

Cripple Creek Review

2009-2010

a fine arts center product

Table of Contents

A Joke	1
by Kathleen Cole	
Hemstitch	2
by Molly Frazier	
Tough	3
by Stephanie Gray	
Clinging Season	5
by Jaime Hammer	
Tea Leaves	6
by Andi Pardee	
Remembering Good Things, Poorly	7
by Geoffrey Billetter	
Mariposa and the Eta Carinae Nebula	8
by Cara Sinicropi	
Midnight	12
by Calvin Caldwell	
The Weaver	13
by AJ Davis	
Twenty Feet Away, or Maybe Ten	14
by Hayden DeBruler	
Across Waters	15
by Allesha Smith	
Ameliorate	17
by Hayden DeBruler	
Poor Stranger's Had an Accident	18
by Andi Pardee	
Lost With Time	22
by Alec Brososky	
Residuum	24
by Jana Wilson	
A Double Take On Angela's Hair	25
by Eric Roper	
The Ceramic Mug's Affair	26
by Kevin Emery	

I Weave the Clothes I Wear	27
by Jana Wilson	
Mythology	28
by Stephanie Gray	
Desire	29
by Emma Tillman	
Infatuation Means Subtracting	30
by Geoffrey Billetter	
Pretty Boy	34
by Caroline Bayne	
Through the Pass	35
by Molly Frazier	
Self-Portrait in a Velvet Dress	36
by Cara Sinicropi	
Specter	37
by Eric Roper	
The Limpid Hour	38
by Alec Brososky	
It's All Here	39
by Andi Pardee	
Of Her Loins	45
by Jana Wilson	
Wrangler	47
by Caroline Bayne	
Who is to Say What has Passed Through My Fingers	48
by Eric Roper	
Mid-West Tendencies	49
by Geoffrey Billetter	

Acknowledgments

Our grateful thanks to the editors in whose journals some of these poems and stories have previously appeared:

Polyphony, Vol. VI: “Specter,” “Self-Portrait in a Velvet Dress,” and “The Limpid Hour.”

Cargoes, “The Weaver.”

Bennington Young Writer’s Award, “Pretty Boy.”

A Joke

A man walked into a bar. I imagine this would hurt, but I also imagined a sunset could last forever; I've been wrong before. Skipping the pain, the *ouch*, the *goddammit why is this here*, the man who walked into a bar will walk into another sort of bar and order whatever the bartender will give him to ease the ache in his forehead. He'll drink it while girls giggle behind hands and a warning will go out—man walking into bars all over town, stay tuned.

Hemstitch

Coral, seaweed door.
Sculling oar, boat propeller,
and a red and white flag.
I lift the knocker, a simple lump of metal.
Let it thunk against the wood door.
Quickly through the shadowed alcove to the courtyard.
She doesn't look up. She is sewing.
Across the water,
orange and a smudge of smoke on the western shore.
What's going on, I ask.
The world, I suppose, she says.
Her needle flashes back and forth,
leaping through the cloth
like a fish through water.

Tough

I was sitting on the back porch steps at Christian's house when he crashed through the screen door, face ruddy and streaked with tears. I had never before seen him cry. Apathy had always been his thing. I thought dire, dark things when I looked him in the eye: 9/11 part two, his best friend was dead, his grandmother, his mother, his sister, his girlfriend... I knew better than to ask. He wiped at his face with his sleeve (not very productive, considering he was wearing his leather jacket), and took a pack of Camel Crushes out of his pocket, offering me one. I shook my head. He lit the cigarette, exhaled a cloud and muttered "Heathledgerdied."

I stood and turned to face him fully, standing on the bottom stair, "Who died?"

He sighed, "Heath Ledger."

"Oh." I said, relieved. It wasn't anyone...well, I wouldn't say important, he didn't make millions of dollars a year being nameless, but...wasn't anyone close. No one he'd miss.

"I mean...he..." Christian choked on his own exhalation of smoke. "I was thinking we could watch some of his movies, but I don't have anything on DVD and my VCR is busted. Do you have anything?"

"Um..." I thought on it a moment. "I have...Brokeback...?" I expected him to flinch and dismiss it, but instead he flicked his cigarette, hunched into his jacket a little, and nodded in the direction of the car.

The ride was short, and mostly silent. If we had walked, it would have taken only maybe ten minutes, but it wasn't exactly safe to walk through his neighborhood at night. He parked in the church parking lot across the street from my house, not in a 'don't want your parents to know I'm here' kind of way, more of a 'your mom will yell at me if I block her car' way, and we

walked over to my gravel drive. He stood at the bottom of the stairs and waited for me to unlock the door, staring at his boots.

Once inside, he nodded at my mom, who was playing *Ninja Gaiden*, mashing the Playstation controller buttons with fervor, apparently unaware of what had come to pass. We sidled past her and into my room. I took the DVD off the shelf and put it in the player, then settled next to him on my futon. The feature started and I began to feel extremely uncomfortable. Jack Twist and Ennis Del Mar (Heath) became friends, then lovers on screen, and I, for once, had the good sense not to dissolve into a fit of giggles at the sex scene.

Jake Gyllenhaal cried “I wish I knew how to quit you!” and Christian shuddered. Scenes later, he died, Heath cried, and Christian melted, sobbing loudly and uncontrollably, curling up on the futon, head in my lap. I watched the credits roll and patted him on the head awkwardly.

“It’s okay,” I mumbled, not knowing what else to say. “The Dark Knight comes out this summer, it’ll be okay...”

“That...” He sniffed, “That was a *beautiful* movie!” He sobbed some more, and I tried not to laugh. I really shouldn’t have even had the impulse to, but if you had a nearly grown, bearded man curled up in your lap sobbing in a leather jacket, boots, a Nine Inch Nails T-shirt, you might have been swayed too.

“Oh my God,” I heard my mom say through the wall, “Heath Ledger died?!”

I patted Christian’s head awkwardly again, called my mom into the room, and, as she settled on the futon beside us, handed Christian a box of tissues, picked up the remote and pressed play.

Clinging Season

after a line by Alberto Rios

(credit for the title goes to Eric Roper)

The ready perfumes of Summer's middle days
follow her through baked suburban streets.
Sweat drapes over her forehead;
it trickles down the milky skin of her arm.
She passes a funeral, but no one is wearing black.
White tuxedos. Some pastel sundresses.

The pastor's daughter is marrying today
at the small chapel on the street corner.
A pall of concern hangs over the bride's family.

Claustrophobia ensues,
smothering sticky clothes.
The pool—drained to be cleaned,
the pond—dried up,
no one's air conditioning works.
Even the grasshoppers are sweating.

Tea Leaves

You savor it more,
sucking the liquid through your teeth,
sloshing it around your molars
before you swallow and take
an orange slice.
I set our dishes in the yard
but had to bring them in.
The brown hares crawled from
their holes and chipped their teeth
on the mugs. The ceramic was enticing
I guess, glaring in the sun,
white discs against green blades, immobile.
Your mother bought a rabbit
on your birthday and weeks later
it starved. We found him
in the box, flatter and with stained paws.
I tapped a sunken eye with my finger.
You thought it was glass.

Remembering Good Things, Poorly

I.

An old lover of my tongue was in my car & I brought up our sex. We laughed—nervously perhaps—& he was dull or rather dim or rather red in the face, young at heart, this annoying blemish on my record of this & that & kissing & oh man if I could take it back—to when I preferred to follow him to work then buy apples & say nothing to him but think in my head that if I bought enough apples then maybe he'd call—I would. I kicked him out of my car, in the rain no less & no umbrella or hooded shirt & he called & called. What adrenaline.

II.

When I tell a story at any party that is to say—when I'm drunk enough to tell a story at any party—I tell the one about the heterosexual boy who made out with my face four times. He complained about my beard & I complained about his technique & his ugliness & I complained about my sexuality being a party trick & my beard bothered him. By the end of the story many people—who know this boy quite well—have had all the laughs & think us to be friends & then the blind date suggestions come. He is this & smart or he is this & hip or this & that or this & he is straight, too, but I think it's funny & lemme text him real quick. My chiny chin itches—my beard is back—& to be honest I do not want any of these dates. I much prefer to lick the molars of this drink.

III.

A grand victory to kick an ex into a fall deluge—for many things—most of all my tongue & beard. My car won't even start fast enough for the joke—rattling engine how you laugh along with me—my lover out in the rain & pneumonia. He trudges through puddles & all the while in my rearview mirror I taunt him mercilessly & finger through my itchy beard that hangs down my chin, tickles the center of my chest, & whispers sloppily for me to circle round with the gas pedal & laugh some more.

Mariposa and The Eta Carinae Nebula

“This false color image was created using the following formula: red for sulfur, green for hydrogen, and blue for oxygen emissions. The black is negative space.”

The three girls nod their heads, their hands tightly clasped in front of them. They sit on a white couch in a square room with white-washed walls. On one wall is projected an expansive picture, the formula of which has just been read aloud by a voice resonate of a loud speaker.

Girl One stands up and walks over towards the swirling image. She extends her fingers towards the wall and rubs the thin film of space between her thumb and index finger. She stretches her arm further into the image. The surface breaks around her arm, forming a tight circle about her elbow. Her skin begins to take on shades of blue and green, tinted yellow in places where the colors touch. She waves her hand slowly, the colors trailing behind.

Girl One withdraws her arm from the permeable surface. Girl Two and Girl Three watch her with heavy, fluttering eyelids.

“What is it?” Girl Two asks.

Girl Three leans forward, in order to better hear.

“I’m not sure.”

“You are viewing a portion of a nebula, in a solar system in the constellation, Carina. Known as Tseen Shee, or Heaven’s Alter. It is currently in the state of false supernova.”

“Has that always been here?” asks Girl Three. “That picture I mean.”

“I don’t see why it wouldn’t be,” says Girl One as she dips her hand back into the gaseous wall.

“Have we met before?” Girl Two asks of them both. “You seem familiar.”

“No. I don’t think so,” responds Girl One with both hands pushed into the image.

“How did we get here?”

Girl Three begins to speculate. “Maybe we’re from here.” Girl Three stands, her head tilted towards the ceiling.

Two frowns and chews her lip. “That doesn’t sound right. I think we’ve been somewhere else before.”

“I do too,” adds Girl One.

“Are we supposed to know where we were before?” says Girl Two.

Girl One pauses, says, “I wouldn’t think so.”

“Why not?” asks Girl Three, as she twiddles her thumbs. “Where did that voice come from?”

Girl Two glances disapprovingly at Three’s hands, her hands neatly folded and still. “I don’t know. I think you should sit down.”

Girl Three sits down again.

Girl One ignores them, and cups her hands. “It’s warm,” says One, reaching her arms further into the constellation.

She draws her arms out of the universe, slivers of the solar flare clinging to her fingertips. She brings her palms to her lips and tilts her head backwards, welcoming the nebula, cradling it on her tongue like a communion wafer, passing it over her molars. Girl One swallows it, feels it expanding in her stomach.

“What does it taste like?” asks Three.

“It tastes empty.”

“Do you feel empty?” questions Two.

“No.” Girl One rests her palms on the surface of the solar system. “What are your names?”

Girl Two and Three frown.

“I can’t remember. Maybe the voice knows?”

“Neither can I. I think I had a name once,” states Two. “You should leave it alone.”

“I can’t recall mine either.” says Girl One, lifting her palm to lick remainders of the nebula off her fingers.

“What do we do now?” asks Two, unsure of how to respond to Girl One’s dismissal of their concern.

Girl Three shrugs and looks at Girl One. “Maybe they don’t matter here?”

Again, Girl One does not respond. She draws her right hand across the surface, as though to part it. The surface shivers. Girl One edges her toes inside the veil. She steps through. Her fingers drag across the colors, momentarily disrupting them as she passes further into the constellation.

Girl Two and Three watch, heads tilted, as she ebbs into the constellation. They remain seated on the sofa.

“Do you think she’s coming back?” asks Three.

“No, I don’t think so.”

Girl One is becoming colors, a center of yellow-hydrogen and sulfur, oxygen extending from the middle of the colors. Her body begins to blur together, the yellow melting into a washed out water color, red seeping in from the edges. Her hair and arms are trailing behind her, taking on fanned out fluorescent-blue extensions. The tips of the blue extensions melt into the black.

“Should we follow her?”

“No, I don’t think so, let’s stay a while,” says Girl Two.

“This image has been photographed by the Hubble Space Telescope and is titled, Mariposa. It is viewable in a scrollable gallery, along with Celestial Hand, Pillars of Creation, and Eye of God.”

“Where is that coming from?” asks Two.

“I’m not sure,” replies Three. “Hello?”

Three is combing her fingers through her translucent hair and dropping strands onto the floor. Two remains still.

Midnight

The beginning and the end are one
as one day falls while simultaneously
another one rises. In this sixty seconds of transition
when the lights in the house are out,
and there is no sound but the small swish
of the fan overhead in my bedroom
my past is left behind, and my future restored.

After bad days, I always look forward to midnight,
when nature stands still as the trees sleep
and the sun hits his alarm,
clearly not ready to rise just yet.
The mountains snore and the hills roll over in bed,
anticipating the new day,
a chance to recreate themselves.

The whole world experiences this occasion.
Some are asleep, some awake to witness,
cherishing the moment like the last words
to a dying relative. The world seems to stop
on its axis while pondering what the next day should hold.
As Midnight wipes away the day
I'll never get back and starts the clock
on what I will do to manifest the new one.

The Weaver

My grandmother is simply a call
on weekend mornings when the sun
doesn't quite touch the leaves
of the peach tree in our backyard.
A birthday gift
that arrives two months late.
A farmhouse in Missouri
buried under green Corell dishes,
binder cookbooks
with missing pages,
and leather couches ripped by animals.
The lingering scent
of tobacco that drifts in a smoker's mouth
long after the smoker has quit
for good this time.
She is the weaver
who has worked my mother's unraveled brain
into a rug that can never be picked apart.

Twenty Feet Away, or Maybe Ten

I can't see individual leaves on trees,
they're just green masses swaying on popsicle sticks.
I can't see the painting at the end of the hallway,
the one with magenta flowers, sherbet orange
and bright yellow, like vivid scoops of ice cream.
I can't see the chair or the face of the man
in the business suit approaching. I can't see
twenty feet away, or ten or eight, maybe six.
I can't see the horizon, or at least only
as a blur of pink and gold, reflecting
off the bottoms of the clouds

But I can see down. I can see my shoes,
my white laces untied. I can see the morning light
falling through the bathroom window,
the most graceful possible fall.
I can see the gazebo across the narrow path
and the honeysuckle tangled up the posts,
supporting the fence. I can see my memory,
old lang syne driving around the bend
in a burgundy Roles Royce, a manmade breeze
ruffling my dress. The playful past.

Across Waters

We were decided the day I was born.
Seven years older than me
and twice as tall,
he stood at the door
waiting to take me “home.”
Our past destroyed our future.
The past was ancient, cold,
and named Sophie.

She married young
and had three children,
none of which belonged
to her husband.
He left when the third child
came out Hispanic.
They divorced,
leaving her family
ashamed and his vile.

Word was spread of
the bastard children
and their mother.
We were always referred to
as the “other children.”
When some children got candy
and juice, we stood under the tree
watching our non-family
enjoy everything we deserved.

We were left alone for the most part.
My mother worked in a mill.
She would stand at a machine
everyday and stamp patterns
on someone else’s clothes.
There was no baby sitter,
she barely made enough money
to pay the rent.

On more than one occasion,
the lights were turned off.
We lit the house with candles.

Each had their own scent
and after awhile they started to blend.
My allergies threatened
to kill me if I didn't get out of the house.
The smell of lavender and vanilla
set off a sneezing attack
there and at my wedding.

People were everywhere,
telling me how great I looked
in a white dress, while six months pregnant.
Behind my back I heard them saying
that I was just like my mother.
They did not think the baby was his,
and I was not certain
if it was a lie or not.

My husband took me with an easy grip
as we danced to the first song,
his hand we placed slightly on my waist
and the other dangled by his side.
It would never move, and I would never
feel it softly touch my face.

Ameliorate

in the style of Franck André Jammé

Orange pools of light
cascade from the
monkey bars, as my breath
swings away
on palmed branches.
Fountains of virid
making white noise against the
sun-lit pavonian sky
meliorating into wispy clouds
a shadow of my breath.

Poor Stranger's Had an Accident

Stranger walked up the patio steps, late. In the mornings he waited for all the children to get to class before him. The halls of the school were painted with murals of a park scene with little benches, little birds, a post office. Stranger walked his fingers down the walls and stopped to perch them on a bench.

“Son, do you go to this school?” Stranger was asked this question more than he thought coincidental.

“Yes. I’m on my way.” His black hair swayed side to side in a pony-tail as he walked swiftly down the hallway. His clothes were baggy; he didn’t like the fit. He was Asian, and his muscles were toned at a young age. When he wore what he liked to school (tank tops, cloth shorts, leather sandals) the girls called him fuzzy names, and the boys called him freak. He didn’t want either, only wanted the sun on his skin at recess and his pants to stay up during P.E.

“As you all should know today is Friday, art day. I hope you all did not leave your supplies at home! We will be making boxes to hold our crayons and such the first half of class, the other half is to practice creativity.” Ms. Grend was young but not very attractive.

“I did.” Stranger whispered that he had forgotten. Ms. Grend did not hear him, and Stranger knew the other children would not share their supplies. The boxes were passed out along with paste. The girls colored hearts on their boxes, their names boldly on the lids, and used an array of colors. The boys made glue balls in their palms and flicked them across the room. Stranger sat. He reached for a fallen marker but his finger was stepped on.

“Oops... sorry Stranger Danger, better look at whose marker you’re trying to steal before you nab it.” The fat boy jiggled when he laughed. Stranger clenched his jaw and slowly stood up to search for scissors. He approached Ms. Grend’s desk.

“Stranger, you are not working hard. Let’s see what all you have done.” Ms. Grend walked to his desk, Stranger trailed reluctantly. She knew the box hadn’t been touched, knew it stayed stark white.

“I forgot.” Stranger looked into the woman’s squinty brown eyes and scratched his stomach.

“Yes. Your box will stay plain Stranger, ugly white. You will be sad looking at the artistic boxes your friends have made. You should have listened instead of coming in late this week, you would have known today is the only box day for art.” Ms. Grend was ugly.

Stranger turned from Ms. Grend and took his neighbor’s scissors. He moved them around in his hand, reflecting light around the room, on the children’s boxes, and onto the fat boy’s face. He held them pointing up in his hand, took his box, and entered the bathroom. Stranger held the scissors open in front of his nose, watching his reflection. His skin was pulled tight by his pony tail. Stranger wore his hair this way to school only. He snipped the hair band and let his hair fall beneath his shoulders, parted in the middle. Stranger combed through his hair with the scissors in a slow methodic motion. Long strands sunk to the bathroom floor. Stranger opened the scissors and caught a glimpse of his face before making a small cut on his fingertip. He held his finger upside down and squeezed like the nurse during his physical exam. He opened the lid to his box and let the blood drip down inside. The blood left trails that were more brownish than red. Stranger bent over and found the broken hair band on the floor. He

also picked up most of the hair he cut and put it all in his box along with the scissors. Stranger exited the bathroom inconspicuously and went to the first-aid box. He neatly wrapped a small band-aid around his finger.

“That cabinet is off limits!” Ms. Grend was red. Stranger turned his head and looked at his teacher’s nappy brown hair. He felt his own hair, virtually unchanged. Ms. Grend squinted and attempted to snatch Stranger’s box. He pulled away from her and held the box behind his back momentarily. He smiled and then slowly handed over the box. Ms. Grend received it eagerly, shook it around, and opened it.

“What is this mess, Stranger? You are a sick child! Your box, like you Stranger, is repulsive. You will receive negative points for the box art lesson. Now get out of here, show the principle your disgust. Don’t be late.”

Stranger escorted himself to the office. His fingers ran down the halls instead of their usual saunter. They convinced Stranger to take just one lap extra around the school before he arrived in the pale green waiting room. There was student art on the walls, but mostly pictures Stranger knew to be the principle’s family. There was one other boy waiting, his hair was red and he had freckles on his cheeks.

“Hey, how do you see outta them eyes?”

“...I don’t know, just like you do I guess.” Stranger took the scissors from his pocket, ran them across his palm and cut the toes of his tennis shoes off. He struggled to get through the rubber.

“Mm... I don’t know. I reckon it’s probably differ’nt.”

“Maybe,” Stranger told him. He opened his art box and placed the toes of his shoes inside. He stood up, left the box in his seat, and exited the school with obscene toes.

Lost With Time

My brother sat across from me
on a \$5,000 chair and foot rest
looking intently at the glowing television screen.
Terminator 2: Judgment Day.

I lay on a \$9,000 couch looking instead
at the sleeping figure in the least comfortable
of all chairs. His was head at an odd angle,
his snores distorted by a bent neck and TV explosions.

He would mumble and sometimes break from sleep,
only to cry out in pain at his strange position
and mouth nonsense. With his sour breath,
each night was relatively the same.

One night, as I lay awake on the sagging couch,
a man broke the front door open with a clash.
He bounded towards my silent sleeping guardian,
battering him screams and fists, disturbing
the resting wolverine. The room smelled sour.

A lamp broke: \$2,000.
A desk flipped: \$5,000. I lay there
silently watching the cartoon whirlwind,
thinking how strange it was for such
a simple object to cost so much.

My hero returned, bloody from the fight.
He said things I hadn't thought about before:
"You'll always be safe with me" and "I'll protect you".
I stayed silent and thought maybe, just maybe,
we'd build bottle rockets tomorrow.

Weeks later, it was time to launch a rocket.
It had taken hours to set up, yet something wasn't right.
The damn rocket wouldn't ignite!
I cussed, my brother chided me.

We watched as the sweet smelling man crushed
the rocket under his boot. He jumped on it like a spoiled child
demolishing a broken toy. He kicked its debris,

turned around, gave us a toothy smile, and I loved him

The funeral was fun. I got to see my teachers cry,
and I met a strange girl in the basement,
Nothing was real, or ever will be.
I made jokes that were offensive, Pete laughed.
I wish I cried more.

Residuum

Slick, greasy beach covered
with senior citizens, their
jellyfish skin coagulates.

They leave dentures
on the shore which
outnumber the shells.
Crabs make
gap-toothed homes.

When the tide comes in they
cling like sea urchins
to the bottom of boats
and flat tires to stay afloat.
Wallow in briny
seaweed and IV fluids.

Oxygen tanks drag
them to the bottom.
They breathe in sand.
Choke on their pearls.

A Double Take on Angela's Hair

I.

The curtains of her hair
part around her immaculate
forehead, undulate loose behind her.
Wind pushes her thoughts
along the strands of hair
until they are flicked off the ends
in invisible beads, leaving implied splotches
on the asphalt of Filmore Street.
The color of her hair is the stolen child
of bread and the sleepy sun.

II.

This creature of her head
will sway its tendril tentacles,
innocuous in the current,
until it seizes its prey
and feels for firmness, ripeness
fullness, longevity.
It will return some to the current
and wrap others in its countless
appendages, drawing them close
into its dank interior
to be consumed slowly.

The Ceramic Mug's Affair

The lady edged her hand around my handle.
My stomach tightened as her hand oil
seeped into me as it did every single day.
She made up for it by pouring the black brew
straight into my mouth, warming me
and burning off that oil.

She took me for a spin in the car,
and let the cup holder hold me
even though I was a mug.

She got out next to a window repair shop
and left me out in the cold, on a rail.
She came out with new glass and frame
and left me there.

Hours passed, the black brew nearly turned to ice.
Then a hand picked me up, and took me
to the cemetery. This, I suppose, was fine.
His hands were rough, sweaty and warm,
with calluses on the edge.
There was even a splinter in his right finger!
My kind of man.

After that, he filled my mouth with a new brew,
whose flavor was contained
in a soft silk bag that caressed my insides.

And then, it seems, he left me in a Toyota to die.
But he came back this time as a line backer.
Drenched in sweat and parched,
he took me. His lips met mine,
and he slurped the given fluids
inside me until I was dry.
I bet that other oily woman is jealous.

I Weave the Clothes I Wear

They are filthy and crusted.
Seams unravel quickly
and my skirt stays up through
safety-pins in shredded thread.

On the window-glass I can feel
dirty skin, hand, palm grease,
and baby tears, some mine.

I was six years here,
when momma died.

Everyone called it
black lung.
She was cremated.

I stole the clothes I'd made for her
and pulled the loosest threads.
They sounded like tiny zippers.
I entwined her into the hem
of my skirt, just like I do
with everything else.

Mythology

Bears are real, in some off-beat, brisk, tangible way. You can see the mud in between their toes or whatever you call the digits on their paws; you can smell the salmon or mauled camper on their breath should you venture that close; you can rub their hair that feels coarse like a pit-bull's. Simply because you see it, you know it exists.

But you can see unicorns in paintings, or on a carousel, or in the circus while your mother destroys the magic with an, "It's just a goat with its horns melded together," and still not believe. They might as well be pulling Santa's sleigh or chilling with Sasquatch. Unicorns aren't real, but maybe it's because, deep down, we think if they really were, we'd be disappointed. Maybe bears came first, we thought the bears would be gentle and come home, and not be upset that Goldilocks had eaten their food and broken their chairs and slept in their beds, and when we found her in little bloody pieces in the woods, we decided bears were inhospitable, and the story should end with Goldilocks getting away. We kept the mythos, all the while knowing the truth. We decided to put off making any real unicorns for a while. Just in case.

Desire

My heels dangle above the concrete floor listening to “Oh Holy, You Are,” and I’m thinking about the sexually transmitted diseases I’m lusting to give you. Infatuation in mind, this outbreak of desire brings me thoughts of you contracting Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, and Donovanosis. Your brown eyes hold on waiting for the closing prayer, church bulletin in hand, and I’m frothing at the fingers to get you out of here. Strong fervor for passion and soon you’ll be sweating syphilis, or chancroid. I’m examining the buttons of your dress shirt. I see through the gap of two buttons and to your white undershirt and there’s the want to give you a piece of Kaposi’s sarcoma: some lesions, some sores, maybe some tumors. No ‘most commonly cured’ here. Maybe a little acquired immune deficiency syndrome will settle you down after the itch of passion sets in.

Infatuation Means Subtracting

Derek is telling me about something but I can't hear him because I am drunk and can pay no mind to specifics. I concentrate on remembering that we are swinging, and there are people kissing, and that I am shivering a lot and it must be uncomfortable for him as I shake against his side. I have experienced this before and, in my heart of hearts, I take none of it seriously. If I allowed myself to be somehow caught in the act of infatuation, as devastated as I may be, I would grow from the emotional downfall.

I remember I was sitting facing him. He was on one of those porch swings with three other people, smoking a cigarette. I don't smoke anymore, I just drink; I tell him when he holds a cigarette in front of my face. Derek and I pass a forty ounce bottle of malt liquor back and forth; it is my birthday and no one should have expected me to share. I watched some of the foam and some of the liquid linger on his mustache with each swig. Derek hands the bottle to me and my friend has finished her cigarette and goes inside. His left side is cold now, he says, and I dismiss the invitation. I can't keep you warm, I say. He pays no mind and pats the empty space. Derek adjusts himself as I sit down and slide over towards his cold left side. His arm rests on the back of the swing and I hand him the bottle of malt liquor. He is done with his cigarette and the only other people on the swing are a couple, and they are kissing and there is a party inside. Derek and I swing and I continue to watch the damp hairs on his upper lip.

Derek is an idea that he is not defined by, he isn't even aware of this idea of him that I have. An idea being so far away is dangerous, cancerous even, but nothing about it hurts me enough. Derek Archer isn't, however, that far away.

...

Infatuation isn't anything new, so much so that it feels prehistoric, like I've discovered it as fossilized remains. The new way is of the fresh-faced Nihilist; the one who disregards meaning. I practice this in terms of bruises—my friends and I beat the ever loving out of each other on a weekly basis. I've never had such exhilarating altercations before.

In the beginning of the fight the opponents generally laugh as they face the people they eat lunch with, get drunk with, or kiss—how does one start a fight without first disagreeing or, at least, talking? You have to push through something that feels as physical as brick—the empty space between you and everyone increases in weight right before an unsure fist blisters through. It is odd how quickly we can go from docile to violent—someone just had to act first, most of us are far too nice to break the ice. Afterwards the mass of everything else becomes so much less. It is easier than talking, though there's nothing to really talk about. The atmosphere of our fighting area, aside from being choked in cigarette smoke, is vibrant in its illnesses. I haven't decided if this is real life or pop-culture philosophy—is it hedonism or chastity?

The way people lounge on sofas and spit beer accidentally as they cheer reminds me of hedonism—of something prodigiously rotund and selfish; it seems masturbatory. Even the fighters with ribs showing and only one lump of gristle for muscle seem like overfed aristocracy. Overfeeding themselves *with* self.

No one goes to the doctor here. Your hairline fracture is a trophy, if you wear it correctly, and you suffer for the good of the people who cheer and spill beer, the people who fought before your round and offered up adrenaline for the spectators, and the abominable urge to hide the fact that you really want to win—even though nobody admits it, everyone is here to

win. This life of absence from aid and comfort feels like mythological adversity that you overcome not as yourself but with acceptance that you have and are nothing and that something greater than you is guiding you. Sometimes, I honestly believe in a vow to have nothing.

...

Ideas are good but if that is all they amount to then they do not help anyone progress. The fresh-faced Nihilist is fine with this—is progression so great, after all? The advancement in technology has dug the core out of our planet and left it to collapse. Stagnation in terms of ideas, of people as ideas, helps you to ignore the fact that you are disintegrating—when you progress you seem to explode time again and time again. From one fission to the next you gain more intelligence in some way; you get something that helps you burn up all at once, all over again. Stagnation is like a beast—the singular monster in your closet. Tapping into lifelines and brainwaves it loves you according to a hallowed expression, which amounts to saying that it never loved you at all. While the choice is not clear which is actually easier or healthier—I do have a bias towards explosion, to be flung into bits from a mistake, but I cannot seem to get all the way to detonation.

So what of this ancient beast that I lie beneath? Derek Archer has pinned me in between two mattresses that we use for fighting—I feel epiphanic. I laugh at the notion of being under a bed, of being a monster. I am freed from the hold and I rush my fist into Derek's eye. It was never a fair fight, I was always going to lose, but I felt like being exposed as a loser. The fight has justified my celibacy in that Derek's physical urges towards me are fleetingly violent and nothing more. I've cut my lip on something that is not someone else's mouth and I've

completely missed the point of Nihilism—it isn't about subtraction at all. Nihilism adds, exponentially, to a person's life in terms of effort and philosophy. This is quite a burden to carry around. Being infatuated lets you drop things at various intervals and focus on progression to a singular goal—which will be, without a doubt, jerked away inches in front of your face at the last second. And then you erupt.

Pretty Boy

I passed a band of queers on the side of the road
and wondered why they weren't in school.
They were all made up, black eyes, wavy hair,
no reds, all blonde and brown.
These boys were too young

to be clutching brown bottles inside brown bags.
They were not loitering but barely moving,
hindered by the weight of their heads.
These boys had lean necks and fingers

pawing at cigarettes and distressed denim;
these boys thought they were Dean.
The boys were Caucasian at best,
lacking any exotic roll of the tongue;
compact, flat, middle class faces
with homemade haircuts and baby-book names.

I'm sure these kids were bandits that smelled
of dead sweat and the coin laundry.
Despite my disdain, I wanted to join them
for fear of ending up like the parents
I'm sure they were obligated to resent.

Through the Pass

Driving through La Veta Pass in Colorado, headed to Alamosa,
my father tells how he ran away from home.

A graduate from Duke University, driving out to Wyoming
to find work on a ranch, his mother worrying
and his father proud in Tennessee. Selling beer at a rodeo,
cringing at the crunch of bones, and sleeping in his car
before he met the foreman of a ranch just down the road.
Dad slows the car, "Look at this, here on your right,"
a dozen mule deer jumping a fence.

He drove down to the ranch the next day and baled hay,
then herded cattle, then rode roundup, then quit
because they tried to cut his pay for his honesty.
He went back southeast for Christmas,
picked up a cousin on the way back, fitting Little Murray
into his car with two saddles and suitcases,
and a black Lab puppy named Gypsy.
Pointing through the windshield, "Look at that sunset,"
like the orange he got me for continental breakfast.

They found work the same way, walked into a bar,
anybody looking for cowboys?
The bartender told them the Goemmer's might be,
down the road just an hour's drive. His favorite horse was Camel,
smooth and easy for a ten-hour ride, Gypsy trotting
beside or slung across the saddle like one of the calves
plodding too slowly to make it to the corral by dinner-time.
Two plates of food with bites for Gypsy and her almost-coyote litter.
"Gosh at that view," looking down through the pass at the land,
this thing that we have for our own by sheer luck.

Self-Portrait in a Velvet Dress

Maroon walls for a beginning,
sperm and globular tissue
hissing, sputtering— a singular sozzle.

The veins fat with water, retained
like in skin of the malnourished.

Reflecting the primordial,
like the nightmare
painted on Goya's wall—
Cronus devouring
his children.

The womb— a static netting
crackling, decaying in folds.
A dream of the un-birth,
an image shared
 with Frida—
 Henry Ford Hospital, 1932.

Specter

This thing
(for it is still a thing to me.
I have not seen the grainy images of its penis
nor witnessed a lack thereof,
nor marveled at the form of its head,
like a gourd. I have not felt its writhing,
no characteristic efforts to emancipate itself
from its wet and warm cell.
In my dreams it comes out
from between my legs, a moist vapor
the vague shape of a child, though
without wrinkles, it is difficult to determine—
but it cries with an aqueous gurgle
and the milky pearls of its tears
fall and stain the sterile fabric.
The doctors hold it to the light,
and try to describe its texture.
The enigma I formed is kept from me
so they can observe it in its Plexiglas cocoon
and ensure it does not evaporate
or imbue into the blankets as it sleeps.
For six days, you and I question the unused crib
and on the seventh it is mine to embrace.
I recall my mother telling me as a girl
that this is the moment in which a noise
you have heard your whole life suddenly stops.
On the way home, you tell me
you will not love it.)
is rumored to be inside me.

The Limpid Hour

The coast is a liar.
Still full of passion,
its graffitied stones wrap
around a scatter of jetsam.
It's mine,

for now.
The absent horizon cries out.
The blobfish creeps
from behind an opaque cloud,
and exhales a grateful wheeze.

The waves fall into my lap,
along with a crab or two.
No fighting today,
the tiny salt merchants relapse
(claw-in-claw) into the ichor.

It's All Here

Character Listing:

Doctor- The doctor is tall and thin with wild dark hair, always speaks with confidence and at a calm pace, except for when singing a more rapid bell-sounding voice is used. He is dressed in a white overcoat with white pants also.

Chub- Chub speaks much more rapidly than the doctor and with much enthusiasm, although not much confidence. He is a short man with a round middle and may be balding slightly; appears older than the doctor in physicality but not in personality. He also is wearing a white lab coat but has on teal slacks.

Setting: The walls of the room are white with a wooden desk in the center and two metal chairs on either side of the stage facing in towards the center of the stage. The Doctor stands in the center of the stage and is revealed as the curtains open.

Doctor: *(waltzing simple steps around the stage)* One, two, three... one, two, three.. a-one, a-two, a-three... and a-one, two—

Chub: *(runs in from off stage with a small baby in his arms)* Sir, Doctor, the babies are here, just got in... the mother! It's incredible, never seen anything like them, those babies, I swear if I had one I'd name it Cliff, short for Clifford, teach it to climb. They're magnificent; pink and brown and the yellow ones have black hair, the black ones too. I found this one, I mean I found this one, he's smaller than the rest, didn't wail like the others, I don't know what he is, what do we make of it?

Doctor: *(takes the baby from Chub, holding it up over his face looking at it)* The small one? The small ones are just the same, only smaller of course! This baby has two eyes, one nose, even two ears. I say it is no different; look upon him Chub! Always one in the group, always! *(still holding the baby, spinning in circles)* Babies babies, this one small, babies babies!... *(pulls the baby close to his chest and hands it back to Chub. The tone in his voice drops significantly)* This one small, Take it away Chub. Put it in the incubator. We'll keep it for a month, one month, not any longer, Keep them in there too long and I swear it's monstrous.

Chub: Yes sir, Doctor! Get the small one, check the bigger ones, watch them all, organize! It's all here, it's all here... *(hurriedly exits the stage holding the baby out in front of himself, dangling)*

Doctor: There's just not another like it, babies in and babies out, the mamas, dadas come in, squeals, teary eyes, all wanting their hands on a tot! And to be in charge of it all; you get this one, I keep that one. No not that one *(using big arm gestures pointing to imagined babies in front of him)*, let's take this one, the small one with the ears! Ah yes, the wonderful parents will arrive! Chubs *(calling off stage)*, there is much to prepare for, the parents!

Chub: *(runs on the stage with four babies in his arms)*: Doctor, yes the parents, I can't wait to meet them, you said they're fantastic, only the best, I'll have to wash the floors won't I? Yes, comb the hair, brush the teeth, shave the face, I must be presentable, I am in care of these tiny ones, I must impress the parents with tidiness!

Doctor: Tidiness? No Chub, not tidiness, while yes it is important, you are correct there, the key to the parents' hearts is all the set-up of the offspring, the lay-out of the beds, the colors of the nursery and the variety of hair-bows we struggle to clip on the little girls' heads! Do you see? Presentation over all, we'll have it like this, *(uses big arms and hand gestures)* some in this corner, some in that, some in the middle, and the cribs will all be raised on levels like bleachers! See the idea? Paint the walls yellow, pink, blue! *(While each color is said an appropriately colored drop falls over the back and both the side walls of the white walls on stage.)* And what with the babies, Chub? Put them down, let them lay now.

(Chub runs offstage and returns quickly without the babies, removes the chairs, the Doctor removes the desk. The lights dim quickly and come back)

Chub: Let me get them sir! The babies mustn't wait long for the parents, it's just not fair, every child needs someone and we are much less someones than needed, just you and I. They're all laying, squirming; Doctor they are anxious.

Doctor: *(takes a deep breath)* Well Chub you see like the babies, you must wait on the parents arrival. Now we can estimate, guesstimate if you please at when they will arrive but you most certainly will never know certainly. It's all timing. The babies could grow four inches before they arrive but I do tell you this is doubtful. I have seen the parents before and they did come quite on time, quite on with the estimates. I had no assistant then Chub, just one man preparing the spectacle: fixing the nursery, freshening the babies, laying them out, settling the parents. You are a lucky man Chub, a lucky witness. Babyhood is all that we look forward to. You have taken on the role I have most graciously given you. I thank me also Chub. It's time, let's roll out the tykes.

Chub: Right!

(The two roll in three sets of bleacher-like stands. The stands have multiple levels and on each level is a row of babies each in what may resemble a car-seat or crib. One is on the back wall and the other two are on the sides, facing in towards the center of the stage and slightly angled for better audience vision.)

Chub: All the eyes! They're surrounding us Sir, watching what we do, and can you believe they all are seeing the same thing while we are seeing them in a same but also different way too? I will remember this forever, these great baby walls aren't going anywhere in my mind! When I was lifting them sir, putting them all into place I couldn't help but notice, have you seen their round bellies? They must be the most pleasant surfaces on Earth, I have the right mind to just keep a couple atop my bed, use the babies for pillows! Of course we couldn't really do that Doctor could we? The babies aren't ours I guess, never have been, and they would grow out of their perfect pillow shape... *(Chub shows much facial and vocal disappointment)* Oh and having to feed a pillow would be a hassle... to keep one alive, keep it fluffed during the night....

Doctor: Chub it's only natural to want one for yourself, but you can't let the upset get to you! No, no, no Chub, with the babies around it must be all smiles and giggles. Do not let them feel your sadness Chub, the wails are contagious and very hard to control. Get one going and by the time it stops another is going and is even louder than the first. As for these thoughts Chub, you must *(throws his hand in the air)* discard them! No baby pillows, no willows, it's just not right. You are correct when you say they are not ours to keep Chub; they most certainly are not and I would hate for you to get confused! Confusion may poison even the most astute of minds, forgetting what is best for not only them but for themselves. Imagine taking care of all these children Chub, all on our own. You and I, playing the roles of both ma and pa, and all without parenting eyes! A disaster! *(Runs around to the baby stands, pointing and talking at various babies)* Could you imagine little one? I your single papa, and Chub your single mama? Or vice versa baby, could I be your mother? HA what a grin, baby, put that away! Chub the babies have the finest senses for humor as they are born, and unfortunately most of them will slowly lose it. It will slip away into adulthood. It's a wonder I held onto mine, it's most important, well it's why I hold this spectacular occupation. You Chub have been less fortunate but I do appreciate what you have left, more than most, and enough to provide assistance!

(Chub opens his mouth, struggles on his words and shuts it again, slightly confused.)

Doctor: Chub it's a simple compliment! Take it and be merry, there is no more time for meaningless mumbles. The babies you so adore, they are crying. Sing them a lullaby Chub, the only one you know!

Chub: *(confused and speaks slowly)* But sir, what... lullaby? The one I know... right the one I know... well yes the only one I have ever learned—

Doctor: Oh silly Chub! The baby's lullaby is but the most important song we sing! For you to have forgotten it, well I must excuse you, as it is your fault but at this moment we have no room for errors. Dig deep Chub and sing with me!

*(waltzing again) Eyelids open, baby close them now,
Closed for parents, don't wake up,
Mama's coming soon baby, for the tuck.*

Come on Chub! Join me now!

(The doctor continues the song and waltz twice more while Chub waltzes with very awkward effort, mumbling noises pretending he knows the words.)

Doctor: Excellent lullaby Chub. Well- practiced, keep on top of your duties at all time. Yes it seems you do, prime assistant my Chub, quality. After the song is let out it is time to observe the little ones all sleeping, lulled and sedated. We are influential, you know my friend, we are the sole caretakers of these next. The beginnings of lives create the soul, I have run tests Chub. It is all very difficult and I do not expect your understanding much of it, but what I mean to say is—
(tone and facial expressions drop into mania)

Chub do not look down at the tiling while we are in conversation. I am sharing with you the core concepts of our beliefs and you have no concentration. Another time Chub. It was preferable just then but then again all is well, it all can be well anyway and yes it will be, I will see to that. Chub, give me a moment, I am in need of your dismissal, I must talk.

Chub: *(speaks slowly with uncertainty)* Doctor— I, I mean I should be here too right? The mother, I think it's time I finally see her, I mean really see her Doctor, being around these babies, It's really making me think you know? Maybe— *(with desperation)* the vision, the actual sight, maybe it could give me all it has given you Doctor, maybe one day—

Doctor: Do not get ahead Chub, not one day, not the next, and certainly in no ten months will you. It is all too much determined like I said Chub, it is the beginnings that happen to be most important and while yes, I have admitted you and you have had some fortunate upbringing, you were never brought up as I. This is time Chub, leave me now. I will request your return.

(Chub exits the stage and the doctor stands still for a moment and then sits cross-legged in the very center of the stage)

Doctor: *(eyes closed)* Mother yes mother I have all the babies, all the excitement, my assistant too, he will be part this time but yes I know as you have told me, he will never know. He will never know what I know, what you have taught me mother. Never let them out of your sight, babies grow faster than peas, and yes all is to be valued in quantity! Oh mother, mother, elite, and Chub.

(pauses and his face twist into child-like frustration and confusion)

(building emphasis each time the name is said) Chub. Chub. Chub must always keep his eyes open, that is the trouble mother, he cannot see you like I, because mother, he does not look with the absence of sight! *(throws his arms out wide and gains facial confidence)* They all come, always, they always do and I never mistook them, never mistook you and it is all so bountiful! *(the doctor holds the pose for a moment, sitting cross-legged with closed eyes and his arms stretched parallel to the floor. His arms then slowly fall along with his facial expression losing excitement and turning to confusion.)* But mother what is next? What does come after me, surely it is no Chub, no Chub can satisfy the young and... there is no other. Mother, there is no other is there? There isn't anyone. After I... it's... it's... well then it isn't, is it?

(The doctor stands slowly and pauses. all stress leaves his body, his arms falling into a cradling shape as he waltzes, very slowly, humming the lullaby once. The doctor exits the stage. The stage is left empty for one minute, no noise can be heard. The doctor returns holding two adult mannequin dolls, each by the hand, one male and one female, both ordinarily clothed.)

Doctor: *(casually laughing and positioning the mannequins close to the babies on stage while he speaks to the mannequins)* Yes only the finest, both the parents and children and yes ma'am that is why we are so proud, prestigious and yes we are very well-recognized. It is all for the babies, yes the babies. *(exits the stage and returns talking to another mannequin couple he brings onto stage)* Lady, my sir, please yes

this is all yours, plentiful it is, and what a wonderful gift, the children. Cherish, yes we do cherish.

(exits and enters again with another couple of mannequins, this action is repeated until the mannequins are enough to account for the amount of babies. For time's sake the lights may be dimmed as the doctor is still heard and mannequins may be brought on stage in mass by the crew. The doctor's words may be let off into mumbles or improvisational conversation may be made to the mannequins. If the lights had been dimmed to save time they would reappear as the second to last pair is brought out. Chub enters the stage slowly.)

Chub *(interrupting the doctor and speaks with much uncertainty, little enthusiasm)*: Sir.. doctor, the parents? The parents doctor I was preparing... I mean the arrival...excitement.—

Doctor: *(putting the dolls in place and with much enthusiasm)* Yes Chub the arrival! The parents! Delightful and you come as summoned Chub! All is almost in place and yes I feel the grandiose, I am swollen with babies! Chub are you so dumbfounded? I understand it is near incomprehensible but open your eyes! All is here before us, what I have told you, taught you, showed you, sang you, I have proven you! And now prove yourself Chub! Prove and make acquaintance with your surroundings, explore the possibility in creation right as we speak! The small ones, they are growing! Right before our eyes they are changing! The perfect upbringing Chub, that is what we are doing, creating them— you can control development! There is enough inside of you to contribute! It is time to enjoy Chub, forget your petty worries— none are real. *(bowing)*It's all here.

(Chub makes no bodily movement, his expression stays confused)

Doctor: Chub you are dumbfounded. *(exits the stage and returns with the last pair of mannequins. He places the mannequins side by side and facing Chub. The doctor stands behind the two mannequins. Chub and the doctor pause for a several seconds, the doctor intent on Chub, Chub on the mannequins.)*

Chub: *(with significantly slower speaking and no enthusiasm, he addresses the mannequins)* ... Hello. Yes the babies are here. They are...pink and brown and— *(looks over towards the babies and mannequins set up behind him)* I see you two are late, the others, already arrived, gotten theirs. Don't want to be late...

(The doctor rapidly interjects himself between the two mannequins grabbing the wrist of the mannequin on each side of him. He stands holding the wrists of the mannequins on either side of himself)

Doctor: Chub the parents, *(shaking the mannequins by the wrists)* these are the parents, see them Chub, see! They have believed in you for so long Chub, believed in the caretakers and trusted the caretakers and the caretakers are what we are Chub! You have lost much of yourself and so briefly, Chub, liven yourself, now is the time you cease the work but now is the time that you are, that you need to be! Chub, it is the time, be!

Chub: I am, doctor, I always have been, I feel no less now and I think, I mean I think I would see it if I wasn't doctor, you would have seen it... surely Sir.

Doctor: Oh Chub I would have and did not and I do not but only slightly. I wish not to, please yes, be. *(The doctor thrusts the mannequins towards Chub, offering him the unoccupied hand of each mannequin. The mannequins are still in the doctor's hold as he waits for Chub to grab the hands.)*

(Chub takes the hands and forms a circle with the doctor and the two mannequins. The circle begins to waltz together, Chub and the doctor lifting up the mannequins. The waltz is slow at first and then gets faster. The doctor sings the lullaby and Chub finds the words the second time the song is sung. As the doctor gets faster Chub loses the words and begins a frantic hum. After the dance has reached maximum intensity the doctor throws out his arms rapidly, holding the mannequins out by his sides with straight arms. This causes Chub to lose hold on the mannequins and to stumble back several feet. The doctor calmly and slowly walks and places the mannequins in the center of the mannequin/ baby display, slightly in front of it. Chub walks to these center mannequins and pauses while the doctor walks directly a few feet in front of the same mannequins and sits cross-legged on the floor. The doctor closes his eyes.)

Chub: *(to the mannequins with an aloof spaced tone and a slow pace)* Oh my parents are here, I don't have to tell you, you are you and I can see you and feel you, like the babies so small and I must see that they are settled! *(moving around, scanning the babies)* Babies. Babies, babies, yes all the babies you are all young babies. *(his voice is increasingly louder and faster with each line delivered)* The babies with their parents so delighted! So delighted the babies! *(now yelling)* The babies are so delighted!

(The babies began to scream and cry terribly. As the sound level increases the doctor, still cross-legged on the floor with closed eyes, begins to spread his arms outwards slowly, parallel to the floor. This pose should mimic the one held previously by the doctor, when he was alone addressing the mother. This suggests her presence in the doctor. Chub is now running around the baby stands, weaving in between mannequins screaming)

Chub: *(running around, screaming)* Babies, parents babies, baby parents, this, this, magnificent! It is all here, it is all here! Doctor I have got it, I have got, I have got it and it is ALL HERE! ALL HERE DOCTOR, SIR. DOCTOR, I HAVE GOT IT AND IT IS ALL HERE!

(A curtain is dramatically dropped hiding the whole stage scene except the doctor. He is left on stage holding the same pose, cross-legged, his eyes still closed and arms parallel. The curtain should fall only inches behind his back. Chub is heard from behind the curtain although muffled, repeating "Doctor" and "sir" slowly with uncertainty and sounds to be crying and in agony. As the doctor's arms are still parallel to the floor, the doctor slowly stretches his fingers from his palms, and pauses. During his pause Chub falls silent. The doctor holds this pose, arms parallel, eyes closed, fingers outstretched for one minute in silence. He then opens his eyes wide and very dramatically. A sudden sharp sound is made as the doctor opens eyes to create emphasis. The second curtain falls instantly after, hiding the doctor.)

Of Her Loins

I used to tell my brothers
not to fall in love in the garden. It never ends well.
But they believed in the story of our parents
who loved in our backyard patch
of fruit and vegetables.

I refused to find or look for love there.
I wanted a man, though everyone preferred
the potatoes and turnips.

My father loved a watermelon.

He loved the every mystery,
her black seeds, her undeveloped white seeds.
He would tend to her and help her grow. Her vines
twisted into the ground like stretching limbs.

He praised the contours of her dark
green stripes to his mother and sisters
when he described how he had fallen in love.

She was still a vessel of life,
giving birth to me and my brothers.

We grew inside of small melons,
our personal eggs to age us into children.
After we were born we would play
with the rocks in the garden, let our mother know us
while our father pruned her leaves and washed her
with the sprinkler setting on the hose.

Sometimes we slept outside to care for her.
We pitched our tent next to the garden
and pretended it was woods. Our father used to tell us
that when our mother was pregnant he expected
strawberries or tomatoes, lovely and red
the way he knew our mother was on the inside.

To keep my mother safe, my father build
a garden fence around just her.
It frustrated the squirrels and rabbits,

but it didn't keep out the dogs.

They ravaged my mother,
lapped at her romantic core,
pushing her inedible shell
into the fertilized ground with their paws.

We found her strewn about the garden.
My brothers and I put what was left of her
into a shoebox and buried her where she had spent her life.
our father cried in the kitchen to the minister
who refused to give a eulogy for fruit.

Wrangler

She settles in without wine and thinks
of the wide pocket in the back of his jeans.
Washed out blue, threadbare;
it could hold her whole hand.

She runs her hands under the faucet
and lets them lay in the dish cloth soup.

The last piece of pie, with cherries
so bulbous, outstanding sheen,
she saved for the scum growing
in her basement; the son in her basement.

She cannot knit so she holds the yarn
and begs it to spin itself into
something worn out and blue.

Her son's eyes are painted up
but all she does is hold the pie
on a plate with a glass of milk
the same color. Her son's eyes
are not her eyes or her husband's eyes.
The son knows no father.
He asks who ate the rest of the pie.

Who is to Say What has Passed Through My Fingers

The pit of a peach,
brain-like,
I released from my fingertips,
my arm extended rigidly out of the window
while driving through West Virginia.
I forgot it so quickly,
I may have actually begun to forget it
before I began releasing it.
But that is only conjecture.
By the time it hit the ground
inaudibly, we were out of range
for regret or even a wistful
backward glance.
It was, at best, a flippant gesture.
I assume it was run over by a truck
made into negligible dust,
not a tree.
Do they grow peaches in West Virginia?
I saw a few breweries
and coal mines were implied
in the mountainsides.
The peach pit was not a child,
though it could have been;
I having orphaned it
by consuming its sweet womb.
aborting it, too—exposing it
to the sun and air and asphalt
all at once. It did not resist.
Nor did I, failing to even consider it
temptation.
My fingers were sticky
until the next rest stop.
I must remember it smashed,
irreversible, inconsequential
on the road, so I can forget it again.

Mid-West Tendencies

Minnesota adds a sense of ease
to yesterday's trouble:
the brick patio & dead vegetation.
The fussy, asthmatic pug
who wheezes with tremulous fury.
No worries, now, for dead shrubbery—
the ice killed it long ago
& the pug breathes the length
of the borders it took to get North.

Illinois won't have the same comfort;
no empty lots to practice rebellion,
no one road downtown, & the content feeling
of being hot in winter does not follow.

All at once,
Louisiana smiles within state lines,
Georgia beckons, the Carolinas shiver
inside the Blue Ridge Mountains.
They delight, contained within themselves—
this is not seen from space
or Wisconsin, whose borders
huddle by water front monsters.

Can state lines swell?
Like bloated vestibules,
falling onto highway construction
& displacing forests and deer population

No, the South cannot rise more than once
in the lifetime of a nation.