

DAVID A. PORTER

david@atlascommunications.com • 347-324-7557

Skype ID porter1306 • @porter1306

PORTFOLIO

FICTION + POETRY

FICTION

The Surfer's Journal

April 2016

Roadside Death Marker

I wanted to be your favorite pop song. Jangling guitars and tambourines, Beatle boots and girl group harmonies. Set me on repeat, play me over and over, the chorus you can't shake out of your head.

Jeff, John and I buy Mexican car insurance for the RV in San Ysidro. By ten Tijuana is gritty and gray, Mighty Morphin Power Rangers, growling Volkswagens, a bullring by the sea, valleys clotted with the rusted hulls of dead cars. South of Ensenada 1 becomes two lanes, a thousand pot-holed miles to Cabo San Lucas.

I was the earnest boy, standing on the lawn of the house of the girl he loved. It was snowing. I waited for you to answer the door, the star of a movie about an earnest boy. I wanted to serenade you. The way you spoke to me when I was yours, breath and spit and heat. You unbuttoned an old red flannel shirt, dropped it to the floor, stepped toward me. The carpet slanted, tumbled you toward me.

Dawn. A breeze slipped through the window, shivered the curtains. You laughed, pulled a sheet to your chin. Tide of air, your morning skin.

We have a twenty-six foot RV, seven surfboards, four wetsuits, three rash guards, one boogie board, five leashes, fifteen bars of surf wax, a television, a VCR, a camcorder, a CD player, ten movies, forty CDs, one copy of *The Magnificent Peninsula*, one copy of *Baja California*, *A Lonely Planet Travel Survival Kit*, the "Traveler's Reference Map of Mexico, Baja California" and the Surf Reports for Baja Norte and Baja Sur.

Costco before we left California. We have five pounds of pasta, three jars of marinara sauce, two pounds of butter, four pounds of sausage, two gallons of milk, two boxes of Captain Crunch, a box of Total, a pound of sugar, four frozen pizzas, two loaves of wheat bread, five pounds of peanut butter, two pounds of strawberry preserves. We have three pounds of Peet's coffee, two cartons of Marlboro Regulars, a box of matches, two cases of Tecate on ice in a cooler beside the refrigerator.

We have a toaster, a coffee maker, a microwave, a toilet, a shower, a kitchen table and a couch. We have aspirin, Pepto Bismol – liquid and tablet – toothpaste, shampoo, soap, deodorant. I sit on the toilet and watch 1 recede, a black line through the desert. Above San Agustin Jeff presses the wrong tank control button, evacuates the black water. We leave our shit baking in the road, continue south.

The float of ranchero guitar, Peñafiel bottle caps, flecks of warm water surf wax. Twelve inch crosses painted white, pushed into the dirt alongside 1. Time is heat, sunlight, miles.

I become millenary.

I left you homeless, bereft of the city I was building, where we were driving. The way you thought I twisted beneath the lights in the produce section, flickered, turned into the person who would leave you. A payphone off Route 80 in Nevada, midnight. 'I miss you so much,' you said. 'I hate being away from you.'

Old records, piles of paper, traffic on the bridge, the same song on the radio, three times every day since summer started. A glaze of light along the ridges, some reference to a saint.

Why have I been given anything? I can't keep it.

Below Mulege. On the beach at Punta Arena I write I LOVE YOU in zinc oxide between your shoulder blades. Unshuttered and adored, drench you with my mouth and hands. We could have changed everything down here. Parked in pebbles and dust, bottled water and straw sombreros. We could have taken the sun full on, been extraordinary in the heat and cholla and sand. Realized this was something.

Driving south from Loreto, Ciudad Insurgentes by nightfall. We come over a hill, drop, a stray dog standing in the middle of our lane. Jeff leans on the horn. The dog turns toward us, its face calm, expectant. Jeff slows and presses the horn again, but the dog doesn't move. Jeff stops five feet from the dog and leans on the horn. The dog walks across the dividing line and stops in the middle of the northbound lane. Jeff accelerates. The road descends, veers left. If we looked back we would only see the road curve up and around, the dog invisible.

"That dog's going to get fucking whacked," John says. The road uncoils into straightaway. A truck whips past us in the northbound lane.

I practiced waiting. Stood myself in long lines at the bank, outside movie theaters. I found empty chairs at the dentist's office, sat and stared at my feet – no appointment. I wanted to feel time crippled, watch its pace become moribund, seep into all of my minutes. Feel it decelerate the moment you touched me.

The RV is always low on gas and full of black water. South of Ciudad Constitucion I buy refried beans, salsa, tortillas. I stop playing cassettes, search the radio for ranchero music, Selena. I stop speaking English in the mercados and Pemex stations and RV parks. Jeff and John sit up front smoking Marlboros, drinking Tecates. I watch the Llano de Magdalena through the windows, Galloping Cactus and Century Plants. We drive toward Todos Santos, an RV park south of El Pescadero.

Our roads full of cars, our sky full of planes, my mouth and hands full of you. The world shrinks around me, makes me itch. I want to skip back, rewind, drop the needle at the crackling beginning. I want to slow it down, reverse it, a boy in a straw sombrero beneath a palapa on the beach at San Pedrito. Backwards into the future, a perpetual homesickness.

We could pretend it's dawn, always at the beginning, forever slipping into a morning, the world quiet and waiting. We think we have the future, but we're lined up against the sun. We're going to lose.

We find clean, shoulder-high waves at Playa Los Cerritos. Little kids run up and down the beach kicking soccer balls, riding belly boards, laughing. We surf all afternoon and return to Playa San Pedrito for showers and dinner in the RV park restaurant. I carry my board, razor and dry clothes to the bathroom. The campground is deserted in the day's last heat.

He's over six feet, blond and burly, carrying a longboard and a bucket. "Eric," he says. We shake hands. He lives in the big trailer below the hills at the north end of the beach. He's been down here three years.

"I'm building a place down by Los Cerritos, no other houses around. I'm waiting for these guys I hired to dig a well for me." He owned supply stores for marijuana growers in Tempe and Long Beach. Grow lights, humidifiers, fertilizer. Mail order. "The FBI kept trying to get my customer lists, close me down. I sold it all to my partner and bailed down here. My kids still live in LA."

"Do you ever miss home?" He shakes his head.

"I hope I'm dead before they wreck this, too."

We give up an afternoon in the water to drive the two hours from San Pedrito to Cabo San Lucas. We drink Coronas and weave our way through No Fear t-shirts, silver rings, painted pottery. Outside the market it's Baskin Robbins, Pizza Hut, Carlos and Charlies, Cabo Wabo. I walk past an American kid crossing Boulevard Marina, silkscreen of a blonde in a bikini with enormous breasts. 'Let's see the Japanese build a better one of these.'

The postcard you bought me at that place in North Beach, a photograph from the Sixties. A couple walks toward the ocean after sunset, the sky inflamed – inside of a pink grapefruit, skin of a tangerine. He carries a longboard, the lights on a municipal pier glittering behind them. The caption at the bottom reads 'one more time.' Her hair is long,

her arms and legs thin and muscular. The string tying the bottom of her bikini, her flat stomach, the poise of her breasts, she walks into the surf.

I dreamt of California. Wet sand, the darkening sky red and sweet, the cool wet clean of her skin. Stand in the outgoing tide, press yourself against me. Give it to me once, now, while I'm still young. While I'm standing in the surf, waiting.

We stop at a roadside shrine, a small wooden altar painted white, embraced by bougainvillea. Statue of the Madonna, unlit candles, bouquets of red and pink paper roses, the sky the color of your lips when it was cold. St. Patrick's Cathedral, Rockefeller Center, the windows at Lord & Taylor.

I don't know what other people say to themselves. We live in our own languages now. Our country is finished.

The evening empties itself into the sky, the RV idles. Looking back over these years you'll see a boy driving toward you.

I saw you. I really saw you.

Watch you fade.

FICTION

Hotel Amerika

Spring 2009

Homesickness Preliminary

You were standing in the rain in a white dress, glowing in the rain and the sidewalks and the sad little strip mall at the intersection. “Do you worry about me?” you asked. Headlights filled the shallow ponds upon the sidewalk, raindrops leapt like small silver fishes, glimmered. There were bald tires, wet roads, oncoming traffic. Men who didn’t sweat when they were nervous, whose voices never broke in public, who had no feminine side. “I don’t worry about you,” I said. “You’ll be fine.” Something my father would say – an airport payphone, a lie. A cartoon toughness, homesickness preliminary.

There were lights strung above Díaz Ordaz, shouting children and guitars, old men sitting on white benches along the Malecón. I walked down the stairs to my building, smooth stone steps, shadowed and cool – your skin beneath the air conditioner, the curve of your back, a valley – smooth, cool stone steps twisting to the sidewalk. An alcove, a green bucket, red and pink paper roses. An airplane twisted across the sky, a spiral of smoke behind it, and I wanted to tell you that’s how I feel – speak to you of sunlight, my fingers in your hair.

Easter weekend 1988. Campus was deserted, a shivery April rain. I woke up Saturday morning with a sore throat and a head cold. Your roommate was home in Boston, and you put me to bed in your room. You cooked me Campbell’s Chicken Noodle soup in a hot pot on your desk, brought me a roll of toilet paper from the women’s bathroom. You carried your black and white television to your desk chair and pushed it next to your bed. We watched *Saturday Night Live*.

In the morning we made love. Afterward you put on a green dress and a ski jacket. You kissed me on the lips and left for the chapel.

I opened the window above your bed. I watched you walk across the quad in the cold wet air until I couldn’t see you, until I couldn’t hear your duck boots on the pavement.

When you told me you felt safe when I held you, I knew I would let you down. “I believe we were meant to be together forever,” you said, “but we met at the wrong time and we screwed it up too much and now it will never happen.” Something in your voice broke, fell into itself, rushed toward the beach. Two lovers kissed, a streetcar rattled forward. “Why do we always have to discuss it?” you said. “Why can’t we just have it?” An orchard swayed and glistened in the rain. This is how I looked in the Hollywood Hills, this is how I looked driving up 5. We died in miles, left out in the cigarettes, the smoke and rain.

Our room in Paris smelled sweet, the pages of an old book. We opened the windows, caught snow in our hands, along our wrists. You stood in the middle of the room. You unbuttoned your jeans, pushed them from your hips. You pulled your sweater over your head, your hair fell back to your shoulders. You reached behind your back, unhooked your

bra, your breasts fell forward. You hooked your thumbs beneath the elastic of your panties and pulled them from your hips. You pushed them to your knees, to your ankles, let go with one hand, stepped away. You stood up. You were naked except for your socks, standing next to an old floor lamp – a tide of light, your winter skin. Snow fell into the room. You smiled and you shivered.

You know I loved you, I let you watch me crush it into dust. The hills escalated, a sheet of sunlight flickered on the sea and faded. Things die, things come back to life – grass through cracked pavement, love through the spaces between your ribs, through your fingers. A lavender sky, a glaze of moonlight, an introductory star.

It was hard to see in so much sunlight. A polished light along the ridges, some reference to a saint – you took your hand away from the back of my neck. Now shattered over highway shoulders, broken in a thousand bits of shell. A twilight, punctuated.

Sometimes I am deep in a dream of you,
aching for a faltering light –
to wake in that sweat again.
A fragile, battered morning.
I sat and looked out toward the sea.

I wasted it, lost it, all, all of it.
A pirouette up on your high beams,
a thousand nervous hands.

Another weeping summer.
I am leaning at a rainy window,
at home with clouds and records –
their dark circles, their willing mouths.

I slip them from their paper dresses.
I touch their black grooves.
I play them over and over.

FICTION

The Santa Clara Review

Spring 1995

How Did You End Up Here?

"Come on, Ricky, pick up the phone." There was a long pause. "You're playing games, Rick. It's bullshit." He hung up.

"Do you want me to save this?"

"Fuck it," Rick said. I pressed '3' and erased the message.

We were sitting at the kitchen table in my apartment in the Outer Sunset. I'd been living with my friend Marybeth from Rutgers since August, when I'd moved to San Francisco from New Jersey. Marybeth's dad was a cardiologist on the Upper East Side, and Rick was his office manager. He had come to San Francisco to meet his son, Alex, who had turned four in November. It was a Sunday night in the middle of December. There were colored Christmas lights strung above the kitchen, ceramic Santa and Mrs. Claus salt and pepper shakers on the table.

It had been my ex-girlfriend Emma's idea to move to California. "We could move to Los Angeles," she said. "Something's always happening there, and you love to drive. Bruce Springsteen lives there, even." Before I left New Jersey a woman I worked with told me, 'everyone in California is either running from an old love or running to find a new one.' On the drive out I leaned on the wheel all day long for six days and said it to myself over and over.

"Where'd you get this?" I inhaled hard and killed the roach.

"The Haight."

"Are you crazy?" I coughed and a cloud of smoke rolled through the air above the table. "We're probably smoking linoleum or eucalyptus leaves or something." Rick laughed and then my feet began to feel like cinder blocks.

"California's the best, man," Rick said. "You can walk down Haight Street on a beautiful sunny day and buy a killer bag, no hassles." The phone rang.

"The voicemail'll pick it up," I said. Rick reached for his beer.

We had been sitting in the kitchen smoking a joint and drinking a twelve-pack of Budweiser Rick had picked up at the 7-Eleven by my house when the phone rang at about 12:30. At first I hoped it might be Emma, since we always used to call each other after midnight, but Rick told me not to answer it, that it was his boyfriend, Alan, and that Alan was all pissed-off and he didn't want to deal with him. We sat there for about three minutes, which we figured was long enough to leave a message, and the whole time my heart was punching the inside of my chest like a boxer at a speed bag. Sure enough, though, it was Alan.

"Can you play it back?" I pushed the speaker button and dialed into voicemail:

"I've got all night, Rick," Alan said, a bit slurry. "I'll just keep calling." He waited. "Fine." We heard the phone miss the cradle. "Shit!" He hung up.

"Do you think he knows we can't hear him?" I said.

"He doesn't give a shit," Rick said. "He's piss-drunk."

"It's almost four in the morning back East."

"Alan doesn't care, he's off tomorrow." Rick shook his head. "He's sitting on the couch in the living room drinking Absolut screwdrivers and watching the Weather Channel. He's probably already fed half a bag of Cool Ranch Doritos to the dog." He stood up. "Let me go get the rest of the pot."

"The Weather Channel?"

"Yeah," he called from the hallway. He walked into the kitchen. "He likes seeing the whole country on the screen in front of him. He says weather's the only thing that's real, everything else is bullshit." He handed me the bag and a small gold pipe. "I bought it at the Pipefitter, that head shop on Haight Street?" I nodded. "It's made out of bullets."

"That's a bit disconcerting," I said.

"Paid for it with my ATM card," Rick said. I took a small chunk of bud from the bag and pushed it into the bowl. I handed Rick the pipe and the lighter. "Thanks," he said.

"What was it like growing up in Texas?" The phone rang.

"What?" Rick leaned back and exhaled. Smoke floated toward the Christmas lights.

"Texas."

"Did I tell you I'm from Texas?"

"What was it like growing up there?" I took a hit.

"Completely fucked." He handed me the pipe. "Everything was so fucking Texan. No blacks, no Jews, no Asians and definitely no queers. There wasn't anything to do except drink, smoke, drive and fuck." Rick picked up his beer. "I've been drinking and smoking since I was ten years old."

"All we did was watch MTV and drive around Short Hills looking for parties," I said.

"The cool people ran away to Austin and became speed freaks."

"What'd you do?"

"Joined the Navy and became a speed freak."

"Why speed, was it a Seventies thing? Wait, the Seventies was coke, right?"

"I'm not that old, man. It was the Eighties." He finished his beer. "Speed's fucking great." He looked at me. "Ever try it?" I shook my head. He stood up and walked to the refrigerator. "It's like flying." He grabbed two beers and handed me one. "That's how I ended up living out here, this was a great place to do speed back then." He sat down and opened his beer. "That's how I ended up married, actually."

"How's that?" *When I woke up in your bed that morning, I knew.*

"I was living here for a while after I got out of the Navy, just partying and hanging out. I met Karen in some dyke bar and went home with her that night. I was hanging out with her on and off for a while and then she inherited a hundred thousand dollars." He drank some beer and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "I figured I'd spend the rest of my life flying on speed, so I married her." He grinned.

"So what happened?"

"Let's just say a hundred thousand dollars isn't a lot of money when you get right down to it."

"How long did it take?"

"A year." The phone rang. We waited a bit.

"Do you want me to pull the messages?" I said.

"Just the last one," Rick said. He leaned forward. I dialed into voicemail. I erased the first message and played the second:

"Rick you pig, listen to this." We heard the sound of fabric ripping. "That was your white silk Armani, faggot. Faggot! Faggot! Faggot!" Alan slammed the phone down.

"He's totally wasted," Rick said. "That's his shirt." He shook his head. "I'm sorry about all this."

"Don't sweat it."

"Thanks for being such a sweetheart."

"How'd you end up getting married if you're gay?"

"I was bi back then, but just barely." He rubbed his face. "A few months after I married Karen I knew for sure I wasn't."

"And you haven't wanted to be with a woman since?" He shook his head. "Never?"

"No desire whatsoever. Do you ever want to be with a man?"

"No desire whatsoever." I smiled. "There are some beautiful men in this city, though."

"Tell me about it." The phone rang. "See, aren't you glad you're not dating anyone?" *You make me laugh.* Rick leaned back. "Play the message," he said. "Let's see what he's gotten up to now." I pressed the speaker button and dialed into voicemail:

"You're a whore, Rick." We heard a heavy object crash through glass.

"Coffee table," Rick said.

"Coffee table!" Alan shouted. "That was your coffee table, you fucking whore! Fucking call me back!" He hung up. I erased the message and turned off the speaker.

"He's hammered," Rick said.

"Did you cheat on him? I mean, it's none of —"

"Sort of." He sighed. "I'd better call him, he's in glass mode." He looked down at the table. "What if he goes after the television? It's a twenty-four inch JVC."

"It might not be so bad." I reached for the bag and the pipe. "Do you mind if I pack another one?"

"Go ahead."

"If you don't have a TV you can't watch it."

"I'd go apeshit without the tube, it's how I relax." He picked up his beer. "You don't watch TV?"

"Rarely. Every time I turn it on there's some beautiful seventeen year-old girl writhing around in a lycra bodysuit." I pressed a small bud into the bowl. "Or cheerleaders." I handed Rick the pipe. "It kills me."

"I don't really have that problem."

"Why don't you call him back?" Rick reached for the lighter.

"It's bullshit, man. I'm not going to play this game." He took a hit and exhaled. "Besides, he's so fucked up right now it'd be useless talking to him."

"What other stuff do you have?" I said. Rick handed me the lighter. "Like breakable stuff."

"Let's see, the TV." He looked at the ceiling. "The CD player." He counted on his fingers as he went through the list. "The sectional, Alan's Macintosh. What else?" He

pressed his teeth into his lower lip. "Krupps espresso maker, CDs and the dog." He looked at me.

"What's the dog's name?"

"Austin. As in Austin, Texas."

"So he —"

"She."

"She's yours?"

"Yeah, I've had her since I got out of the Navy." He picked up his beer. "She's a sweet old dog, man. Irish Setter. She follows me everywhere, barks if anyone comes near me." He looked at Santa and Mrs. Claus. "Alan loves her, he wouldn't fuck with her." He sipped his beer. "And he paid for most of the shit in the apartment, so if he wrecks it —" He shrugged his shoulders.

"The more shit he smashes, the less you'll have to divvy up if you bail."

"True."

"And you won't have a bunch of Alan's shit sitting around making you sad later on." Emma was somewhere, sleeping. "I had this old red flannel shirt, some J. Crew thing my mom bought me a million years ago." I rubbed my eyes and my forehead. "I slept in it for years before I met Em, then she got a hold of it and that was it. She slept in it all the time. She said it smelled like me." *Your hair between my fingers, the radiator breathing like a sleeping dog. Wait until you slip to sleep, mumble 'I love you' through paste and pyjamas.*

"Did she give it back?" I shook my head.

"She kept it. I wanted her to." *He pulls himself from her, falls asleep beside her. Her breathing is measured, satisfied.* "I don't have anything except some letters."

"Do you have any pictures?"

"Five. At my parents' house in New Jersey." I drank the rest of my beer. "I have some mix tapes." I threw my empty toward the recycling bin at the back of the kitchen, missed. "Well, they're not mix tapes, exactly."

"What are they? Is she talking on them or singing to you or something?"

"No, they're these tapes with one or two songs on them. Mostly one, actually." I leaned forward. "See, she'd hear some song on the radio or find a song on a CD that she loved, and she'd tape that one song and send it to me. She never waited to fill the whole tape."

"What kind of songs?"

"Love songs, stuff that made her laugh." I leaned back. "She loved that "I'm Too Sexy" song, "Never My Love" by the Association. Bread, the Carpenters, Stone Temple Pilots. That sort of thing." *Shoes off in the living room, Smokey Robinson on the turntable, seems that I'm always thinking of you. I love you and all I want you to do is just hold me, hold me, hold me.* "They're good tapes, too, like Maxell XLIIIs, TDK SA90s." I shrugged. "Em's kind of an audiophile."

"You never used the blank space on the tapes?"

"Never." The phone rang.

"You mean you have all these tapes with only one song on them, but you don't use them?"

"Nope."

"Do you ever listen to them?"

"No way." I shook my head.

"And you won't tape over them?"

"No way, never." Rick laughed. "Couldn't," I said.

"You're all right," Rick said. He drained his beer and put the can on the table next to the other empties. We had a nice little city of cans going. "Play the new message, will you?" I pushed the speaker button and dialed. "I'm really sorry about this," Rick said.

"Don't worry about it." I pressed '1':

"Hey, Ricky-boy. Sweetie. How's it going, lover?" Alan waited a few seconds. "Some really bad things are going to happen if you don't call me back, love. I'm waiting." He hung up. I erased the message.

"He sounds like he's ready to do some fucked up stuff, doesn't he?" Rick said.

"He kind of already has," I said. Rick looked down at his lap. "You can't have this shit in your life anymore, Rick." He looked at me. "You have to think about Alex."

"You're right." He sighed. "It wasn't like this at first." He put his elbows on the table, his chin in his hands. "When I first met Alan it was beautiful. He wasn't drinking so much then. We used to walk home from the clubs at three in the morning, not even that fucked-up. I had an apartment down by the river, and we used to cross Hudson at Charles to get to my place." He smiled. "One night we got caught at the light and we started kissing. We must've stood there making out through four green lights before we finally crossed the street." He leaned back and folded his arms. "And the sex was amazing. Still is sometimes, but..." He shook his head. "God, it was intense. You can't imagine."

"That's okay." Waking up beside a man, my chin chafed raw by someone else's stubble, like Emma's chin when I didn't shave. *We were standing in the middle of the quad. You took off your mittens and put your hands to my face.*

"You don't know what it's like to be thrown down and fucked," Rick said. "Only a man can do that to you."

"I don't know. It was pretty intense with Emma." I stood up. "It was like a car crash, sometimes." Sunset, an evening breeze through the dune grass at Island Beach State Park. *I feel like an old cat falling asleep on a pile of warm laundry. "I need a beer." I want to live between your fingers, in the curve of your back. Like opening my bedroom window to snow.* I walked to the refrigerator and opened the door. "Driving down drunk street," I said to myself.

"Yeah, but just thrown down and fucked?" Rick said. "Just taken?"

"It felt that way," I said. I pulled a beer from the suitcase. "Do you want one?"

"You may never know," Rick said. His voice was sad and tired.

"Hey, I kind of hope not." I grabbed another beer and closed the refrigerator. "No offense, but I don't want to be with a man." I handed Rick a beer.

"Thanks."

"It's just not me," I said. I sat down. "Hey, how was seeing Alex? I totally forgot to ask you."

"It was amazing. Amazing." Rick opened his beer and took a sip. "We spent the day in Golden Gate Park. We watched the buffaloes, we walked through the arboretum,

we rode the carousel.” He took another sip of beer. “At first he was totally freaked out. I mean, he had no idea who I was, but we had some ice cream and then we watched some guys playing inline hockey and he just started *talking*. He was telling me about the Ninja Turtles and about his nursery school. Man can he *talk*.” Rick smiled. “He just blew me away.”

“Awesome, I’m really happy for you.” I drank some beer. We were quiet for a few minutes.

“Would you mind playing that last message?” Rick said.

“Not at all.” I pressed the speaker button and dialed:

“Hey, lover, it’s me. Me. It’s me,” Alan said. “Listen. Listen. Listen, you fucker.” We heard a woman whimpering.

“Austin,” Rick said.

“I’m going to kill the dog, Rick. I’m going to kill the dog. I’m going to hurt her the way you hurt me, the way you humiliated me. I’m not disposable Rick.” He waited. He must have let go of Austin because we couldn’t hear her whimpering. “I’m not disposable, Rick! I’m not just some fucking hole you can shove your dick into and walk away from!” He was breathing hard. “You have fifteen minutes to call me back, exactly fifteen minutes. Listen.” Austin started whimpering again. “I’m watching the Weather Channel, I know what time it is, I’m not that fucking drunk.” He hung up. I erased the message. Alan had called at 1:28. I looked at the clock. It was 1:41.

“Call him, we’ve only got two minutes,” I said. I pushed the phone toward Rick. “It’s enough already.”

“He’s not gonna kill the dog.”

“Come on, Rick, he’s out of his fucking mind. He’s already wrecked your apartment.” Rick looked at his hands. “You broke his heart,” I said. He didn’t look up. I looked at the clock. It was 1:42. “Come on, Rick, call him.” I put my hands on my head. I wanted to cry.

“This shit’s got to stop,” Rick said. He shook his head. “I can’t let him –” I jumped up and grabbed the front of his shirt.

“If you don’t call him right now I’ll kill you,” I said. We stared at each other for a few seconds. “I swear to God, Rick. I’ll fucking kill you.” I let go of his shirt and stepped away from him.

“Okay,” he said. He lifted the receiver. “Can I dial direct, I –”

“Dial the fucking number, Rick! Just dial!” He put the receiver to his ear and dialed.

“Alan. Are you out of your fucking mind?” He listened for a few seconds. “I was out with Marybeth’s roommate. Judah. We just walked in the fucking door.” Rick looked at me. “Yes, I heard every message.” He pushed his hair back from his forehead. “What if I hadn’t gotten back here when I did, you would’ve hurt Austin? So fucking what, what if Marybeth had picked up her messages?”

“Is the dog all right?” I whispered.

“Then you shouldn’t have gotten so fucked up.” Rick nodded at me. “You’re doing this all the time now, Alan. All the fucking time.” I took a deep breath and left the kitchen. “I know what I did, Alan,” Rick said. “I’m sick of hearing about it.”

I walked into my room and turned on my clock radio. It was set to KOIT, the light rock station. Marybeth had left a pack of Benson & Hedges 100s on my desk. I lit a cigarette and opened my window. I stood there for a while smoking and listening to the radio. I heard "If You Could Read My Mind," by Gordon Lightfoot, the Pretenders' "2000 Miles" and Mariah Carey, "Vision of Love." *I raked leaves with your father on your front lawn, short hair and khakis. You watched me from your bedroom window. Later you told me I was your perfect man, a sweaty blue Oxford and a quick kiss in your front hall. We were breathing God's cleanest air.*

After about fifteen minutes Rick knocked on my door.

"Come on in," I said. He looked exhausted. "Is the dog all right? Please say yes."

"Don't worry, Jude. It's cool." I pulled a cigarette from the pack, lit it with mine and handed it to him. "Thanks." He took a drag and exhaled toward the hallway. "I told Alan we're finished," he said. "I've got to get my shit together." He took another drag, then he tapped his ashes into his free hand. "Because of Alex."

"Good." We stood and smoked for a minute. "Good," I said. Rick stepped toward me and dumped his ashes out the window.

"I'll find someone else," Rick said. He looked at me. "So will you."

"You sound pretty fatherly," I said. He raised his eyebrows.

"Get used to it." He smiled. He turned and flicked his cigarette out the window.

"I want to be taken," I said. Rick put his hand on my cheek.

"I know," he said. "Good night, sweetie." He left the room.

Bradley Beach, after an evening thunderstorm. People stood on their porches to watch the sky clear. Headlights filled the shallow ponds upon the sidewalk, raindrops leapt like small silver fishes, glimmered. We walked to the boardwalk, past the drenched miniature golf course. The sky was the color of Emma's lips when it was cold. I kissed the back of her neck.

I reached down and shut off the radio. Above Ocean Beach, stray clouds drifted past the moon, their edges silvered by its touch. A few blue stars burned in their wake. *We are a history of broken fevers.* I dropped my cigarette and turned away from the window.

POETRY

Sunbeams

The 2018 Joan Ramseyer Memorial Poetry Contest Anthology

Fall 2018

Sleeping with Leo, 20 Months

On a blanket folded in half
on the floor of his darkened nursery,
I pull him to my chest.
I press the heel of my palm
against his breastbone.
I hook my fingers beneath his ribs,
crush my lips and nose
against the back of his damp head.
I close my eyes and wait for him to snore.

Is this what you want?

Forever?

Nothing more?

Yes, please. Yes.

Alexandria Quarterly
Semi-Finalist
End of Summer Poetry Contest
Fall 2018
Horafi

- *for Leontios*

A short walk from our bus stop on Strovolou,
the scent of honeysuckle begins.
You grip my index finger
as we walk up the empty street toward home.
There is the periodic hiss of traffic behind us,
the staccato bark of a small dog
patrolling a nearby driveway,
the first bright stars.
We step onto the sidewalk
that rings the empty lot
a block behind our building.
Here in Cyprus they call it
a "horafi," "inheritance."
It is November and
still warm and dry;
the usual rain has been scarce,
but enough to bring forth
a gift of high, thick grass.
It cannot be resisted,
and you are off,
tearing through it.
You are as certain
as you are unsteady;
you stumble and I let you.
I wait on a small hill
at the edge of the lot.
I listen to your chatter,
to the soft FM static
of your sneakers kicking through the grass.
You run.

Connecticut River Review

Summer 2018

The List

You learn penury as you progress,
the way your musculature expands
after months in the gym.
Remember the gym?
That chain of luxurious shrines
to your physique,
spilled across Manhattan
like a stack of chips
fallen to the felt of a poker table.
Now you hector your saints beneath your breath,
beg your razor to wait a bit longer for blades,
take glass cleaner to the sparse shelves of your refrigerator...
You have given up on whiter teeth,
dry cleaning,
the highest bidder,
a pair of shiny speakers
to bookend your laptop
like obedient robots.
The music is tinny, but hopeful.
On the back of the envelope
from which you've extracted
a late payment notice
from the electricity authority
you write a list –
the stinging bills,
the impossible debts,
all to be paid in some richer future,
where somewhere there is
a silver circus,
an airshow,
where the lacquered red wings of a biplane
flash beneath the bright summer sun
as they twist in a perfect spiral
across the hot blue sky.
What you'll love most, though,
what you'll remember,
is the sound of the engine,
glorious and undaunted,
burning all that fuel just for your delight.
You put it on the list.

The Orange Coast Review
Spring 2016
Torch Town Eulogy

It had to burn.
Even without paper,
it was incendiary.
The numbers,
once subtracted,
only coughed,
unwilling to say their unbearable sum aloud.
The days were unstruck match heads.
The nights wheezed,
starved for air.

Afterward,
we sat in bed
and picked through the cinders.
There was a laminated map of Venice,
my grandfather's wedding ring,
a crescent of green glass
we found on a beach near Mykonos Town,
a horn concerto...
We had pawned everything else.

Across the street,
in the courtyard of a smoldering building
smoke still whispering from its roof,
a little boy flung
fistfuls of feathery ashes
toward a waning streetlight.

Spoon River Poetry Review
Winter 2016
Canyon

- *For Leontios*

I held you on my lap
as we rode home from Solomou Square
in the back of a crowded bus,
your legs folded into
our rumpled IKEA bag
atop your Thomas the Tank Engine potty,
a package of chamomile-scented wet wipes,
and the floppy camouflage hat
I bought for one euro to fend off the sun.
I sang to you as we drove up Strovolou:
“first there is a mountain,
then there is no mountain,
then there is...”

These have been my happiest days.
I tell you *I love you so much*, so often –
sometimes I shout it: *I love you so much!* –
because I do,
my little boy, my love.
And someday,
as you make your way without me
down the sad and ravaged canyon
the second half of this hopeless century
will surely be,
you will hear an echo,
behind you,
beside you.
I love you so much.
Just listen.
Let me have these last words.

Crab Creek Review
Winter 2016
Underwater

- for *Leontios*

I thought you were beside
the kiddie pool at the UN
with Kristina and Emily
when I saw a small child
submerged in the shallow end of the lap pool,
hands reaching for the surface.
A lifeguard leapt into the water,
then an Argentine soldier,
who must have wondered
why the boy's father
was standing beside the pool
watching his son drown.
He returned you to me,
drenched and sobbing.
I held you in my arms,
kissed you again and again,
whispered, "shh, shh, shh."
I wanted to weep,
to smash the plastic chaise longues,
to flee,
but I waited until you finished crying
and I carried you back into the water,
told you, "it's okay, it's okay, it's okay."
Later I sat at the edge of the pool,
where I filled two plastic watering cans again and again
so you could pour them out, with glee,
onto the worn blue AstroTurf.

The first time I saw you underwater
was an ultrasound,
and it was like the gate to Heaven had been flung open to me.
The distance has been brief,
both terrible and sweet,
mi niño, mi corazón, mi vida –
between the miracle of your appearance
and the thousand ways you might disappear.

Nimrod
Spring 2014
Alentejo

A south wind
tousles the leaves
of the Azinheira tree
beyond our bedroom window –
even the ants are startled
by a momentary sunlight.
Twenty years ago, in Lisbon,
I stumbled down from the Coliseu
toward the Tejo.
The lights of the Praça do Comércio
were flares you could cup in your hands.

The decades amass,
but the past is ever-vivid:
an icing of clouds above the Alentejo,
the bleat of sheep
from a hillside across the valley.
I never leave it.
I sing it to myself again and again.
It has become a testament,
the song that created the world.