

VOLUME ONE

MARCH 2013

if & when

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DESIGNER
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PENCILED IN
PENCILEDIN.COM
IFWHEN.US

ISBN 978-1-939502-02-5



9 781939 502025



VOLUME ONE

March 2013

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ISBN-13:

Digital Edition: 978-1-939502-02-5



Penciled In

penciledin.com

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Definitions for words

THIS MAGAZINE BELONGS TO:



Editor-in-Chief Victoria Billings



Designer Benjamin Daniel Lawless



Dear Reader,

I can only start this letter by saying THANK YOU for picking up the inaugural issue of *if&when*. This magazine started as a thought tossed back and forth between friends, then bloomed into a full-grown idea before becoming the volume you see before you now.

Benjamin Daniel Lawless, my friend and *if&when*'s incredible designer, and I created this journal with the intention of showcasing some of the best modern writing available, and in turn inspiring writers dedicated to the world of literature. It is with this in mind that we designed *if&when* as a literary journal journal, with quality pieces and blank space and prompts to get readers writing, too. Throughout *if&when* you may notice some lonely sentences. These "literary lines" are yours to adopt, if you wish, for your own inspiration, poem or story.

Please, use the pages of *if&when* as your own personal writing journal and revel in literature.

Don't just read it; react.

— Victoria, Editor-in-Chief

This Poem is About This Poem

It's not about clouds in their drift
impaled on the lyric of a captured language.

It's not about the damned; it might be about
the measures they take to their margins.

How they endure their windowless walls.
How the widow wanders the width of her bed.

Don't you see, it isn't about me
or even how the wind holds back the sea

from its vocabulary, but how to bind these
into their boundaries, as in artifice,

the capsizing threat, the art of containment.

Stirrings

There is seismic energy in the air between us. You have a girlfriend now, I remind myself. That is the grounding factor. When you were younger, you would've been reckless, you say. I don't want a part in that kind of problem. Oh, but I would. I want to fuck you wild. Like we used to. You still have emotional currents that run through your veins for me. You told me. I did not invent it.

We meet for creative sessions. We share and give feedback on one another's work in the space of your apartment, where the cells of my creativity were rearranged. Where I learned about the power of performance. Where months ago I traced your scars in the thin light that came through the slats in your blinds. When we wrote invisible words with fingertips on each other's sweaty backs and tried to guess what they said. Things like ocean and beauty and truth.

We went our separate ways not because of argument or loss of interest, but because of age gap and timing.

We decided to keep these creative meetings going.

The third minor earthquake in the last month struck Los Angeles last night, struck your sleep, my sleep, the sleep of the spider in my windowsill. Punctured dreams. It felt like a

truck barreling down the alley, clunky and rattling the metal side of the garage that is my room. The quake before that felt like an animal scurrying across the flat roof, a shudder through the structure. Experts say be prepared, a big one's coming. How to prepare for falling objects and crumbling concrete?

The result of a sudden release of energy in the earth's crust causes seismic waves.

There is energy here. Do you feel it? Yes, you say. Yes, there definitely is. It swells between us on your couch. Stirrings move under the night sky, constellations of sexual tension. You would've been reckless back in the day. Time slips by while you stay in something that's not in love. I want to shake you by the shoulders and then I want to turn you inside out in nakedness.

The sides of a fault move past each other smoothly and a-seismically only if there are no irregularities or asperities along the fault surface that increase the frictional resistance.

You say your relationship is up and down. You say this with a shrug. Sure relationships are, I say. But at the core, are you in love? Not *in* love, you say. Did you fall in love at some point? Your face is blank. Early on, did you? No is your answer. There is a degree of safety in non-seismic energy.

Aftershocks are formed as the crust around the displaced fault plane adjusts to the effects of the main shock.

Something is seeking to settle. The earth is telling us. A plane circling to land, a bird's claws stretching towards a steady branch in the wind. There will probably always be this energy, you say. Yes, I think, though I do not say it. I want these words kept safe in your mouth.

Continued relative motion between the plates leads to increased stress and stored strain energy in the volume around the fault surface.

When we are in the same room, chemicals assert themselves. I trace your outline with my knowledge of this is how it is. We can't meet anymore, I say. We can meet at a café, you say. A café is non-risky territory, is what you mean. You're beautiful, you say. Normally I would say thank you, but tonight, beautiful is not enough.

I hope you are happy, I say. Somewhere in that brief smile of yours, I think that perhaps you are settled with something mild, quake- less.

We say goodbye.

The energy released in an earthquake is proportional to the area of the fault that ruptures. The longer the length and the wider the width of the faulted area, the larger the resulting magnitude.

Plates shift without warning. From the shift, something tangible erects. The settling of aftershocks. Tiny mountains of meaning are being made.

Passion

Begins as deep-sea fishing
—line-baiting desire to lift
some mysterious Other
from the rolling darkness,
to consume its flesh,
be transformed,
transported beyond
caution's rocking boat.

Resisting, the quarry
pulls the fisherman down
with strong craving
to taste a creature of light.
If neither releases the line,
an ecstatic oscillation
of depths, surfaces, horizons
—stops time.

Too soon, only bones.

Bau See Moon

Leslie and I snore lightly
in the back seat of the '39 Dodge.
We know not whether we are flying
or dreaming or just tired.
Ma pays no attention, her eyes focused
on the bright lights of *Ai Fow*.
Bah Bah drives us home toward Oakland
after a grand day of eating *cha ngow*
and drinking *po-nay cha*.
Ah Chenk, Ma's bachelor brother-in-law,
dapper in his three-piece suit,
treated us to dinner of prime rib
and mashed potatoes, upstairs from his
Mon Hop Laundry on Bush Street.
Leslie's and my bellies' growling
halted by a sumptuous feast.

Suddenly Bah Bah cries out,
never taking his eye off the road,
"Hai gah ngoot koi bau see?"
See the moon, so conceited?
Hai ock geen mah? See it?
his voice booming in our tender ears.
We rise, snub our noses against the window
beyond the arc of the silver bridge
and spy the moon glowing in the midnight sky.

Free words

These words, chosen because they were uncommon, obsolete or unusual, are for use in your writing.

We've included definitions on page 80.

Don't feel you need to adhere to them.

There are other lists of free words sprinkled throughout the magazine.

Nouns:

Accismus

Drazel

Mumpsimus

Sceivity

Umtagat

Verbs:

Crepitate

Honeyfugle

Pandiculate

Adjectives:

Boeotian

Kemspeckle

Oltrepreu

Sprachgefühl

Yaply



FAMILY CRISIS

They've become a sort of pasta in my memory. But in
this place, under ceilings with dark thoughts all their own,
my family fades into a remembered file, whose flavor
continues to give comfort
despite the tight shoes they wore and the concrete slabs
their home stood on.

Humor belongs in tragedy as salt belongs in hot chocolate.
Put lemon juice on grilled fish: it brings out the flavor. So what
can we do about the ritual we missed, now that our old house
is someone else's Big Idea, and the calendar's a wall of bricks?

All My Children

The clock struck one; James stood, sighed profoundly and looked around the playground. *She might be the one*, he thought, when he spotted a tiny girl in the pink snowsuit. *See you next time*, he whispered to himself. He smiled at a little boy in a reindeer sweater. *Now that is a good looking kid. I wonder...* He studied the child carefully, until the boy's mother glared at James contemptuously and placed a protective arm around her son. *Geez lady, I'm not a perv; I'm just...*, but his thought was cut short when he glanced at his watch. He didn't want to be late.

James ambled on, thinking of all the women with whom he had come so close. Carina, for instance, had been beautiful, smart and funny, all the characteristics he hoped to pass along to his offspring. They had talked seriously about having a baby together, but when Carina announced that she expected a wedding, a mortgage and a minivan first, James felt a familiar shiver of dread. Of course he wanted to become a father, but a husband, a home owner and a provider? Well, those were different matters entirely. Carina hung on for a short time, as women are wont to do, hoping against hope that their undying love would make the leopard change its spots, but eventually she left him. James was devastated.

It was then that quirky, eccentric, free-spirited Jasmine walked into his life. James could not believe his great good fortune. Their days were spent tending her organic vegetable garden, sipping herbal tea and reading each other's auras. At night they made wild passionate love in unusual and dangerous places, the men's room at a local coffee house, on burlap bags of popcorn kernels in the storeroom of a neighborhood theatre, in photo booths while the camera clicked away, documenting their ardor in strip after glossy strip. But when it came to parenthood, their notions differed dramatically. Jasmine strongly believed that parenting was a responsibility to be shared equally by father and mother, the dirty diapers, the childhood tantrums, the adolescent rants. James, however, saw parenthood as a periodic play date in the park, a new school photo every year for his wallet and an occasional celebratory bash for birthdays, graduations and holidays. Such a dilemma. What was he to do? James wanted to be a father, but . . . Then one day while surfing the Web, a pop-up popped up, and with the click of a mouse, James' world was forever changed.

His reverie evaporated when he realized he had reached his destination. He stepped through the heavy glass doors and into an immaculate white office. "On time, as usual," smiled the pretty nurse at the reception desk as she handed James the cup. And while he abhorred the idea of having sex with a plastic receptacle, James, for the greater good, had willingly sacrificed himself again and again and again over the years.

SUSAN TUTTLE

The world stopped
when Goren laughed,



so he didn't do it
very often.

Altar with Club Soda,
Bag of Peanuts and
Air Brushed Lupines
on the Cover of
“In Flight” Magazine

After R.F.


When the world tumbles under you,
it's hard not to tremble, not to

call out wild hallelujahs to the others, closed
into their kitten selves, all their ghosts

and skeletons safely buckled in, their trays
in the upright, locked position, eyes glazed

over with re-circulated oblivion.

Stunned by the toy Nirvana below, it's hard not to run



talking in tongues, up and down the aisles
a shell shocked witness, giddy with the miles

that separate you from murders and mergers below
from the tiny mountains capped with snow. So

easy to miss the passing glimpse, lupine's ghost
print, shadow of a wing, the miracles unclaimed, like lost

baggage, spinning on a carousel for days. Bored, they
turn to crossword puzzles, to four letter words for blasé.

The Kill

It was a cold night. The wind blew hard. Bits of scrap and dirt flew around me. I was sitting in a dead bush, its branches sticking me everywhere I wasn't padded. This was a simple job, a job I volunteered for. A quick shot to the head using the rifle that had been passed on to me from my father. He had told me it would be the tool that kept me alive. He never knew how right he was.

I kept the rifle as clean as I could but my oil had run dry three days ago. This kill would pay for what I needed. Water. Food. Most important, the bullets I would need for the next job. I pulled back the bolt as quiet as I could and loaded one of the three bullets I had left.

I had taken my time creeping into this bush. I hadn't noticed the thorns, but the caravan had lights, and they were pointed outward. I couldn't risk the comfort of moving. The lights were enough to deter the thieves and raiders in the wasteland. They knew if you had lights, then you had electricity. If you could afford electricity, well, then you could afford guns. Guns were the apotheosis of commodity; but they were scarce. It was easier to use a piece of sharpened scrap metal, or a large rock to hunt for food, defend yourself or kill your neighbor.

I heard a coyote in the distance, a long mournful howl. The sound reminded me of my lost child. In the valley below me beyond the caravan, I could see the dead forest. Trees blackened from some fire they were taking their time recovering from. The animals in this world were as desperate as us. If lucky, they would live and die in their dead forest, away from the sins of man.

The night sky was starting to brighten. Was it morning already? I watched the shadows of the dead forest grow over themselves, and it became darker, a contrast to the dirt reflected sun. The caravan started to make noise. The morning fire was started. A cooking smell reached my nose. At first I thought of bodies. Then rabbit. My mouth watered the little bit it could. I couldn't afford to let it bother me.

I tracked the target to the largest tent. My vantage point was maybe 100 yards away and 20 feet up a hill; through my scope, I could see the tattered flap that served as a door. People walked by. Large people. Armed people. The trick wasn't killing the target. The trick was not getting caught. He would emerge, I would fire, and then I had to get my ass out of this damned thorny bush. I knew the caravan was moving north, so, perhaps I could burrow myself south a ways. Just enough to see them pack up, and- fingers crossed -see them move on.

The man I was after wasn't the leader of the caravan, but he could afford the electric lights and he could afford the hired guns. His sins would catch up to him. Through the scope I stood vigil. The tattered flap stayed closed.

The sun dimmed and I risked a look up at the sky. The sky was a harsh red. Dusty brown clouds were circling. Rain? No, not this season. Mother Nature had given up, she was

STEVEN E. DOMINGUES II

trying to get rid of us all. It had happened before, and it'll happen again. We're just too stupid, or maybe stubborn, to understand.

The wind started to pick up. I adjusted my rifle, and settled down again. The sun had risen behind me; it would help shield me from the inevitable bullets. I hoped I had stacked the deck enough in my favor.

Through my scope the tent shivered. Someone had woken up. Perhaps the roasting rabbit had awoken him too. I settled into my killers pose. My finger was a feather on the trigger. My eyes were open. The wind howled, then died. I risked re-adjusting the rifle.

The flap opened and I thought about the atrocities this man had committed, the burned bodies of women and children fresh in my mind. As I grieved my wife and child, I wondered if my loss had given someone else the will to survive in this world. I forgave this man for his actions, knowing the world we lived in never could.

"Rest in Peace." I whispered and pulled the trigger.

Green Parrots



My stepdaughter lives near the green
parrots' roost
high in the eucalyptus.

We crane our necks to catch a glimpse.
Never see, hear them.

She said they flew the coop to join a flock.
Illusion of family.

My stepdaughter weaves on a loom.

Reminds me:
when my hair was waist
long friends braided me into a
macramé wall hanging.

I didn't belong there.

That doesn't mean green parrots don't exist.

On our trajectory North
her father and I searched out the aurora
borealis, never saw it.

Eskimos called the light
"Demon searching out lost souls."

What do cows do
when it rains?

They sing in the shower.

If You're Going To San Francisco

I remember the CBS Evening News
with Walter Cronkite

Tuscaloosa 1963
Governor George Wallace blocked the doorway
to the University of Alabama
"Segregation now, tomorrow and forever"

President Kennedy federalized
the Alabama National Guard

"If I were president" my father growled
"I'd ship 'em all back to Africa
That Martin Luther King
just a communist
always stirring up the Negroes"

"Are you prejudiced?" I asked

"Of course not
What the hell's wrong with you?
I'm not prejudiced at all
How dare you ask such a thing?"
His face curved into purple-pink snake coils

"And make sure you register
for the draft God damn it

No son of mine is gonna be
a protester, a draft dodger
No son of mine is gonna run away to Canada”

Today
while walking knee deep in the surf
the tide turned
and the sand started slipping
toward the Age of Aquarius
and that old song came flooding back
If you're going to San Francisco
be sure to wear some flowers in your hair

And I'm 18 once again
the long reach of the sea
lifting me out of Michigan
Pulled by the moon
I cross Wisconsin
riding the wind through
wheat fields of Wyoming
skimming the thin crust of Yellowstone
over the Rockies
over the deep-turquoise of Lake Tahoe
down the western Sierra Nevada
down into San Francisco
further and further from my father

Even back then
I was already gone

N I G H T

His fingers brush across
the keyboard
like sliding glissandos,
a twenty-first-century sonata
in plastic,
the music of today
cubiced
into isolated echoes;
staccato accents tapped with vigor
against arrhythmic tempi
of printer
phone line
disk drive
fluorescent lighting;
the muted cacophony
of daily life.

I listen to his fingers,
so square and strong,
a gentleness belied
by the sportsman's body,



MUSIC

listen to those fingers move
 amidst the figures and totals,
the reports and programs,
and I wonder how his fingers
 would move
in the darkness,
away from printer and
 phone line and disk drive,

Move in the private places of starlight,
 brush across
a human keyboard
 breathing syncopated rhythms
into the silence

of life.

What would it sound like,
his music of the night?

Johnnie Ray

Initially it was his voice: sounding basically black, especially when he drifted into Rhythm & Blues territory: like his remarkable originals (*Whiskey & Gin* & his b-side ballad *Tell The Lady I Said Goodbye*) first performed at Eddie Condon's *Flame Club*, in Detroit in 1950. In point of fact a soundie exists of one of him at the piano doing *Tell The Lady*: singing the line *Tell the La-hayhay hay-d I sahe-heh-heh-he-d goo-hoo-d by-ay* & fundamentally predating all those current *American Idol*, *Star Search* psuedo soul-singers stretching a 2-syllable word into 9-syllables. He initiated that sound.

He recorded both on the *Okeh* label (a subsidiary of *Columbia Records*) which made most uninformed listeners believe he was black: a *Negro* entertainer marketing another *race record*.

This was followed by his 2-sided hit *Cry* & his original tune *The Little White Cloud That Cried* both of which became the 1st double-sided hit in recorded music history, which immediately placed him in the lexicon of *White* American contemporary pop music.

His voice was sort of an even split between Nellie Lutcher & Little Jimmy Scott; or possibly Edith Piaf & Frankie Lane: a crazy sound, but strangely infectious to junior-high-schoolers. A large part of his appeal was his histrionic performances.

One bit, I remember, in filmed nightclub appearance, when he was so thoroughly agonizing the lyrics to (just as an example) *Here Am I Broken-Hearted*.

We would see him, during the course of performing the song, literally throw himself on the stage floor, jump on people's dinner tables, begin tearing at his outer clothing in an emotional mock strip, shuddering & weeping & wailing.

In effect, he was throwing a commercial tantrum.

A then-teenaged movie star Margaret O'Brien was typical of girls who couldn't get enough of him, playing his 78 shellac & 45 singles on their 3-speed 1950s record changers. Female-fans, during that time, just went absolutely banana cream pie over a singer in a sharkskin suit, a Fed-Mart tie & a hearing-aid. Not really exemplary of your all-time singing star image at all. I think he appealed to schoolgirls mainly because, with his high-pitched whine & tantrum-like behavior, he sounded (most of the time) like some hysterical kid.

I dug him, because I was getting in trouble by objecting to parental control, becoming obstreperous, sometimes, resorting to a high-pitched objection & privately doing what he was doing in public. I'd get locked in a broom closet & Johnnie Ray was getting a paycheck. It just wasn't fair!

You have to remember, too, that all this was pre-Elvis. In a weird way Johnnie Ray paved the road so Presley had a less bumpy ride to recording stardom.

He was the definitive link between Sinatra & Elvis.

Yet, as an irony, the memory of Johnnie Ray hardly lives on.

Free words

These words, chosen because they were uncommon, obsolete or unusual, are for use in your writing.

We've included definitions on page 80.

Don't feel you need to adhere to them.

Nouns:

Currwhibble

Mogigraph

Paddereen

Tawpie

Verbs:

Calamistrate

Freck

Naufrogate

Adjectives:

Blesiloquent

Icterical

Marcesible

Selcouth

Temulent

Comfort

In an era when schools have given up
on dress codes, my granddaughter's
choices don't get a rise out of me.
On a rainy morning she can ask me

if her holey shorts and black lace tights
go with her boots and striped shirt and
I say, Yeah, as long as you're warm enough.
She came home saying it was a cold day.

I breathe slowly too as we lurch into first
in our stick-shift, two weeks into her
learner's permit. She's only driven over
my narcissus. I ponder, Is this a metaphor?

She asks, Will I ever be a good driver?
I say, Sure. Think of your cousin Natalie
who drove through the garage and into
the kitchen. Now she drives a fire truck.

Five-and-a-half months remain in this poignant
rite of passage that in the '50s was a school class.
Oh, the dual-control '58 Ford and Mr. Starr
on the freeways of the San Fernando Valley . . .

Which recalls the vice-principal making
a girl kneel to check if her skirt met the floor.
And no matter how tired we were, Miss Kirby
said, Ladies don't lie on the lawn during lunch.

Ladies also didn't wear pants into town. One
Saturday I wore mine to Thrifty's in Van Nuys.
How many skirts did I re-hem as styles rose;
how many decades did I hobble in heels?

Am I looking back only two generations
of human history? I try to keep abreast
of texting and global struggles.
Is it age making me uncomfortable

for the fracking future?

Downtown, You Gave Your Best To Us

Downtown L.A.,

In 1980 you were derelict, run down

Even before crack.

We filled your dilapidated vacant warehouses
with art studios

Where young rebels studied and broke rules

With jerriged water and electricity pirated from the grid.

Following eclectic forms

Reconstructed from myths still hanging in the air of

The semiarid Nahuatl plain that preceded
even Kwang-ya and the old Native,
Spanish and African Pueblo.

Where now children of millionaires
walk the wino/crackhead streets
past the lofts where we partied and
worked,

stepping alike over Indian ghosts and
dying homeless rejects

from post-Reagan genetic and
social engineering
to buy art.



How To Bury Your Dog

It was my mother who told me about the Munsons, who lived in a two-story place in a cul-de-sac. On the phone, Mrs. Munson said that she preferred to do business through text messaging before hanging up on me, so I shot her a text and they hired me to watch their dog while they took their annual Easter vacation in Cabo. Which was cool, I mean, it's not like I couldn't use the money or anything. I still couldn't work in the diner because I had broken my arm. Couldn't tie an apron, couldn't hold a spatula, couldn't dice an onion. You get the idea.

The Munsons left me a hundred-dollar bill in a basket of leftover Peeps by the door. She said it was "in case of an emergency," as if a dog could actually get into one. I mean honestly, what's the worst that could happen?

Mrs. Patricia Munson ("Call me Trixie ☺") invited me to help myself to the candies and anything else I could find. She showed me where her private stash of pot could be found: several neatly-rolled joints packed discreetly inside a box of Tampax under 'her' sink.

From there she led me into the bedroom (a nice touch) to meet Spaniel. You can guess his breed.

“Spaniel has some pedigree,” she said, with a look in her eyes that could get an elected official impeached. “I’ll make the extra work worth your while. And don’t worry. I’ll see to the tip *personally*.” She even winked when she said it, for Christ’s sake.

Mr. Munson announced from the kitchen that he was ready to go. I helped Trixie pack the last of their luggage, and then they left me with the dog and the money so they could bask in the sun on a beach near the equator with shiny open bars and other colorful forms of tourism. I texted Trixie saying that Spaniel and I would get along great, wink face.

I looked down at Spaniel. “Won’t we, boy!”

He barked on cue, having been trained for good conversation.

The job is pretty simple: thaw Meaty Treats (salmon flavor) over night in the fridge, and heat for twenty-five seconds in the microwave, serve after cooling for one minute, 9:30AM; Noon – take Spaniel for his five-mile walk (turn around when I get to the subway); 8:00PM – heat Meaty Treats (filet mignon flavor) for dinner and fry up one slice of bacon, for dessert; bathe him at the end of the week. Each

night when I leave I am to lock up and turn everything off except for the radio, so that it sounds like they're home when they're really not. Protection against burglary. Easy money, really.

The first two days were fine. It's like I said. How hard could it possibly be? The dog lived like a king, so it basically just slept in the sun all day. The job was almost done for me. I kept myself entertained by tossing Peeps in front of Spaniel's face every couple of hours. He'd slide his tubby body across the floor and lick the sugar chicklets right up. It was pretty hilarious and we got along swimmingly following this routine for the first two days. But on the third day I found Spaniel deader than a Baptist wedding on the living room floor.

Well shit, I had never dealt with this sort of thing before. So I call up the mister (Trixie, being a rich white bitch, would probably have no idea what to do). I tell him how dead his dog is and he's like a veteran about it, all, "Yes, this is very sad news. Truth be told, we were expecting him to pass soon. We should have mentioned his ... condition."

Indeed. So it turns out that Spaniel was a diabetic, and Trixie just couldn't help but spoil him rotten. And there was the bacon, and, I guess, the Peeps couldn't have helped the situation. Anyway, her stupid problem became mine, and all I wanted to know is what I should do about it.

The mister said to bring it to the pound in a black bag, which I could find under the sink next to the Epsom salts. I let him know that the garbage bags sure were there, and that I'd handle the thing with the pound expediently. He thanked me kindly, offering extra compensation for my troubles. I thought about Trixie and said that it would be much appreciated.

Getting Spaniel into a black bag was no problem. The problem was that the bag was shaped like a dead dog, and I was not about to board any form of public transit with it. So I stuffed it in my oversized backpack and walked with Spaniel to the subway for the last time.

The subway was packed thanks to the lunch rush, but I was lucky enough to score a seat right by the door next to a guy with a build like he played football in high school.

He had a humongous bag that took up all the floor space, and since you're not supposed to leave shit in the aisle, the overhead compartment was my only option. But my goddamned arm was broken and that dog was fat as shit, so I showed the footballer my cast and he caught my drift, standing to help me lift the bag into the overhead.

"Jesus," he said. "What have you got in there? Bricks?"

I laughed and said, "Good one." But he just couldn't let sleeping dogs lie.

He asked me again, "C'mon. What'cha got?"

"I don't know, some old gym clothes. And some ... rocks? To run with?"

He said that it must have been pretty tough to work out with only one arm, and I said yes, it was.

We make small talk about where we're going and why. He's going to his office building to meet a big-time executive and everything. Wow, I thought, a real businessman. I told him how super impressed I was. He thanked me graciously and congratulated me on winning the Baltimore Animal Service Award, which I told him I was on my way to the city pound to accept. He seemed impressed, like, super impressed.

We reached my stop, eight blocks from the pound. I asked if he would kindly take my bag down for me, and he reached up with a smug little grin that you only develop after years of strenuous penting-up of aggression. I was thinking about what I would do when I got to the pound, what I would say, how to explain the backpack, the faces they would make, when suddenly, that fucking footballer punched me right in the stomach and ran off with my backpack.

I was so shocked that it took me a minute to come to terms with what had just happened, and by the time I recovered he'd already hopped a subway in the opposite direction. I burst into laughter, all the way back to the Munson's, where a one-hundred dollar emergency fund awaited my arrival. I texted Trixie saying that everything had taken care of itself, and that I couldn't wait to get the tip from her when she got home. Wink face.



She stows away inside me,
waves at the mirror
and makes faces till I laugh.

She watches for shadows to tag
and says, Don't step on cracks,

She steers me to toy stores—
pushes every press me button
and begs for a scooter.

In supermarkets she fingers Twinkies,
and to move her past candy at checkout,
I let her slide my charge card, press tabs,
and scribble my name.

She wonders why people don't sing
and skip down the street. She wonders
about their stowaways, and wants
to call them on deck to play.

At home, I invite her topside—
we hopscotch down the hall.

Photo is part of the "approaching third equinox" triptych
by woodleywonderworks

She was like
bad water
in a good river.

In Defense of Characters Who Quote

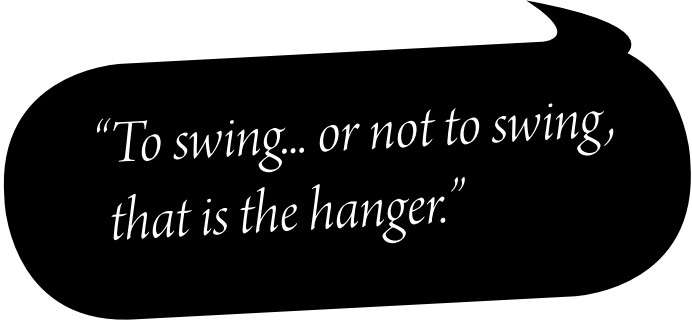
Personally, I know people
who go to Ashland, for chrissakes,
every year, camp out and
wallow in metaphor a whole week.

Shoot, my old boss
spent one whole semester
with a wild semanticist at Whittier
reading Hamlet—nothing but.

He wrote a paper from Yorick's
point of view
(Yorick, in case you haven't gone
to Ashland, is a skull
Hamlet knew well.)

Hell, guys lifting weights
at the Sporting House
argue about Portia and
women sipping Starbucks
still disdain Desdemona—

My characters do not quote
Hegel or Thomas Mann
Hemingway's grace under pressure
Faulkner or Tom Robbins—well
maybe Robbins who quotes them all
from Jesus to the Dalai Lama—
but mine are not pedants,
they know only the famous lines
such as Lord Buckley's:



*"To swing... or not to swing,
that is the hanger."*



Willy the Shake

and

“Hipsters, flipsters and
finger popping daddies,
knock me your lobes.
I have come to lay Ceasar out,
not to hip you to him.
The bad jazz a cat blows
wails long after
he’s cut out,
but the groovy—the groovy
is often stashed with his flems.
So don’t put Caesar down.”

Alas, my novel is merely a tale
told by an idiot
full of sound, wind, and fury,
signifying nothing
who had a lot of fun
showing off Shakespearean lines
along the way
because I don’t know any better lines
anywhere, nohow.

Neither do my characters,
and they go to Ashland
every year.

These Women Drug Me

How many two-for-one specials has it been
Since we saw you last, Ms. As-Of-Lately?

Now just mostly relying
On the termite-bitten balustrade that leads you

Downstairs past a couch to a door in the hallway
That is my memory. I will not tell you this heart floats
higher

Toward a light. Nor that it croons
Proper English in the car in 2AM light.

And a red light holding still.
The green one letting go.

That faded yellow like a tossed coin of beery decision.
I am being swallowed by that

Mouth which is abatement opening wide into speed. My
memory as useless as guts
Without a body. Supine on the butcher's board

I only see you in the reflection of the knife.
And after life exits

Still meat drinks from the puddle of its situation
And death soaks in over time.

Watching from the edge of the blade
Another dive approaching--Harry's, Teddy's, Johnny's—

Hurling around first names like so many neon stops
Before the engine kaputs.

“Let me tell ya,” I’m telling the woman’s legs beside me
Whose occasional face holds no face tomorrow.

“There’s no buzz like the one you’re carrying.”
“And has anyone toldya,” he says to the eyes drawn in dark lines,

“I think your sugar’s somethin’ worth tryin’.”

As the room says upon entering the mirror:

“I’m just a secret compartment
That isn’t there.”

And black looks around in its color:
“Where’d I put it again?”

“On that cocktail napkin?
All those directions

To ain’t nobody’s
Home.”

Fill in the blanks! The real poem is on the next page.
If you like, please send your completed re-made poem to
editorinchief@ifwhen.us

Church NOUN

At twelve I decided to VERB _____ publicly
that my NOUN _____ had been forgiven, so I VERB _____
down the NOUN _____ of the echoey NOUN _____
in front of God and all those PLURAL NOUN _____
and let my NOUN _____ get completely ADJECTIVE _____ and stood there
looking ADJECTIVE _____. In the name
of the Father, the NOUN _____ and the Holy NOUN _____, I VERB _____ thee
YOUR NAME _____ so that everyone
might VERB _____ at thee when it's over
and see thy ADJECTIVE _____ hair. My best friend NAME _____
VERB _____ this with me. But I knew, even ADJECTIVE _____,
she would VERB _____ ADJECTIVE _____. She had
ADJECTIVE _____ hair and ADJECTIVE _____ fingers than mine. Boys
would VERB _____ us late at night on NOUN _____,
after the NOUN _____, and VERB _____

right at her. She'd VERB away—
 as if the NOUN were somehow ADJECTIVE;
 I'd VERB right at them: their NOUN, their NOUN, their
ADJECTIVE feet, their thick NOUN jerking around for her.
 They'd VERB with their eyes—around my PLURAL NOUN
 then up through the NOUN—ask us to follow them
 back into the ADJECTIVE PLURAL NOUN
 of the ADJECTIVE building. We'd VERB
 in the dark, feeling along the ADJECTIVE PLURAL NOUN,
 and one or all of them would VERB
 and VERB the bats into a startled ADJECTIVE
 of wings. We would VERB then too,
 at the thought of PLURAL NOUN caught and VERB
 in our hair. And we'd VERB. Out and away from the NOUN,
 back toward the NOUN of the room
 where the answers to the PLURAL NOUN we weren't VERB
 stood perfectly ADJECTIVE in the floating ADJECTIVE air,
 our feet VERB us NOUN,
 hungry for something as ADJECTIVE
 as the NOUN to be ADJECTIVE.

Church Girl

At twelve I decided to declare publicly
that my sins had been forgiven, so I sloshed
down the steps of the echoey baptismal
in front of God and all those boys
and let my hair get completely wet and stood there
looking drowned. In the name
of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, I baptize thee
Ginger Lynn Adcock so that everyone
might stare at thee when it's over
and see thy flat hair. My best friend Shawna
did this with me. But I knew, even wet,
she would look pretty. She had slick
blonde hair and readier fingers than mine. Boys
would approach us late at night on Wednesdays,
after the Missionary Meeting, and look
right at her. She'd look away—
as if the grass were somehow interesting;
I'd look right at them: their arms, their chests, their
splayed feet, their thick eyebrows jerking around for her.

They'd take me in with their eyes—around my edges
then up through the middle—ask us to follow them
back into the darkened passageways
of the Sunday School building. We'd sneak
in the dark, feeling along the stuccoed walls,
and one or all of them would scream
and send the bats into a startled thudding flutter
of wings. We would scream then too,
at the thought of bats caught and flapping
in our hair. And we'd run. Out and away from the dark,
back toward the glow of the room
where the answers to the questions we weren't asking
stood perfectly still in the floating July air,
our feet churning us forward,
hungry for something as real
as the chance to be afraid.



Why Do I Think Men Won't Come Back

Why do I think
that men won't
come back when
they say they will
where does the
betrayal start and
who's was it?

How do I recognize
that mourning
bell the taste of
blood in my throat
the suffocating
grave stone pushing
against my chest?

Who taught me the
full meaning of
absence the sense
of irreversible
the unlimited
shape of despair
the void...

Who's designed my
first loss and why
loss stays with me
for ever and ever
why whenever you
walk out
that door I see

deserts
surrounding me
the cold breath of
silence
the no land
of no
love.

View from the Corner Office

First we grew outwards, carving concrete
rivers into canopies of white oak. We used to think
we've only been killing each other since we left
the trees, but are never surprised when fossils
are excavated.

Next we started growing upwards, with gravity
presiding over the whole charade, as if my body
and a falling leaf could hit the ground at the exact
same time.

All my life I've only wanted to be pure potential, a fossil fuel
bubbling under the bedrock. The sun sets
through the great coin-slot in the sky as
another day dawns on another great American
team player jumping one more step up the ladder.

Today a group of interns discovered the star
they've been wishing on has been dead for thousands of years.
I am carving my name and dates into an oaken
composite desk.

We were not made like trees to stand tall,
but to be sucked to the center of the Earth.
There will be no safety net, the velocity
terminal, and when the world finally absorbs my impact
I won't be able to fall any closer.

Free words

These words, chosen because they were uncommon, obsolete or unusual, are for use in your writing. We've included definitions on page 80. Don't feel you need to adhere to them.

Nouns:

Acrasia
Gammerstang
Nudiustertian
Scibility

Verbs:

Aucupate
Fleer
Jirble
Subumber

Adjectives:

Hypethral
Leggiadrous
Palestral
Swasivious

Valentine Just In Time

Her eyes instead of rain
Her skin instead of snow

Her mouth
Instead of sunshine waves

She makes me want to inhale
Olympian lost treasures for lunch, as
Pentagon gods devour the dinners of war

I am walking through these television,
Beverly Hills, yellow, hallowed houses of
Her hair

I'm looking through her face
Instead of windows

That's right!

In a more quiet time,
In a more timeless place

I'm looking through her face
Instead of windows

Comfort

Comfort wears something soft
you saved from the goodwill bag,
with a bit of raggedy velvet at the wrist.
Comfort sings a lullaby
or the blues. Maybe she lived
in New Orleans before she came here.
Comfort turns me into a one-note crooning
Southern woman with a voice
full of rain and dirt.
Comfort is dirt. Good dirt.
Things grow here.
Comfort is rain so hard
you can't hear your thoughts.
The air blows in fresh
and rivulets happen up
all through the yard
washing everything downhill.
Comfort is seeing 5:00 a.m. on the clock
and knowing you've slept all night.
Comfort is dog fur, dog breath, dog warmth
and dog smell. How they connect you

to the Earth they never left
just when your heart is taking off on bat wings
into the darkest part of the cave.
Comfort reminds you there are
people who are saner, kinder, simpler, funnier
who love you and who still come around.
Comfort is reading Rumi and Hafiz,
the old Avila Hotsprings
soaking out weary joints since 1907.
Comfort is Monday coffees by the beach,
and dolphin sightings. Comfort is
breathing together
and seeing your face
again and again, my friend. By my door
is a cloakroom for anger and grief,
lost moral compasses,
errors in judgment,
confusion and things that went wrong.
Leave them all there, take your check.
You can have them all back if you want.
If you think there's some things
worth taking home.
See, I have laid us a carpet
of poppies and mountain sage.
If you are chilled with unkindness
there is a quilt here for your knees.
Comfort is brewing something good.
Shall we see what compassion
has hidden in the pantry?
Please, my friend, come on in.

The Cad

Running to catch the bus, she pulled herself through the open door at the last moment. All but the heel of her boot was aboard. The door hissed open just long enough for her to retrieve it. “Shit,” she sputtered, as she inspected the marred leather. The driver gave her a disapproving shake of his head, and Christine slunk to the back of the bus.

She was about to take a seat when she glimpsed a handsome Wall Street executive type, his navy gabardine suit clearly not off the rack, his shirt so white it fairly glowed, his tie knotted in the perfect Windsor. Christine was rooted to the spot. This was the type of man she had always dreamed about, the type who would slip an imposing yet tasteful engagement ring on her finger, the type who would not be ashamed to let tears of joy roll freely down his cheeks as he watched her walk toward him down the aisle. This was a man who would whisk her away to a tropical honeymoon where a staff of silent, almost invisible, servants would prepare gourmet meals, draw perfectly tempered baths and turn down Egyptian cotton sheets as soft and comforting as the azure skies above.

They would host legendary dinner parties at their suburban manor, after which, he would insist she sit and

rest, sip a glass of expensive port, while he tidied up. Their lush sweeping lawns would be the perfect backdrop for magnificent garden parties, invitations to which would be highly coveted by friends and neighbors alike. Architectural Digest would often feature their home in its pages, particularly during the holidays, because no one could deck a hall quite like Christine.

And there would be children, of course, a boy and a girl, favorites of their kindergarten and preschool teachers, models of perfection to which the other soccer moms would compare their own, somewhat lacking, offspring. In high school, he would be captain of the varsity football team, she, head cheerleader of the pep squad. The generous scholarships they earned to prestigious universities would be donated to the less fortunate because, heaven knows, they had no need of them.

But what would happen when the children finally left home? Christine would be middle aged, unable to keep the crow's feet and cellulite at bay no matter how much she oiled and creamed and loofahed. What would she and her husband say to one another at the dinner table night after night, without their daughter's girlish giggles or their son's boisterous banter? Christine would sink into depression and her husband would become bored with her. Eventually, he would leave her for his secretary, hire the best divorce attorney money could buy and Christine would find herself alone and penniless after giving him the best years of her life.

At her stop, Christine stumbled to the door of the bus. But before she exited, she fixed the hapless man with her tear-reddened eyes. "You bastard," she shouted.

The Undivorced

Alfred J. Prufrock spoke of measuring
life out in coffee spoons. We ration
ours in thimbles and don't seem to mind.

How can passion flatten into slippers
old, worn thin and colorless, shushing along
our wooden floors, squashed silent?

But we plod on, sitting abreast in
church pews, sharing hymnals and
prayers and holy charades.

You go your way and I mine. You
fade into your office walls, and cable shows,
blogs, eBay, and coffee shops.

I lose myself in backyard bowers, take
garden tours with women twice my
age, recalling bouquets you used to give.

We used to dance on the rooftop of
the Bluezz Club, and sleep on a mattress
dragged outdoors in summer months.

You used to transport me with
touch, with songs crooned into my
ears till our eyes closed in bliss.

We used to lie entangled, legs caressing,
whispering in darkness about our day,
but who remembers all that now?

Most often, we are proverbial ships.
My nights are your days, and for years I've
slipped like stone, alone, into my side of bed.

COME WITNESS THE
DEATH-DEFYING
HIGH DIVE ANTICS OF
CHUCK & THE HORSE

Under Water

I had my ears pierced on the high dive
at the Steel Pier in Atlantic City.
Chuck took a splinter from the old
decaying board and jammed it through
one earlobe. All the while his auburn
eyes looked into mine.
Then I let him pierce the other.

Chuck saw no more than impression
and the diving bell rusted to netting
with fish entering and exiting
while Atlantic tides spun faster
than roulette balls—all the while
Ray Anthony's horn jammed the pilings.

Atlantic City is now flooded with gamblers.
The horse no longer does his death-
defying dive. Everyone remembers
the horse but they don't remember
Chuck, the horseback rider in the act.
Now he's an artist of unknown fame
with a lover who keeps her husband
submerged in Rosamond.

I take a single begonia bloom,
Aloha Chicken Salad and iced Ginseng
to a sick friend while my husband
skin dives at El Matador.
We rarely do things for each other.
I asked him to pierce my ears
and he said, "No."

Relationships
with dead people
are entirely one-sided.

Lost & Found

Closing time, the bartender checks
for items left behind (Rayban
shades...once a black runner's bra).
He gathers glasses with their dregs,

brooding, a poet, on how to describe
the beer-tang, dark-wood-smell of the place
which he knows will ripen once the sun
breathes on the louvers, wanting in.

The smell's like the ghost of an ongoing sound,
like the tang and sway of back-up singers
humming after the music's connivings
have dimmed. He feels invited now

to judge his life's improbable risks:
keys in hand he's thinking damn
at the run of his inventory of loss,
enduring a shuffle of inward snapshots:

lovers, friends, now distant or gone,
and no reprieve. The bar seems huge
and he approaching something huge
a place where there's no lost & found.

To Your Last

period which ends
three cycles past
a fiftieth birthday bash

on the heels of a chemo
drip and crash: wrapped
and ribboned gift infusion

tubed intrusion
on the eggs' slow
demise—no time to brood

bereft of fruit,
only to stifle
this deep-boned ruin

blot out the reds
give whites the boot.
Once done, you've shed

your past, your youth
in one fell swoop
though you'd not planned

to join this group
collateral
of a lymphocytic coup.

Definitions for words

Nouns:

<i>Accismus:</i>	the act of pretending not to be interested in someone
<i>Acrasia:</i>	lack of self-control
<i>Currwhibble:</i>	a thingamajig
<i>Drazel:</i>	a slut
<i>Gammerstang:</i>	a tall, awkward woman
<i>Mogigraph:</i>	writer's cramp
<i>Mumpsimus:</i>	improper use of words, often out of obstinancy or habit
<i>Nudiustertian:</i>	the day before yesterday
<i>Paddereen:</i>	rosary bead
<i>Sceivity:</i>	bad luck
<i>Scibility:</i>	the power of knowing
<i>Tawpie:</i>	foolish or idle young person
<i>Umtagat:</i>	wizard

Verbs:

<i>Aucupate:</i>	to go bird watching
<i>Calamistrate:</i>	to curl hair
<i>Crepitate:</i>	to fall with a noise on something, like rain
<i>Fleer:</i>	to laugh jeeringly
<i>Freck:</i>	to move quickly or nimbly

<i>Honeyfugle:</i>	to swindle or cheat
<i>Jirble:</i>	to spill liquid because of shaking or unsteadiness
<i>Naufragate:</i>	to wreck
<i>Pandiculate:</i>	to stretch one's body when yawning
<i>Subumber:</i>	to shelter

Adjectives:

<i>Blesiloquent:</i>	speaking with a lisp or stammer
<i>Boeotian:</i>	having a dull personality
<i>Hypethral:</i>	all or partially open to the sky, often buildings
<i>Icteric:</i>	tinged with yellow
<i>Kemspeckle:</i>	conspicuous
<i>Leggiadrous:</i>	graceful, elegant
<i>Marcesible:</i>	likely to fade or wither
<i>Oltreprou:</i>	extremely brave
<i>Palestral:</i>	pertaining to wrestling
<i>Selcouth:</i>	unfamiliar, rare, strange, marvelous, wonderful
<i>Sprachgefühl:</i>	sensitive to appropriate and correct language
<i>Swasivious:</i>	agreeably persuasive
<i>Temulent:</i>	drunken or intoxicating
<i>Yaply:</i>	very hungry