

#### MATTHEW GUZMAN

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The blood tells me, of feudal land owners, my ancestors in silk robes upon their quick horses. Four by four, the patter of shoed hoofs ride in rhythmic beats. I train my ears and hear them speak through me.

I.

#### FREEDOM FROM MY MOTHER

She lets me stay out until whenever Last night I heard her stumble to the sound of breaking glass Mom never asks about my homework

Two weeks ago, Nicole finally let me see her naked I found out later that she sucked some 24-year-old-dude off right before So I drank a fourth-of-a-bottle of Wild Turkey & tried to forget the outline of her body

Mom lets me stay out until whenever Last night I thought about outer space Red-eyed & floating into the hunger of distance

Her father, the monster under her bed His father, found hanging in his barn Mom gives me my freedom

Up on the roof, my hands are pillows I paint traces connecting glowing dots & think about if I'd ever have kids.

# HER HANDS

are curling, bending into unnatural silhouettes. The acid eating her joints, while she sleeps, as she feels pain turn numb.

In pictures she holds me high above her head in a full body laugh; in pictures she flings a softball from one hip –

those hands, not as they are, but as they were. She doesn't recognize herself *most days*.

Most days it's the bottle, and not the one from the baby pictures. The dark long-necked ones, the ones that gather together and jingle like trash bag sleigh bells on Christmas Eve.

Her hands shake in the morning as she lights that first cigarette. I have the photograph in my mind, one deep breath, a cloud of grey-blue smoke, and then the picture disappears.

# THE MECHANIC

Lingering second day cigarette smoke reminds me of you. Looking so cool, a half-naked girl inked on your immense bicep, your cig clamped between your teeth, huddled in grease under a perpetually broken, shit brown Dodge.

"Junior...Jun-ior! Hand me that wrench...No! Not that one, the other one. Are you fucking retarded?!" Those eyes pumping with gasoline, a sparkplug for a heart. Engine running, broken and explosive.

Skiddish and shy out in public, His head down, hands in pockets, speaking softly. But...between private shaking walls, Master. With a wife not old enough to drive, and one boy, quivering from His slightest word, He idling until the next explosion.

Now, those stained inch thick callous hands reside in that Dodge, his own world of: sleeping behind department stores, bathing under rest stop facets. A grease slathered, broken down, Father.

# FAMILY BECOMES OVERRATED WHEN IT COMES TO CELEBRATIONS INVOLVING TURKEYS

Preparation the night before includes the creation of stuffings, mounds of bread and spice to be jammed into the business end of some unlucky fowl at o'five-hundred the following morning. Demonic eggs whipped with pickled cucumber and mayo then sprinkled with the most famous spice to emerge from Hungary in the last millennium.

Tomorrow will be like every other year, Grandma will come with her wildgrey teased hair and bad teeth, smiling while she slyly asks for another "loan" from my mother, knowing good and well that she will never pay her back. Mom will slip her a hundred when no one is looking. Grandpa will be there sweat-stained armpits and all, always ready for any occasion involving food, dowsing everything with Tabasco sauce and ketchup, haphazardly disregarding his obesity and diabetes, munching down his remaining dignity, smacking his jaws, little bits of mash and green bean casserole flying from his emasculation while he asks for third-helpings or eagerly inquires about dessert. Then sometime during the meal Grandpa will inevitably start crying because he will feel that he is being ignored. I will eat and try not to say much, thinking about the luckiest one at the table, and how that morning I had stuffed three pounds of bread and spice up its ass.



I see a squirrel trotting a high wire act along power lines strung between trees, her small baby watches from a close branch – fear holds him in place.

The Alstromeria bulbs that Mother gave me the spring before she passed have just started to sprout from the ground. New life – that I was scared to plant for years.

The mother, patient, clucks encouragement. It's not just the art of letting go, but a lesson in trust. He grips a firm footing and soars – they trot across the line together.

Sun oranges will mix with aqua skies, vermillion and slender green bloom and fill my garden. Letting go – trust. MATTHEW CUZMAN

### JUST LIKE THE MOVIES

Reading: Walden by Thoreau

Listening to: The sharp shoowps cars make as they pass a local coffee shop patio

Rising action: Telephone rings

Climax: "Hello, is this Matt? Matt this is John, a chaplain for the Bexar County Fire Department. Matt there's been an accident with your step-father.

Falling action: Driving a road driven many times before, silence. Turned the radio off as not to associate any song or music with this particular drive.

Crime scene report: one man, 81 y.o.a., D.O.A., found outside by wife, gunshot wound to head, 357 magnum, suicide.

Resolution: Endure.

#### Taking Out Stumps

There, dug deep from hundreds of years, an old oak stump. It gave me such an epic battle, Achilles versus Hector, my aging father standing at my side.

I plunged the axe with all the power he had passed onto me. Lunge, after fierce lunge, my steady opponent looking unscathed, almost laughing with silence. The battle carried on through many hours, my father tirelessly by my side.

Victory! One final heave and my worthy rival split in two. My chest beating the train's heavy song, salt dripping into my eyes.

"You did it!" my father said, patting me on the shoulder. We smiled – his face drooping with age, my face flushed and wet from battle.

Tomorrow, my father will be lying dead on the ground, only a few yards from this very spot. Sleeping, an ocean of claret staining a shadow once cast by a threehundred-year-old oak.

Sitting by a hole left in the ground, the wind suddenly picks up – I hear his voice, feel his hand on my back, leading me through the empty spaces we create. II.

## Soothsayer with Oil From Jerusalem

I went to a fortune teller, a mystical woman cloaked in a thin faded moo-moo, her mustache of grey sprigs like the gnarled twists of an ancient tree.

She spread the cards upon the table – told me about the demons surrounding my love life, said even if I found "the one," it wouldn't last.

She offered to help me – "This is special oil from Jerusalem," she said, "it costs two dollars for every pound you weigh." Yes, for two-hundred-and-sixty dollars she said she could fix everything.

I told her I was a poor man, and then she offered the cure for half-price. I walked out just as I had walked in, damned.

## A PAINTING OF DIONYSUS

We sit outside drinking cheap wine cold, a dirty porch lifted into the canopy of a half-dead oak. I see your forward posture, leaning close, I see wiry jet black nose hairs peeking out, turning your face into some surrealist painting.

Our tongues taste like ash – wild hairs dance to Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers. This wine, fermented grapes, warmness – making you think you've found something special.

Tomorrow is going to be an early morning and neither of us feels the cold house chill. When the sun rises, our hearts somehow know, that one can warm a bed, the same as two.

## MY PASSIONATE MONKEY LADY

You come home covered in bruises, I call them your "leopard spots." You love me like an animal, you feel "it," the beauty of a crawling vine, or a broken and discarded mirror. You help me to see what you see.

My passionate woman, who picks the nose of a sick bird, a bird whose lover has left him. You flutter naked with your hummingbird wings around our apartment – whispering the McCaw lover's call, the deep guttural breathing of various primates. Your smile crosses that which separates species, with feathers in your hair, speaking in a language all your own.

### MUSIC - Sonc #2

Sit by the piano that plays in my memory. Those bluesy tunes

about how happiness "don't take no money." Play a rhapsody again, while I sit drunk

with life, intoxicated by your notes, outstretched to our life on a ten by ten carpet,

dizzy in denouement of the final note. You transferred your power from finger to key,

from key to hammer, hammer to soul. We once bounced free on clouds above

overcasted day-gloom. But now, the apartment is smaller and there is no piano. I traded it for a volume of books,

books I have yet to read. I look at their nice leather covers and try to imagine the music.

## Something of New Year's at Nicht

We sit at a table, drawn close together by a dozen or so drinks.

An illuminated ball drops in downtown San Antonio

from a small television mounted in the corner. I hold my breath as the whole

bar speaks in a single voice – *Three, Two, One!* The band starts to play, *Something in the way…she moves,* 

*attracts me like no other lover.* I stare into her eyes,

she smiles. I often dream of ceremonial balls dropping

> in city centers across the country, but instead of down, they all counted up –

*the days, the hours in a day, the days in a year.* I begin whispering the words to the song,

some into her ear, some to myself.

## Lunch with an Old Friend

Meeting to exchange a formality at a safe place full of people. I see your chest still rashes out red in the heat of your un-air-conditioned car. You've seen me naked, which seems like not so long ago. The discomfort finally subsides and words fill our coffee cups. We console one another with memories – Remember that trip to the beach, those bubbles in our hot tub filled the hotel room and we laughed until our bellies swole.

#### III.

#### INTERSTICE

life without this sort of examination is not worth living... (line 38a) – The Apology

There are no constants, only approximate errors, only the odds for success.

Each of these is filled with interstellar space, infinitely wide or narrow areas of transition, the secrets

of time and distance. Anyone can identify and describe moments of incredible ecstasy.

Most could recognize agony if only in its contrast to delight. Moments in-between, however,

whisper the silence of sunlit honey on a wooden floor.

Floating through the embryonic fluid, nestled in the womb, unable to stow these memories, these

moments in time. For in the womb one has not seen the way shadows dance while sitting under pewter moonlight.

I have dreamt of a time before comparison, like a chicken who knows only the metal wire, the cage.

In the dream my feet melt into the ground, the earth and I become interconnected.

There is neither moan nor laughter, only an incredible silence; cantos of nothingness, the death Socrates

speaks of in his *Apology*, the sleep of blackness which one never shakes. Between dream

and that which is not dream, in-between ecstasy and agony I wait, sitting under an ashen moon,

watching as the clouds move in silence.

# Dinner on a Restaurant's Portico by a Coffee Shop

Bright blue sleeping mat wrapped with a strap of Velcro. Outline of a sideways wallet

imprinted on his left back pocket. I've seen him around this area before. He pauses then looks

up at the sinking of a distant burning star. The air smells of rain forecasting scents of clover and asphalt.

From the tiled portico, I see him hounding through a garbage can and I overhear some woman complaining to her friend.

> "Look at that...see that Martha? These people are everywhere," The other replies, "I know, ain't it a shame."

His clean-shaven cheeks and parted-at-the-side hair no a strand out of place

makes me think that he should be sending grandchildren funny birthday cards with twenty dollar bills stapled inside

or playing gin rummy or watching Wheel of Fortune – instead of washing himself in coffee shop lavatories and searching for temporary sanctuary.

He walks, and is soon covered by streets and traffic. The ladies continue their meal.

I motion for the check, knowing it will be too late to catch him. He's gone.

Leaving the waiter a forty percent tip, a kind of penitence – and a hope for a better tomorrow.



Driving through the night, a need for semi-sour

air, the tar and seagull's song. Locked by land,

the land of a single star. He hears the wind tunnel

of two cracked windows speaking like an anonymous crowd,

one hundred voices synchronized into one static charged

Beethovenesque movement. Sand is near, the crossroads

of sailor, adventurer, misanthrope. All keen eyes upon the sea

and her regal music. The crisp rumble takes him away, riding on a black

segmented ocean. Blue dreams are close now, so close the other wheeled ships disappear,

and he sails alone, with the current, through the night.

# GRACE'S BOWL

Earthen, that coarse wheel turned fragility. He broke two just this week. The faded brown turned tan, a minute precipice forming along the ridge.

This bowl sat patiently waiting for years, in dusty boxes, disturbed a halfdozen times, moving as she moved, transient through attic spaces. The cracking from non-use and neglect, paper-thin scars, like his bourbon breath and foreign lipstick perfumes, almost invisible.

Ashley tells me how Grace kept the dishes for her, the remnants of what didn't shatter along the way.

### VT COMES WITH THE NICHT

Music seeps through the walls Of this small apartment, Headboard smacking in four-four from the unit That neighbors the dinner table. Doing wash, never segregating The whites and the coloreds, Believing in a community Free from the shackles of aesthetics. They scream out, fists in the air, And march from hamper to washer, Washer to dryer, dryer to floor. Thoughts fire like careless bullets in the night -Escaping wisdom, Thinning hair, Joblessness, Existentialism, War and Peace. Utopianisms. How these notes create the soundtrack To whatever comes with the night.

#### THERE SHE LIES DYINC

back twists, hovers in the air, a spasmodic twitch every few seconds in her flanks one exposed, the other hidden under a portly belly moving like a receding tide she is still alive, still breathing, the pain anesthetized by shock – as I load the 410 shotgun invisible birds chirp and my ears fill with heat blood comes five or ten seconds after the ringing, it rolls as I imagine the birth of a new stream cold air mixed with bright red and steam rose then lingered like the moment before early fog burns away.

### Enclist Lesson

We began talking before class, my student told me about how, years ago, he shot someone,

> "Yeah, spent some time in jail. Had to join a gang in there."

Told me about his cholo cellmate who couldn't read, "Yeah, one time he came to

> me with a letter from his wife,... it was all full of dirty-sex-talk, but he didn't care that I read it out loud."

We talked for about an hour – He met a woman, got married, kids, joined the army, wife left and took

the kids, he came back after fighting in a desert to a deserted house.

When we were in class later, I looked over his writing, but

I couldn't tell him that there shouldn't be a space between "heart" and "break."

Because sometimes there needs to be.

# IN A SAN ANTONIO SUPERMARKET

I wander around the fruit displays dodging the cranky old ladies,

the ones that knock on every piece of fruit, and park their carts haphaz-

a rdly horizontal!

Didn't someone write a poem about wandering lonely in a supermarket? Maybe not literally ambulating, but at least metaphorically?

Well, I am literally here because I need bananas and soy milk.

Leave it to the poets who sing mantras or chant in electric day-glow

to summon rich comparison and illusion, the greatest minds of another generation.

I'm just hungry for calcium and potassium, nanners and soybean juice.

The check-out girl smiles and asks if I'd like a toothbrush to go with my purchase today.

Such a strange tag-on sale, but I'm charmed by her smile and innocence so I get a toothbrush, and with thirty-two cents jingling in my right pocket, I bag my groceries and begin to leave.

The girl says - "Wait Sir! Walt will help you out to the car."

"Naw, it's okay I got it, save him for a bearded poet who howls at the moon," I say.

Then I get into my car and float down the Lethe, toothbrush in hand.

# READING AT A BOOKSTORE'S OPEN MIC.

I normally hate these things. Hearing other people Spout off stale similes regarding Cats or the "art of creation." My stuff isn't the greatest, Mostly depressing, and Sometimes involves disturbing Sexual imagery. I'm a poor reader & all the Journals have been quite efficient With sending prompt rejection letters.

The host calls my name, I hold my breath, heart Beating in my throat – "The title of my poem is... The Art of Training Your Bi-Polar Pussy." I forget how the rest goes...

#### MATTHEW GUZMAN

## WAITING FOR THE NEXT REVOLUTION

Not by flood, not by a food shortage, not because of a communist dictator, no, no, the next one will be epic. The messiah will neither appear in a jelly donut, nor on Mount Sinai. It will start subtly, as does everything of importance.

First, the commissioner of baseball will come to his senses and cap all player salaries at a modest but reasonable \$65,000 per year. America's pastime will attempt to act as a furtive paradigm for the reevaluation of values and growth. Then, this same model will waft its way to the game of football; thus, capping all wages at \$80,000 (the slightly increased amount due to the nature of football's more direct physical contact). Soon to follow will be all other major sports such as: basketball, soccer, cricket, rugby, hockey, curling, volleyball, ping pong, golf, and tennis. It will all start in the West and spread through England, Ireland, mainland Europe, Africa, and beyond. The number of professional athletes will diminish at an exponential rate, which will intern result in yearly involuntary "drafts."

Young children will rebel against their parent's incessant pleas to join their school's sporting teams, unconvinced that it will build strong moral characteristics like sacrifice and unity.
The children will ignore their parents, and begin diving into complex subjects such as philosophy, calculus, physics, literature, and history. When you will ask a typical four year old boy or girl what he or she wants to be when grown, you will get things like – "I want to understand the universe much like Steven Hawking." Or "If I could write like Milton,

I would be content." Or "You know, I really don't feel, at least at this time, that I am ready to make such a bold claim – seeing as how much life there is to live, my answer would be a bit trite as well as limiting."

There will be the greatest of schisms and the world will be divided in two. The elders will sit on wicker rocking chairs and reminisce about the good ol'days,

shaking their fists at groups of teens walking by on their way to grassroots meetings discussing Camus

and Existentialism. In these aging rockers a growing void will begin to fill and fill with boredom,

but worse, boredom will quickly turn sour as a carton of milk left in the sun.

Without the distraction of organized sport, the spoiling aging population will have to face that which they overlooked for so long, themselves. No longer will they be able to live vicariously through the diversion of field goals and free throws. They will be no longer able to claim such and such is their team; therefore, left belonging only to the team which can be called nothing else but what it is. Oh, how they will revolt in the beginning – burning and pillaging, raping, molesting, cutting themselves to feel. Oh, they will not give up easily. There will be bonfires again. Books, brochures, pamphlets will be consumed in a flame of wild hatred. At the end of the epic battle, the old era will be devoured by the new. The remaining few from a time so long removed will retreat into the silence, with only their own thoughts echoing tales of the 1975 World Series or the gaming winning goal they saw from the sidelines on a cold October night, still lingering in a space between past and present.

So swing away Revolution, swing away. We've already spent too much time at play.

# **INTERSTICE** MATTHEW CUZMAN

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