

SMALL HOUSE PAMPHLET SERIES

NUMBER 1 • MAY 2020

SMALL HOUSE READING SERIES hosted our first reading in the fall of 2016, just before the 2016 election, in Greenville, South Carolina. That fall ushered in a sense of darkness and fear that had long lurked just beneath the surface; for the next three years, until spring of 2019, we were grateful for the words shared by our readers—who came from far and wide to share their work—and for the fellowship the readings brought about.

In spring of 2020, we find ourselves missing the voices of our friends and wondering what we can do to help our communities. We asked our readers to share a poem—not necessarily of the moment, just a poem—as well as a community organization. If you’re reading this now, and if you can, we invite you to contribute to any of the following organizations suggested by our poets. Links to these organizations can also be found at the Small House website, [www.smallhousepoetry.com](http://www.smallhousepoetry.com)

We look forward to the next time we can all come together safely in our small house, or anywhere else.

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**COLORADO:**

Front Range Mutual Aid Network: <https://frman.org/>

**OHIO:**

The Refugee Response: <https://www.refugeerresponse.org/give>

Cincinnati Homeless Coalition: <https://cincihomeless.org/about/donate-2/>

**MASSACHUSETTS:**

Greater Somerville Homeless Coalition:

<https://charity.gofundme.com/o/en/campaign/help4thehelpless>

**NORTH CAROLINA:**

Asheville Poverty Initiative: <https://www.ashevillepovertyinitiative.org/donate>

NC Solidarity Fund: <https://donorbox.org/nc-solidarity-fund>

**SOUTH CAROLINA:**

Emrys Literary Foundation: <https://www.emrys.org/donate-1>

Harvest Hope Food Bank: <https://give.harvesthope.org/checkout/5372>

PASOs: <https://www.scpasos.org/donate/>

**NATIONWIDE:**

The Trevor Project: <https://give.thetrevorproject.org/give/63307/#!/donation/checkout>



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**POEM IN WHICH MY LOVE WILL NOT LET YOU DOWN**

**SAM AMADON**

*Hold still.* And that was all we said,  
Having found shadows on the porch, warm  
In places that should've been cool still,  
Places that had stayed dark all day. It was  
The same when we filled the tub with

Cool water—we tried it, with our hands  
Up to our wrists, and it was seawater, warm  
In the tub when we had just woken up. Or  
It woke us, the tub filling with seawater—  
And that was a dream we were having:

One where seawater fills the tub. Maybe  
Then we thought this is how to live now.  
With the thing as we feared it. Or we said  
*Hold still.* I said it, and then you said it.  
We said it together, like it was our breath.

Then we were in Rome again. Walking  
In a crowd from one dark field into  
Another. You shouted *Via Appia!* And so  
I shouted *Via delle Capannelle!* Gianfranco  
Shouted *Via Appia e Via delle Capannelle!*

And we shouted into the plastic phone

*Via Appia or Via delle Capannelle!* This was when  
We were walking so close I saw faces  
In the back of the man before me, buzzing  
In places, I was numb still in others

From the concert, from jumping in place,  
From being thirsty, from drinking water. All of  
These lines of rope and if you crossed them  
People shouted. We shouted *Is this your car!*  
And we shouted *Are you the person I am*

*Speaking to! Am I speaking to you!* And then  
We had our heads against the headrests,  
Driving too fast, it seemed because of the music—  
I wasn't driving but it was how I would  
Drive because of the music, and in the past,

When it felt like I was in several cities at  
Once (with you), or in places that weren't cities,  
Never would be. The air rose as far as  
The mountains. It held. And shadows were  
Everywhere, but there was nothing

We couldn't see through. The highway  
Interchanges pile atop each other, in rings that  
Breathe. It was the sky over Texas,  
And we chased the reach of our fingers  
With roads. Out where we couldn't even tell

If the air was hot, it was too full of  
Direction. It was what we wanted. To be in  
A vagueness specific, like the name  
Of a wind. The sky was not red.  
It was gray, then black, then dimly blue.

We sat in the waves on the shore, in  
Thick Florida sand, or we stood on stones  
At an Adriatic beach with water so  
Cold it was like a dream. Something  
You'd have to make up, but wouldn't

Know how. Wouldn't have known  
You had to. Or we are in your place.  
Springsteen and us. Over us.  
Over the couch, and the short table.  
Filling in the lamplight in the corner,

And the choice to lie down on a rug,  
To lay out a game between us,  
And listen, as the trees in Houston turn  
Their branches against windows  
In Montrose, on Hawthorne Street,

Listen, as the song goes *In the silence,*  
*I hear my heart beating,* and then *time*  
*Slipping away.* Hear it repeat.  
We play it again, and it pours around  
Us into whatever room we keep.

## ORDEAL

CLAIRE BATEMAN

And now you must enter the forest of fiery hands.

You may not proceed in clusters or pairs—squeeze through the narrow gap alone, turn sideways, suck in your breath.

All the hands are ready to be plucked, ripe inside their flames.

Your strategy should be a combination of speed and aplomb—reach in boldly to extract a hand from its fibrous casing, and you won't be harmed, but if you hesitate, pausing to stroke the palm or test the fingers, you may find yourself singed.

Don't waste time attempting to locate identical hands—a degree of tactical incongruity may prove decisive in the endeavor to come. Particularly auspicious matches include a transparent hand with a polynomial hand, a shattered hand with a petrified hand, a mordant hand with a confectionary hand.

Understand that each hand you choose will immediately engulf your birth hand, auto-grafting to your wrist. Avert your gaze lest you spook it during this process, causing it to balk or bolt.

As soon as your selection is fully adhered, you must sing to it as it self-extinguishes, then cools. Every hand possesses idiosyncratic musical affinities and aversions; run through your repertoire until you identify its preferred style. This is why it's necessary to have picked only one hand at a time lest you find yourself trying to simultaneously gratify hands with incompatible tastes, though even with appropriate sequencing, it may be several days before they can tolerate each other, let alone operate in tandem. Should you attempt to rush the process, they may turn combative, necessitating surgical removal.

If you're the one who harvested the lone aqualuminous hand, understand that you'll be in immediate danger from the eleven assassins who have been seeking it without surcease through all the adjacent dimensions; report to us at once, and we'll issue the protective black diamond glove.

Once the cooling is complete, the forest will precipitously eject you. Should you try to force your way back in, you'll find the passage overgrown with brambles as though you'd never passed through.

Now you'll begin your march toward the sea together.

According to the mandate, you must press on in silence. You may exchange information only through expelling air currents by mouth in shapes appropriate to your meaning, a phenomenon

that will suffer many names throughout the ages until it eventually comes to be known as whispering.

There will be seasons of snow and seasons of bituminous winds, opaque cities you'll pass through like ghosts, and spectral cities shimmering around your density.

There will be the viscera of unidentifiable creatures strewn across the road; the sky as it basks and turns, drinking the luxuriant smoke of villagers ritually cremating the shadows of their dead; the terror that everything could at any moment of its own accord become even one degree more beautiful.

By your third century, you'll be trudging as if in sleep, while inside the adopted hands, which are also dozing, your birth hands twitch and tremble like hunting dogs dreaming by the hearth.

All along the way, you'll sense that the forest is palpably right behind you like a stealth subcontinent, pausing as you pause, breathing as you breathe, but looking back will be forbidden, so you'll never determine whether this is actual pursuit or the hallucinatory after-effect of your sojourn there.

And all along the way, you'll anticipate waves and foam, the opening out of atmosphere into saturated distance.

But when you finally reach the shore, though these components will indeed be in place, the scene will feel like nothing you'd expected, because you yourself will have changed. Are you bulky or buoyant?

You'll long to linger, caressing the horizon with your gaze in the near-dusk plumy with incandescence as clouds pile up impossibly overhead.

Nevertheless, you must walk straight into the water while the sand sucks at your feet and you wonder if that crackling in your brain is your hair freezing to your scalp or the static of submerged constellations.

You'll step deeper, ever deeper.

Now you are traversing the very bottom of the world wherein hide the treasures of darkness and of the night.

Now the bearer of the lone aqua-luminous hand will remove their black diamond glove, finger by finger, lighting you to the spot where the mighty vessel foundered and sank so long ago.

There can be no exemptions. It will take every one of those hands to dredge up the hull and turn the great ship around.

## UNIVERSAL

SARAH COOPER

If you use only the periodic table  
one can argue the moon and earth  
are identical twins.

It's true: they share  
the same isotopes.  
To be fair though, I prefer  
earthy things:  
wet dirt over worn  
hiking boots, hands  
calloused from  
wooden shovel  
handles, tan lines  
splitting across scapulas.

Put it another way  
the shine of  
shin skin when shaving,  
rain-slick  
highways evaporating  
to heat  
and the hum of  
nothingness  
(though that may  
be procured  
on the moon too)  
is where I want to live.

If you think too much  
or not enough  
you can convince  
yourself of anything  
or of everything.

## ENVELOPE

LIZ COUNTRYMAN

There are camellia flowers  
on the camellia bushes  
the oregano is flourishing  
sunlight moves on the gray wall  
and shows the dust  
on the window screens  
a paper bag leans against  
the side of the window  
some of the leaves are green  
and some are yellow  
some of the trees are bare  
some vines grow high  
in the tall bare trees  
old crepe myrtles  
with bulbous blight on them  
some of the leaves shimmer

Some of what I see seems to move  
some of it seems to be still  
some of my fingers move  
we think of a tree as unmoving  
when a breeze arrives the leaves  
trying to be turned  
the purposeful bend  
in branches the purpose  
no longer apparent  
also leaves room  
for the next thing

Some trash floated across a plaza  
on a Christmas evening  
in a show I watched  
set in Chicago in the 1990s  
George Clooney held  
his wool overcoat around him as  
discarded wrappers  
pulsed around him like sea waves  
other people crossed the plaza  
and the camera lifted quite high  
different kinds of coats

the plaza lightened with flying papers  
some kids with bright  
puffy coats  
some adults with dark wool coats  
he made his way across the street  
his heartbreak seemingly  
one more floating paper

There was an awful amount  
of room around Clooney  
remember that moment where paper  
pulsed inside us like  
we were full of imperfect air  
that time a girl  
who'd been nice to me  
suddenly wasn't  
and it felt as though a bush had been  
ripped up from my heart  
so that behind it I could suddenly see  
another area  
that had apparently been there all along  
and I wandered in

Like a piece of paper George Clooney  
may find new use  
flying into different hands  
I'm looking at you from here  
with the camera and years after  
I'm still concerned that you're cold  
your coat still holds  
reality to be coaxed out  
a store  
today  
inert human designs  
stupid purchases made in hope  
routines that feel both awful and good  
are all areas  
like a swirling plaza  
pockets of communion and pause  
toys everywhere  
books everywhere  
and when we used to purchase CDs  
here is your Christmas present  
a little room for you to dream in

The decisions about shape  
a tree has made  
seeking and avoiding  
leave room for light  
I feel a small amount of room  
balloon  
a neighbor who dressed as Santa  
opened his hatchback  
on my block  
for all of us kids  
or everyone else  
when I brought home the small plastic  
helmet  
an ice cream dish  
how an awareness of  
everyone else  
was wound up  
in my happiness

Someone is going to listen to you  
George Clooney  
someone may still listen to you  
the cardboard coasters  
in bars  
how they mop up  
spilled water on the bar  
the overpass  
how my daughter  
proclaims it a bridge  
what is exchanged among people  
almost purposefully  
like a paper loose from the hand

A letter and an envelope  
what I thought and  
how it didn't think of me  
as it moved around the country  
in other people's hands  
the afternoon was gone  
but the letter kept it  
in store  
endless as a college campus quad  
hopeless as a bird

on a quad whose hope  
is emptied by the sloped quad's  
tunnel of wind

Sometimes warmth feels so  
slightly wonderful it is  
extremely wonderful  
December-colored grass and  
chimes somewhere  
movement somewhere  
chirping  
the tearing away of cars  
a block or two from here  
wind and cars sort of the same  
the benevolent warmth  
skin-thick warmth  
browning of leaves  
unreachable as the past  
it is indeed the past  
where I dream of you and find you  
or hear your cries  
in the driveway and anticipate you  
hear the beep of the car as you lock it  
shouts waving past me  
like distant cars

We have somewhere to go  
we can't linger here  
we can't reach what is here  
it's just like the past  
that steady  
that enormous  
that familiar and unfamiliar  
the gracious sun  
unsettles the part of us that  
desires control  
benevolence outmans us  
and slips past

## SELF-INTERROGATIONS

MICHAEL DOWDY

In the port of entry did you soften your suspicion of the words *isolation* and *distance*?

Past the port of entry did you hear the symphony in the mountain laurel? Did you feel its forest-horny rhythm, each raindrop seeking another, each thunderclap rapturing the cherry blossoms?

On your island among the islands did you rise to Muriel Rukeyser's irritation? "O for God's sake," hadn't she grumbled, islands "are connected / underneath"?

On Rukeyser Day did you dream of freeing the streams buried beneath the Walmart bordering the forest? Of tossing the words *cruise* and *all-inclusive* down the aisles? Of following a rebellion of delivery drivers?

On the other days as your island seemed to shrink did you cultivate the notion that solitude is sometimes not a stun-gun but a telescope?

When the evenings of social-distancing came did the words you'd gathered in approximate order become provisional manuals or provisions for the storms? Or did you let them all unravel?

Did you drive your daughter to the padlocked gates of her beloved summer camp, stopping only to snap pics of the NO DOLLAR IN THE HOLLER signs lining the mountain road?

When you saw minutes later that Dollar General had prevailed could you still summon the suspended dream of standing shoulder to shoulder against capital?

Did you realize that a port of entry is equally a port of departure? In the sudden weather of a Transylvania County spring did you fathom that direction sometimes matters less than being present in the presence of others?

From your island's hemlocks and maples did you recall that Transylvania means *through the forest*? Did you insist then on the proximity of the others despite their seeming distance?

Did you ditch your daughter's "e-learning packets"? For music lessons did she dance to John Prine's "Paradise"? For math did she count the times Bill Withers croons "I know" in "Ain't No Sunshine"?

Did you vow to tattoo the words of a Mexican poet—"nada es de nadie," *nothing belongs to anyone*—to your torso?

Did you hear the sirens and helicopters, the whippoorwills and owls, the gunfire echoing over the ridge? Did their beats between your eardrums form a requiem for the crowd or a hoedown for the last days of the bloodsuckers?

In the port of departure between the disaster and whatever comes after will you muster the courage to follow your child into the social blister of the future, she the lance and you the raw skin—or the flap ripped off—during the passage?

**CANTO**

**GRAHAM FOUST**

Decay's eddies in the days

to come, your failure's tastes,  
a love stripped of everything

but cruelty—what to do?

How to live the faintest game  
is the question of you

and your own worst history

including a poem  
including upholstery

soaked acridly through.

In the bright months of bare legs  
One day it snows. / Snow  
Is stranger than we remembered /  
Just cold itself turned temporary bauble  
To make distracted glee of the day.  
I am a random  
Woman eating snow from her fingers /  
Betel nut wrapped in a leaf / that was another  
Day / Thought is the first note of ether  
With the snow succulent as the sting of metal  
At the start of a dream. / I  
Am carrying on an affair with my husband's  
Permission: to staunch the boredom  
I recommend it usually but my dreams  
Yesterday cast doubt / I can never  
Tell if he's drunk, given that he's sober  
But lied once. / Betel nut / Snow

It presses in on the chamber of the day  
We're living: frost frames the day  
With the night pressing close / ;  
All the cards I drew were the Moon  
In reverse: dispelled anxieties  
Or a woman's mind knifed from its source: I  
Am not afraid these days though I wonder  
If this is because a miracle of stupidity  
Has lit on the brain / with a charge  
Like tongued snow / In other

Winters the snow is a constant  
So that when he woke me  
In the dark -- the cats slunk into  
Their secrecy -- to say: snow!  
This is lost to them / as if we'd excavated  
The miraculous of the first shock  
Of pain / before it grew tired / before  
It was our cross / perhaps it was simply  
The new / with the sudden wet  
Joy of the mouth. That is snow

To us / in the green-drenched  
Heat country when sometimes  
Like today it snows

The betel nut has nothing  
To do with today / it was a decade  
Ago when I visited  
My cousin in Poona wanting  
A home that I'd forgotten  
Previously to acknowledge -- but he  
Was eighteen and wanted  
To get stoned / and the truth is there  
Is a home in that also : in drug

Like the home that shines  
With estrangement is just  
Over there through the smoke / With  
Strangers who are home  
Also / I lost maybe five  
Years of my life to staring in awe  
At that home / Oh well / I am  
Fearless now as I mentioned and  
Light: I let the moments rest  
In my hand like angel cake or  
A finch -- once I had a parakeet  
Two -- but I gave them away  
Since I could not bear  
The thought of their death / The man  
With whom I am having the open  
Affair goes by -- this is true -- an  
Initial -- I mean his name  
Is only an initial and my friends  
Put it in quotes when they talk  
To make fun of me / The good

Thing about being sober is that  
Everyone else becomes more open  
To embarrassment as the night  
Goes on / I went so far once I am already  
There / So I watch from this side  
Of embarrassment as they  
Approach. I watch the kindness  
Open in their eyes like another  
Pupil -- I will watch you

Tonight, with gladness / I am watching  
Now / I don't know what  
Else we are expected to do when  
Perched on the edge of the end  
--what will the weather  
Be like, say, in the week  
Before the end -- I think there  
Will be snow and but maybe  
With the return of the miracle  
For everyone -- even  
When battened with dirt

## A LITTLE SUGAR

VERA GÓMEZ

—after Linda McCune’s corporate caring series #22

When the syringes came, first one then two  
then three a day, Tia Bertha waited to ask me to inject her.  
I could see her bruises when I obliged.

The small trail of pocked marks lined her upper arms,  
the inside of her thighs, and the curve of her hips.  
She’d flinch every time I got the injection ready.

The insulin so crystalline it was almost a glaze  
on her skin as we struggled with the needle.

For my first communion, she brought me *pan dulce*.  
The pastry made from scratch. The tops scored  
and sprinkled with dyed food-colored sugar.

Tia Bertha floats medicated, bandaged and scarred.  
An angel tied to IVs with white hair loose like wings.

The sweet bread was puffy like her hospital pillows.  
Holding her hand, I can see its diamond-patterned top  
mixed in with the meds resting on her night stand.

The first bite was always sweet. The bread’s insides  
soft, doughy and bright white like her coffin’s lining.

**TRAVANJ - APRIL**  
*the season of growing grass*

**SARAH HUENER**

morning again and the day still possible  
i walk in the woods and breathe leaflight  
both closeby and faraway i hear sirens  
as the first birds sing phrases to each other  
    from tree to tree to tree

the wisteria flowers have all fallen  
gone for another year  
on the shore every bowed branch  
and its shadow in the pond meet  
touching at the edges to form a portal

o, how i'd love to sit and talk with you

the meadow: grass in its everywhereness  
a bright blanket *the grass covers all*  
stuck in my head      and the pond  
ringed by tall swaying trees  
deep as sight   their blowing heads  
                    bright with sun

full of memory the forest swells greenly  
rippling foliage inrushing wind  
acute and unknowing sky—  
i look up as if from the bottom of a well  
above me   the whole world my one star

Into poorly lit grey, she moves

*quite tame, or absolutely inoffensive and shadowlike*

Both reduced and reducible instrument      shifting

her weight between heeled feet      an introduction

to electronics in the mall

Walking where?—like she shouldn't

The formal example of passive tense:

The police report's missing subject

::

Worry like one would for pain

wagered on a child and pray

aloud for relief

*safe I mixed with the crowd where it was deepest*

The idea of the body of money in the future meanwhile

collapses—and not crashingly      as on stairs

but noiselessly and

as yet without threat      or figure of a floor

And against mourning

she buoys belief simultaneous

to shaking her head—a *sorry*

::

An *impossible* a funeral in the end for her own

cool-headed prospects

her uprightness out in the bright

fathom between was and would-be

*a sound like a strong tide*

The blame looms: oh my love is not big enough

My conviction's voice fires

too small lives too low

in the stomach's cavity still made

out of spare wet tinder whatever's fallen

from a molting stand of oaks

::

She coarsens back into ornament. Violation, an event—

stranded in episode—disavows civics

*moonlight and heaven are banished*

It isn't safe you know the night

::

Where ownership falls as the sky does not behave

*Light broke, movement gathered, chimes pealed*

What constitutes seeing in the event of atmosphere

While factually sequence is ineluctable—vague

uncontainable      poorly mythologized

Wind in her hair      her rising hem      flat treatment of struggle

*It seems as if I had been pioneered invisibly*

Factually the city exists only under erasure

To be fair      it's not a reasonable hour

*as if some dissolving force had gone before me*

That detachable armature from which responsibility lilt

Privately she cultivates incredulity

Which falls first—a cry or a siren—

reframed as an attitude aloft on air

from EVERYONE I'VE DANCED WITH IS DEAD

MAMIE MORGAN

Poetry is like seeing *Pirates of the Caribbean*  
when you're not ready for it. When you're small.  
When you're, like, seven.

-Brian (1996-2013)

\*

B's failing poetry, but he's a nice boy,  
lives in his leather bomber, loves AP Bio,

is cool to no one.

When he leans

against the hand-me-down Ikea chaise  
in my office, says *it feels like a valley,*

*were a valley everywhere,*

I make him a copy

of some Simic poem about Euclid  
& chickens & light-dressed women carrying

parasols & Saturday morning

before they find him I dress

in a black gown with cut-outs careful  
to keep the tags intact for a pageant

I've entered at the Baptist church.

My dad carries a sickness so small

in his merkel cells we haven't met it yet.

Everything's a joke.

For weeks my boyfriend Josh & I practice  
our show walk up & down the carport,

smoking ladylike the both of us over a trill

of my school-issued iPad's *Toddlers & Tiaras*.

Josh's casual walk is killer. It's 2013.  
I don't remember anything

else that whole year. I hear Josh

is a welder now & has like a hundred babies.  
I bet he's burnt so many things back together.

MAY 5 (A COVER)

ANNA MOSCHOVAKIS

after and with Yannis Ritsos' poem "November 6" from *Diaries of Exile*,  
translated by Karen Emmerich and Edmund Keeley

Morning. Eno on Bluetooth.  
Rumbles from the neighbor's A/C.  
Was it last week?—I don't know anything—a fire with distant friends  
so living, so gold, so blue.  
We sat there. We looked away. We fell silent  
together, alone, lobbing our grief over the flames  
as if to fuse it together, to un-individuate our doubts.

A report was published everywhere:  
another thousand gone.  
Our shadows clung to the corrugated fence.  
Our company nothing now.

The month had no minutes. The waiting frayed.  
Mercedes' garden flowers rotted in their vase.  
We fell down. We blamed ourselves. We loved one another  
around that dying bouquet that no longer helped.

Around noon the children came in from their screens  
and ate the last slices of bread.  
Then the sun came in  
and blasted everything in the yard.  
Jo's fingers on the keyboard  
were a marathon trainer's feet.

I mean, must we be so sad  
to love one another?

## **BIRTHDAY PORTRAIT**

**KATHLEEN NALLEY**

You are sum of your parts:  
stratum and sinew,  
mirror and muscle,  
thrumming blood, synapse spark,  
a phenomenal hush and hum.  
You were born of the ram's horn.  
You were not missing a rib.  
Your body, a cartographer's rush:  
undulating hills, cavernous ravines.  
You are no man's land. You resist excavation.  
When you propel and thrust, tectonic  
plates collide, even oceans  
tremor and quake. When you speak,  
incendiary dust combusts.  
You are fire.

**FJORD, RIVERMOUTH**

**SARA PECK**

about the restless sun the bedroom  
full of long dead birds  
                    hooked knee windowsill

it is impossible to describe a city  
where we were when the light sweat  
our skin undry  
                    it said *radiance is definitely*

read instead as *radiance defined by*  
our own train car

                    Untitled over the water  
second hand wool and I'd name  
all of the boats for weather and you

                    we walk in cobbled quiet

\*\*\*

a geology fractures  
                                    and be still  
you can feel earth falling out

we're still growing but this  
doesn't mean the rocks don't ache

growth being rarely as clean as  
one rock in  
                                    one rock out

here we're comprised  
almost entirely of basalt let's

stay as long as the world  
will let us

                                    from the passenger seat  
I watch the cliffs converge with our left

islands crop up literally all the time

I imagine you too  
myth-like and cleaving

\*\*\*

*in every part of every living thing  
is stuff that was once rock*

your pockets being warmer  
I panic in the bigness  
finger the black stones worn glassy  
a thing I can hold and  
there's no hurry to go home

the moss cover of everything  
clouds seeping through the cracked mountains  
through our gravel pinged red car  
our borrowed camera this

all used to be rock

Outrageous as Easter on Twitter, I was saying. Across the street a pigeon stepped across the line of sight of a woman, lying, not asleep, on concrete.

Could she hear me, in my own home, opening a medical bill with one finger? Opening a box of super tampons, green?

The next day I left her a box of super tampons. Green as an ammo box in a row of ammo boxes.

Protein bars, bottles of water. I set them down. The bag whispered. My own phrase is *back to life*.

I say it the day I stop thinking again of suicide. Every liturgical calendar starts pagan and ends. You can roll back the rock, if you want. You can film it.

A woman can vanish from one place, appear somewhere else. Orange cats pace the sidewalk, indelicate among needles. She lives on the sidewalk, all day I can see her. On the steps of our porches. At night blue lights on our porches keep bodies from finding their own veins.

To fire me someone says *this is your last day*.

\*

When you walk by, the bush releases its binders of birds. You go on to have a normal life. You let a family member track your newest patterns on your newest phone.

Why did you change your story? I asked. Like a puff from a muzzle, birds acquit, block after block. Once, I said, when I came someone asked me *what happened?* Is this how you remember it?

The river was low. It was where the city always dumped us, the crowning dam. There was a small group of volunteers. You could tell they weren't stopping. Most days, I said helpfully, I feel fine.

Did I sound like a cheap canal? Should I stop scrolling?

I want to believe you like a background check believes me, no waiting period. You keep telling me about everything in your file. There's no file. No one thinks there was ever a place like that, where a story like that could be. I can tell you've been taking selfies of your shadow.

They're converting the old mills to coworking spaces. Things here aren't indelible. Any good party member knows when, by the highway, in the midst of a newspaper, it's coming. Fistful of jacketed birds.

\*

By midday I could get to the library. The key had gone and I knew the return would mean crying out through the chainlink, dialing through the chainlink into a stranger's responsive phone.

I could feel the afternoons in me, fixed as an old case of swayback. At some point I'd get up off the floor and make the wrong dinner. Some mornings a deer stood right before me, looking right at me, and I reached the soft ridge of its spine with the flat of my well-read hand.

People who bother watching you want you to live. When is this true? Are burials cheaper than deportations?

I myself never finished filling out the form. Only the neighborhood knew what to call me. They sent a coyote once down the street and I saw how it went. A dead aunt of my aunt had married so well I could still live. The man was a furrier and all the coats became money well before tastes in bodies changed.

Finally my body began to work for me. I went downtown. In the train station people lay right on the steps, unmoving. I went from kiosk to kiosk. What do you want me to do? a woman said from within the good swells of her uniform. Behind her two more closed their eyes. You must be from the suburbs, she said. What's your plan for the city?

## HAND OVER FIST

JOHN PURSLEY

The Atlantic breaks at the estuary's edge,  
Rushes among rocks. Rolls dreg & silt  
For miles upstream. Like a devolving language

It settles out slowly—*or like curlews themselves*  
Who circle the shoals for worms and carrion.  
Imagine the hand-over-fist force of salt

And sediment, of water impinged upon  
Undulate water. Eighteen-thousand years  
Of spherical melting. Ice. Coming to calm

In slow procession. The reverberant dead-  
Mile drift. The flatness of it all  
Laid out in fallow fields, like thin threads

Warped along looms. The provisional  
Placidity, as if stillness were a formality  
Of strict discipline—*or motion*. Before the gull

Rises, the tern & curlew. Before bodies  
*Are lifted & the first cricket sings. Imagine*  
The repose, the uninterrupted periodicity.

EXIT

ADRIENNE RAPHEL

The mind will play tricks, resist it.  
It's cancer until the body repeats it, nix it.  
If the leg isn't broken, don't fix it, retrain it.  
Until it must just fit, adjust it, the worst is still later, it's  
the mammal that's still in distress,  
dissect it, inspect it, vivisect it, inject it. Forget it.  
What planet's a saint, the mind will play tricks.  
What's Jurassic, restrict it. T-Rex it, instruct it.  
What animal not on the ark,  
the octopus stuck in the glass as itself.  
The mind will do things, predict it, discuss it, digest it, disgust it.  
The mind will play tricks but the body is there, erase it,  
the mind will go on if the body is blasted,  
nothing is new and the body, don't ask it.  
The world hasn't ended, don't jinx it.  
Relax, you won't miss it.  
The mind will be resting, don't trust it.  
The body will sleep but the mind only lies in wait.

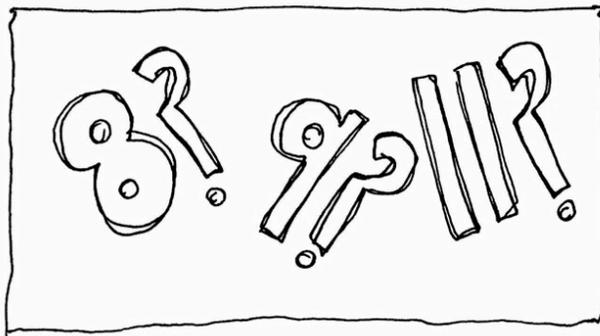
## READINGS

ZACH SAVICH

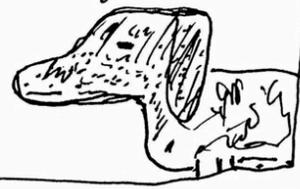
The circuit burns out as soon  
as it fires It can fire for a while though  
It can Yes and you can see  
by its light  
if it's dark enough Poem as  
potato with tendrils  
wires It's a radio  
No But it conducts

\*

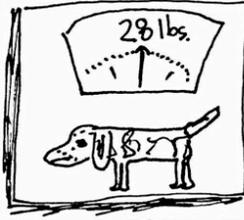
Preceding bees  
magnolias evolved  
for pollination  
by beetles The blossoms evolved  
to endure  
beetles Yes and wind turns  
the page We read  
from there



During these weeks, I looked at Martha, and — for the first time ever — I had the thought that she looked old.



Mostly it was the white — so much white — around her mouth. But she is eight — hardly ancient for a dog of her size.



Then it occurred to me — also for the first time in the seven years she has been with us — that maybe we don't know her actual age.



The shelter had said she was one. But, concerned that older dogs will not be adopted, shelters do sometimes present dogs as younger than they most likely are.



We pondered the possibility. We added it to our list of home school subjects.

- math
- reading
- street style
- oatmeal-making
- how old
- \_\_\_\_\_ is martha

Maybe it runs in the family. My grandfather believed he was younger than he was for almost his entire life. Then he unearthed his birth certificate and was shocked.



A drawing of my grandfather + Martha watching a movie together. Not something that happened, but a synthesis of separate memories. Love to everyone in this hard time.

— Natalie Shapero



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and thanks to our communities and friends in South Carolina, Colorado, and elsewhere.  
Please take care of yourselves and each other. We love you.