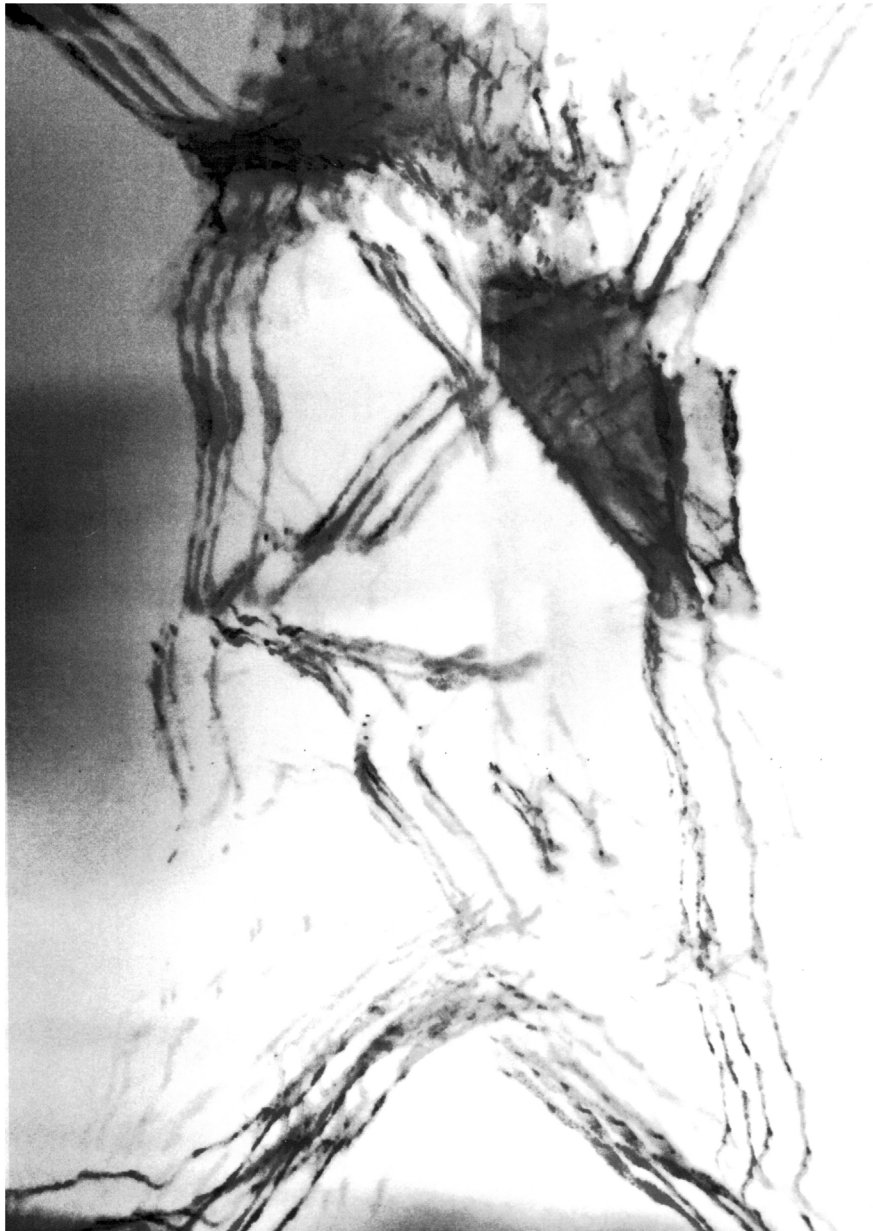


STREET CAKE

experimental writing magazine

issue 71

part 1



‘tiledance’ @jcolsthoorn

contents

issue 71

part 1

lottie angell – parliament in session

jane ayres - neurodivergent cake dream

amy barnes - ambrotypes

alexis beale - you

natasha binder - the story of a cactus

steve carr – the house of similar irregularities

rachael charlotte - sentinel

ashley cline - in which i am on a first date & answer

“tell me about yourself” honestly, an overture

thomas s crane - a train journey during the pandemic

zoe critchley - instrument of death

seth crook - letter of complaint

dah - i am saying, i have said nothing

teo eve - when the opacity of art fails to serve

david greaves - you can't spell everyone slaughtered by john wick

without keanu reeves

sarah hall-murphy - lamppost dogs

Parliament in session

Across the lake
geese squabble and jeer

stretch
jab and jut their beaks

primp plump chests
hissssssss and honk

as they strike

green opaque
fan feathered tails

l o n g n e c k s
thrash distended wings

tighten slack dewlaps
through narrow bills

the opposing side

in the distance
 a lamb cries
 its frail baa lost
in a field of sheep
 all bleating back
 desperate to be heard

by the ganders

who gaggle and strut

neurodivergent cake dream

Last night I ate chocolate without washing my hands first which was a mistake something that rarely happens so I dreamed I went to your house & you had a committee meeting about something or other but we were all outside (chairs socially distanced) so I sat on the hill apart from everyone & you'd made cakes which you never do & wanted me to try some but I'm anxious because I don't usually eat food I haven't prepared myself unless it has labels I can scrutinize but the Victoria Sponge looked tempting & I should try to eat out of my comfort zone (people tell me) not let my issues get the better of me so I say *do any of them contain nuts* & you reply *no except that one* & point to a round cake that doesn't look like a cake that would contain nuts but I never know these days as they put nuts in things I don't expect but then you add *well I think it was that one* & now I hesitate over the Victoria Sponge because if you aren't sure I don't think I'll take the risk

Ambrotypes

My skin is sepia now. In tone and the way it seeps into everything, tan nostalgic, not black and white, faded like how expired film blurs into ghost images. At night, I crawl into bed next to my pilot husband that didn't come back from his sky mission yesterday. There's a shadow on his side of the bed. I hear his favorite book rustling and the snap of our 50s matching night light sconces as the moon turns off too. He leaves for the skies before I get up. I hear him start the coffee but he's gone before I get up.

When I was a kid, I was scared a black hole might appear like a L'Engle portal. I wanted to go to Space Camp but only with Lea Thompson and impossibly beautiful teenagers who impossibly took off in a rocket. It was too expensive so I imagined the blue flight suits were uncomfortable like gym uniforms.

I read recently when you step into a black hole, you don't disappear completely. Instead, you sink in and return later in scattered spots of yourself.

"What's the point of black holes?" I ask Tim that last morning.

"There are no black holes on our flight path, just Toledo."

He stands on the porch a little longer, staring into the baby's brown eyes. I hand him coffee with a lid that isn't quite tight enough, hoping he spills it down his white pilot's uniform. Instead, he tightens the lid and kisses me with his tan Selleck mustache.

I didn't study space in college. To my parent's horror, I study antique ways of taking photographs, Brownie cameras, Leicas, history, death images.

I'm fascinated by a documentary authenticating a newly-discovered Abraham Lincoln deathbed photograph, an ambrotype. I watch to see if 19th century Lincoln comes back to life on television. I've studied the president and the photography form; it has the same blurred hue as my face, my dress, my hands, my baby, our house's paint. A tan still alive ambrotype.

It's windy on the sun *that* morning. The newscasters report like they know science but they've only been to Space Camp and not the Lea Thompson movie version, the boring one where you share a cabin with Angela Adams.

I imagine Tim as Lea Thompson but without a helping adult to guide him in Toledo's troubled airspace. The sun is confused. His plane is confused.

I find Tim's face hair bits on my black crepe dress that I haven't worn since his dad died. When the pastor finds me, I brush them, brush Tim into my hands.

"You look a little pale," he says. "Want some coffee?"

I slap the styrofoam cup with my balled up full-of-hair fist. A tan stain spreads down his white shirt.

"Would you like to see him for a few minutes alone?" He asks.

I follow him to the viewing room. Tim looks like Lincoln, too tall for his coffin bed. I pull out my camera and snap one image and another and then twelve. Pastor Greg pulls me away.

"I bet you stole from Lincoln's wife too." I accuse.

Abraham Lincoln gives the funeral service. He says *four score and twenty years ago and young mother and brave and sees the face of God*.

Holding hands with Mary Todd, I wait for Tim to polka dot the pews from the black hole
over Toledo. I'll develop the film tomorrow.

You
licked
love
notes
down
my
body
without hesitation

I'd like to tell you a story about my cactus.

I like cacti, they're hardy. That's gardener speak for *'It doesn't die when neglected.'* That suits me because I'm one of those people who likes pretty things, but inadvertently **MURDERS** them because I know next to nothing about plants and gardening.

So I was in the greengrocers buying some -already dead- vegetables when I saw them. A whole table full of spiky little beauties;
tall ones,
round ones,
and some of those hilarious phallic shaped ones you see in westerns.

Some of them even had **flowers** on, which I thought was unusual, because as far as I know cacti only flower every seven years...

What a special moment to be able to share with a plant; it's first BLOOM.

I picked a small, perfectly round cactus with a little black flower on. I thought she would look perfect on my desk at work next to the pens and post-its.

I put her in a nice sunny spot, with fresh filtered water and a little motivational speech to help her **grow**. (I read somewhere that they can hear and respond positively to encouragement)

So today, as I was giving her spikes a little tickle, I noticed something.

That little black flower that made a pretty plant even prettier was **A LIE**.

Someone had decided to glue a plastic flower head on to a living, breathing plant. That's like sticking wings on your cat and pretending it's a dragon. It's funny, but really you know it isn't true.

Someone had decided that this amazing succulent wasn't good enough, and, in order to sell said plant, had made it something it's not.

They had attached unrealistic standards of floral **beauty** to it, telling it *'Look love, you're cute, but you're not a flower so you're not good enough.'*

NO.

Cactus, you are your own kind of pretty. You let those little spikes of crazy do their thing. Don't conform to *normality*, just because those little petal-headed bastards think they're all that. **Let your freak flag fly.**

That's it. That's the story of my cactus. You probably think there's a metaphor here somewhere. Something like; *'Always be yourself. If you can't be yourself, be a cactus.'*

Not really. I just wanted to tell you a story about my cactus.

THE HOUSE OF SIMILAR IRREGULARITIES

Act One

“The house was built on the side of a gently sloping cliff, anchored into the limestone bedrock by steel beams acquired from the demolished Tyree Bank Building, once the largest skyscraper in the state. It was the only house on the cliff or for miles around. It was a large house with enough guest bedrooms to accommodate...”

“How many guest bedrooms?” Sitting on a brown metal folding chair in the middle of the room, Harry raised his script. “In that opening monologue shouldn’t you be specific about how many guest bedrooms there are?”

Standing at the front of the room, Laura studied the script in her hands. “Why?”

“There might be audience members who will be distracted by wondering how many guest bedrooms there were.”

“That’s absurd.”

“It may be, but now that I’ve asked the question myself, I can’t stop thinking about how many bedrooms there were.”

Laura took the pencil from behind her ear and scratched out the sentence and wrote a new one above it. She then began again from the last sentence. “It was a large house with fifteen guest bedrooms, enough to accommodate the small crowds who spent the weekends at the house throwing all manner of parties.”

“What kind of parties?” Harry interrupted.

Laura looked up from her script. “Parties. All types. Holidays, birthdays, just parties. You’ve read the script, you know that the people who came to the house were young and liked to throw parties.

It's why the cowboy is brought to the house to begin with."

"Yes, but the title of your play is *A Cowboy Comes to Dinner* not *A Cowboy Comes to A Party*."

"It's a dinner party."

"Then shouldn't you be more specific and say what kind of parties are thrown at the house?"

Kyle rose from his chair, a few feet to the left of where Laura was standing. "Why didn't you guys iron these things out before you roped me into being in this play?"

"It's a work-in-progress," Harry said. "The first entire cast read-through allows everyone to make suggestions."

"Entire?"

"Yes, everyone."

"You said entire as if there were a hundred cast members. There's only three of us in this cast."

Laura smacked her script on the palm of her hand. "Can I please just get through the opening monologue so that the scene is set for where the dinner . . . party . . . that the cowboy comes to takes place?"

"Go ahead," Kyle said. "I was going to go try on the cowboy boots since the monologue goes on for several pages."

"Yes, but hurry back. You have your important entrance scene coming up. Please, go on, Laura," Harry said.

As Kyle left, Laura began again. "The house was built on the side of a gently sloping cliff."

#

"Sorry, I'm late. I wish you lived closer to town. Whoever thought of building a house way out here in the middle of nowhere?" Shelly tossed her script, purse and keys onto a chair near where Laura was standing. "I saw Kyle on the porch with one of his boots off and rubbing his toes. He says the

boots are too small and the script has him pacing back and forth in the very first three scenes after he enters. Have you seen his feet? You could paddle a boat with them.”

“Do you mind?” Laura said sharply from her chair at the front of the room. She flipped the page of her script back to where it had been just prior to Shelly’s entrance.

“Oh, sorry.” Shelly said and turned to Harry and mouthed, “Where are we?”

“Act one, scene seven, page sixteen, your entrance,” he slowly mouthed back. “We weren’t sure you’d show up.”

“If you weren’t certain I’d show up, then I’m just in time,” she replied, picked up her script, and found the correct page.

Laura ran her finger down the page finding the line just before Shelly’s first line. “Amelia, I’m so glad you could make it. Everyone is simply agog with the cowboy who has come for dinner.”

Amelia looked around. “Wherever is he? I’ve never met an actual cowboy before. Does he ride a horse?”

“All cowboys ride horses. This one sings and plays the guitar too.”

Shelly glanced at Harry. “This play is about as deep as a sweat stain.”

“There is a lot of subtext,” Laura said, sounding hurt.

“Continue on,” Harry said.

“How charming that all cowboys share riding horses in common. All that everyone else at this party shares is that we drink too much.” She pushed her things from the chair and sat down. “Speaking of drinks, I could use a martini. A liquid appetizer just before dinner would be simply divine.”

Kyle entered the room. His boots thudded on the floor as he walked between where Harry and the two women sat. He sat down in an empty chair.

“Must you clomp across the room like that?” Laura said. “If you do that on stage the audience

will think you're stomping on bugs."

"This isn't a ballet," he said. "I think the floor of this house is made of plywood."

Shelly giggled. "Imagine a ballet dancer with feet the size of yours! He'd knock over the swans like bowling pins with every grande jeté he made."

Harry clapped his hands, loudly. "Can we all just get back to the reading of the play?"

"Can't we do it while sitting down?" Kyle said.

"No, I can't work on the blocking if you're just sitting down. Shelly, continue please."

"A liquid appetizer just before dinner would be simply divine."

Laura stood up. "Kansas had never been in a house like the one he found himself in on that hot summer night. Champagne flowed in a marble fountain in the shape of a satyr. Mounds of food were stacked on huge silver platters . . ."

Kyle raised his hand and waved it frantically.

"What is it, Kyle?" Harry said.

"How did anyone get all that stuff to the house if it's on the side of the cliff. For that matter, how did anyone get there?"

Laura threw her script on the floor and screamed, "It doesn't matter. That house on the cliff isn't real. It's a metaphor." She stormed out of the room.

Kyle got up from his chair, picked up her script, and scanned all the text highlighted in yellow magic marker. "Metaphor for what?"

Harry and Shelly shrugged in unison.

#

Kyle sat in his chair with his boots and socks off and massaged his feet, first one, then the other, and then back again. He had his script open in his lap.

“Do you mind if I continue with this monologue?” Laura asked.

He looked up. “Fine by me.”

“The balmy breeze blew in through the open windows, causing the white gauzy curtains to dance in the air and the many teardrop crystals that hung from the chandeliers to tinkle melodically. The roar of the ocean waves crashing over . . .”

“Shouldn’t the ocean be mentioned before this?” Shelly asked. “I mean, how did the ocean magically appear?”

Laura flipped back through the pages of her script and at the bottom of one of the monologues wrote in large bold letters: ocean, waves. She held her script up and showed her notation to the others. “There, I’ll fix it later.”

Kyle poked at a small blister on his left big toe. “Just so I get the geography that surrounds this house on the cliff right, there’s an ocean at the base of the cliff, correct?”

Laura sighed dramatically. “Yes, but the ocean isn’t important other than to add atmosphere.”

“We’ll have ocean waves sound effects,” Harry added. “And maybe some fog and mist rolling in from time to time.”

“That’ll do wonders for my hair and makeup,” Shelly said.

Kyle scratched his head. “Is there a beach?”

“No.”

“I think adding a beach would be a nice touch,” Shelly said.

“Did you all know there’s a nudist beach near here?” Henry said conspiratorially.

Kyle and Shelly looked at him, intrigued. “Really?” they said simultaneously.

“Can I get through at least one of my monologues without an interruption?” Shelly said through clenched teeth.

“If you ask me there are too many monologues. There’s one spoken by your character in each scene,” Shelly said. “Maybe a few could be cut out.”

“It’s my play. The monologues stay,” Laura replied

“How come Kansas doesn’t get a monologue or two?” Kyle said.

“Because Kansas is a dumb cowboy, that’s why,” Laura said.

“Yeah, but he’s the one who comes to dinner.” He puffed out his chest. “And I sing and play the guitar.”

“I think Amelia should get at least one small monologue,” Shelly said. “She flies airplanes for God’s sake, and in the 1930s almost no other women did that!”

Laura slumped down on her chair and cradled her script against her chest. “We’re near the end of act one. Can we please get through it and then we can take a break? I’ll write in one monologue for each of you.”

Shelly turned to Kyle. “While she’s doing that, we can go check out that nudist beach.”

“Any excuse to take off these boots,” he said.

Harry stood up. “Do you mind if I tag along?”

“Don’t be gone too long. If you remember from reading your scripts in act two is where the action really heats up,” Shelly said.

Act Two

“Only the best people are invited to Chance’s dinner parties. You should feel very lucky.”

“All the best people I know are cowpokes who ride horses and rustle cattle.”

Harry stood up from his chair, following along in his script the interaction between the two characters, while eyeballing the movements of the two actors. “Hold it a second. I know this isn’t a rehearsal, but the two of you need to sound like you have never met before instead of being old

friends.”

“That’s hard to do when we just got back from seeing each other bare ass naked,” Shelly said.

Laura loudly cleared her throat from her chair between where Kyle and Shelly were standing.

“I’ve been thinking that I may need to reveal that at some point in the past Kansas and Amelia had been lovers. They act like strangers only to hide their past and their pain.”

“Where would an aviatrix have met a singing cowboy to have an affair with him?” Shelly said.

“It doesn’t matter. This is a play about the here and now. Living in the moment.”

“Then why mention their past?”

“It was just a thought.”

Harry plopped down in his chair. “Okay Kyle and Shelly, let’s pick it up from Kansas’ last line.”

Kyle found the page and read, “All the best people I know are cowpokes who ride horses and rustle cattle.”

Amelia lit a cigarette, took a puff and exhaled a ring of smoke. “Where did you meet Chance that she would invite you to her home?”

“Is it really so special to be invited here?”

Laura stepped forward, her script open in her hands. “Built at the height of the depression, many people gasped that so much money was being spent on building the large house. The beams holding the house to the cliff were worth a fortune, although they had been sold on a discount due to rust . . .”

Shelly burst out laughing.

Laura stomped her foot. “What is it now?”

“That part about the beams being sold on a discount because they had some rust is the stupidest line in a play I’ve ever heard.”

“It’s not stupid! The rusty beams help explain why the house collapses during the dinner party.”

Kyle quietly laid his script on his chair and left the room, his boots thudding on the floor with every step.

“Where did Kansas go?” Harry said after a few moments, suddenly realizing that Kyle was gone.

Then there was the sound of clanging, metal on metal, coming from the kitchen.

“That’s Kyle,” Shelly said. “At the beach he told me he’s a plumber when he isn’t acting.” She looked at Laura. “He told me you have leaky pipes.”

“Well, you can’t just walk out on a reading. Doesn’t he understand? This is a work-in-progress,” Harry said.

#

“The house lay at the bottom of the cliff, crumbled and broken like a dead leviathan, slain by the ravages of time, the passing of an era. Crushed beneath a crystal chandelier that had hung over the dinner table, Chance held her dead hand out as if seeking a last attempt to snatch one final golden nugget of luck. Beside her, holding onto a finger bowl, his expression of confusion about it still on his face, Kansas, the singing cowboy, one of the last of his kind, lay dead with his guitar at his side.”

“Only I, Amelia, arose from the rubble, to fly again. For a short time at least.”

Sentinel

I check my email box sporadically
 for the next two weeks
 perhaps, he has died.

Ah no. He is still active on
 Twitter.

Not dead then.

This is both a relief and
 a disappointment.

I said a lot of things to him that day,
 the best day of the year so far.

Rediscovered sunglasses packed like old relics,
 dusty, solitary shut up,
 he is always
 real.

Protecting nothing more than
 little pieces of inside,
 formed into lives,
 formed into tongues –
 exhibited.

in which i am on a first date & answer “tell me about yourself” honestly, an overture

i have a terrible habit of naming things before i am sure / if they will stay, which is to say that my name in certain mouths makes me nervous / & i'm never quite sure what to do with my hands, which is to say that / my fists are often clenched for reasons other than self-preservation, & my arms have never known / a breeze worth taking off on, so i've managed to stay quite grounded because of all this, you see, but the thing about bodies is that / nothing grows from them when they are planted in the dirt / & i don't think i've ever known a quieter thought than wildflowers, which is to say that / i have lost things before i even knew that they were mine to begin with / & the depression has been here awhile; we just tuck her into corners when company is over, & dress her up in silk around the holidays / but the depression has been here for awhile, now: we're just finally calling her by her name, which is to say that / you pronounce my name just a bit differently / these days, as if you can't make the syllables fit / over your tongue without tasting a bitterness i can't quite / place, & of course, when i say “you,” i don't mean *you* / you, but rather a *you* who / is now just a *them*—who is now just a ghost of syntax i hold beneath my tongue, pressing it deeply into my gums because / i'm not sure i'll know how to smile once it dissolves entirely, which is to say that / a year ago today, i was wearing the same pair of ripped jeans, because sometimes a year is / too much time when your greatest trick is disappearing— & you can't unravel fast enough / because sometimes a year is too little time when your body has found ways to pull itself through the eye of a needle & you / can't suture your mother's hurt quick enough, which is to say that / my nervous system is the most calm thing about me because it has been here before, which is to say that / i inherited this anxious stomach from decades of dragging loneliness around by her crutch, thank you for asking. & these clumsy hands? / well, they were made by centuries of trying to puzzle piece them into spaces they were never meant to / fit into in the first place, which is to say that / i don't think we were meant to swallow our tongues, but that doesn't stop me / from trying—from trying to taste the honey through the smoke, from trying to keep the words that were never mine to say / in the back of my throat, just in case the seagulls ever ask me to join them, one day / because it's funny how under the proper conditions, or / on the right breeze, a flock's cry can sound just like your name stitched into a sweater, which is to say that / if i am a place, i am a place that you have been before: you have already seen the sights, you have already visited / the tourist attractions & so, you'll close your eyes & wait for the train to / move along to another anywhere else, which is to say that your tongue tastes of validation, & i know this, already, which is to say that / it's nice to meet you; i've named you, already—

hello.

A Train Journey During the Pandemic

The anthem
of glory
and genocide
blares.
It wants
to sell me
insurance



A glance
or two
of panic
in the
polished
tunnel -
we shield
our faces
against the safe
and deadly crisis.
(The shield
is a part of me
in Schrödinger's

We count
ourselves,
then
with relief
see our protection.
Contactless,
electric aura
of safety.
Praise be,
numbers are over.

The tannoy
blares
again,
now
to remind
our eyes
are needed

The anthem
of glory
and genocide
blares.
It wants
to sell me
insurance



A glance
or two
of panic
in the
polished
tunnel -
we shield
our faces
against the safe
and deadly crisis.
(The shield
who I am
outside).

We count
ourselves,
then
with relief
see our protection.
Contactless,
electric aura
of safety.
Praise be,
numbers are over.

The tannoy
blares
again,
this time
us
our eyes
citizen.

We are
cameras,
we must
watch.
I adjust
my lens,
and both
see and hear
the words.

We are
cameras,
we must
watch.
I adjust
my lens,
and both
see and hear
the words.

S
E
E

I
T

DISTORT
EYE
SIESTA.

DIETY
EATS
STORIES.

RIOT
STATESIDE
YES.

EASIEST
EDIT
STORY.

S
O
R
T
E
D

SERIES
TIDE
TOASTY.
DISEASE
TESTY
TRIO.

S
A
Y

I
T

we are still just
MUSCLE
AND
BLOOD
AND
SKIN
AND
BONE

I AM BECOME DATA POINT
I AM BECOME RESOURCE
I AM BECOME ALGORYTHM

that we do not own the rights to alter

THIS IS NOT
STEEL GLEAM
HOPES DREAMS
VISTAS HORIZONS
THE FRONTIER IS NOT
WITHIN OR WITHOUT,
OR BURIED IN THE
GRINDSTONE

Let me out Let me out Let me out Let me out Let me out Let me out Let me out Let me out Let me out Let me out

And in dog, rain, and damp earth,
the journey is over.

Instrument of Death

In the great con-cer-to of life, Death plays the vi-o-lin. He has un-fath-om-able, un-beat-able,
 in-ex-or-able tal-ent. Death acc-omp-an-ies the orc-hes-tra as it moves through the mo-tions
 of life's main phras-es and ref-rains. Its chang-es in *tempo, dynamic* and *mood*___ Al-though
 he may not al-ways step in-to the light dur-ing the main bo-dy of the score, he is a cons-tant
 qui-et un-der-tone, pat-ient-ly bi-ding his time_____ Be-cause Death's so-lo al-ways comes.
 As the piece draws to its end, near-ing its last *Diminuendo*_____ Death's so-lo begins.
 Death's vi-o-lin is a beaut-i-ful ins-trum-ent___Its Neck, Waist, Fin-ger-board and Chin-rest
 make up its bod-y. The Scroll bears the names of the souls that the Bridge holds, teet-er-ing
 on the pre-car-i-ous edge of the fall or rise of each note. Death's per-for-mance is haunt-ing
 to hear___ All who list-en, with trep-i-dation, ant-ici-pation or res-ig-nation are at the mer-cy
 of the strings that are as de-fin-ite as the threads of the Fates__ Death is a loom-ing pres-ence,

a fidd-ler of fate, as he weaves his lam-ent from the high-est wail of the E string, to the low-est

dev-a-stat-ed moan of the G ____ The list-en-ers' breaths shud-der on a *Tremolo*, tight on their

necks as they all hang on a quak-ing *Vibrato* ____ The next bars are in-ev-it-able; class-i-cal.

With each *Staccato* stroke of his bow Death cuts at the strings. With *Col legno* his bow makes

each strike. With *Pizzicato* he plucks each soul. He plays *Forte* for those that go out with a bang

and *Piano* for those that go out with a gen-tle whim-per ____ He slows the *tempo* to *Grave*.

Death plays for ev-ery-bod-y, though few seek an aud-i-ence ____ Death fin-ish-es his so-lo

req-ui-em with one long fi-nal note, a held cert-ain-ty, a last breath ____ be-fore the fade

to si-lence. The cur-tain des-cends. No-bod-y app-lauds, but Death un-der-stands ____

He knows full well that he knocked them all dead.

Letter of Complaint

The three of us are
made to feel nv s ble

Signed
, ,

i am saying , i have said nothing

you , schemes of sour love
/ sharp sensations / a quick feather
in the eye
in the red evening tears.
those vast words / thick sounds

, smothering , we almost choked :
a little breath / a little wind
goes a short distance
even the trees understand this :
/ to live a final breath .

i am saying , i have said nothing
near you / away from you :
your lips faded
like a day of departure / of
dire memories , deep

in anger in rage in sex you came
like a tightly wound ophidian/
the classic labor of lust
and motion / like
the eerie gestures of sea foam .

to have loved like this / raucous
and perverse /
nothing contrived
as if our bodies were eyes
opening for the first time

and for so many reasons / a bit
twisted, a bit severe /
a bit nasty
octaves of recklessness
, a heavy smashing of hearts

When The Opacity of Art Fails To Serve

After Anne Boyer's 'How to Go from Poetry to Art / How to Go from Art to Poetry'

When the immediacy of words fail to serve,
being not so direct, and too vague,
we turn to image; the poet picks up a paintbrush,
studies the canvas, begins. Her cool palette
sharpens with practice, the world wears a new coat,
becomes child-like, each and every sign seen
for its own special hue.

*

When the directness of image fails to serve,
being too immediate, and not so vague,
we turn to words; the painter picks up a pen,
studies the notepad, begins. His vast lexicon
softens with practice, the world sheds its old coat,
becomes child-like, each and every symbol scanned
for its wealth of signifiers.

you can't spell *everyone slaughtered by john wick* without *keanu reeves*

we open on a void. we open on the sheer blank in which we are open. when we look there is void. objects exist in void. objects are compelled, and we are open, with conditions, and under conditions, specifically. we open on a scene and certain lights are present. open on either possibility or compulsion. I am not here. we are undetermined and open as an object achieving the condition of void.

—

the numbers are difficult &
 keeping track of the numbers is difficult &
 certain deaths are ambiguous &
 certain are implied & yet there is a clarity,
 distinct from but entangled with void. that void
 is inherent and that clarity is required,
 a stable connection,
 conduit to the eye. it is crucial that it is witnessed.
 a body gives way in many ways &
 under many conditions, this is *possibility*.
 what is best in life? break
 a body like something
 plastic. like something turned
 brittle and honed with age. they are a forest in stone;
 nothing completes and nothing resolves like
 waking at 6am with nowhere to go. drive.
 somewhere, the sun is turning like coins.

—

they conduit &
 & they are regarded |
 regard the arrayed

in void possibility
 the speed | the relative force
 & this is recursive,

orbit this void
 & determine that | weight
 like weight

& like a conduit
 fingers are placed |
 a flat surface opaque, sheer

they accrete & they
 call | a name
 are gone. void goes.

what gives way is
 come & see | then see
 met with honest want

accumulate. mesh like
 that arcs | & this accords
 a tunnel that describes an arc

& arc like void
burning | shared
caught in something

which is explained &
then break rock(s)
climbs without breaking

—

we open ^{to} on a body ruptured in a series of gates. this body may be located; it is a skein. ^{pass these} ^{head & lock}

—

& they hone toward the end state of information a soft & cold churn in succession
made honed in an *object as* thrown matter a conscious & an unconscious instantiated in certain
tones & repeat lapsed & various skirting like a looped break salt upon the salt bank of many
they create an absence. this beckons | patterns are then beckoned.
voids where the nature of void is to imply *that is* the nature of implication is to circle within the
slow ring of sand over broken ^{break like a wave on stone that breaks} *open as a gate* and animal where the nature of animal is a perfect
cascade down numbered steps

—

a nothing ^{man of all men} man wherein nothing | “*I am*” in passage. a gate | made silhouetted, as | it appears
silhouette this as if with titanic light

Lamppost Dogs

If you must think of death, think of it as an absolute; as resolute as the sun, or the sky, or God, or dogs pissing against lampposts. Then, he told her, you may begin to understand it.

She was a woman of twenty-seven, and she dressed like her mother and cheated like her father yet hoped, truly, to be like neither. She worked a job she did not particularly care for, which she was qualified for by an education she had never really understood. She was fixated (more than she cared to admit) on a childhood that had never felt especially safe, and haunted by the chance she would, one day, go on to inflict the same childhood on another.

She liked her toast plain and ordered things with soya milk in to appear more concerned about the world than she actually was; and sometimes, on the days where the rain never stopped, she realised she had become exactly the sort of person who would be indistinguishable in a crowd.

But that was life. And life was simple when boiled down to its barest bones. Life was the acceptance of the things that were necessary and the rejection of the things that were possible. And that was okay, really, once you understood it.

But she did not understand *this*.

Ward 6 was a lonely place. The room hummed unpleasantly, the steady beeps and moans of the monitors filling the silence. The nurses varied; most, she knew, were not bad people. But the more she watched of them the less she liked. They became a leering presence; angels of death waiting impatiently for the ticking-clock to run down with every pill and pinch and poke. She knew it was irrational, cruel, even, to view the people caring for her father this way. But...

She cannot understand this. His eyes were shut. He wasn't dead- not yet- but he was not quite awake, either. She liked it best when he was asleep because she did not have to try to smile and he did not have to try to pretend he wasn't hurting. She closes her eyes for a moment, letting her headache fizzle in the darkness. It's almost peaceful, when it's like this. Almost.

Most days are like this: Her father lies in the bed and barely speaks. She spoon-feeds him when his hands are too weak to rise, which is all the time now. His lips are sinking into his face and his eyeballs too, and his face lines itself like a tapestry, and his chest shudders and aches for the day it won't have to move anymore and God, she thinks, is that all death is?

There was a small table next to the bed. The well-wishing card, unopened, took up half of it. The machine at the foot of the bed beeped. She closed her eyes again.

The plants are being drowned outside, and the sky is grey. Outside is the rain that will never stop pouring. The hospital ward was very loud, even at this time of day. A little too loud.

She realised she was waiting for the silence.