

# redivder 11.1

# reDIVIDER

## VOLUME 11.1



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# The Orangutan

*Michael Bazzett*

They were more than a little embarrassed when it turned out their orangutan was electric.

They've gotten so good with the musculature, said father, who knew?

Also the soft parts, said mother, who loved to stroke the wrinkled skin in the hinges of his body. Sometimes his flesh responded in the most surprising ways. And lord knows, she added, he ate more than his share of bananas.

But then they found them, mashed in a brown pile, melting in a syrupy mass stashed behind the furnace in the basement. He had always been a furtive monkey. Dozens of ants were trapped in the clear fluid leaking from the pile.

We couldn't have come up with a better trap if we'd tried, shouted father, picking at the delicate carcasses.

Their daughter remained quiet through it all, which they attributed to shock. When the baby was born some months later, its face was eerily reminiscent of a calculator.

I don't know what to say, the girl announced, pressing the function key on her new son. Every time I run the numbers, I get a different answer.

# Girl in Red Stilettos Getting Drunk in Ashgabat

*Adriana Parámo*

I

THE THING IS, THIS IS Turkmenistan, we are in the thick of winter, it's snowing outside, and she is wearing red stilettos. The moment the young girl walks in the club, I stop stirring my gin and tonic and study her. She's got bony knees, long svelte legs, porcelain-white skin, and black tresses that shimmer under the strobe lights like a million tiny suns. The barman pours her a sexy martini and she lights a cigarette. Perfect rings of smoke emerge from her red lipsticked mouth.

She pulls down her little black dress, sits at the bar a few feet away from me and laughs at something the barman says. My heart cracks wide open. I try not to stare but I can't help myself. I want to be able to speak her language (is she Russian or a local Turkmen girl?), befriend her, and tell her my secrets. That I'm an empty-nester, that my daughter is in the US Navy and hasn't needed me in years, that I feel painfully lonely in Turkmenistan—a country many can't even locate on a map—and that I don't know why looking at her makes me think of my daughter because truth be told, they don't look at all alike. This girl here, with her black back-seamed nylons, the choker necklace, the dramatic black eye shadow, and those killer pumps, looks like a gothic castle balancing on stilts. Red stilts, that is. Paula is different. She is jeans, t-shirts, flip-flops, and high ponytails; she has no use for makeup, jewelry, or sunglasses.

Yet, tonight this girl and my daughter, 7,554 miles apart from each other, seem to collude to bake the secrets of my heart to ashes.

## II

One day, when my daughter was about three years old, she dragged her tricycle up the stairs. I told her to stop. I didn't take the tricycle away. I simply told her to stop. Her playmate's mother and I hadn't seen each other for a while and there was much catching up to do. "Stop that, right now," I shouted upon hearing the distressing racket of chain and rubber hitting the steps. She struggled to drag the tricycle as she approached the landing. Then both machine and daughter came rolling down. She landed underneath the tricycle, her flower-printed dress bunched up around her waist. A pedal cut her left cheek; it wasn't a long cut but it was deep and it bled. I held Paula in my arms; blood stained my blouse. Her tiny face wet with sweat and tears. I didn't comfort her. I didn't soothe her. "Didn't I tell you to stop? That's what happens for not listening to Mommy," were the only words that came out of my mouth.

## III

An obnoxious loudmouth buys this girl drinks. I hope he is not her date. He is too short for her, too brutish, too bald, too thick around the waist. He looks like one of those pathetic ex-KGB orderlies patrolling the empty streets of Ashgabat; like one of those phony double-agent-wannabes dressed in black polyester outfits from the seventies, sporting cheap sunglasses, obsolete walkie-talkies, and a mean gaze, a communist legacy some Turkmen still cling to twenty years after the Russians left.

Mr. Hotshot here grabs the girl's languid white arm. He wants to dance and to kiss her; he wants to place his shot glass between her breasts and to bite her neck. He slaps her ass. Hard. She grimaces, but quickly, as if on command, she softens her frown and walks away with a coy smile across her face. She takes long strides toward the dance floor and her bony knees make me think of doe deer and wild antelope.

*Atta girl. Show the drunk bastard who's boss. That's right, ignore him. Go meet your girlfriends at the other side of the dance floor. Dance the*

*night away. Let the rude loudmouth know that you don't need him to have fun. That when women dance together, a sinuous river of skin and sandalwood breaks loose somewhere in Guam.*

## IV

My sister and I were Uncle Julio's favorite nieces. When she was eleven and I five, Uncle Julio took us to the cinema to watch our first movie. A few minutes into the film I asked him to take me to the restroom; I needed to pee. He told me to go on my own. "I trust you," he said. "You're a big girl." I was delighted and I took my time. I forgot to pee. I sat in random empty seats to see if the movie looked the same from different angles; I peeked into the projection room; I got gum stuck to one of my shoes, went to the restroom and removed it with hot water. I walked into the men's restroom and discovered that men urinate standing up. I finally remembered to pee. I got lost looking for the ladies'. By the time I got back to my seat, my sister was in tears, visibly shaken. "What took you so long?" she asked between sobs. I shrugged my shoulders feeling all grown up and called her a crybaby.

Forty years later, she told me what Uncle Julio had done to her while I played big girl.

## V

The DJ plays one of the old Santana songs. This girl dances with her girlfriends and together they move like seaweed. Arms above the head, hips swaying left, right, left, so slowly and so offbeat that I wonder if they've ever heard "Black Magic Woman" in this part of the world. She makes circles with her head; sparkly strands of strobe-colored hair cover her face. She puckers her lips as she dances, like she is practicing a kiss, the way we all do when we are little girls, and every time she flutters her fake eyelashes, I'm sure an Akhalteke stud whinnies in the Turkmen desert. She blows her date a kiss, turns, giggles and locks arms with one of her girlfriends, a *femme fatale* stuffed in a tiny bustier incessantly fluffing her hair and dancing



*Untitled (Steven)*, Joe Sobel (Photograph)



*Untitled (Sasha)*, Joe Sobel (Photograph)



## Cover Artist Interview: Jeremy Freedman

*Redivider: We chose your image “Dead Man’s Float” for our cover. What was your inspiration for that?*

Jeremy Freedman: “Inspiration,” by which I take it you mean the basis for a decision to create a specific work, is a complicated process. Some works may have had a direct and specific inspiration and some may not. “Dead Man’s Float” is one of the latter. I saw something that I felt I could translate into something beautiful. The addition of a title adds metaphorical resonance I think. My work generally involves a process of improvisation and reflection within the broad outline of the kinds of images that I find appealing.

*RD: What draws you to your medium?*

JF: I was trained as a painter but when I started to work in photography, on film and in a darkroom, I was amazed and delighted by the sheer magic of it. The first time I saw one of my pictures developing in the tray was a moment of happiness. But now I work exclusively in a digital format and I’ve come to think it’s better because it’s so much easier to work fast

*RD: What artists have influenced you?*

JF: Influenced how? In my life or in my work, or both? And how do you separate them? And what about negative influences? The question of influence is a question of everything I’ve ever seen or felt, including painters, photographers, writers, composers, musicians, etc. But it’s different than merely a list of artists I like. So any list of past and perhaps current positive influences includes, in no particular order and without limitation: Duchamp, Thelonious Monk, Malevich, Pessoa, Henri Laurens, Frank O’Hara, W.G. Sebald, Walker Evans, Robert Frank, Miles Davis, Shostakovich, Richard Tuttle, Charles Ives, and Philip Guston. I’m in favor of sentiment but I stay away from the sentimental.

*RD: What do you want others to feel about your artwork?*

JF: That has to be up to the viewer ultimately.

*RD: How do you feel about your artwork being shown in different mediums versus in person?*

JF: Pictures are for viewing, in any format. The more widely art is disseminated, the better off we’ll be. Music is music, whether it’s heard on the radio or in concert.

*RD: What is the most valuable thing you’ve learned about art?*

JF: One day, when I was six or seven years old, my mother took me to the Museum of Modern Art. I saw in passing on that visit a drawing that has stayed with me for my entire life. It was a drawing, in charcoal perhaps, of a standing nude woman with three breasts. This was astonishing to me at that age. Later, I’ve come to think it was a drawing by Gaston Lachaise, one of his typically formidable-looking nudes, but I’ve never been able to find it. I’ve come to think that this drawing does not exist; at least not in the way I remembered it. And today I don’t even like Lachaise all that much. But that doesn’t matter because what I learned that day and what stuck with me was this lesson: the job of an artist is to organize the world according to his or her preferences, visions, desires, needs; and the freedom to do so is what defines artistic activity.

Follow Jeremy at [jfreennyc.com](http://jfreennyc.com).

## Contributors

**Beth Bachmann's** first book, *Temper*, won the 2008 AWP Donald Hall Prize, published through the Pitt Poetry Series, and received the 2010 Kate Tufts Discovery Award. Her new book, *Do Not Rise*, was chosen by Elizabeth Willis as winner of the 2011 Poetry Society of America's Alice Fay Di Castagnola Award and is forthcoming from Pitt in early 2015.

**Michael Bazzett** has new poems forthcoming in *Ploughshares*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Pleiades*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *32 Poems*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Forklift, Ohio*. He is the author of *The Imaginary City*, recently published in the OW! Arts Chapbook Series. He lives in Minneapolis with his wife and two children.

**Gerri Brightwell** is a British writer who lives in Alaska. She has two published novels: *Cold Country* (Duckworth, 2003) and *The Dark Lantern* (Crown, 2008). Her writing has also recently appeared (or is forthcoming) in such venues as BBC Radio 4's *Opening Lines*, the *Los Angeles Review*, *Fiction Southeast*, *BLIP*, and *Gargoyle*. When she has time, she enjoys trying to cook Indian food.

**John F. Buckley and Martin Ott** began their ongoing games of poetic volleyball in the spring of 2009. Their previous collaboration *Poets' Guide to America* was published by Brooklyn Arts Press in 2012, featuring poems published in more than forty journals and anthologies, including *A Bird as Black as the Sun: California Poets on Crows and Ravens*, *City of the Big Shoulders: an Anthology of Chicago Poetry*, *Confrontation*, *Post Road* and *ZYZZYVA*. They have recently completed a second volume of collaborative poems, *The Yankee Broadcast Network*.

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After a rather extended and varied second childhood in New Orleans (street musician, psych-tech, riverboat something-or-other, door-to-door poetry peddler), **Matt Dennison** finished his undergraduate degree at Mississippi State University where he won the National Sigma Tau Delta essay competition (judged by X.J. Kennedy). His work has appeared in *Rattle*, *Natural Bridge*, *The Spoon River Poetry Review*, and *Cider Press Review*, among others. He currently lives in a 108-year-old house with "lots of potential" and can be reached at [columbusmatt@cablone.net](mailto:columbusmatt@cablone.net).

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