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Image by Vjeran Lisjak

R E B E C C A L B R O W N

TIMOTHY HAWKINS

When they said I was going to be on the radio, nobody
told me they meant from the start to the end:

*Timothy Hawkins was born as a loser,
tonight he will die as one, live for your pleasure. Ninety dull
years he has lived without living – a minute and a half
silence, one second per year then we'll send you
to bed with the sound of the sixties...*

I found myself looking forward to the music
although I would never hear it.

SLICK

I died for my sins the morning that
I woke up beside you for the very first time.
Your long, dark hair greased
the edges of the pillow; I slipped
you out of bed onto the cold-painted floor and left
you there as I walked home alone.

COMMUTING

Twenty-six tickets and none of them
the way out of this job.

Three changes,
one at Queen Street,
the second at Llandaff Station.

The third one happens only in my mind.
Get off, get on, dash across the platform;
no seats, no sanity
I am travelling the wrong way.

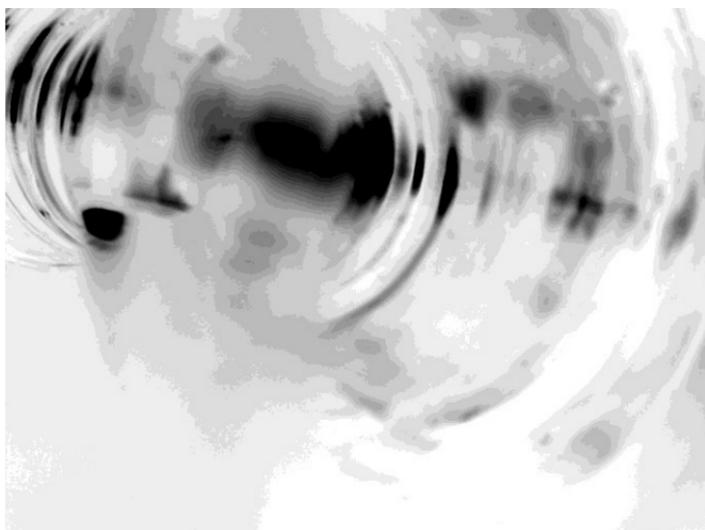


Image by Nick Winchester

I A N M U L L I N S

YOU DON'T KNOW ME

Men like you and me
can smell one another
in the dark; we can open windows
at night and know
another is out there,
gunning like an owl
for a sparrow or a killer
for a cop. In a crowded
smiling room we are the only men
who do not smile, who
do not crowd. We shiver in
summer and steam like cans
heated in coals
when winter raps on our doors.

We are family men
but live alone, talk aloud
but have nothing to say
except to ourselves
in the winter, in the dark,
at the foot of a child's bed
when their mothers – our wives –
are sleeping. We are the lost boys
who came back too late,
too lost, burned by cold fires
poured over our burning feet.
Though we stand on this street
where our paths have stumbled
we are alone, you and I,
and dare not speak
to each other.

BLOOD LINE

Whatever it was
has frozen overnight,
a long brown trail
from the public toilet
across the pavement
dripping like a waterfall
frozen in mid-flow.

Last night I thought
it was blood; it looked red
and rich, with spots of white,
like semen, or transparent,
like sweat. But today
it looks like
what it probably always was:
a mess of shit from one hundred
different people
leaking from a busted cistern.
There's no "out of order" sign
or police warning tape
to hold people back,
no grey-beard CSI scraping samples
from people's shoes,

so I must have been wrong
last night, when that donkey thought
pinned its tail on me, that maybe
there's a body in there; a heart
cooling down, a lung
taking its last breath,
a woman

a man
a child or a dog

but surely they would have found her
by now? There's always someone
who'll get their feet wet
and paddle through it all,
just as there's always people like me
who choose to do nothing
but thank god there're good people like you,

I couldn't live with myself
otherwise. I don't want it to be
someone like me
who's passing the toilet
the day my boat leaves harbour
without me. Maybe I should
go in there now, lock the door
and unwrap the blade:

be angry, ungrateful;
un-saved.

ALMOST HUMAN

I was crazy tonight
a mad bear in the woods
crashing through trees,
brain un-spooling
like a can of film
showing all the lives I never lived,
all the lies I never told.

Think how wonderful life could have been
if only I'd told better lies;
I wouldn't be lying here
screaming alone
with neighbours at the door,
police cars swarming like bees
around a dead hive of honey.

I could be a in a quiet cell
somewhere in the country
with rubber walls
and rubber knives,
not out here on the street
with my arms' broken branches
cuffed behind my back,
trying to pass for human.



Image by Andreas Krappweis

S T E V E S U B R I Z I

THE LAST MEAT

He vanished from town in the weeks after his butchery closed down. It's said that once his fridge was empty, he first turned the cleaver on his left shoulder. It's said that he would fry a tiny slab of himself with a packet of dried seasoning and a pad of his own fat once every evening. We understand that his wife left as soon as the sheets grew damp and red. Not long after she went, a cluster of bone, stomach, and hands was seen bounding over the docks and out toward what fish still lived in the sea.

TWO SEASONS OF CRASHING

I was pacing the edge of town until the house had gone to bed so I could get on the couch and not look at anybody. I hid from the rain beneath the awning of the rug emporium.

A sparrow flew into one of the display windows and then flew into the other display window and then into the first display window and then it finally flew away into the hard autumn rain.

ANGEL'S GLOW

On the occasion of the town's final recorded hangover, there followed an incidental day of mourning. The Oakland A's switched from green and yellow uniforms to all black. The American flag outside of the car dealership got snagged on some Christmas lights and held still forever. A potted sapling spilled over in a pissed-off breeze. The whole day moved with the grace of an accident that cures an accident, not unlike the occurrence at Shiloh after that famous battle, when the puke from the parasites killed all the bacteria in the wounds of the soldiers and made their skin glow blue in the dark.



Image by Andreas Krappweis

THE RUINED TOWER

Almost like climbing countless flights of steps
to find the last flight crumbling down: a sketch
towards its never-to-be-finished form,
and then you face a wilderness of doors
which lead to nowhere, or to nowhere but
those rooms where clock hands slowly run to dust,
ambition's trampled like a heart torn thin,
walls spiral up like great black wings,
your broken image fits an empty frame –
this place has dreamt of you. It knows your name.

MORE OR LESS THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

After we fucked on the classroom table
I felt a searing need to be alone:
to make my own way out into the dark,
walk the knotted miles of country lanes home.

Snow was falling: slow shivers of wax
from the high, guttering candles of the night.
The coiling lanes slid smooth as skin, as far
as childhood: snow seemed tied to any time.

And so much blankness still ahead of me
unmarred save for a thin spine of prints: a trace
made small against the vastness of the new –
some formless creature that I couldn't name
that stopped for just a moment, paused, and still
uncomprehending, carried on its way.

FIESTA

She wakes first, feels all the foul
dregs of morning fill her mouth.
Short-sightedly, she stumbles out.

Pools of the night lie, beached fish
in the grained light, a lip's-width
of liquid: lager laced with spit.

She remembers, most of all, the shock –
clear – between last bottle, first shot,
the sharp-sweet sense of being lost,

the whole of the evening shrinking down
to a single point, to here-and-now,
a blade of ice in the heat of the crowd,

a shared and silent loneliness
bound by the vow of the optimist:
this can't be me. I can't be *this*.

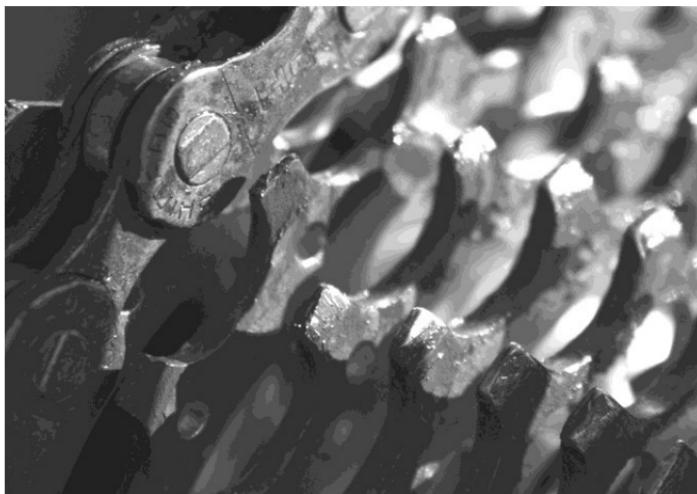


Image by Chilli Head

IN PLACE OF A YOUNGER MAN

First I say I'm sorry and then ask if he's okay and he looks down at himself and rotates his hands and says, "I think so." I'm not sure what to say next so I repeat myself and the young guy looks himself over once more and rotates his dirty hands again and says, "Yeah. I think so."

"Thank God."

"Yeah."

"I thought for sure you'd—"

"Christ," he says. "Never mind." The guy pulls his hand from his side and it's thick with blood. He cranes about madly to assess his injury but isn't flexible enough. "What's it look like?" he asks, turning his back to me and peering over his shoulder.

"Red."

"Red?"

"Yeah. God, I'm sorry."

"Well what else?"

"I don't know. Wound-like I guess."

"Wound-like?"

"I don't know. Your shirt's hanging over it."

"Should I take it off?"

"Your shirt? What if stuff spills out?"

"Could that happen?"

"I don't know."

"Christ. All right. I'll leave it on."

"How does it feel?"

"That's the weird thing. I don't really feel it. Just warm and sticky."

"That's probably good, right?"

"Shit."

"What?" I grab at my hair.

He points to his shoulder bag in the street beside his bicycle. "This'll be my first late delivery." Then he says he is going to lie down and he does and I ask what his name is and he dies and I'm still asking his name.

A fire engine shows up first even though there's no fire. The firemen come without their jackets and say, "Yeah. He's dead." They wait for the ambulance and paramedics who say the same and wait for the police who ask for my information. I say I was just laid off and my head was someplace else and the bicyclist wasn't there and then he was and then my windshield was all smashed and it was an accident. They say these things usually are. "Always a damn shame. A shame anyway you look at it." In any case, they say they'll need my information now and I'll hear back from them in the coming week about next steps.

"And what about right now?"

"Seeing as your windshield's all busted, probably isn't the best idea to drive. Best get a tow."

"But I don't have to stay?"

"Not unless you'd like to."

I point to the guy's bag. "What about his stuff?"

"What about it?"

"He said he was making a delivery."

"Was he? Like I said: a shame anyway you look at it."

Two paramedics hunch over the dead bicyclist and count to three and heave him up onto a gurney then roll him away.

"Will someone deliver his package?"

"Someone?" the policeman says. "No, I don't think someone will." He walks over to the bag and picks it up and shakes it at his ear. "Maybe you ought to. You're someone, aren't you?"

"Me? No. I'm nobody," I say.

"Now wait a minute. Someone hit this guy with his car." He holds up the shoulder bag. "You must be someone. You can ride a bike, can't you?" He pulls a thin cardboard package from the bag. "Let's see," he says, dropping his finger down over its label.

"Twenty-one thirty, Pinegrove. Ten-minute ride from here. Know the place?"

"I know it."

He hands me the bag. The fabric is dark. I can't tell if there is any blood on it.

"You did kill the guy."

"It was an accident."

"These things usually are."

Then they drive away, the fire engine, the ambulance, the cruiser. They leave me standing in the street by my broken car, holding a dead man's bag near the dead man's bike at the place where he died.

*

I stand his bicycle up and look it over. It fared better than he did. The seat is too high so I take it down. The strap of the shoulder bag is too loose so I take it in. The seat is still warm. I ride away.

The trip is more like twenty minutes. Old men and women are talking about grandchildren by their mailboxes. There's a kid trying to learn to skateboard. A dachshund poops in someone else's yard and the owner pretends she doesn't see. No one asks me what I'm doing on a dead man's bicycle.

Before knocking on the door of twenty-one thirty, Pinegrove, I reread the address to be sure. I reread the address a second and third time. The cul-de-sac is empty except for a man watering rows of plants and he doesn't appear to wonder what I'm doing here.

"Hello," says the woman at the door.

"Hi. I... I have a..." I fumble through the bag, which seems to have grown larger and more full of things, then pull out the package.

"Thank you. Do you need me to sign for it?"

"Sign for it? I suppose so." I go back into the bag where my fingers make out the edges of a half-sized clipboard, which I hand to her. She signs it and dots an I somewhere and hands it

back to me smiling. She holds the clipboard out, looking from it to me and back. I think about telling her I killed her deliveryman by accident.

"Is everything all right?" she says.

"I'm not sure what I was expecting."

"Expecting?"

"I thought you wouldn't recognize me."

"I don't recognize you."

"I know. I'm not sure what I was expecting."

She puts the clipboard in my hand.

"Well, thank you."

"For what?"

"The delivery."

"Oh. Yes."

I want to ask her what's in the package. She closes the door.

*

I still have his bicycle. Returning it is the right thing to do. I need to spend the next while doing as many right things as I can manage. I never hoped to be a great man, not even a good man, but I hope to die having done as much good as bad. All I want now is to cancel out. When I'm gone, it'll be like I was never here.

Hanging beneath the seat there is a novelty license plate that says, "Greenly's Green Delivery." Beneath that there is an address. Returning the bicycle is the right thing to do. There's no getting around it.

This ride is thirty-some minutes and it's hot outside. I am in horrible shape. That's something I know but don't think about, like dying, like knowing I won't ever have kids or those sorts of things. My thighs burn and my chest goes all hot and rigid. I'm sweating deep Vs into my shirt beneath my arms and at my chest. My ass is a swamp.

The store is one of those places you pass your whole life but have never been inside. It could be a façade piece for a movie set. Or it could have been anyway. I stop at the street side opposite of Greenly's Green Delivery and consider leaving the bicycle at the door with a note. Then I feel ashamed.

There is a bell that rings when I walk into the shop. A man with a short-billed hat is on the phone saying, "Just a second ma'am," and snapping his fingers at another man popping out from behind a doorway. I let him go on talking and snapping and writing things down and wait for a lull that doesn't come. He only goes on answering phone calls and snapping at a man always disappearing behind something.

Then he looks at me and puts his palm over the telephone receiver. "The hell are you waiting for?"

I open my mouth and then close it and think empty thoughts. He says, Christ's sake, and goes back to the telephone.

"I delivered the package to twenty-one thirty, Pinegrove and hit your delivery man with my car this morning."

"All right," he says, either to me or to the telephone, then pushes a package to the edge of the counter and says, "Fourteen seventeen, Harris street."

"What?"

He taps the package.

"I hit your delivery man with my car."

He takes the phone from his ear. "What's that?"

"I hit him with my car. It was an accident."

The second man pops into the doorway. "What did he say?"

"This asshole hit one of our guys with his car."

"And I delivered your package."

"Well, is he all right?" the second man asks.

"And I brought his bike back."

"Is he all right?" the first man says to me.

"He's dead."

"He says he's dead."

"You killed him?"

"By accident."

"Christ, that's a fuckin' shame."

"A shame anyway you look at it," I say.

The first man eyes me carefully and asks, "What does that mean?"

"I'm not sure."

The second man approaches the counter. "Which of our guys did you kill?"

"I don't know his name."

"You killed a man and never bothered to learn his name?"

"It wasn't on purpose." I open up the dead man's bag and pull out the clipboard and say, "Here." The first man takes it and shrugs before handing it to the second man who says, "This was Ian's delivery."

"Ian?" the first man asks.

"Yeah. Kid with the cowlick."

"Young guy, right?"

"That's right."

I ask how young.

"Couldn't have been out of his mid twenties," the second man says.

"Of all the men you could have killed today," the first man says, "you went and killed a kid with a cowlick who had his whole life ahead of him."

"I didn't pick him."

"He might have cured cancer," the first man says.

"Or he might have been our best delivery man."

"At least he'd have made a family someday. Most men do."

"I never did," I say.

"Well he might've."

Then the first man asks me if I remember what it was like to be a twenty-something year old. "Not very well," I tell him.

The second man says they'll need another deliveryman.

"Goddamn." The first man scratches his nose and looks out the window. "Anyone dropped off an application recently?"

"Not recently."

"Goddamn," he says. Then he points at me. "What about you?"

"Me?"

The second man asks me if I have a job.

"Not anymore—"

"Don't have a job? You can ride a bike, can't you?"

"I can. But—"

"Then congratulations. The job is yours."

The second man congratulates me also then tells me I'll start tomorrow.

"Look, I don't have a job, but I'm looking for something else. Something less physical."

"You kill a man and then you come here to say you're too good for the work he did?"

"I didn't mean to say that."

The second man asks me if I think my life is any better than the dead bicyclist's was. I have trouble with this question and consider not answering it, but the first man says, "Well? Is it?"

"No," I say. "No, I suppose it isn't."

"I wouldn't suppose so either. You'll start tomorrow."

"All right."

This is me cancelling myself out.

"Keep the bike."

"Sure."

"And take this." The second man hands me an envelope.

"What's this?"

"Ian's last paycheque. Was supposed to pick it up today. You can take this to his mother."

The first man says, "You take it to her because we sure as hell aren't. We didn't kill her boy."

The envelope is lighter than I thought it would be. I turn it over and back and pat it gently against my palm. "All right," I tell the two men. "Where does she live?"

The second man flips through a drawer of folders and writes an address down and says, "She's blind."

"What's that?"

"Ian said his mother was blind. So, I don't know, don't be surprised if she wants to touch your face or put your fingers in her mouth or whatever."

"Fingers in her mouth?"

"I don't know."

I nod and begin wheeling what seems now to be my bicycle out the door when the first man says, "Just because you're working here doesn't mean we like you. You still killed our guy."

"Ian," the second man adds.

"Ian. That's right."

"All right."

*

My mother died during my early thirties. She died in a different state. She died far away, where she couldn't waste my visits complaining about never having any grandchildren and worrying that I'd never get married. As far as I know, all mothers worry about these things they have no control over. The only way for us to escape their worrying is by moving away and calling them only rarely and visiting them even less.

Evening comes about slowly like sleep. House lights go on and families sit at dinner tables passing plates and bowls. The sun doesn't set, but slips closer to the hills, changing colour. My tire spokes reel and hum in the wind and no one watches.

I wish she wasn't blind. I can't find a good reason for it, but go on wishing anyway.

The house is one storey, with a small white porch and chimney coming up from the side and looks just as I imagined. The yard is mowed and healthy and cut through by a curving,

brick walkway. There are two blooming hydrangeas set on either side of an ugly birdbath.

An accident is no reason to kill anyone.

I stand quietly at her doormat.

After pressing the doorbell there is the quiet sound of feet in socks. The door opens.

"You're late," she says warmly. Her ghost-town eyes stare over my shoulder at things following in the half light. "Come in, come in." She has one hand on the wall and the other holding a cane, beckoning me inside.

I stand at the doormat, holding an envelope she doesn't see.

"Hello," I say.

"Your voice, honey. You've got a cold coming on."

"I'm sorry?"

"I can hear that cold a mile away." She tells me to come in again and begins walking down the hallway with tiny, shuffling steps. "If I weren't expecting you, I might think you were a stranger, but then a mother knows her son. I'll put on the kettle."

"No. I'm not your son. Please," I say from the doorway but she's already gone past a corner, leaving behind only the sounds of her footsteps and the careful opening and closing of cupboards from another room. I glance out desperately behind me, to the dim-lit houses and the red sun after, to the trees and the birds that make no sound except for the abrupt and horrifying beating of their wings.

I step inside and close the door behind me and have never been more terrified of anything in my whole stupid life.

"You're late," she says. "Thank God you're finally here. I would have called the plumber, but if you believe my luck, the telephone's being finicky again. I made sure the thing was plugged in, but that's about as much as an old blind woman can check for. I worried you weren't coming." Her socks are mismatched.

"I'm so sorry, but—"

"It's all right. I know you're a big busy man." She waves a hand about. "Only you never know how much you need a sink until it's not working."

"A sink?"

"That's right. Like I told you." She pats the outline of the white sink rim. "Since yesterday morning I've been without my sink. I don't figure the problem is all that serious, but once the Lord has taken your sight, everything's more problematic. That's what a woman's son is for. Her husband and her son."

"I hit him with my car."

"Boy, could your father fix up a kitchen. If you're a handyman now, it's only thanks to your father. Go on and take a look." She opens the cupboards beneath the sink then goes back patting around the dials of the stove.

"I'm going to break your heart," I say, looking down the garbage disposal.

She draws her hands over a row of mugs and pulls two away and brings them to the kettle. "Do whatever you have to do down there. I just want my sink back." She pours the kettle slowly, with her forefinger dipping below the mug's rim to feel the tea rising, then takes the finger out and wipes it on her thigh. "Well go on," she says. "Help your old blind mother, won't you?" She laughs and moves the mugs one at a time to a small table adjacent to the counter, patting surfaces as she goes.

"All right." I stoop down and take up armfuls of cleaning supplies from beneath the sink and put them out on the kitchen floor then lie on my back and shimmy up under the pipes because I don't know what else to do.

"Is it only clogged?"

"How should I know?"

"All right."

I pull myself out from the sink and rummage through the cupboards until I find a plastic popcorn bowl.

"You'll never guess what I found the other day," she says.

"I'll need a clothes hanger. The wire kind."

"You know where my closet is. Go fetch one."

There are only two hallways and one leads to the front door. I take the second, which ends in a bathroom and passes a bedroom. From the other room, she asks me to guess what she found the other day. I say, "Just a minute." Her closet is open and perfectly orderly and divided into two sides. One side is full of colourful women's clothing and the other is full with old brown suits and muted polo shirts and cheap blue jeans. I take a hanger and unwind it.

"Harriet was here three days ago, helping me clean out my closet," she says. I climb under the sink. "It was becoming a mess. Being blind and messy aren't things that go well with one another." She laughs. I run my fingers along the curved, steel belly of the p-trap and turn the plastic washers holding it in place. "Harriet took something down from the top shelf and she said, 'well look at this'. Next she's handing me this big old binder. Guess what it was." The p-trap comes loose and grey water falls into the popcorn bowl. "It was your sticker book. Can you believe it? I'd nearly forgotten." Holding the piping over the bowl, I run it through with the hanger wire, dislodging colourless pieces of food pulp. "I put it here in the desk drawer. I wish I could look at it." I work the wire through the p-trap until it threads through the pipe smoothly and nothing comes falling out. Then I assemble the piping again and return the cleaning supplies.

"I'm going to run this out to the garbage."

"Did you make a mess of yourself under there?"

I look down at my shirt that is now dotted with light stains. "Not too bad."

When I come back from the garbage the mother is standing in the centre of the room looking like something hung in empty space. "It's one of your father's. Go on and keep it." She extends an unsure arm holding tightly a t-shirt that says, "Hang Loose."

"I'm fine. Really."

"Go on. Your father won't be wearing it."

She only smiles again when I take the shirt from her and look it over gingerly. "Well put it on," she says. "I won't be peeking."

I do because she asks and because I killed her son.

"How does it look?" she asks.

"Good."

"I wish I could look at you." She smiles with her empty eyes. "Come here." The mother pulls the binder from the drawer where she said it was and sits at the table and pats the empty chair beside her. "Please. Come here. What does it look like?" She runs her fingers lightly over a corner of the binder.

"It's blue," I tell her.

"And what else?"

"It says: *my sticker collection*. The letters are all stickers. Most of them are shiny and sparkle. A couple aren't."

"And inside?" She smiles dreamily.

I open the book. The spine cracks. "The first page is mostly tractors."

"Describe them to me."

"There's a yellow steamroller with no one driving it and a red crane lifting a steel beam. There's a yellow dump truck and yellow backhoe. The only tractor that isn't yellow is the crane. In the corner there's a man with a jackhammer."

The mother is holding her hands together and looking forward at something I can't see. "I remember." She tells me to go on and I do. The next page is all dinosaurs and I do my best. There is a page of farm animals and then astronauts and aliens. There are two pages of bugs and one page for airplanes. A page of dogs and a page of cats. There is a page of different sports balls and sport equipment. There are six miscellany pages. The mother closes her eyes and says, "I remember. I remember."

"This page looks like it's all jungle animals. There is a snake in a coil and sticker of three parrots. There are two monkeys. A lion sticker is fuzzy and soft."

"Show me."

And I do because she asks. I wrap my hand around hers and extend her forefinger and run it across the page, drawing it over the raised edges of the stickers until we reach the lion. With my fingertip on top of hers, we trace the lion's silhouette and fall over his body. "Do you remember?" she asks me.

"I don't."

"Don't you? This was your favourite. You saw this at a crafts store and came begging, wrapping your little arms around my thigh. Cost a quarter. And with a quarter, I made you as happy as you'd ever been, maybe the happiest you'd ever be." She closes her hand around my fingers. "The hardest thing about your little boy growing up is realizing you can't make him happy anymore. Sometimes the world is just too much. You'll understand when you're a father." She puts her head on my shoulder. "I wish you could remember, Ian. I bought you the world for a quarter."

"I do." I take my hands up to my face and weep. "I remember."

"Ian, what's the matter?" She runs her hand up and down my back. "Tell me what's wrong."

"I forgot, but now I remember everything."

Mother pulls me into her arms and runs her fingers through my hair. "It's all right," she says. "Everything is all right. Everything is okay. A quarter just doesn't go as far as it used to." She wipes away my tears and draws her thumbs across my cheek and then she goes still. Her fingers tap about my face lightly then pull away. She takes my head slowly from her breast as though to see me carefully.

"You," she says quietly. "Who are you?"

"It's me," I tell her. My face is leaking and slipping out of place. "It's your boy."



Image by Shaun Ellithorpe

H A R R Y G I L E S

THE DRONE REGARDS HERSELF IN THE BATHROOM MIRROR

Her tanlines are embarrassing. She is two weeks
into a cloud-patched getaway and already longing

for a drink of water that doesn't taste of pasta.
Her cock hangs wanting. She has not found

a summer lover drone, so maybe it is time already
to turn on again her guidance systems. Her anemometer

needs oiling. Her hands are sore from travel-sized
hostel soap. She was turned away from the pizzeria

for seeming too lonely. She wasn't built for cut-price
guidebooks, for Chrissakes, she is razor's edge

military hardware and speaks straight to the heart
of the post-9/11 global condition. So why

does she still want to take her bug-bitten legs
down cobbled alleys, imagined unlisted

in even the roughest of guides, beyond the reach
of global positioning satellites? So why

does she want something new to write home about
when she returns to the WiFi hotspot, something

to gesture at over more familiar beers, to remember
when gliding through restricted airspace to deliver the payload?

THE DRONE CANNOT MEND A PUNCTURE

She cannot fix a bookshelf, or sew a button.
Her functions have such limited range: she can

barely change a lightbulb, and when her fingers
are stuck with grease she shudders. It fills her

with monstrous dread, this mending. She breaks bones,
and does not tie slings well. Once, she saw a girl

wipe sticky hands (whether blood or oil she really
doesn't care) across her tank-top – nails,

split; boots, practical. A bulb cut out.
She wanted that mechanic so much her timers

all turned on at once, red digits glowing along
her titanium arms and each counting down.

THE DRONE IS AT THE PARTY, THE DRONE IS NOT AT THE PARTY

She is not so much nursing her drink as performing open heart surgery. She talks to an ICBM who says he likes people-watching. She doesn't.

At parties, watching people only makes her feel more anxious: she can't achieve the sense of flow and control she finds when flying above them.

She likes the ICBM, but he is awkward, and has a genuine taste for gory low-budget horror films. This worries her.

But still she can see herself leaving the party early with him, taking his hand on the way to her room, though

his palm is damp, his inexperience poorly-masked. She can see herself doing this. She doesn't. Their conversation

slowly reduces to nothing. They watch the party in silence. Eventually she calls it a night, because what else can she call it?

THE DRONE EXPERIMENTS WITH SHOPLIFTING

It is not that she cannot afford to pay. In fact,
it is probably precisely because she can, because

her salary is immodest, her balance embarrassingly
safe. Her job is good. It gives her the security

to graciously walk past security with a full festival-
branded cotton bag and a sack of premium muesli.

To be extra-certain, she blusters through a one-sided
phonecall with a ghost named Phil, clearly subordinate.

She is thinking of taking up veganism, now that she has
disposable income and a reliable source of nutritional

yeast flakes. She is almost disappointed not to feel
the firm hand of a nametagged guard as she steps

out of the Target-light and into the evening, nor
any particular thrill: instead, merely a little

hum of satisfaction, the same small completeness
as when checking off one more name from the kill-list.



Image by Jason Antony

S A M F E T T E R S

STONEFLOWER

All day
she sits
full lotus
and drinks
stolen wine
in front
of the television.

She tunes out
the knocking
at her yellow
front door.

All night
she lies
next to me
and feels
like stone.

FOUR PARTS

I've lost
whatever it is –
fragments
I can't remember
much of anything.

Once, we were
something
different.

I got a taste
of insanity –
now all I know
is fear.

I hope
I have time
at least
to give away
my belongings.

DEAD RHETORIC

Everybody
 looks
like they need
to use
 the toilet.

Puttering
 in pyjamas
 at the grocery.

Dozing at red lights.

Going limp,
 running dry.

Spittle lips,
 booger noses.

Nobody says much
 and the police
take away
 all of our angels.



Image by Simon Tullstedt

J A M E S T R E V E L Y A N

THE FLAVOURIST

It's a delicate art filling

pipettes

to blend the next sweet or drink

that best describes

the red of cherries,

the gold of mango; to fashion

complexities of passion-

fruit and rhubarb,

to forge

the absolute

of butterscotch.

But after fifteen years,

here I am

in a white coat and goggles creating:

bubblegum

when all I want is

to chew on the September sun

that spilt over our weekend in the hills,

to drink the grizzly hum and chemical

warmth of the launderette I walked past

for two months to stand at your door.

UNDERSTANDING THE COLLAPSE OF THE ECONOMY

greed or somewhere
between
mindless desire
and naivety it's like
when Katie
Roberts got off
with four boys
in one night
at the Rugby Club
and I didn't care
cos one of them
was me yeah
it's a bit like that

STAGE DIRECTIONS FOR A SHORT PLAY

JOHN

*pity wallowing pride swallowing
shoulder chipped tongue bit in a fit of desire
for CLARE*

*thoughtful sullen staring
at the horizon or some point before field meets
sky that has her eye frozen*

*we can't tell
which neither can JOHN who looks
from her face to her focus takes
a step closer*

(beat)

and speaks



Image by "linno1234"

THEME PARK LOVE STORY

The new boy, Tom, was leaving. This came as a surprise to Rose and Jake. He'd only been there a season. Tom worked with Rose and Jake as pirates. The first thing he'd said to them was that Jake was "a very apt name". The second thing he said was "Shiver me timbers shipmates, that coffee's bad." Rose liked Tom. He liked making people laugh. It made a change from Jake. Lately, Jake could be very intense.

The three of them worked five shows per day through the summer. They were on at twelve and then one, two, three and four. The shows were twenty minutes long. The stage was by the side of the lake. It was designed to look like the wreck of a pirate ship. Rose and Jake and Tom sang and danced. There were acrobatics. In the finale they used a trampoline. At the end of every show, Jake used to end up in the water. Then they swapped and it was Tom.

Tom told Rose and Jake his decision over a Rib Meal from the Princess's Restaurant in the Fairytale Castle. The Fairytale Castle smelt of animal fat. Tom suggested they eat there as a joke, but he wasn't smiling when he did. The three of them sat and watched the Dragon Ride, listened to the screams of children. *Reward Yourself!* it said on the arch above the drawbridge.

"Mate, I've got to go," said Tom.

"Why?" said Jake.

"Oh come on. Look around you."

Jake wasn't going to look around. He knew the place. There was a Medieval Kingdom, an Alien Planet, a Wild West Town, an Aztec World. There was candy floss, hot dogs, rotisserie chicken, slush. He knew the rides. The lake. The muzak or instructions that came from the loudspeakers on poles. He knew

the games where you had to throw a basketball through a specially-narrowed hoop. You won a cuddly toy.

"All this," said Tom, "it's just horrible. It's getting me down."

"I know what you mean," said Rose.

"What do you mean?" said Jake. "It's not real enough for you? Or too real?"

*

After Tom left the restaurant, Rose and Jake walked back to their rooms. They were staying in the staff quarters of the theme park's hotel. They walked through the theme park.

"What was that for?" said Rose. "What's got into you?"

"He's a prick," said Jake. "Pays his wages doesn't it? The fuck does he want?"

"You used to think like that."

"Yeah but it's too easy isn't it? So it's a theme park. Big deal. We're actors. Life's a theme park. Nothing's real, everything's real, blah, blah blah. Get over it."

*

Jake and Rose spend the evening apart. Later they are in Rose's bedroom. They have been fucking for three seasons. Last year Rose asked Jake if he loved her and he said "If I get this wrong, does it mean we're going to stop having sex?" and they both laughed. It had been the first time in a while.

Tonight, the night that Tom has told them he's leaving, Rose says, "Look. Do you mind? If we don't... You know. If we just hold each other?"

And to her surprise, Jake says, "No. No, that's okay."

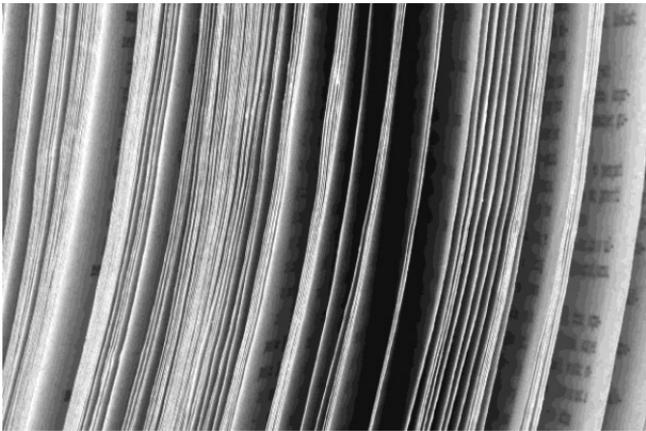


Image by Kruno Knezevic

C O N T R I B U T O R S

Rebecca L Brown is a British writer. She specialises in horror, science fiction, humour, surreal and experimental fiction, although her writing often wanders off into other genres and gets horribly lost.

Ian Mullins was whelped in Liverpool, England, and has been a dog ever since.

Steve Subrizi lives in Massachusetts and has performed his poetry at dive bars and lecture halls across America. His work has appeared in such places as *The Scrambler*, *Muzzle*, *NOÖ Journal*, and *Monday Night*. His e-chapbook, *Newly Wild Hedgehog*, is available from *NAP*. He plays in a band called The Crazy Exes From Hell. His website is www.stevesubrizi.com.

Jacob Silkstone graduated from the Creative Writing MA at Lancaster University with a distinction and has recently worked as a primary school teacher in Dhaka, Bangladesh. He is a poetry editor for *The Missing Slate*, and has previously been published in *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *The Cadaverine* and *Cake Magazine*.

Taylor Koekkoek is a writer from Portland, Oregon. His stories have appeared, or are forthcoming, in a small collection of journals.

Harry Giles has lived on four islands, each larger than the last. The latest used to run a fifth of the planet, badly. Now he writes (recently in *Clinic*, *Antiphon* and *Magma*) and performs (theatre, poetry and workshops). He founded the writing and performance events series Inky Fingers, and online he can be found at www.harrygiles.org.

Sam Fetters reads books and makes poems in Cincinnati, Ohio. Sometimes he operates *Mouthbreather Poetry Corp.* The world is not ending. Peace be with you.

James Trevelyan grew up in the Midlands and now lives in London. He has an MA in Creative Writing from Royal Holloway and his poems have appeared in *14 Magazine*, *Aspidistra*, *Prole*, and *Bedford Square 5*.

Charlie Hill is a writer from Birmingham. His short stories have appeared in *Ambit*, *Stand* and *Litro*. His first novel was described in the *Observer* as "rich in wry social commentary but also funny and linguistically dexterous... an inventive work that shows much promise." His second is due out in November 2013.