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**HSTQ:
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A Dryness Hollering Out for Death
M.P. Powers

Men that I have known
who once had the strength of the mighty
Pacific in them, with backbones
made of molten organ pipes, and minds in torrid
wakefulness;
to see them now reduced
to the echo of an empty conch shell,
to husks of long departed
insects, thinning, dried-up,
cracked.

Men that I have known
who once were brimming with wild
stories and undiscovered ferocities,
washed-up now,
longing for long-gone
days, subsisting off songs
the world has long since drawn
the spirit out of and left for dead.

Maybe you've seen one
standing in line at the supermarket,
mowing his lawn, or driving in the car next to you,
this angry, decomposing,
pot-scraping infertility,
a dryness hollering out for death,
a stone-gray shadow.

With nothing left to say.
With nothing left to be.
With nothing left to give.
(The worse tragedy of them all.)

The men I have known.

Gibbous Fall
Willie Smith

The wind is blowing,
the moon is high,
the dead and dry leaves
chattering the price of sole in China.
The gibbous moon moves
fishmouth-like through the Virgin.
Spica, star of an ear of wheat,
peers down, drowning in moonlight,
from over two hundred years ago.
The wind, an old song about a youth
killed on a midnight highway,
blows stiff and sad. The oak,
gloomy godzillas and kongs,
stand tall, air-shampooing their hair.
Leaves over the concrete scatter,
cling a moment in the grass,
hoping the coming rain
will raise a memory from their fall.

The President's Daily Briefs
John Alejandro King

One morning in the White House Situation Room
I gave a briefing that lasted 'till noon
And afterward during the lunch break, I happened to peek
In a drawer where they kept the President's Daily Briefs

They lay in a stack, all pristine and white
It was said he received new ones each morning and night
What a thrill to imagine our Commander In Chief
Handling those very same President's Daily Briefs

Who knew what secrets those articles contained
They didn't appear worn, showed no evidence of stain
As I ran my fingers over each fold and crease
I resolved that I must have the President's Daily Briefs

Perhaps my brush with greatness had robbed me of my wits
For I found the temptation too strong to resist
So looking both ways, I gingerly reached
And swiped me a pair of the President's Daily Briefs

I carefully placed them in a folder between
Two Senior Executive Intelligence magazines
Then walked down the hallway to return to my seat
All the while feeling the President's Daily Briefs

But as I was rounding the corner a man
With dark shades and earphone seized hold of my hand
You should have heard the shouts of anger and disbelief
When I was apprehended with the President's Daily Briefs

I swore they were my own briefs, that there'd been a mistake
But the presidential seal on them guaranteed my fate
They took me to a back room and made me spread my cheeks
All for purloining the President's Daily Briefs

The news soon reached Langley, where they placed me on leave
Investigations followed, polygraphs without reprieve
For at first they thought they'd found the source of White House leaks
In the person who had ripped off the President's Daily Briefs

In the end I convinced them I wasn't a spy
My clearances were saved, but in ruins my career would lie
For all around Headquarters I was known as the freak
Who tried to leave the White House with the President's Daily Briefs

So now I sweep floors in the CIA basement
But rather than wallow in my debasement
I dream of a transfer, to launder White House sheets
... And another chance at glimpsing the President's Daily Briefs

Eggs

Carrie Magness Radna

Crack it open
my mind
my fears
my hesitation
mother fucker
let it drip
like golden yolk
from a
sunny-side-up egg
my man
loves it runny
with Sriracha
my mind's
still spicy
& raunchy
even when
we are hands off
we still talk
sexy shit
when we get tired
sexy dreams
make us touch all over
I'm not a chicken
my own eggs
are drying up
but the sexy girls
in my head
shine the lust light
golden light
I can come
without touching
are you jealous?

I lift my legs
20 times each
to alleviate the pain
of the back
I don't care Baby
if you are now fatter
compared when
we first met
we still love
each other's asses
please don't
be a sleepy chicken
crack it open
our fears need
to take a hike
you already touched
my heart light
my heart pumps
we go too deep
white stuff
oozing out
wearing our fear
frozen
upon our faces
but I want pleasure
again & again
let's crack it
& solve the problem
of getting down
& busy

that's why we don't
we are too busy
& too fat
& too fragile
& too goddamned tired
eggs are expensive
& we are fried
& we are stuck
trying not to break open
he loves his gizzum
she thinks it's disgusting
don't want it on her face
no pearl necklace
but egg whites are okay
on her face
needs more batteries
for remote controls
& vibrators
sweating in bed
feeling the change
transforming
but still ravenous
for eggs

dam i wish i had a mcchicken...

Johnny Scarlotti

i sit down on the curb
remembering that great scene in the movie american history x
* so hungry *
look at the ground
a roly bug (!)
pick it up
watch it on my palm

a young one approaches
are you really jesus christ reincarnated? she asks,
pointing to the words on my shirt
sure am.
mom told me you are just a very sick man
well, what do you think? i ask her
hmm, she thinks..
while i put the bug in my mouth
ew! she squeels
mmm! i say
what's it taste like?
a mcchicky, i tell her

JENNY COME HERE RIGHT THIS INSTANT! her mom is screaming
jenny says bye jesus!
see u later jenny
i watch her run
her dress blowing up in the wind
revealing very white panties
i tongue bits of the bug from my teeth
tastes like pussy

pro tip: if ur really hungry u can eat rolypollies to keep ur energy up
suburban bear grills

i walk on
through a neighborhood
passing great big houses
perfectly manicured green lawns
cherry blossom trees
barking dogs
behind big gates
a muscle man is washing his BMW
shirtless
he stares at me
i stare back
i take off my shirt
he asks what are you staring at?
i say i'm staring at a *mcchicken*
what did you say, buddy?
you heard me loud and clear, chum
listen pal, if you don't move along, i'm going to call the cops...
i see a lady pass by in the window behind him
i point her out,
i tell him i'm going to move a long thick schlong
up that bitch!

i lick my lips

i'm jesus christ i can do anything i want

nothing but pain
J.J. Campbell

he told me beautiful women
bring nothing but pain

i was too young at the time
to know what he was talking
about

but now, i do understand

heartache

alimony

a fucking rolodex of what
could have been

yet, the whole thing about
pain is some of us need it

crave it

even think we deserve it

so, hello to all the beautiful
women

try me

Purple Tea
Ken Kakareka

My wife's
got me
drinking
purple tea.
Her Tia
swears by it –
heals everything,
cleanses
your whole system –
Hell,
cures cancer!
She gave
my wife
a huge
brown paper bag
full
of leaves.
My wife
boils them
in a pot
then
extracts the tea
and stores it
in mason jars.

Over time,
it condenses
into this
thick purple stuff
that tastes
like dirt water.
I have to
infuse it
with honey
and pinch
my nose
when I down it.
It's not bourbon!
my wife jokes.
Sip it!
But there's
no enjoying
this stuff.
It's old age
in a mug
laughing
its way down
my throat
and landing
where the bourbon
once was.

Favorite Things
Judge Santiago Burdon

Dirty martinis and Cuban cigars
Fishnet stockings on hookers
Playing my guitar.
Vacationing in Mexico
Women without wedding rings
Making a list of my favorite things.

Sex before breakfast
Out-running the cops
A judge that grants bail
Then getting bailed out.
Books by Sandra Cisneros
And Renaissance Art,
All of these things have a special place in my heart.

But when the bars close
And I'm still sober
My dealer doesn't answer the phone
I think on these things
To keep from getting pissed off
And I express how I feel
in a poem.

Rock n' Roll music and classic cars
Rockford Files reruns
Deep cuts that leave scars
My probation officer not making me drop
Dive bars bad girls and musty bookshops.

A day at Wrigley
Watching the Cubs
Cool Tucson mornings
And falling in love
My children's laughter
and the first day of spring
What a great life
having these things.

But when I'm hungover
And I've got warrants
Or when my car breaks down
I think of all of my favorite things
And haul my ass out of town.

A Secret After Party (ASAP) ~ Paige Johnson

Gravel bouncing off the megaphone
Of some sidewalk grifter's pity party,
Asking anti-Capitalists to hit up his Ca\$hhtag,
Passing out pre-landfill leaflets on eco-terrorism.

These days,
I prefer the candor and clamor
of Black Israelites.
At least they mean it
and they're not self-hating
when they scream,
No parody of privilege
shrugging off a pedigree
to sell grinders to shakers.

These nights,
I prefer to walk the cratered streets
with the moon the only curse-worthy whiteness,
my solo passenger, as I skip another class on existentialism,
sick of the professor with a ratty bob
proclaiming the end of the world
like a cardboard-toting Jesus freak,
claiming we'll all be choking
on seaweed before grad school.

The South Beach bars
have been under water
since they opened,
but then again,
Liquor has never led to sound planning
or shied away from an insurance scam.
It's where you go to take
on a Tuesday bloat
even in the best of times.
Drown me in a river
rimmed with salt
and orange-peel garnish

And I'll die a DeSoto saint,
conservative when I come to,
But it's all relative to the
loser olympics on campus.

Revived on counterfeit
big pharma Flintstones
I found on the floor,
I sink into the cement again,
absorbing the graffiti gang signs,
seeing construction cones as buoys
and liking them that way.
I fall in lockstep with the other
Wavy-walking, smudge-eye grrls,
Envyng their salty exteriors
that come off more strategic
Than breeze-begotten,
weather-eroded,
or college-bought.

They wear headphones in the club,
more content off their own mix
And whichever hides in their purses,
canceling the noise
Of dick jockeys, static MCs,
and other slack-jaw jivers.
Hip-checking and chin-swaying,
they laugh off the come-ons
Of CHUD hucksters and
creepy Che-shirters, asking,
"Doesn't anyone want to
enjoy themselves anymore?"

The Spit that Fell From the Clouds
Mather Schneider

When your wife has been ill for 2 years
and no doctor in the land can put a name to it
when she cries in bed each night
and flinches when you touch her
and all you can do is remember
how young and happy she once was
it is difficult to give a shit
that they're fighting over sky-fairies in Tal Afar
or that demonstrators are up in arms in Barcelona
or that somebody made hot cakes on Facebook
or that glassy-eyed poets are passing mouth-gas on Spotify
bitching about Nietzsche
with their backdrop bookshelves testifying
to their talent and mental acuity
or that the motorcycle rally is next weekend
or that the car is filthy
from the spit that fell from the clouds
or that jam has bits of fruit in it unlike jelly
or that a pubescent loop-job dropped artillery
in a Missoula classroom
killing eleven
or that the monarchs are fluttering again
on the motherfucking wind.

dead old guy in a casket
Karl Koweski

no different
than any of the other
hundred corpses
in a hundred
other boxes.

I'm stopped before
I can make it
back to my seat
by a wilted woman
flanked by grown sons.

I've never seen them before.
they've never seen me
but I offer the grieving
family my condolences.

"did you work with Jon?"
the presumed widow asks.

"no, ma'am, I did not,
we were lovers," I say
loud enough to be heard
by those gathered.
"when I was thirteen years old
he was my big teddy bear
and I'll never forget him."

her eyes glaze over
bottom lip quivering.
her sons request
my departure, apparently
they have enough trauma.

I walk out to my car.
no one follows.

sometimes, they do.

I spread the
obituary page
across the steering wheel
and read down the column.

near the bottom,
Donnie Allridge.
his wake at
Godwin's Funeral Home
is across town.
if I hurry
I can arrive in time
to rewrite
another man's history.

Francis Bacon and Adolf Hitler Enter Heaven Together
Robert Beveridge

On the newsstand
a familiar face
attached to a body
that looks like John Kennedy's

HITLER DIES OF HEART ATTACK
screams the headline.
On the same day
Francis Bacon keeled over
on another continent.

Bacon's easel
set up by St. Peter
days before in preparation
waits for his first figure.

Hitler jogs, out of breath
up the lit path
catches up with Bacon's back

and the two of them
amble through the gates together.

Bacon, in gratitude,
begins to sketch
(starts of course
with the forelock
and mustache)

Hitler, failed, beams
scans the horizon
for suitable architecture
wonders if Bacon
will let Hitler
paint his portrait

Misery Acquaints a Man with Strange Bedfellows
Charles J. March

In bed and at the gym: You can't even do one?
In bed and in elementary school: Aren't you a little old for this?
In bed and in elementary school: What do the instructions say?
In bed and at a gas station: Meet me at the pump.
In bed and on a hike: This isn't as enjoyable as I thought.
In bed and at the hairstylist: Boy, now there's a close shave.
In bed and at a gas station: Now I'm supposed to pay extra for that?!
In bed and at a religious service: Is that the body of Christ?
In bed and during a Supreme Court session: Go easy on me.
In bed and at the gym: Let me slip into something more comfortable.
In bed and to the Jan. 6 committee: That one guy was like an animal!
In bed and on a hike: Is that a rash?
In bed and on a hike: Did you bring all the supplies?
In bed and to a telemarketer: What can you offer?
In bed and to a telemarketer: Please don't ever ask that again.
In bed and during a court session: I object!
In bed and at the gym: You need a shower.
In bed and to the Jan. 6 rioters: You're not supposed to go in there!
In bed and at the hairstylist: Just get everything out of my eyes.
In bed and in elementary school: Draw what you want.
In bed and in elementary school: Nice lunchbox.
In bed and at a religious service: Take off your cassocks.
In bed and at a religious service: Pray this works.
In bed and at the hairstylist: Please stop talking.
In bed and at a gas station: I think I need some air.

Drugs And The Woman
Andy Seven

This is a story about drugs and the woman
in my cold midnight room

I think about the one I loved
she was fair she was clean

Every day had a bright tomorrow
but the spiders have their way

And the hangman has a schedule
tik tock and time ran out

But she left me bereft of me
The man had better game, was I to blame – no

8 balls and dime bags
fentanyl and pipes of Pan crack

The way to a woman's heart is through her vices

She ran with the pipe ran with the smoke
slithered through the powder
CAN I SAY IT ANY LOUDER?

She bought it all, man
the dealer's promise
the pimp hand
she belonged to the street
she was in the life
drowned in the pipeline

Bloody arms and bloody nose
Where have you been and where are you going?

Empty bed blues
he was at the White Horse Saloon

Sunset and Western
I had my gun all ready

He was lounging in the booth
All his boys were sucking up vermouth

When they saw me they all laughed
I heard them speak but I didn't hear a word

My head was pounding and I reached into my jacket
Blew two rounds into his head then ran out the back

Lost the jacket ditched the heat
saw an old, familiar face standing on the street

Queen Hard-on / Fright Night
Casey Renee Kiser

King of superficial, ha,
spanks louder till she's special
Future-fakes for a moment-medal
Thinks a shooting star will settle
Well, *bless his heart...*

Put him on a pedestal
A hot ghost to keep her cool
Truth always cums on a bar stool
Queen Hard-on chose a dull tool
Well, *bless her heart...*

Angels and a demon
She's in a thousand deserts
drowning in semen
Demons and an angel,
both just wanna hike their skirts;
take turns with the label
Well,
bless their checkered hearts...

Gather broken clocks, *no feeling*
They take turns revealing
She crawls on his ceiling
Karmic wheel is misery-healing
Why is Love always leaving
and *rarely*
coming...
Cum on, get a beating, just beat it,
beat me, eat me, lick the icing gone,
some tough love, jerked around,
jerk it all night, jerks all around,
jerks for everyone
until everyone is *found*

A cosmic collide on a freaky Friday,
Bad love dresses up as a good lay
Wind gets a kick blowin' the wrong way
In the mirror, he thinks he hears her say
I'm taking my soul back tonight
He pleads with his pseudo reflection
Cum on baby,
don't leave me in this forever-fright
night

Even the moon is hiding tonight
Dan Cuddy

Even the moon is hiding tonight
Thieves are unscrewing, detaching everything
The walls are coming down,
Secrets are dancing in the street
In the few streetlights still blooming pallid flowers of light
There is thunder in the sky
There is sobbing and crying somewhere, everywhere
All directions the human is suffering
Why did we lose our souls
No one believes in immortal things
Everything is cheap and made of tin
Not even a good echo for a dropped coin
And a man's word is as hollow as a cave
We are all enslaved to our seven vices and hundred devices
Bombing the city with ingenuity
How tricked we are looking for our own images in mirrors
We have become vampires and screech like Covid bats
Our eyes are cold with either fear or indifference
Our minds want to blow up the world
Hallelujah nuclear suicide
There will be an empire ruled by death
Not a thing will move
Cockroaches will glow until they slow and
Turn on their backs, useless legs twitching
Itching in agony as the darkness brightens, lightens
With radioactive rain

Did you Amber Heard your bed again?
Ryan Quinn Flanagan

Did you Amber Heard your bed again?
I heard the woman yell to her child upstairs.
She didn't like to swear.

The kid was bawling.
I couldn't tell if it was from being in trouble
or because he had to be Amber Heard.

Into the bathroom!, I heard her demand.
In that angry mother voice
that could be used as paint stripper
in a pinch.

Clunking pipes in the wall.
That sudden rush from a running shower.

If she starts stripping the bed,
I'm out of here, I thought.

The kid already had a father off somewhere.
Probably passing bad cheques and kidney stones
with equal vigour.

The beer was warm as piss.
What the hell was it with this place
and bodily fluids?

I decided right there, that I must have
been a stunt man in a past life.

The kitchen table sitting there in front of me.
Like a line of 27 burning cars waiting
for me to try jump over them

Know Your Season

M.P. Powers

An aging surfer dressed like he's still fourteen,
shouting in his cellphone. I can hear him through the ficus
hedges and coconut palms: "I told you I'd have yer
money on Friday, bro. FRIDAY!
That's when the eagle
shits."

He clops through the sand in his flip-flops,
passes a voluptuous young beauty
in a black bikini. She struts past me, shaking softly
her three silver bracelets
as the music pours out of the bar across the street.
She moves in perfect rhythm with it,
and will stay in perfect rhythm, just like that, for years,
through love affairs, the changing of seasons, styles,
empires, epochs,
drifting along,
the music brushing lightly
against her hips and shoulders, her silky skin, touching her ears,
becoming her thoughts and words and then...

Well, and then,
going slowly out of time,
like everything that lives long enough. The music attaching
to someone else.

It's all part of the process,
and when it happens, it just happens, and you have to know
it's happened and accept and adapt.

I watch as she takes the crosswalk, glides along
the other side of the street.
A few minutes later, she is gone, and the aging surfer is back,
still on his cellphone. A tired old song
from a bygone era.

"Dude, why you gotta
bust my chops?
I told you my situation!
Work with me, bro. Work with me!"