

# Rust + Moth

*Winter 2021*

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ISBN: 978-1-716-30742-3

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## **The Keeping**

The long bay sets its hand upon us  
as the pale hens scatter  
the scraps of last night's dinner.  
A collie circles the black-tailed tractor, watches  
the smoke turn back  
to open sky.  
The farmer peels the skin  
of hard clay, plunges ten seedlings  
deep into dark matter.  
The dog chases one more vulture  
across the purple meadow,  
just like we taught her to do.  
And the thrush skips along the bramble  
that the stone wall holds together,  
knits the hawthorn, cypress and willow  
like a needle, keeping the whole of this world  
together.

## **The Dual Nature of Light**

From a distance  
everything looks thinner.

Like wearing black  
or a pinstripe suit.

Even death  
can seem like nothing

more than a crack  
in the windscreen.

Time is the distance  
that has made you disappear.

The neighbor still tinkers every weekend  
on that boat he never sails.

Each evening at precisely six  
I expect you and the cat for dinner.

Sometimes the crack is barely visible.  
Sometimes it seems healed over.

Light passing through it  
has the properties of waves—and bullets.

Sometimes the crack wanders  
until the whole glass shatters.

## **Carrington Event (1859)**

I.

A physicist in New Haven  
observed an irregular mass

of violet swirls and emerald-tinted streamers  
evolving in the west.

II.

In Mississippi, a radiant  
crimson column shot up

and billowed, like moss in a storm, or a military banner,  
over the houses and cabins.

III.

As far south as Havana,  
the heavens seemed to reflect

a conflagration leveling  
the other half of the island.

IV.

Parisian magnetometers  
were violently deflected.

Throughout the Russian Empire,  
the needles went off-scale.

V.

Back at the chemical telegraph office  
in Massachusetts, business was interrupted.

An iron stylus sparked. Some treated papers  
caught on fire, producing considerable smoke.

VI.

A Rear Admiral sailing  
the Gulf of Guinea logged

an “angry glow” from 2 a.m.  
until the solar dawn.

## I drank black tea with honey and wondered

which verbs I shall use to murder my mother, already dead,  
or which adjectives will adequately capture the way she hid  
love, not on purpose, I know that. She was losing her own  
syllables. And still. And yet. I will extract the mother  
who wasn't there, replace her with the mother who was—  
an invention of my accomplishment. Every psychologist  
from here to Timbuctoo says I must mother myself,  
so, I buy yellow sunflowers, place them in a crystal vase  
by the window. There was a time when this felt performative,  
but now, the flowers shine so brightly, all the mothering  
on this fading star of a doomed planet cannot compete.  
I sing a vowel of pleasure *ouiiiiii*, and feel understood—  
yellow flowers with their hallowed corollas and anthems,  
stigmas and anthers—*Shine on baby shine on*, they coo  
in a greener language than I've ever spoken. I add streams  
of clear water to keep these beauties alive, hoping to mother  
some small living thing—how else will I stop the sad ghosts  
who follow me repeating unkind words from their own mothers?  
I know she loved me in her way. She said so at the end,  
the way the sweet syllables came from her dying eyes.

## **Apostate**

In a church I crept and prayed the Song  
of the Heathen. A plaster  
Christ nailed with blood, thorns.  
My body a severed finger.

Wasps crawled over the sugar donuts,  
the pan dulce, as I stared  
at my reflection in a window  
at a San Miguel bakery.

A cross the size of a jacaranda, leaning  
and men and women whisper words  
I don't know. Carrie brushes my neck.  
Last night I dreamt of Caravaggio

with blue lips, palm full of rotten  
grapes, yellow skin. Naked—  
I squeeze into a fist,  
crack a knuckle.

I was trying not to drink  
and my hands shook.

## **Exit wounds**

The anatomy of a bee sting is blue lipped.  
High noon sky in agony, an abundance  
of heat. Light cuts ridges into the cement  
shade. This is not about the bees, disemboweled  
and writhing. In the morning, their husks  
will spike the dirt, their entrails wind  
into roads that mimic dry rivers in juniper shade.  
These bodies are grief like a moon in ink: round,  
placental. Grown from the holes birth leaves  
in a waxen womb. Abdominal curves as crescent in flight,  
a dagger, a comma in splice. Sometimes a hum.  
Like stones, where stones are casualties and also  
floral. What remains laid out as jewels, their glow  
sacrificial at least: most at your own expense.

## **Hunger**

She's never alone. The children  
follow the path to her house,  
where warm broth and soft beds  
await them. She knows  
they will come to regret it—  
she cannot help her nature.  
The bright roof is in constant  
need of repairs. With so many  
mouths to feed, she's had  
to cut corners. Not everything  
around her yard is edible  
any longer. But she's earnest  
when twisting the neck  
of her fattest chicken, bent  
on making the children feel  
welcome. She doesn't skimp  
on cinnamon, honey, and ginger.  
They have never eaten so well.  
Back at home, they sleep  
on corn shucks, ready to bolt  
when drunken fathers trip over  
the threshold, when put-upon  
stepmothers have had enough  
and send the kids off to the woods  
with a handful of bread crumbs.

## Immigrant!

The airport is a land of small funerals.  
Suitcases—hard-shell ripstop cordura  
Icelandic blue parrot-green universe-black—  
carry the pyres of our past lives bundled  
in packs. Ghosts float through scanners  
and lines, untying laces grimed in mother  
land dirt. It still smells like ashoka bark  
and ixora—Indian jasmine. In India,  
it's just jasmine. Everything will be known  
by this name, now. It will be Indian food,  
not food. Indian clothes, not clothes.  
Indian people, not people. Indian gods,  
and Indian holidays, Indian festivals  
with Indian fireworks like mandalas  
threaded in the sky. What is the purpose  
of your visit—business or pleasure?  
*We are emigrating*, my father says.  
Like the European Roller who winters  
in India, but the other way around.  
And we won't leave until it's time  
to leave for good. Until we know  
we will become silver ash that settles  
on the Ganges and dissolves  
as a dream fuzzes when we wake.

## Vase of Pink Tulips

They stand in the corner like uptight guests  
who arrive after a long ride on a crowded subway.

Next time I look their heads are down, telling  
stories of sad childhoods—the anxious mother

who insisted on training wheels far too long,  
the uncle whose hand lingered on a knee.

Only then do they spin off to the dance floor,  
their reckless whirling stilled as if caught in a strobe light.

They open up, flaring, pressing against  
the glass. “Come!” they beckon the bees.

Flushed, they begin to turn inside out.  
Petals curling, falling like slept-in skirts,

exposing the plumbing, their naked stamens  
spill yellow dust on the white Formica table.

I sit with them over breakfast, their pink threads  
a filigree through thinning fabric. I beg them to stay,

though I know their petals will drop and I will have no choice  
but to snap their stems and show them the door.

## ...I'll leave jewelry at her threshold\*

My mother isn't dead but  
I'll leave jewelry at her threshold,  
rattles of gold  
so that she hangs them from her ears  
and birds come  
to her prideful call.  
They'll eat her earlobes  
like pieces of bread.  
Pregnant mummy  
with a long braid in her hair  
that needs to be filled with balm  
and then they raise  
a pyramid in her name.  
You'll have to pass through a labyrinth  
to get to her.  
Sphinx, lion's body  
that speaks in riddles:  
*What walks on three legs?*  
My mother with her cane.  
The jewelry will rust,  
her face will become unrecognizable  
but always look forward  
while I live  
my little life.

*\*Original poem by Carla Chinski. Excerpted from her debut collection  
Canciones de cuna para mi madre (Llanten 2019, Buenos Aires)*

## ...dejaré alhajas en su umbral

Mi madre no está muerta pero  
dejaré alhajas en su umbral,  
sonajeros de oro  
para que se los cuelgue de los oídos  
y acudan los pájaros  
a su llamado presuntuoso.  
Comerán sus lóbulos  
como pedacitos de pan.  
Momia embarazada  
con una trenza larga en el pelo  
que necesita ser llenada de ungüentos  
y que levanten  
una pirámide en su nombre.  
Habrá que recorrer un laberinto  
para llegar a ella.  
Esfinge, cuerpo de leona  
que habla con adivinanzas:  
*¿Qué cosa camina en tres patas?*  
Mi madre con su bastón.  
Las alhajas se oxidarán,  
su cara se hará irreconocible  
pero mirará siempre hacia adelante  
mientras yo viva  
mi pequeña vida.

**...I'm responsible for her life\***

My mother isn't dead but  
I'm responsible for her life  
as we return from the hospital.  
When she enters the house  
it no longer acknowledges her as the owner,  
the walls close in with suspicion,  
the water comes cloudy out of the faucets.  
One leg is late while walking  
dragging melancholic behind her  
as if it hadn't wanted to come back.  
The other, in turn,  
tries to pretend  
that nothing happened,  
it rushes to arrive at this race,  
running into things  
like a nervous animal.  
For anyone else  
coming back would be a relief.  
But for her it means  
being my mother again, and wife.  
I open the closet door  
and brush away the moths  
hanging around the linens like jailers.

I put on her clothes  
but I know it's not enough.  
I hold her life as though it were  
a silk spun by worms  
that have never seen a tomb.  
I try to be that leg  
that drags behind  
but today I'm wearing the  
white and flowered  
dress of her youth.

*\*Original poem by Carla Chinski. Excerpted from her debut collection  
Canciones de cuna para mi madre (Llanten 2019, Buenos Aires).*

## **...yo soy responsable de su vida**

Mi madre no está muerta pero  
yo soy responsable de su vida  
en el regreso del hospital.  
Cuando entra, la casa  
ya no la reconoce como su dueña,  
las paredes se cierran con recelo,  
el agua sale turbia de las canillas.  
Una pierna se atrasa al caminar  
arrastrándose melancólica detrás  
como si no hubiera querido volver.  
La otra, en cambio,  
trata de hacer de cuenta  
que no pasó nada,  
se apura por llegar a esta carrera,  
chocándose contra las cosas  
como un animal ansioso.  
Para cualquiera  
estar de vuelta sería un alivio.  
Pero para ella significa  
ser mi madre otra vez, y esposa.  
Yo abro la puerta del placard  
y ahuyento las polillas  
que rondan el algodón como carceleros.

Me visto con su ropa  
pero sé que no es suficiente.  
Sostengo su vida como si fuera  
una seda tejida por gusanos  
que nunca vieron una tumba.  
Me tienta ser esa pierna  
que se arrastra  
pero hoy tengo puesto el vestido  
blanco y floreado  
de su juventud.

## Talk at the End of Summer

All my three offspring in town for the last  
of August, we potluck into the dusk  
on the weathered deck, big Japanese maple  
leaning its reddened breeze-shivered leaves  
and samaras over us as if to eavesdrop.

Low in the plum-purple southeast, Saturn  
grants us an audience. The kids, grown  
and partnered, talk of not having kids—no  
little round mouths irresistibly calling  
for more rice or milk than there is, no new  
throats in the drought, and no pink lungs  
panting for oxygen while it runs out.

I see the loose ends of my lineage, bloomless  
stems, sprouts swept useless across clay  
hardpan—our uncanny design gone  
fruitless. There won't be a miracle  
miniature hand come to clutch my thumb, no  
pair of womb-fresh wide eyes ushering  
a jaundiced old one back into love's home.

So let it be these young, whose genes  
have swum eons on a rough tide of births  
wanted and not. Let Saturn see these  
thoughtful ones, faces dusky as the rose  
petals fallen along the fence, eyes casting  
moon-like light before moonrise, lips  
reposed between soft-spoken reflections...

Let my awe show as these once little ones  
discuss the loss of their intricate code.  
Will Saturn bless them? Can these dangling  
seed-wings hear? Does anything earthly  
remember? I'm kissing each child goodnight.

## **Burning the Calendar**

We cram the year into the yawning fire:  
December for its wolf-dark winter sky,  
October for the trick-or-treat that wasn't,

April and March for lockdown's slapdash ire,  
July for momentary respite, May  
for nothing, really, but the incessant

desire for a return to life as-was.  
The fire glows boldly—in go thirty days

for June; November with its Great Big Lie  
lies smoldering beneath a calm still life  
of violins and peaches. Last year burns—

remorseless, unforgiving. Butterflies  
of gleaming ash concede the epitaph,  
dissipate as the hissing bonfire churns.

## **Dear Human**

Don't forget dear  
human please how  
fragile you are all  
unzipped cobbled  
together ripped  
like a ragdoll dog-  
eared loose-screwed  
evolution's Mr.  
Potato Head so  
out of whack  
not even Mary  
Shelley could've  
contrived you

## Playing with Tiger Sharks on the Missile Range

We were shrewd on an adventure, like Huck Finn.  
She was six, I was eight. We set out to hike  
the entire boomerang of the island. We took  
peanut butter sandwiches in a purple bandana,  
flip-flopped to the rocks

at ocean's edge. My sister and I knew  
our matching denim with stars had superpowers,  
like Wonder Woman, so we climbed, our spindly  
legs slipping. We knew the glistening indigo spikes

of the sea urchin, the orange and blue-splotched coral,  
the dark manta shadow, knew the sea  
held shell-encrusted *Treasure Island* chests of gold.  
How thrilled we were to spot the shiny fin

of a little tiger shark, a friend  
like Baloo, Bagheera, the striped body undulating  
in the clear Micronesian water, so close  
we could almost touch it, then another. Another.

We were captivated that they followed us,  
impressed by our daring plan, wanting to play.  
If we'd seen a flash of light, say, over nearby Bikini,  
an immense boiling mushroom over the sea,  
we would have looked for Alice's caterpillar.

## **When the Credits End**

As soon as we get the all-clear, we flood the aisles to gather into bags the buckets & boxes & cups (empty, full, it makes no difference), to mop the sticky spills that threaten to pull shoes from feet and feet from shins, to sweep into big-mouthed dust pans whatever our brooms can rouse, to suck up with vacuums all that's loose and in sight: Whoppers & Milk Duds, ticket stubs & napkins, Sno-Caps & Raisinets, Skittles & Junior Mints.

I've come across some awful things, but once I found a diamond ring. The gold wasn't true and the man in the pawn shop with a loupe in his eye like the tiniest telescope said the stone was glass so I kept it because it was still pretty. But sometimes what's left behind by the tide makes me wonder about the lives that wash in, bob about, wash out.

The perks, though! This is what I once thought, but even the best movies eventually ruin themselves, becoming nothing but flickering litanies. And free popcorn loses its allure once the counterfeit scent of butter embeds in you like a yellow tattoo.

But before we fill the aisles, we wait outside the swinging doors to watch the faces as they exit. How slack & blank they are, how innocent & pale, like hermit crabs pulled from their shells, but inside, they're still bubbling with laughter or love or the most thrilling terror. They've not yet risen to rejoin us in this world of the damaged & damaging, but until they hit the cruel surface, they're lovely.

## My latest ancestry.com DNA update

Do you know that the ancient Irish  
believed the dead withdraw westward over the sea  
with the setting sun? Do you know that they  
believed in an afterlife                      reincarnation  
the dead transforming      human                      animal  
   inanimate?

Did you ever watch the sun go down  
over the water, everything bathed  
in golden orange purple peach light?  
Boundaries blurred, water and sky bleeding  
into one? The birds circling one last time  
as the day ends? At the water's edge,  
I call you, chant your name,  
drum up druid woman-blood,  
seer-woman blood, priest-woman blood,  
see-the-future-and-the-other-side  
with-leaves-and-feathers-blood

druid-woman, seer-woman,  
I chant your name, I call you to me.

I step into the water, your name on my lips, the dying  
light gilding my bare flesh. I take one step.

Another. Do you know your name  
means *to descend*? I call you, call  
you. I am coming, I am coming.

No matter your new form, I am coming.

Do you know that the ancient Celts believed a woman  
could tempt a man with singing a silver branch an apple  
the promise of love to bring him to her?

I am coming

I am singing your name

What will it take to tempt you back to me

What will it take

## **First swim with dragonflies, exuvial**

Find still water  
drop egglife, a coin  
you have wished upon.  
The trick in cold climates is waiting  
year after year in your too tight skin  
for summer. Emboldened,  
clawbirds scavanging elsewhere  
lilly pad clinging,  
pollenflower, a wilting ghost  
dripping tears of your body  
as you lose it finally  
find the wings you always knew  
were folded on your back  
like praying hands.  
Now membranous, luminous  
your newfound eyes allseeing everything,  
even the skin you leave behind  
like a coat of dried blood  
on the water, tiny crawlfeet vestigal  
no longer landbound, vivid beautiful  
molten change.

## “Gaudy”

The bird book called him *America's most gaudy bird*. Some said the king cakes in New Orleans were *gaudy* and the Mardi Gras beads too, gold, green, and purple inelegance thrown from floats in the parade. Now in central Texas, I look for this bird in the Lost Pine Forest wondering if he will be *gaudy*, like the brassy god inside me and the twinkling drag queens who introduced me to the next world. I want the sight of this bird to cut my breath like the first time I saw two men kiss and then there he is

a blue head and hood,  
bold red eye liner, lime  
green shoulder wings, red breast  
and belly, yellow

in the places in between: painted bunting.  
My heart—a revelry, a carnival feast,  
a flashy and flamboyant beating.

## Snake Pit Police Raid 1970

Diego Vinales jumped from the  
second floor of the Charles Street Police Station,  
lips of the night evaporating off him  
in silk swathes,  
terror of being deported,  
the crime of being out.

Diego Vinales jumped  
and landed on a fairy's one weakness:  
wrought iron/ impaled & cut down.

Diego Vinales jumped  
and survived, Saint Sebastian  
of the *Snake Pit*, torn wings  
lifted the movement; they said,  
"Any way you look at it that boy was pushed,  
we are all being pushed."

Diego Vinales jumped  
and was deported once he recovered.  
*Oh fondly foolish boy, seeking in vain  
to clasp a fleeting image.*

## **The icecap of my sleep habit is melting**

and the beautiful place that is sleep recedes  
along with the frosts that fed my eyes,  
dream-lit pools by which to dry wet fur on snow,  
and look to the pole to tell night's green margin  
from the day's while the busy cells within my ears  
and brain whistle for sleep's cleansing rinse.  
Sleep which may yet remake my seafloor,  
and, by the moon, sweep and reorder it.

Only, too often now I surface among an injury  
of pylons, bunkhouses, decomposing cars  
to ramble within an Arctic town where my ration  
of sunless hours burns wildly and dangerously on.  
Now habitual and repetitive and familiar,  
my nocturnal journey is alive with grief  
as the land is, and the carrion dread is,  
as the beautiful place that is sleep deserts me.

## PINK N♀ISE

When you were nothing, your parents cut off the tongue of a horse and showed it to your relatives as a gender reveal. They ate dissected guavas from the supermarket. Your fifth birthday, you took off your shirt like a boy at the pool and ran down the block. Mother's screaming behind you. Magenta in the mere footprints of the wind, the same color as your clothes; an alternative. Now you investigate the branches. Hear paper leaves shivering, testing their fruits. Some fall like frozen iguanas, candescent like the sequins on a mini dress. Pink fingers frost a tree's tangled intestines in preparation for the reaping. Pretend by fidgeting your own. Wonder if that's why you found an ice cube in your chest after refusing to climb down the sycamore. The neighborhood boys could see straight up your skirt; even while wearing skin, lace was the only thing blushing. Lifespans dot the ground as they hit: How long. What age. Doze off to ambience and question the relative danger of living amidst the invisible. Reconsider the shiv of your mother's voice; femininity dripping in stallion's blood. A transaction flayed to the colored bone.

## grudges

my great grandfather stopped in a random town en route to michigan and asked the local barber for a shave. the barber said *sure, just as soon as i get back from lunch*, and left my great grandfather sitting there. until the end of his days, he wouldn't even drive through that small town, made a point of going around it because that barber knew when he was hungry, knew how to take care of himself first. grudges like this run down the family lines, run through my own veins. my granddad wouldn't speak to my uncle for six months because in a dream, my uncle, his youngest son, wronged him. my uncle said *dad, you can't be mad at me for something i didn't do*, and granddad said *if i dreamt it, that means you were thinking about doing it*. my own father still won't even speak the name of the neighbor who killed the soft purple lean of his wisteria vine over 35 years ago. just like how i dream over and over that you have found someone else, that sometimes she is in our house, brushing the ghosts of her fingertips against walls. how in my sleep i scream at you, claw the air demanding the fullness of your attention, but you don't hear me, won't even give me the warmth of your gaze. how when i wake, i am that plum-colored ache of a vine, cut down, dead. you are a continent away in the next room, and i don't know how to forgive you.

## Painting with the dark

Caravaggio knows the dark; don't we all?  
For him, it's Rome's seething underside:  
scarce-cooked horsemeat, stench of dung,  
tallow candles spitting like cats. Fillide's  
hard face and her soft tongue, the shudder  
of his blade as it skewers his rival's life.  
Banishment. *David with the head of Goliath*  
is a cry for grace but what light is there in Rome?

Van Gogh lived the brittle days of Dutch winters,  
of peeling potatoes without taste and sharing  
the gospel to waxed-up ears. Later, in France,  
the sun threw open the shutters on his palette  
so that it blazed. But, in his last self-portrait  
vibrant cyan, turquoise and lilac form agitated swirls.  
His eyes look fixed and bitter. Death could enter  
through those windows. The light has not reached within.

Rembrandt's too old to run. His *Portrait  
as the apostle Paul* reveals that life has flowed,  
with grit, across his face. A ridged forehead,  
sagging cheeks, dull deep eyes. They show  
a man who's been spurned by art's fickle fashion,  
has pawned his painter's props for soup and  
placed a rose and tears on the grave of Saskia,  
his wife. And yet, the background is dark earth tones,

not just bone black, and there's warm light falling  
on his head. It highlights white and yellow-gold  
spun in his swept hat. The artist shows his face,  
as vulnerable as ours. Rembrandt's mysterious  
depths have *said things for which there are no  
words in any language*. He paints the Bible  
like it's true: full of washerwomen, beggars, the blind  
and a God who hugs a wayward son.

## **Ocean**

Ocean to me is close enough to God—gray,  
impenetrable, tide-muscled, a brawler. Unseen  
fist that has clouted me airless more than once.

Repetitive. Answer always oblique, spitting  
its sharps in harangues of salt, its froth in murmur.  
Abrader and buoy, both. Antagonist. Beguiler.

A cradle, but also, the scene of the crime; I return  
and return. Not braving pummel, but submitting  
to it. At smack of wave, offering only the body's

negotiations. Over me, a choir of gulls, their one  
note, indignant. Each inch forward, a reluctant  
confession. Each inch backward, a pardon in sand.

## Suspended in Space

—A golden shovel using a line from Paige Lewis's "Because the Color is Half the Taste"

There are 4,548 stars in the night sky, and I  
haven't bothered to notice a single one. I learn

depressing facts about myself every day like I'm the  
type of person who ignores the universe

rather than attend its dinner parties. Tell me, is  
the body celestial if it's launched into space? I need an

answer. No, I need to find the omnipotent arrow  
that points towards meaning. I have to find it without

my eyes. There are things about this life that don't end  
quick enough: office jobs, dentist appointments, and

war. What was I talking about? Stars. Universe. Bodies. It  
seems impossible that we all exist here, and that we do asks

the question, *Who doesn't exist?* Never mind. There's only  
ever questions and never answers. There's only ever one

dinner party invitation and never a question  
about my body suspended in space. How

is my body a star burning? Do I dare  
look at the universe and say, *You*.

## Things Inside Other Things

The fridge no longer regulates itself  
like it used to: stalactites form  
in the hummus top & half a shelf away

milk curdles. This is one of many madneses  
to be ignored, like dust shoved into corners.  
You tap the microwave. Uninvited, you wonder

what shade your blood might run tonight.  
Darkness is a state, like Arkansas, only larger.  
You tap the microwave again.

This is no place for butter. Too much heat  
and rumbling. That is how machines work.  
Also, people. A boiled bubble bursts. It's time.

Oh, and the faucet leaks. Solution: patch  
the gashes in the PVC below. Forgotten  
all this time, the rug's dark spot's been spreading.

## **The Change**

You wake in the middle of your life  
in a wood tender with light. Familiar  
trunks grown full slant sighing down  
to loam. Daughters sprout in glades  
streaming with milk-warm sun.

Summer sags past solstice. Poplars  
dissolve in silver; bee larvae swell  
waxen cells; cicadas split their stays.  
Who is this porous one, limbs loosening,  
whose waist opens, whose breasts relax?

You turn until your bearings fall in place.  
You had not guessed it possible to walk  
this way, and not so far. But you  
remember this, as blood after its push  
and braiding homes in on the heart.

Ease your knapsack down—strained  
pouches, strapped-on gear. Your scalp  
is damp to the roots as turned earth,  
your eyesight softens, your knees melt—  
Soon enough you will step out of flesh.

## Denouement

The only part of *Time Bandits* I remember is the end, when the boy's parents hold a toaster oven between them with a charred hunk of evil inside. The boy tells them not to touch it. I think he says, "Don't touch it, it's evil!" But they touch it anyway, and though we don't like them—they're bad parents—the resulting blast is disturbing. Even as the curious neighbors step out onto their lawns and the firetrucks arrive, we know he'll be left alone, which isn't necessarily better. I might be remembering it wrong. It's been thirty years since I saw it. But I remember clearly the dull sense of dread settling in my bones. It probably came from the recent realization that my parents weren't quite up to the task of raising me, and that I wasn't quite up to it either, and those were the only available options. This was about the time when all my friends' parents decided it would be best if I played at their houses, and not the other way around.

They were generous with their invitations to sleepovers, but it was starting to dawn on me that that's what this was—generosity—and generosity was something people exercised when they were comfortable and had some comfort to spare. In other words, it was optional, conditional, and unreliable. Our toaster oven was reliable. I used it to cook Pop-Tarts and English muffin pizzas, which, along with ramen, were the main staples of my diet. I was trying to grow up as quickly as I could. I didn't know how much time I had left before it all exploded, leaving me like the boy in the movie, standing alone in the front yard as the sirens faded and everyone else went back inside.

## Even as I take the photo, it is dying

Even as I take the photo, it is dying. Music  
from a nearby flat seeps into the park  
heat-soaked beats that make me think

of *getting ready*: the slow ritual of it  
the skin-tight Primark bodycon, foundation  
oil pastel thick on chins and foreheads, the taste

of Smirnoff Ice on our lips, alcohol  
softened by sugar, the way we nonchalantly knew  
we'd be desired. In the long light evening of today

I lean closer to the Comma that does not know  
that I am taking its photo, that does not know  
it is resting on the exact same metal fence

I saw another Comma bask on last summer,  
and another the summer before that. Even the angle  
of the wings is the same: the way it spreads them

wide and proud as sails, a kite in miniature  
before it's off and airborne, darting up  
to places I can only dream of:

where scalloped orange wings touch orange sky  
and tree tops shimmer in cloudless electricity.  
The mid-August weather holds

everything like a temple as my hands  
sit on the fence with the missing butterfly  
lightly brush against the absence

and my body softens in the sun, tells me  
that it would like to fall in love again,  
says that it thinks we could do it



## **Christmas on the Seventh Floor**

The river curves along East Medical Center Drive, curl  
of smoke through bare trees, gray with a rim of rust.  
Above the hospital, it is still and foggy on Christmas Day.

A white van gently circles into a spot on the parking lot roof.  
The flag poofs and flutters now and again, resting like the ridges  
of red and white ribbon candy Grandpa would unwrap for the holiday.

Ripples like the water in the stretch of river below—what happens  
when liquid moves over solid ground—somehow both smooth  
and significant, simultaneously. Like breath in the body, in/out

through a tunnel of lung/vein/heart, deep path we take  
for granted most days, quiet route we travel over and over.  
Ease of this river in the gully below, its grace filled flow.

## About the Authors

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**Gregory Wolff** is an almost-PhD in philosophy turned organic farmer, writer of fiction, poetry, essays, and children's literature, and very proud father of two enchanted and half-wild children. His writing appears or is forthcoming in *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *EVENT*, *Prairie Fire*, *J Journal*, *The Moth*, *About Place Journal*, *Zone 3*, *Vassar Review*, *Writers Resist*, and elsewhere.

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**Marc Alan Di Martino** is a Pushcart-nominated poet, translator, and author of the collection *Unburial* (Kelsay, 2019). His work appears in *Baltimore Review*, *Rattle*, *Free Inquiry*, *Tinderbox*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, and many other journals and anthologies. His second collection *Still Life with City* is forthcoming from Pski's Porch. He lives in Italy.

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**Katherine Hagopian Berry** (she/her) has appeared in the *Café Review*, *Rise-Up Review*, *Feral*, and *Glass: Poets Resist*, among other places. Her first collection *Mast Year* was published in 2020. She is a poetry reader for the *Maine Review*.

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**Richard Lister** draws you into stories of intriguing people, places, and art. His poetry is “a celebration of ordinary magic perceived by a keen eye.” Richard’s work is carved into the Radius sculpture, published in 7 collections, and exhibited at Leith Hill. He works to address poverty in Africa and Asia.

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**Ellen Stone** advises a poetry club at Community High School and co-hosts a monthly poetry series in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where she raised three daughters with her husband. Her poetry collections are *What Is in the Blood* (Mayapple Press, 2020) and *The Solid Living World* (Michigan Writers' Cooperative Press, 2013).



Cover and layout by Josiah Spence.

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ISSN # 1942-5848

[rustandmoth.com](http://rustandmoth.com)