



[Alternate Route]

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# [Alternate Route]

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## Metamorphosis

"I'm not going!" I throw my arms into the air with frustration. My dad pokes his head around the door to see what's going on. Seeing that the coast is clear and there aren't any objects flying across the room, he enters my bedroom and stands behind me looking at my reflection in the mirror. I stare at his large hairy hands placed on my shoulders. "Deep breath, son." He picks up my tie, untangles it and drapes it around my neck, tying it into a perfect knot.

"What if he sees the chair and changes his mind?" I scowl, my head cloudy with negative thoughts. "Then he's obviously not the one for you." My dad had a hard time accepting my sexuality, but he took it far better than knowing I'll be stuck in this chair for the rest of my life. So what if I date other guys? I can't swim, I can't play football, I can't go motorcycle racing with him. I can't do all the things with him that we loved doing together as father and son. Being gay is trivial compared to the loss of my 'old life'.

In the car, I sit staring out the window, my stomach turning over with nerves, my dad humming 'Streets of London' as we make our way to the restaurant. Once I'm in my chair and ready to go, he pauses for a moment and his eyes go a little red. "Hey, son." He looks me up and down. "You look great." He sniffs, smiles and then leans forward and nudges me on the arm. "I'm proud of you, son. Now you go and have a good night."

I tell him I love him and start to roll away as panic starts to set in. What if there are steps? What if the table is the wrong height for my chair? What will he think of me? Will he be annoyed I didn't tell him I use a chair? Thoughts race through my head as I approach the entrance to the restaurant. "Great, no steps. Good start." I reassure myself silently. I arrive at the doors and just as I go to reach the door handle, a middle-aged guy and his wife spot me and they hold the doors open for me. "Cheers!" I thank them. "So far so good." I begin to ease a little.

A young waitress strides over in her white blouse and black apron. "Reservation?" she squeaks. I confirm my name. "Great, your party has already arrived. Just this way, please." Oh god, he's already here! I don't have any time to settle in and make sure everything is ok. I follow the waitress past many tables,

conscious of the odd person looking up from their tables to look over at me, especially children who gawp at me until I'm out of sight.

We turn into a quieter area with a log fire and an impressive chimney breast. "There we are. Can I get you some drinks?" The waitress' voice sounds muffled in my overwhelmed reaction to meeting Ryan for the first time after speaking online for a little over six months.

"Same again for me, please." His voice is lower than I thought it would be. "I'll have what he's having." I stammer. He smiles warmly at me, the orange glow from the log fire flickers onto his face. "Great, I'll move this chair over." I thank her and park myself into the spot. I stay silent for a moment, unsure as to what to say. I decide to let him speak first.

"Well, isn't this a surprise." He grins, looking at the chair. I immediately spill out apologies and try to explain the many reasons why I didn't mention anything about the chair beforehand. Before I could go any further, he raises his hand and I instantly stop my spiel. He calmly leans over to one side and points towards a wheelchair folded up behind him. "Me too!" He laughs. I sit open-mouthed and we both giggle uncontrollably. "No way! What are the chances?" We echo each other. This perfect ice breaker relaxes me and the twisting sensation in my stomach eases. Our drinks arrive and we order our food; our starters and mains identical with a dessert to share.

"How long have you used a chair?" I ask. "Parachuting accident four years ago. I did a jump for charity and the parachute got tangled and we had a pretty hard landing." He explained. "What about you?" I tell him about the car accident; about how mum had died and dad blamed himself, even though it wasn't his fault. "I'm sorry" he frowned.

"This is my first time out in public on my own since getting the chair, so I was pretty nervous about not having someone with me in case I got stuck. But then again I didn't fancy my dad joining us!" I joke. Ryan explains he had a few guys stop talking to him online after he told them he uses a chair so he figured just to get to know someone well enough to meet up and take it from there.

We speak a little about the emotional and psychological effects of using a chair and it comforted me to know he is fully



independent, lives on his own, has a great job and plays a lot of sports. "You're welcome to come along on Tuesday night and meet the team. Bring your dad along, too. It can be something you can do together," he said enthusiastically. "How could he play?" I ask, confused. "He would need to use a spare chair from the sports hall," he explained. I didn't know if wheelchair basketball would be his thing, but it was worth mentioning, I suppose.

We finish our dessert, argue over who pays for the bill and get ready to leave. I watch him get into his chair quickly with ease. Once outside, we say goodnight and say we'll talk later. I roll around the corner to the car park, a contented smile on my face. I enter the carpark to find, to my surprise, my dad's car already waiting for me. I knock on the driver's side window and wake up my snoring, drooling dad. After some disorientation he rolls down the window.

"How long have you been here?" I laughed. "I never left. Just in case, you know, you needed me or things didn't work out," he admitted. "You silly sod!" I go round to the passenger side and heave myself into the car with his help. He pushes the door shut and hauls my chair into the boot when I feel my phone vibrate;

#### **RYAN**

It was great meeting you tonight. See you Tuesday for Basketball : ) I'll msg you later to sort out our next date, my treat this time xx

"I take it it went well then, yeah?" he asked, spotting the smile on my face. "I'm taking you out on Tuesday, Dad. Bring your gym shorts."

## Thrive

A nation of back-garden farmers  
Sowing, tending, nibbling  
Our way through lockdown.  
A positive lifeline  
And escape outdoors.

We reach peak harvest,  
Savour what we've grown,  
Bottle up that goodness  
With all the energy and love.  
We owe it to ourselves  
Not to waste a bit.

An old skill or a new discovery,  
A positive force of good  
Nurturing and feeding us  
In so many ways,  
Bringing together generations,  
Communities and cultures.

Nature belongs to us all  
And in the times of change ahead  
We can all thrive through gardening.

**Diadalszekér (Chariot)**  
**(Tarot, Nagy Arkánum VII.)**

Az illeszkedés kísérlete elárul.  
 Kiközösít a nyáj. A különb kérge küszöb,  
 s a kint-bent ugyanúgy sehol. Tűnő káprázat,  
     ha élődi fény sziszeg kígyó-fürtökön;  
 küllőtől megfosztott kerék az Örök

Körforgás.

Féllábú, pingvin-képű cukros bácsi bámul a kapualjból,  
 tökhéj-bárkák úsznak  
     a lemeztelenített, reszkető víz testén.)

Minden állítás igaz. S ugyanúgy az ellentéte is.  
 Bűnös, aki összehasonlít, megkülönböztet;  
 kápó a fogyasztói társadalom átnevelő táborában...

Nem ural már érdek, düh, szájalom,  
     átmeneti formák az élők, a lét  
     szüntelen vágta hullá-halmokon.  
 A rőfögve négykézlábra ereszkedők  
 kényszerítik harcra  
 a felegyenesedőt.

**Chariot**  
**(Tarot, Major Arcana VII.)**

The attempt to fit in betrays you.  
 The flock excludes you. The better one's bark is the threshold,  
 in or out is the same as nowhere. Transient delusion,

if parasite light hisses on snake clusters.  
 Eternal Cycle is a wheel deprived of its

spokes.

A one-legged, penguin faced candy man's staring  
 from the doorway,  
     pumpkin barges swim  
 on the bare body of the quivering water.

*All statements are true. And so are their opposites.*  
*The sinner is who compares, distinguishes,*  
*he's the capo in the reeducation camps of consumer society...*

Interest, anger, and pity aren't dominating me anymore,  
     these are the temporary forms of living,  
         a relentless galloping on the piles of corpses.  
 Those grunting on all fours  
 force  
 the one who stands up straight  
 to fight.

(Translated by Gabor Gyukics)

## Homunculus

Csenevész, szőrös újszülöttet főz...

- Mi a lófaszt csinál komámasszony?

„Kifőzzük a kilenc ördögöt belőle.”

Kilenc koravén, kacsalábú gnóm,

istenkísértő praktikák

szülöttei. Ez a kölyök mumifikáltan is

(pergamen-tapintású, hámló, aszalmány-bőrű) a jászol szégyene.

Kóborló szarvasok ákása-képét

űzik, hajszojják agyafúrt

lőcslábú kopói. Kilenc lépésnyire a folyó, kilenc Hold ül a

mozdulatlan víz fölött.

A teremtő Uzsorás hétrét

görnyedve ural valós és vélt

világot. Cinkelt lapot oszt,

s őrzik termékeny irkafirkák

a kilenc kristályszerkezetű Gonoszt.



Believe

## Homunculus

Cooking a scrawny, hairy  
newborn...

- What the fuck are you doing, cummer?

"We'll boil the nine devils out of him."  
Nine precocious, duck-legged gnomes,  
born by God-tempting practices of  
witchcraft.

This brat is not even mummified.  
(parchment-coated, peeling, scaly-skinned) he is  
a disgrace to the crib.

His shrewd, bow-legged hounds chase  
and hunt the stray deers' akasha image.  
Nine paces from the river, nine moons sit  
above the motionless water.

Usurer, the sevenfold crouching creator rules  
the real and the imagined  
world.

He deals zinc-clad cards  
while fertile scribbles guard  
the nine crystal-structured Villains.

(Translated by Gabor Gyukics)

## Cat Hair

One roommate heard somewhere that the most effective way to achieve dreadlocks over a short period of time was to use egg whites and aerosol hair products. I sat at my vanity and let four fellow white college girls twist and shred my dirty blond hair into tiny matted ropes using their bare hands and a rattail comb. They sealed the locs with egg whites and extra-hold hair spray and, fearing their sculpture might be water-soluble, told me not to wash my hair. The dreads lasted three weeks until I could no longer abide the colony of raw egg pathogens likely terraforming all over my head and pillowcase; a live culture, appropriating. J-Lo was delivering her SNL opening monologue, wearing her famous backwards dress, when I sat in front of the hallway mirror and full-sober sawed off my locs two inches from my scalp with a pair of orange-handled Fiskars. As the scissors released each ropy twist, I felt bubbly, tipsy; light as green Versace silk chiffon in a wind machine. I left my hair in a pile on the hallway carpet to spook my roommates when they came home from the parties. That's the kind of person I am. Two roommates stumbled in and saw the locs on the floor. A lone dread snaked out from the pile. The drunk roommate kneeled and snuggled into the pile. "It's our cat. Pet the cat." We didn't have a cat.

## Empty Calories

Our Santa Cruz Street duplex is lit up when Paloma parks. I clutch Jeremy's pillow from his Berkeley sublet and stagger out of Paloma's backseat, exhausted, hungry, ready for bed. Siobhan is passed out on a porch chair. Some guy with black hair and sideburns kneels before her, cradling her head and stroking her alabaster face. "She didn't eat enough."

Our house is full of Abercrombie & Fitch associates from Siobhan's closing shift, plus their friends. Three hot as fuck A&F'ers raid the fridge, shattering a pickle jar on the linoleum. Three strangers spread their legs on the couch, holding beers while watching "Waking Life" on mute. An Incubus song blares from the stereo. I hear Paloma down the hall yelling at some kid we'll soon find out has an extensive criminal record. "Why are you in Siobhan's room? Did you take something?"

A group of guys stare at the Abercrombie photo mural on our living room wall, a retired store display Siobhan took home last season, showing a shirtless man getting out of a pool in black and white. The guys on the couch thumb an Abercrombie catalogue, pausing over all the T&A spread across the pages.

Julie sits inside the refrigerator door, feeding slices of Paloma's lunch meat to Hey Mister as he lounges with his head in her lap, his silver tags glinting under the refrigerator light. Julie laughs and takes a swig from a vodka bottle, probably her only meal that day. We named the neighbor's wandering puppy after that awful song by Custom that made me cry the first time I heard it. We really are just lumps of flesh to some boys, aren't we?

Paloma grabs my arm. "Someone just drove away in Siobhan's truck and backed over the fence." I hold her hand while she phones the police. The music is silenced; the search party begins. Jeremy helps carry Siobhan to her bed where she stays until late morning, out cold and oblivious.

Hours later, an officer calls Paloma. He found the brand new Tacoma pulled to a curb three streets over, slightly dented. All of Siobhan's cds are strewn across the asphalt. The officer picks one up. "Led Zeppelin, alright! Well, you can drive the



truck home. Have your housemate file a report in the morning. Try to get some sleep.”

No one sleeps or eats that night, and the Abercrombie boys never come back again.



Walk

**Heart Flame**

up  
side  
down or  
rightside up  
flames can be  
touched but not held  
I am trying to hand my  
heart over to you as an upturned  
dancing flame gasping to feed on your  
breath growing full fueled by the oxygen of  
hope emitting palpable vulnerability to stamping  
out as it slips through the spaces between your  
fingers onto the ground at our feet trembling to be  
trampled. I bend to scoop up the dying ember  
to save what can be salvaged before it dies  
out altogether to put it back inside  
of me where it belongs safely  
upside down again

## Queen Anne's Lace

walking around the arboretum  
under a bright hot summer sun  
taking pictures of flowers and trees,  
I saw Queen Anne's Lace  
and thought about what made you happy

when you were here  
you were grandma  
and we would play  
I Spy With My Little Eye

now I see you, a beautiful young woman  
in black and white photos  
jet black bone straight hair  
curled to perfection every time

I spy someone I miss  
and start to cry

I imagine your disapproving look  
scowl-lipped, shaking head  
saying *don't waste your time*  
*it's more than thirty years*  
*I'm gone*

I see you hand me a tissue  
feel your arm around me  
as you *tsk tsk* my tears dry

I still feel how it felt  
when they told me you were gone  
my insides gutted hollow  
throbbing in dread

bringing you back like this  
I miss you in a weepy way  
like wandering a cemetery  
crying for the dead

driving home the sky gets dark  
giant drops pelt the windshield  
until it's hard to see anything at all  
I think about the photos  
what I can't see outside the frames  
I'm gutted all over again

you look lovestruck there  
but so unhappy here  
like you couldn't smile  
after your love died  
but you carried on so many years

I wonder what we would have been  
if I had ever been more than a kid to you  
you would have shown me how to grow things  
like the flowers we saw today  
how to prune roses  
without getting stuck

Sitting in the driveway in the car  
It's raining too hard to get out  
You'd say *keep your sunglasses on*  
*don't turn your tears into a problem*  
*hold your head high*  
*and carry on*

I spy with my little eye

stoicism in you  
building up in me

## PTSD

The glass was always half full  
until it started to look half empty  
then it shattered into shards  
like your war stories  
and we search for shards everywhere now  
selecting each one to scrutinize  
in the light  
and piece together  
again

in a way that holds water



Fraught

**Starving**

i look down and watch them all day long  
but my hands are not my own  
only bones and veins  
vivid blue as winding rivers  
nor are my eyes my own  
they cannot see  
what isn't there anymore  
nor is my mind my own  
i don't control it  
it controls my senses and self  
the light is fading slowly  
as i pretend it grows brighter  
i can't reach beyond my shadow world  
the hazy fog is thick and overwhelming  
you could lead me out  
if you can find your way through it to me  
take my strange hands in yours  
make them my own again  
help me to see again  
show me how to make my mind  
my own again

## 1 to 1 to 1 to 1, with the 1 equalling You, always You

### **What has the staff member enjoyed most/least since their last supervision meeting?**

N.B. The answer, “not having supervision meetings” is not acceptable. Please tick Box D below for the attention of HR so we can keep an eye on the sarcastic bugger. Equally, “sitting at home and scratching myself in front of Netflix” lacks an adequate focus on the job in hand. Although, if they’ve given you that answer, it’s possibly a good idea not to use the phrase “job in hand” in your follow-up question.

### **What tasks/activities do you feel confident doing here?**

N.B. The “clever” response will focus on this room right now, i.e. “sitting here talking to you”. Again, please tick Box D below for the attention of HR. If necessary – i.e. if you’ve made the mistake of scheduling the meeting late on a Friday afternoon – prompt the employee with the tasks/activities about which they might have a reasonable chance of expressing confidence. No leading questions, though. Suggesting “showing up within half an hour of your scheduled start time” might well give them grounds to assume you’re not on their side. You’re not, but they don’t need to know that, at least until writing up the targets they can’t achieve at the end of the session.

### **What’s your biggest challenge right now?**

N.B. Ensure adequate size of chair and that the heating is neither too high nor likely to invoke the brass monkeys that might otherwise be your answer.

N.N.B. Quite clearly, the employee will not be honest about this – remember the Mr Scott principle: never tell the boss how long a job is going to take. The same holds true for challenges. They’re unlikely to be real challenges. Make note of what is offered up and then check the Shared Drive to see if they’ve finished the job months back and they’re just taking the piss.

### **How can I get more involved in workplace culture? / Are there any aspects of our culture you wish you could change?**

N.B. Best asked without blinking. If necessary, interrogate the ceiling tiles until they offer something they think might relate

to workplace culture. This will be the most telling question of all – please note Boxes E – G below for the attention of HR. Answers relating solely to buying milk and the dishwasher are of concern, and if you find the bastard who keeps blocking the downstairs loo, please tick Box H and Facilities will be in touch with the photographic evidence for the follow-up disciplinary.

**How can I best support you? / How can you best support me?**

N.B. You'll know what counts as an inappropriate answer to this one, although it might give you the heads up on future behaviour to watch out for.

Completed supervision forms should be written up by the line manager and forwarded to employee and HR within one week of the scheduled meeting. If any of the above questions present difficulties, please don't hesitate to contact Derek in HR and he'll make sure to write it up in advance on your own appraisal form. Either that or just fudge your way through it as you usually do – you don't think anyone actually reads these things, do you?



**My take on local news with traditional shoehorned side order of disguised national news and desperate filler from a remarkably familiar, Russian-oligarch owned newspaper.**

*Reporter Benjamin Bench helps himself to a serving of The Evening News in South Sumpchester and drives away with mixed feelings.*

**Not Pictured:** The Sumpchester Evening News' front page, because you might as well look at this one.

When I set off to collect my takeaway news, my chief concern is always the parking.

Yes, I know it's a peculiar opening, and not what you were expecting, but bear with me (he's reviewing a newspaper and he's mostly bothered about the parking? Surely his chief concern is news? I mean, hello? Have you read my other articles? I churn out eight a day for this rag, and that's on a slow day.)

You see, like you, I want to get in and out in as quickly as possible. (You've got to imagine I'm writing all of this with a vision of you in my head. Which, I think, is probably better than you reading this with a vision of *me* in yours. Oh, and by the way, that innuendo you smirked at there – have it on me, because we've got to be cheeky chappies in our reporting, now, haven't we? As the money runs out and the offices close and the staff who used to work for one city now find themselves writing copy for half the country, just making sure to put in local place names for verisimilitude, we're got to maintain that journalistic insouciance. Like nothing really matters. Because, our bosses are so keen to tell us, nothing does).

But I digress.

As we all know, convenience is paramount these days. We want our news, but we want it as swiftly as possible. None of that unnecessary fannying about (bit of the old tabloid lingo, there) waiting for stories to be confirmed by a second source. Or even an initial one. No, what we want is our daily reminder that other people in town have it worse than we do, and the townies and the thugs have been given the frighteners by the local bobbies.

But how does this relate to the parking, I hear you ask? The 30% of you who've made it down to this bit of the page (because I've done the psychology about how people read headlines, then bylines, then maybe the lead paragraph, before their attention proceeds to dribble down the page, idly looking for anything shocking, surprising or amusing, or just flicking to the next page and the next story).

It relates to the parking because there were easily a hundred or so parking spaces and I could have my pick. Generously spaced bays, including one for an editor whose car was, of course, not to be found because he'll be based somewhere else in the country entirely. And, from that, I had my takeaway, didn't I? I knew what the news would be like in the paper even before I read it. I knew there'd be the story about a new chocolate bar on sale in B & M for 49p (11p off recommended price). I knew that a large amount of the story would have come from Twitter. I knew the by-line would come from the nuttiest of those comments ("*some people said it should be illegal*"). I knew because I'd actually "written" that one, wondering if it would get past whatever passes for quality control in local papers these days. Knowing that they'd print it anyway.

Like they've printed this, too. So, no, I'm sorry I can't say I recommend the Sumpchester Evening News. Although I do look forward to seeing this article, word-for-word, repeated there, only with another paper's name inserted.

**down the stairs**

you say you know everything about me

almost but not everything, here's a courageous confession:

you don't know what distresses me the most  
the magnitude of how terrified I am to harm a man of muscles

so I go out of my way  
down the stairs of comfort and freedom

to be an empyreal pillow  
for everyone to dispose of their tears

but some days this feeble pillow  
is so engaged in  
combatting his own specters and fevers

that his actions stab few hearts  
unwillingly, unintentionally

In sooth, I do not want to hurt anyone  
I want to be kind and tender and soft

who wants to share the bitterness  
of the leaves of *Azadirachta indica*?

I want to help mortals by building an encouraging raft  
I want to be kind and tender and soft

but what is mere wanting  
if not converted into acting?

**i want to know**

for you to get over  
the loss of your  
mother's mother  
i know it is so  
hard as if asking a  
man without hands  
to hold a  
bundle of timber

to lose the love  
that was vaster  
than the Caspian sea  
i know it is so  
hard for you are  
used to a fragrance  
not many have  
had the chance  
to savor

but when you  
move on, for once  
spare some time  
to consider the  
magnitude of my pain

and let me know

what is it like to  
be caressed by  
crinkled hands  
and just continue  
holding them  
for hours

when you know  
the edifice of the  
world you had  
assembled carefully  
has disintegrated  
yet again

what is it like to be  
cared and loved  
for who you are  
not for what you  
can do, not for what  
you can lend

what is it like  
to place your  
vulnerable head on  
the safe lap  
of your grandmother  
and dauntlessly let  
the tears drizzle  
the way they prefer  
even when everyone's  
watching with  
eyes like eagles

i do not know  
for my mother's  
mother died before  
i entered this world.

**what do i do**

to become a poet  
they say you have  
to learn the correct  
spelling  
memorize  
the complex names  
of all the delicate herbs  
of all the tiny seeds  
of all the  
captivating flowers

what do i do  
with  
the deep-rooted  
softness of a poet  
but frustrating  
maladies named  
ADHD and Dementia

i strive to  
focus on ruddy roses  
just them but  
my mind  
moves to  
far away lands where  
placid daisies grow  
and  
no one gathers them  
for their beloveds

sometimes when i'm  
rinsing my face  
i plan

a whole poem  
with a  
terrific rhyme scheme  
even if i say  
so myself

but when i sit down on  
my battered desk  
with a pen  
and a sheet  
i'm unable to  
recollect even the  
remnants of the concept  
that was supposed to  
be executed

so you keep warning  
me: you can  
never become a poet

maybe i don't desire  
to be dubbed a poet  
by the world

my aureate heart  
knows I possess  
the genteel soul  
of a poet

the heart knows  
isn't that enough?

**Big Dipper**

The winter sky, moon mocked  
And torn with stars as I walked home,  
The tear-drowned, teenage me,  
Howled out and full of woe.  
I crashed up that country hill  
Wishing I was dead.  
But as it turned out  
I didn't die; the past did.



Brook



## Lonely

When you arrive you climb the stairs up to her apartment and it's so packed away you almost can't believe she ever moved in. She greets you with a hug and she asks if you would like any of the stuff she is n't keeping (and you keep most of it in a box you still don't open) and conversation continues about the memories the things bring and not at all about the big thing that hangs heavy, swollen, sopping with grief above it all until there is nothing else left and the gravity pulls you both in and you begin to feel the raw size of it, the unprocessed texture of a moment you are certain you will remember forever and the crushing weight of not knowing what to do with this fleeting ripe permanence and so you say you love her and will miss her and she says the same and hugs you and you both hug and you say you're excited to possibly date again as a poly foursome like you've talked about and nothing changes but a catch clicks in your mind and you say with soft recognition:

"We're not going to date again, are we."

Her head shakes slow, like she's afraid it will fall off if she moves too fast and that's how you both start to cry, streams of silent tears at first, then as it takes root you both begin to shudder and small sobs escape and you sink to the floor still holding together and you take turns talking and reminiscing and singing some of your private songs together and then it is late. It is very late and you have to go back to your place and she has an early flight, so you hold tight at the door on your way out, and a place in your heart knows this is the last time you will see each other so you desperately promise it isn't, then you pick up your box and not knowing what else to do you leave. You walk down the hall toward the elevator, and suddenly realize there's one thing you can do, so you set the box down and walk back, getting faster with each step until you are knocking on her door and she answers it with a red-eyed silly smile and asks what you forgot, and you say I just need to hug you one more time, and you hold each other tight, tight, tight—

**Waves**

Waves, ceaseless, carry themselves.  
Thoughts of the world flow back and forth,  
Ubi sunt?  
Ubi sunt qui ante nos fuerunt?  
Two answers take turns:  
Where are they that came before us?  
They are dead  
They are here.  
Sunlight holds each needle of the pines  
Tender  
Tight  
Tight they are here  
Tender they are dead.  
The waves and thoughts flow back and forth  
Is truth the water or the sand?  
Both pass  
Both remain.  
Here a hollow world  
Fills with shadow and light

## A World in Which the Black Panther Party Logo Appears on a Box in My Parents' Garage

It would probably need to begin with their families.  
 Perhaps my dad, instead of being motivated by his  
 father,  
 had been disillusioned,  
 or perhaps he worked in lumber and found it to his  
 liking  
 and grew up to be a blue-collar union man  
 like so many of his cousins.

Perhaps my mom was the same in every way  
 but never became fearful and quiet.  
 Maybe she grew up climbing the greased pole at the  
 county fair  
 and when she got the ten-dollar bill  
 was inspired.  
 Perhaps instead of dismissing the people pushing her  
 to be a doctor rather than nurse,  
 lawyer rather than librarian, she had heard  
 and succeeded  
 and found anger at injustice.  
 Perhaps that anger was fanned,  
 and she met a friend in college.

Perhaps the two of them still met at a Christmas party,  
 but dad talked about "strong together"  
 and mom talked about "mutual aid"  
 and when they talked about children it wasn't how  
 many  
 but how motivated,  
 how powerful,  
 how educated.

Perhaps when I am born they teach me  
 not obedience but determination,  
 freedom instead of faith.  
 Maybe in this world  
 I am not scared away from being gay, but

it is hard to imagine they have this house  
unless there are greater changes.

And perhaps that's the real answer.  
Perhaps how the logo appears in their garage  
is a world where the party was sold.  
Perhaps it became the face of a company with good  
prices.

Perhaps it is easier to think hope can be bought  
than to think my parents could become people  
I would want to become.



Courthouse

**Hailey**

Hailey I'm breaking our friendship off  
because you made me feel uncomfortable  
when I tried to eat dinner with  
you and your friends and  
because you were not kind enough and  
because you have not been  
as good a friend  
as I hoped and  
because I am not involved  
enough in your life  
which tells me  
that I am not  
in a healthy place  
to be friends and  
because you are dead  
and I want the pain to stop.

## Limit

Sitting in my chair, reaching for  
a glass of (which is an emptiness  
made (although no, a cup is  
not the emptiness it's the  
boundary (which is used to  
create an understood space  
like lines on paper, so then  
maybe a cup is one example  
(and it isn't glass after all,  
it's plastic (probably formed  
from some tarry soup made  
of the eons when plants  
ruled the earth uncontested,  
rather than the hellish silica  
adopted to frighten and kill  
would-be devourers by  
making themselves too  
dangerous (and here too  
is confusion and difference,  
divergence between the  
relatable need to survive  
and the weapon (which has  
proactive (like how 'prey'  
in vore might seek 'predator'  
to find fulfillment in filling  
or intimacy in being taken  
whole with no shadow doubts  
that part is unwanted)  
implications) that cannot be  
wielded without loss) to eat)  
instead) of an optical illusion)  
made solid) useful) water.

### Hearing Vivaldi's 'Winter – The Four Seasons'

This is the music my father  
would like, aching strings

a taking back to soaring  
spires, heights I never quite

acquired, in the rarefied  
slow air of his study

smelling of single malt,  
books and the aftermath

of pipe smoke, I sat on blue  
carpet before the drawn-out

note of grief-before-grief,  
when he was the only man

I knew. I wish I'd listened  
more closely to music like this,

rather than saying *Make it stop*,  
so, with an eye roll, he switched it off,

because that is the father he was,  
and that is the father he is.

## Advisory

If you're suckered,  
you have groped  
losing starry mites.  
Why do you wheel away  
hoping pleasant dreams  
wind up in other minds.  
Meeting an end,  
as faded glories.  
Embers of sadness,  
a flickering gesture.  
A simple request  
likely unanswered.



Flap



**And Suchlike**

You once foretold a notice  
of a most noisy whirlwind  
without a gift for language.  
Emblems served  
at different times  
laid at death's door.  
Stricken by disease,  
those rare and fatal.  
Foaming at the mouth,  
in sudden raging fever..  
You know its meaning  
from balding husbands. .  
They raid Christian coffers  
using lore from the Vikings.  
Their teeth remain clenched,  
keeping to a certain deafness.

## Bonneau's Landing

Finding what's warmest,  
yellow bellied and naive.  
A belligerent syrup flows  
from each and every pore.  
The streets shimmer,  
in a sense of urgency.  
People seem to detest  
hardworking eruptions...  
For bargains with opponents,  
who hits the ground running,.  
They serve as mere relics  
of the ones who departed.



Last Steps

## Scientist

On a shore forever lambent  
he disappeared in the sands..  
Robbery of a true birth  
is the matter on record.  
He played the market  
for wine colored cars  
but only on the side.  
He is without claims  
to formal description.  
None is his color,  
zero is his number.  
In all his escapades,  
he stays undetected.  
Shrugging his shoulders  
he gauges all the signals  
of pendulums in a basin..



Chestnut Ridge

## It Came Through My Window One Night

It came through my window one night.  
Prayer-like. Though hardly expected. Yes,  
death bore me. I barely felt its gentle hands  
as they lifted me. Lifeless as I was, suspended  
like a float in the ball of its flat fist.  
I thought of all the things I'd miss.  
I waved goodbye to passport and colouring book.  
Caught the smell of clean bedsheets and rum.  
I did things I'd never done. Spoke at the funerals  
of people I never knew. I stepped in their shoes.  
Wiggled my toes in new shores.  
Why hadn't I done this before?

They say your life passes you by when you die,  
but that doesn't tell even half of it.  
And don't ask me how, but I smiled  
when it pulled me out of myself  
and left all of me behind.

And the last thing I heard?  
It was as if a single solitary note  
played itself out in an encore.  
Uncertain at first, then joined by  
a gazillion more.

## The Grandfather Clock

We dine together in the shadow of the grandfather clock.  
I gaze at you. Perfect man. Greek God. Bad boy.  
All rolled into one. Eyes like shiny shells. Lips  
as moist as plums. The sweet allure of coconuts,  
desiccated, or dripping delicately down the palm.  
I will lose myself in that tonight.

We drink our fill of Cabernet Sauvignon,  
perfected over decades in our sleepless cellar.  
Ninety years old yet flush as a new-born cherub.

I propose a toast,  
to the delicate tapestry of your Renaissance beauty,  
holding your gaze through my crimsoned glass. A toast.  
To the twirling liquid that sparkles like infant blood,  
whose dancing legs play spring notes on our tongues.

To the ageless face of the grandfather clock,  
whose slow, patient hands unravel all evenings to  
a threadbare dusk.

**Talent**

I sit obediently in this chair for you.  
Unblinking. 'Please don't move'.  
Not an inch. Still as a rock.

I disappear as you paint me on canvas.  
A smearing of sepia makes a smattering  
of nothing. *Why did you choose me?*

In my mind I offer you my empty palette.  
You fill it with worms that shed their skin  
onto my open palms.

Perhaps my portrait will hang in  
London town, under sinful Red Lights,  
bowing the heads of sleazy men in seedy  
city bars—

'Sit up straight'. I wince and blush.  
Bent to the whiskers of your  
paintbrush.

### Thanks to the Fallen, I am free

On a chilly night, a lady as bright as light,  
Without any fright, sings lovely for wights delight:  
“It will be alright; no one will forget your fights.  
Even out of sight, everyone praises you, Knights.”

In the beautiful sky of blue, I used to view,  
Two or more souls who blew, my mind and my heart too  
Due to a freedom that came true. So, what I do  
Is, I say to you: “Thank you.” “Thanks to all of you!”

For the Fallen of all wars, who have become stars  
This poetic art soars, in honor of your scars.  
“Thank you to you!” I roar. You may be far, but are  
No more than our freedom core. Rare are such lodestars.

“Hey, can you hear me?” I asked, to the souls who passed  
“Your love for the nation was vast, and it still lasts!”  
Strong and steadfast, to the sky, my tribute I cast.  
They pass very fast, but what a blast from the past!

### Luna Selene

I want to hear what the moon is thinking.  
Does it keep a diary because it's been in bloom for centuries?  
Does it take note of all those who dote on its dimples, like me?  
Does it remember the ones that stand out, who love lawlessly,  
who loiter in its shadow for a hint of a remedy?  
Does it whisper to its Grecian brothers and sisters  
about the slow-moving tragedies, the spoiled beauty of  
humanity,  
the hundred tiny taskmasters who die every night of their own  
vanity?  
And does it smile when it sees what we've made it out to be,  
a goddess, a godmother, a symbol of love and eternity?  
The maidens who dream of sailing its seas,  
the mothers who bless their babies in its beams,  
the crones who cry until their claws come out in its gleam,  
they all want to hear the moon's midnight screams.



## Starlight

Oh sweet sombre starlight, how easy it seems  
to stand on Windermere peaks and watch you be shorn  
from the shore of the blighted black sea,  
see your endless misty acquaintances  
weave in and out of view like the ghostly guests of my garden  
party;

your headlights pierce through the curtained windows  
to curtail my glee but you're still happy to see me,  
now emancipated from the arresting aura of shimmering  
moonbeams.

You watch the weeping willow sway in the breeze,  
a beer bottle lying dead at the base of the trunk like an offering,  
a sacrifice to be seized,  
and you're reminded of your shivering sisters still stuck in the  
sun's trajectory.

Over the years, since the start of the fight, you've stored up  
enough spite to invert the sky  
but you need to wait until they all align when the time is right.  
Until then you stand around until ten, waiting to watch your  
brethren start their shifts again.

## The Fold

Marching down a hillside  
I came upon a hermit  
who spun a sordid story  
and told me I should learn it;

he told me to spread it far  
from summit to riverbed,  
so all the world may hear it  
and this is what he said:

be you priestly or a prince  
ordained with golden roses,  
take comfort in your certain seat  
beside the ancient Moses.

But if you're a lecher,  
a trickster, fiend or drunk,  
the prince's serpent herd  
will ensure your ego's shrunk;

they'll drag you down below,  
flaunt the cinnamon springs  
of heaven's final blow,  
show you what you're missing.

The gates, shut forever  
whether you're young or old,  
smirk at you as you're pulled  
further into the fold.

### The Red Rose

The plants here are so miserable  
in this sunless seafront flower shop.  
You can't grow confident about profit  
when your custom can't be counted on,  
tourists passing its tinted windows one day  
and magicked away the very next,  
the ghosts of teenagers guffawing about plant sex.

Lent blackens the perfunctory pages of my ledger;  
St. Valentine is long dead and there's a change in the weather,  
the leftovers of lost loves wilting to a fine leather.  
I resort to make wine out of some red rose petals,  
drink away the night as my letter box fills.  
There's always a love overspill, less couples down here every  
year,  
but I don't know what to with it – let it run free, stab its feeble  
heart with a spear?  
It'll die soon anyway but these flowers aren't free –  
my life has a price and the red always rises as easter kills me.

## Barren Days

These days, possibly  
I could stay awake all night  
without lids open  
without an outgrown mass for affection  
staring into the raw rims of oval mouth- night shifters, as I say

A thing might be done during the afternoons  
but generally nothing much happens in my house  
all yellow- mahogany ruptured landscape  
with tainted smiles to watch  
monotony of colours, pigments and textures.  
I have frowned faces all over  
for spilled, spoiled milk (whatever you say)  
A woman dragging her shadow in circles  
counting till 50 backwards to go off to sanity,  
nothing to stop her,  
often, she skips if not running.

I can smell the salt all day.  
Through the hanging stale night lamps,  
a toothpaste now old and rustic  
with beds cracking,  
days so pale like the birds bereft of water  
brown as your memory  
*brown table, brown cinema and nothing wonderful.*

Breakfasts are small,  
*small* and wholesome.  
Pinkish fruity nectar,  
jasmine tea  
and no words.

The rose from my balcony is my muse  
a snippet from a falling sky-  
it reminds me of my field of stone,  
air and blur.  
Sunsets and smiles.

These days, possibly  
I can imagine going off to sleep

with everything inside my clumsy fist.  
Askew, I will wake and break,



Duquesne Fog

**Burning Embers**

My words are nought  
but burning embers  
They hold no sway  
Will change  
merely a microcosm  
of personal history

Every poem  
an amusement  
Mostly for myself  
Still, I hustle  
to validate  
one more bruised ego.

### Three Nil Down

The manure stench  
wafts in on the wind  
The third swish of the net  
That pre-match latte  
sloshes  
as you abandon the chase

The glamour of the game  
Unfathomably far away  
Those days  
of being the best kid  
on the school pitch  
Remain

Stand on weakened parapets  
as the fourth thwaps home  
Rub at the fresh stud marks  
branded to your inner thigh  
Played and played  
until youthful passion  
Evaporates

Trying to pass it on  
to a new generation  
All the while  
struggling to provide yourself  
any motivation

### Filling the Void

My veins are spun sugar  
Sanity bites eroding arteries  
I grow bulbous  
trying to fill the void  
three layers at a time  
Convenience over confidence  
Why don't these clothes fit?  
Tugging at my tee  
while unwrapping another sweet.



## Demigods

As religion fades to myth  
We anoint them  
as demigods  
Mistake the work  
for self-worth

Follow like disciples  
hanging onto words  
and wardrobes  
The performance of a lifetime  
Tik Tok  
Attention spans  
mean your 15 seconds  
is coming up.

### The Unopened Rose

Walking through the garden of memories, I  
smell the jasmine of youthful hope, gently  
stroke the daisies of goodwill, admire the  
beauteous lotus of hard work and cringe at  
the many weeds of suspicion. Away from  
the beauty, the delight, the chaos  
of my growing garden;  
-a wilted dead rose- so  
full of colour,  
abundance in fragrance.  
But unopened by the  
hand of time and  
captured within the  
grip of caution.

## A Garden

Searching for the truth beneath the sun  
-looking for innocence once had- now  
lost.

Calling out the name of devotion  
-blindly followed- now forsaken  
for understanding.

Looking for respect within the juicy fruits  
-always savoured- though  
not always earned.

Tracing down obedience below colourful petals  
-a companion I no longer heed. Standing  
beneath trees, I try to find the naked  
innocence of childhood  
draped in the blackness of  
disturbed age.

## Chocolate Cake

Soft.  
Moist.  
Satisfying.

My daily routine.

The wealth of the decadent icing,  
the labour put into the layered masterpiece.

An acquired craft  
- diligent workmanship-  
- a fine hand-  
- years of knowledge-  
  
all stripped away.

Really,  
I have just  
been savouring  
    - day after day -  
mundane  
sponge.