CAULDRON
CAULDRON
Kalamazoo College
1985/86
And I
Am the arrow,

The dew that flies
Suicidal, at one with the drive
Into the red

Eye, the cauldron of morning.

—from "Ariel" by Sylvia Plath

THE CAULDRON STAFF

David Boventer
Chris Corcoran
Jennifer Ciemiega
Janette Foss
Nathan Guequierre
Beverly Gustafson
Gail Kidder
Heather Laymon
Katie Murphy
Susan Priller
Luis Salazar
Lynn Staley
Tina Stoecklin
David Torresen
Tim Webster
Samantha Whitney
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Can I go swimming in your stream (of consciousness)?
   splish
   splash
Intimations

I don’t like funerals. Maybe I should clarify that a little better. I don’t like tombstones, plastic flowers, the smell of white lilies, formaldehyde, or dead people. Some people hold their breath when driving past a cemetery; I shut my eyes. I’ve always been meaning to take that religion class offered each spring on death, but it never fits into my schedule. Maybe next spring.

My step-mom is big on cemeteries. I mean, her idea of a fun afternoon is to drive eighty goddamn miles somewhere and walk through a cemetery. She really gets her kicks out of that. Last Christmas, when I went to visit my cousins in Fairfax, West Virginia, and my cousin suggested that we take a walk and we ended up in some two-hundred year old cemetery, it was all I could do to keep from getting ill as Karen Boked around and said things like, “Oh, here’s a new one. Gee, she really died a young age. Oh, what a nice little saying.” Make me sick.

When I die, I’m going to be cremated. I can’t stand the thought of taking up a square inch of room in this world when a living person could be using it. My dad was going to be cremated too, that is, when he dies, but my step-mom talked him out of it. Something about he’ll probably die before her, being that men die earlier than women, and she wants to be able to have something to remember him by. And look who’s in the hospital all the time with bunions or bowel problems or something; she is.

I guess you could say that my first official funeral I’ve gone to was for my grandma. I don’t remember it all that well, you see, because I was only seven years old. When you are just a kid, you can only comprehend things like Kool-Aid and coloring books and recess. You don’t understand coming inside when it’s too dark or cold out to play, the importance of eating green vegetables, and death.

I remember the craziest details of grandma’s funeral. When we got to the church, it was open casket, which dad had told me ahead of time. It didn’t even faze me. I mean, grandma didn’t even look like herself in that opened box. Her face was caked with that awful orange make-up that those caretakers think gives you a healthy glow, and she was so stiff. That just isn’t the last way I remember grandma. I remember her as coming over on Sunday afternoons, when I wouldn’t be doing much at all, and bringing me those little sampler boxes of Russell Stover chocolates. I always ate the coconut one first, and then tried to pass the other three off on my dad.

The service was your basic funeral, I guess, but what really hit me was when grandma’s women’s church group all got up to sing her a farewell song. That was pretty touching, to see about forty really old ladies getting up and croaking out a song for grandma. My step-mom started bawling then.

We rode in a limousine to the cemetery, my step-mom, dad, some aunts and uncles, with the hearse right behind us. I sat in the back, reading some comic book. I think of that now and it sounds so sick, reading a comic book, when you’re driving to the cemetery to say your final goodbye to your grandma, but like I said, kids can’t comprehend those kinds of things. All that really happened at the cemetery was a prayer said in the building there, and grandma’s casket was brought in, now all closed up. The whole family was getting pretty whipped by now, having been crying for most of the morning, so it was a good thing it was time for the reception.

We got in our car now, and drove to some restaurant in Warren Woods where the basement was reserved for us. I remember sitting with some of my cousins, eating cannelloni, drinking Pepsi, and getting hugged and kissed and pinched by all those relatives that you see about three times in your life. It was kind of dark down there, but everyone was in better spirits, laughing a bit and more relaxed than during the morning’s activities. The owner of the restaurant came up to my Aunt Margaret at one point and said, “You must be relieved, dear; it’s all over now.” I still wonder how you can go to your grandma’s funeral and eat cannelloni in the same day.

Another funeral I have been to, and I don’t even know if this would qualify for a funeral, was for my sister. It was closer to a memorial service, I guess. Sal would’ve been thirty this past March 14th, and you know, it just doesn’t seem real. I mean, she could walk through the door right now, and it would be right and normal to me. Sal had called home a few weeks before she died, just to say “hi” and talk to the family. I was the only one home, so we shot the breeze together for a half-hour or so. I’ll always remember that. She had met some new guy, Rob, and school was going really well. Sal was one of those people that had to struggle for B’s and C’s. We’re really different in that respect. I seldom crack a book, and I get by OK. Well, back to what I was saying.
It was one of those Saturday afternoons in March, you know, the kind that are a little muddy, but there's always a great smell of things growing outside, and that really gets everyone excited, that is, that spring's coming and no more salt crusting on your shoes. Anyway, dad and my step-mom were out back, near the dog pen, which the dog refuses to ever go in. They were fighting about something really stupid, like taking in the garbage cans or where the tomatoes were to be planted. I had been cleaning the guest bedroom which had previously been the family dumping ground for things we didn't want, but didn't have the heart to throw away. The phone rings and it's for my dad.

I run out back and wait for a good time to interrupt the fight. “The phone's for you, I finally yell, and eventually he runs inside and gets the phone. I make my way into the house, to hear him scream, “Get a pen, get a pen.” He's sounding sort of hysterical, but that's normal for my dad, so I slowly make my way into the family room, where he's standing, tears running down his face, uncontrollably, like a May snowstorm in Michigan. I then scream, “What is the matter, what is the matter,” but he waves me away and keeps bawling and blubbering over the phone. I run for my step-mom, telling her that something is wrong. I hear her dash into the family room, the click of the phone falling back into the receiver, and my step-mom's scream as my dad tries to control his voice and state to her, “Sal is dead.”

I didn't even move. I didn't even lose a beat. I mean, the words sounded sort of normal to me, like “the waffles are burning,” or “you be careful, young lady, when you go downtown.” Sort of empty phrases that don't really sink in. I guess that's why Sal could walk through the door and it wouldn't faze me a bit.

So anyway, these reporters are calling up and asking questions like, “What do you wish for the court to decide, if the two suspected men are captured and put on trial?” How the hell are you supposed to answer a question like that? “I sincerely hope that all efforts are being made to apprehend the culprits and I am convinced that a jury would award them life in prison.” I wanted to say something like “I hope to high hell I see them first, because I want to hang them by their fingernails for starters.” Even if I had said something like that, you just know what phrase would be printed. I’m so glad I could just stay up in my room, unless some relative I hadn't seen in six years came over. Then I'd have to go downstairs, but basically, I could ignore everything.

I didn't shed a tear during the five day ordeal, and many times I felt so goddamn sacreligious for not doing so. You know, when all of the family would be over in the living room, eating walnut cake that someone in the church had brought over for us, remembering Sal's curly eyelashes, or how she used to sneak into the church to play on the organ, I would just sit there and pick out the walnuts in the cake while everyone would start sniffing. Even at the memorial service, God, everyone was around me bawling their eyes out. I just stood there and stared. It was like one of those Greek tragedies by Aeschylus, or whatever his name was, with everyone getting all dramatic and upset. All the local TV stations were there, and I just kept up my sitting and staring routine, as my dad jumped out of his pew, in the middle of some hymn we were singing, screaming at the cameramen to get the hell out of the church. Those goddamn reporters; anything for a little news.

All that we had for Sal was the memorial service. My family had her cremated and buried out near the lake, by a church Sal used to go to when she was young. You know, the same one she used to sneak into to play the organ in.
Looking back on this whole deal, I guess I can say that Sal’s death has changed my life, and the lives around me. Now, I’m not saying my grandma didn’t mean anything to me. I mean, I loved her, in my seven-year-old way, and she isn’t here for us to go over to her house for Easter dinner and get chocolate rabbits in purple foil anymore. Now, my dad cries every Sunday morning during church. We just kind of brace ourselves during the service, waiting for him to cry, so we can hug him or squeeze his hand. He’ll cry during the movies, my step-mom has told me; it’s dark and no one can see him there. And last December, when step-mom was adding the orange slices to the cranberry sauce she makes each year for Christmas, she just broke down and ran to her room. So I stood next to the stove for an hour, stirring the cranberries by myself.

Last month, a good friend of mine’s step-dad died. I didn’t really know Jimmy’s step-dad, but Jimmy’s my friend, so I decided that going to the funeral would be a good, supportive, friend-like thing to do. Sam was seventy-five when he died, and had already had two heart attacks or so. He swallowed so many pills each morning, it’s really amazing he didn’t choke to death. So, I mean, we were all kind of expecting it, but that doesn’t mean we wanted him to die or something. Jimmy flew in from school; he goes to U.C. or Loyola or Northwestern, one of those Chicago-area schools. I can’t keep track of those sort of details. Well, hell, it’s not the details that matter in life, anyway, it’s real things.

The service was no big thing, really. I was fine. We all then drove to the cemetery where a last prayer was to be said. So we’re standing around the flower-covered coffin while the priest is saying the last prayer. Jimmy was up in front, and I was several rows behind him. And then out of the clear blue, or what seemed the clear blue, Jimmy just broke down. He was standing up there, and just couldn’t take it any longer. I stood back where I was, observing this whole thing, watching Jimmy’s hands start to shake, flopping like two fish lying on a dock, and I found myself crying. Crying, with the smell of chocolates and cranberries stinging my wet nostrils.
Gail Griffin

The Woman I Lost

"112 pounds—do you realize you've lost a whole person?"—Melinda

I turned just in time to catch her disappearing around a corner, the edge of her coat, her left heel vanishing. There is no point in pursuit; she is already through a revolving door, heading for the cosmetics. I have seen her before, I think: as I stepped from a subway car she slipped into the one behind it—slight, not a hundred fifteen dripping wet, her face hidden by a headscarf. There is no following her now. But sometime today, in a buzzing street, I will turn suddenly, caught by an image in a store window, next to the bald unnippled mannequin whose haggard eyes scan her detachable hands, and there she'll be, watching me.
Now, three years later, I see what you mean about the hills: they draw you in and up with the slow pull of gravity, reversed. Even the hurt runs clean along the thighs, gripping the knees. Even the strident breath yanked in, forced out of taut, belabored lungs sears like some rarer, finer air that others do not breathe. I finally understand your wide foreknowing smile when you explained about loving the hills.

I watched you run up past the body’s dead weight and the ache of muscles, past the tired necessity of breath, the heart’s absurd redundancy; and I have followed, losing you in distance, plugging upward, looking back to see, falling away behind me, my own flesh. And as I run, I comprehend.

The question’s one of baggage: when you shed the load of fate, when you can ditch the years that trail behind, tripping you up like untied laces, and run on, lightened, pain becomes a thing to run through, like the rain or wind or cold, a medium toward something else, a force inside you, to be trusted, like the heart, whose thrumming is an anthem to the hills.
Johnnie M.-A. Stroud

Harpo's Memoirs

I remember the look
on your face
as you discovered
I whistle
while making love.
I shrugged my shoulders,
flashed the eyebrows,
and kept on loving.

Anticipating an orgasm,
I gigglesnap
a photograph of your face,
spilling flash powder
all in your hair.

I then throw off the sheets,
scramble to a corner of the bed,
turn a complete flip,
land on my feet,
grab my hat,
take up a bottle of seltzer from the night stand
and spray you in the face.

Stepping over top of you
to get back in bed,
I honk twice,
toss a cream pie in the air,
produce from my raincoat
a reuben on rye
and offer you half.
Neal Port

Entre Nous

Laurin Buchanan

Just between us, I think it's time for us to realize, the spaces in between leave room for you and I to grow.

David Bowie

Shake It

Laurin Buchanan

I feel like a sailboat a-drift on the sea. It's a brand new day, so when are you gonna phone me?
Meditations: VI Christos

Laurin Buchanan
Here There is Bread

Nested
between the fishmonger
and the flowershop
it is small,
crowded
with the virile smell
of yeast. It pushes
out the opened
door into the streets
gleaming with morning
and wet, momentarily
stronger than the day’s
first catch being slapped
wide-eyed onto beds of ice.
And that same cat who
waits all night
for that fish thrusts
its nose instead
to the warmer draft,
that draws it
as it draws the old women
who still rise before
everyone else, their
swollen ankles,
their baskets on wheels,
rocking on uneven legs,
touching elbow and shoulder
and wig, filling them
with gallego rounds
shaped like breasts
nipples erect and powdered.
And the baker smiling
with no teeth and leaning
with his thumbs on the counter
blows tobacco smoke
into their ears.
A ladder outside the window
Bushes winning hide-and-seek for me
Bushel baskets full of apples that mature
    in reverse and become pink blossoms
A self-conscious looking glass
That voice in the crowded room that keeps
    calling your name but is connected to
    no face
The act of turning to the last page of a book
    before reading it
A clear glass of water
The first word you ever spoke
Men with no legs frying fish at the V.F.W.
Bells on Sunday mornings
    from church steeples
    on bicycle handle bars
    hanging over the front porch, blowing
    in the wind
There is something in every person
    that incites a particular interest in
    ambulances going by
And refuses to let us take our eyes from that
    balloon that falls deeper and deeper into the
    sky until it is swallowed
By some tiny mouth
Christopher Tower

And There Is No Moon

My mother is the wind
my father the rain
and I am Endymion seething in sleep
while my new lovers chase your taunting
spirit through the halls of this house.

When night finds me in empty houses,
when sleep is a distant cousin
I search cracked attic boxes
for a forgotten shrine,
a medallion, once worn daily—for the moon.

Moondust settles beneath a blank sky
winding down the night.
Endings to my story loom in the sky
but never break the horizon.
Nights measured, like my life,
in wind-up clocks
yield only emptiness.

Time freezes after midnight.
Loitering in diners edged
by coffee yawns and morning stains
we waste our frozen minutes
uncovering the archaeology
of intimate conversation
with our touching buried in the web of sleep.

There is no moon.

Sounds and sights
swirl in sleepless night's
wind and rain. When I hear
dust thicken on tractors in the barn;
when gentle thumps and unseen footfalls
haunt the sickness in my soul,
this depleted home. Visions of making love
—lights on, crawl under my skin.
And neither bring rest or answers.
The stars testify to our madness

but there is no moon.
Samantha Whitney

An Artist's Life

Poor artcrazed photographers take crusty loaves of french bread and brie to parquet floor houses with leaded windows and no furniture they eat imported gelato and sushi smoke Dunhills in the blue and gold box and clip coupons out of the yellow pages for Burger King
Justin Lahart

Machias

The license plates scream "Vacationland!" but no one here listens to them. Only the gray seals act as they should—dancing their waltz around these granite islands—Thunder Crag, Sleeping Witch. In summer the men haul in lobster pots with frayed hands, as their wives and children sink beneath the sun in fields of dust, as they pull berries from bushes with metal rakes.

Those that do vacation here play croquet on lawns that hang over the sea and talk about the hardscrabble charm that the locals with the tar paper houses have. In winter, ice grips the land like a glove and a man has nothing to do but drink and lay down upon his wife.

Benjamin R. Clarke

Sassafras
(After Stanley Plumley’s “Peppergrass”)

Tasting the woods, by sight, by smell by our touch, tasting we remember Indian-Cucumber, spring buds, mint—wipe the dirty part away from your find as if the dirt the grime wasn’t bitterly delicious, this tree lustrous, tea merchants gold, tasting what is free: blue afternoons as we pulled down fleshy leaves, chewed, smiled like boys...

Tasting we held on to the child song days, free as breathing.

We were Indians in a Red man’s land tasting, tasting sassafras combing the grass, talking to the wind.
Lynn Staley

Bertha

That was not me.
I was always crafty
a witch
some say
waiting for Gracie to fall
asleep, dead drunk
taking the key.
You wonder why I laugh.

Perhaps I hired
a stunt double.
Too modern, you say
but I was a woman
ahead of my time.
I am the archetype
and the example.

They wish him back
his eye
maybe the hand
but they never wish me
back my life.
I paid the higher price.
I always did.
I am mad,
a witch
some say
waiting . . .
waiting for him to call me
to call me by my
rightful human
name.
And if I had but lived
my last word
very quietly
would have been "Edward."

It is lucky
that I did not
for instead
among the flames
aching behind me
another name swells
into the darkness
and choking on smoke
and crackling, dancing sparks
I set you
all
free.

* Bertha is Edward Rochester’s wife, from Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre.
**Lynn Staley**

**Tattoo**
*(from U.P.)*

She is not
a bright
woman, beyond knowing
who gets
what, and at
what table.
And her name
is Alice or Helen or
Sally and she
is not proud not
young.
She has never left
her home more
than fifty miles
behind her.
But around her wrist
as she reaches
to pour your coffee
you see a
bracelet
of roses in red
full-blooming and budding,
leaves and thorns,
tattooed.
Ode to Spring

I

Oh Spring, Spring, Springs,
How sweetly thy name rings.
The trees are green
And long to be seen;
The sun smiles down on all,
As bat meets ball.

II

The flowers are colorful
And ever bountiful,
And happy chirp the birds.
The clouds are white,
The light is bright,
The children run in herds.

III

Oh Spring,
You're pretty keen.
Oh Spring,
You want to be seen.
Oh Spring,
How nifty you are.
It's good you're not too far.

Ode to a Fly

Death came so quickly for
our little friend
wings flapping
body shaking
and spinning around.

So alive in death as it was in
life
a creature black and
slimy
has fallen into our hearts.

And now it's dead
dead as a doornail
and we miss it.
As the Sun Set

She laid the pills out carefully on the table.
"All ready," she said.
He came in and closed the door quietly behind him.
"Hello, Jane. Everything under control?"
"Soon," she said. "Very soon." She swirled the water around in the pitcher. The ice cubes clinked softly against the glass.
"Is the water cold?"
"This could be straight vodka, Nick, and you'd never know it."
"That cold, huh?"
She put the pitcher down and stared out the window. "Actually, I never considered vodka. Well, too late now."
"Is it?" he said. She turned to look at him.
"Yes." A helicopter flew by outside. The noise was frightening.
"They're coming to get us," she yelled, waving.
He sneaked up behind her and put his arms around her waist.
"Don't joke," he said, kissing her on the ear.
"Sorry."
The helicopter was gone.
He sat on the sofa with his back to the window and watched her walk around the room.
"They kind of scared me," she said.
"Not me."
"They scared me. I'm easily scared, though, you know?"
She sat at the table and began silently counting the pills.
He leaned forward. "Could you count aloud please, Jane? It soothes me."
"Read a book. You're bored."
"There are no books. Except Gideon's Bible." He picked it up off the end table. "And I've already read it."
"So write one."
"Ah." He stood up. "That brings up a very interesting subject."
"What's that?" she said, smiling, but not looking up from her pills.
"Time."
"Time, thyme is the spice of life. And it's rare."
"I guess I'll never write a book, Jane."
"Very good, Nick. You're learning."
"Yeah. That's another one."
"Learning?"
"Yeah. How about facts?"
"Yes, Nick. I'm weak in the arts, but strong in arithmetic."
"I used to play golf."
"Did you?"
"Not very well. My best hole was the nineteenth. Gee, I could sure do with some vodka. Is there time?"
She laughed. "Yes."
He stood up. "I'll run down to the lobby. Back in a flash."
He walked down the hall to the elevator. She wasn't terribly happy about the vodka idea. But one had to enjoy life.
He paid too much for a fifth of Commissar and went back upstairs. When he got there, she was fooling with some electric wires.
He put the bottle down, enjoying the gentle thud.
"What's that?"
"Tape recorder."
"Ah. Is there any ice left?"
"Keep your priorities straight, Nick."
"Jane, Jane. Can't you enjoy life?"
"She stood up and looked at him. "No," she said. "As it turns out, I can't. You know what I mean?"
"Yes, Jane. I'm sorry. That was the wrong thing to say."
She took his hand and kissed it. "Forget it, Nicky. Pour me a drink, will you?"
"Certainly, my dear," he said.
She went back to her electrical stuff. He unwrapped two plastic cups from the bathroom and stuck his hand in the water pitcher. He grabbed a couple of ice cubes and put one in each glass. She was looking at him.
"I washed my hands," he said.
"Testing. One, two, three, testing," she said. "This is Jane Henry, testing."
He opened the vodka and poured it.
"Pity we don't have any lime juice," he said.
"Testing, one, two, three..." the tape recorder said.
She knelt on the floor and unplugged it.
"It works." She wrapped the cord around the machine and put it in the dresser drawer.
"What's it for?"
"A souvenir. Looking at it depresses me."
"Here." He handed her a drink. "Health and happiness."
She smiled. "And long life." She tossed it back and coughed.
He took a sip and handed her the bottle.
"How long till sunset?" he asked.
She checked her watch and looked up at the ceiling, calculating. "About twenty minutes, maybe less."
"Well, bottoms up," he said.
"Yes." She poured herself another.
"I have an idea. Let's turn the couch around to face the window."
"In a minute."
He leaned against the desk.
"Can you smash that mirror?"
He looked behind him. His own puffy face stared back at him. He looked around the room.
"Sure. Why?"
"I'm afraid it might interfere," she said simply.
He picked up a suitcase rack and folded it.
"Stand back."
"Wait." She tore a blanket off the bed and draped it over the mirror's frame. "Now."
He stabbed at it with the aluminum legs. There was a muffled crash and the glass fell heavily into the blanket.
"Seven years bad luck," she said.
He put the suitcase rack on the desktop to keep any of the glass from falling on the floor.
"We didn't really need to break it. Once it was covered with the blanket, I mean."
"Yes." She closed the bathroom door. "But I feel better all the same."
There was a knock at the door.
"That," he said, "will be the porter, wondering if everything is all right, saying he heard a noise."
She opened the door a crack. He couldn't see who it was.
"My husband sneezed," she said. "He has a bad cold."
"Atchoo," he said.
"No, that won't be necessary. Thank you very much."
She closed the door and leaned against it sensuously. "He wanted to know if he should call a doctor."
He laughed. "I'm not dead yet."
She hooked the safety chain into place and jumped up on the bed.
"You'll get it dirty," he said absently.
"Big deal," she said, hopping down on the other side. "Help me move this table."
He got hold of the other end and lifted. A few of the pills fell on the carpet.
"Damn," she said, and knelt to pick them up.
He leaned over and watched her. She counted them quickly and put them all in her shirt pocket. He thought briefly about her breasts. Then they lifted the table and set it down between the bed and the desk.
"We're trapped," he said.
She was laying out the pills again. "Use the bed."
He leaped onto the bed and started bouncing. "Trampoline artist, Nick Watford, was confined to bed earlier today," he shouted, "due to a table in the way."
She looked at him and smiled. “Time to move the couch, you funny man.”

He jumped off the bed and landed with a flourish. “During the Depression, Mr. Watford was forced to make a living as a moving man.”

“Careful. You’ll knock the pills off the table again.”

The couch was not as easy to move as the table had been. He knocked over a lamp, but they finally managed to turn it around and he picked the lamp up again.

“I think the bulb’s broken,” he said.

“We won’t need it.” She was banging the pillows with the palm of her hand.

“Mmm.”

She stopped banging and looked out the window. “What’s that you said about depression?”

“I don’t remember.”

“You must remember. It wasn’t more than thirty seconds ago.”

“When I sat on the couch, I made a depression.”

“I took care of that.”

“I know, but is that it?”

“What?”

“What I said.”

“I don’t know. You said it.”

He picked up the bottle in one hand and his glass in another. “Shall we sit down, my dear?”

“Of course, my dear. The bottle?” He held it up. “Oh, you’ve got it.”

“Your glass is on the dresser.” He pointed.

They sat down. The sun was just beginning to set.

“It’s still very bright,” he said.

“Give it time,” she said.

He laughed. “And a pinch of salt.”

Slowly, the glare faded and they could look straight at it. The sky was light purple and about half of the orange ball was gone.

They sat and watched it disappear, sipping their drinks as darkness closed in on them. When it was quite dark, she spoke.

“Switch on the lamp.”

He tried it. It didn’t work. “I guess I broke it.”

“Damn.” She got up and turned on the reading lamp by the bed.

“It’s time,” she said.

“I didn’t hear a knock,” he said.

She took the tape recorder out of the dresser drawer and began unwrapping the cord. “Don’t plan, just let it happen.”

He sipped his drink and poured her a refill as she plugged the tape recorder in.

She sat down again with the tape recorder on her lap.

“Damn,” she said, “I forgot the light.”

“I’ll get it. Don’t get up.”

He walked around the couch. She sat straight, staring at the city lights. He turned off the lamp. All he could see was her outline, framed against a flashing Coca-Cola sign. She didn’t move.

He sat down without a sound. She didn’t look at him. For a long time, she just stared. Then, finally, she blinked and turned to him with a sigh.

“You ready?”

He grinned. “As ready as I’m ever going to be.”

“You have to be really ready. If you’re never going to be ready, then you’ll never be ready.”

“Yes.”

“I’ve started recording.” He looked down and she moved her finger, exposing the little red light.

“Condenser mike. Just talk in your normal voice.”

He couldn’t think of anything to say.

“First let us introduce ourselves,” she said. “I’m Jane Henry.” She elbowed him in the ribs.

“And I’m Nick. Um ... Nicholas Watford, trampoline dancer and furniture mover.”

“Not so loud,” she whispered.

In the silence, he could hear the humming of the machine as the wheel turned, recording nothing.

“This is a souvenir,” she said. “A calling card of sorts.”

“A sort of ‘un-calling card,’” he said.

“The view is great,” she said. “And so is the vodka. We’re on top of the world.” She was getting excited.
"And the countdown for lift-off has begun," he said.

"I would like to end with the words of the great American poet: 'Let what will be, be.'"

"And I, furniture mover and smasher of mirrors, would like to apologize to the management and suggest that you sell the tape recorder to cover the damages."

She switched it off with a click.

"Not very elegant," he said. "But sincere."

"Yes." She put the tape recorder on the ground. "Shall we listen to it?"

"Not on your life."

She smiled. "Why not? How will we know it worked?"

"Faith, Jane. Faith."

"Fill the glasses up." She got up and walked over to the table.

"Can you hand me the water pitcher."

"No. We'll use vodka."

"Yeah, but the ice cubes."

"Ah, yes." She handed it to him. The outside was wet with condensation. He grabbed the remaining ice cubes and put them in the glasses. Then he slowly filled them to the rim with vodka. There was about a quarter of the bottle left. For the porter who wanted to call a doctor. He put it under the couch.

She was beside him again.

"Put out your hand." He did and she counted out eleven pills into his palm.

"You're heavier than me. I gave myself ten."

"It's enough?"

"Plenty. Trust me."

"Oh, I do."

They swallowed the pills and finished their drinks.

"Any more vodka?"

"All gone," he said, wishing he hadn't broken the mirror.

"Take care, Nick."

"I will, Jane. You too, you hear?"

"I've only just noticed that Coke sign, Nick."

"Cool, huh."

"Yes." She lay down with her head in his lap. He stroked her hair.

"I'm falling asleep, Nick."

"Sleep tight, Jane."

"See you soon, Nick."

Her breathing was easy and she didn't say anything.

He felt tired. She began to snore quietly. He slipped out from under her and jumped on the bed. He bounced up and down to the rhythm of the flashing Coca-Cola sign.

He could see her on the couch, being lit up by the sign every time he jumped. The neighbors would hate them.
Luis Salazar

Shortwaves

inside

London Taiwan Bangkok Berlin
sounds broken, slung to the horizon on a wave
cresting and rushing to background noise
in the stutter of sunspots, echoes of
the big bang, the pre-bomb to the bomb.
I can hear specks of lead punching through people
in the crosshair of Beirut,
through a curtain of comment; Andromeda counting
centuries, turning in the cradle.

above

Some photos return, unable to find peace in a blanket
of eons, the thoughtless chatter of moons. They
find an unwary antenna, fill it with news of
Cuban missiles, Tet offensives and statistics
of napalm and tropical fruit. Taiwan
mutter rainy rhythms, four tones more than
I can hear. But I listen.

below

In the tower, at night with the bells, I tune, crouch, and
fog the heavy glass, wind sucking at the panes lit
from below, from headlights, bedlights, cigarette glow.
They all talk, in the moth music of a dial unable to stop
turning about its axis.
But I listen.
Heather Laymon

Experiment by a Genius

He has chosen to use his sabbatical for an experiment. The Economics professor is cohabitating with a pig colony his deranged uncle runs.

Peeling off his three-piece suit, he sinks into the mud. Snorting in chorus, the pig colony welcomes a new body to rub their snouts against.

Sharing his life with the pigs, he begins to snort in his sleep and his white skin turns pink to match his companions'. He follows the pigs everywhere, carrying his legal pad through the mud, jotting notes.

Being a vegetarian, he decides against butchering his colony, and builds a manure recycling plant. Each pig poops down a chute to the basement. Pig committees scatter vegetable seeds into rich soil. By summer, huge exotic vegetables flourish, breaking through windows and bending the ceiling with their gigantic stems.

When the newspapermen come to take pictures of the phenomenon, he wonders what his ex-wife will say when she sees his pink buttocks on the front page.
I Am a Word in a Foreign Language—Margaret Atwood

At the window, I sit
with my chair tipped
and a picture book,
Yoruba Blue,
lying on my lap.
The pages turn and begin
to smell like the wind
of August and night earth
—the comfortable water
smell of old paper. Raffia
must smell this way.
A Yoruba woman must bind
adire with this smell.

Blue is her favorite color because
when she wears adire
beaten upon
the indigo ground,
the material intoxicates
her. Drunk, she sits
and I sleep

wordless.
Jeffrey O'Brien

Confession of a Grave Robber

Above the scruples of this mound—
A breast left bitten by the moon.
This night rides the back of my neck.
I wrap my fingers in cheesecloth
And rake for baubles in barefeet,
Neglecting the novelty of poplars
Scratching my intention.
When I dig deeper
The cypress quiver with delight.

Heather Laymon

The Stranger

who drives this cab has a beard like Jesus
wears a wedding ring because he's married to God
is determined that you contemplate Christ
forces healthy food on you (a child who
only eats Pop Tarts and Captain Crunch)
loves you and thinks of you constantly
forgets your birthday
buys you a silver flute
hasn’t seen you for a year
sends religious pamphlets
writes letters in beautiful calligraphy telling
you how selfish you are
gave you blue eyes, flat fingernails
and an athletic build
makes mom's voice nervous on the phone.
Luis Salazar

Phonebook Wisdom

He who shall purposely overlook, shall trip on the over, fall on the look, and thus become blind to gravity in the situation.
It happens to the best of us, bleary and hung on the horizon of sleep. And some awake.

Few realize that if God is omniscient, He knows how to make pineapple upside down cake, cheerlead, and that killing is killing, no matter how you cut it.
    Some of us are at it again, though, the enrapturing forgetfulness in cobalt blue, stealing, pissing the time away, ensuring balance in the large eye. Everyone knows how many die each minute, how many cars drop their drivers off only to escape,

    but no one has yet calculated how many moths elude the candle.

    We are too busy flying.
Samantha Whitney

You're in My Room

You're in my room
those mahogany wood closet doors
no longer shut
they overflow
with dirty clothes

You’re making love in my bed
you read pre-suicidal poetry in my bed
you probably eat
cereal
late at night
in my bed.

I can’t stand the dirt; your filth.
Dust cloths are foreign to your hand
my dresser is so covered
in dust
in it
I can write
all the names of the persons who lived in my room
before you.

you have filled my desk
with faces

I don’t recognize

I barely know the walls
Barb Breeden

Wet Letter Day

Last week you sat writing
With your back against a rock
In the Peruvian countryside.
Later you hiked in the rain.
Your words are now slurred from the dampness.

Maybe this morning you saw a wheelbarrow
Full of beans, dragging an old man.
And at noon you feasted on something
You couldn't quite pronounce, bought from an old woman
With leather hands and big brown shoes
Who wanted you to buy two.

This evening your feet will learn
That the sand stays warm long after sundown.
And your eyes will follow the comfortable seascape
Until they reach an unfamiliar sky.

Lynn Staley

Ode to the Larger-Size Thermos

A small bottle would carry two cups of coffee, and would last the morning, resting behind the cracked, black vinyl seat of the bulldozer.

But for Chuck two cups would not make the ride to the job, to the suburbs they were raising. So he carried his in an emptied milk carton, half-gallon size, spout paper-clipped shut. And he would cradle it in his hands as he drove, and pull in for work grinning. All day he would smell of sweat, of fresh dirt and coffee, morning-spilled.
Diane Harbaugh

The Bus to Dachau

The bus to Dachau is orange
Like other buses and waits
Like others in the same place for people.
Its board only says Dachau though,
Not streets,
So everyone knows.

The bus driver is old enough,
I watch his face for clues.
My arm brushes a German’s with bus motion.
We shift away.
I watch the driver.

Maybe he does penance hourly
Driving Americans.
Maybe all of the drivers take turns.

Did he live here, see the glow,
Drop the gas?
Does he feel that board above him
Showing Dachau
Like others feel their signs?

At night when driving’s over
He takes Dauchau off the bus
and lets it rest.
He carries the board away to sit
While he traces the letters of the place with his fingers
Over and over.
Jean Roberts
Magic

Across from me, on the train
sat a woman I didn’t know. Her
face was thin and pretty,
and her hair held
the sunlight that came in
the window for a second,
and let it go. She
ate an apple and I
could see her teeth as
she opened her mouth.
I wrote a letter,
and she read a book,
and outside the October day
crystalized into
an October evening. We never
said a word. We kept
going. Had she talked
to me:

   You look thinner, she said
What, I said, I bought a head
of lettuce today for fifty cents.
You always know where to look, she said.
We never said a word, but
she was pretty, and sometimes
she looked out the window
at the sun and the hills.
And when we stopped
and she got off, the last
little bit of sunlight stayed
and lit up where she
had been.

Sometimes

   just before
I fall asleep, I think
of a poem. I don’t
write it down; I have dreams,
by morning the moon is gone
and my stomach is empty.
And who am I,
that everywhere I go,
I expect magic at every
moment? I who go
places without even thinking.