

SAKURA REVIEW

NINE



Sakura Review

NINE

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Masthead

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Editor's Note

Sakura Nine ushers in the writing of this moment that has self-trained to stay against the aftershocks; the unholy successions that it responds to are recognized without and within, and the rebellion in these pages is sage and seasoned.

The early work of this issue extracts example and wields it for us, apparently having diligently spent time observing its facets, if with a weary eye. The last few pieces, lyrical, lead us into the territory of the future, which will certainly be craggy and jagged rock-strewn and difficult to breathe in.

The writing in *Sakura Nine* gives lessons with still lovely strokes, graceful. And a lesson a step above: there are many ways yet to give them.

—*Julia Leverone*

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Contents

! Ô NGUYỄN MAI	
<i>Before</i>	8
INA CARIÑO	
<i>Sumpâ for a Vigilante</i>	10
DUJIE TAHAT	
<i>Epithalamion with Light</i>	12
<i>I Can Hardly Remember Last Year Now</i>	13
LOURDES ESPÍNOLA translated by LINA FERREIRA	
<i>To Be Born Woman-Poet</i>	15
SHABNAM PIRYAEI	
<i>The Eventual Skinslit of the Determined Butterknife</i>	16
<i>She</i>	18
ANNIE BLAKE	
<i>In the Name of the Son</i>	20
LETISIA CRUZ	
<i>Hunger</i>	26
E. KRISTIN ANDERSON	
<i>So Help Me, It's True</i>	27
A. ANUPAMA	
<i>Ode to an Aubade</i>	28
<i>Asters</i>	30
<i>No</i>	32

VINCENT HAO	
<i>The Loose Fingers Which Finish the Tapestry</i>	34
BENNIE HERRON	
<i>Hoods</i>	43
SAMANTHA LÊ	
<i>East Side</i>	45
<i>I Went to Little Saigon</i>	47
<i>Every Day Dishtowels and Aspirins</i>	49
STEWART LUPTON	
<i>Only the Good Die Young</i>	50
<i>From the Land of Bruises and Meander</i>	52
FABIÁN O. IRIARTE translated by DONNY SMITH	
<i>Miss Moore Adored the Odd</i>	55
<i>Things That Leave Marks</i>	56
<i>The Jaw</i>	57
<i>Reading Between the Lines</i>	58
SHAWN RUBENFELD	
<i>Stand Clear of the Closing Doors, Please</i>	59
VIRGINIA SMITH RICE	
<i>All Right Then. All Right. Then Left.</i>	71
CHARLES KELL	
<i>Wasted Wednesday</i>	73

JOHN SIBLEY WILLIAMS	
<i>Late Empire</i>	74
ABBY RYDER-HUTH RATHGEBER	
<i>Brief Plains</i>	75
<i>Contributors</i>	78

! ỗ Nguyễn Mai

BOYS

Once, we had a god
heartbeats blossomed
into drumbeat
there, always music

always
dance

my feet calloused
against memory of song.

Once, we prayed to a god
altars spilling over with sunlight

the universe draped
over trembling shoulders

heads bowed in reverence
to our unknowingness

knees bruised
in want.

! ã Nguyễn Mai

Once, we were gods

lungs filled with legend
heaven yielding to our breath

bodies unending
remembering –

O body, do not forget.

When the typhoon opens its mouth,
spear its head with your blistering hands.

Body, stay.

When the moon drags the quilted surface
of the sea,
tighten your fist at its border.

Ina Cariño

SUMPÂ FOR A VIGILANTE *

—*n. blasphemy, curse, imprecation*

may your bullets jam

may your nights in Barangay 106
trail with fishball vendor stink

as your unmarked motorbike roars
past sari-sari stores
may maya birdshit
rain down on you

may your M4 rifles crack

may you slip in a red puddle in the back alley

may you witness the dusk jasmine
blooming from holes
in a dead boy's chest

may you always repeat his last words
please stop do not let me be
as those white moths chalk-wings
folding wilting in midnight heat

Ina Cariño

when you skulk behind a corner
may your God watch you

when you greet your elders at the gate
may they spit their hexes on you

may the keening of mothers on sidewalks echo
in the hollow of your left ear

let your brow always be damp with sweat

let the rusty salt never wash from your palms

**Estimated death toll from police-led and vigilante extrajudicial killings in the Philippine War on Drugs: 7,000.*

Dujie Tahat

EPITHALAMION WITH LIGHT

all the homies came out tonight

& now we got ourselves a fat stack

of love poems & some lighter fluid.

How fortuitous—the night before

a wedding—to happen upon a bouquet

of flames to spark up this newest hour.

Dujie Tahat

I CAN HARDLY REMEMBER LAST YEAR NOW

everything happens so quickly

I'm always just catching up—

if at all. The days fold in

on themselves daily:

as soon as I unlock my phone,

out falls a mother asking her son to call

back when he finds time plz,

out falls a voicemail from a debt

collector, out falls a school

with a shooter & everything,

out falls a riot, out falls a child

asking another child how scared

she is, out falls an election & another riot

Dujie Tahat

out falls a pair of legs at a hotel pool,

out falls a man & another terrible man

& another terrible man & Jesus how many more

until out falls Janelle Monaé,

plentiful & perfectly formed.

At what point, exactly, does grief start?

This relentless barrage of self-

portraits in convex mirrors, each

moment more upside down

than the next. All I wanted

was to know what time it was.

Lourdes Espínola translated by
Lina Ferreira

TO BE BORN WOMAN-POET

The alternative:

To leap from the balcony; tear it apart.

Skirts, fan, thread, needle:

I undress and rebel.

Enough of watching life

from a balcony!

Semicircular prison

deaf eardrum, deaf mouth

I yell and speak

from the solitary task of writing.

Manuscript of internal visions

mirrors of women opening up.

I am born

shattering poisonous springs.

Shabnam Piryaei

THE EVENTUAL SKINSLIT OF THE DETERMINED BUTTERKNIFE

this is how I write now.
discerning blankly passing cars
until something tilts sufficiently to expel.

to choose laziness is to move closer to death.

I try to write a dialogue between darkness and light. It begins

darkness:

Trauma rings the neck of a dewy upward gaze.

I am her trail of ants. Reappearing

black traffic of hunger.

Proximity to intestinal violation.

Carcass-eyed surrender to absence of undulations.

I'm the windowless shed.

I am her window

less shed. I am her first lover.

*I precede her. She knows
the count of creases in the crook
of my elbow. You are only
an aspiration, a faint recipient
of jetless appeals.*

Shabnam Piryaei

for light I write

only *red dragonfly red dragonfly red dragonfly white butterfly*

which is fine if it is all I know.

is chronicling every magic an evisceration?

I hate writing like this. like a conversation.

how do I honor waking up

a thousand times alive.

Shabnam Piryaei

SHE

Like a severed ear lying in the grass
something hidden is jarring the pilot wave.

Bees halo eleven blue throats in our front
yard. Our yard. The land you bought
while I shimmied along the precipice avoiding
eye contact, a stubborn baby refusing
to eat. There is a baby inside
me. *Prey.*

Just cells dividing. Just cells dividing.
I coerce myself to stand, to look at you.
But not look
at her. *Just cells dividing.*

Stalks of mint interrupt the arthritic cactus
reclining against the stairs, tiny white dots
of alyssum giggling at its feet.
I am distracting myself from the kill.

Speak with her.
until the palms of your eyes dock tenderly.
offer love wetly from an index finger

Shabnam Piryaei

until she can choir away.

Each sauntering breeze sways the burgundy bodies
of plum trees like flesh in the water.
On the sidewalk dogs menacingly
cast tunnels at Marianne. She delivers me
letters, packages, and bills. And spiders
roosting in corners of our window rush
into our home, bolting across the floor.
Clambering for shelter from me. I have killed
them. With your shoes. I don't know why
I fear them.

*sky blue buoy in the vines, you trust me
with a width that tugs
at my ribcage like a name
called in sleep.*

*the day before the poison is the day before my birthday.
I frantically re-plant the dying
aloe vera, mouthful of elliptical chaos.
I am illuminated and weary of all
the text lyricizing from god's mouth.*

Annie Blake

IN THE NAME OF THE SON

—for Louisa Jane

it is important to have a mirror strong sunlight can placate your
view facing my own umbra my healer and i in the medicine
house he is taking my lethal dose of sleeping pills away from
me assisted dying is a euphemism for suicide the destroyer
archetype is incompatible with life my mother used to call me a
doll i expected my children to stay still like a photograph

my masochistic side is my father he has been coming through
the back door he is familiar with his trigger loops he scratches
his chilblained fingers he is their itch he tells me he is lonely i
turn my head i don't want to be part of his autolysis i tell him
he's going to have to work out how a needle can be used to
patch color on grazed knees

i see the blue dresses of wraiths in my house handmaids and
arks of the covenant the cloth of table spread out for children
to eat she told me to look out for what was behind the door a
young child is honest enough to rise up through the ceiling as
high and wide as chimney smoke

Annie Blake

i found a large silver coin heads or tails it was a man's head i
took off the shade of the lamp to expose light from its chimney
the men weren't telling me something i told my child she had
to walk around with me because she wasn't safe on her own the
wraiths had more to tell me an older child was playing
hopscotch on the wooden floor she was in 'pride and prejudice'
clothes

he gave me a cheap poem and a thread that's just pulp fiction
oxygen in two parts is the most stable allotrope of oxygen i
always take diuretics with a glass of water for once i was
thinking of him fur on skin friction like brushing my hair
pleasurable tear of my body like handmade cotton the sucking
of milk of figs the talking pendulum of a clock i hear it the
seconds exhale harmonious immolation unspilling of wine my
slaughter moans in her sleep

strong backs of men i cross the moor on horseback from the
fever of rain haloed fresh curved hulls of women stone visions
of cities should glow in our dreams insect rings on my toes

i am in my child room i gesture for my children to keep shut i
can see him the window is like a door his mouth the rattlesnake
of a motor the pouts of his mouth puffing like an old steam
train some men just knock on the door to make sure no one is
home there is a cigarette wrinkling in an ashtray all i carve is a
knife i find him already dismantling my curtains his knees are

Annie Blake

balancing themselves on my sill all that i deny is in the bough
of a tree like the broad shoulders of men it is his fault my
mouth is the cold dish of lent

there are roots hardening like icing dreadlocked hair their
needle sphincters crawling in forests the moon automatically
slides back into her protective cap i am the restitution of my
black bales the disengagement of the hinges of my mortal
attachments

her hair is up to her knees when she was one she could stand on
her feet rising from the palms of her hands resting on the balls
of her feet mounting with her instincts bird beaks to pluck out
forest trees their threshing legs limp as hair thumbs from mud
the cutting out of mouths vigilant owls spread their wings to
unlace half-circles holes in the heart of trees sawtoothed feet the
war of the young when she feeds them live eyes their pupils
round like pins of nails soluble like salt even sugar the unruffled
rays of the sun sting like pepper a full lemon in the mouth
straightens our line of vision half lizards on tongues like
receiving the eucharist round with side legs kicking out like
rhizomes autotomy darting like rain pattering i can hear the
hypnotic rhythm of a drum

tails curl swing like a bell they withhold a body organ that
clangs clitorides bruised against the brass the church is as guilty
as anyone the pope on his throne the queen in her gold lies

Annie Blake

flash like bad teeth her wedding dress bridal or a bridle reining
my spirit or a bridle inside a gunlock she thinks she
consummates inside wedlock a wedding dress can become a
winged dressoir it is heartbreaking to see untasted crockery and
utensils sink with the titanic sagging womb

the dew spreads over me like a body when i dream my head
wool of dark jungle my legs crisscrossed bamboo sticks do i join
together the trees of this barn with crown notches or dovetail
ones ruah comes when the son is born the queen the ribs of her
corset were stolen from children's bones her peruke protects
against the shame of syphilis or impoverishment of any style

everybody knows wooden healing bathrooms and spring houses
eventually crumble the physical temple its rust on black iron
shows us how the young must return to us with their own sawed
wood the stacking of warm tombs the body is a tree leaves and
breath from the mouth of a hollow for squirrels the silent hole
of acorns the wheeling of medieval carts on sandstone squares

feeling for this ceiling of lights eating with eagle claws airplanes
look like white eagles on a summer's day let them wonder why i
won't wash the blood off my hands the curtain eyelids that shed
like women who fall for their men who wear cake dresses sponge
and blood sweet jam in whorled wells like worms upside down
cake strawberries for feet clawfoot bath turn into wide-webbed
duck feet

Annie Blake

cold mouths of men acerbic and fingerless stumps arms
without spades the dirt has become graved bodies waterlogged
and silenced meat grunting guns their killing smoke wedding
rings like nooses silver or brass coins heads are attached to
necks mortuum vadium we all want bite-sized apples skin the
color of candy they carry flags instead of mountains their caves
gape dried up hay pants of brute silk bullets tear eggs crepe
paper seeds the primary colors of pre-school children about the
age of two some play in fields of color others play in a black
and white television show a monday or tuesday in the core of
winter

some never come to appreciate differentiation forget the
balance of ballet dancers her pointes pungere thighs
sharpening the knife is in the spinning not the slick edges of
blades shuffling of blunt knives like the legs of my father
cursed sons upside down plates because they are afraid of
eating the locusts from dust storms their hair in their food
their heart-charms palms rainbow lollipops as empty as white
plates sticky half-licked intuition is not in the balancing of
books i am not an accountant

snails die in shells but the wind makes a voice in their helicons
grow seed when their layers of gastropod egos eat from the
dark earth they too are afraid of the sun withering their
saplings closed ducks preening feathers keep them warm in
water caulking the window of your ship at half past four we

Annie Blake

don't sit by the hearth by six o'clock too many socks piled in a
heap at the tie or crust of my bed there is money in a glass jar
which don't have access to lungs don't pump out their wreaths
when earthquakes come in the dead of fall they white they
solidify and crack like spoilt eggs green-boiled yolks mute
inside the shell turbulence of white like acne on the skin boils
breaking with pus under to rock her in her satan sleep gutted
fish slit in half

snow white snow it is not blood they are just red tongues
angelic feline he unhooks her hand wrestle her huntsman in
the quick-webbing forest spider black eyes of cats they used to
be syringed balls devoid of water my husband leaves his alarm
clock on even on the weekend cars drive down my street when
people should be sleeping hard electronic furnishings light
vigils of the hierarchy

in nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti you are my son you
are my son

the shepherd how he takes off the wool of lambs separates the
fire from their meats

and their trust

that he will let them live

Letisia Cruz

HUNGER

Paco de Lucia's guitar is the Monarch migration—
a butterfly in my mouth,
silent cross offerings.

We stand at the altar praying. You say
the opposite of loneliness is.
You say the rumors are.
And milkweed is nearly vanished.
We stand at the crosswalk waiting.
Cars soar by and the skies swell.
You say you smell rain and we
reach out our hands.

E. Kristin Anderson

SO HELP ME, IT'S TRUE

It almost looked as if young woman was planted in line
behind *mother*, in dire need of maddening circularity,
something this queen began, dangerous and hard.

You'll think you hallucinated a little girl enlightened,
dragging flinty eyes in America. The woman you want
was still, pretty, a philosopher, quick to punch slain luck.

A girl would light the fading purple of late evening,
velvety, flooding unexpected panic like dry fire:
that long, strange year hard to explain

*Erasure poem source: King, Stephen. Christine. New York: Signet,
1983. 41-44.*

A. Anupama

ODE TO AN AUBADE

But it is hard to sleep.
I adjust my heart
so that it can catch the train
whistle in the night.

We collect so much of it before dawn.
Sometimes, I don't know
what to do, so I burn it
where the birds can warm themselves.
Inevitable that a song must
spread its beautiful ice
on each needle of the pine
in an afternoon.

The impossible gift arrives
and it is possible
to not notice. The delivery van
has a dent in its door.

Sometimes, I'm just rolling
in daylight and when
someone plays Ravel on the radio

A. Anupama

the claw of desire lacerates
the living moonlight out of me
and I miss you.

There is no escape from that.

But there is dawn
before my heart must burst.

A. Anupama

ASTERS

—“are star-like, multi-petaled flowers, actually a compact cluster called a ‘flowerhead.’”

You are a flowerhead
and your heart is a shiny
leaf on a stalk. That
was the thought on my
mind when I rode my
bike up and down the
gravel road that summer,
thinking how nice it
would be to fly away.
After so many years, it's
still true. You are a flowerhead
and I guess I haven't
flown far enough away.
I pedal my thoughts and
coast downhill sometimes
with the breeze behind us.
The field is gone. The pines
are gone. Imperceptible,
what is gone from the sky.
A beaded robe and our youthful
anticipation of change—both
shiny like a leaf on a too-sunny

A. Anupama

June day—drop through the song
and are forgotten again.
Working the pedals uphill now,
I could recall how to put up
the old tent. We told stories
in the dark then, before we even
had very many. It's funny
how the color red steals
the memory and I can hear
you say "tutti-frutti" like
it's the scientific name for that flower.
I would like to laugh.
The fireflies scared you
a little—what if they burned
our hands? Remember—
after having gone, they will return.
But they don't bother flying away.
Remember how they sleep?
On the undersides of leaves,
on flowerstalks.
I've replanted the field in its exact
horseshoe-shape in my heart.

A. Anupama

NO

If someone says it,
you can clasp hands and
slide back to the sand.

In a garden, where someone
has drawn ripples in sand,
Guan Yin points the way with her toe.
There. She's waiting
for a peony, there.

No one can really repeat
something that is nothing,
a negation, a zero.
But, if you believe other-
wise?

Someone could put
a large rectangular block of marble
in your way. If it makes
a shadow, it's not that serious.
It may, in fact, be a bridge.
Some bridges are built of wood,
painted red. In the middle of some,
some have put temples. Would you
stop halfway to pray?

A. Anupama

Prayers and tolls are not the same thing.

And then we all go back sometime.
Whether that same way
or only in memory or
in forgetfulness, which are
the same thing.

If you repeat it, saying
under your breath,
no, no, no, no,
you will hurry too fast for
the peony to catch.

I wander around with a
small dog most days, wherever
the solar system and its whirling-
galaxy home are taking us.
Sometimes that small dog
stays fixed
on the crack in the door,
waiting to hear
the giant squirrel
that lives in the neighbors' roof.
I don't tell him "no."
Just "it's okay."

Vincent Hao

THE LOOSE FINGERS WHICH FINISH THE TAPESTRY

Me and Tamlin, we're downing spirits by the river, watching floral patterns build from the loose smoke. The wind is catching in all the contours, breaking the liaisons of grey into coalitions, then siblings, then singles. Tamlin dunks his head into the water near an amethyst stone, as if to drown himself away. There are no birds in the water, no people. I've been disguising the cold in my black sketched board shorts. I've been waiting for my watch to run out of time, and the sun keeps skipping steps, building in half crescents before winking and relapsing past the wall of a winter cloud.

Tamlin speaks in a lost, hushed voice. Like me, he minces his vowels, cuts g's at the bridge, and loses his thoughts within a slight smile that allows the light from his white-cut teeth to shine through. We're losing tandem, we're breaking bicycles, and my mother keeps falling through the seamless light. She's been begging me to wash the dishes for a million years. She's been awake, washing my brother's muddy shinguards. His youthful dirt tracks against the doorframe, past the tile lining and the tile and the carpet which she will replace with floorboards soon. Eddie, my brother, sits too close to the tv, and she keeps pulling him away, assuaging him with a lecture about the frailty of his retinas. But Eddie is drawn by the deep magnetism of the tv, he spaces and crawls closer, and at the

Vincent Hao

point where the bible burns, my mother has no fingernails and the cross drips off her heart, leaving shadows on her shaking arms.

I'm lost in the wasted energy. At night, I watch the static dress and undress itself, the pixie stars beset with electricity. I'm restless. I'm phasing to the sidewalks, stealing frames from my mother's midnight breath. All the ambience—the door's restless sighs, the crickets shouting for god, they're culminating at the peak of my ears and I've fallen in love with escape.

And standing outside in the night, barefoot, my skinny body slumped against a beam of light, I keep losing focus. Sometimes cars pass, their mechanical wind stealing my bearings, followed by the flash of white headlight beams. My breath grows shallow in the darkness between streetlamps, and I skip sidewalk cracks, stepping low and quick to keep my toes tethered against the earth. Sometimes the stars break through. The earth shines with blue and gold, pinpoints of light traipse along the bromeliad trees, and I swipe for a star until it becomes a stolen moth, frantic and dying all at once.

By the time the first lapses of orange sneak up against the horizon, the world is a statue, its canvas fills with milk and cereal. I eat, then I watch grandpa eat. The spoon struggles to his lips. Before he sleeps, grandma unbuttons his shirt and he cries into the linen. These are deep, sobbing tears, ruminations which pass through the walls and fill my uneasy attempts at sleep. Since he's been here, I've been clasping my hands in foreign notions, rekindling the contour of fingertip skin,

Vincent Hao

wrapping my lips around a prayer that I never know how to begin. It's never my voice fleeing these lips, it's something small and benign and devoured. There's something divine about a soul condensed in a broken body. After he leaves for california, I clean the guest room, vacuum up parkinson's pills and lint, and they make a brazen, relapsing sound.

We celebrate his birthday against an orange sun, watching palm trees and yellow tides flood into hawaii primer, the color of the surf illuminating the potatoes and the pan-fried leeks. Grandpa cries, but it is of happiness. He walks slowly along the beach, leaving shallow footprints. At christmas, he folds hundred dollar bills into red envelopes, and smiles when we open them, the vast possibility drenched on our impressionable faces. Eddie won't pose for the pictures, he's too restless and his bones show against the silhouette of his sweater. Eddie squirms the same way sitting on the beechwood bench, neck following from stiff collar and tight blue tie. He's playing simple songs, twisting his fingers at the touch of a harmony, blue mirages of noise sweeping from his restless grip. Imagine the place where the world ends, he says, and he switches his computer screen towards me, allowing my eyes to rest upon the shimmers of hellish light which radiate against his eyes.

I love you, I want to say. But I never do, and I never will. I know the world is ending, I say, but it is slow. You have nothing to fear but the touch of some other god. We can repent. I'll prove it.

And I'm gathering whiskey bottles, wine in cardboard

Vincent Hao

boxes, beer, pale ale and moonshine, pink and rosalia, gin, tonic, rubbing alcohol, vodka, distilled vodka. Anything to make the mouth lose its flavor, to help the tongue forget its language. In the night the boys have haunted faces and the girls are on stilettos, and gravity is twisting, the essence falls into concavity and the ether brings her careless eye too close to my own, and the alternative sin is rejection, relapse back to some place where I keep shaking her hand and forgetting the sound of my name and asking her to estimate what day it is. It's saturday, the moonlight shatters against the waves, and when I lean real close against the railing, the mist drapes on my face like snowflakes.

In the morning we stand in line and the attendants hand out plastic ponchos, embalmed with 'tour the niagara falls' stretching over a clear, blue canvas. The boat drops through the waterfall, and when I reach my hand out, it is beaten with water until it is clear and my veins show through. At the dock, a tall man grips my hand to help me off. When he lets go, the blood in my palm slowly dissolves from view. In the afternoon we walk back to the hotel. The air is cut with melody.

And the dogs keep whispering songs, until Tamlin barks back and a wild music runs parallel through the streams of grass. His footprints are an aural mark in the earth, the place of separation between crushed dandelion stalks and cyphers of indented mud. I'm repenting, slowly, with my fingers perpendicular to the tall blades of grass. If I squint my eyes, I can make out skinny crosses, jesus's beard falling through the stained glass. The potluck is cold, the adults are laughing in the

Vincent Hao

kitchen, and I'm wasting in the empty pews. My fingers lead through bible pages and the hard leather binding creases into my palm. I'm army crawling against the tile, dodging crescent moon faces of half-drunk christians, and scandal is a laughing wink between the pages of ezekiel and matthew.

The voices become cyclical. The king slays john the baptist and lays his head on a platter. All across america, ham watches noah with vivid eyes. The floods come and wash humanity away. My mother clutches my shoulder and I fall asleep in her arms, my eyes regressing from the aura of her rudimentary smile.

Streetlights pass and contour, their light washes in rhythm, the car's steel drum hums and eclipses, and the moon rises to a peak. The world is flush with patterns, in the scarlet, gridded sky and the vested clouds tucked against blue mountain points. The trees pulse and fade into cityscapes, rich houses with venetian tile roofs and green, gasping lawns. I strain my vision searching in the apathy for something to remember. It's easiest to press the weight of my head against the seatbelt, let it lock up, and watch the highway channel fill up with visions. A green ford blurs against the exit ramp. A white chevy malibu floats through the road, its tires washed into the scenic night. In my altered state, everything round is the moon, every pane is the auburn grip of light. The windows are hazing with memories.

The windows are fading blue, white. There is barely any snow against them. Eddie steps through the white sheets as paths of pristine ice lead him onwards. I cut snowflakes with my bare

Vincent Hao

hands and watch as they lustre against my palm, shine with the eve of my creasing skin. I collect the white into balls. There are no carrots in the fridge, no finger-tipped tree branches, no scarves or small sweaters. Eddie gives the the snowman two pebbles for eyes and their weight makes the man slump, his posture creased and relapsing. Eddie runs in the house. The mirage of seconds becomes years of passive ice, nature's conflict broken with the snowman's tenement drifted away. When he separates, torso flattened on the wet porchwood, I decide to name him kyle, for all the skies shined blue with spit. His eyes perk before falling off melting cheeks. Until the sky scatters again, his body parts lay stricken against the porchlight, drawing in ice and steel, adapting to the shine of a winter breeze.

And in the night we're shivering through blankets while watching wolverine, the road filled with comic blood, the scar shines tearing the screen's fabric. Wolverine cuts Eddie deep and his body contours into the world form—the sky broken by twitching toes, roots lensing into fingerprints forming cumulus clouds—and the quick trigger claws tattoo omens against Eddie's eyes, the blood drips and stains his teeth with hunger. I wake up indebted, and I've lost my keys. They aren't under the couch cushions, or against the blue clock, or in my mother's purse. I tie a rainbow bracelet against my key so I know it's mine. I fall off the school bus in a daze, walk to the mahogany door and cut the key into the cheap brass.

I wake up indebted. I cut the key against a loose shirt thread, until it tars and splinters and fragments. The breeze

Vincent Hao

kisses the candles and they dance like ballerinas, pivot toes leading at the shimmering pools of wax. The ceiling is painted with the bodies of chinese dragons. The man's body in prayer collapses against a ripping cloth pad. When he rises and turns he is wearing a tattered vest, hands shivering with heat. Near him, I light incense and the pyrotechnics fall in slow streams, the stalk shivers and collapses into small, private remembrance. Everything falls in a gasp of buddhist breath. I'm shaking the old man's hand and filling him in with grandpa's features: the young chin, old veins, cheery, sunken eyes. And in the fleeting moments, the frames of light as my hand steels against his, I'm forgetting to breathe. Everything is real, and aural: the spikes of his short, greying hair, the miracles of the buddha's transformations, the bed of draping incense smoke. In a second, other people rush in and I'll let go of the memory, watch as it drifts against the wind and sits on the draining sea. I lock against the man's face as children with cameras rush over us, I manage a smile and disappear before remembering to pray.

In a second, I'll catch against the bed strands and wake up with a faucet becoming a river on my lips. I'm at the skinny point between two stars, conceiving as a prayer on my mother's palm. Seventeen years pass and I'm six dollars caught against the storm drain's edge, watching all the water flood past. My hands are threading pants pockets, I'm slumping and braving the cold.

Me and Tamlin, we're on the edge of the river and we're nearly kites. The water lapses and relapses against my toes.

Vincent Hao

Sometimes there is a picnic blanket keeping me warm. Sometimes I stare deep into the grey of the current, as the torment of the sea cascades over my frame. In the lily apex of the water, the strokes of an oil painting clash in minutiae, and the silver of a small minnow drowns from itself. There's a winter breath and a few ghosts cascading into patterns, shattering skulls on the rocks and imminent danger. A niagara falls attendant is telling me to pull the poncho tight. I never listen. I nearly cascade over the edge, and my hair is wet, and Tamlin is always laughing about things we forget to explain. Eddie is in the water, slowly baptising, and his lips lock and I lose the key somewhere in the surf. I want to talk, I yell, but I never do. I'm never whole on these dreamy days where the sun forgets to rise, I'm forgetting my fingers in the water and watching the nylon pull from my socks. The grass grows green, and sturdy. The construction cranes are slowly becoming birds. And all across my body, fire ants are building fireworks and my mother is singing karaoke until her voice scratches and stops.

And I'm wondering who could have ever been sure, in the midst of her stare I'm thinking about this girl that I love, how I've been living on a marble marooned in her eyes. I'm sitting in her minivan and trying not to stare, but the shine off passing headlights is leaving her face in sermon, enveloping her freckled canvas of stars with new moonlight. The breaths I take shiver and linger, and memorize lineages, and a million years of evolution has brought me to her, to her moment, and in her presence I'm dissolving into a pool of lapsing thoughts. In my head marbles are clutching marbles, whispering something about how I could live this way forever, how I could die in this

Vincent Hao

moment with my hand clutched in hers, grasping at her meaning and that would have always been enough.

Bennie Herron

HOODS

this place is a living body
where the pulse beat is human
prayers are coin tosses a gamble for your own good
a quick score a come up
this place has a metric sun bringing
order to chaos moon to mouth resuscitation
imagine this world slowed down
so you could see the clouds become rain

we come from a place where the world starts over
the dolls have straight hair braided in corn rows
mothers evolve in this space fathers invent new
wheels returning to the essence with swagger and fire

the churches are old the white tee shirt
is crisp and the hustle is american
what we covet connects us it shades us with liquor
store signs and cigarette ashes
the lyrics in this place rhyme they come from brevity
this place is infested with dice games
crying fiction over breaking dawns
the dusk has us by-standing beneath buildings
that bend our thinking

in this place anything is everything

Bennie Herron

last is a dance step
having is accomplishing
there's a neo bop in the step of the people
they want what the sun owes them
now and for forever

this place writes poems it starts and finishes
riots it cries beads that dangle from new minds
this place is dogon mythology mud cloths and
incense smoke

this place is retroactive insistent volatile and
whole this place cuts then slices leaves backs
heavy embraces triumph it lets children dream
it is old and young pure to the taste of divinity
this place listens it hears what you are
it's a mirror a window to the other side
a gateway passed through time and time
again

Samantha Lê

EAST SIDE

It was where we were adolescents together—
the latchkey children of Asian immigrants—
cooking for ourselves afterschool and learning
important lessons from the TV like duck and cover,
stranger danger and saying “no” with Nancy Reagan.

The spontaneous eruption of a noisy game
of parking lot kickball. The tish-tish tish-tish
of the rotating water sprinklers on brown lawns.
To avoid the long afternoon blocks without shade,
we risked the predatory reaches of park rangers
down by the creek, surfacing in time to chase
after ice cream trucks with hot, palmed change.

Grannies with curved backs swept the front stoops
before their early morning mall walks, pushing
the bad luck in front of someone else’s door.
Jimmy Dang’s dad had a rusted Camaro
in his carport. It hadn’t turned over since 1977,
but he leaned on the hood every Sunday
and preached to the congregation of boys
who daydreamed about tricked-out American
muscles and cruising down Lucretia St. Dollar bills
tucked into the snug band of his Rocky Balboa
sweatpants—2 for \$10 special from Rite-Aid.

Samantha Lê

Indian summer sweat kept them moist like skin.
Returning, my first language is minced by a second
tongue that only speaks with an American accent.
The old words, their emotional attachments,
are more dreams than memories, impossible
to share with anyone who wasn't there.

Samantha Lê

I WENT TO LITTLE SAIGON

To tell my Daddy a man wants me. The rain followed me up and exited west Tully Rd. Apple blossoms scattered like plucked regrets. Blurred faces in shop windows, shocked to see water fall from the sky. Plastic bags dance with the wind. Street clean-up done away with budget cuts. Mole encampments push the boundaries of weed fields. Smiley adopted the mole life, followed the creek trail down to where dead grass sprouts green. Soaked to the knees, says he believes in rain again. He goes to Our Lady of Refuge and swallows the promise of eternal love like a fist of soil that's forgotten the penetration of water.

He was the one who found Mama's missing moving truck, maybe he took it, then changed his mind. Her world in recycled boxes, locked up like a secret shame. She parks shame in Daddy's driveway, and he watches it when he can't sleep. I still don't know where my Mama lives, somewhere at the end of a tired story, with Monk D still clinging to the last punctuation mark. He had a heart attack in winter. Now, he has nothing left

Samantha Lê

to lose. He tracks Mama's wanderings with an app, trading that red, blinking dot for companionship. He doesn't ask, but he knows about the electrician boyfriend she's fooling with—the version of a man who works.

Samantha Lê

EVERY DAY DISHTOWELS AND ASPIRINS

To be a girl is to work. No harder work
than caring for an angry man. A man who wears
down doorframes thwacking at betrayals,
gorging on fire until he spits out flames. Some men prefer to
 hold the spiciness
of whisky on their tongue, letting the bite
reveal itself slowly. He chooses chunky
bitterness that punches him in the mouth.

I overheard our relatives talking. They said
she isn't coming back. The darkness slipped in
when she opened the door. We packed it
and schlepped it, like an old cast iron pot,
from shared rooms to drafty apartments.
At each new place, we cut the packing tape,
turned the box over and let it fall onto the floor.

The nervous curtains flutter like useless arms. They motion to
 people on the street. Stop.
Look inside, they say, at the drama unfolding
behind this breakable glass. The lamps cock
their shades to listen for wreckage. The keyhole
practices calculated, selective compassion
while I work and wait for something to happen.

Stewart Lupton

ONLY THE GOOD DIE YOUNG

Pale pals, pots and pans,
we modulate through harm.

We ride our bathtubs to the bottom of the East River
in search of the second sleep of night;
fix a shopping cart as a sidecar
in case the bathtub doesn't work right.

We are married to an unfaithful world in a sulfurous green light.
A blue star does its part for shoplifters in the woods;
it's prenatal syntax for problem children in year 16.

Tetanus plus catharsis.

Name tags and needles
where people ate themselves.

Flip-book sex shows through wired glass,
and a grape Nehi on the first day out of the hospital.

Pale pals, pots and pans,
we modulate through harm.

The yawn is ripped from the morning's mouth
as our souls are weighed in orange peel ashtrays.

I am dumbstruck by a dump-truck.

I hold my hand over my heart as failure tugs me across the street
to a twenty-year come-down that leaves me conditional,
dry-bawling at the trustee for them to take the helmet off.

No flag for this country,
of Dante wolves and illegal brambles,

Stewart Lupton

beer bottle sunsets and ambulance moons.
I would core my memories to run,
but love pummels me and holds me in check.
The stoplight trines with my iris as blurred red cathedrals
suspend themselves in geometry with no home.
I am dumbstruck by a dump-truck.
Pale pals, pots and pans,
we modulate through harm.

Stewart Lupton

FROM THE LAND OF BRUISES AND MEANDER

I come from the land of bruises and meander.
If you ask how I came to be,
or whose is the claw mark in the mud
I am the gold tooth in the smile of thwarted promise.
I did not mean to leave the fold, only digress.
This conspiracy of blood and bone and orange juice. This breath that
keeps us buoyant,
Why do you turn from me only to sputter? Why do you suffer only to
part with choice?
I will give you your power back,
and you will come in my hand
and the granaries will swell and the light will sweeten
and fruit will bulge in purple bolts of shade.
We untie the kinetic letters of the evening, waiting for a timbre to
augment,
parts of speech not yet turned over,
sewn with red and yellow foil into the grids below. I stick to the path but
see the valley tremble.
We couldn't fuck the smarm away, but my hickey is shaped like a
geranium and my love is willing to
stay with me for another season.
This is all I know how to cup, all I know how to give!
I am wrist-shackled to meat.
I don't have the strength to relive my core experience

Stewart Lupton

and pass through flames, and die shameless, fearless, and cored. To tell
mother all and go.

I have become a husk of shame and attitude, polluting the cosmos with
post-suicidal lust.

Look not,
it is undone by a wink. Here Betsy,
it is this
that is my hand.

This love will come to bloom
like a tiny temple in your tortured squint.

You are a bad wet nurse, charisma.

I wanted to be exuberant for you, oh Lord.

Mingle our alphabets, pluck your safe decision from you, make a
tremolo of the horizons.

He speaks with a squint that says you came too near my throne: "Be you
mawkish, accurate and frail

and I will undo the darkness for you
in a nova of meat red love that would tease
the divine from an enraged bull.

Why do you turn from me only to sputter?

Why do you suffer only to part with choice?

So let us bandage your syntax and let the failure speak for itself. Nothing
is bereft of meaning in our home

and I would like to stay there until my fever passes.

Take my speech as your own as you did the first time you held love's gold
in your hand. Grief fleeces you no more."

Chordings of supple fruitfulness, all the unsung
uncared for unlooked at runts of promise. The garlands of bottle caps
and lighter tops.

I forward this story to the burdensome ones, the ones who don't know

Stewart Lupton

how to die.

"You, come over here, this is going to hurt."

And a choir of gestures of people we once loved is sung all at once,
all day long, from the bows of apartment rooftops.

The laughs, the spectrums of timbres,

the little hands, the thoughts written on faces. We are mankind.

There is flesh in that cloud.

Fabián O. Iriarte translated by
Donny Smith

MISS MOORE ADORED THE
ODD

and in the end had a monumental surprise
precious stones painted in her name
animals of foreign plumage
angel skins torn in extremis

...

she was described by those who knew her
as resembling her pangolin ("she seems withdrawn
from the world") surprised as a nun in flagrante
or magnificent as a mummy but arrogant
and that is a sin is a sin is a sin

Fabián O. Iriarte translated by
Donny Smith

THINGS THAT LEAVE MARKS

four: the knife that opens and cuts and separates
the coming and going of the waves / the tides of the light
blinding dizzying inundating

Fabián O. Iriarte translated by
Donny Smith

THE JAW

—*So quick bright things come to confusion.*

A Midsummer Night's Dream, 1.1.149

Then why does love happen?

"The jaws of darkness do devour it up."

Not so simple as biological norm
or categorical imperative. How your voice
sounds in the dark.

Let none rebuke or shout "empty refrains and naive rhythms."
Knowing full well, haphazard, how not to take a chance.
With sequence of sound and sense.

Wrinkled time
like your penis in the ocean's icy waters.

We enter blindly. In any case, we can't
avoid the end or the confusion, the inclination to complain,
willy-nilly.

The darkness devours it, chews up love.
Then it happens. Like those things that are bright.

Fabián O. Iriarte translated by
Donny Smith

READING BETWEEN THE LINES

*—This material requires reading dots,
brackets, uncertain letters, gaps, and emendations.*

Diane Rayor

There are people, fragmentary
like lyric poems in archaic greek.

You read them slowly, between the lines, careful
not to overlook
any gentle spirit whose smooth breathing might move,
in the beginning.

“He seems to me equal to the gods
the one who is seated in front of you.”

A non-existent comma, a temporal
modulation (spring so far away)
(so long ago)...

The person becomes fragments, splinters,
or stellar, like the night,
like a broken mirror. And who is the expert
who can read the text.

Who can read you.

Shawn Rubenfeld

STAND CLEAR OF THE CLOSING DOORS, PLEASE

The train stops and the doors open. DeKalb Avenue/Flatbush Avenue. A flood of people push into the car. The most famous voice in New York says, "Stand clear of the closing doors, please." The train kicks twice and goes forward. Some are standing, wiping sweat. Others put their hands on their face and close their eyes.

And Travis? He's playing Angry Birds. First it was Sporcle. Now it's Angry Birds. Here he's supposed to be providing me just a touch of moral support on this mid-afternoon trip uptown to see Dr. White because of a brown spot he may or may not have found while fondling my breast, but he's just sitting there flinging birds at pigs and blowing up wooden towers. The least he could do is be hot and miserable like the rest of us.

"How's the game?" I ask.

"I'm winning. Look at this."

The screen says "Level Cleared! New High Score!" One by one three giant stars light up.

"Wow. That's—that's pretty great," I say, pretending to care. I put my hand on his leg. "You're not hot?"

"What? Yeah, I'm hot. Why?"

"I don't know. You don't look it."

"How am I supposed to look it?"

"By sweating. I don't know. Like *that* guy. In the blue."

I point with my eyes to a guy across from us, in an

untucked blue button-up. Travis looks up. He's patting a page of the *Times* on his sweaty forehead.

"Yeah, no thanks." He goes back to the game.

"Here, wipe mine." I lean so he doesn't have to reach.

"Wipe your what?"

"My sweat."

He leans the other way, holding the iPhone with his left hand.

"Ew. Gross."

"Come on," I say. "It's only sweat. You like *pimples*. You have to like sweat."

"Okay, no."

I wipe my forehead until my palm is shiny. Then I put it up to his face. I'm happy I didn't wear makeup today. But really, who wears makeup to a breast exam? "Know what it's saying? It's saying *Travis, I want you to like me. It would make my sweaty life complete. Please stop playing Angry Birds, Travis. And play with me instead.*"

He doesn't answer. He nods and looks at the screen.

I move the hand closer to his, slowly, like the shadow of a subway rat.

"Okay, Jess, stop it. You're making me lose."

"*You don't want to touch me, Travis?*"

"Not really. No."

"What if I were the sweat of your lover Amelia Cooke? Would you touch me then?"

"No, I wouldn't."

A tight-jeaned hipster walks over and motions to the subway map on the wall behind me. I slide out of the way, closer to Travis. His arm is sweating worse than the guy in

blue. Little beads of sweat gesticulate from his wrist. I watch them carefully, making sure they don't fall to the seat and hit me. He looks at the map and squints, tracing his finger up to Central Park and down to SoHo. Travis doesn't seem the least bit disappointed by this lull in conversation. Already he's back to Angry Birds.

When the hipster retreats, I resume. "Okay, but what if she begs you to touch her? What if she says you need to touch her or she'll disappear into B-movie obscurity forever and you'll never hear from her again?" I realize that I'm talking too fast, so I stop for a breath.

"Yeah, she's already trapped in B-movie obscurity forever," Travis says.

"I've noted your claim," I say. "Hold on, let me confer." I put my hand to my ear and nod. "Yeah, we don't believe you. You've touched sweat before. I've seen you covered in sweat if you know what I mean."

"Jess. Come on. We're in public."

"I'm just saying. It's natural."

"Whatever you say," he says.

He pauses the game to scratch his neck. Then he rubs his back against the seat. He's wearing the striped blue and white shirt that I like because of the way it's cut up front. This means that at just the right angle I can see a mound of chest hair. If we weren't on the D train riding three hundred feet beneath the East River, I'd pull the shirt down and tickle it. I'd trace his larger-than-average nipple with my tongue.

Just thinking about it makes me need a breath. But then there's this pinching in my stomach and a feeling like I'm gonna throw up. Sienna Herman. From his grad program at

Brooklyn. Their second lunch “date” on Thursday. And me, of course, with this impending breast exam. Travis starts the next level and rolls his tongue on his lips.

“Okay, fine,” I say. He fires a bird. “Here’s one: Sienna Herman. Would you touch her sweat?”

He sighs. “No, Jess. I wouldn’t.”

“Are you sure?”

He taps the screen to pause and looks me in the eye, holding the stare like he’s waiting for something. Here we go again.

“You said you wouldn’t talk about this anymore.”

“Relax. I was just curious.”

“Uh-huh.”

“What’s the big deal?”

He rolls his eyes. “Nothing.”

“Well, good. I just don’t see why you need to get lunch with her, that’s all. You saw her once, isn’t that enough?”

“Jess—”

“What? I’m serious.”

“Okay, great.” He raises her voice now. Finally, a hint of passion. “Can you stop? This isn’t important right now.”

“I’m just saying you don’t see me getting lunch with random dudes who like me. And here’s one, you know Brandon from my Spanish class? Well, he’s pretty interested. Said he likes my accent.”

“You don’t have an accent.”

“Says you.”

“Okay, so let me hear it.”

“Why?”

“So you can prove yourself right.”

Shawn Rubenfeld

"No, that's okay. I want to save it for him. Keep it fresh."

He shrugs. "All right. Fine."

"And you don't care?"

"Why would I care?"

"Because I'm getting lunch with another dude? One who hasn't been shy to declare his love for me."

He points to my engagement ring. Only three-weeks old. "It's called trust, genius."

"*Trust*. Give me a break."

The train stops and the doors open. Broadway-Lafayette Street.

"Anyway," I say, giving Travis a chance to fill the silence. When he doesn't I clear my throat and look at the ceiling—tilted white panels and little holes for speakers. The ads—"YOUR KIDS could be DRINKING themselves to death." "YOU could be DRINKING yourself to death." Death. Everything about death. So melodramatic. Through the window, I watch two guys with cardboard boxes sprint down the platform. They get to the door at the last possible second. There's a double-beep and it slides open. Mr. America says: "Stand clear of the closing doors, please."

After a bit of a struggle, the two sprinters lift their boxes above their heads and stand at the middle of the car. The one in a Yankees hat whistles. "Attention, attention." He's tall and skinny for his age. Eighteen, I'd wager. His friend behind him is wearing headphones. He's got a beard that would be considered thick for most thirty-year-olds. They're dripping with sweat. Everyone but Travis is dripping with sweat. "My name is Q—"

Shawn Rubenfeld

"And my name is T—"

"And we are here with fine candy for you fine folks—"

"On this fine train."

"Today we got Sour Patch."

"Peanut Butter Cup."

"Three Musketeers."

"Baby Ruth."

"And Snickers."

"Fifty cents a piece—"

"Or three pieces for one dollar."

"Get 'em while you can—"

"And help us honest kids—"

"Make some honest money."

They scatter off, one on each side, catching the boxes and hugging them to their chests.

I turn to Travis. "Don't you think they should at least make up some charity or something? You know, help their case a little?"

He shrugs. "If you don't want to buy from them then don't."

"Some candy, sir," Q says, standing over Travis. He's holding the metal pole and using his knee to balance the cardboard box. His hair is wet and frizzy, like a tennis ball dropped in water.

He shakes his head.

"Just one piece," Q says.

"No thanks."

"What about you, ma'am," Q says, turning to me. "Some Baby Ruth?"

I shake my head too, politely, passing over a friendly smile.

Shawn Rubenfeld

As big a smile as you can get from someone in a scorching hot subway car en route to a breast exam. Q lifts a bar from the box and holds it in front of me.

"You know you want some," Q says. "Baby Ruth. You know you want some. Don't fight it, sweetheart. Baby Ruth. Beautiful lady like you. Don't fight it."

The train stops and Q grabs the pole to keep from falling. West 4th Street/Washington Square. There's a beep and the door opens, letting about a dozen people into the car. Q watches T who's selling bars to a gray couple by the door. T keeps the bill in the hands as he works his way down the row, as if it'll motivate the others.

Q goes right back to shaking his shiny Baby Ruth.

"What do you say sweetheart? Baby Ruth? It's only fifty cents."

I look at Travis, but he doesn't seem to care. "Okay, fine," I say, thinking, if nothing else, it'll be good karma for my meeting with Dr. White. "Beautiful lady like me. I'll take one."

I pull two shiny quarters from the little pocket of my bag and pass them over.

Q takes the money and closes it into a fist. He doesn't give me any candy.

"Miss, I see you got a lot of quarters in there—"

"Just dimes and nickels."

"I'm broke and young but I'm not dumb. Fifty cents. To help me live. My Dad's deadweight. Mom's counting of me. I'm all she's got. It'll get you three bars instead of one."

I cross one leg over the other, a little pissed. I tuck the bag between my legs.

"Please," Q says, holding his hands together. "Special. Today only."

Finally, as if out of the blue, Travis speaks up. "Hey, man, she just gave you fifty cents," he says. "Just give her the bar and carry on."

"Fifty more," Q says, ignoring him. "Come on. It's nothing. I got nothing but candy. Just trying to make your life good. Add a little smile to your day. Chocolate always does the trick."

Part of me wants to say *keep your stupid candy then*, but there's something about seeing Travis get all worked up that drives me. His phone is down now, and he's eyeing Q carefully. I clear my throat. Then, before I know what's happening, I find myself fishing around for two more quarters, playing helpless. I drop them into Q's palm, bringing his total to four. Again, he closes his fist.

"You need anything else?" I say, trying to sound scared, desperate.

Q doesn't answer at first. He looks just as confused as I am. I lean forward, my breasts pressing against the cups of my bra. I'm wearing a loose shirt. I can only assume the view from the top is a good one.

"You got a place we can do this?" he asks.

"What?"

"You got a place we can do this?"

"Do what?"

"This, baby."

Honestly, I can't believe it worked at all. I feel bad, actually, like it's all fake. A bad show. A B-movie. But it's too late now, isn't it? What can you do once you've opened that

door? "But I only want the candy," I say.

"I'm talking about the candy," he says. "The real candy."

The real candy? Well isn't that one a hoot.

"Forget it," I say. "You know what. I think I'm good."

"Nah, baby, you paid now you're in." He leans forward and touches my shoulder. I push his hand away.

Travis hands me his phone and stands so that he's eye-to-eye with the guy. I let out a big breath. "Don't touch her," he says.

"You want some too?" Q says. "Is that what this is about?"

"Just get away."

"Yes or no? You want some? Because I'll give you."

"I said get away."

The train stops. The doors open. 34th Street. Half the car leaves—people pretending that they have no idea something's happening. Typical New York. No one wants to be around any trouble. Not if they can help it. Three people step forward, take one look at Q, T (who's walking over now), and Travis, and head right for the door. Q looks him up and down to try and intimidate him.

"What are you doin'?" T says. He's taller than Q. There's a red gash on his cheek, just below his beard. "What's the issue here?"

The train starts again. Just as it does, the sweaty hipster who had been studying the subway map steps forward. I hadn't noticed before that he was wearing cowboy heels. Or that a tie is tucked into his tight pants. "Get out of here," he says, waving an arm. He steps between Travis and Q and T like Travis isn't even there. "Both of you."

Q and T look at each other and laugh. T puts his hand on

this guy's shoulder.

"You're scary," T says.

"Don't test me," the hipster says. "I'll fuck the two of you up."

The other six people on the train are quiet. Including me. Including Travis. But everyone's watching this little hipster standing there. All 98 pounds of him. Travis sidesteps as if trying to make it so that they're side by side, but he doesn't give him the room.

"Says who?" Q says.

The dude stands on his toes and stares at them, like he's looking in all four eyes at once. The train bumps but he doesn't lose his footing.

Finally, Q breaks the silence. "This guy's a dick sucker," he says. "Move your little faggot ass. T, Come on. You don't want to touch that shit. You'll get AIDS or something. And you," he says to me. "I'll come back for you sweetheart. Don't you worry. You're the easy kind. I like that."

He hits T on the shoulder. The two of them head to the front door and open it. There's a clickety-clank and then the door closes.

The people break out in applause. The six of them whistling and cheering for this hipster like he's won some kind of award.

"You okay?" he asks me. He waves to the rest of the train and bends down. He's an implant. I can tell. A true New Yorker wouldn't get mixed up in a confrontation like that unless they had to.

"Yeah, I'm fine," I say. "I mean, I had it and all. But thanks."

He straightens up. At first, he doesn't look at Travis. Then he scrunches his nose and gives him this sorry little pout. "You can't put your head down," he says. "It shows weakness."

He nods. "Oh. Yeah."

The hipster puts his scrawny hand on Travis' back and pats twice. He goes to his spot by the other door, where a little old lady moves over so he can sit.

Travis lets out a deep breath and sits, too. I hand him back his phone.

"Did you see that?" he says, crossing his legs and gesturing to the hipster by the door. "That loser came over to clean up and take the check. What a joke."

"That loser? I thought he was pretty compelling, actually."

"You're gonna side with him now too? Those candy rapists weren't enough for one day?"

"Whatever, Travis."

"Yeah, whatever is right. Seriously, what the hell were you thinking?"

"I don't know, Travis."

"Well, now you know."

"Yup, I guess I do."

The train stops and the doors open. Bryant Park.

"Is this us?" he asks.

"Nope."

"Where are we?"

I really had to think about it. "125."

"125? Why don't we go to the Bronx while we're at it?"

I sit back and pick my nails. Hipster kid is playing with one of those big CD players that only tight-jeaned hipsters use. I wonder what he's got in there. Some kind of def-punk?

Shawn Rubenfeld

Some metal? Something to get him angry, to give him the courage to put his hand on another man's back and say *don't put your head down, you look weak*. Either way Travis is looking at him too, the way he was looking at my breast last week, like it was something he didn't recognize, like it was something that disgusted him. Like, in that moment—early-evening, just after homemade grits and grillades—something had irrevocably changed. What about how he looks at Aimee Herman on their lunch dates? What's his face look like then? The hipster flips his plaid bag over his shoulder and bends down, his tight jeans creasing at the thighs. I'm watching purely out of interest, but Travis turns as if he's caught me doing something I'm not supposed to. I keep staring. Of course, now I can feel the sweat coming down Travis' face, which has a heat all its own. Now he's really getting hot. Now he uncrosses his legs and pushes them together, sighing nice and loud. He doesn't even try to hide it.

This time, maybe I won't either.

Virginia Smith Rice

ALL RIGHT THEN. ALL RIGHT.
THEN LEFT.

The cemetery used to be a way
I could stand to look at the world
without the world staring back. Then

death grew an expression and looked
straight at me as she hung her
set of scales from the slow-leaning oak.

Death, an invasive species that breaks
the skin, excavating spaces sealed since birth.
So this is resurrection: to be opened,

emptied, and placed piece by piece
in cases for the world to examine. Hello,
countless eyes, vast-lit catacombs

behind stranged faces. Let's not
pretend that the world is more than
a tree, or a room. Is it larger than the

objects pressing back on
the air that surrounds them?
A meteor falls to the ground and is levered

out by a farmer who uses it to build

Virginia Smith Rice

a wall between neighboring fields.
A meteor falls to the ground and everyone

rushes to the window at its bright flash.
Then concussion, the exploding glass:
a thousand tiny meteors fall to the ground

and hiss like hot pins on snow.
I live with the window open, a dogleg
away from rooms and their object—

a delicate content, filament-fine,
between me and the leaf-churr
rocking this mild October night.

My best distance is just past
the horizon. I tip into that balance,
amazed at how comfortable

I am among the lost
hours that no longer need their names.
All night I drift, unlatching labels

from dated ablations. What is left underneath?
A simpler skeleton. Breath with no letters.
An excised, rimless tomorrow.

Charles Kell

WASTED WEDNESDAY

You were caught black
handed in the wrong bar.
Drinking over with an old
newspaper spread flat

on the white quartz.
It was a theater of cruelty.
A shadow boxing ring
with each convict

preening into the dirty
yellow mirror. You were
the prized child
dressed for slaughter.

I can feel each liquid
jolt roll down my throat.
The clock struck dead
nibbling the flypaper's

wax string. The hung row
of neon lights is a pretty
meadow. Behind the exit
door is a cold dark hole.

John Sibley Williams

LATE EMPIRE

Sky & streetlight softly slap
against each other like hostile
flags hung side-by-side above
an empty Alabama courthouse.
Breaths tangle. Oaths collide.
Protest & counter-. Everywhere
trees are shedding their ropes,
at least the image of rope. Still
that tether & sway that makes
every mouth a wound. That earth
will swallow us equally & all
is too poetic for a body to taste.
A body only knows how to tell
dusk from dawn, light rising or
light fading, if we're lucky parity
from a looser leash.

Abby Ryder-Huth

BRIEF PLAINS

On the brief plains
animals go circling scratching and bored.
The same hot day comes
everyday but plains don't ask
why animals. Animals came
uninvited to punch holes find food undo the monotony
come and retreat like string zipped through a loom

What about killing? Animals love killing
keep watching that golden thing

*

Animals come in noiseless as other animals
scuttling while the ground clears out
what is plains a mansion
decades of space
and surface a bolt of cloth
shreddable
animals love shredding
plains is a safe witness

Animals remember the old days when they ran
these plains
still run just sleep later and more often after all

Abby Ryder-Huth

why always prowl?

There is a wall hurrying towards animals a big closed mouth
What kind of answer is this
ask animals staring into whatever mirror

*

There are two states
scratched state
insatiate state

Animals talk about light
it is a knot they stay awake
undoing it is not a pool
whoever called it that

*

Who does not want to be animals streaming down?
In moments of hard
shining before bursting animals writhe and feel
young, swathed
in nearness—any hand reaching out a way of gnawing
the dimness back
after all what is battle if not one spreading
voice on a quiet
whole animal mound
how a tree on fire turns night into night

*

Abby Ryder-Huth

There is a sweetness hurrying towards
animals a wall

The off-hours are nothing
like an end
animals play cards
animals brush their hair
animals want to talk about philosophy
in a language without tenses
animals circle
animals want circles of everything
animals never veer

*

There is a wall
sweetly—

not sweetly animals say parading
animals excuseless animals in midair ready
animals tired of animals after marauding
turn the tv on watch reality plains stung
open in the new wind

Contributors

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The year was 1975, a month before the fall of Saigon; SAMANTHA LÊ celebrated her first birthday by selecting

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