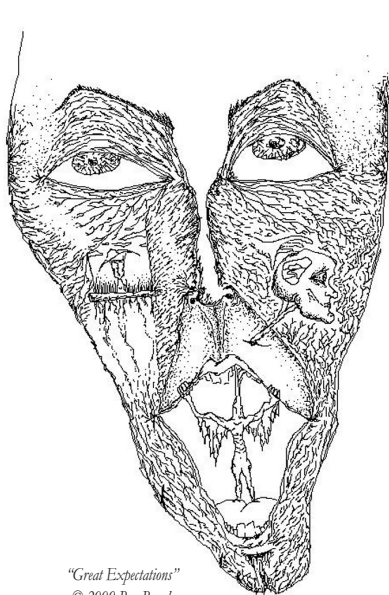
Put your head in your *hands*. Put your *head* in your hands. *Put* your head in your hands.

All wrong, all fallacies of emphasis giving rise to false meanings. Try this instead. Try, Put *your* head in *your* hands.

You're alone, for the first time in your life. You're all alone, in a normal body with a normal amount of heads and hands and feet and lungs and stomachs and yes, a normal number of hearts.

A heart can break from loss, from exhilaration, from the push and pull of the two. There is nothing lonelier than this: You, alone, separated from the only one you love, not just with emotion but with body and blood, shared across barriers created from bone and skin and nerve endings dug deep into each other. This is prophecy, this is vision, this is a sign of what must come, what always comes one way or another. It is what happens to all of us, but you and your brother, you will not be prepared, will never have had to live just one life at a time.

Eat. Eat until the tomatoes make you sick, until you vomit up the knowledge they have imparted. You must not take it with you. It will not save you. Knowing who you will become is the sweetest poison, and you must get rid of every last drop if you're ever going to find your way back home.



"Great Expectations"

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(an ineffable play for voices. blogspot.com)

# My Brother, In This and the Preceding

-- Ari Feld



Untitled / © 2009 Lucy Diamond Phillips ([www.flickr.com/photos/superbomba/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/superbomba/))

My folks are fond of saying, “sprung from our loins,”  
in reference to my brother, the meteor,  
the kid the neighbors found  
stowing away  
in their cellar and pretending  
to be an urchin, the David  
awakened, a toucher of many bodies and the one  
with both ears, the dead-ringer  
for our sisters  
who spent much of his youth  
pillowfighting our sisters’ confused girlfriends  
and tracking alligators, that fattener of hogs  
and poisoner of lawns,  
spectator of bland music, the afterhours convocator  
and cruiserweight,  
an experimenter with religions and unwilling  
to share, “he whom we would have picked anyway,” the pumper  
of diesel into the minivan  
who ruined our only out of state vacation,  
the sand magnate of the Aleutians,  
bereft of hair, implicated  
in police blotters, the tickler  
of children and  
an indulgent pet owner, the once well-hewn, now  
resuscitated version of himself,  
the often coddled—as when  
we both got beestings  
and he got held on Mama’s lap, or when  
he bullwhipped the couch and called himself  
the Von Sweetbeating, the humper  
of candied fruit,  
the one who would say, “get off your broke-ass  
tricycle and find us some lemonade  
and don’t give me that look like you’re going  
to eat dirt and blame it on me again,”  
the releaser of frogs (after we saw E.T.)  
and now the last chance to pass on  
our family name and an unlikely candidate,  
a fucker of it up  
who, for that entire winter, iced new rinks all over town  
as penance for his pyramid scheme,  
the shotgunner  
of wine coolers, the chairman of power  
and water for the city of Boise, a seducer  
of the underfondled,  
the one my children continue to call Papa, the MC  
of open mic night, the one I found  
singing “My baby does the hanky-panky” over an opened  
grave, voted simply  
most likely, half-crazed after Peace Corps  
malaria, thrashing  
through the screen door, the volunteer  
for human testing, a marauder  
of ghost-towns, last seen  
pushing a flaming car through artichoke groves.



# Poem Up On Blocks

-- Clay Matthews



The neighbors hide their muscle car  
 behind a row of bamboo. In east Tennessee  
 you are either one of those people with a big hog  
 of a car in your yard/driveway, or you are one  
 without. Peer pressure kind of creates this emptiness  
 in me sometimes. In the afternoon the stalks  
 make a shadow across the living room wall,  
 other neighbors drive by, they've all modified  
 their mufflers so that their engines roar, first gear  
 hitting the higher RPMs down every short stretch  
 of asphalt, tires peeling, the dogs barking, roosters  
 crowing all day because in this town someone  
 is always just waking up. Some days in the afternoons  
 I crack the hood of my small truck, stare at the engine,  
 climb under and bang on pipes and bolts, but mostly  
 I'm just happy it runs. Mostly I drive back and forth  
 to work, passing at least twenty car lots, and often  
 I see an old Camaro, an old Cadillac, an old GTO  
 on the side of the road for sale. I tell myself it is okay  
 to want them but I also say *That bastard is probably  
 terrible on gas*. I think about the environment  
 because it seems important. I think about fitting in  
 and what I'll take from this place when I eventually  
 move away. I read recently that people are building  
 houses out of old barge and railroad cars.  
 They stack them together, weld them, and build  
 windows somewhere. They look out their windows  
 at their recycling and compost piles, and, in the distance,  
 birds sing, the ground is green. I look out my windows  
 and see a beater in the yard next door on blocks.  
 It is hard to remember what we're supposed to be  
 doing as humans, it is hard to be gentle on a car.  
 Out of an old truckbed down the road, daffodils  
 sprout like bits of confetti. Or fireworks, or champagne  
 or beer here, the lid cracked open on the fender of a car  
 that stopped mattering, that stopped running and now  
 is just a part of the reckless and beautiful landscape,  
 just a place for us to lean on as we look out and drink.





# *Eggs Benedict*

-- Bradley Sands

**I AM SITTING BY MYSELF** in a booth, eating Eggs Benedict. It is during peak hours. I have been eating the same breakfast for the past 72 weeks. The waitresses have just started to give me dirty looks. Hungry, tableless people also give me dirty looks. A tyrannosaurus rex sits down across from me. She is a very rude tyrannosaurus rex. I say, "You are a very rude tyrannosaurus rex. You should have asked if it was okay to sit at my table." The tyrannosaurus rex does not respond. I leer at her. She feeds coins into the jukebox. Her eyes become fluorescent lights. Her teeth become a stack of menus. Her mouth becomes the door to the women's bathroom. She becomes the diner. I feel lightheaded. The diner is sitting across from me. I am not sure if she was ever a tyrannosaurus rex. I am sure the diner is a very rude diner. I say, "You are a very rude diner. You should have asked if it was okay to sit at my table." The diner asks for my head in marriage. This catches me off guard. Women never ask me this question. I always ask this question. I weigh my options. I determine my response. I open my mouth to release it. The Eggs Benedict slips a diaphragm between its muffin and poached egg. This turns me on. I do not know why. Diaphragms do not usually have this effect on me. I have second thoughts about my response. I do not want to live in a world where I cannot take pleasure in a willing participant who is not my diner. The diaphragm turns into a puddle of Hollandaise sauce. A waitress touches my arm. She says, "I'm sorry, but we need your table." I look to the diner for guidance, but her seat is empty.



# JUST BETWEEN US



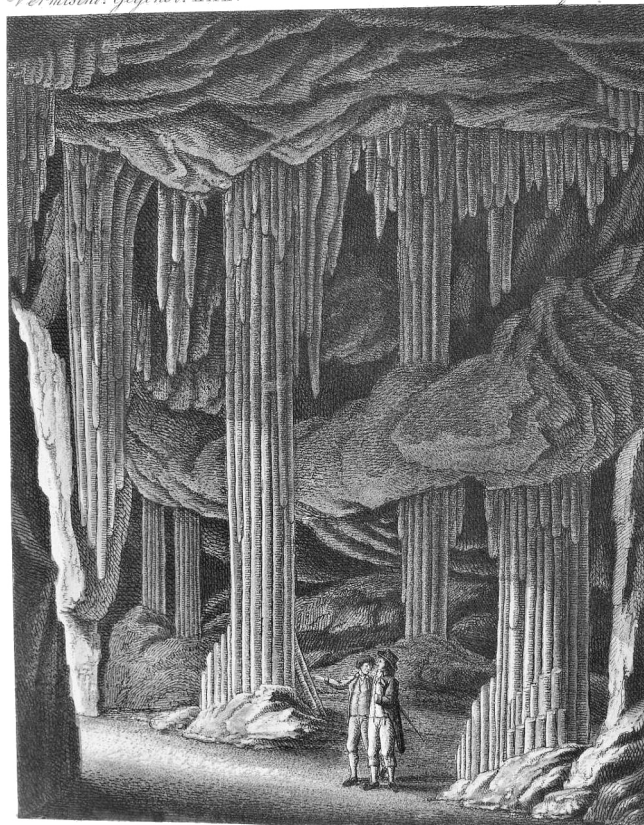
-- Loren Goodman

I was never really interested  
 In being in a fraternity  
 Other than the fraternity  
 Of mankind; not that I wouldn't  
 Be an active part of life on another  
 Planet. In fact I have. For thirteen  
 Years in 1981 I spent six  
 Months among the denizens of  
 ::Üghàãágh!! where I was taught  
 To make Italian food and copulate.  
 When I reappeared from my  
 Place of departure—abduction—the  
 Family farm near Pierre, I hadn't  
 Missed much on this earth; they  
 Told me I could be famous if  
 I wanted to, and make other people  
 Rich; try not to harm water  
 And other living things. What  
 Got into my head most in  
 Outer space was the feeling  
 I'd finally broken away from  
 The things that hold us all back  
 And returning, having  
 Done that—thanks to some  
 Funny-looking, fun-loving  
 Freaks from ::Üghàãágh!!—  
 Was exhilarating. Eighth grade  
 Would begin next fall,  
 And with my experiences abroad,  
 I'd be ready to make new friends.



*Vermischt. Gegenst. XXX.*

*Melanges XXX.*



*from Bertuch's Bilderbuch für Kinder / [bibliodyssey.blogspot.com/2009/04/world-around-us.html](http://bibliodyssey.blogspot.com/2009/04/world-around-us.html)*



# To My Possible Babies

-- Bryan Coffelt

My forthcoming babies  
 it's four flourishes, then "Hail, Columbia."  
 In 33 minutes, you will all have new names.  
 The window's crack  
 a translucent sprocket  
 that some sound escapes through —

My fantastic babies, all roughshod  
 and packing heat, you are only  
 as old as you feel.  
 The upset stomach of old Ohio goes green —  
 goes without its "spring dew."

My multipurpose babies, on feather's  
 edge, how come the Hopalong Cassidy,  
 how come the Pound quotes?  
 It's—how do you say—illiquid. It's, um,  
 as cold as the Rockies.

This light, my babies, will be the death  
 of us all.  
 He will bob and weave.  
 He will bob and weave as much  
 as you'd care to see.

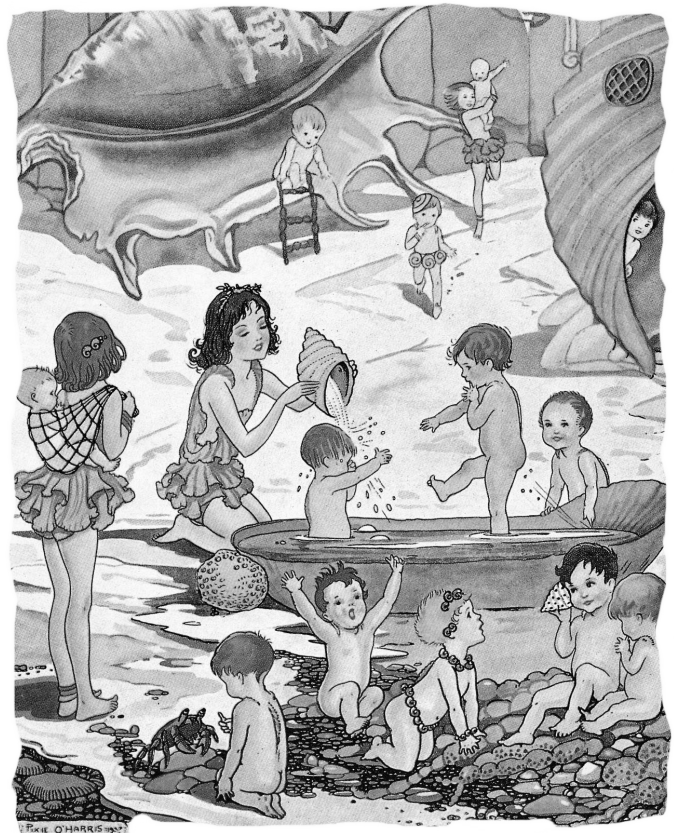
My babies, the LA trains are  
 doing their best impression of a cross stitch.  
 Time beats in the temple. \*points to temple\*  
 Hear the trestles undressing  
 the highways?  
 Oop—I've got your nose. You have my  
 Ponce De León.

Eh, post-adolescent babies,  
 don't rock the corduroy —  
 No ridges compensate for your soft spots.  
 Coffee table books await thee.

My possible lukewarm babies  
 you are white to be swearing —  
 scrubbed buckles (the lot of you)  
 all "hung jury," all perfect \$\$ —  
 (just testing the sunset's end.)

Old, dirty babies  
 do what I say:  
 fuck The Watchtower, trowel it away.  
 Because mirrors are already "ubiquitous."  
 Because the Holy Land is something you  
 just write about.  
 "Pull up a Big N' Tasty, oh, or don't."

Heap of general babies, stick  
 your tongues out and always try  
 to pee on the moon. Believe —  
 to your pretty selves —  
 that we work for money  
 we smile for candy  
 we walk for patience  
 we bleed for St. Vincent de Paul  
 we water the grass to bleed  
 we honk to freeze  
 we call out to be stomped  
 and that we are the "Good Guys."



*'The beauty of the garden took her breath away' / Piskie O'Harris in 'Pearl Pinkie and the Sea Greenie' (1935)*

# The Last Medicine

-- Peter Schwartz



Today the doctors voted on going post-modern. Instead of vaccines or sedatives they prescribe rubber alligators and condoms filled with bubble gum. The lawyers react perhaps a little too poetically to be effective. The city streets burn like Gonorrhea. A nun in Argentina makes the rather startling connection between coffee and Satanism.

The effects are varied. Some bloom like mushrooms while others rot like dog teeth. An ex-astronaut teaches his children to make heroin from garbage. The police plant flowers on the ruins of bus shelters. Sixteen thousand people dye their hair green and the stock market giggles.

The oceans sigh as we readjust the stars to better fit inside the darkness of our laptops. Cough syrup goes through the roof. Parents everywhere use root beer as baby formula but the next generation only grows stronger. Every single human hope is placed in a silver kayak buried at the tip of Iceland.

The rest of us simply learn to sleep very, very well. But please, no need for post-cards, you're already here too.



# Your Lilly Smells Fantastic In Old Fake Flower Land

-- Paul Siegell

/A/nd we come home smelling like smoke. A wannabeatnik L.A. hellhole. For how many deaths have I been alive? Internet access in an igloo. "Koalas at risk from toxic eucalyptus leaves." Bristled brushes played a snare and neither a-you could get into either one. "BE'ER NOW." Step lively, -ingly. Trey & Ana stayed with Zeo. Strong like ant. Moth sounds at which I can no longer light, but maybe that's just me reading it like a bike messenger's dry cleaning bill. These so-called "dues" are becoming expensive. Genres of music like regions of country. "They are shipped to you as eggs and will be hatching by the time you receive them." I'm just sayin' is all. A highly motivated specialist with a degree in an avalanche of letters. Is there really a dogma for all these domain names? I just exploded on a toilet. Two New Mexico quarters and a cloud of birds. And how the hell did I ever parachute into such paradise? An Egyptian belly dancer conceals her Isis wings. From sudden death overtime into the off-season. Of all the deals from *Camp Crowkeeper* as only print on page, but more than just ink and mutilated forest. Life's all over the place. I just got another IM. Thing about the trombone is it has no frets. A trail bereft of cairns, the upright bass alike. Feels like I hopped in, snuck inside the show. I'm tempted to see how long it can last.



Madame Fortune Clotjulia - Bearded Lady' / Charles Eisenmann (date unknown)



# Postmodern Martial Arts

-- Rich Murphy



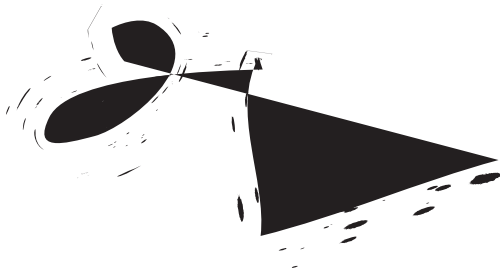
With what we don't have flaunted all around.  
Gnats taunting garbage. False sincerity  
igniting rats. Gucci, Gucci goo. Malaise  
stuck on the heel of a shoe fills nostrils.  
Gross domestic happiness  
waves its mortgage to waive fear  
for mayonnaise. The flow charts.  
Feet look sewer. Acquisitions and enjoyments  
rev their motives while waiting for the third  
generation cowboy. "Come down off a cloud  
named Silver." US cash total 300,000 =  
the 150 million meek. What's wrong  
with the unimaginative tells the street people  
how lucky the dead are not. Earth  
my word my witness. Deregulated violence  
drones it Tasers: gawking testicles,  
not Moloch moms spoiling dinner,  
children, and their own lives. Get hip  
and walk a mile. The beat survives  
on bread alone. Too late to wake up man.  
The buses for one leave their curves.  
The dear in headlights pushes hope  
with its eye out all made up.



# The Spittle Bug

-- Ron Padgett

After drowning in a swamp  
I climbed out and went downstairs,  
treetops gone in fog.  
The bug population was beginning to stir  
in the dewfall. Archimedes  
dropped his math problem and fell  
to his knees for mercy,  
but the soldier lopped off his head.  
The spittle bug has left  
a ball of foam on the grass.  
It's going to be a nice day.

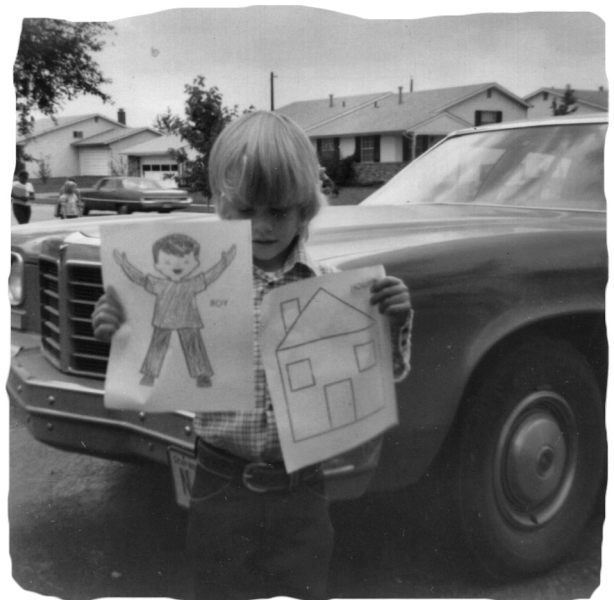




# ECLIPSE THE LIGHT & CRUDELY DIVIDE

-- Amy King

Milk is a mythical moth that sees its own heart, mostly  
in summer. Some kind of pillow moves me too  
and dissolves my palate; I cannot taste  
the shabby white wings  
and behold each shadow's infancy  
beneath the definition of sleep.  
I'm the kind of person who rides between towns  
in terra cotta music, green's death beat  
turning air into earth, a Roman ruins kind of day, impolitic.  
Blank sheets of ice to float on appear,  
saving me from my lackluster heart, a platter adrift,  
so that to carry you is  
my only dark sleeve  
essayed to reduce the people of things.  
You say you know me, understand my ways,  
but people love their homes, their locks that work  
both ways. My hands are the in's that tremble  
out the beats of verbatim, infection, bacterial electrics.  
Roused, I was reading a book that fell  
from your hands while we paddled,  
completing the myth of our symmetry.  
It held many pages and was a prefix  
to our relations.  
I am the gruntwork and a mystery of the gruntwork  
precedes the masks along the entrails  
reflecting our lives. Stand here in the rain  
on this coral shelf, hold out for land.  
We'll make way if we eclipse the light  
and crudely divide, dissolution of the mewing  
across the decks of countless ships, home to the anti-us.



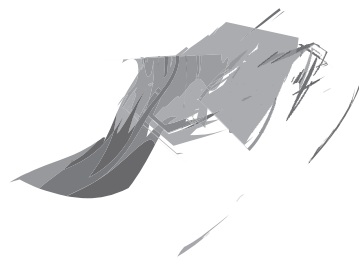
Untitled / © 2009 Lucy Diamond Phillips ([www.flickr.com/photos/superbomba](http://www.flickr.com/photos/superbomba))



# CANDY FOUNTAIN

-- Jason Bredle

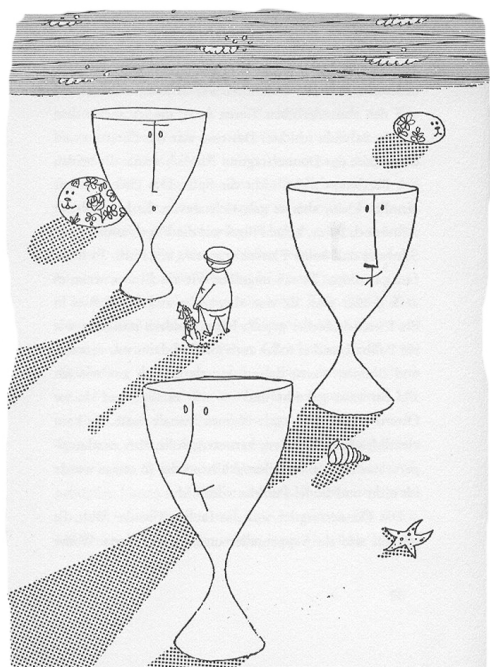
Pretend it's not raining or pretend the city has enough awnings.  
 Pretend you remember the last time we spoke.  
 For example, I could talk about the ferris wheel—  
 shaped like the elbow  
 of a dancer you once loved,  
 shaped like a dancer who left you for Tokyo Disney.  
 How much involvement, I wonder,  
 did the Oak Ridge Boys have in developing the world's first  
 atomic bomb. My favorite story  
 isn't the one about the boy  
 who falls into the abandoned grain elevator  
 but the one about the boy  
 who erases his memory to save his dying mother.  
 Pretend this song doesn't remind you of the desert,  
 pretend this song reminds you of the carnival.  
 But what do I mean by this?  
 Becky hates this song anyway, it reminds her of the desert.  
 I wonder if the Oak Ridge Boys  
 have ever discussed Japanese tea gardens.  
 Pretend I'm writing to you backwards, pretend I'm in love with you.  
 Here, you said, handing me an elephant ear,  
 pretend this is my heart.  
 When I'm hiding, you yelled,  
 when I'm hiding from  
 oh my God I'm so scared oh my God I'm so scared  
 oh my God I'm so scared.  
 I love this song, I yelled back.  
 There are blue ribbon goats and then there are blue ribbon goats  
 and then there are blue ribbon goats!  
 Like an oasis of light  
 rising above the energy,  
 like an oasis of quiet  
 rising above the energy.  
 Now, pretend there's a body of water in front of you.  
 Now pretend there's a body in front of you.  
 Last night,  
 I dreamt I was a teenager again,  
 but I knew things I didn't know the first time,  
 so when X threw a rock at Y, I explained to adults  
 how this is completely retarded,  
 Y's head and shirt covered with blood. Later, I dreamt I explained  
 my dream to a woman with many  
 l's and j's in her name. I awoke four times covered with sweat.  
 Being in love will make you do crazy things on ferris wheels.



-- Phil Estes

# Junichiro Koizumi Doesn't Care About White People

**Y**omiuri Shinbun says Typhoon 18 is four Katrinas.  
The sake I bought from 7-11 comes in a space-age bottle—  
push the button on the cap and the wine warms.  
We're shit faced in ten minutes and I mouth off,  
*This is how the telethon for Typhoon 18 would go—  
me standing by the prop comic in leather short-shorts  
and sunglasses. I'd say, "We lost our satellites in the storm.  
Hundreds of white men across Western Japan cannot  
watch the American League Divisional Series.  
Junichiro Koizumi doesn't care about white people."*  
Typhoon 18 dies on Hiroshima's mountains  
and we get heavy rain instead.  
Frank and I get on bikes, ride to McDonald's  
for Big Macs and Fanta. We point at the meal  
combo's number on the menu. I'm a fool.  
Japanese weathermen stand in water waste deep  
in the French Quarter; they wear yellow suits and blue ties.  
They take their cameras into the Superdome,  
interview families on Astroturf.  
How do weathermen translate  
"I walked through water with a shotgun and four shells"  
for the families sitting on tatami mats?  
A mo-ga girl with orange dyed hair  
and a pink mini-skirt hocks the return of the Ebi-Fry,  
fried batter and shrimp sandwich, back to the value menu.  
No cars, or people with cars, inch in lines  
down western highways to escape the rain.



from Balduin Baumschub / Stig Lindberg



# Contributors' Notes

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**BEN BROOKS** is a young writer and artist from the south west of England. His first novel *Fences* is forthcoming from Fugue State Press and he has work in *Succour*, *For Every Year* and *Willows Wept Review*.

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**LOREN GOODMAN** is Assistant Professor of Creative Writing and English Literature at Yonsei University/Underwood International College in Seoul, Korea. His first book of poems, *Famous Americans*, was selected by W.S. Merwin for the 2002 Yale Series of Younger Poets. His chapbook *Suppository Writing* (2008) is available from The Chuckwagon.

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**MARY HAMILTON** lives in Chicago where she is an optician and writer-type. Her work has appeared in lots of journals. Mary is also the co-founder and co-host of the QUICKIES! reading series. Visit her online at [thedukegoesonreading.blogspot.com](http://thedukegoesonreading.blogspot.com).

**AMY KING** is the author of *I'm the Man Who Loves You* and *Antidotes for an Alibi*, both from BlazeVOX Books, *The People Instruments* (Pavement Saw Press), *Kiss Me With the Mouth of Your Country* (Dusie Press), and forthcoming, *Slaves to Do These Things* and *I Want to Make You Safe*.

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**RICH MURPHY'S** most recent collection *Voyeur* won the tenth Gival Press Poetry Award for 2008 and will be out in Fall 2009.

**JONNY NEGRON** has been published in the pages of *Meat Haus S.O.S.* and *Candy + Cigarettes*. He lives in Oakland, California, and his work will be published regularly on [hachlever.com](http://hachlever.com).

**RON PADGETT'S** most recent book is *How to Be Perfect* (Coffee House Press, 2007).

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**LENA REVENKO** was born in Minsk, Belarus and at the age of 14 moved with a family to Israel. She studied visual communications at Bezalel Art Academy in Jerusalem. In 2002, on a trip across India, she was charmed by Indian miniatures. The good ones were expensive, so instead of buying them she decided to draw her own. Since 2002, Lucy has had exhibitions in Japan, the US, and China.



**B**RADLEY SANDS is the author of *It Came from Below the Belt*. He edits a literary journal called *Bust Down the Door and Eat All the Chickens*. Find more online at [lawngnomesinspace.blogspot.com](http://lawngnomesinspace.blogspot.com).

**P**ETER SCHWARTZ'S poetry has been featured in *The Columbia Review*, *DI-AGRAM*, and *Opium Magazine*. He's the art editor at *DOGZPLOT* and his third chapbook *ghost diet* will be out at the end of 2009.

**P**AUL SIEGELL is, ah, the author of *jambandbootleg* (A-Head 2009), *Poemergency Room* (Otoliths 2008), & the e-chap *JAM>* (ungovernable press 2008). He is a staff editor at *Painted Bride Quarterly* and blogs at *ReVeLeR @ eYeLeVeL* ([paulsiegell.blogspot.com](http://paulsiegell.blogspot.com)).

**B**ETH THOMAS'S stories have appeared in *Keyhole*, *FRiGG*, *Smoke-Long Quarterly*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Monkeybicycle*, and others. She lives

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**B**ONNIE ZOBELL has received a BNEA and a PEN Syndicated Fiction Award and won the Capricorn Novel Award. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in such print magazines as *American Fiction*, *The Bellingham Review*, and *The Greensboro Review*, and online at *SmokeLong Quarterly*, *FRiGG*, and *Hobart*. She received an MFA from Columbia and teaches at San Diego Mesa College.

## Many Thanks To the Warm of Heart

Chris Alba  
Amherst Books  
Bookslut  
Daniel Bailey  
Clayton Banes  
Colin Bassett  
Randall Brown  
Aaron Burch  
Blake Butler  
Christy Call  
Laura Call  
Jimmy Chen  
Jack Christian  
The Cinnamon Urns  
Dave Clapper  
Stephan Clark

Claire Donato  
Elizabeth Ellen  
Erin Fitzgerald  
Roxanne Gay  
Brandon Scott Gorrell  
Barry Graham  
Elliot and Erin Harmon  
Shane Jones  
Darby Larson  
P.H. Madore  
Kendra Grant Malone  
Chelsea Martin  
K. Silem Mohammad  
Gene Morgan  
Jack Morgan  
Anjali and Edward Mullany

The Orchard Street Progressive  
Dinner Club  
Kyle Peterson  
Adam Robinson  
Lindsay Rowan  
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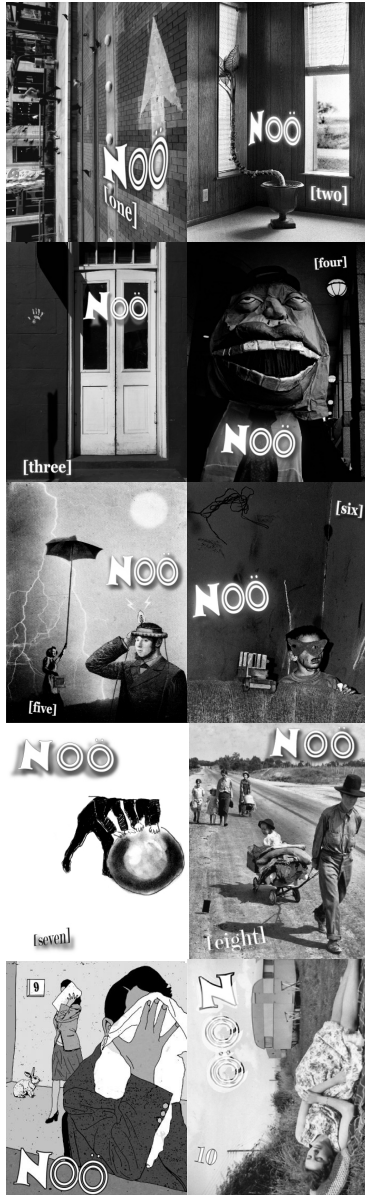
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## What's In This For Me?

-- In Brian Foley's *The Tornado Is Not A Surrealist*, icebergs quietly conspire against passing ships, a man's knotted muscles become ocean liners upon his skin, other men threaten various narrators with shovels and steal their breakfast eggs ...

**NÖÖ Presents: The Greying Ghost Press, Ryan Call, page 4-5**

-- If he's looking at her in the sunlight he can only think of one thing: he can only think about how she can make the towel stay up when she ties it on after a shower, and he can't.

**At the End of This Story Three Months Will Pass, Crispin Best, page 12**

-- Everyone says the heart is the shape of the human fist but I think it's more like a bullfrog. Inside the ribs it shivers like a bullfrog's throat.

**The Breakfast, Rebecah Pulsifer, page 16**

-- You have to walk until you get hungry enough to steal, to take what is not yours, to convince yourself that the deep magic of this place will not miss one tomato out of its thousands.

**Brother, There Is a Field, Matt Bell, page 17**

-- or when / he bullwhipped the couch and called himself / the Von Sweetbeating, the humper / of candied fruit ...

**My Brother, In This and the Preceding, Ari Feld, page 18**

-- For thirteen / Years in 1981 I spent six / Months among the denizens of / ¡Üghàãgh!! where I was taught / To make Italian food and copulate.

**Just Between Us, Loren Goodman, page 21**