

free swim

MICHELLE GREENBLATT

2005 SCARS PUBLICATIONS CHAPBOOK



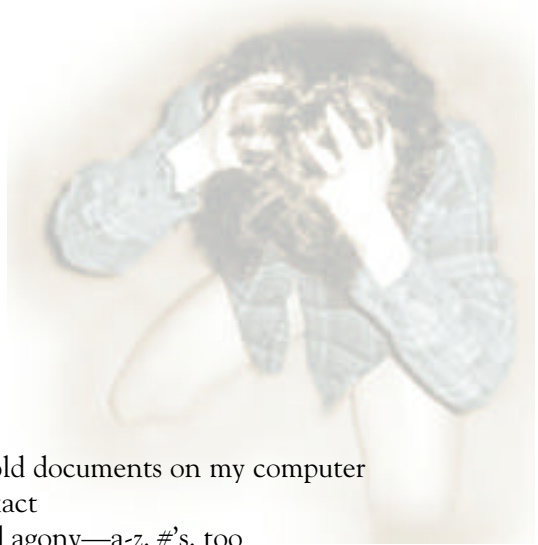
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NOTE: THE YEAR THE PIECE WAS WRITTEN IS LISTED IN THE HEADER OF THE PAGE



*For my mother, my North Star.*



going thru old documents on my computer  
537 to be exact  
alphabetized agony—a-z, #'s, too  
I'm weeping, scratching at my face. this,  
for a chapbook or 2.  
the dark life of a poet, Ha.  
make a poem of that.

# FREE SWIM

Ste. Agathe,  
field trip

we peered  
into the church marked  
*forbidden place* by our parents,  
pale wooden seats in three rows of  
two long benches each; white  
candles whispering tiny prayers  
towards columns lined  
in black reaching for  
the domed sky—

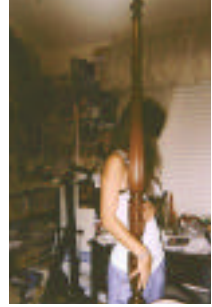
no prayer was said—

then picnicked by Lac de Sables: sandwiches out  
of paper bags, half-melted cheese between  
our teeth as we wandered  
around the beige sandy shore, clutching  
our boxed apple juices, trying  
not to be too bored, watching  
birds fight over the bread we scattered

when we got back to camp we  
kayaked, our boats cutting  
the water like red and yellow  
crayolas lashed  
against blue  
then floated, paddling in the warm  
patches of water, playfully splashing  
each other, sputtering, laughing,  
Free Swim:

then your hands  
underwater while they weren't  
looking

when we all went  
swimming



# COFFEE SHOP

*to Stan, the man with the brown briefcase*

coffee shop:

cracked beans scattered  
on dingy yellow floor, square tiles dusted  
with forgotten  
sprinkles, non  
dairy creamer.

at one table,  
a man, hunched over  
paperwork pulled  
from his briefcase bulging  
with memos and deadlines, his head  
surrounded by a miasma  
of smoke and contemplation.

cigarette he holds,  
forlorn in its forgotten  
presence, curls its hazy fingers in  
filmy caress around his face.

he writes,  
I am alive.  
I can hear the coffee brewing, behind  
here there  
is a dumpster where uneaten pastries  
go. I can  
taste whipped cream disintegrating  
on my tongue. I am  
alive. when  
I blink, I can  
see the open  
and close of things.







## OPPOSITE EYES

our opposite eyes peer  
at, never into, each  
other:

what holds us together, fucking.  
it should be more  
complicated, given the years  
we spent dancing,  
yet

promises still spill over  
your lips easy as  
saliva. i swallow waves  
of nausea, strange  
slimy seas:

the ambush of your  
body, fused limbs too  
warm for any question  
to form.

we explode  
across the room  
like universe, cacophony of  
light, body, the color  
and texture  
of the infinite and forgotten.

## LEAKING

I'm leaking all over  
 Ft Lauderdale                    spilling  
 onto the roadsides    sloshing around  
 bars   looking  
 for your face

bell-jarred by memories

led always to the oblique  
 goings but    pedantic  
 distortions of water    lucent  
 wide   among lies  
 so tender my    flesh prepared  
 to enter sleep,   now this  
 version

thick like  
 honey   moist like  
 ocean   tight like  
 time

is undone  
 unstitched  
 unsealed  
       for   you



# OUTSIDE WITH PANDORA

*for Pandora*

Open the door, I said, It's fine,  
It's only raining. You can let me in; I won't scream.  
I don't even have scissors.

But you didn't come; it began  
to pour. I could hear Pandora mewling at the door;

I could see the television flickering. I peered  
through your window, saw  
a new blanket on your bed, the eyes  
of my memories looking  
up at me but not  
you. You weren't anywhere,  
although the sound

of your phone cut  
off mid-ring as I stood  
there helpless, dripping.

\*



I wonder if I imaged you,  
switchblade eyes, rimmed red,  
bright and loose as raspberry  
jam

but I dreamed  
last night of a sudden  
pain, like a hacked down  
tree, like blood  
being pulled

from starved  
veins, months  
upon months suddenly  
crumbling

beneath aching,  
icy  
undersides of quiet.

# A MEDITATION

Under open silence where certainty is impossible. Agony of doubt.  
How do I surrender to the impossibly of not knowing?

Descartes: *belief is certain*  
*if not logically possible to doubt its truth.*

Melt down love into some sort of categorical imperative, as Kant would have it, has its questions. How can I be satisfied with skepticism?

Direct realism makes stability of love crumble, gates to various dimensions open. Everything bleeds, no doubt; never thought this much.

Methodical doubt, all too common when one examines the science of a relationship.

*You ruined us.*

I can be certain that I exist and then be certain in turn that you exist but cannot draw the conclusion that we existed together.

I built foundations on falsehoods. Descartes would have said I let power and destruction fuse to become you.

I believed in what I felt; I confess.

I may never be able to prove it as false.

Hope is a powerful thing;  
even when the grounds to deny what is in front of us are there.

Clarity is hazy at best.

# 6TH SHOT OF CUERVO

wind licks the pavement  
scuffs the earth with its sandpaper  
tongue  
the fossils stir  
deep w/in the soil  
the bells ring  
in silent harmony  
the music weeps  
for your solo departures.

I'm drinking at 3:49 p.m.  
I've been erased  
& it hasn't been easy

now your hands  
are on her  
I wonder  
if she cries  
like I did  
when you touched me

I am not drunk yet



*-previously published in children churches & daddies v142, November 22, 2004*

## MAKE YOU INTO AN ANGEL

birthed from your web of starlight  
worming its way through my clogged gardens  
then out through  
the veins feeding my heart,  
jammed with snow;  
the fear shrank at first then  
a small cry escaped,

which you somehow heard,  
miles away. you took your time  
plucking roses rimmed  
with black, eyes of my dead child,

bringing crates of rotted cherries in your arms  
and ambled towards me, smiling.

how long did we lie there before you changed?  
i don't remember you turning to marble, only the cool  
surprise of your hardened skin under  
my unsuspecting fingers, still softened with sweat and  
expectations of sky.

foolish of me to think i could save  
crumbling skies, paralyzed suns;  
stupid to try and chisel scars  
off your face,  
to make you into an angel.

# BEYOND THE MOON

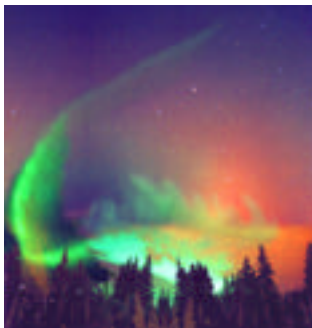
I know I have reached  
a point that goes beyond  
the moon,  
(praying to it) when I whisper conversations into your  
non-existent skull:

your name is mine; we fused into the sky,  
out here by the fire,  
shivering.

when dreams of the desert to haunt me long into  
the morning—  
when I caress your cheeks again, while you are  
sleeping—

I erect buildings in the cold shadow of memory  
having been fucked into dust  
lying limp on the ghosts of plaid sheets

sheathing my brain, leaving shells of  
opaque color,  
all the while wondering,  
*where are you.*





## BURNED SPOON

the bottles of cough  
syrup began to accumulate,  
Sambuca, shot glasses

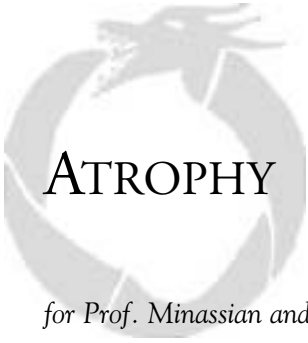
subjected to that  
sentence, *I love*  
*you*. How  
risible. The monster  
of tomorrow and  
tomorrow snatched  
you away—

I could lie  
to myself until the tinfoil  
was burned  
smelled sweet, like candy

until little baggies  
were halfheartedly  
hidden under  
my English  
textbooks. I almost  
laughed  
then,

until I ate cereal with a burned spoon





# ATROPHY

*for Prof. Minassian and for Ryan, who hated this poem*

the air stays stagnant over the  
the embalmed city fighting for breath  
people trampled trashed scrambling in the streets  
for scraps of bread on the wrecked ground  
the barren homes of the helpless, hopeless  
struggling; the in-betweens of every day  
in-and-out breathing, fighting for  
foodlovebreath the avoidance of  
snakes  
in the bedroom and rats  
in the kitchen the ignorance of the trees  
keeping their branches raised  
shrugging saying, this is not my fault  
and the moon fat with indifference  
looks down with a certain  
small, aloof smile.

*-previously published in down in the dirt 11/04, v015*



# SUICIDE SIDEWALKS

to C.A.

past the pond sealed  
with algae down  
on Oakland Park Boulevard and State Road 7  
where the children play  
in the tattered streets  
in front of their bruised homes  
with a deflated ball  
on suicide sidewalks  
gutted by pot-holes  
and long dead fathers—courage, her face  
shows courage,  
and years, hollowed out by  
a dead and dying family,  
a house unbuilding itself,  
deconstructing under the pinch of a needle,  
a last daughter collapsing  
in the bathroom, eyes rolling back  
in pleasure. mother's slow stride,  
her eyes, caving from the inside out,  
destitute drags on her cigarettes, trapped  
in America the tragic,  
dreaming of America the magic,  
imagining a world where her daughter  
will eat instead of feed,  
praying for a place where her dead daughter  
is still alive,  
sitting on the worn sofa, suturing  
all her wounds.  
to have enough life to go living,  
to have enough stars so that  
she doesn't need a sky—  
she gets down on her knees  
and she prays and she weeps  
and she breathes raggedly.  
She is hungry but sold her food stamps

for money so she could pay  
for her living daughter's last  
uninsured hour long stay  
in the hospital.

(Charcoal)

She watches  
as the children play  
in the tattered streets  
in front of their bruised homes  
with a deflated ball  
on suicide sidewalks  
guttled by pot-holes  
children play  
in front of the their bruised homes  
with a deflated  
ball on suicide sidewalks  
guttled by pot-holes and long  
dead fathers.



*-version previously published in down in the dirt 12/04, v16,  
and was reprinted in The Mad Swirl at [www.madswirl.com](http://www.madswirl.com).*

## CHEVAL-DE-FRISE

veiled threat behind  
your body,  
barbed block of ice

(cold mountain,  
permafrost forming,  
slithering up  
skeletal trees,

your limbs)

various opiates sketching  
ivory paint over your  
sallow face,

clock counting  
onetwothreefourfive onetwo  
three as sun rises cold, bright on  
this night which will have no morning.

2001  
4:56 a.m.  
and long  
dead fathers.

## OVERFED



1.

trudging thru the greenery, sodden remembrance  
of you, the stagnant puddles and old leaves muted brown,  
weight of the forest on my stomach.



I am full. what can I say?  
I was overfed.

2.



twisted beams of darkness: a crumbling statue leaning  
toward a sliver of sunlight, burning embers of twilight  
in her eyes / the statue is me / but not the eyes

3.

I am with you  
I have watched you sleep  
heard our hearts pound  
together as one organ

drowning in the same blood

*-version previously published in children churches & daddies v142, November 22, 2004*



## BOULEVARD OF AGONY

It appears as it's appeared before. The scarred ghettos, the pocked streets; I am walking into the caves of the trashed projects, straight into the hearts of the crack addicts on the street corners, their money floating above the sidewalks, bodies robbed, empty heart chambers echoing. The streets flower with pain.

If I walk down a boulevard of agony,  
if I talk cautious steps upwind,  
I will still be sniffed  
out, my blonde hair,  
my blue eyes

I will hear the sounds of  
the mothers and children screaming;  
I will fail to describe it.  
I will fail as they are beaten down,  
domestic agony bound behind locked  
doors, three, four, five  
weeping children, now grown, striding



down Opalocka with Smith and Wessons  
loaded. In their skulls,  
their eyes are opening.  
While they sleep, their eyes remain  
wide, watching  
in the dark for allies or strangers,  
for policemen, for roaches traveling  
through the cracks  
in the walls and scuttling on the tiles  
of their dingy one bedroom apartments.

The families gather around  
the single 19" T.V. They huddle,  
watching the politicians speak nothing  
of politics; they shred USA today  
to start the fire in the fireplace,  
which bakes the thin cold air  
that circulates through their  
small home.



*-previously published in down in the dirt, 11/04 v15*

# UNPLUCKED

teetering on the edge  
of february,  
frosted glass and  
stone, those eyes unplucked, petrified

wood, no eternal ocean will forgive us  
our trespasses, sins, this round  
sensate diction provocatively  
poetic and turning

a corner, squaring off the cemetery  
where they lie; by this time their skin  
rotting off their bones,  
their eyes gone big and scabrous

how's the girl, you ask me, meaning,  
how are you— if you don't emerge looking  
crazed but feeling sane  
mending edges

with the saliva, blood, flesh  
of the sunrise like  
the insides of a peach ripped out  
leaving furry, wrinkled skin.



# JE ME SOUVIENS

between dream and nightmare  
 I drink away pain,  
 when looking at the three pictures I have of you,  
 two unsigned cards,  
 (stunning that wreckage precious that crash)  
 mistakes of Orlando  
 how very little poetry I wrote, how little else is salvageable,  
 (run, baby, run)  
 your cat who ran away from your cold fingers,  
 two of us scratching at your door  
 too many  
 minutes hours days *je me*  
*souviens* so many times you held me  
 and summertime was in your eyes.



# LETTER TO JASON

I woke to you fucking,  
which was fine. I wasn't asleep, not in the technical sense—  
maybe the right word is distracted. I looked  
down at myself and saw a pegboard,  
painted blue like the ones given to us in preschool, with  
the little round pegs we  
were supposed to jam in the holes to further our  
cognitive development.

I felt you try to fill me up,  
you with your black curly hair and  
Jose Cuervo tongue. I thought:  
*allow a little perspective. you're just  
another brown peg, you sweat on my face,  
you don't even fit right.* and I resented your smile:  
empty, like a vase with no flowers.

I thought: *this could be the culmination  
of something important.* a revelation,  
peg people whirling by in an endless sequence,  
the decoding of the message that became so  
blatantly clear as you licked the side of my neck:  
*stop this.  
become whole.*

I pondered this as you moved— not like  
you'd notice I was doing  
anything but you—it was the principle  
of that caught  
my attention this time.

My thoughts drifted.  
I wondered if you would tell people  
I was a bad kisser: I remember clearly thinking  
I really like the smell of boy,  
despite my fastidious ramblings you  
really weren't all that bad,  
just mostly useless.

# SUMMER CHASE AT WINTER PARK

we follow cement paths paved with  
open lips of  
silent women, scattered  
scabs and flower  
petals, soothed by incessant  
smoke and liquor circulating through cool  
apartment air shafts;

we know—

everything comes  
together perfectly to build  
the brick castle  
the marble museum  
the pictures of teens frozen in  
aching pornography.

as we cross the bridge we  
glance back at dried vomit,  
used condoms,  
empty bottles of beer  
cigarette butts;

we know—

we could stop now.  
now is when  
we could end and begin  
all over again,  
but

here there are only two seasons  
(tequila or vodka);  
down on Semoran where girls part their  
thighs for a warm tongue and the drumbeat just  
beats on  
and on.

## NIGHTS LIKE THIS

nights like this run  
down my throat,  
into my stomach  
but I'm alive  
because on nights

like this you feel  
like home, except  
warmer.  
except colder:

the mattress with the plaid sheets,  
still stained from before—  
the nights I spent waiting,  
the days

without oxygen  
without words—

soon one of us will awaken  
to find that one of us has changed  
although neither of us will know who  
is awake  
or who is different

we will get drunk, both of us,  
but separately

vomit into plastic bags  
or out car windows  
and be stricken  
with homesickness,  
like a fever.

## ON THE VERGE OF SOLITUDE

never by writing it down did I make him come back  
 I, at the edge of turbulence, at the vortex of it all—,  
 still on the verge of solitude in the heat of summer.

always tight-throated & uninformed  
 haunted like an apparition in every dark corner—  
 never by writing it down did I make him come back.

the taxis screeching around the corners  
 the raw streets crammed with cars and buses—  
 still on the verge of solitude in the heat of summer.

the rhythm disrupted:  
 between the first sign of rapture and last cry of regret—  
 never by writing down did I make him come back.

at times doors would open, men and women  
 would annex themselves to one another  
 still on the verge of solitude in the heat of summer.

his hands have already forgotten mine as  
 my mouth trembles to define him—  
 never by writing it down did I make him come back—  
 still on the verge of solitude in heat of summer.

# WHITE WALLS

Made sense, you said, to bite  
a hole  
in that white wall. You were drunk  
at Chris's. For  
a change. Sixteen.

Sam on white tile floor  
white bathroom  
with blonde girlfriend,  
you watching  
television, sitting on white toilet  
seat, knees in black jeans  
drawn to hollow white  
chest.

(I had been trying to get  
your attention  
all night, but bathroom  
television  
was top priority.)

(*Love me, love me*, begs  
the puppy.)

Unhappy with the commercial  
playing,  
you sunk your teeth  
into brand new white wall,  
tasted fresh white plaster, spat.

I landed on the floor  
in wet chunks.

## VILLA'S

Humid Florida Summer  
 Night, Villa's (University  
 Blvd. Mexican-Cuban  
 Restaurant you loved)—  
 We ran out of things to say.  
 I was starving  
 Myself again but  
 Had a Diet Coke  
 Traditional two tacos.  
 Was picking at  
 Pintos and cheese  
 With stained fork.

Looked at you under dark lashes,  
 Painted lids, said, "So? Say  
 Something." You were flying sideways,  
 Looping in wide circles, further, further  
 Away.  
 You said,  
 "Something. No,  
 I'm just kidding, Blue."

I knew what you meant. Your cobalt  
 Detachment,  
 My stone cerulean eyes looking out  
 From bone pale face, pleading,  
 Shrieking through  
 Azure sky,

I used to protest,  
 But I loved nights  
 At Villa's, us, just laughing.

Drove to your  
 Yellow apartment building  
 After dinner. Lay  
 In your lovemegodplease bed,  
 My chin resting on your chest,  
 Your breath smelling of plantains.

Knew it was over, though you held  
 Me close as always.



## LIVE LIKE PLASTIC

wild with starlight  
(mangled, unfolding)  
fear cracks open like december,  
a million trees under diverging sky

overhead and below the noise quietly retracts  
survival is buried deeply inside  
the thin line connecting ocean to horizon

whatever crimes I have committed,  
whatever larcenies, trespasses,  
now holding you is trying to catch the wind with a butterfly net.

the hours/days churn in the cement mixer of  
time, you subside,  
slip out of view, leave no fingerprints

only a note pinned on my body to teach me  
a lesson. I wake  
and read it:

*Michelle,  
this is how you live when nothing has  
a container, when you live like liquid and do everything  
to hide it.*

# acknowledgements

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## Images from Scars Publications

Cover: Claire at a gazebo.

Page 2 (Table of Contents): images of churches in Bruxelles, Rome, Paris and Luxembourg.

Page 4: image photographed in 2000 in Downingtown, Pennsylvania

Page 7: Eugene, photographed in Chicago, Illinois.

Page 9: Katie (not Pandora), through a doorwat.

Page 10: height difference photographed in Naples, Florida.

Page 12: "The Burning" photograph with liquor bottles taken un Urbana, Illinois.

Page 16: Serpent drawn 1988-1992. Trees photographed 06/09/03.

Page 21: Top plant image photographed in San Juan. Second image is of trees, photographed in Gurnee, Illinois. The tird (bottom) image is an edited image of a Greek statue of a woman with a flute, photographed in Shanghai, China.

Page 22: Two photographs taken of old and new construction in Shanghai, China.

Page 23: A street corner in Paris.

Page 25: John Galt on a bookshelf.

Page 31: Top: compter-generated rain from editing shower image. Bottom: Beach and stormy waves in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Page 32: Lori, photographed in Michigan.

Back Cover: a silo at Paradise Island

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*(author supplied the images on page 5)*



# free swim

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**Compact Discs:** *MFV* the demo tapes, *Kuypers* the final (*MFVInclusive*), *Weeds and Flowers* the beauty & the desolation, *The Second Axing* Something is Sweating, *The Second Axing* Live in Alaska, *Pettus & Kuypers* Live at Cafe Aloha, *Pointless Orchestra* Rough Mixes, *Kuypers* Seeing Things Differently, *SD/SD* Tick Tock, *Kuypers* Change Rearrange, *Order From Chaos* The Entropy Project, *Kuypers* Six One One, *Kuypers* Stop., *Kuypers* Masterful Performances mp3 CD, *Kuypers* Death Comes in Threes, *Kuypers* Changing Gears.