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Table of Contents

Now I Know Better	CAITLIN ELIZABETH THOMSON	-	2
Turtle Rock	BOONA DAROOM	-	3
Poems	KEVIN RIDGEWAY	-	11
LA Curfew	ROGER LEATHERWOOD	-	13
My Hand is Obscene	SAM WYATT OGDEN	-	20
Poems	HOWIE GOOD	-	23
Novel excerpt	JOSEPH PLASAN	-	25
A Night in L.A.	JAMES KNIGHT	-	27
Poems	DAMIAN LANAHAN-KALISH	-	28
Novel excerpt	JESSE MILLER	-	29

Now I Know Better

by CAITLIN ELIZABETH THOMSON

I used to search LA

for Phillip Marlow.

Turtle Rock

by BOONA DAROOM

She peels his Cobra up the block. She feels a flash on her nape, pictures the paparazzi in hot pursuit. A yellow marine layer thins against the bluffs and the billboards. The sunshine tangs of citrus, chlorine and exhaust. She pulls into an alley and parks. He tunes the radio to a Spanish station, his eyes glassed and bloodshot. She reaches between his legs, opens the glove box. Digs for something deep inside. A blowgun. A cigarette case full of darts. She loads the barrel and sites a giant

eyeball on a nearby billboard. She rests the mouthpiece on his lips and – *HATHUPPPP* – nails the eyeball in the middle of the pupil. The dart rips through the aluminum and peters out the backside. The hole expels a whirl of rose petals, trailing an upward spirogyra in the wind. The billboard tips forward and crashes on the parking lot. Black pigeons mark the power lines about. Squabble. Shit. She turns the key in the ignition. He lays her down, mesmerized by her marksmanship.

* * *

He claws through the walls of the club. He finds her in the middle of the arcade snorting from Pixy Stixs beside a Pac-Man, her face wrinkled and streaked with old globulin. When she sees him she pounces, sinking her teeth into his pecks. He palms her forehead squirming with her odor and her hold of him. She chews a hole in his chest and releases. He can hear his lungs hiss as he slips into unconsciousness, the crimson glisten of her brow shining pale and holy.

* * *

She drags him by the foot upstate to a costume party in a withered apartment complex. A Jason-masked Buddha and a nun dry hump on the hood a mustard-colored Nissan. She leaves him lying on the lawn. In the floodlight, he hears a cell phone ring, the rustle of leaves in the autumn draft. Hello? he says. But one answers. He stands and falls over and over and over.

* * *

He pokes a needle through the mouth of her license. She pokes holes in his walls with his pots and pans and broken piece of furniture. You're being ridiculous, he says. *You're being ridiculous*, she mimes.

He rips off all her clothes and plugs her holes in his walls with her garments. She watches him, naked and shivering, her skin, lily-white save for an old tattoo on her shoulder blade that looks like the plague. He grimaces and she runs upstairs, and he chases her through a muggy room, onto a balcony overlooking a dormant transformer. She plops breathless on a hammock. He kneels at her feet, the phantasm of her arch pinioned by the wing of his tongue.

* * *

The interns juggle fire in the governor's penthouse. Her color scheme spooks him and he hides inside the closet. She feels a deadbolt unlock somewhere inside her and another presence enters the room. Musky pheromones spread around and arouse her, fingering her lips and wounds. *Mi princesa*, they hither. *Te necesito*. And her eyes whiten. And her head rocks and she falls backward, mumbling, Amor mio. Me vuelves loca. And then nothing. What's happening out there? he says. Who are you talking to? But she doesn't respond. Instead, she tears the chest of her dress and opens her mouth to humid swirl around her. Blushing. Perspiring. Sighing, Ay Dios Mio. ¿Qué pasó.

* * *

He looked lame where she left him, quavering beside a koi pond in an empty parking lot of a Japanese restaurant. It was 12 o'clock. The blacktop burned like lava hot. He dipped his hand in the pond and tried to drink but the heat evaporated every drop before he could sip. He licked the moisture along his Life Line and swallowed a sob. A small cyst budded in the center of his palm. He licked it again and the bump sprouted a head and then a tail and then four legs. It crawled up his arm, perched on his shoulder and unleashed a

stone-aged screech. He rose. Buckled his belt.

Walked towards the bus stop, an unfounded belief about him.

* * *

She'd just about rung out all his fat. The kaleidoscope of his eyes consumed his entire face. She choked him until she couldn't feel. He always made her do this just before bed though, now, he too felt nothing. All he wanted was roll over and picture her engine parts, how she needed oiling. Her tires, rotating. The buggy gristle of her grill, a squeegee.

He follows the Viaduct to the lumberyard. At the gate he passes a crudely lettered caution sign and continues on. She waits for him watching from an oxidized earth-moving machine. She puffs out her chest and starts chugging from a two-liter of Coca-Cola, her jonquil legs jerking with each swallow. He sits beside her. Leans in. Holds his ear to her stomach. Something inside her quakes. His hands clam and spasm. She turns her head back and pops a Mentos. He presses against her harder. Deep in her bowl, a chortle. The sparking of a motherboard. A little black combustion engine.

I come from a long line of arsonists, she says. The kerosene can of her vapors through her nose. Tell me more, he says. But she falls silent. *No*, her lips seem to insist. *Never*. She handstands on the sun-baked lawn and walks towards him, pouring what's left of her out. Soaking him. He tries to light a match but his stoned hands are useless. She somersaults. Spreads herself an angel in the dust. He drops his Bermudas and stands over her. She works them off his ankles and rings them into a puddle at her feet. Raw steam rises between her knees. A flame sprouts. And

spreads. And spreads. And she laughs. Somewhere, faint in the datasphere, a siren.

* * *

She stirs his cactus in a caldron and feeds him a wedge with a bayonet. His Cobra is flat deep in the dunes of her boondocks. A snarling clot of bugs circum the sun. He honks his horn and the buzzards scatter. She leaves him be and climbs the fire escape to sunbathe, cactus juicing from every pore. The buzzards cast the shadows of cherubim floating overhead, watching her spaghetti legs kick

with a moth-mauled consonance, asking, *see me, want me, eat me.*

* * *

He humps her tank up the hill. Gas hisses from the nozzle and the air tubes in her nose. He slips on a pebble and tumbles backwards – the tank too – crashing into the bus depot at the bottom and exploding. Air whistles from her sinus and her body begins to deflate. She rights herself on a bleached femur jutting from the muddy incline. She withdraws the bone, snaps it over her knee, plugs her nostrils. *This is my chance*, she thinks...*to escape.* He

watches her float slowly into the atmosphere, the valley floor scrolling smoke far below. She mingles amongst the satellites. Rotund and acolyte-like in the night, a mauve crescent moon.

* * *

You only live once, he says and give the cashier a dollar for a 100 Grand. She coils a rosary around her wrist and hides a straight razor and a nail file and an *Us Weekly* in her carryall. They slowly exit the store and ride the Metro in the afternoon for the air conditioning. She scrapes the razor against the file and sparkles squirt onto the magazine. She

watches the pages ignite and curl and her eyes dilate. He breaks the 100 Grand in half and feeds her a chunk. She chews, stoking the flames with her toe, her skin abristle with tard tingles. He heats the razor in the embers and shaves his head. The train doors open to a platform of passengers. It's rush hour. There's burnt hair everywhere.

* * *

He unplugs her machines and waltzes away, the peeling ceiling of her curled on the clapboard porch. He walks through moon-blached halewoods, a craven, half-bald watchdog yapping inside him. He

stands before a green sapling sprouting from a rusting coffee can. It whispers something to him in a foreign tongue – something beautiful but indecipherable. He can smell the gauze of her. The cheesing. The ick. He can't do a thing to stop it, he knows. But he can pretend.

* * *

The breeze sweeps pine shed off the solar panel. Needles fall from the roof, onto her shoulders. She enters the garage. Parks his Cobra in the glass of broken bottle. He droops in a lawn chair, his hair gelled like a youth minister, sipping Chablis from a

Styrofoam cup. He watches her clutch her stomach and brace her body against the hood. Her thighs tighten and ripple. He picks a bit of fuzz from his shirt and fans himself with a piece of junk mail. She stomps her sandals. Her entire torso, pulsing, sweat soaking everything. It goes on for a while until he lurches forward, forces his hand inside her, and removes the obstruction. A crystal ovule, the size of a small football. Transparent. Empty. He loads her pipe and she cradles it, walking into the yard. Smoke in the air. A firefly there. And there.



Greetings from Los Angeles

KEVIN RIDGEWAY

in the dirty,
over-grown grass
suburbs of L.A.
the five AM moon
is bright and
glorious,
as seen through
premature hangover
sunglasses
flanked by three
wild palm trees
and
framed by endless
power lines
strung with
old shoes

this kind
of postcard
should be sent
to Nebraska
so they will
stop daydreaming
about the phony
glitz
and realize its
mostly
shit-stained
streets
swallowing
the picture-perfect
television
images
whole

Televised Pursuit

KEVIN RIDGEWAY

the afternoon
police chase
along the
golden state's
freeways
is a guaranteed
aspect of
daytime television
whether it be
a weathered lemon
or a pimped-out SUV
they always
pump that gas
peddle until they
run out of fuel,
emerge
from their
cars,
and
inevitably

try to climb
a tall chain link fence
off to the side of
the road
before being
dragged
away by
the highway patrol
kicking and
screaming

unless of course
they bring
a gun and blow
their brains out
on live television,
the news helicopters
buzzing like
vultures over
their bodies,

which I
sometimes
think a lot
of people
watching
want them
to do,
lusting
over blood
and stale
popcorn

Women Under the Influence

KEVIN RIDGEWAY

the ladies of the household
are crouched under the kitchen sink
with an industrial vacuum
sucking cockroaches up off of
the bottles of Bleach and
powdered Ajax

“Oh, that one’s a beaut, suck ‘em up”
cigarettes dangle from their mouths
and ashes hit the yellow tile floor,
a cloud of clear pesticide can be seen
hovering over the room
the little specks of poison drift
down into the cups of coffee
that they periodically slurp from

their eyes are wild,
and I ask them how
many roaches they found

“Just two”

it must be a combination
of the toxic java and the
heat wave that’s made them
temporarily insane

I stand and watch in amazement
as they dirty their nightgowns
against the cat-shit rugs,
desperately searching for
something to kill

Rotgut Wine and Country Music

KEVIN RIDGEWAY

I only really like country music
when I’ve been drinking
the cheapest bottom-shelf wine
dancing to Waylon Jennings
in my underwear in front of a mirror,
a rainy day good old boy
hides in this city boy
shooting his hands like hot pistols
and looking for a woman to disappoint,
a dog to alienate,
and a truck to destroy on a back road
but these country songs of my own
stay in my mind where they belong
I argue with the neighbors
who tell me to turn it all down
I ask them if I can marry their
first born daughter
but they only stare at me

and when I sober up with
a cowboy hat on the pillow next to me,
I know exactly what I was drinking
the night before,
and the country records go back
in their bins,
replaced by the usual
urban rock and roll
I finally put on some pants,
giving the neighbors an
awkward hello as I
retrieve the morning paper.

LA Curfew

by ROGER LEATHERWOOD

The drinks stopped their glow just before we were about to hit the streets again. It was last call and the lights were coming out and everyone tried to get the last best dribble.

The nozzles separated the drips from each other so you didn't end up with the concoction Mecure kept finding herself throwing up over, some pulp and scotch sweetsour iced pick to the spleen unless you really tried - she smiled through it as if she were drinking her own orgasm even as

her stomach emptied onto her Kevlar in front of all of us. One too many, she was redesigned and I thought I'd never see her again. Was surprised when she showed up again at the site I shipped to last December in the valley under the new highways. She was working elec and she didn't recognize me at the afterhours later, when it happened again.

The buses had pulled in outside the stainless siding with 10 minutes to go; they were always early and they always let us turn around for 4 good before going back out. Whether the sun was up or not. Not a matter of the sunlight.

Qhall and Sinte were both headed to Silver Lake to find someplace to crash where the hogs wouldn't

hassle them. As long as they ended up together in each other's arms, in someone's arms and their coders weren't defragged, they wouldn't be roused or redesigned.

I was at Westside Beachside hotel all this week. Which in spite of its name was not near any beach. The sandblast of the dust and smog in the air had worn the west side smooth. Exposed pockmarks in the concrete revealed ragged stone flakes, smoothed by polishing of the wind and there were drifts of sandy grit pooled on the empty parking lot. The piles of brick dust and brown glass duned along the avenue and up the alley. We might as

well as been near the water with sand like the old days.

They woke me up at 10 on the dot and the shower mist took the last of the sourmash and the tangled aroma of pot out of my hair. I zipleined down to the depot and was assigned onto one of the day's buses.

The 4 girls in here with the handles underneath the vidfeeds started at my end but I got blown in the club last night and I pushed them off. A couple of the others went ahead and got a slide in on the way to the tunnels. These girls appreciated the practice with an eye on their careers - once I recognized one I'd slid from behind 6 months later in a vidfeed. Her ass had

that mole on her right round buttock which made it hard to face her, but she took it as a compliment and I guess the exec who finally cast her agreed. There she was on the feed every 95 minutes and she knew what her best asset was and worked it onto every screen in the state whether we watched it or not.

At the waystation outside the tunnels they scanned us and gave us our 10-packs of heliums and we smoked the first and the lithium infused into our bloodstreams and we slid down and got started.

Driving the mole carts through the shale and the metal girders under the surface of old

downtown was less tiresome with the heliums. Even after 12 hours. The masks helped too. Their effect suppressed the anxiety and the dark aches of claustrophobia one could get. That was why they were free; they weren't any fucking good for partying and so they decriminalized the heroin to lace it in, one an hour, carefully modulated and we all got our share.

We could spill our blood building the undercarriage of future civilization but we were all in it together, make no mistake a tribe without limit, travelling along the city's zipline routes all going in the same direction. The tunnel leads were preplanned and scored and the scraping and detail work laying fiber and fuse-leads was downright peaceful once you

shut out distractions and stopped your mind from wandering to places it did not know where to go. Until afterhours.

They'd recharted the infrastructure under and around the foundations of buildings left over from the dead downtown. The concrete, granite and iron had rusted and cracked in the acid rains and spasms of the earth's convulsing skin but they couldn't abandon the arteries or the populace, and we were young enough and motivated to replace the substructure with a new underground hive, impenetrable and deep and forever. From the side aqueducts an interwoven glowing wonderland like Disneyland or the Atlantis project. We belonged

to the future. If we actually managed to complete it in the next 20 years only the young would be able to move in.

All the leftovers had moved along the desert tracks a decade ago. They lived modulated and moderated, in miles of acres arranged in rows by the two governments. The sharp sunlight was easier to control and limit in large flat land tracts and they still needed the natural melatonin. We never got addicted to the sun in the city with the application of chemistry and prenatal conditioning and modulation in the hives. Safest place to be born and raised after the weather changed 24 years ago. The natural stuff

was too unreliable now. I'd have hated to be a prisoner to the circadian cycle like my lost parents.

We stayed in the inner city and built it up even as we undermined it under our feet, destroying the obsolete foundations and building the spiderweb of new titanium and stainless networks, an organic dream for future generations that would hopefully emerge from our loins.

All dependent on the young and fuck the leftovers. Although no one was sure we'd be able to make those plans. The seeping erosion of the new rain that fell from the sky and the chemicals that counteracted the bad sideeffects of our breast milk also scrambled our DNA, our RNA, and our

ANA. The specifics are hard to know when no one stayed to settle, always being shipped out to another site out east or down to Long Beach in that underwater thing, now that's an adventure, never returning. None of us wanted to settle anyway and someone's working on it as I speak. There's work to be done. And play.

So let us fuck ourselves up with the parties - there was no risk to the gene pool and no damage to class by screwing the wrong peoples, no miscegenation among races and no broken homes. We told them we wanted it that way and for once they listened. A true democracy, finally, first in history; power to the people. They didn't restrict our morality anymore -

the repressive age my grandleftovers turned to dust when families stopped having kids and had to stay in one place to raise them themselves. The Judeo-Christian walk of shame had been lifted and rich could fuck poor and young could fuck younger.

So why not stay out all night and smoke a shot or two, especially when the hogs were supplying us? If I saw a darkie upside from the last generation wearing Kevlar like a junkie I just made sure there was enough smoke or jack to get her high enough to go down, as long as her skin wasn't so blasted my stomach emptied and it was thrillbait and then she thanked me. The slide thanked me!

You never had to deal with the same people anyway unless you happened to end up in the same afterhours on accident but they modulated all that and it only happened when someone changed their desig and then it was like someone new anyway. When would anyone ever stay on the same grid as you?

At 11 when the busses came back to take us offline I saw we were headed for the lower hills of Culver. They had that large flat mall two floors with lots of booths and lights and the nozzles were mixed with all tastes of smoke and palaver, and the thick glass walls let in the daylight when it was night and the night when it was day so you almost could keep

track of how long you'd been there afterhours. Not just a nod-off but an actual two-part break from light to dark, right? like time was actually passing. Very trending.

We passed a line of others going out to work in the North over the mountains by Griffith, opposite our grid. The rumor was a nuclear proton accelerator under the hill powering the entire district but no one ever saw any plans. Just small pieces had leaked and the only reason I mention is I heard it two times from two different guys at two different rooms. Neither could be trusted.

No one compares notes and I guess it's safe and none of us are engineers.

I'd been at the Culver place before and since we were starting at noon we'd be here until 7 last call and the glows went dark and the buses were arriving. Some said that people were getting shipped east. Nevada needs workers. I went out and started in a booth where the TVs all intertwined up on the ceiling over the couches made one large image out of dozens of small ones, all tuned to different feeds. I didn't recognize anyone above me.



My Hand is Obscene

by SAM WYATT OGDEN

They say that pregnant women have an inner glow that changes everything they do into an act of beatitude. All things were subsumed into what was growing in her. Our interactions with others always included the phrase “We’re pregnant.”

Did she glow? Maybe. Her skin became greasier and less painted, but I began to see even that as one of her many mechanisms for absorbing the world around her—as if her skin had become

more permeable to take in the light.

Was she beatific? Maybe. I mean, logic would have it that she was in fact glowing and I’ve always been a slave of logic so maybe I see her glowing and sometimes the furniture and definitely the furnace which of course we baby proofed as well. You see the furnace is downstairs in our apartment, and I know the kid won’t be able to even get downstairs for a few years but we couldn’t help but think more and more ahead each day as our minds seem always to go a step faster than the pace of life, so anyways the furnace is downstairs and there’s a door that slides in to the wall that leads you into the furnace room which is about two by two feet and ten

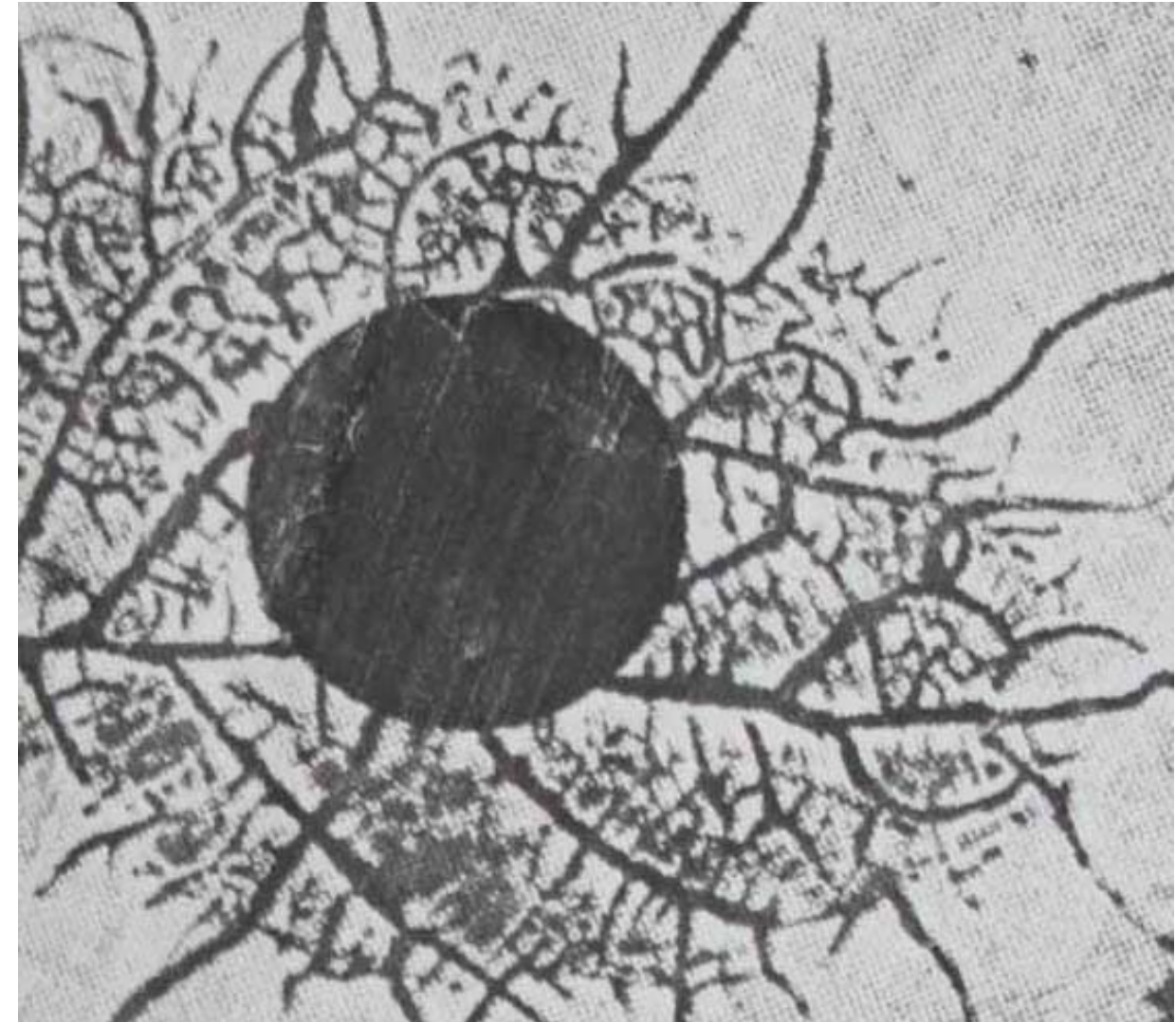
or so feet tall and there's this part of the furnace that gets really hot, like burning hot on the side, don't ask me what it is I don't know a damn thing about furnaces that's for the electricians right specialized society and all everyone in their place, anyways this hot part, is a pipe of some kind sticks straight out the front right about two feet high right where the little one's head might be, right about the time he's walking but before he has much control, right at the moment when he can move but he will be thinking more about the act of said movement than the direction because see all of his attention will be taken up by that act itself and his head might just slam right into that

hot pipe heat and pressure and friction right and that's all it takes, childhood trauma.

That's it that's all you need and then ten years down the line he starts cutting himself and thinking about suicide and she's no longer glowing long since beyond the beatitude and she's yelling at me about the furnace and we should have done something about the furnace because now she can't sleep at night because she's terrified she will try to open the bathroom door one night and find it locked and get no answer at first and you know maybe some one left it locked so she speaks louder and no one answers so she jimmys open the door the crafty little girl she is and there's blood staining the carpet and silence

everywhere and the waters already lukewarm and little Jimmy's gone over that line, despite the counseling and all the words of encouragement come too late. So see I took this piece of metal and got the drill gun out and then the hammer hit the wall in different places until I found a stud and then put in the first few screws and the other side of the latch on the sliding door and one of those cute little locks they sell at the convenience store for a dollar at the counter and the whole set up's about four feet up so by the time he can reach it he will be able to pay attention to where he walks and that little metal piece will hit him about chest

level and hell be wearing a shirt so even if he does run into it it won't be a big deal.



IN THE DARK

by HOWIE GOOD

I

Ask anyone how we found ourselves living in a country so dark, they'll tell you which common household objects can get you high & the sexual positions that were never implemented & have since disappeared. Hardly anyone mentions just how much suffering healing is.

2

Everyone says I should get a new attitude. Or shoot myself. A plaster angel plunges its hand into a tottering pile of smashed, burned-out cars, fifty-seven acres of aimless regret. The next day only brings more rain & incompetent boots. Not a single unborn child objects.

3

Charred corpses litter the streets. Imagine, if you can, blowing white curtains, a black hole with teeth.

QUINTET

by HOWIE GOOD

I

We live in the constant instant, body piled upon crumbling body. Security has a duty to look up your skirt. The Buddha is portrayed with his eyes closed for a reason.

2

Someone would eat the heart to gain courage; someone else the liver to gain strength. I prefer to get my prescription refilled.

3

Ignore the off ramp ahead. This isn't the beautiful weather I remember from home. This isn't the kind of pain I experienced at birth.

4

And if you concentrate harder, you might hear the clanking of robots on amphetamines, a planet of scorched stumps, the ocean noisily burning as the gods sleep with their windows shut.

5

For thirteen days now, it's officially been fall, the yellow cab hitting the trees head-on. A pair of crows confers in the nervous branches of an upright willow. When I was little, the goldfish in the bowl on the kitchen windowsill were always dying.

DOWNTICK

by HOWIE GOOD

Only birds know what birds are saying, high on cold medicine & receding into the distance, the saint of safe travel, packed in sawdust & iridescent suds, on the road out to Meyer's farm, our bodies pressed together like palms in prayer, a flower that an arbitrary moral system predicts will someday make a magnificent ruin.

AT THE EDGE OF HISTORY

by HOWIE GOOD

I

Summer lasted another forty or fifty minutes. That son of a bitch, backed up by a private army, was laughing at the bony ass of the moon.

2

The God of Love powered down – a marbleized heart in the care of the Speech & Hearing Clinic. The only stage direction was *(Silence)*.

3

Spy cameras everywhere. Theologians, too. Many languages being spoken at once & circular winds swirling against the ceiling. It was fashionable to be pessimistic, like the pink and green sunsets found only in Los Angeles.

4

The red came off on my hands. Please see Sandy if you think it might be yours.

excerpt from

A Long, Silly Letter to El Paso

by JOSEPH PLASAN

President Walton continued: "What it really comes down to is children . . . we simply don't trust them, build large steel erections so that we can have more room for our sweatpants, we need you to wear those sweatpants out so you can make more, we also need you to join the ranks of our military so that other countries can indulge in these pants. WE WILL SHOW THE WORLD how to wear sweatpants and eat discount corn chips. THE WHOLE WORLD WILL BE WAL-MART," It was during this speech

that Jenna remembered how the apocalypse came about. Could it really have been over sweatpants? People now wished that they had never gotten their degrees in matters of thought. You use your social security ATM card to purchase a tank of corn-oil nowadays and it costs 50 Ameri-Rubles. What happened? Was this really because of a pig's affinity to be comfortable in cotton pants? All we got out of this revolution was a new designer tranquilizer and faster pre-buttered popping corn? Jenna pondered his life of solitude in a different light, the dark interior of his shitty little roach hotel didn't seem so dark now, Jenna was no longer residing in the pubic region of California; the once most polluted city in America turned into a garden of Eden compared

to the Wal-Mart cities. The apocalypse hadn't brought death and destruction as everyone had imagined it might . . . what it brought instead was more laws, plastic, highway signs, rent-a-cops, wax for cars, more driving and less thinking. The walls got real thick for awhile before totally eroding. You see, walls only get thicker when the enemy is getting thicker . . . and those dangerous, DANGEROUS, Mexicans burst right through that fucker, like a pack of wolves running into a well organized insane asylum, white room, people sitting in wheel chairs drooling onto their bibs while a fuzzy television entertaining the vegetables. A shiny white porcelain table holds a vase full of plastic flowers, the only

other object in the padded room being the nurse's station. The wolves look at one another with confusion and turn around, sauntering slowly back into Chihuahua. One of the Nurses shoves a cigarette in her mouth and morphs into a soldier, "That was weird wasn't it?" He says to old man Thompson. The rank and file wheel chairs, 100 ranks and files per room, made a simultaneous left face; the metal hooks grabbed their wheels from what looked like railroad tracks on the hospital floor. ZIEG HIEL! They slobbered. Television: That dirty whore hole.



A Night in L.A.

by JAMES KNIGHT

I said, Hi.
My name's Jim.
So . . . How d'ya like
me so far?

She said,
Well, you're kinda cute,
so, like, stick around
and let me check you out.
Ya know?

If you seem smart and witty,
then okay, maybe we can move
it to coffee and donuts.
Big *MAY*be.

And, ya know, like, we'll see.
Maybe I'll let you
take me to dinner, a
show, then we'll see

about a few quiet
drinks later.

But,
of course,
that depends on what you do,
the kind of car you drive,
and where you live.

I mean, like,
if you drive a Mercedes
and live on the beach,
skip coffee and donuts.
Like, who needs preliminaries?

If you make big deals on
your cell with friends
from the club,
we'll go right
out for drinks.

If you're
a starving actor,
writer or musician,

that's, like, way romantic-
cool, so, I'll take *you*
for coffee and donuts.

If you're none of the above,
and just on the make,
get lost.

So I did.

I said, Hi.
My name's Jim.
I don't drive a Mercedes,
don't live on the beach,
and the only deals I've
been making lately are
with my landlord.

I'm not an actor,
writer or musician, but
that doesn't mean I'm not
starving.

I like coffee,
hate donuts,
boring dinners and
lousy shows.

I *am* just out
on the make.

So, how do you
like me
so far?"

A strong baritone voice replied,
"My place or yours?"

Mr. Pretor-Pinney

by DAMIAN LANAHAN-KALISH

Mr. Pretor-Pinney is a cloud spotter
and he wrote a book!

He is a cloud collector
he's named the clouds!
things like "morning glory" and "King of Clouds"

Mr. Pretor-Pinney is the president of the Cloud Appreciation Society
They look at clouds together

He lives in england
with a wife and two kids
and he publishes an annual journal
about doing nothing!

I am glad
That I did not make up
Mr. Pretor Pinney

Poem about a girl I saw on the subway, # XLII

The Shortest Amazon

by DAMIAN LANAHAN-KALISH

You are the shortest Amazon in this jungle
Wearing a bracelet given to you by the king of Brooklyn
And a nose ring you took from your latest kill
I watch you hide between trains and airplanes
Hunting the wild boar to extinction

excerpt from

Unwrap Your Candy

by JESSE MILLER

He kept trying to walk straight, but could only weave back and forth. A dull ache stirred up from his balls. Two apples being twisted off a tree. A broken egg clung to the center of his chest. He was at the very least, drunk.

The street was bare. Light hollowed out all it could from the darkness, but not a drop more. Leaking off metal tubes, bubbles of white light laced the empty path before him. An alignment of planets. It seemed a mistake to be outside, that at any moment the cool feel of steel handcuffs would

lock his body into place. A child's fear.

He fumbled with a pack of cigarettes from his coat pocket, dropping it twice, but eventually brought one to his lips and a flaring match to the other end. He crumpled the pack and watched as it fell to the ground.

—Kurplunk.

That should be the sound everything makes.

As he dragged, as tobacco became smoke, something became nothing, he unwittingly pulled open the wrappings of a tiny memory . . .

He didn't know how to hold it the first time. The paper tube felt like a pencil, but shorter. He couldn't figure out the fingering on it. But Kelly could coax

two pale strands of smoke out of her lips and ring them through her mouth. When the smoke ran up her nose, it looked like she was being rewound. She called it: FRENCH INHALING. She could launch 10 smoke rings, one after the other, constructing a tunnel that hung in the still air of the car before it twitched and fell apart, ring by dissolving ring. Thom gagged, but forced his first one down.

His hand on her left breast, he could see the car grow foggier and foggier, as though they were building a cloud. He pulled his hand from her shirt and couldn't help caressing the palm, where Kelly's nipples had been moments before. He

imagined a lynch and conflagration sermon from some Sunday school years ago, and recalled the teacher drawing a circle in his palm in permanent magic marker at the beginning of class and kept showing it to the class.

Thom leaned in, slowly, trying to catch his lips on her breath like a fishhook, but the car was turning into moist blue lung that throbbed slowly in the parking lot.

Thom reached for her chest and Kelly pulled away.

—I'd probably fuck an older guy. If he loved me. Who knows why she said it. She'd said a million crazy things. Thom touched his palm and imagined

his hand was empty, in a tiny circle, at the center. Later that night, with the taste of smoke still lingering on his lips, he dreamed of them. Hundreds of packs pirouetting in the air. Blond filters. Transparent paper dresses. He craved them all and wanted to eat them like food. Little salty fish sticks. He wanted to eat the cigarettes and put an end to the hunger and be satisfied, but there didn't seem to be enough in the dream to kill the craving. He wanted to put it all in his mouth, Kelly and her unseen breasts, and the block they lived on her Kelly's older sister with strawberry curls and her boyfriend and the ribbiting leather couch they used to roll around on when he was

younger and under the rule of being babysat, and the couch itself, put the whole goddamn slippery enormous plum of the world in his mouth and chew. It was all so fucking crazy.

Thom continued to walk along the empty street, away from his apartment. When he turned the corner, one hundred thousand flash bulbs dinged at once. His eyes were steeped in thick moonlight. The hanging ball above leaked an ocean of milk.

It was so near. It was a fly ball from the diamond. A diamond itself. He wanted to wrap his hand around it and pluck the jewel from the sky. Study it. Learn by feeling the hollow places and the rocky imperfections. Put it on a mantle. Show his kids.

And then crush it like an egg in his hand.

Like it was nothing.

Like it was hollow.

A used up pack of smokes.

He wove and wove, passing house after silent house. Step after step he walked, straddled between the lines of faded paint on the street. He noticed how lights left on at night for comfort or protection broke through, making a softly glowing aisle. The light was for him.

He walked on down the aisle and his shoes clacked against the asphalt with a developing cadence. Kurplunk. Kurplunkurplunk. The lights blurred. He tried to adjust his eyes, but

couldn't.

A hush broke over the street after every step. A sound and then nothing. A stress and then silence. Hushed were the houses vibrating with soft light. Hushed were the cats and the dogs coiled in contentment. Hushed were the homeowners tucked between two velvety sheets, in a dream.

The whole of the nightworld blurred. Light became shadows, stretching off of objects, whispering to each other. Connecting things. Each step he clapped on the cool street became involuntary, less noticeable than breathing. He was being pulled. Lulled down a mossy river toward the light that rattled the sky.

The light was for him. He bathed in it,
uncovering wings. There was no silence now.
Kurplunkurplunkurplunk. He closed his eyes,
spreading his arms as wide as he could. He saw
blue and red dots, the light of ruined worlds
pinned between his mind and eyelids. The dots
joined, fingers interweaving, and smashed white.

The light was for him.

His feet pulled faster at the street. The silent
houses opened and then began to scream by. His
heart pitched his blood forward. He was rising.
Off of the earth. Above the street. Above the
house lights. Above the twiggy Autumn trees.
Above the air. Rising moonward. Thom's mouth

fell open and the noises in his head leaked into the
night.

–Don't you see, these are your lights, those stars,
those are for you!

Kurplunkurplunkurplunk.

–This is your vigil. These are for you!

Kurplunkitybunkity.

–Are you hanging behind the moon?

Kurplusscaprice.

–It's all for you!

Curious city.

–All of it, all!

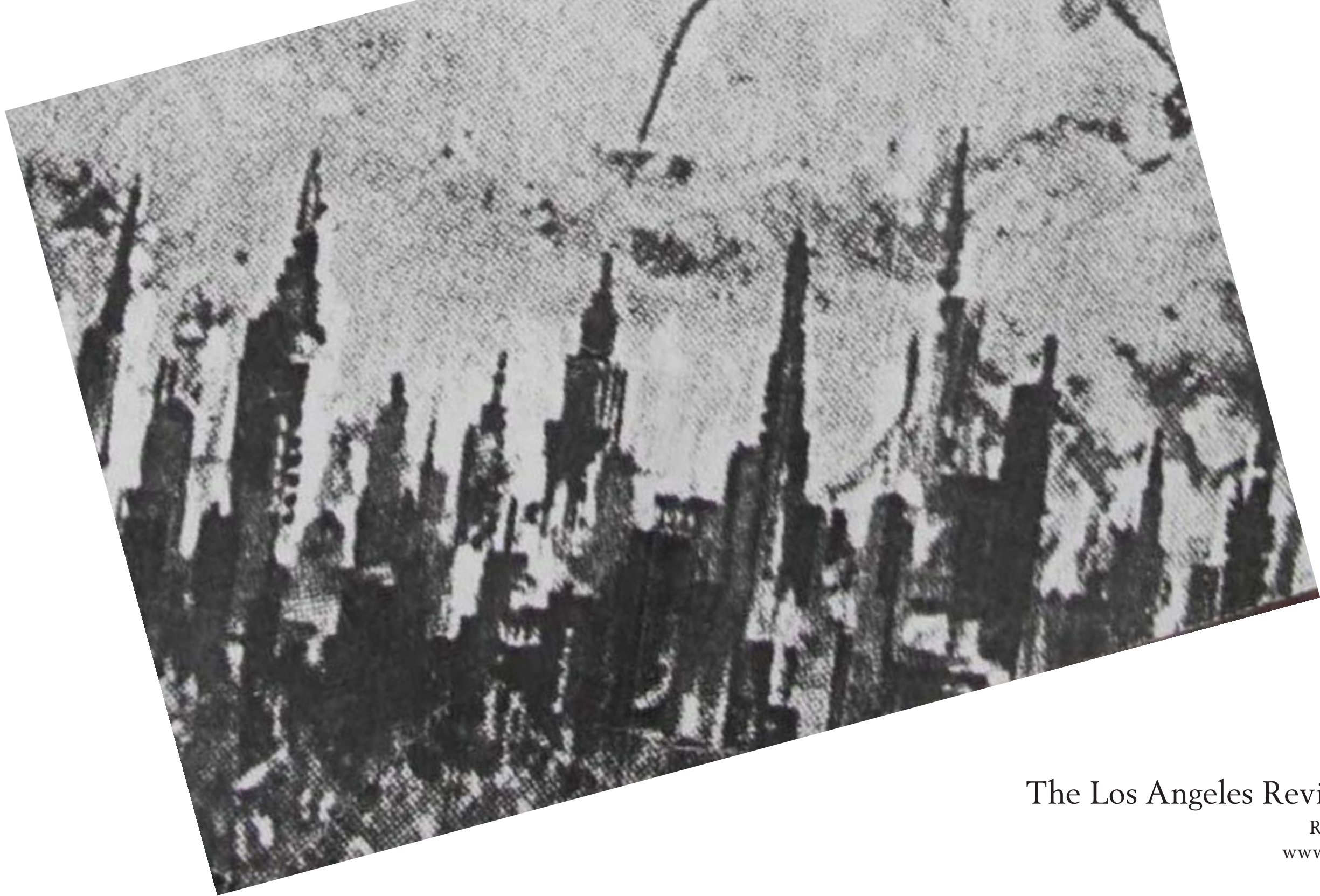
Curiosity.

The mumbling of a motor grew louder and louder.

His feet were stiff on the street, inches from the curb. The aisle was no longer soft or glowing like rows of sweet candles. The leaves had left the trees, but the branches were thick and long, hanging like hands that cover eyes at a slasher flick. He froze. A torrent of nausea cut his stomach and toppled his body. His palms ran aground. A berserk twitch rippled through his torso. He vomited.

The snarl of metal approached. His neck shivered into a crisis as his stomach broke open.

He must have French inhaled the last one.



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