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Or Maybe It's Already Ended
Mather Schneider

Let's not be melodramatic
let's not wear turtlenecks in the sun
let's not stand up there and apologize for nonexistent
stage fright
let's not applaud wildly like soccer moms
at kindergarten graduation
let's not be sad because it's cool
or delicate because it's expected
or vegetarians
let's not pretend we're Indians
or gangsters
or are channeling some Egyptian princess
let's not quote Becket
or carry bibles everywhere we go
or romanticize bus stops
or heroin needles
let's stop saying blood and guts and
let's stop saying genius and must-read.

Let's start being honest
about all this
it's not much
we're not much
goobers in the sand pile
downers in skinny jeans
latte-slurpers and sushi-chewers
screws loose and heads fat as Thanksgiving turkeys
just look at the way we walk and talk and
make videos
it's sickening
even our laughter is false and condescending
our little hard-ons
our little death plays
12 poems about starvation before dinner
9 poems about heart-ache after dinner.

Rebels, please, even our preachers have earrings
and tattoos
everybody's trying to sell their penny-sick souls
everybody's trying to sell their dimestore doohickies
shit, just look at the cherub faces
of the poor prepubescent world-changers
chapbook makers
pony-tailed haiku poopsters
shopping mall roosters with perfect noses
crowing about the hard life
academics writing papers about reviving the male spirit
slapping their own asses
loafers and tenure and diarrhea down their legs
which nobody will mention.
Where will it end
where can it end
our doggy-whimpers
practicing inflections to the mirror
writing "you are beautiful" in lipstick
believing everything that falls off
the ends of our dull little pencils.

The Crazy Old Toothless Man on the Bus
John Tustin

The crazy old toothless man on the bus
sat all alone,
an oasis of just him,
near the center of the bus on the left
and he kept saying,
to no one in particular,
They'll fucking get you,
get you no matter what.
It's useless to fight it,
we all get it in the ass with a hot poker
eventually, if not continually

and, to a person,
everyone on the bus was silent,
avoided looking at him,
was afraid of him,
wanted him off of the bus
and also thought to themselves,
but when he's right, he's right.

Obsidian Bones
Kayla Rose

Beauty can be found in chaos
you once whispered,
placing an obsidian arrowhead
between my mangled fingers.

You sing me stories of
girls born from fire.
Rising from soot and
destruction, their obsidian bones
A pinnacle of strength.
You say I hold the same
volcanic beauty.

Do you not know
my lava-scarred skin drapes
bones of burning poison?
Piles of ash call me their home.
There is no obsidian
born from my eruption.

Pushing the arrowhead across the table,
I smile weakly.

There is no beauty to be found here.

Tiny Desk Confessional
Mike Zone

(to Effie)

Eye of the port
as the storm nears
imperial bedrooms quaking underneath zodiac trees
last supper inspiration
from a deck of cards
where communion has been rendered anything but
roller-derby brawler at the end of the world
fall down
crash
burning bright
a celestial tigress aflame
claws tearing vapid skies
truth telling in a realm of toxic positivity
where the land that isn't your land
is just the land
and so are you
skin to skin
beauty marks
corresponding with astrological projection
where do we find the reflections of oneself
but in other's existential dread
in genuine paths
in the places of dead roads
where romance has no place to fluctuate
but the nature of one's being
alone
no longer withholding
the desperation of truth
we all wish to speak
a tiny desk
confession
the root of it all

los ombligos del mundo
John Yohe

the girls in Sevilla
smiling and laughing
on this cool friday night
baring dark inies and outies
in the old cobbled streets

touching a Buddha statue belly
is good luck
though some people make fun of buddhists
who
they say
gaze on navels too much
that navels
are a path to wisdom
or self centeredness

how much wisdom
in a girl's navel?
how much wisdom
in keeping distance
from a girl showing off her navel—
that wanting that much attention
they must have nothing inside

but I remain unenlightened enough
to want to kneel
and work my tongue
into each warm hole
to taste for myself

box cars on the bar top
Preacher Allgood

when the dice flop out of the cup
across a bar top that's older than sin
and you look down on five beautiful sixes
you catch a rare win
for a jackass interloper
in a world full of sharks

you're just a small time punk
from a nowhere town
born with a useless gift for words
wins and triumphs don't figure in your life

and all those box cars on the bar top
don't mean your lot has changed for the better
the hundred bucks you won will disappear
when you get mugged in the alley
on the way back to your motel room

that notebook of defiant poems in your pocket
won't save your bumpkin ass

but it's still fun to revel in a win
and a joy to fuck with the local destiny
by leaving the c-note
tacked under the bar with a wad of gum

if you survive the robbery
you can sneak it out tomorrow
just before the Trailways bus pulls out of town

in the wastelands of america
J.J. Campbell

random acts of violence
on the back country roads
a slit wrist night in the
wastelands of america

hope is the last train that
leaves on a friday night

you remember drinking
moonshine under the bridge
on a rainy afternoon

trading kisses like the world
would be ending soon

those lost dreams still
come to me on every
other lonely night

it wasn't supposed to
be this hard

to be nothing but broken
bones, broken homes,
streets filled with needles
and curious little kids

the rain drips off the
roof like blood

the neighbors are starting
to wonder if the rumors
are true

good thing they don't
have the balls to ask

The Light Switch
Jay Maria Simpson

Up and down
Left and right
Side to side
Round and round

My filthy fingers touch the pendulum
stimulate the lighting switch
play with your vulnerability
its neediness to understand
the refracting light the desire
to escape and to stay

The metronome smiles into the distance
keeping a perfect beat
remembering the practice required
to beat out
the pleasure
the spontaneity

The drummer leans back and teeters
she strokes the snare
possessively
rides the cymbal relentlessly
the tension rods, the tuning keys
the drumheads

The unwound clock the lightning switch
sync like lovers fucking
for the first time
smelling flesh and wonderment
shaking
at the slightest touch

We turn the light off and on
second by second beat by beat
like a broken whirligig, heart petering out
rising up pulsing hard
speeding up giving up
fighting to survive

**Exact Figures on the Anti-Climax of Just Laying Back and Taking It
Ezhno Martin**

Samantha, there are Sixty-Three-Thousand
Two-Hundred-Forty-Three holes in my ceiling
and I feel like I'VE LOST ALL CAPACITY FOR HUMAN EMOTION.

There are One Hundred-Thirty and Two-Third tiles
crookedly and amateurishly applied and painted white
hanging over my head every night
and you hang over my head
like an amateurish application of fidelity

On each of the One Hundred-Thirty and Two-Third tiles
are Twenty-Two rows of Twenty-Two holes
that's Four-Hundred-Eighty-Four holes per tile
that's a lot of damage

I like to wallow in the thought that I have a lot of damage
One-Hundred-Thirty and Two-Thirds
multiplied by Four-Hundred-Eighty-Four
is not technically
Sixty-Three-Thousand Two-Hundred-Forty-Three
but some more exact figure that doesn't make sense
in words and only exists in a long string of decimals
I have rounded up
to complete an abstract conceptualization
that quantifies insurmountability

Technically the holes aren't on my ceiling
I don't have a ceiling
I live with a woman that looks like you
and I sleep in a separate bed in the basement
every chance I get

But she wakes up to go to the bathroom
several times a night
and she finds me and has sex with me sometimes
and I stare at her ceiling while she bounces on my cock
which, because she looks like you,
is like a concrete Frankenstein,

and I count the holes
and I count the rows
and I count the tiles
but I don't count the days since we last spoke
and I'm only addressing this to you because I don't believe in god
and this is a prayer to feel human emotions again
and I need a holy ghost
and I've made you so much holier
than that woman I used to know
who I named you after

Samantha, there are Sixty-Three-Thousand
Two-Hundred-Forty-Three holes in my ceiling
and I feel like I'VE LOST ALL CAPACITY FOR HUMAN EMOTION.

Samantha, you are the only constant in my life
besides alcoholism
in the last Three-Thousand-Six-Hundred-Fifty-Two days
and both of you have done one hell of a job
of convincing me that I can't live without you
and people only hurt me.

Pinky Bipolar Blues
C. Renee Kiser

I used to be the kinda girl
who'd fight with another girl
over a bag of trash;
over a bag of trash, man
over a trashman
Ha!

I used to be the kinda girl
who'd strip with another girl
to get under a fan
to win over a fan,
to get over on the man
Ha!

I used to know Pinky-
a basic whore-cheesing mouse
who lived in a glass house,
ran with a lost soul, strapped;
ran into her own trap,
ran spitting the hunger rap
Yo!

Pinky turned pale as a ghost
when forced to face the host
broken glass-sharp-dull heart;
broken bottle-false start
broken personna(s) empty cart
Go! Pinky, Go!

Haunt me now with bad bitch wisdom
Shame is a dollar store thief in The Kingdom
I remember pieces of Pinky

and
The
Blues.

The Last Romantic
Damon Hubbs

he spoke about her pussy
in terms of art—
a dampness like Vermeer
a Monet water lily
from a certain angle
on the cheap four-poster bed
like Van Gogh's severed ear

she sighed
and lit a cigarette
said she didn't care for art
and kindly told him
he'd have to pay extra
if he wanted to leave the lights on
next time

Addicted
Jacklyn Henry

i chase my addiction
in the dark cool embrace
of midnight,
hidden deep within shadows,
behind doors locked with
libidinous keys.
there is no need for commerce,
no exchange of crumpled bills,
no crushing of rocks,
no back-alley shenanigans,
no needles nor spoons,
or lines of sweet transgression,
no fear of vagrancy
or the stamping flat foot of the LAPD.
there in darkness, bathed in flickering light,
i watch others in transcendence,
in desperation, in the clutch of chemical ecstasy;
writhing and mewling with false pleasure,
deep in a dance of denial, thrusting and fucking,
tearing at flesh.
faster, faster,
yes! yes! just like that!
just
like
that

and a blink of a sorrowful eye
i am one with them, i am a
part of them, captured and chained
and tied for gossamer thread,
a participant from afar,
static and solitary,
i am a part of scene, my degradation palatable,
my shame and misery complete,
blood rising and rushing, an addict in the arboretum,
my skin crackles with fire.
i am burning.
burning, burning.
i am
burning.
eyes dilate,
heart beats fast to a strange kind of music
and
soon
i collapse,
only to feel the hunger rise
once more
from the base of my cock
into
the pit of my soul.

white jeans
John Grochalski

tights ass
in white jeans

the way you sway
down an aisle

kills poetry
and makes slaves

tight ass
in white jeans

what does it feel like
to own the living world of men?

tight ass
in white jeans

wars should've been fought over you
christ should've died for this instead

nations conquered
wild beasts tamed

tight ass
in white jeans

you have laid claim to my art

the goddamned mona lisa
bows before you

and the moon looms hollow
in your presence

The Highest Office in the Land
Ryan Quinn Flanagan

He was the CEO of CEOs.
Hotboxed his spacious workplace
in the clouds.

Felt his heavy eyes fall in on themselves.
The highest office in the land.

Getting on the phone to listen
to some strange voice say a bunch
of even stranger numbers.

Then under his desk to construct a fort.
Shooting staples at imaginary armies.

Looking at his plant in the corner
and wondering about photosynthesis.

Trying to figure out why rain was wet
before the munchies kicked in.

bedside manner
Nathaniel Sverlow

“I’m going to put
a finger
in your ass!”

moving her other hand
down my balls

“the hell you are!”
I say, jumping up

“c’mon, it’ll feel good”

“so help me,
if one cuticle
makes it in,
I’ll slap you
into next year”

her fingers trailed down
my taint

“you think I’m bluffing?”

“I think you’re curious”

she pressed against
my hole,
pushed in,
and I slapped her
off the bed

“what’d you think?”
she said,
climbing back up

we both looked down
at my cock
twitching
and spitting
like a madman

“ah, hell,” I said,
“let’s give it
another shot”

“I told you
it’d feel good”

“you sure did,
baby”

and she shoved it in
this time

and I squealed
like a stuck pig

and she laughed
like I had it coming

for my poor
bedside manner

Bookshelves
Nick Romeo

I would meet you in the sports aisle
Or it might be the mystery
Either way it will change quickly
Into new intricate romance
When I wrap my arms around you
Clenching you tightly from behind
Whispering haikus in your ear
Your beauty being the highlight
Along with radiant core
You gasp as my lips touch your neck
Meekly telling me your boyfriend
Is not too far away from us
I smile *You should call him over*
Bring an army and take some notes
This is how I treat a woman
Who is packed with hours of delight
Who deals in dopamine coinage
Your heartbeat speeds up as you clench
My arms which still cling to your waist
I am not going to let you go
A duplicate does not exist
You close your eyes with a deep breath
One-by-one books burst into flame

**Because I once quoted Shakespeare,
I'm considered the factory intellectual
Karl Koweski**

Gary stopped in the aisle
at the hydraulic factory
and asked my opinion
concerning the earth being flat.

I looked into his Scooby Doo gaze
hoping to find a looming punchline,
anything other than the fervent certainty
that modern science
had gotten it all absolutely wrong.

neutral expression upheld,
I told him I figured
this had been decided for good and all
at least six hundred years ago,
two thousand years in some of the
more forward thinking civilizations,
ten thousand years if you are
inclined to include the Atlanteans.

I wouldn't be so sure, Gary cautioned.
I've been watching those TikTok videos.

The fact you're watching
TikTok videos of anything
other than bouncing breasts
and shaking asses leads me
to question your competency.

TikTok only shows me
this kind of stuff,
Gary said, exasperated.
his peaceful pseudo-porn
obviously usurped by
algorithms purposefully

designed by Democrats
working hand in hand
with the Chinese
to wake him from the
global conspiracy
hoodwinking humanity
into believing we exist
upon the surface
of a spherical planet.

NASA knows all about it,
Gary continued without
a shade of shame to his shadow.
they photoshop all their
satellite pictures
and they're the ones in charge
of guarding the Antarctic ice wall,
and, you know, rockets, they
can actually only go four miles
up because there's a dome
or, uhm... something.

Gary, stop, just stop, man,
how tired of porn do you have to be
to watch these bullshit videos?

he held his tongue a bare moment,
so, you know everything, then?

I know the earth's fucking round!

all right, can we at least agree
the moon landing was staged?

we shook hands at that,
compromising on the utter
evil duplicity
of our government

The Moon is a Neon Light
Jonathan Baker

She is love and light
and wild mood swings
and laughter, and a rictus smile
that says she is on the brink
and every other guy
in this dive bar
leans away to avoid her
but I'm stupid.

So I take a stool near hers.
She asks what I do
and I tell her I'm a poet
and leave out the day job.
She slaps my thigh and squeezes,
tells me she just must hear a poem
but never leaves a space
between her own hurried words.
She tells me she lives for her art
but doesn't see color
and thinks we all
should get along
and thinks the protests
went too far
and there are good cops too
but not her ex.

She ashes her smoke
in her neighbor's drink
and puts a finger to her lips
because we're in on this together
but even though she has
those 70's titties
and you're sure
her bush is
soft, wild, and warm
as a good dream
you head home
because you can only
pretend to give a shit
about gemstones
for so long.
So you settle up
and slip out as she
tells the next guy down
all about Sedona.

Back on your couch
you lovingly imagine
bringing her home.
When you finally fall into sleep
you're glad you didn't.

When We Were Dogs
Judson Michael Agla

Do you remember when we were dogs?
Fighting for every scrap of flesh and bone
while the protesters screamed for a freedom
they'd never known and would never have.

The powers that be
just didn't have the machinery,
or the will to build it.

We were happy in the dirt
breaking the necks of vultures.

Who were they to starve us?
Who were they to take our bones?

Times were simple
until your rising
when my wounds were still open
you left the dirt to transform the world.

All you got was a chainsaw
and a rusty pail full of empty promises.
It wasn't just bones buried in the dirt.

You didn't understand that we were surfacing history.
The only truth is that it's real.

So, tell me; tell me from your podium,
flags blowing behind you, and the starving at your feet.
Do you remember when we were dogs?

end game
Johnny Scarlotti

i get on stage
and all the girls scream

i begin reciting my poetry
and girls are throwing their bras and panties at me

girls are pushing past security grabbing at me
stroking my dick
rubbing their pussies

i tell security
it's aiiit let em thru

and girls come on stage with me
and take my pants off and start sucking
and fucking my enormous penis

and the crowd is going crazy
sold out stadium

and i'm reading my poems and they are screaming HOLY SHIT
he's a FUCKING GENIUS
the G.O.A.T.

they shout ENCORE ENCORE and i come back out
rip my shirt off
revealing a suicide vest
it's my favorite part of my set:
WHERE I KILL US ALL