

ISSUE TWO

JUNE 2013

# *if & when*

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF  
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Definitions for unknown words

[illegible]



Editor-in-Chief Victoria Billings

Creative Lead Benjamin Daniel Lawless

at Victoria and Ben's featured poetry reading shortly after releasing the first issue, Atascadero CA, March 2013





# Dear Reader,

I move as a man running out of time.

In January, just days after we opened submissions for the first issue, my father passed away. It hit me hard. I fell asleep for a couple of months and when I awoke, somehow *if&when* issue one was complete.

My father was a bibliophile like no other, often reading two or three books a day. This is for him. The world can't afford to lose another book lover. Thank you for picking up this issue. In a way, it adds to his legacy.

Now, as I write this, my first son is about to be born. His due date is June 6<sup>th</sup>, and we're hoping to have this in your hands a few weeks after that. I've been working at a feverish pace on multiple projects (including this one) so I can focus everything on my son when he makes his debut.

I wonder if we'll ever have an "easy" issue of *if&when*. If so, I'm not sure I'd want that.

I can assure you the writing in this volume is second to none. Victoria and I are committed to producing the most visionary and honest magazine possible, and our submissions continually exceed our expectations. Many thanks to our contributors, who hail from all over the globe. Their diversity, creativity and quality astound.

We have some big plans for the fourth issue, which we'll announce along with the third issue's call for submissions. Be ready. We're not done. Not by a long shot.

— Benjamin Daniel Lawless, Creative Lead



The *great*  
*red* eye of  
the stoplight  
**peering**  
through the  
curtains

# Negative Space

Oh, God, I'm tired  
Of poets and poetry.  
and Poetic verse.  
And color.  
Please shield me from poetic  
Use of color  
Green hills.  
Green trees.  
Green days.  
Everything green.  
Oh.  
And Golden.  
Golden hills.  
Golden trees.  
Golden days.  
Golden everything that isn't green  
Or blue.  
Blue skies.  
Blue horizons.  
Dark blue blending into  
Purple.  
Purple haze.  
Blue.  
Green.  
Golden.  
And everything in-between.  
Colors.  
Everything in color.

Poor poetic saps  
Paint with color in their words.  
See our world in patterns of color.  
They don't get it.  
Our world is not made up of color.  
Our world is made up of the flip side.  
Color is a trick to keep us from seeing  
The world is made of colorless shadows.  
Terrifying.  
Horrifying.  
Flitting  
Across the revolving mass.  
From before.  
From after.  
Slipping sideways in and out  
between slices of color.  
Hiding.  
Waiting.  
Expecting us!

# Tornado Boy

A boy was lifted into the air and sucked into a tornado this afternoon. There were several surviving witnesses who attested to this tragedy. They said it was the autistic boy, Cleveland Jones, the one who attended the special class at his school, the one who was always running away.

He was a quiet kid and never said a lot. Cleveland didn't have much aptitude for school, and about the only thing that set him off was being locked or confined indoors. He spent almost all of his time at home trying to get out of it, ever since he was a baby.

Cleveland's first escape came at 6 months, when he found a way to slip out of his crib and start a fast crawl toward the doggie door. The young Houdini started climbing by age one and hardly any barrier could keep him tied to one area or another. His parents, Fred and Eunice, had to make sure windows and doors were locked at all times, with special latches that Cleveland's nimble fingers couldn't figure out.

He was a late talker and primarily just screamed and howled if a door in the house was closed or locked on him. When he finally started talking at the age of three-and-a-half, it was amazingly in almost complete sentences.

"I want out of the house," he said to his shocked parents. They took turns watching him in their yards, as Cleveland instinctively gravitated toward openings in gates and fences. To placate him, Fred would often accompany the child as he stepped out into the fields or wandered down the road, once walking a mile-and-a-half at the age of four.

“What’s down there?” Cleveland pointed to the gray horizon hovering over the tape of black road that faded into the distance.

“A whole lotta world,” Fred replied. “You’ll get to see it soon enough.”

The first time a tornado ever passed by the Jones property, Cleveland tried to climb out of the basement. He was a strong kid at six, and kicked and screamed, not at the crashing sound of the twister menacing his house, but at the horror of being held down by his panicked parents.

“What the hell’s wrong with you?” Fred demanded to know as Cleveland reached toward the cellar door with tears in his eyes.

“I don’t know,” Cleveland cried, “My head’s too fast. Too loud ...always spinning!”

“What? Are you trying to get yourself killed, boy?”

“No, I just want my head to slow down. I can’t think unless I catch up...”

No school could keep Cleveland on its grounds for long. He would duck out a rear classroom door, run down the halls, and out into the playground, like a guided missile toward the streets and surrounding neighborhood. He ran fast at first, like a sprinter, but then would slow to a jog as he grew tired. Eventually, Cleveland just walked, usually along the shoulder of a road, or down by the creek, following the snaky water to see where it went. When Cleveland Jones had gone as far as he could, he would catch up to his thoughts

and smile. He felt better and knew he could go home. He was usually hungry by then and missed his parents.

The police knew the Jones family well, as the missing person's reports they took nearly every other day began to be a statistical anomaly for their small town.

"That boy's a menace," someone said, "running off the way he does. Who knows what he's up to when he's gone?"

"Something's wrong with that kid," a woman replied, "He's autistic. He's like a Rain Man, only a boy. And Black."

On the day the big twister came through town, the one that carried Cleveland away, Mr. Perry, Fred Jones' neighbor, ran wild-eyed toward a police command post:

"Cleveland's missing!"

"We know," replied a skinny cop with a bobbing Adam's apple. "I took the report yesterday."

"NO! No, he's missing! Up in the tornado! He got carried away, up in the sky!"

"What!?" exclaimed Chief Willis. "Are you *sure*?"

"I saw it with my own eyes!" Perry said, two fingers pointed toward his peepers. "Damn thing nearly carried *me* away! It destroyed my farm, and the Jones house, too!"

The devastation was complete and sickening. Half of the town was leveled, as if a small atom bomb had wiped it off the map. The modest house Cleveland shared with his parents was smashed into pieces of wood and brick scattered across the field like the toys and clothes in Cleveland's messy room. Fred and Eunice were among the twenty-four people killed.

There was no sign of Cleveland Jones.

"To think if Fred and Eunice had stayed in Ohio they'd probably still be alive," Mr. Perry remarked later.



"I dunno why anyone would want to live in this flat, crappy place," said his wife, as she picked up pieces of their broken life from the debris. "Mother Nature killing people all the time."

A week later, Chief Willis and the rest of the survivors learned about a weary, dirty seven-year-old African-American child who was found walking aimlessly down a road near the outskirts of Dodge City, nearly 200 miles away. Was that Cleveland Jones? Was he alive? Had the tornado safely dropped him there? Comparisons with *The Wizard of Oz* were expected.

"He's like Dorothy...only a boy. And Black," a former classmate said.

Cleveland became a media sensation. The *Weekly World News* dubbed him "Tornado Boy."

Later, at a press conference, as the reporters closed in on Cleveland Jones, cameras flashing and microphones pointing, he knew he would be unable to hear any of what they had to say, let alone be able to answer them. His thoughts were running faster than ever. Cleveland fidgeted in his chair behind that big table. As the adults began to speak, Cleveland's eyes found the opening, saw the door, and knew that on the other side was a whole lotta world with plenty of room to catch up to his head.

# New Muse

## 1

Dear Mnemosyne, the black cloud rising from that hole in Iceland has reached Greece. Your concerns: registered. What are you doing down there, under Hades, visiting your brothers? Get back to Siberia. I know I've been inattentive, but the mortal world is in bad shape and requires constant intervention.

You've been driven to distraction by all your correspondents who send emails with pictorial attachments? Such people are on my case, too. Painters since Apelles have been petitioning us to create another muse, and the damned photographers are even more demanding. Why stop at nine? Ten would make a complete set.

It will soon be two centuries since we were first pestered by Talbot, and then Daguerre, about their silvery ghosts. And now there is cinema and television to consider. Let's meet at that little motel by the River Styx, remember? Another fling for old time's sake. Hera's off shopping in Paris; I can get away for a weekend. Fondly, Zeus

## 2

Dear Zeus, I was afraid you had been flirting with oblivion  
in cousin Lethe's bed and had forgotten me. I suppose you  
expect me to say "your wish is my command" and just roll  
over, as it were. Even though visual artists are clamoring  
for a muse, you've ignored me for millennia, and I'd like  
something more seductive than your businesslike message.  
I'll meet you on one condition. The child must be male.  
There are women artists these days, and they deserve a youth  
to deliver their inspiration, a Ganymede to bring their drinks.  
We'll call him Oculus. Like the opening left for light, air,  
and a view of heaven in a great dome, he'll personify the art  
of making visible what is worth remembering.

I look forward to seeing you. Best come by sea; my method  
of contacting you has closed most of the airports. Please  
buy a boat ticket and don't try coming as a stupid shark, squid  
or sturgeon. I'm not one of your silly water nymphs.  
Meanwhile, wire me—no thunderbolts—a bouquet of  
forget-me-nots and roses. Love, Mnemosyne

# Mortal is Just Another Word for Terminal

I wake to eternal spring—  
no surprises, no changes of weather.  
I walk steep hills, breathe harder,  
run out of altitude.

I dissolve  
when people surround me.  
A phone's ring alarms me.  
The mail is scary.

I don't recognize myself.  
I've cut off all my hair,  
stopped lining my eyes,  
haven't had sex.



I study Modigliani for hours,  
listen to Poulenc,  
watch the Russian's dance,  
as though to save myself.

I am in love with a zombie prince.  
His pallor is that of the early moon.  
Long fingers could catch my neck.  
He keeps his teeth hidden.

I could live with his vices,  
his distorted images, altered intellect.  
It is not his flashes of reason I fear,  
but news of his suicide.

# Free words

These words, chosen because they were uncommon, obsolete or unusual, are for use in your writing. We've included definitions on page 90. Don't feel you need to adhere to them. There are other lists of free words sprinkled throughout the magazine.

## Nouns:

*Agonistarch*  
*Chrestomathy*  
*Otacust*  
*Scrippage*  
*Ziraleet*

## Verbs:

*Deturpate*  
*Infucate*  
*Sternutate*

## Adjectives:

*Atavistic*  
*Festuceous*  
*Pulveratricious*  
*Vimineous*

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# Dancing With Embargo

It was a Friday in February, 2004, noonish and sweltering. I swapped a clean t-shirt for the one I'd worn during my four-hour dance class at Escuela Nacional de Artes in Havana. The studio lacked air conditioning, not even a swamp cooler. No mirrors; walls bare except for a rotting piano in the corner and water-stained photos of Castro and Ernesto "Ché" Guevara. No running water in the coed bathroom. No locks on the doors, no toilet seats—sacrifices for the fifty-year revolution.

California-based Plaza Cuba organizes two-week workshops on Cuban music, folkloric dance, art and culture in Havana. The first morning of the dance program, I walked the potholed alley from Hotel Palco, in the municipality of Playa, to campus where a security guard eyed my flimsy *Permiso de Entrada* pass. I fed his dog sausage leftover from the hotel buffet; thereafter, smuggling hard boiled eggs for the guard himself. A fence capped with barbed wire enclosed what was once exclusively a white's only country club, during Batista's dictatorship from 1952 to 1959. It's still possible to make out a fairway here and there, though middle- and high-school students now rule the grounds with musical instruments.

Our dance classes began at 9:30 each morning under the direction of Isaías Rojoas Ramirez. Ramirez is known for combining a smooth, classic dance style with vernacular movement from the island's barrios. A graduate of the Instituto Superior de Artes de Cuba, he's also Artistic Director of the Afro-Cuban Folkloric Dance Troupe



Ban Rra Rra for whom he choreographs dramatic works influenced by Haitian folk customs.

The first dance we studied was cha-cha-cha, a unique blend of fire and grace with a characteristic triple step that swept Cuba in 1953. Ramirez pressed a button on a relic boom-box and asked us to listen to the music, and then find the beat using claves. These short round wooden sticks are held one in each hand and struck together as a rhythmic accent. The exercise was simple enough until we were asked, one at a time, to keep the beat with our feet. Still, he shouted encouragement. “*Eso es!* That’s it!”

After class I ditched the scheduled group instead flagging down a sixty-year-old Willy’s Wagon—inarguably the world’s first SUV—scrambling over a bumper held on by baling wire. I settled next to a shriveled woman in a faded muumuu. She scrutinized my clunky dance sneakers over a grocery bag stuffed with carrots, eggplants, yucca. Knowing little Spanish, I gave her a sample-size bottle of perfume, packed for just such an occasion. Her gold-tooth grin said *gracias*.

Exhaust poured up from a hole in the wooden floor as I aimed my camera at a foreign embassy housed in a pre-revolution mansion. Turning onto *Avenida Quinta* (Fifth Avenue), I snapped billboard after government billboard: a profile of national heroes Juan Almeida, Camilo Cienfuegos, and Ché Guevara beside the caption “*De estos hombres se hace un pueblo*” (“From these men came a people”).

I motioned ‘pull over’ to the driver, then I set off on foot. On streets like Trocadero and Neptuno, laundry hung from a melange of wrought iron balconies. Below, shirtless men sat in plastic chairs playing dominoes or chess; in an alcove, two women in tank tops and Spandex shorts painted each other’s toe nails.

Children stopped games of soccer and stickball to ask for Chicklets. I offered pencils instead. The reactions of people along the crumbling cobblestone streets away from busy tourist areas was immediate. Men glanced up from beneath dented hoods of classic Chevys, nodding, “Olá.” Music spilled from doorways, mostly salsa and rhumba. I felt as if I’d stepped into the documentary “Buena Vista Social Club” in the scene when Ibrahim Ferrer and his wife strolled through similar streets greeting friends and feral dogs.

I kept a similar route every afternoon, walking among ordinary people and their backstreet lives; often roaming past twilight into darkness where the aroma of garlic and onions battled exhaust fumes. I watched one entrepreneur as he filled disposable Bic lighters with fluid, and admired vacant lots subdivided into *huertos populares* (popular gardens), state-owned land offered at no cost as long as it was used for cultivation.

One day I walked farther down the Malecón than usual, dodging waves crashing on the seaside boulevard, soaking cars and pedestrians alike. Men young and old perched on the wall, crude fishing poles in hand. The heat was unusually oppressive; I drained a liter bottle of water.

Across from the U.S. Interests Section office, located in the Embassy of Switzerland, stood two enormous billboards: Unbearable photos of tortured inmates at Iraq’s Abu Ghraib

prison. I slumped on the wet wall, sad and embarrassed, trying to imagine what could have happened? This, more than a month before *Sixty Minutes II* broke the story. The heat refused to exhaust itself. I sipped from my second bottle of water and retied my sneakers. A woman came up and rested her hand on my shoulder. Then a second woman walked over, asking if I knew any movie stars.

Four years later, February 2008, I returned to the same dance program retracing my old routes on back streets. But for the lack of feral dogs wandering the streets little had changed. The beat up cars, poverty, and most of all the loving nature of the people were the same. The bulk of ruin and rubble from the devastating 2005 hurricane season, the most destructive in recorded history, had been cleared from the main arteries. I played charades to communicate, bought peanuts in paper cones, and gave pencils to smiling children.

One late afternoon, I checked my email in the hotel business center. My inbox was clogged with messages from family and friends back home; I feared something terrible must have happened. *Are you okay? Can you call us? Are there marches? Protests? Riots?* A French version of *Gramma International* dated February 24, 2008 lay on the counter. The headline read “*Ce n’est pas un adieu.*”

A full five days had passed since Fidel Castro announced he would not accept another term as president, ending the Communist revolutionary’s 49 years in power. Yet not one had mentioned it.

I grabbed my camera and set off, each stride in time to Ramirez’s words, “The clave lives inside you.”

## Picture This:

instead of sun, moon, gods  
hunted and hunter  
inscribed in rock  
or tagging, tugging  
epithets marked  
on restroom walls  
subway halls  
picture this:

thirty-seven wars rage  
on planet earth  
our restless  
tornado tossed home  
flounders under floods' assault  
fires, landslides.  
homeless, jobless, injured, ill  
multiply like amoebas



how to translate  
now for future folks?  
figures crouching  
before pc's  
laptops perhaps?  
or rushing into the blue nowhere  
with our iPods, iPads,  
blackberries, Kindle,  
NOOK, droids, smart phones

picture this:  
images of rough drawn heads  
everywhere exploding

TMI scrawled beside them

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previewing this issue of

*if & when*

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