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# Calling All Spirits

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## ABSTRACT

*Calling All Spirits* showcases an exploration into the more uncanny aspects of life. In both fiction writing and poetry, this collection essentially wanders into various aspects of the post-Enlightenment societal void and communicates different characters and personas grasping at a more wholesome, organic existence amidst the processed and sometimes degradative confusion of contemporary life. Through offering different perspectives and putting words to multiple concerns, a goal of *Calling All Spirits* is to prioritize the works over any less important concerns about, for example, how closely a poem's speaker resembles the author. Allowing a writer to freely voice a concern within an artistic safe haven that ought not to foster simplistic stigmas is a great privilege and one that should show the complexity of life experience, as *Calling All Spirits* seeks to do.

CALLING ALL SPIRITS

by

Jesse Alexander Silk

A Collection of Creative Writing Submitted to the Faculty of the Department of English,  
Literature, and Modern Languages at Cedarville University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Creative Writing Minor

Cedarville, Ohio

2014

Approved by

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Dedicated to my loving family, my best friend Hudson and all the artists who have helped fan  
the flame.

“There are things known and things unknown, and in between are the doors.” – Jim Morrison

## INTRODUCTION

The title of this collection is rather straightforward and indicative of the desperate longing that pervades contemporary life. Beneath my writing and my understandings of life in general is a continually growing appreciation for literary theory and the immensely expansive and truthful thoughts of those such as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, Mikhail Bakhtin, Antonio Gramsci, Jean Baudrillard and Michel Foucault. The bottomless principles one can derive from these illuminating philosophers constantly weighs upon my consciousness. Thus, as a writer I feel liberated, for what were once murky explorations of mere emotion can now be grounded in a larger conversation of scholarship that is not just insightful, but fundamental. From Horkheimer and Adorno, I understand society's Post-Enlightenment vulnerable desperation in which the culture industry can flourish; from Foucault, I see the constant presence of power structures that impact human behavior.

These writers' texts, indispensable for all those who seek to truly understand the world around them, lead readers to understand, amongst other concepts, a vast and complicated absence of what I would call organic existence. Humans grow increasingly distant from both nature and one another as technology intensifies the presence of all that is contrived, misleading and oppressive. Thus, *Calling All Spirits* quite evidently depicts relationships between people and between humankind and nature, and it considers all the ways these unions have been severed or distorted while also wondering what it would be like to experience truly authentic and genuine moments amidst hyperreality.

This is the general context for the pieces in the collection, but I prefer to maintain enough mystery about the works so as to not present them as overly processed. As Foucault attests to, there are so many concepts in life in which humanity has termed and codified, and in doing so we have taken the wonder out of experience. I am trying to reclaim some of that wonder – if such a pursuit is possible. Many would plausibly assert that there is no going back – that the effects of the past two centuries have especially shaped in humanity permanent

sentiments. Thus, several of these pieces delve into the combination of this existential loss and an attempt to gain, of hope and despair, of the surreal and the all-too-real.

In order to achieve such effects, I have found that multiple perspectives and a variety of images are great tools for the writer. Story innately incorporates multiple perspectives, and this is what makes it such a beautiful art form. I, the author, can disappear while the characters emerge at the forefront, allowing their different experiences and philosophies to converse, battle with or synthesize one another. Poetry may be my favorite form of writing, because the mystery intensifies. Stories have narrators, and there can be a great amount of artistry done in creating a narrator, but the possibilities in creating speakers for a poem are bountifully exciting. I can begin the poem from one speaker's perspective, and in the next stanza, shift the diction and tone to those of a different speaker. Moreover, I may not introduce these characters at all; they may be defined wholly by what they say. I have seen such an approach beautifully utilized by Daron Malakian and Serj Tankian, who vary uses of different speakers, oftentimes so that these speakers may serve as microcosms of greater bodies of belief, criticism and behavior. The poet can boil down the ideas of a movement or a society into one voice.

Whether through fiction or poetry, *Calling All Spirits* wants to summon moments into a cauldron of logical emotion. Veiling words thinly or thickly does not correlate in the artist being void of moral responsibility, but rather, the artist must confront his or her audience with the undeniable and the irrefutable. Whereas arguments tend to rise and fall and fragment based upon overarching, vague principles and the use of people as statistics, creative writing enables one to present an individual. The individual's story is neither right nor wrong; it merely is. He or she is a character living life, not debating policy with pundits on a news program. You the reader must process these characters, their pasts, their surroundings, their hardships, their glories, their subjugation, exaltation, deadened spirits and opaque horizons. The moral call of the artist therefore does not pertain so much to the characters as it does to the readers. "Will this poem or story create sympathetic understanding and inklings to alleviate injustice amongst my

audience?” the writer must ask himself.

So, with these two primary principles – multiple perspectives and liberating benevolence – in mind, I can thank numerous influences. In addition to Malakian and Tankian, Bruce Springsteen, Peter Gabriel, Don Henley, Steve Harris, Zacharías de la Rocha, Otep Shamaya, Peter Richards, Ray Bradbury, J.D. Salinger, George Saunders, Trey Parker and Matt Stone and many other creative writers demonstrate to me an insightfully accurate grasp of reality, a social conscience, a sense of wonder and multifaceted artistry. Aesthetically, these writers have imparted me with a sense of how to tonally balance subtlety and nuance with necessary aggressiveness. The ambiguity of their works is not aimless but rather allows readers to follow any one of multiple guiding paths. And, though the metaphor may be somewhat cliché, their words and images truly are vivid paintings, and the more I view them, the steadier my brushstroke becomes.

I hope that this collection serves its purpose as a document that enables readers to explore unsearched parts of their lives or the lives of others. Amidst all the aforementioned realities and the knowledge that certain subcultures can exert their influence through astucious means, I wonder if the sphere of artistic influence can become its own power structure – not one that abides by the principles of other vectors of control, but rather, one that checks them and enables some existence apart from them. Maybe one day art will not be swallowed by the culture machine but can be the swallower, the greater force, the power that gains a critical mass. We will keep writing to draw nearer and nearer to that day.

So, for all that has been said here, much more can be said in what will follow. I can say that *Calling All Spirits* may demonstrate longing, inner dialogue and meditation, trying to cope with malaise, an appreciation for the bizarre and a host of other themes, but as Tankian would say, “I’d rather let the music speak for itself.”

## FOREWORD

As a writer, I consider that a chief principle of the artistic mission is depicting truth or using stories and images to lead both the writer and readers toward truth. Truth is a concept that has become increasingly elusory and often controversial, but it can make itself known in numerous forms. I have discovered many enlightening principles of reality and the human condition through my experiences in the arts, and it because of these realizations and philosophical meditations that I adhere to a life narrative that is the most metaphysically and epistemologically sound. Some refer to this narrative as Christianity, and though this term often becomes conflated with Christendom and presents difficulties, its tenets and principles have veracity and guide my artistic endeavors.

Upon establishing with adequate certainty the existence of God as construed in the Christian Bible, I have understood my purpose as a writer from biblical passages and concepts. 2 Timothy 2:15 instructs followers of the Bible to “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” While I may write about topics and perspectives that are not conventionally approved or associated with Christian culture, I know that before God I would not be ashamed of my writing because it seeks to portray truth at all costs, no matter how difficult the subject matter.

Ecclesiastes particularly guides concepts in my writing, for it more than any other book has illustrated one form of truth: experiential truth. Experiential and anecdotal truth appears often in my writing because it is a microcosm of universal truth and often comes in more palatable or undeniable forms than overarching statements. Solomon’s writings show that all that transpires “under the sun” is utterly fleeting and meaningless, and as humans, upon realizing this, we can experience a depressing malaise as he did. Humans who truly acknowledge and consider life’s intricacies will be driven to immensely difficult realizations; dismay should not be viewed with stigma, but rather, it naturally aligns with experiential truth and accounts for the world around us. The philosophically beleaguered are those who truly

travel life's trajectory from innocence to experience and do not settle for any lesser truths.

It is out of this disheartening, deeply nuanced void that I write. I write to process and synthesize hardship and meaninglessness, which ironically and thankfully gives meaning. Like Solomon, after we have examined the surrounding world and realized it has collapsed on more levels than we would ever care to imagine, somehow we still fight. Somehow, though there is no reason to expect hope, we persist. These past 1900 years or so have predominately existed without the overt supernatural involvement that was so prominent in the prior eras of history, so although seekers of truth can know God is there, they must also know that under his sovereignty, we are agents of change in this present age. This is not Deism, but Christianity that simply accounts for the way things are. We have ultimate hope in the afterlife, but that does not necessitate situational hope. And yet we cannot give up; it is not an option. The biblical virtue of perseverance is far more profound and demanding than we might know.

So as a writer of faith who believes that we will eventually enter the presence of God who values the here-and-now, it is my duty to do all I can in the artistic sphere to usher in the principles of his kingdom and the pursuit of truth. I believe God uses the writer to say what is not being said from all the other occupations in the world. Writers must appreciate the wisdom literature of the Bible in order to understand and depict the world in ways the rest of humanity may not care to consider. This is not an arrogant role, though, but rather the opposite; like Christ, we must humbly work not for appreciation, but for the goals of our mission.

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## SILKEN SHUDDER

Chase trots down the sidewalk, the newly dried cement corroding the arches of his feet just as the old pavement would. He prefers to look down when walking but often has to direct his eyes upward to avoid any oncoming pedestrian traffic. During one of these necessary scans of his surroundings, Chase sees at the curbside to his left construction workers cutting down caution tape and picking up orange cones, stacking them in piles and tossing them into the backs of their trucks. Now with no one in sight, it's back to watching each crack and prosaic slab of gray pass under his toes.

At the end of the corner a van has been shifted into park for quite some time, its motor bashfully and inconspicuously purring. The right door to the middle seat lies almost all the way open but not clicked into place. As Chase passes the corner, he feels a rigorous tug on the back of his shirt as his dainty frame is thrust into the van, his head slamming against the headrest of the passenger seat. "Easy with the merchandise!" shouts the driver.

In his disorientation, Chase cannot respond to struggle (as if it would matter) before a canvas shrouds his face. His senses return to a ringing darkness and the sound of two clicks and a voice that says, "Make a noise and I'll decorate the interior with your pretty boy brains." The van smoothly strolls to the end of the alley and turns onto the street.

A few miles away on the other side of town, the van pulls into a parking lot and men lead Chase up a flight of stairs. Removing the burlap from his face, they shove him forward into a room and lock the door behind him from the outside. Expecting some harm to immediately befall him, Chase uses his newfound sight to scan his surroundings and brace himself, but no one else is in the room. It is not the dingy dungeon with leaky pipes and cold concrete floors he

was expecting. In front of him is a double bed with an indigo comforter, and on each side of the bed there are glass end tables with upholstered chairs around them. Chase looks for a window, a vent, anything that may let him escape, but the room is sealed. As he steps forward, he begins to rub the soft plush of the bed covers with his fingers, as if to tangibly understand how this comfortable room is the result of being abducted. The door opens behind him.

“Hello there.” A tall man with beaming blue eyes and shoulder-length blond hair stands confidently in the doorway. “I’m sorry for the difficulty getting you here; do forgive us, sometimes Miguel and Lester can be a bit impatient when there’s work to be done quickly. Well, I hope you are doing alright now... I didn’t happen to catch your name?”

Chase does not respond, and has not moved an iota either, his feet glued to the floor in front of the bed and not a limb moving one inch this way or the other.

“Well, I’m Ronny.” The man’s Australian accent is comforting in spite of the circumstances, but the stone statue of Chase in front of him refuses to make it seem so. “Look... um... I know this can seem like a scary situation, but I promise, we’re not going to hurt you or anything like that.

“Things will just go much more smoothly if we all get along, eh? And well, hell, I’ll just tell you now, this here is where you’ll get to stay. Not bad, huh? I think you’ll find it plenty comfortable. We’ll work on getting a TV in here for you soon.”

Ronny walks out as begins to close the door. “I’ll, uh, leave ya be for awhile, and we’ll get dinner and I’ll show you around later. You should probably get some rest, kid.”

The door locks from the outside.

Chase knows there is no use in yelling and it’d only make things worse. He gives every inch of the room a second examination, and with not even a hint of an escape idea available, he lays down on the bed and falls asleep.

\*

Chase awakens to the sound of a turning latch.

Ronny is standing in the doorway again, “Oh, sorry there mate, didn’t know you were sleeping. Hey, you wanna grab a bite to eat? We’ve got some food downstairs.”

Chase follows Ronny into the hallway, and sees one of the men who brought him here standing to his right at the intersection of the hallway and what seems to be a foyer to the front door. Chase stares at the man while walking. “Oh, that’s Lester,” Ronny says cordially. “Hey Les, why don’t ya tell the kid you’re sorry for roughin’ him up, huh!?” The pride and perfect posture of the door guard melts into reluctance and chagrin, “Sorry.”

“Les is a good guy, sometimes he can just get a little too into his work, you know? Here, let’s head downstairs.”

At the end of the hallway, Ronny and Chase turn left down a flight of stairs to a kitchen area. Opening the refrigerator, Ronny asks, “What’d ya like? We’ve got ham and cheese for a sandwich, or some leftover pizza?”

“A sandwich is fine,” Chase softly says, now seated on a stool and leaning over and staring down at the glossy white tile countertop.

“Well, I know we’ve sort of been introduced, but I haven’t gotten your name...”

After trying to hold firm to his silence of staring at the tiles, Chase lifts his head up for a slight moment to make eye contact with Ronny. Straight-faced but slightly shaking, he opens his mouth but then clenches his lips back together, holding onto his answer.

“Look kid, I want things to go well for you and me.” Ronny says, now leaning across the countertop and speaking closely to Chase’s face. “I’d just like to get to know ya a little, learn your name, what you like to do.” Chase’s right forearm begins to tremble; Ronny grabs it softly to still it. “Hey, hey, it’s okay, it’s okay, I’m not gonna hurt you.”

“Chase.”

“Well it’s nice to meet you, Chase,” Ronny smiles. “So what sort of things are you into, Chase? You a sports guy?”

“I like baseball.”

“Oh yeah, you play?” Chase nods. “You look to me like you’d be an infielder. Shortstop?”

“Yeah,” Chase says, ending his streak of stone-faced monotone with a bit of a surprised look, though slightly uneasy by the correct guess.

“They put me at first when I played, but the field wasn’t really my thing,” Ronny chimes in. “Earned my stripes at the plate.”

“Yeah, I’m an okay hitter, trying to get better though.”

“Well hey, tell ya what, if you’d like I can set you up with one of those hitaways so you can practice here.”

“Sure,” Chase says, now postured upright on his stool.

“I bet the chicks dig a good lookin’ ballplayer like yourself, eh?” It’s back to a bit of a slouch and a shoulder shrug. “Well hey, how’d you like to hang out with some girls here. I bet they’d be all over you.”

A few seconds of silence go by, then Chase musters up the words, “C-can I talk to my family?”

“Um... not right now, but maybe soon. We don’t use phones around here, but I can try to pull a few strings so you can see ‘em. Well Chase, I’ve gotta get back to my work, but make yourself comfortable; the door in the back corner leads to a room with a couch and TV. I’ll invite some of those girls over tonight for you to meet,” Ronny grins, walking through a padded door back near the staircase and shutting it so it clicks into place.

A conference table hardly full with four people turn their attention to Ronny, who sits at the head. “You’re not really gonna let the kid see his family, are you?” Miguel asks.

“No, you fucking idiot! The kid’s shaken up. He needs to calm down, something to hold onto.”

“Well I think Tasha and I can provide that,” a woman seated at the middle of the table smirks. “That’s a hot pickup you boys made.”

“Be nice to the kid. For all we know it could be his first time.”

“First of many, I got people lined up for weeks,” a shaggy-bearded man in his late 20s looks down at a clipboard. “Onto a second page.”

“Good, good, but what you gotta remember, Percy, is that this kid is more important than that list you got. People’ll come and go, and it’s your job that they do, but we can’t rush him. The better he can handle it, the better we do in the long run.”

“Okay Ronny. But if it keeps up at this rate, I think we’re gonna have to get someone else to be making sales and scheduling sessions.”

Ronny is now standing up in front of his chair. “Agreed, we’ll find somebody and I’ll interview them.”

“Already on it, I’ve got a guy lined up already. Name’s Rick. Stays clean, keeps quiet, knows how this works. Not used to female clientele but I’ll show him it’s not much different.”

“Ok fine. Set him up to meet with me tomorrow. Now, Rachel, you’re on with the kid at 9:00. His name’s Chase. I’m gonna go get him ready.”

Ronny walks out of the dimly lit room, adjusting his eyes to the brightness of the kitchen while seeing the flickering of the TV through the cracked door in the dusky far room. “How ya doin’ man?” he asks as he taps the door open with two fingers. “Anything good on?”

“Not really.”

“Well hey, pretty soon the girls are gonna be over, so if you wanna wash up, there’s a bathroom back upstairs. It’s on the right – we passed it on our way down here. There’s some clothes and a towel for you in your top dresser drawer. Oh, and their names are Rachel and Tasha.”

Walking upstairs, Chase keeps his eyes straightforward as he passes by Lester again on the way to his room. He slowly paces his next few steps across the bubbly beige carpet to try to analyze the complicated lock on the door without drawing attention to himself. He can keep getting peeks at it each time he passes by, he tells himself. Surely Lester won’t be standing by the

front door 24/7. Chase opens the dresser drawer, takes out a towel and set of clothes, turns the shower knob on and locks the door behind him. The bathroom looks like the one back home. There's no threatening men here, here he is safe. He cups the shower water in his hands like it's the first time he's ever touched it.

Twenty minutes later, Chase dries off, shaking not from the cold of getting out of the shower but from the thought of what awaits downstairs. Halfway down, he twitches on the landing when two girls sitting in the kitchen call to him. "Hi there, Chase," Rachel says in flirtatious tone. "I'm Rachel, and this is Tasha." Tasha, about five years younger than Rachel but five older than Chase, looks him in the eye and smiles. "It's nice to meet you, Chase." Sensing his nerves, Tasha's delays and conversation contrast Rachel's strict business. "So, I heard you're a baseball player!" her perky tone calms him. "That's neat, I had a boyfriend who was a really good player, got a scholarship for college. Is that what you want to do?"

"Um, yeah, I guess. I gotta make my school's team first though. Tryouts are in a couple months." He walks closer to the side of the counter Tasha is sitting at.

"So, Chase, do you have a girlfriend?" Rachel inquires.

After seeing him nod sideways, Tasha softly speaks, "Well, *we* can be your friends." However leading her words, their genuine sound, cheesiness or whatever mixture of the two – so unfamiliar to this place – is a welcome kindness.

"Can we see your room?" she asks.

The three walk upstairs to Chase's room, and Rachel and Tasha sit at the chairs at the end tables, leaving only the bed left for Chase.

"This is a nice place you got here," Rachel says. "I wish I had a room this nice."

Tasha nears closer to Chase, setting her hand on his knee. "I really like you, Chase. You're cute." She moves her hand to his chest, Chase's nerves igniting his rapidly beating heart to thump like a base drum. Tasha moves in to kiss him; Chase twitches and thinks about pulling away but instead sits stoically still on the edge of the bed as he receives his first kiss.

Rachel walks over and begins to massage Chase, moving to undo his belt. “I-I don’t think I’m ready for this.”

“It’s alright sweetie, we’re not doing anything wrong, just having a little fun is all.”

In a matter of minutes, Chase is lying flat on the bed, pantless with his tense hands at his sides clenching the plush comforter. Rachel is on top of him but Tasha is at his side, and with a face full of panic and confusion he stares at Tasha, who briefly can’t fight back her own expression of sympathy amidst a visage otherwise projecting the required pleasure and charm.

\*

Tom and Angela arrive home from a Friday night out at a banquet with Tom’s company. Shortly after walking in the front door, the grandfather clock in the foyer begins to strike. “Oh, Tom, I thought I told you to turn that thing off so we don’t hear it at night. It’s probably waking Chase up right now!” Angela exclaims in a loud whisper.

“I’m sorry honey, I forgot.” Tom then proceeds to quickly fiddle with the back of the clock, able to stop it after it’s completed five of its twelve dings.

“Well I’m exhausted, I’m going to bed.”

“Me too, I’ll be right up.”

The next morning, Angela is up before Tom, who awakens to the sound of her yelling, “Chase? Are you in here?”

“What’s going on?” Tom asks.

“Chase – he’s not in his room, I’ve looked and called for him everywhere else.”

“He could just be out with some friends.”

“This early in the morning?”

“I’ll try calling his phone.”

\*

Rick opens the door to Ronny’s office. “It’s nice to meet you, sir.”

“Please, call me Ronny. Take a seat.” Rick makes himself comfortable in a maroon upholstered plush armchair across the desk from Ronny, who sits beneath a portrait of J.P. Morgan hanging on the wall.

“Now Percy tells me you’re interested in joining us and that you have experience, but I’d like to inform you about how things work around here. My office is here and this place is my mainstay, but there are two other buildings in town that we’re set up in and have business running and supervised. We deal in both girls and boys, but usually what they give us to take one isn’t anything compared to what we can make keeping them here. And you’re gonna need to learn how to reel in lady folk as well. We pride ourselves on being open to anybody; this business caters way too much toward middle-aged men, and we’re more than that. We’ve got a teenage kid here – best we’ve had in years – and he’s got us a whole list of paying customers signed up – women and men. Your job would be marketing our assets and scheduling clients, but you’ll still be around here some, so you’ve gotta know how to act around them. Chase, this new kid, is really shy, don’t think he quite likes it here yet, so be nice but be on your guard not to give the slightest hint of a way out. Now, we’ve already done a background check with you and know you’re too smart to be thinking you could play for any other team but ours while you’re here. So if you’re up to it, we’ll have you aboard, and you can work here as long as business is going well and you abide by our rules on communication.”

“Thanks, Ronny,” Rick smiles and shakes his hand. “I won’t let you down.”

\*

“He’s not answering his phone. I left a couple of voicemails.”

“Tom I’m worried sick – I think we should call the police.”

“I’m not so sure we need to do that just yet. We don’t wanna be one of those parents in those goofy news stories who panics when their kid is just out at the park or something.”

“Well fine – I’ll just drive down to the police station and *calmly* approach an officer or secretary or whoever’s working there and tell them we can’t find Chase.”

Upon arriving at the station, Angela approaches a room with personnel sitting at desks and alerts the first person she sees, trying to maintain composure. “Hello, um, my husband and I cannot find my son Chase, and I believe he’s missing. He may not have come home from school yesterday, and he hasn’t been at home all day today. We don’t know where else he could be. We’ve tried calling his phone.”

“Okay, ma’am, let me have you fill out a missing persons report and we will do everything we can to help locate your son.”

\*

Ronny’s business begins running through Percy’s list of clients for Chase. The first two are women who just want things pretty standard, nothing too out of the ordinary. But Ronny’s gotta brief Chase before the list starts to get a little tougher or things might scare him even more. Especially the big spenders who basically get to do whatever they want. Chase already feels like day after day he’s chained to that bed with no hope of escape, but it becomes a lot different when he *really is*.

After a few more sessions Ronny follows through with his promise of getting Chase a TV for his room. Every night before he tries to sleep, he courses through the channels, welcoming the light-flashing box’s breaking of the windowless darkness. But even the figures on the screen just end up morphing into the sickened, insatiable, open-mouthed animals that no even truly believes exist until you’ve got one on top of you managing to still steal something from you when you thought by now you’d for sure lost it all. And when the light from the box goes off, Chase tries to sleep but lies awaking shivering, and it’s not even cold in there.

Every smile he ever sees is now one of *those* kind of smiles: leading, excited, wanting something, trying to craft their faces just as perfect as they’ve seen in the porn vids while still showing some sense of elated disbelief that they are actually getting to do this. A walk back from the kitchen or bathroom used to be a time to survey his door lock for a few seconds, but it’s pointless and now Chase just walks straight into his room without a thought of it.

The next week, a really sweet kid, maybe eighteen or nineteen, who rolls with the wrong crowd just enough to know where this place is shows up at the front door. He's not Chase by any means but as quite a looker he knows the danger, so there's a posse trailing him that could snitch on this place to get him out if anything goes wrong. He walks up five ice-covered steps and knocks on the front door, and Lester eyes him through the peephole. After a couple seconds of worrisome silence he stutter-steps to turn around but then reasserts his stance in front of the door and calls out the open-sesame phrase, "Hello? I-I came by to visit my uncle Charlie." The door swings open with no one in sight, and the boy walks in, startled after the door shuts behind him and reveals Lester gratingly commanding,

"What do you want, kid?"

"Um, I came for a session."

"We're not expecting anybody. You gotta schedule those ahead of time."

"Look, I got money with me here ready to go."

"Alright well I'll see if we can fit you in. You don't move a muscle, not towards the door or towards the hallways, got it?"

He nervously nods his head yes, shaking a few flakes of snow off his hat, and Lester turns right down the hallway and walks downstairs, returning in a minute with the answer, "Who you here to see?"

"The boy—I mean, the guy—I mea—"

"Ok, I get it. We'll get him ready."

Chase is just about to shower off from his last session and Lester spots him in the hallway. "Hey, Chase, we, uh, got another person lined up that we weren't expecting. So maybe save the shower for later?"

The kid takes a few steps forward into the hallway to see what's going on, looks left and sees Chase letting go of the bathroom doorknob. He's not just *one* of those boys he's always dreamed about – the ones his friends would know he liked and joke, "Man, you're a sick pedo!"

to which he'd claim "Dude I can't be a pedo he's only like 4 years younger" then they'd say, "You're nineteen son, they'll throw yo sick ass in jail!" – no, he's *the* boy.

After an awkward dead stare straight at Chase for a good five seconds, the kid stammers, "I mean, I think it'd be better if he showers off. I don't know what that last person might've had. If that costs extra or whatever that's fine."

And before Lester can get through affirming the client's request, even though they make damn sure Chase never catches anything, he adds, "Can, can I just go in there with him?" He stretches his neck out and points with his head toward the bathroom door, "You know?"

"We don't allow that 'cause we don't know what you've got, and when you're done if one of our workers catches something using that bathroom, well, we can't have that happen."

"I'm clean, but I'll go 50 extra to use it – you can pay that to somebody to scrub it down or whatever."

And with that, the kid and Chase are setting their clothes on the bathroom countertop and turning the shower water on. It's a nice change in scenery, albeit with the same deed.

"Alright, what do you want to do..." Chase gets down to business, again with the monotone – this one not of fear but of defeat.

"Hey, it's alright," the kid says, looking up to smile at Chase and almost tripping as he works to get a pant-leg off his foot. "You can clean up and take your time. And, well, whatever you wanna do..."

Obviously he doesn't want to do anything, but it's a strange absence of orders nonetheless. Chase remains silent and climbs up a step into the shower. The kid finishes undressing but doesn't go in and just sits on the counter. Chase hasn't had a haircut since he's been here, and the shower water turns the mop on his head into long, smooth streaks of wet gold.

“You look like an angel,” the kid says, mesmerized and all of a sudden feeling a bit uneasy. How long has he been here? Did he need money? This poor kid, he might never get to be anybody.

The kid walks up into the shower, placing his hand on Chase’s face. “Hey, are you okay?” he asks, softly enough to be beautiful – if there is such a thing anymore – but with enough volume to sear through the air louder than the cascading water. Chase just looks downward, trying to ignore the question that every second of life answers with a resounding *no*.

The kid hugs him and pats his head, and Chase starts sobbing on his shoulder.

Several minutes later, the bathroom door opens, they walk out, Chase back to his room, the kid slowly towards the door, waving goodbye to Chase. After Chase is in his room and the kid nears to leave, he stops to ask Lester, “Hey, how much would he be? You know, to take him off your hands.”

“You kiddin’ me, boy? We’d probably need ten grand for what that kid is gonna make us. I bet you ain’t got that, and you best get out of here ‘cause we don’t deal with just anybody. Just another trusted contractor, going to a place just like this. Now scram.”

The kid meets up with his crew, the ring leader, José, about twenty-five, gibes, “So, how was it, perv boy?”

“Yeah, Matty, we’ve stayed out a couple hours, so it better have been good,” Danica adds.

“Hey don’t bitch, he’s done way more for us before,” another member says.

Ignoring the conversation, Matty’s sitting on the curb, tapping his knee and thinking aloud, “José, what would it take, what would it take for you to go in there, you know, like a pimp?”

“You must be outta yo mind Matty! I ain’t doin’ that. And besides, they figure out I’m playin’ and you probably find me in a couple different dumpsters across town. You don’t fuck with those kinda guys. You especially don’t try to bust ‘em. You put a couple away and the rest of

'em know it was you who snitched, and they find you. Besides, what else do you want with those guys?"

"It's that kid. He's just a boy, he shouldn't be in there. You think we've seen some shit? And I mean, some of that's on us. We can find a way, guys, I know it."

"Matty, look, that's nice and all, but life ain't fair, and we can't be playing hero out here and getting' ourselves killed for your lover boy. I'm sorry."

\*

Angela drives to a city further than any one she's been to yet, posting MISSING fliers with Chase's picture on every corner. She must have covered a fifty mile radius by now. Nothing on the web pages. One person who thought they saw him, but they were mistaken. She drives back home, leaving the town through a park of budding trees.

The police department has been on the case for awhile. No leads.

\*

Matty sees José walking on the street, and he walks up behind him, grabs his hand and slaps onto it a wad of hundred dollar bills.

José, taking a skittish step backwards while the rubber-banded cash falls on the curb, sees it's just Matty, "Where'd you get that?"

"It doesn't matter. Remember how you said you'd never go in to that apartment to get that kid?"

"Yeah and don't you forget it. Don't get any ideas, Ma-"

"What about for some of this? C'mon, you've put your ass on the line for less than this, José."

"No, Matty, I ain't doin' it."

"Well think about it, eh? You come around, let me know and I'll set you up with the guy who let me know about that place, and we'll build you a rep for that and get word out on the street."

\*

Chase has had the flu all week, so all customers have been rescheduled. Ronny walks in, fanning himself with his hat. “The fucking air conditioning my car is broken again,” he snaps as he walks through the foyer.

A half hour later Lester let’s a man in. “You’re here for business with Ronny I’ve been told. First I’ve gotta frisk you.” Lester finishes his pat-down, “Take a right and head downstairs, first door on the left.”

“Ah, yes, come right in,” Ronny stands up out of his desk chair, shakes the man’s hand, offers him a seat and closes the leather upholstered door.

“Percy tells me you’re interested in the services of one of our employees.”

“That’s right, the boy. I was thinkin’ we could work on a deal if you’re interested.”

“Well I won’t lie to you, it is good to mix up our goods every once in awhile so as to not leave a trail. But I’m afraid this kid is just too valuable for us to part with.”

“More valuable than five G’s?”

“Son, he’s probably already made us that much.”

“What is it you want?”

“I want what is best for my business. And that is keeping the boy. Unless you can do better, or provide me with more than adequate compensation of new employees.”

“Ten.”

“I’d say I’ll probably have that by the end of the year, but I’ll still have him, too.”

The man stares at his shoes for a few seconds while Ronny leans back in his chair, legs crossed and hands folded together.

“Fifteen.”

“You really think this kid is gonna turn your luck around? Alright, well I think we might have something here. Just make sure the kid still gets some pussy, eh? I’m all about equal opportunity. I’ll take you over to Percy to sort things out, and I’ll go get the kid ready.”

Chase hears the lock outside his door click open, and Ronny walks in, explaining carefully and quickly that Chase is going to have to say goodbye to that comfortable room, but that this other guy really wants him and that when your valuable – well, there's something to be said for that.

Chase is walked out to meet the man in the foyer, who leads him out through door. Sunlight pounces upon Chase, and the beaming heat of a momentary bridge of freedom between two landmasses of somatic serfdom sends him fainting to the concrete, held up just in time by the lunging man. "Nice save," quips Lester as the door shuts.

\*

The man drives Chase to a meeting spot outside of town. They get out of the car and walk a couple hundred feet across a gravel underneath some overhanging foliage of the woods that slopes down from the lot. Chase's eyes are still mostly closed and the man props him up as they walk, arriving at a rusted '92 Tempo with no hubcaps and a crack running through the windshield. The man opens the passenger door, sets Chase down in the front seat and the car quickly pulls away.

Chase slowly begins to adjust to the light, and the driver asks, "Where do you live?" Trying not to pay attention to the words of his next captor, Chase doesn't respond, realizing that that the question was nonsense anyway – what does he mean where he lives? What could they possibly want with that, he doesn't have any siblings.

Chase lifts his head slightly and looks at the driver, making out a familiar face. "I'm going to take you home," Matty smiles.

\*

Twenty minutes later, the beat up Tempo pulls into a driveway. Chase cannot believe what lies fifty feet ahead of him. "Did you do this?" he asks. Matty nods, and after a long pause, Chase asks how. "I'm in some trouble and I gotta get outta town now. You just go on home to

your family.” He leans in to kiss Chase goodbye, and Chase opens the car door, walking out onto the well-overgrown border of the front lawn. Turning around, he says, “I’m Chase, by the way.”

“I’m Matthew,” the driver smiles and shifts the car into reverse.

Chase rings the doorbell, wondering if this is all a trick, if they’ve kidnapped his parents too and if Ronny or Lester or someone new awaits him on the other side of the door. A half a minute goes by and Angela opens the door. Her bloodshot eyes and a downward gaze transform into a shriek of disbelief and cupped hands over face. She clenches a red-nosed, sniffling boy, whose face tingles, almost forgetting how to smile.

## FLY ON THE WALL

*Musca domestica*, they call me. Or housefly, my more common name.

I make my home at the school grounds of West High, swiftly curving above the crowd of students in the hallway, or at least I'd like to think so. After perching on the security camera for a few minutes, I swoop down to fly in front of it and analyze my pattern of movement — much more jagged and scattered than I had imagined.

This place is a nice setup. Plenty of food, but then again, I've got quite an eclectic appetite. It's early April and warm outside, so when the front lobby door opens, I'll spend time roaming around, buzzing about the schoolyard and the silver flagpole that reflects the beaming sun like a solar panel.

When I go back inside, if I fly down too low, a student may occasionally swat their hand, missing me by a comfortable margin. The other students who can't see me must wonder why she squints while waving.

I can tell I'm not well-liked. I stay out of harm's way usually, but I've only about a month to live, so I figure when I go, it might as well be by the smashing of some textbook instead of boringly flopping onto the ground.

But in my brief time here at West High, life can get boring after all the basic daily needs are accounted for, so I will follow around a student who seems interesting. I have trouble telling most of them apart. They walk through the halls, say hello to their friends, sit down in class. I suppose the ones who sign out to the bathroom to lean against the back walls of the school and smoke are different than normal, but they're not that interesting.

But there is one boy, James, who catches my lenses. He doesn't talk much at all and looks downward as he walks. The mop of hair on his head helps cover up eyes which seem to be

slowly closing but somehow stay open enough to stay awake and keep walking.

After the school day ends, he walks to the boys' locker room, so I follow him there. The ceilings are quite shorter in here than in the hallways, so I know I need to be careful. As he walks in, two boys are sitting on benches, already in their baseball uniforms and ready for practice. They sit on opposite benches about ten feet apart and bounce a tennis ball back and forth at each other. The one not bouncing the ball giggles like a girl with his arms held behind his back and his legs spread open; I'm not sure I understand this game.

I ascend above the lockers near the clock, and the minute hand ticking 3:25 frightens me. "Let's go!" shouts a voice from outside on the door. "On the baseline by 3:30!"

James' drowsiness begins to subside as he frantically rummages through his duffle bag and begins putting on his uniform. As he changes into his compression shorts, to his right he can peripherally sense the downward glance one of his teammates, who offers some sort of mocking glance to the teammate to James' left. James recedes further into the locker cubbyhole, futilely grasping for nonexistent privacy.

As the players go into the gymnasium, I follow, and am attracted by the open space and the bright lights showering down pale yellow beams from the rafters. Below me they are running from one end of the court to the other, leaning down to touch a stripe of black paint then sprinting back again.

The practice ends as 29 players circle around, put their fists in the air and shout the name of the team mascot. "David, Juan, James, Grant, I need to see you guys for a sec," says the head coach. "As you guys know, next week we begin the season with the spring break trip to Florida. Now, we only have room for so many, so we're gonna have to ask you guys to stay back. I know you'll be practicing hard over that week we're gone." James turns back his head for a moment to see the other 25 laughing as one snaps a towel against the butt of his teammate.

I've not got long to go, so despite the risks of the cars zooming by on the road, I

decide to follow James home. A tan mini-van pulls up to the school entrance and James gets in the front seat, though his mother is getting out of the car. “You need to get your 30 hours in,” she says, as he walks around the front of the car and hops up into the driver’s seat. They close the doors too quickly, so I fly into the window of the semi truck dropping off goods for the vending machine. Luckily, both drive down the main road, but after awhile, the truck driver notices me, crinkles up the newspaper on the passenger seat and starts to swat around while holding his soda in his other hand. His swipes become more accurate at the four-way stop, and I fly out the open window and buzz my way toward the van ahead. James’ mom is enjoying the temperate spring day with the window down, and I fly in unnoticed just before the van moves again.

The van pulls up a gravel driveway, and as the door opens, I make my way toward open trash cans for a little snack. I find a rotten banana, spend the next few hours outside until the cold nighttime comes and then dribble my way down the chimney like a falling feather.

All lights but a lamp in the kitchen are turned off, so my phototaxis can feel the involuntary pull of incandescence as I circle about. As my fear subsides and boredom rises, I make my way from light to light, until I hear a scream.

James shouts in horror, unable to cry, panic spread across his discolored face and his eyebrows bent in a way I’ve never seen before. He opens the door to his mother’s room, stammering words that don’t make sense. A night terror, I’ve heard it called on that Dr. Oz program the school office secretary watches.

The next day, I circle above James and his mother at a safe distance and follow them into the van again. I sit atop the ceiling fan in his pre-calculus class. He sits in the back of the classroom and set his blue binder upright to shield himself from his teacher’s view as he slowly falls asleep.

“James, are you with us?” she asks, and he affirms, doing his best to subtly move away from his crouched over position against the desk.

\*

During the weekend, James' mother drives him to the DMV to take his driver's test. A large woman dressed in black with a badge on her shirt pocket looks in no way happy to be there. James fills out the necessary paper work and they proceed out to the test car. In the maneuverability course, he puts the car in reverse, weaves around the straight-line cones, but the bumper smacks the back one as orange plastic falls to the ground and recoils like one of those inflatable clown punching bags.

\*

The next Monday, the math teacher hands back tests from before spring break, and James opens the fold to see a "D-" boldly staring at him in red ink. As class ends, I follow him to his locker. I see a tear slowly mounting in the corner of his eye, with his eyebrows clenched downwards. But I fly too close, down to the tip of the locker door. The last thing I see is a rectangle of blue plastic swinging towards me.

## EVER-CLINGING BOYHOOD

It's been a long day. Low sleep, two tests and this bus is catching every red light. Michael leans against the window, as its metal frame serves as just as uncomfortable a resting place for his elbow as the vinyl-wrapped-plywood does for his backside. His languid lashes begin to descend to the sight of a fingerprint-smearred plexiglass picture frame showcasing wayward shoots of grass that pop up in street crevices.

It's less than five minutes till his stop. Danny taps Michael on the shoulder.

"Hey man, are you still cool with me getting off at your stop and hangin' at your place?"

The way Danny asks is adorably polite, but with enough self-respect that he could clearly handle a denial.

"Um, yeah, sure man. I'm kinda tired though, so if you just wanna like chill and play video games or whatever, that'd be cool."

The boys open the front door. A voice calls from upstairs, "Hello, Michael, how was your day?" Michael's mother appears, "Oh, hi Danny, I almost forgot you were coming over today."

"Hi Mrs. Warner," Danny says, blushing after the crack of his voice.

Michael grins, "Um, we're going to go play Halo now."

"Okay. Snacks are in the pantry."

\*

Even in his sleep-deprived daze, Michael is still slaughtering Danny. After Michael Notches his eleventh kill while Danny is still sitting two, Danny exclaims with playful frustration, "Gah! I had the gun loading but couldn't get it fired in time!"

“You might be able to play better without your hair covering your eyes,” Michael jokes. Danny flamboyantly flips his hair backwards and the boys share a laugh.

Michael pauses the game, “Hey, come on outside, I’ve got something to show you.”

Outside amidst a neatly groomed lawn, there is a wooden door where the backyards of the Warner’s and their neighbors’ connect. Michael reaches down to lift the handle, and a rusty set of stairs emerges.

“Is this yours?” Danny asks.

“Uh huh; I want us to get power down here so I can bring the Xbox and TV, but it’s still a good place to get away. I’ve got some flashlights down here so we can see.” He turns them on and props them upward against the walls of the cellar.

“Take cover!” he yells. Danny crouches against a corner while Michael shoves the door upwards so it descends down again to close with a thunderous slam. He dives down next to Danny on a plush rug that shields them from the cold floor.

“You can even lock the door in case there’s a zombie attack,” Michael says.

The boys continue to converse, occasionally piecing together a thought but mostly sitting there, treating the pauses not with awkwardness but gentle reverence. What might happen if they stayed down there all night, or even forever, they wonder. They grab some of the blankets from the far corner and lean against them, falling asleep as Michael puts his arm around Danny.

## PRESERVED

Neptune lilacs, crystal pedals the sweat of mossy knolls,  
the gloss of kitestring dewdrops icing down the rabbit-plain.  
Warm thumps of anvil breeze cartwheel then flicker,  
combing the limbs of sprouts eager for their morning haze.

Volted yarn whistles through the soilcakes,  
asking flattop cane-bearers and virgin craters for directions.

With palate hissing the crags whisper,  
wrapping two spoons together in a bubble cocoon.  
Oakstump fingerprints play dartboard to plateau crumbs,  
pressed against the lips of stone shinbones on a sledride into the sea.

The tilted hips of holy hymns ignite in blue ribbons and hazelnut picture frames,  
birthing the nervous calm of the human soul.

## HAIR FLIP

Two mops descend from a parted golden river, a caramel waterfall carries one coy eye. Combed plasma, rising volts, hemispheres of grass and cardboard bones.

A mojave yucca held in place by superglue skin. Liquid locks are tractor beams, lasers trip a smitten tourist over lakes of stairs. Back to the waterfall.

Lick up cotton-candy follicles to run your fingers through a pile of butter ribbons. And if you want to see the main event, position pupils and paint your horizon gold.

With glassy strides you crawl toward his head. And to viewer's delight, rapids erupt, gravy bangs slurped by air. A sour sauce for meat riding a tattered getaway skateboard.

## TEACH A LITTLE BOY MUSIC

Rubberbands stretched over a tissue box  
breathe over its hole. Because I've blown  
my nose and eaten a toothpaste milkshake  
by accident. But I hear them vibrate.

Step over train tracks and wrapping  
paper, sit down on the bench, tap  
pedals with your feet. Eighty-eight  
spruce chiclets taste like envelopes.

They don't care if I lie. The flats  
are melting candy bars. I blow  
on the sharps like blades of  
grass turned into kazoos.

They don't care if I don't know  
why my pants were around my  
ankles or remind me that  
four of Mozart's children died.

I wash myself on a snow-covered  
back porch, a rolling pin licking  
up icy dust with a tongue  
burnt from hot chocolate.

Dear Yamaha, please keep me  
safe. Hug me with mahogany,  
dance in my dreams and tease  
the pink drapes of our living room.

## ALL WILL FADE TO GRAY

A pickup truck backs up with  
a bed full of steaming mulch.  
We jab in oversized forks,  
hauling chocolate woodchips  
to spread their icing at the  
base of 30 foot tall, CO<sub>2</sub>-  
breathing candles.

In overgrown battlefields I man  
the Craftsman trigger, spinning  
plastic helicopter wings to vanquish  
a stemmed enemy.

Above a sweated pantleg  
bound to my shinbone,  
seven dollars appears in my pocket  
at the end of every hour.

With suds sloshed about the  
patio, I ring out a pale-grey  
yarnstick in the Winco MPB-36.<sup>1</sup>  
“Easy there, killer,” says the grizzled  
vet. “We’ve got to make 8  
hours out of this.”

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<sup>1</sup> A mop bucket.

<sup>2</sup> Lyrics to Solefald’s 1999 song “CK II Chanel No. 6” — written by Cornelius von Jackhelln and Lars Are Nedland.

## THE HANGIN' BLUES

Locked in the closet if ya been too loose  
Don't heed the word, gonna hang by the noose

Gonna watch a picture show, see the skinny boy sway  
He ain't ever comin' here, the rope'll have it's way

I'm gonna dance to the stool, clap my hands, sing a song  
Gonna laugh at the fools, Mr. Dreamy, sing along

Pink-horseshoe throat, pretendin' you're here  
Karma's a cowboy whose ropin' in queers

## FACTORY

Magma waterfalls flow from barrels,  
rippling in bobsled slopes like hula hoops.

A car passes on the highway next to  
smokestacks and a salmon sky.

“My dad used to say that’s always  
a good sign,” a mother tells her child.

Men with shovels shout over clanking  
plates in molten weight rooms.

Clouds of soot coil as snakes, mushrooms  
kissing the heavens with cottonball lips.

## EPHEBOPHILIA AS ORDAINED BY FATHER DARWIN

When Baudrillard declared the sign effectively dead,  
13-going-on-20 became par for the course –  
the tail-end of Generation-Yers unaware their big  
toe is pressing down on the fastforward button

Or perhaps this is all not so new,  
for the vanished forms of Plato resided  
in the infatuating smooth skin of Grecian statues

When Donatello sculpted David, our iceberg thoughts  
beneath cerebral waters knew the allure of beauty elegantly  
paraded two feet beneath the sling-shot boy-wonder's laurel-topped hat

But now, Mother law cries *Save the children from our fears!*  
*Save the girl with a wedding band!*  
He'll be good for her, this boy of nineteen years  
She's just too young to understand

But she's a woman without origin,  
unlike the species. We think it fundamental,  
quaint even; in our minds this girl's  
bonneted, churning butter. A far cry  
from NAMBLA, one could say, if  
one could bear to say it.

Less than a tenth of life in the teen years,  
but we shake them away like we did  
pond drops from our formerly amphibious selves.

Pituitary equality, we cry!  
Bereft of time machines, we starve  
ourselves, baldening our bodies  
with razors, hoping amidst the  
throes of banned love the mirror  
will at least remind of the supple  
pubescence that eludes us like a  
bobbing carrot on a string.

The fittest survive on tabloid paper,  
or maybe we allow them to,  
without allowing ourselves  
to voice the miracle of burgeoning sensuality.

The post-chimpanzee  
Discovery:  
Holy Trinity,  
Morality...

No more. What we didn't know at 15, they know now.

This is our right. Our *natural selection*.

## CREATE YOUR OWN DREAM

In the astral plane, chandeliers  
swirl and release turquoise  
powder, which descends to perch  
on icecaps. The exosphere's  
dripping down needles  
that align like a flock of birds.  
Its lid slowly eludes us like  
melting honey in a strainer.  
Who can cap the expanse?

A fissure to Stygian lies  
covered by sheets of cowhide.  
The indentations of sponge rocks  
weave in and out like the teeth  
of a comb. The tinge of granite  
tings off tin pans, chiming  
a rattlesnake sizzle.

You may swim through  
a tunnel of glittering rubber,  
but you are really dragged by the  
mouse of the cosmos, dangled  
then caked in mud.

Dust shakes off the boots of  
clocks that say it's time to go.

## POPPING POTENTIAL

In my nightstand drawer I hide my thought-bubble wand and a bottle of angry suds. Inside that plastic, perforated spoon, light stripes like open watermelon slices and circles as MRSA bacteria under a microscope. A bubble rises as a feather falls, gently sniffing out oxygen, cordially coursing through the day's events with air particle acquaintances. Gleaming spheres careen and reach for the ceiling in fear.

OF SETH SIRO ANTON'S "DAYS OF NOTHING"

The staircase rusts a cradle,  
clockwork crows circle a hunched creature.  
Fossil paws, leather skin floating through  
iron bars and crusted vines. Maybe the sun  
peers through the pasty walls.

One eye centered in a bird's  
body peers out from the bronze  
hip of sandpaper man. Canvas limbs lie limp.  
Perhaps the sulfur moon stands in for his skull.

Are you one of the ghosts, coiling over creaky choirs?  
Feathers are fingers, pointing away from nothing.

## CRY FOR HELP

Flip through the yearbook, Xs of red sharpie  
fill up rectangles, intersecting over polished  
piano keys between the glossy outlines of avocados.

The warmth from a kicked-away blanket  
evaporates beneath a dusty ceiling fan, a boy  
loads the thigh and knee pads into his nylon pants.

More water for your brave soul? More worship  
of the four chords, or that light cracking  
through the window slits of the chapel?  
God must be in there somewhere.

We are glued to cedar logs with strips  
of sisal carpet stapled on top, holding our  
tongues out to catch a stereo snowflake, singing,

“Survival of the fittest suites me fine:  
the truth as it was told to me by Calvin Klein.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Lyrics to Solefald’s 1999 song “CK II Chanel No. 6” — written by Cornelius von Jackhelln and Lars Are Nedland.

## REQUIEM FOR A HEAVY STAR

Before birth, his spirit weaves through dust clouds  
in the midst of frosted shadows, charcoal protons  
kiss, convert, give him a dense center, a soul.

From a pressurized core, he outshines his  
friends, who play connect-the-dots,  
forming swans and lions in the sky.

Hydrogen and lithium have a one-night  
stand. Hydrogen is used, steps in a  
curbside puddle on his way into the pub.

He comes home from work late, looks in  
the mirror at a wrinkled face. Helium strokes  
the hair of supernovas on their death beds.

Tea-kettles contract, erupt and whistle  
on the galaxy's stove. An iron core crushes into  
a black hole, eating a TV dinner of light rays.

FOR A LIMITED TIME OFFER

I don't think we really quite  
understand blue. Do you  
know what kind of tea  
the lonely drink? There's  
a grainy displeasure when  
the finest horse neighs from  
your friend's stable. So  
if we really think about it,  
there's a reason why the  
only predator of the fearsome  
Great White is the Orca.  
The whole world is a billboard,  
and your crusty textbooks are  
    fun-sized  
    mirrors.

But haven't you heard?  
My pet fish needs to  
stop this whole floating-on-  
top-of-the-water circus  
act. Yes, it's such  
a shame, the boys  
dressing in high heels.  
But the ones wearing  
too-tight pants, those  
are the real men. And  
toast tastes best slightly  
underdone.

## SELLING ME

City wind spills its bullish soot,  
erupts in his lungs. He waits,  
gropes the curb's crooked rungs.

Wait as a squirming worm for a bird.  
His marketing eyes bounce to  
passers-by, wallets on four wheels.

A Buick stops, a few words  
they barter. A door latch  
snaps in the dark.

When parked at who cares where,  
his lilac bruises are his bouquet,  
in the sweat still frozen gray.

A mutual meeting of needs.

## THE URGE FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

In lightning flash playpens,  
sprites thrash on turquoise mats.  
Who watches these Hollywood Squares,  
these boarded-up Discovery Zones?  
We are gorillas brushing off fire,  
zip-lining into black holes.

But I will enjoy my cell,  
my five-second altar to  
bronze-plated hourglasses.  
With clenched lips she sings  
against the cage walls, and  
we have never been so free.

Incandescent egg-crate walls  
surround tethered nets. I  
dip my own heel and slosh  
around in strange waters,  
trading in coated noodles  
for gel-soaked strands of yarn.

In this universe, God blesses  
those who endure. He plucks  
heartthrobs out of the sky and  
tosses them into fish tanks.

My victory, my normalcy  
is the base of a candle wick,  
watching the crisping cord  
above me, waiting.

## BLACKENED WHITE

They say that poets like Maya Angelou  
had to write loud, they had to write true  
Or that sometimes if you don't shout your chance will be missed –  
that enough subtlety buys you a chance to just get pissed

But never mind all that, 'cause order is on its way  
And we welcome all here – unless you're a ...  
My interpretations are five carpeted steps more tested and tried  
I stand in front of you with fate – I mean – providence on my side

When doctors bearing the diagnosis of realism conveyed  
"We're sorry sir, but this power structure is inoperable, we're afraid"  
I just smiled and said, that's alright with me  
Just keep all the water in the roots of the tree

Confine control to a dozen bishops of trust  
U.S. indirect democracy's got nothing on us!  
And even if we are appointed by popular demand  
We've got a few thousand of you in the palms of our hands

So sit back and enjoy the show, 5 days a week  
For don't you know that blessed are the meek?  
Some may wonder why I'm so concerned you're convinced  
Well the Mormons have their 3rd testament, and mine is called *The Prince*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> A political manifesto written by Niccolò Machiavelli.

## CALLING ALL SPIRITS

Leave with me, beyond this shadowed plaster  
beyond the zeros, heroes and dignity-back guarantees  
far past stolen fields caged by electronic proms and certain windsprints  
safely distant from patent fists and their needle children of sin

Who knows where we'll go?  
Maybe onto a cause, taking our stand in  
searing circles of asphalt love  
for flags to fly in fire holes  
cloth catching on our curious dreams  
dragging away the dead skin of lost wonder  
for a new cloistered coat of jagged ice

No, sing to me with the shy organ of longing, the dribbling snare of unrest  
open the doors of blue souls to the preacher of the soft parade  
haunt us with the searing screech of invisible arrows,  
paving a hardwood road spiraling into a gallery of fusion, the cherub opticon

So by the formless ghouls of forest ditches,  
on these stream-hissing city streets, these quiet walls of broken braille  
where opening oceans of orange orbs wash our tired ears  
clean of mechanized pulpits and the flashing sages of vacant content –  
in these places – and I swear they are somewhere, diming  
their iron lights and tucking blinding gates  
into sweet covers of dusty tumbleweed – there we will find  
the last seconds of the last song, just in time to lie  
unaware of circling buzzards as we fortify our brick ticket on the sun boat of Ra,  
praying to each other with the glossy everything of our rainedancing eyes