

children churches & daddies

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supplement



P O E M

A T T A C K

D A N N Y

R A N D

She hopped on the elevator
and pressed six.
I pressed seven
and the elevator door rattled shut.

“There’s a lot of crazies up on the sixth floor,” I told her.

She smiled shyly. “I just moved in.”

“I used to live on the sixth floor.”

She nodded politely
and winced a smile.

“I probably should be saying this,
but there is this one woman
with red curly hair
who always wears bright red lipstick.
She’s the craziest of the lot.”

The elevator stopped and the door opened.

“Ahh, thanks...,” the new attendany said all tongue-tied,
when the door shut
and she was gone.

I rode the elevator up the next level,
feeling a little crazy myself,
for talking so candidly.
You don’t know how to behave in front of people,
I kept hearing myself say.

So I discussed it with Joan
a little later on.

“I didn’t mean to scare the new resident or anything,” I said.

“Don’t be silly. That redhead really is crazy.”

“Yeah, but...”

“Oh, it’s fine. You were just making conversation.”

Joan slipped on her coat.

We stepped out into the hallway
and she locked the door behind her.

“...People like to hear that kind of stuff.”

“I guess, you’re right.”

On the way down,
the elevator stopped on the sixth floor.

The crazy woman with curly red hair
and bright red lipstick got on.

“How are you two doing?”
she asked very cheerfully.

“Good, and you?”

The crazy woman rolled her eyes back.

“I’m going crazy,” she said,

“but I’m not dangerous.”

She laughed at the joke.

The irony of it all, I thought,
that the crazy woman would repeat exactly what Joan and I had just said,
as if to confirm how odd everything was
that related to her.

It’s amazing.

I felt my head whirl about.

A poem had started to germinate.

I could recognize the signs:

dry mouth,

sweaty palms,

sweaty temples

and armpits,

a hemorrhaging of dovetail sentences in the speech area of my brain,

a quick sense of euphoria,
trembling hands,
dilating pupils....

Then all at once,
the elevator walls started waving good-by;
the buttons began to dance
and Dixie music started to play in my ears.
The smell of burnt plastic filtered
through my nose-trails.
I started to feel sick.

The the elevator came to a jarring stop
and the crazy woman sailed into the lobby.

“Hey, Sammy, you don’t look to well,” Joan exclaimed.

I fumbled about in some literary paroxysm.

“Are you okay?” she asked.

I could hear the concern in her voice,
but couldn’t focus on her face.
My breath was getting heavy.
I took a step and leaned against the elevator door for support.
“I think I’m having a poem attack.”

THE OUTSIDER

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When I killed the deer

I had punished myself before. After my two older sisters graduated, the keys had been handed to me and I attained the status of “the one who drives us to school”. One morning, driving my brothers, James and Paul, to school, I was feeling my oats a little on a straight stretch. I was pushing sixty in my parent’s Pontiac when a buck leapt from the forest smack into our path. There was nothing to do. We sailed into the buck, broad siding him and knocking him a good 15 feet into a ditch. He raised his head once, looked at us and then laid it down for good. At first I was too surprised to feel upset. What had I done? We got out of the car and checked. It was dead.

Pride goeth before a fall, I thought. I felt as if I had somehow participated in something slightly evil. Nonchalant in front of my brothers I drove on to school. I called my parents and they called a ranger. It wasn’t hunting season and you were supposed to report things like that. Sad, I stood in the rain during lunch to punish myself.

By summer, I had my own little brown bomb of a car. I was a senior and my girlfriend Nancy, a sophomore. It was about 6 miles from my house on the mountain to Nancy’s place down in Corbett, a ranching/farming community. The two lane roads were well kept and wound through the forest, thick with pine and fir on either side. Nancy and I were going to go down to Rooster Rock on the Columbia river and loll on the beach. Winter, its endless cold soggy hours of reading books or stomping sluggishly through the snow, was over. It had been sunny and warm for a while and I was looking forward to coming out of hibernation.

Nancy was a local catch. Her father worked for the telephone company repairing lines, installing phones and driving one of those big rigs with a boom lift on it. She highlighted her hair blond and was cute and very social. She was vaguely worried by her role as the chirpy cheerleader who dates football players. That was okay, I was tall and athletic but I wasn’t a very good football player. I didn’t know the rules and I didn’t want to hurt people. Here, if you want the ball that bad, you can have it. What’s the point anyway?

Enjoying the anticipation, I waited until the last minute to leave. That always irked Nancy. I liked that. I had a girl waiting for me. But then I would push it until she was really annoyed and then race apologetically to her house, hoping she wasn’t too angry to put up with my shenanigans.

Country roads are great to drive on. You can take over both lanes, cutting the corners hard and whipping out of the curve to fly down the straight stretches. About half way to Nancy’s house there was a severe corner followed by a long straight stretch. Though straight, the road swooped down steeply into a valley for about two or three hundred yards before climbing swiftly to the same elevation again. The great thing was to whip out of the curve at the top, floor it and accelerate down the slope before hitting the bottom and taking off up the incline. I could usually get to about 90. But if you didn’t get enough momentum, you had to lug slowly up the slope in your rattling old car feeling lame and impotent, wishing for a little power. Hogging the road, I whipped out of the corner as fast as I could take the curve. The little engine whined as I shifted into fourth and pressed the car faster and faster down the hill. The needle hovered uncertainly around 70. I was approaching the bottom when, on the upswing stretch of the hill, a doe and a fawn wandered side by side into my lane. Damnit, they were going to make me lug the hill. I swooped the bottom and rolled upwards.

My dad drove fast and decisively. He often used our family car to pull city folks in their 4X4 off-roaders out of the snow and mud on the mountain. Most people haven't got a clue. As my dad would wheel into the driveway, my mom would grip the dash saying, Herb, look out for the cat! He said, they'll get out of the way. One day, a black and white tabby was too pregnant and it got its back broken. Unlike every Ford or Chevy half ton truck around those parts, we kept no guns. Looking severe and very pale my dad beat the cat to death with a fence post.

I sailed toward them. The doe leapt out of the way but the fawn froze, glistening eyes and twitching ears aimed at me. I braked but I don't remember if I swerved. I think I swerved slightly to the left. The only thing I know for sure is that I rolled over the fawn going about 20 miles an hour. The doe was terrified but she didn't want to leave. She hesitated on the other side of the road until I got out and then she leapt into the woods.

The fawn lay in the ditch, a smooth brown body with its hind legs bunched under it. Its spindly front legs were pawing and scrabbling at the dead leaves and grass. Eyes squeezed shut, it craned its neck as it bleated blindly for its mother. A lonely terrified baby, it cried. Its back was broken.

I had to kill it. Numb, I climbed back in my car. Where could I get a gun as fast as possible? I didn't want to drive back up the mountain. Most of the people up there were stand-offish and intimidating. If you walked on their land people usually stood and stared suspiciously until you had stated your case. I drove on towards the farming part of the country, leaning and urging my little car forward as it lugged along the roads. The fawn was suffering.

I stopped at Mark Stewart's house a few miles from our old house on Loudon. When I was younger Mark used to invite me to play with him. Unlike us, they had a TV. It was quite a novelty to me. When people at school would joke and laugh about TV programs I would quickly memorize the story and tell people about the funny scenes. "You remember the part where . . . ?"

When I visited Mark I couldn't take my eyes off of their TV. I had seen my first episode of Star Trek there. It was an episode where some disembodied beings hung Spock and Captain Kirk up by their arms and put them through excruciating torture in order to study them. It was depressing and bewildering but I couldn't stop watching. I wanted to know what happened. I couldn't leave them to it alone. I wanted to make sure it ended. It didn't seem to interest Mark. He wanted to go outside and work on his go-cart so I tore myself away, "Yeah, let's work on the go-cart."

I hadn't associated with Mark in years and I approached the house a little unsure of what to say. Mark's mentally retarded older brother was home. I hoped he would understand.

"Um, sorry to trouble you but I ran over a deer a ways back and its back is broken. I need to shoot it but I don't have a gun."

He was home alone and they didn't have a gun that he knew about. He offered their cross bow. How can I shoot a fawn with a cross bow? I might as well try to stab it with the arrow.

"Maybe you could cut its throat." He offered.

Frustrated I raced out and drove further down the road. Where should I stop? I don't know them. Those people built there after we had moved. I don't want to drive too far because it will take all that time to get back and finish it. Finally, in desperation I stopped at the farm house we used to live in. At least it was familiar. I knocked on the door and a man answered. I stammered out my explanation. He said they really didn't have a gun except for a little .22 rifle. He would come with me. I sat stiffly in the seat trying not to rock forward in an attempt to make the car go faster.

Nearing the top of the little valley I searched the ditch for the fawn. I am sure it was right along here somewhere. He's going to think I'm nuts if I don't find it. Finally, halfway down the slope, there it was, still and brown in the wet leaves. It raised its head as we climbed out of the car.

"I'm sorry. My family doesn't hunt and I don't know how to use a gun."

"Do you want me to do it?" he asked.

"No, I ran over it. I'd better do it."

He showed me how to operate the lever that would jack a shell into the chamber and he reminded me to take off the safety.

"This way is off?"

"Yes"

I should probably shoot the deer in the heart. I read that you can aim for the chest just behind the front leg but I didn't really know where the heart was exactly. But what if I miss and it doesn't die quickly? What if I just puncture its lungs and it

starts to scream again? I'll go for the brain.

It panicked as I approached, waving its head back and forth in pain as it scabbled in the ditch. How do I hold this gun? I tried to aim for the small slender forehead that was weaving in front of me. Doubtful-sick with waiting-I squeezed.

The fawn screamed and bleated frantically. I looked for what I had done. I couldn't even see a hole. Trying to stay calm I worked the lever on the gun and jacked another shell into the chamber. Putting the gun six inches from its face I shot it again. This time the bullet ripped through its throat and it screamed before gurgling and choking on the blood welling from its mouth. It scrambled to get away even more frantically. Sick, I jacked in another shell and shot again. Somewhere on the third or fourth shot it laid down its head and died.

The man had turned his back and was looking into the trees over the opposite bank. I walked over to him and handed him the gun.

"I don't feel very good about this."

He patted me on the shoulder and we stood awkwardly for a moment and then left.

Life goes on and an hour later, there I was, guilty, on a warm beach kissing Nancy Randall.

The Loppings

At the age of 33 I was teaching English in Saudi Arabia. I met a part time teacher there named David Heaton. During the first two months I visited him at his compound a couple of times and we began to get acquainted. David was British but had grown up in Saudi Arabia from the age of twelve. He had converted to Islam and he was more Saudi than he was British. I learned a lot just from talking to him and hanging out with his friends. I was a little uncomfortable because they were so much younger than I was. Some of them were still in high school and would talk about how they harassed the teachers and got them fired. David, however, was quite mature for his age and I really enjoyed his company. He had a great ease around others.

Saudi Arabia still follows the laws of the Old Testament and its traditions haven't changed. Some of the young teachers had gone to see the public executions. Sean, the teacher coordinator, had talked and joked about it and it was becoming a sort of rite of passage to go. I knew I shouldn't go. How could it be okay to watch someone die just to have bragging rights? Just to say, I went too? David had witnessed it many times. He saw it as an affirmation of his faith and of the high moral standards of Muslim society. He said I should go with him.

I went down to Al-Balad, the central area in Jeddah. I caught a taxi and met David. We rode down to the main mosque talking about the many ways a taxi driver can rip you off. There is a big paved lot in front of the mosque with a raised concrete platform, about a foot high. The lot has a low iron fence around it and people were already gathering. Some people looked at us and smiled knowingly. They were there for the entertainment value or from morbid curiosity; who knows; they had grown up with this thing. It was fiercely hot and within minutes sweat was running down our bodies, inside our shirts and soaking our clothes. We waited in the shade of a tree behind an advertising sign.

About 10:30 we made our way to the steps of the mosque above the lot. There, people were already crowding the top of the steps near the line of police and soldiers. Down in the lot there were soldiers with machine guns. A man stood at one end of the lot behind a small soundboard and kept saying "hallo, hallo, hallo" testing the sound system. Another full troop of soldiers marched into the square, quick time, and spread out along the fence and along the bottom of the Mosque steps where the crowd deepened.

We stood in the hot sun for twenty minutes. It beat down fiercely and I quickly became dehydrated. I felt weak and I tried to bend my knees, fearing that if I locked them I might pass out from heat stroke. Trying to protect my head I linked my fingers over the top and my hair was so hot it felt as if it might burn me. Sweat ran into my eyes, stinging them. I wiped at them with my shirt. I was beginning to feel a little nervous and unsure of my reaction. Why did I come? This is barbaric. I am a fool; a slut for experience.

David said, "Are you ready? Prepare yourself."

Sirens wailed and two police cars, front and back, escorted two vans into the square. David said again, "Prepare yourself."

I kept my mind blank to the immediate future. I told myself I was learning something. I was also seriously worried that I might pass out from the heat. My knees felt slack and watery but I didn't want the Saudis to think I was overwhelmed by emotion.

David told me that if a person is being executed for having wronged another family, (murder) then the family can choose to forgive them.

“So sometimes they let them go?”

“Sometimes.”

There is one prince who always offers money to the family if they forgive the crime. I felt a moment of disappointment. Had I come all the way here for nothing? I felt a twinge of guilt. I was just as much a pile of shit as anyone else there. Why did I want to see it? Why did I allow my curiosity to drive me into situations that were extreme and morally questionable? I held onto the idea that it was happening whether I liked it or not.

The soldiers were all dressed in drab green uniforms with black combat boots. Occasionally they looked around and glared at the crowd or pushed through importantly on some errand. Now three or four men entered the square in bright white thobes with red and white checkered shumaks on their heads. Are these officiating princes or just officials? No. One had a scabbard. It wasn't the broad curved scimitar of the Lawrence of Arabia movies. It was a slender curved sword like those favored by Samarai warriors.

The vans backed up to the raised concrete slab. A man placed a colorful rug, it looked like a prayer rug, on the concrete. One and then another and then another; three brightly colored rugs on the gray concrete.

The first van opened its back doors and two policemen climbed out. They moved slowly and I peered in trying to see anyone who looked like a prisoner. The van was filled with police. Where was the marked man? What did someone about to die, look like? Finally, they reached back in and helped a blindfolded man to step down. He was a tall Nigerian. They led him to the rug. His steps seemed a little unsure but he was calm and sedate. David told me, they were sedated.

As a second man was being pulled from the van, the policemen helped the Nigerian to kneel. His hands were bound behind his back by cords and now they began to bind his ankles together. I watched for any sign of struggle. There was none. He even adjusted his weight forward so that they could slip the cords under his feet and around his ankles.

The other man looked Arab but he was not a Saudi. By the time they had secured the Nigerian, two policemen were also securing the Arab. Kneeling, bent forward, blindfolded and motionless they waited side by side, facing the long end of the parking lot where the announcer held the microphone.

The second van opened. Two policemen climbed out and assisted another blindfolded man out. He was a big, strapping Saudi. He also walked quietly with the police and knelt on the rug lain down for him behind the first two men. The police were almost caring in their handling of the men. It was as if, since their doom was sealed, they wanted it to go as humanely and quickly as possible. David mentioned that it went quickly and that if you looked away, just that fast, you might look back and only see headless bodies. I wondered, didn't any of the prisoners ever struggle or faint? Or even leap up and hop away in order to feel those last seconds of life, to have some control over the inevitable?

David said, “Prepare yourself. Just remember, okay, you can't do anything about it. It's going to happen.” Talking with two of his friends, they had told us that the men are prepared for weeks. Religious men come to them and tell them that even now they can repent. The religious leaders explain to them that everyone dies and we can all die at anytime, but if you repent, Allah may yet give you salvation and bring you into the next life.

The announcer began to describe the crimes over the sound system and his voice echoed across the square, mixed with shrill feedback. David translated for me. The Nigerian was being executed for trafficking in cocaine, as was the Arab next to him. No one seemed to care about them much. They were not Saudis and the insanity of drug trafficking in Saudi Arabia can only lead to death. It seemed that many of those executed were Africans who were drug smugglers from poor countries. But the real tension was to rest on the Saudi. He had killed a man in a fight. An eye for an eye; the family of the murdered man could look on silently or could choose to forgive him of his sin against them. I was becoming numb. My brain kept trying to make reason of being there. But there wasn't any good reason.

The man in the white thobe, the executioner, had inherited his job from his father. His father had been famous for his skill, which sometimes requires, for the most heinous crimes, that the head be taken in three or four cuts so that the man mostly bleeds to death, aware of his slow decapitation.

As the executioner's assistant stood by with a second sword, the executioner unsheathed his instrument. It was bright and shone with a high polish. It was razor sharp. It is forbidden by the Koran to make the prisoner suffer needlessly or in any way that is not prescribed by religious law. Even animals must be butchered with one quick slice of the throat; no sawing; so that the suffering is minimized.

Holding the sword casually, the man approached the Arab on the other side of the Nigerian. He was the farthest from me. Probably the man would raise the sword over his head and bring it down in a sweeping blow, ensuring a clean cut.

He should also have to sidestep his own swing to avoid burying the sword in the concrete or in his own knee.

The prisoner was in a kneeling position, head bowed, leaning slightly forward. The similarities to Muslim prayer struck me; calm ritual, total submission. Now it just looked so vulnerable, so sadly meek. The executioner lay his hand gently on the man's neck and made him lean further forward so that his neck was extended. Again the prisoner complied the way a small boy does when the barber gently adjusts his head to clip the back of his neck.

Casually the executioner raised the sword and, without the slightest hesitation or drama, whipped it down.

A red meaty blot spouted where the man's head had been, like a bloody period. The slightest sound reached us, crisp and wet. Two gouts of blood shot, at intervals, from the neck. I couldn't take my eyes away and was only just aware of the shock of black hair rolling just six inches from the body. The body simply went slack and softly pitched over, the legs seeking to relax from their bunched position. A great pool of blood ran out. So easy. I checked myself for my reaction but felt nothing.

Quickly the executioner stepped over to the Nigerian, and gently pushed him forward so that his head and neck were extended beyond his knees. A casual sweep-not even a follow through. The Nigerian's head flopped to the ground and rolled a few inches. A larger man, his body keeled forward and sideways and the legs pushed back. His shoulders pushed from the top of his loose garb and he lay in a fetal position, slumped on one shoulder as if resting in the sun. His neck was ragged red and with two or three great pumps the blood pooled on the concrete.

The Nigerian was nearer and I could see the humanness of his body and how it lay down. I looked back at the Arab and the reality began to sink in. Nothing had changed. They were completely human, laying along the concrete, legs slowly pushing out and straightening. If you didn't look to the neck it was just as if they were settling themselves into a more comfortable position on the concrete slab. The illusion of life sickened me. They were so human, but one sweep of the arm had changed something. Beyond the brute obvious I couldn't tell what. Were they really dead? They didn't look like it. I felt afraid and empty.

The strict social control scared me. Calm and organized, everyone cooperated including me. But, these men were criminals. Why, why, why would anyone ever smuggle drugs into Saudi Arabia? Maybe they were just too stupid to live. Even worse, perhaps they hadn't smuggled anything. Don't think about that now.

Reasoning had been impossible from the beginning. But now, though I still wasn't thinking, I was aware of a growing sense of horror, and fear and disgust; of rejection. The third man had waited the longest. It doesn't seem right to be in such a vulnerable position and be treated so gently and not receive some mercy or grace, if only by a quick resolution. I guess murderers should be struck down but what of the humans capable of executing them? By necessity, this executioner was so good, so gentle and efficient.

The executioner walked to the Saudi and again gently, leaned him over, with a hand on the back of his neck. But then he walked back to the corner of the slab with his sword outstretched as if to hand it to his assistant. What is this? Is he switching swords? I forgot that the family could grant a reprieve; could forgive a fellow Muslim his transgression against them.

The Saudi was a big man. How could he stand it? He was so much flesh and blood. Why didn't he get up or object? After the executioner's touch, he had to be waiting with his heart pumping furiously. He had to be waiting, waiting, waiting. It was a hideously cruel moment. But it was a hesitation of only five seconds at most. An eye for an eye. There was no reprieve from the family. An older man summarily waved with the back of his hand; do it. The executioner took two steps, steadied the Saudi again and stepped back to raise the sword. Two touches. It was too much. The Saudi must be thinking, God, God, God, just do it or don't do it, let it be done.

Perhaps also sympathetic, the executioner, after steadying the man, stepped to him and almost "put" the sword to his neck, as if he couldn't get it there fast enough. Or, as if he had forgotten a small detail at the office and had turned back to quickly complete his task. A shallow cursory blow, dropped almost level to the Saudi's neck; blade meeting flesh near the handle. It didn't seem to have enough momentum, enough swing.

His weighty head dropped to the concrete and rolled away. The man lurched upwards drunkenly as if to stand.

The man was too big to just go to sleep and he had waited too long. There were bits of tendon and bone in the neck. Instead of a great pumping gush of blood, two arteries, thin in the distance, stiffened and flicked out of the gaping neck. Blood shot in two thick streams as the body, too long to unfurl, fell sideways and pumped rhythmically. I couldn't look away, and the blood wouldn't stop pumping; two seconds, four seconds - ten.

I listened, shocked, then offended, as the crowd calmly clapped their approval. But justice had been served and all Muslim society was cleaner and safer for the moment. It wasn't a jeering clap, it was approval of a justified act. But still, afraid of these people, I insisted to myself that I not clap, like a powerless, defensive child. It was the only resistance I felt brave enough to offer. And I was not any better for it. I couldn't take my eyes off of the Saudi who continued to pump blood, as if shooting it desperately at his severed the head. I thought, please don't be thinking. Please don't live, stop it, rest. There is no hope, don't feel, don't pump. He was too dead to live, too alive to die.

I forced myself to look away and around. Three humans lying on the concrete, ordinary in every way except for their separated heads scattered near their bodies. Their clothes remained basically clean and their body positions natural and restful. I thought, they can't be comfortable like that, lying around on the concrete.

Men came, the ambulance pulled up, and they hurriedly straightened out the bodies. The men pulled the first two bodies onto stainless steel trays that puddled the blood and laid the heads with them. The guards pushed at the crowd. I didn't understand their Arabic but it was obvious that, justice completed, ogling was not allowed. I looked again at the Saudi. He was still pumping, but weaker. I'd better leave now. I turned to push back through the crowd that had pressed behind me at the top of the steps. People searched my face for the Westerner's reaction.

David looked inquiring too but I refused to let them see any regard for their little ceremony.

"Are you ready to go?" he asked.

"One minute."

David's friend had brought us water and I took a bottle and pushed back to the top of the steps, brazenly chugging the cold liquid, re-saturating my dehydrated body. I felt extremely aware of the gulping of my throat. My body seemed obscene. Suddenly being alive felt almost absurd or offensive.

Though very weak, the Saudi's body was still pumping small splatters of blood to the concrete in front of his chest where he lay sideways with his raw neck, an abrupt bloody blotch, aimed at me. I felt dizzy and sick but it would be like abandoning him if I left him there, not quite void of life. I can't look away as long as his terrified heart beats. He must have been terror stricken and full of adrenaline. Empty and afraid, I turned away as the blood slowed to occasional splutters. I didn't want to leave him but the soldiers were pushing and really rousing people now. He won't suffer if I leave. They are just large mounds of meat now. Nothing matters for them now. It's the rest of us who have to go on knowing.

As I walked away, all the kindness I had been shown in the country, sat like a cold rock in my stomach. I felt weak, alone and unprotected. I didn't deserve protection. They were much more sure of God than I was. And if God was that strict, what chance did I have? Or if these people were operating on their own, still what chance did I have?

Walking along the fence to the car we stepped over wet tea bags and empty biscuit wrappers strewn on the ground. As we pulled away, a hazardous materials tanker truck was pressure washing the blood of the sinners off the slab. They were cleansed and erased in a wet foamy spray.

Driving home, I boisterously agreed with whatever David and his friends said. Finally, I drew the line when they suggested we go watch them sew the heads back on at the cemetery. It wasn't necessarily respect for the dead, although I still felt a compulsion to protect them. It was me; I needed someone to sew my head back on.

"That's enough for me." I said, a big American in a little car, one small scared speck in a vast dry desert of indifference.

A B J E C T I V E S

P A U L T H O M A S

The foibles of fables, coined in cliché
Conundrums quantum, forever in aspic
The dribbles and tirades, vivid in PK
The maudlin exploits, of congenital fantastic.

The melodic charms, of grossly endemic
On a fertility cruise, to almost ejaculate
The eunuch styled purpose, dreaming of epidemic
Full as a goog, when it's time to evacuate.

Iconoclasm and elastoplasts
Totems of tourniquets, to stop the floods
Rhetoric and a propped up prick
Allowing the wind, to greet the mast.

Rosarch tests, and silicon breasts
Mountains derived, from mayhem
Connubial bliss, upon the abyss
Matches that thrived, in Salem.

Merely stepping, when what was needed was a hop
Not understanding, all life's ruses
Selecting a hot stake, instead of a cold chop
Forgetting the wisdom, of the stooges.

B A S E T E N

M E L I S S A A T H U L L E N

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The number ten is a handbag, a doctor's black stachel.
Ten fruits growing on a limb, purplish-brown,
the shade of deep bruises, hung like an egg carton
(long rows, two by two), balanced by their pale wicks
like teats on the belly of a speckled cat.
Not like apples, which give to the stretching hand,
which make their way to the basket.
The doctor's bag, the leather, the clasp,
it rises in solemn time, engulfs the pendulous
purpling fruits, closes over the limb with a quiet click;
takes the egg-fruits in their ripe formation,
takes the bruised wicks, takes the shining bald air,
takes the quiet of a finished growth, and opens again
to claim nothing inside, black and solid,
the bottom facing up to a cocked eye.

C L A U S T R O P H O B I A

C H E R Y L A T O W N S E N D

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Sometimes
you walk into a room
that you don't really
want to enter
But you're there
You don't want to be
but you're there
You look at the windows
and the door you came
in through You look
for any way out and
you panic You worry
that when you do
finally get out that
not everything will
be as it was when
you walked in
Into that room
Into that space
Into his arms

R O S E

B U D S

M E L A N I E

W A S H I N G T O N

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pricks blood from an already stricken wound
disorganized minds filled with nonsense and lies
when a war starts in your soul that you can not
control
when you lose sense of your own emotions
when battles are being fought were there are no
winners
your every waking moment is controlled by someone
else
their reactions are what makes your actions
pricks of blood from an already stricken wound
when you realize that the war inside of you
will never and can never end
when that
that finally dreadfulness passes over you
then and only then
can you and will you ever
know how i feel