



ANEMONE SIDE CAR

CHAPTER 7
of
THE
ANEMONE SIDECAR

CHAPTER 7

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The Anemone Sidecar, Chapter Seven, 2010,
built on the work of select multitudes.
Cover image by Daniel Boyer.

Chapter 7 of The Anemone Sidecar is dedicated
to the Gulf Coast,
a region visited by two recent plagues:
The Shrugs of the Indifferent;
The Moronic Wave.

Bill Tremblay: Media Haiku

Lax waves lap the marsh
leaving orange slime
where nothing will grow.



Michael Jay Tucker: *on an island otherwise invisible*

For me, you are like, oh, an old Chinese fairy tale, the kind in which the young student is crossing the lake and the boat sinks and he finds himself on an island otherwise invisible and he meets you as you come down the path, you are the child of the rain, your crown is red coral, your gown is yellow silk, your elaborate wings are bronze inlaid with gold, your smile incomprehensible, your lips on his, your nipples hard and sweet under his tongue, your orgasm intricate, violent, complicated.

And, of course, years afterwards, a sister will claim to have seen him in dreams, seen him married to the daughter of a dragon and living in great splendor and the crystal palace requisite in such stories. But, wisely, the student's friends will discount the testimony of she who loved him as a child, will instead assume him drowned, or devoured by a kraken, though they will do so with a certain uneasiness, each knowing in secret that they would rather have him dead than quite so enviable.

© Reuters: *Helsinki, March 6*

“This is simply a historic coincidence. Although the road is a busy one, accidents don’t occur every day,” police officer Marja-Leena Huhtala told Reuters.

One of a pair of identical Finnish twins, aged 71, was hit by a truck and killed while cycling on the west coast of Finland.

Before police had identified the body and informed family members, his brother was killed on his bicycle by a second truck half a mile down the road.

“It made my hair stand on end,” she said.

Richard Kostelanetz: *From 1001 Contemporary Ballets*

Contemporary Ballets consists only of a large message screen, probably a liquid crystal display, on which appear the texts published here:

*

Onto an empty stage, up through the trap doors, come scores of performers, filling the stage so densely that they begin to push one another into the audience.

*

Onto the stage comes a man who leaps into the air, where he hangs suspended for the duration of the performance.

*

On a large blackboard three performers write messages of love to one another one letter at a time, backwards.

*

Set in the control tower of a small airport, this ballet portrays the anxieties and relationships of the flight controllers with the dancers flying gliders or hooked into self-propelled harnesses.

*

The evening is spent waiting for someone named Godot and perhaps his troupe to appear.

*

In a dance lasting at least twenty years, a company of a dozen performers do things they would normally do.

*

A chorus of leprechauns poke at one another, apparently trying to discover who among them might be an imposter, which is to say a man.

*

One performer appears to negotiate a series of mazes whose walls must be precisely mapped in his mind because they are invisible to the audience.

*

Several performers vigorously play nothing on familiar instruments, making a ballet of their moves over the sound of their physical efforts.

*

Several pairs of men, dressed to resemble roosters, imitate as closely as possible the mechanics of a cockfight while the audience is invited to make bets.

*

The prima ballerina returns to the dressing room where the other female dancers, angry about not only her show-stealing but her unexpected departures from the script, set upon her viciously.

*

Two men run in place, with microphones amplifying their breathing and their pounding feet, until the pace of their increasingly heavy breaths becomes quicker than the beat of their footfalls.

*

One performer mimes as closely as possible the moves and dress of another directly opposite him, as though the former inhabited a slightly delayed mirror.

*

Four performers, initially suspended head down by their feet, try to crawl up the ropes holding that are them until all of them disappear behind the top of the proscenium.

*

A group of skilled mechanics completely takes apart a car (or other complicated machine) and then puts it back together, regardless of whether any spectators stay to the conclusion.

*

While three performers execute whatever traditional balletic movements they wish toward the back of the stage, two men, appropriately garbed, have a serious fencing match in the front of the stage.

*

Several performers along with available props behave as though they were caught in a tornado.

*

On the back wall of the theater are posted instructions for physical movements that correspond to the numbers two through twelve. With each throw of a pair of dice, one or more of the performers execute the prescribed movement(s). The more dice that are used, the more throws that are made, perhaps by members of the audience, often simultaneously, the more densely kinetic the stage activities become.

*

What to all appearances resembles a puppet is suddenly revealed to be a man.

*

Several performers repeatedly fall to the floor and push themselves up until all of them can rise no more.

*

No matter where the protagonist goes on stage or elsewhere in the theater, a narrowly focused rain shower falls on his head.

*

A woman tells of her sister and alter ego, a dancer who tours seven American cities to earn sufficient money to build a house for her family back home; in each city she mimics a different tempting sin.

*

Two dancers who should be rehearsing instead don masks of familiar movie stars and imitate physical mannerisms peculiar to each.

*

In an unannounced performance on a green lawn, twenty-eight dancers, dressed in slightly different shades of green, blend into the natural surroundings as they move about.

*

Two young people flirt, embrace, and make love in a changing landscape of projected images from classic paintings.

*

The young female protagonist gives her life to save the leader of a crowd of revolutionaries from an assassin's bullet, thus becoming a heroine immortalized in song and, here, in a dance that reenacts the fateful moments in several ways and at different speeds.

*

A number of skunks are let onto the stage one at a time.

*

On stage is brought an upright piece of ice, roughly the size of a coffin that, as dancers chant and stomp around it, proceeds to defrost, revealing the anointed leader of the people.

*

Onto the stage come bulls, or other imposing animals, whose presence drives the audience to the exits.

*

Several performers on stage follow with their index fingers the trajectory of imaginary objects above the spectators' heads.

Lee Stern: *If I Am Running In Your Direction*

If I am running in your direction,
it may mean that I am doing that for no reason.
It may mean that nobody posted any requirements for me to follow.
Or any visual guides to compare with the books that were already in my heart.

It may mean that I'm just running in your direction.
The way when a tree falls down, it means
that the dirt beneath it is trying to withhold its prayers;
the way, when the clouds retreat to the middle of your senses,
the wind we introduced you to brought lengthening sunlight
to bear upon the seasons of grace at your feet.

(credit: this poem first appeared in "Third Wednesday")

John Glass: two pieces

Brushes Under Nixon

Listen to the silver crisping of my brushes
Can you hear them—lipping—on the edge of my snare?
Orchestras can wait. I
like
the ride and the upright.
That silver flitting is crisper
and tighter
than that old clothesline wrapped
around that old pecan tree
in grandmother's backyard.
My cousin marveled
at how tight that clothesline remained
but my cousin
never made it to one of my jazz gigs.
And when there is Tchaikovsky,
I don't make it to one of my jazz gigs.
Those grey wiry wands sometimes yield
to shiny green xylophone mallets.

But that clothesline—torque tight—creeps into vision.
They tell you to keep your fingers loose
on those brushes,
and with the sticks,
to spray rolls across those toms
as lightly as napalm under Nixon. (Oops)
There's at least one jazz drummer that votes conservative

I really don't always know how to choose between the two.

Gwendolyn and Gong

The poetry of my percussion
is the zing of the finger cymbal
evaporating into the stage night
and settling on a lonely, ripped page
of Mrs. Gwendolyn Brooks.

School is out, so many shouts
but few from the gathered crowd
that is here for Debussy.
The old poster tacked to the old wooden post
no longer works,
there's just too many competing venues for
the time of folks.

So there are the thin crowds we play to,
and there are words that steal their way in,
those from before, usually scattered.
There is a large, dark gong, a copper shimmer,
and a cloaked composer.
A soft second on that dark stage.
Mrs. Brooks steps from the shadows,
and plays that gong with warm, maroon mallets,
and teaches me her verse.

Wain Ewing: an excerpt from "Plant Light and Las Vegas"

Plant Light and Las Vegas

Sitting at table in a brightly lit room. Much of what is on the table is ugly in a Las Vegas way--cheap, glittering, bright like the chrome cocktail lounge in the postcard sent to me by a friend. There are a number of folk-individualists around the table, some seated at it.

Another postcard from the same friend, but from a different place, shows a stone house in the country surrounded by breathing trees and grass-green light. Two white wooden chairs on the lawn.

Grass-green light circulates among the folk-individualists, emanating from potted plants, also on the table.

Cool green light of plants is what Las Vegas is never quite ready to understand and what Las Vegas will continually attempt to use. Appearances are intricately detailed by memorized voices, while green plants grow from black dirt.

I want to believe I'm solely responsible for what goes on around here when I'm not. For realizing what's obvious I am awarded one free breath.

In the throat of this dream two voices contend: the thin wailing voice so terrified of being replaced and the growl that wants to displace it. Could it be a wandering ghost needs an armchair to sit down in and I'll do? My brother approaches, illuminated by the red candle he carries beside his face. He tells me not to worry; the voices are an illusion caused by winter light over the muskeg. He says this type of light causes branches of trees to get so wide.

Craig Buchanan: *Lithogenesis:*

Le Morte d'Arthur's seat

Nowt bar basaltic hornblende
High tea-time at Samson's crypt,
Ambrosia, manna and calf-thigh or
Mince n tatties stroke cabbage and ribs.
Intrusive magma absorbs the ghosts
Of histories slick carboniferous flow,

Pyrites schist the band ay bleas
The siliceous limestone's memories,
Hard dolerites gradual intrusion
An unmovable pyroclastic contusion.
A playground fir bandits and outlaws,
and a frontier of Frisbee and fitbaw.

Nowt bar basaltic horneblende
Yer legends are all broon breed,
The plateau grumbles, mumbles on -
The title says Arthurs deed.

Ricky Garní: *Crostini*

Today that I wondered if it was too late for me to have a child and name it Crostini (if it was a girl)

Crostino if it were a boy. Or maybe Crostina if it were a girl. Crostini if I couldn't decide or if I had twins.

Today I walked by the dead possum on the street and said, underneath my breath, "Crostini" – What else could I say? Not "Possum." Everybody already knows that.

Today I wondered if I would ever be brave enough to walk from the White Truffles of Alba all the way to Crostini, Italy.

I can't decide if I want to do that. Crostini.

Today I admired the stealth, sleek, outlaw timbres of the Stratocaster Guitar. It's sounds like a Crostini that has been lit on fire by someone on Death Row.

Today I thought that if I ever visited Russia, would I be able to find Krostinis in the local Kaffes. In St.Petersburg, perhaps, but it is doubtful that I would find them in Moscow.

Did you know that Woodrow Wilson's dog was named Crostini? Speaking of strokes,

No Tuscan meal would ever be complete without a crostini, a rinse of Grappa, and someone having a heart attack afterwards

I remember that the bubble gum that you used to get in Bazooka Joe Bubble Gum was shaped just like a minature Crostini that was pink and sweet and nothing like Crostini

I remember that the first time I saw the Shroud of Turin it made me really hungry because it looked like a Crostini, although I hadn't had a Crostini yet.

I think that the Crostini is something that you always know, even before you do know it.

My favorite part of 'Crostini' has to be the 'tini' part

Tuscan Kale, Ricotta Salata, Sweet and Hot Pickled Peppers Rapini, Sweet Italian Sausage, Roasted Garlic, Asiago Fresca. It's a no brainer: Crostini Rules!

I have a friend who always says: Kurt Cobain rules!

Which is stupid; Kurt Cobain doesn't rule.

My favorite part of 'tini' is, I think, 'ini'

Jacquie Lanthier: *before you*

winged thoughts become
honeybees born large

dark white butterfly stands
clapping on the steps of a branch

the hum of something
kicks like inside kicking

simple you can't remember
what way came before

the world grows over
everything old outside

Marguerite W. Sullivan: two pieces

A Wellworn Likeness

It was generally observed that he loved the sound of his dark voice, and with it he said things exactly, convincingly from the cream of his throat like a musician of some kind. People, he thought it could be said, loved him early on, and he overdressed on a regular basis and oozed along with that nectar for speech. A master, he admitted, of slang, of road food, of the forty-five, of midnight. He claimed to be a singer, but no one ever heard him do it. His guitar perched on the chair like a cockatoo.

He told stories about his coddling sisters (five of them) and boyhood pranks and car races. In school he'd been something of a bad actor. It wasn't completely true that he disliked others, just that he feared their insinuations. A malevolence grew up around his white collars like a soft glowing mold. His dream of being free, of living a hundred miles from anyone, spurred him forward. He also hungered to make something beautiful, something exact and convincing, and toiled like many before him, bending the rules as he went. The applause was substantial yet never had the effect he expected, though what that was he couldn't have said. He fell down drunk and lost his way. Who wouldn't, he wanted to know.

He had money enough though it ran through his fingers in a lust of objects. With women, he made himself indispensable, digging and shelving and polishing, immersing them in ecstasies untold. He wrapped his form around their desires like an aerialist strapped around the empty sky. He took one to

Spain, a beaming girl who seemed incalculably young with her exposed midriff and a tendency to giggle protractedly. He sized her up in the atmospheric cafes in glib, rather cruel statements after an evening's drink and one night left her sitting there following some small effrontery on her part, packed his gear and returned home without a word. (She wrote to the eldest sister, who eventually paid for an extra week of sightseeing undertaken with a boy from Finland.)

He fell down drunk and heard his mother's dying breath. When he rose, the time closed sufficiently to bind him up, like hot tar upon his limbs, and someone held his hand and looked compassionately into his wet, bewildered eyes, though later he could not produce her name. One sister slipped him a self-help book as she warned about what she observed to be a total absence of fiber in his diet.

Late in the day a perpetual draft wheezed around his chest, and as redemption for his ways, the dull ache of which worked away with all the mystery and intensity of the gout, he wrote a letter to his dead mother each Sunday and built a room for delinquent boys. His grandiloquence still gratified, though bus drivers and waitresses and veterinarians replied without interest. The heft of his passion he kept to himself, sure that this constituted the remarkable thing about him; there remained only one beneficiary, Delia, a glum late-middle-aged woman with a large chest and dainty feet who occasionally accompanied him to a rundown resort and accepted monetary gifts on account of her bedridden father.

After a paralytic spasm of the brain while mowing in the bright May sun, he expired. The three surviving sisters shut the dog up in a shelter, against his wishes, and began to redistribute his prize possessions without waiting for

formalities. The minister suggested our lives could not be contained in cryptic, oversimplified phrasings, then read "Mending Wall" to a quarter-full church. In the third pew Delia wept, her only thought the stray sleeves of Mediterranean blue angora laid parallel on the bed waiting to be stitched on.

Her Winter Story

Because my uncle told me his friend would come at six, I lit the fire at five-thirty.

He was my deceased aunt's husband who never once let a Christmas go by without sending a picture of himself with a new girlfriend. Most times a new girlfriend; I believe there was a series of years in which she was the same. I remember her white furry coat, remember her donning the same coat two or as many as three years in a row. Like a great eager rabbit in the cold. But then her face lapsed into a lesser version of itself. It grew thinner or more weighted down. Something in her missed the point. There was no question the coat became conventional, drab. She might have been anyone.

Business or pleasure, no doubt he'd be a rabid skier, wanting to talk sport. (It had been one of those calls that thrust upon me an acquaintanceship resembling some duty you might encounter in an old novel.) I could provide nothing to drink which was typical of my modernday habits.

Now and then one of these snapshots turned up in the leaves of a book or the recipe card box. There he was, one arm clutching, leaning into the camera ever so slightly, smiling. The girls' grins were more compulsory. Notwithstanding, stooped inside these romantic snowglobes they invoked my aunt, her long years of death. She would murmur diffidently to them as they grinned into the cold. She would lay bare our tedious habits no matter who we were. She would dismiss whole chapters in the blink of an eye. Of course, as I thought these things, the time came closer and the fire dwindled.

The night was clear and chill and provided no obstacles. There had been hours leading up to the time in which I had forgotten the appointment completely.

As if the women had recovered themselves in butter churning and the like. The clock moved, encroaching. No doubt he would mention her, but what was her name now? A sort of fiasco for which I would not be prepared.

Soon there was a sound, a scrabbling at the door. With a cool hand I would stir the fire once the noise ran dry, I told myself.

Iliya Ansky: *Teatime*

All it takes
Is a teabag and some fire

He's been looking for his lighter
Which he couldn't find

But he's got matches instead
So he cuts the teabag open and

Empties its dry contents onto a saucer
Then he wets his index finger and thumb

And turns the porous ethereal paper
Inside out into a miniature windsock

A white translucent rocket appears
Standing feebly on the saucer platform

He removes the label from the thin string
And uses the latter as a fuse instantly

It catches fire from the match and burns out
Reaching the rocket pretty fast

Which ascends swiftly in the owl-lit room
Leaving not a lingering trace behind it

Not a wake of ash on its tiny flaming path
It simply disappears

Like his grandfather did some years ago
Who had taught him this trick

Christopher Ryan: *Welcome*

Did things t' th engine t' make it faster. Rip't off th doors, peel't back th roof, spit shin't th black walls, n belt't ourselves in. We cruiss't down Circuit Ave n along th sleepn waterfront, then race't down Beach Road like it was disappearn behind us forever, all th while talkn n dreamn about jock revenge – force-feedn them overhot foods or cementn their hands t' th weight benches n so forth n such. Only most a' th jocks had become cops, doin th same but with salaries n lethalities on their special belts, so we slow't down n crept along darkly through th backside a' town.

We let th sea breeze pass thru th car sideways, us leann out t' see how close our hands could come t' th hiss a' th tires on th sandy road that cut off th lagoon from th sea from th ocean. We kill't th engine over th jumpin bridge n roll't over near silent t' see if we could spot th hordes a' stingrays sleepn in piles like stacks a' gray triangular pancakes, n while we didn see them we were pretty sure we heard them, flappn n blinkn, rolln their thin white lips acrosst their little teeth, n makn fishy barkn sounds etc.

Went so fast along th south shore that we caught air n didn come down right, but we liv't, hit some beach plums n tall dry grass, straightn't n came out ok. Dimm't th lights t' let a row a' teens pass, all 1/3 drunk on ideas n 2/3 sober with th stillness in their hearts.

Th sirens? Not for us but we duck't in behind th fire truck n got a pull t' th

other end, past not girlfriends' houses but th houses where girls we dreamt a' once slept, all quaint n soft against their pony pillows n rock 'n pop posters. Cliché for a reason because we never saw these rooms. That was th jocks up there, their sweat mixn n curses falln n anuses clenchn in their best imitation a' affections.

N what was burnn? Th cemetery. Is that a doubl negative? We ask't each other – does it take away death or just deadn life more? Only th arsonist could tell, n while we want't to ask him or her what they were afraid a', we didn have th perp n neither did th jocks. S'ok, we said n drove on, realizn that th night was evolvn to mornin. He had to get t' th mainland t' brush his girls' hair and I had t' curl up with my love for a bit too before th sky broke all yellow.

We fix't our ties n adjust't our coats n wipt off our shoes, but I knew as we unbuckl't ourselves n shovt th car into th cold black water that th whole day I'd end up layn in the grass dreamn awake, my heart beatn so fierce that I'd just be countn down th seconds t' when th exhaust pipe'd burst from my chest n th road'd drag its gravely black self over my screams a' joy.

James E. Allman, Jr.: *How Blessed Is the Man
Whose Quiver Is Full*

of sons to be set
loose against a world unsuspecting their
violence to conquer with the hardened
steel edges of surnames: I and my brothers
against my cousins, I and
my brothers and my
cousins against the world.
They longbow, long-shaft bodkins
their fletchings the fast-flying mane
of Bucephalus as he tramples
Persian Immortals under
strong shanks and forearms
to crush with hock and girth
to gallop indefatigable;
to gallop to the ends
of the world to the outer seas; to gallop
indefatigable to unfurl
a banner which reads:
“Fool sons to trouble mothers.”
The wise

disarm, the wise restore the shambled
world (bloodlines—serein
—which stipple
all things red), tender transfusions
of joy.

Tsipi Keller: *Excerpt 3*

a couple of brave windsurfers held onto their sails in the choppy waters,
I admired their courage and physical strength and wished for myself just a
fraction of same,
same same, no same—I sang to myself as I’m inclined to do while walking on
the sand,
I’m an optimist,
yes,
incorrigible, yes,
I chided myself in childlike sing-song,

later, I went to the supermarket, I watched people leave the store with
package-loaded carts, some with kids in specially hoisted seats,
it was all glorious uproarious merchandise,
smartly labeled, vacuum-packed,
I pulled a cart from the lined carts outside and went inside, it was air-
conditionally frigid, people like the air very cold in these parts,
I hugged myself against the chill and went through the aisles,
reaching for products and packaged goods,
no kids in the house, no husbands,
still, I loaded my cart,
reaching for labels seemingly indiscriminately,
no handsome guy followed me around
as they do in the movies,
so I reached for chocolate pudding for dessert,
which I hardly ever eat,
and idly wondered, What’s up with all these purchases?
it was on sale, true,
but making waves, not pudding, is my specialty,
the still water of my existence,

for all my brooding and fretting,
it needs to be said that I do find comfort here and there,
Pascal, no doubt, had me – and himself – in mind when he said,
“a trifle consoles us because a trifle upsets us,”

the fridge is now full, well stocked,

happy days, I'm thinking, à la Beckett,
they may come and stay, they may come and go,
surprise surprise – such happy days declaim upon arriving;
somehow, but not surprisingly, Beckett has made his way here,
earlier, I read a poem by Natan Zach, in which he sits and writes in a room
where Beckett once lived:
“And here, tonight, in my isolated room, where Beckett wrote,
I'm reminded that one can go through life quietly,
even if one's life is harder than Beckett's,
provided that one remains among the living
a little longer. And slowly grows older,
naturally”

(from “Waves and Tonics”)

Ethan Bernard: *Small Miracle, Big City*

The miracle arrives on a Tuesday, via the Port Authority. After the closing of the market, before the best of primetime, in the middle of a July afternoon with the heat wavering between oppressive and totalitarian, the sleep-starved miracle marvels at the skyscrapers, seen through the window of a Greyhound bus. Sure, it's tired, but when small-town dreams meet big city expectations... the miracle flushes with excitement. Truth be told, it's a small miracle, lacking in the elaborate charm and sophistication associated with its grander brothers and sisters. Still, a miracle, and as it wends its way through the thrum of Times Square, the tourists glance for at least half a second before returning to their snapshots.

Overwhelmed. Alone. Even the hardest among us can relate to the small miracle adrift in the metropolis. The nights at the youth hostel. The search for an apartment. That shifty guy who says it's all on his roommate, dude, thank God he's moving, and the bathroom, really, it never looks that way.

Finally, a break. A six-floor walkup in the East Village. Character-building. With a bathroom so small that is what the miracle says to reassure itself. And the roommate, the guy builds Web sites for aspiring so and so's and the business is brisk. He's all right, mainly keeps to himself, a keen interest in fine cheeses, but it would be cool if he could do the dishes once in a while. Yeah, that would be great.

The miracle begins the quest for a job, because it's not all about doing the thing you want to do. It's about doing what it takes to get there. Character-building. Yes. A clipboard and a single question. That is the

miracle's job. Excuse me, sir, or madam. Would you be willing to help the environment? Wait. One more question. You do believe in the environment, don't you?

They stand in elaborate formations, the miracle and other clipboard carriers, constellations of questions gathering up people like wayward planets.

After work the miracle gathers with the other clipboard carriers and they talk about what they've accomplished, and yet how there's still so much left to do. In a spare room they stand in a circle and the head clipboard carrier asks them what is their spirit animal. Eagle. Dolphin. Panther, says another. And then to the miracle. Trying to think and wanting to say cheetah because it's really fast and beautiful and someone has already used a big cat, but the cheetah is fast, and it seems like the truth— Cheetah, the miracle says. Good, the head clipboard carrier says. Good.

Nights the miracle appears at open mics at coffee houses and cheap bars. Between the slam poets, the troubadours strumming their lovesick guitars and the smell of sour beer, the miracle...does the thing that miracles do. The crowds aren't big, but after every show a couple of people come up, You moved me, man, and a shady looking character even offers it "representation."

The Web site guy, he decides to leave the apartment. He's moving to LA. He says it's a natural progression. He forgets his dishes. The cheeses he takes, thankfully. The miracle is not sorry to see him go.

So, interviewing new roommates. Students. Actors, of course. And then there's David Hume. He's a philosopher. Whatever. But the guy says he can clean a dish. He assures the miracle that he will clean all dishes independent of the actuality of their existence. Cool. A philosopher.

They hit the bars on the Lower East Side, sometimes head out to Williamsburg, ambling home in the early hours when the world is filled with

mayhem and youth. They discuss the nature of causation, the fictions of the self. The miracle feels fuzzy when it talks to David Hume, but that could just be the cheap tequila. They play pool, where David Hume often talks about the movements of the balls. Just take your shot, the miracle thinks. The miracle had never really thought about what comes next. Or what came before. Or how they were related. Just move and find out.

When they get home David Hume collapses onto a beanbag while the miracle lies back on the futon under a poster of Bob Marley: *Exodus*. They switch off the lights and look up at the ceiling, staring at a sea of fluorescent stars.

David Hume finds a job teaching adjunct classes, and at night he's out doing his act. He's got something to prove. He wants to prove what you can prove. That's why he's here. He's honing his material, prefers not to perform in front of those he knows. Bit of a perfectionist.

The miracle finishes its work after asking the question and today many people have answered that, yes, they believe in the environment, and they are anxious to know more. And the miracle returns with the other clipboard carriers to the spare room and they form the circle. Hippopotamus. Blue crested warbler. Tasmanian devil. And then to the miracle, who without hesitation says cheetah, saying cheetah again and everyone nods feeling powerful and they all raise their hands while outside the taxis roar down the avenues.

These are the kinds of days when you just feel thankful and that wonders are lurking and though they don't usually lurk on the subway, the miracle has a monthly pass, and even hands a homeless guy a dollar and the guy eyes the miracle strangely, Buddy, you just changed my life.

The miracle wanders off the L, ends up at some enclave in Greenpoint and though it is still summer, the clouds have gathered, promising rain. The

miracle seeks shelter and enters a bar, and there on the stage, David Hume, philosophizing.

He's giving his Sensible Knave spiel, the guy who seems legit, ready with a smile, but when you scratch the surface he turns out to be an odious schmuck. Sure, he's a problem, but sometimes the miracle thinks it would be better just not to worry about him. But then David Hume takes a detour.

The proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined, David Hume says.

What the hell does that mean?

Of the five people in the audience two have glazed eyes, one resigned, another lady still two thoughts behind, and the final nodding along, You tell it, brother.

That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, David Hume continues. He's sweating under the glare of the spotlight.

Hey, the miracle cries out.

David Hume squints and looks out over the crowd. They turn back towards the miracle.

Screw your testimony, asshole, the miracle says.

The audience stares back and forth between David Hume and the miracle, except for that one girl who's still two thoughts behind.

The miracle chokes on all the words and the people stare and the anger grows. I am a cheetah, the miracle says. I AM A CHEETAH!

The girl caught two thoughts behind drops her count and gives the miracle the once over. Actually, she says, you appear to be some sort of miracle. She turns to David Hume and he shrugs.

The miracle bursts out the door and the important thing is to keep moving and not let the weight of the sadness pull you into inactivity and the

miracle buys a pint of Early Times and waits in the living room in the dark under the poster of Bob Marley.

Hours pass and the miracle's thoughts go woolly and David Hume slowly pushes open the door, his head hung low.

He turns on the light and finds the miracle tilted over the futon.

I'm sorry, David Hume says.

But we were friends, the miracle says.

David Hume's fantastical mind starts to spin into action, and the apparatus appears to awaken, but then goes cold, the hum of the gears falling silent. You're a violation of the laws of nature. You invalidate my philosophy, David Hume says.

Invalidate?

Perhaps not invalidate, but complicate would be more accurate, David Hume says. And I'm not looking for any more complication.

I see, the miracle says. The miracle knows it's time to remain silent, that the things have been said, but, unfortunately, that's hardly ever the time for someone to be quiet.

I thought we were friends, the miracle says, framing that musing with short bursts of profanity.

David Hume goes to the tap and fixes himself a glass of water. He takes a sip. I believe we can still be friends, though that perhaps strains the limits of credulity, he says.

The miracle pushes itself off the futon and walks over to David Hume and knocks the glass out of David Hume's hand and it smashes against the wall.

David Hume does not move. They regard each other and then the miracle leaves the apartment. Descends the stairs, until the slip and sliding down a flight and a crash. David Hume runs out and calls down to the

miracle, Are you all right? The miracle pushes itself up and continues down without looking back.

Outside the air is cool, the sky clear, the night lightening, preparing for the sun. The miracle makes its way to the river and starts tracing its way uptown.

Fingers of sunlight grab into the sky and the miracle stops by a little park near the water and sits down on a bench. So this is the big city, and that's life. Across the river, New Jersey? No, Brooklyn. Complicated? Not really. The miracle goes over to the river and water rushes by, pulled toward the sea.

The miracle jumps over the railing and dives in. Floats, soon exhales and sinks, faster, plunging towards bottom. Once reached the miracle thinks, A cheetah? No. The energy building, a kernel sizzling, hotter until burst and the miracle shoots upwards as bolts of light wriggle to the surface and the miracle emerges and continues. Then the sky flashes. Pink. Orange. Green. Blue. Blue. Blue

Harold Bowes: *Laundry Room*

Downstairs

In the
Laundry room

A nightlight

With a sea
Shell cover

Burns

A spray of
White

Against the
Plaster

An arc

A wing

A cornice

A bank of
Fog

Lit from
Within

A star is
a beam,

A narrow stalk
Of light,

With a beginning

Without end

Faint sea breeze

Upstairs

A rank of white caps

On the cupboard shelf

Matt Rittenhouse: *The West Wind*

It was a sickening task shoveling out the piles of rotting fish when we finally accepted that we'd been lost too long to sell any of them.

Billy said, "I cheated on my wife."

Lawrence said, "I killed a neighbor's dog. A boxer that never quit barking."

Gary said, "Before this job, I worked as an accountant for Helio Corporation. I stole people's futures."

We've concluded that we've angered God in some way. Most of our time is spent deciphering what we could've done wrong. We list our mistakes. It's easier than conceding chance.

After we threw the rotted fish overboard, we began to pull strange things from the ocean. Maybe not strange, but things that shouldn't be just floating there, as if waiting for us. The first time, dropped onto the deck out of the net, were these wedding dresses. The fish moving inside the gowns made creepy brides. They looked, when we pulled them free and draped them on the rails, familiar. I said, "I think that's my wife's wedding dress. Or her sister's because I've seen it on someone." Billy said that he was absolutely certain that one of them was his wife's. Captain stood by one and didn't say anything, rubbing the cloth between his fingers. One time there were photographs. We shuffled and searched through many faces we didn't recognize until we found pictures of our children. Children alive, and children lost to us. Mine by car accident, Lawrence's by drowning. Once there were hot meals. One time, baseballs and gloves.

Billy admitted that the only face he can pull up from his memory is not of his wife.

Gary said that he joked with his boss about, “Misplacing Grandma’s Retirement.”

Lawrence said that he should’ve been watching his daughter that day on the jetty.

Captain, on hearing that we believed that we were the cause of our wanderings, assured us that the compasses had been pointing in new, wrong, ways. He said, “There are radio dead zones in many parts of the sea. Our run of bad luck, with its consistency, is almost unheard of, but it has nothing to do with our guilt.”

It could be something as simple as radio dead zones and faulty compass readings. It could be something as simple as a wrong turn, but we have different ideas.

We ran out of fuel this morning. Captain made a joke about putting us to the oars. It was funny because we don’t have any. Our engine is the only way we’re moving anywhere at all. The crane that sends the nets can’t run either. Billy said, commenting on the dead nets, that at least we’ll no longer be surprised with reminders of the lives we’ve lost. He meant that we’ll stop pulling odd things from the sea. Instead, we’ll just strain our eyes looking for land, and hope that there’s a current pulling us somewhere.

Something changed as soon as we boarded this boat, and we feel it’s beyond our grasp to understand. When we speak of our mistakes, not even the faintest undertow of understanding makes itself known. God provides us only silent riddles; capricious signs.

I go further than the others, and write them out. I write sometimes all night, in an almost heedless passion of re-living the parts of my life I wish to forget. I’ve noticed though, that with each time I remember past mistakes,

nothing new becomes understandable. I don't get lighter and I don't feel better. My thoughts seem to run these days, regardless of their intended trajectories, into the ruts of my mistakes, changing their direction to once again weight my heart. I wish that there was another way, but what other way? I list my mistakes, and they slowly become my whole world. The more I think about it, the more I believe that I deserve to be so stranded.

The sun follows an erratic new course and the winds blow from opposing compass points. It is a trial—not knowing exactly where, the vastness of this much water, the stars rearranging themselves at night—to go to get there: home. Sometimes at night, after we've discussed the past, we try to talk on other topics, but find ourselves silent. Shore, that word, some nights seems to lose all meaning. We picture our lives rolling slowly on ahead of us blue and calm and empty. We panic quietly and to ourselves.

Cooper Renner: *A Smear of the Thumb*

Why had I not taken to the sea before? By the second night, after midnight, when the ballroom had finally emptied and most of the passengers had returned to their staterooms to remove corsets or cummerbunds; when the gamblers sat with their whiskeys and decks of cards; when the cautious lovers angled for brief kisses in the shadows of the lifeboats, I strolled in the near darkness of the promenade deck, hands in my pockets, wind in my face, my mind already in Valletta. I had seen a few photographs, including the two of that final postcard; I had seen engravings; I had even read Ryan's *Malta* with its paintings by Vittorio Boron, but what I had, most essentially, were the glimpses of its buildings, of the monumental defensive walls of the knights, of the life of the people as Cooper had described them in his letters. Only three. Only three had arrived before the notification of his death, roughly one every two weeks. At first I had been baffled by my brother's interest in that tiny island most of my countrymen knew only as the place where St Paul had shaken off a viper bite. But Cooper had insisted there was a novel to be made of Coleridge's time there, when the English had only just assumed control at the invitation of Maltese leaders eager to be rid of the French revolutionary army of the young Napoleon. I had studied Coleridge with some assiduity as an undergraduate, swayed no doubt by my brother's influence, but I could remember virtually no impact the island might have had on the future course of the poet's career. He had in fact, in any normative sense, surrendered poetry by the time he returned to England, though he proved to have hundreds – thousands! – of pages of prose still in him.

"Exactly!" Cooper had said, tapping my breastbone with his index

finger. "The most Romantic of all Romantic poets – cursed sailors, serpentine lamiae, Death-in-Life and Life-in-Death, untouchable women eating at his heart and soul. He spends months in one of the most un-English spots imaginable, an island where less than a decade earlier an order of medieval knights had still ruled, an island which had withstood the last great western flotilla of the Turks, an island almost within sight of Africa – and what does he come away with? A hitherto unheralded ability as a governor's secretary? A clear enough head for colonial administration? No, little brother, no. Something is missing. Something is lost. Whether Coleridge repressed it with ever increasing doses of laudanum or whether his inner being actually blacked it out of his memory, something happened. I think –" He paused then and gazed out the window of the apartment he rented from the English department head at Frankfurt.

I was, at the moment, thinking like a member of my family. I was, to be sure, caught up in his excitement, but I was also wondering, as I had the first and second times I had visited him during my own college breaks, why he insisted on subsisting on what was, at that time, still a fairly small college stipend when he could have been living in a compact brownstone at least, if he would only make use of his newspaper dividends. "Cooper?"

He turned suddenly and took me by the shoulders. "I think he fell in love. Oh, it was ever easy for him to forget his wife. But I think he probably forgot Sara Hutchinson too, for a while at least. I can't think of anything else strong enough to explain the zero Malta became in his after life. Or, for that matter, the apparent care and energy he put into his 'office job'."

I shrugged, and he let his hands drop. "I'm so glad you've come, Benjamin. Let me show you some of the writings I'm considering for the next issue of the magazine. There's a peculiar batch of poems from an undergrad somewhere up north. Stevens, I think his name is. Most of the professors here

still insist Emily Dickinson makes no logical sense. I can't imagine what they would make of this young man's work. He is, I think, not even as old as you are. Let's go to the office."

We put on our jackets and clattered down the stairs that ran along the back wall of the professor's house. The air was still and cold, fallen leaves not yet entirely driven away by the winter wind. Ahead of us, at the intersection on the other side of which the University began, a large dog loped unleashed, its pelt rippling over the interplay of its bones. An unimpeachable emblem of freedom, that. I put my arm around Cooper's shoulders for a moment, squeezing him close, then slapping the back of his head with my palm.

"Oh, Lucinda!" he cried before breaking into a laugh.

"It's bric-a-brac, isn't it?" I had asked, holding the handwritten pages of verse.

"Words simply as decoration. I couldn't begin to tell you what it means."

He smiled. "I think so, yes. That's what appeals to me. I have had enough lessons from our sisters and my professors and the Grand Duke —" It was thus he referred most frequently to our father. "I like a poet who just wants to tickle my ear. It's not unlike the music the Negro musicians play in New Orleans. Exuberance. Flair. Sound."

"I haven't been."

"No?" He had taken the handwritten sheets of Master Stevens from me and slipped them into a leather case. "I had never been either until I came to Frankfurt. My first real drunk —"

I glanced down and realized that I was gripping the ship's railing so fiercely my fingers had begun to hurt. Far below me the waves broke against the prow like dandelion blossoms under the breath. That had been — that conversation — three years ago, the last time I had seen Cooper, before his full-time appointment to the English department; before his engagement to

Melinda, whom I knew only from photographs; before the publication of *Jove Protected by Geese* had redeemed him, to Pamela at least. He had been plotting his journey to Malta for so long, awaiting an early sabbatical and the funds to make the journey without accessing his family money. My stubborn brother.

Far out, far ahead of us, where the ocean met the dark sky, there was a darker haze, almost like the smudge of smoke from a road worker's fire-pot, or the smear an artist makes with his thumb across a stroke of charcoal, or the heat cast up from a hundred braziers when the citrus groves are threatened with frost. Rather than lying still like the black air outside a factory on a windless day, it moved eerily, shifting almost like the light and shadow on a slithering snake. Or a pelt. Yes, a dark pelt, in and out of the darker shadow. I remembered again that dog Cooper and I had seen on the university grounds those three long years ago, the perfect liberty of its lolloping stride, and something else – something I had forgotten entirely, not even recalling it just minutes ago: the sudden smile that opened my brother's mouth and the way his hand rested just a moment on the back of his own head, patting and scratching it, exactly as one greets a beloved pet, eagerly thrusting his skull up to his master's fingers.

You have seen how young dogs play, nipping at each other, shoving their snouts under each other's chests and lifting up to tumble the other, bowling their shoulders and forelegs into one another – then sprawling in a heap, a mammalian tangle of leg and ribcage and skull, companionably at rest. I could not remember if anyone had ever rough-housed me in such a fashion, not even Cooper. Five years between us. By the time I was old enough to assert a miniscule independence, he was twice my size. By the time I was nearly as tall as he, he was rather more likely to reach slyly for a girl's gloved hand than to trip up his little brother on the front steps. And Father, if Cooper had tried it, would no doubt have hissed, "You are not urchins of the

rail-yard!" and soundly cuffed the nearer of us, then sent us both to Golgotha for a lecture.

(from "August Darvell")

Lily Cho: *Unsick*

none and none and none
water scratches throat

oh epsilon hawk of blue
in chirrup machinery sky
clack clack red of hue

tempest raven gladys
snowing dust oh sweep
humor green oh green fair

to purple wheel tracks
trickling rosebud tea
etched markings
surrounding wolves

to not for are you eh
eyes reflection square light
unsleeping wavery still

