Wanton Introversion

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Blind Date

The Roman collar and holey paddle that marked dad's childhood did little to prevent his eyes from poking out his head to admire cheeky bikinis and gossamer bandeau push-ups. Not even my mother's goring elbow could stop his manful wheezings or strained ahem's— Which is why he hands me a flashlight, feigning bona fide gallantry, and says, "Go walk this lovely lady to her car." His eyes flash down, calling my attention to no-show velveteen pants that whisper as she grabs her purse from mom's countertop. Coquettish black pearl lashes beat lazily as she sidles up to the doorframe like a coiled viper, but with a forked tongue that flicks through creamy plum lip-gloss. Twenty-two heavy steps out the front door, we arrive at her car. The street lamp reflects hungry azure eves and rattling satin keys that linger in her palm. Dodging her closed eves and extended lips— She jolts into the fabric of my right shoulder. She pauses. "So, you'll call me, right?" Walking back to the house, I glare at the plum resin staining my shirt. Dad's urging is like a blunt cow prod. But my appetite is for angular jaws and warm robust hands that could massage sour isolation away.

Growing

My Opa nudges the plump tomato away, Its miasmic loamy odor fogs his blue eyes, He ate them like apples before the war, Dusty paunched fruit warmed by sun. "Did I ever tell you about Herr Klostermann? A German who hated Nazis. Ein guter mann. I grew tomatoes for him in the winter. Built a glass house and provided what No one else could. He loved fresh produce." Gaze fixated on the cherubial fruit Its entrails like the snot that ran out His nose as bombs dropped around him, Planted in a crater, immovable like yellow Seeds clinging to soggy pitted soil. The stiff uniforms seized him, Cracked dirty hands locked fast Behind a back hardened by labor, Plants crushed under moonless boots, Ribs purpled by faded batons. "Herr Klostermann stopped them. Ein guter mann. He let me grow my plants." The Panzerspähwagen pealed away, And Opa continued growing tomatoes.

Searchlights in the Cane

Red nigger moon. Sinner! Blood-burning moon. Sinner! Come out that fact'ry door. Jean Toomer

Conical hats flash in his snowy eyes, jumping flames, flowing pallid robes pushing from all sides.

Dragged through razor cane stalks to the factory stained in smoky sweat. Bristling hemp rope taut to a stake.

Rotting boards piled around, swathed in cloying kerosene. Ivory mob cheers black smoke

Acrid with the reek of curly hair. Smoky tendrils borne to the red Moon reflected in his eyes.

Just coals ebbed on that floor, the mob stood shuffling, quiet, and walked out the factory door. *bizcochos*: butter pastries

The guilty is not he who commits the sin, but he who causes the darkness.

Victor Hugo

stepping out the faded pink doorway into a street drawn hoary by a lowering swirling sky

the baker's tight-lipped smile behind me, "¡venga otra vez señor!"

stacked blond pastries discharge yeasty aromas into the smudged street.

a scabby thin girl, shorter than my Nike waist, extends her wasted palm upward

the street crawling in the creases of her life-line, cracked broken ruts

swaying mop-head of ratty hair, curled toes blackened dragging, yawning eyes fixed on my *bizcocho*—

spotted apron tromps past me raises a white dusted hand and beats the black mop into cobbles

a small face rent crimson, wheezing at my feet, I toss down a half-eaten pastry.

White Collar Precipice

I'm as rumpled and frayed as the carpet under my office chair, strands and tufts dragged back and forth by worn plastic wheels and serrated rubber shoes. Hermetically sealed to a productive sixty-four degrees— I'd rather be on the sooty roof in the rush-hour breeze. astride the balmy orange photochemical smog. I could step off. But what should my last words be? I would bellow eternal damnation to my boss or likely to my vacant wife, right before my twirling body punches a crater into the roof of a yellow Crown Victoria cab.

Perhaps, if
there was an outstretched
arm, my focus upon
pink tipped fingers
splayed in anguish and an
infinite scream 0-ing from
a small mouth framed by
billowing black strands
of ebony hair cascading
over a whipping white gown—

I could survive.
I would grapple an overhanging balcony, brushing aside geraniums and pigeons, hop down the fire escape one floor per bound.
But a hero mask won't suit me.
For even eye-holes and flowing tai chi would expose me.

I'd have to get up first.

Manhattan Sleeps

I was gripped to my couch that night. T.V glow flickered a mushroom cloud, A bright flash that lit the New York plight.

Urban maze tumbled into craggy blight, Photos and subways left smoldering. I was gripped to my couch that night.

Terror shook the ground tonight, Clenched eyes, soft gaping wails. A bright flash that lit the New York plight.

City sky bleeding, billowing white, Excludes the sun from charred remains. I was gripped to my couch that night.

Sealed nation stricken with fright, Duct tape windows and wide-eyed masks. A bright flash that lit the New York plight.

I watched them, snuffed in an instant, The city that will always sleep. I was gripped to my couch that night. A bright flash that lit the New York plight.

Mula

(Drug Mule)

The dripping faucet keeps time in prison. That, and three meals of soggy empanadas. Also, best to avoid the children. They Diablo's babies. Better stay away upstairs And make *artesania*. I'm let to Sell to you gringos. My hands help To pass of the time. The doctor, he wants it In my mouth. I do, otherwise I get no good food or outside time. Pretty Colombian girls give more. Nicest rooms upstairs for them, With nicest stove and *platos*. See! She wear those pants for El doctor. Follow close, the stairs make slip.

Why I'm here? *Ay!* Same as Everyone. *Drogas*. I hide balloon of cocaína inside me. They say me bring to Florida. Or I see my daughter no more. Aeroport dogs smell it. Better Locked in Ecuador than Mexico. Women don't live long there. My daughter? She with her padre. Him? Av! He love me no more. Say I too estúpido for him. Say he leave me here ten years Before pay for me leave here. My arte maybe get me out in eight. Been seven years, daughter probly Woman now. Padre no let her call Or mail me. Help when you buy My *artesania*. I stay strong for her. But what do nice gringos know? I watch out metal window for Your plane in sky tomorrow.

Viva la Raza

The stooped figure scoops soil
Into a shovel too long for his small frame.
Sweat darkening his paper towel
Bandana where dirt layers,
Like the ebb of a salty tide.

Luis, where did you cross? He doesn't lean on his shovel to talk, But continues scooping crunchy dirt.

Pues, I cross Arizona desert.
Take three days y two tries.
The migra esmart, ¿sabes?
I hide my face behind my soaked sleeve,

The heat doesn't seem to slow him.

I don't know. I was born here. What was it like crossing? His rhythm is constant as dirt leaps Off of his shovel onto the pile.

I have water bottle, bag
Of tortillas, y bic lighter.
We only move at night so
They no find us. I sew
Work card into pants.
Importante find good coyote.

Tinny rancho music drones out His cracked pocket radio. He whistles Through mismatched tawny teeth.

Es lonely here. Cause My wife, she in Mexico. es que mi pobre corazòn se vuelve loco en sus latidos por ti She understand, I send money. Es good being in Estados Unidos.

The metallic music drifted over us.
Over the orchard fence, over cities
Of SUV's and white teeth. Over
The rusting barbed barricades.
Until it passes through a white
stucco window where mole verde
is tended by a basalt skinned indígena.

Chu ok *guero*? ¡No te aguites! I'm fine. But I've never fought For my country like you have. I was born into uniformed schools, And yearly family vacations,

Into balanced meals and good meds. It's good being born in the U.S. Break. *Carnitas* are on me.

Tree Line

Sunlight streaks through Green leaves blur by As fingers ache to hold Onto a 28 inch bar Fling myself down An opaque hillside Knobs bite into sand Pedal with legs steeped In prickling fire Narrow single-track A red jersey overcome Push faster than them Breath rasping irregular An off-camber trail Weight too far forward Front tire too greedy Fingers squeeze brakes Picked a lousy line Eyes fixed onto an oak Chattering tires try Finding purchase on a trail Far too sandy moving at Such a stupid speed Head tucks down low Shoulder meets bark Helmet greets stiff trunk Ear cries, *vermillion*! Bike stops too fast Lost in a sea of dust Choking on gritty soot Red smudging into Freckled white fabric

Red Jersey goes by Hillside churns rampant Head pounds tempo Just another scratch Jump back on your bike.

Mom's Ukrainian Neighborhood

"Nadia, proshu, get some kobasa sausage at Helena's corner grocery." Bounding down the cold grey street, it takes her 4 small steps for every counted cement sidewalk square. Floating inside the hand-me-down faded warm blue snowsuit, she breaches the bright store entry. Jumping and stretching fingers out to grasp the gut-lined meat on the top shelf, and scrubbing aside her greasy thick brown curls the boys at school called, "immigrant locks!" The nice store lady papa talks so highly of, flashes a toothy yellow smile that smells of pickled herring and garlic. Skipping towards the door, she bumps into a jean blockade made up of scruffy tall stranger. "Sorry little boy," he rasps. His glacier brown eyes bore down, framed by a zigzag smirk. "That's okay sir. Oh, and I'm a girl." "Really?" His meaty hand snaps down and gropes against the fluffy faded opaque fabric. His smirk and retracting hand with coarse hair on the knuckles. confirm the pigtail-obvious claim.

Public Penis

You may be on the bus, or walking down a sidewalk, either way, it must be public. It starts with a whisper, penis.

If your opponent is ready, they will respond in kind; however the rule is, you must mimic the blunt Word, but with greater volume and mettle—how far will you go? Eyes skimming surroundings, he or she will flaccidly whisper, *Penis.*

The preceding exchange stokes the game's vigor for you look your opponent dead in the eyes and articulate, *PEnis*.

The challenge is cemented, for who will dare back down now? Balling their hands into mitts and hoping mother and Jesus aren't in earshot, they exclaim, PENis!

The word trails in the air, but just for a convulsive moment. Knowing the next exclamatory release will draw a few stares, you suspend your lungs, only to loose out a strained howl, *PENIs*!

The public already aware of the potent word repeatedly being thrust into the communal air are flinching from the final deep throated, barrel-chested scream to the phallic God of public, *PENIS!!*

Exhausted after the burst of vocal eruptions, both members are left embarrassed and panting.

Quickly jumping off the next stop or skirting down the sidewalk, they are satisfied, for their mark has been left—at least for a time.

MILF Truck

"What a MILF truck!"
the man next to me yells,
his eyes penetrating
the clouded glass
imagining the ass
in the leather seat.
But the reflective SUV
roared through the yellow,
with all six-point-two liters
broadcasting new money
and grasping class.
Chrome glistened sharply
against a horizon
of moonless paint,
reflecting the world away.

As the exhaust dissipates, my own eyes follow the car. Her ovoid black gasses framed by highlights (too perfect to be taken seriously) poked above a steering wheel clasped by acrylic fingers, exhausted of garish rings (but grudging them anyway).

Why the rush? The sunglasses hid her blossoming crow feet and gravitational folds As she sped away from cold sixty-eight year virility and an unwanted breathing legacy, or so I thought.

A Matter of Time

1.
One hot summer
I rode his sport bike.
Just once. Went one-twenty.
His helmet bayoneted
stiff air. Wrist wrenching
speed. The bike wailed
at 14 thousand rpm's.
My dad never knew.

We attacked the smoky bars. The bottom of his glass winking at the ceiling. "Can't keep up, bro?" Woke up on his dusty couch. Pink thong swaying on bent handle outside his room.

Speedometer clicking, a gasping hood scoop. Beading tires. He tugs the wheel. A screaming Drift. My chest moaning against the satiny harness. Never show fear. Never reach for the handles.

Blaring sparkles pricked our squinted eyes. I dive off the ledge, burst through a cold viscid sheen. He jumps, a back-flip, of course. Coiled body strikes water face first. I swim over, split with laughter. Oh shit. Bleeding Head skewed, kinked.

2.
Two months later,
I push him
to the soporific TV.
"Just kill me, man."
Only his eyebrows can furrow,
hollow eyes inside
rolling as if to escape.
He sips meals through a straw
So they can drip into a bag.

"They keep me alive now."

White Wedding

Her dowry
included a white sheet
with an embroidered
breach.
The furrowed face
hidden in robes
droned the rules
in a carved
antechamber,
after
the stuffy
ceremony.

...for the strict purpose of conception.

We waited two months.

Can't have them
thinking

Its out of wedlock,
she said.

More than a sheet separates us now.

Undercurrents

Uniform waves along a hillside, sinewy vines in lineated rows stained our foamy teeth

an off-blue gleaming hue.

My dad dives his nose back
into the twirling paper-thin glass,

closes his eyes and lets the wine ebb his senses back.
"My son has finished college, and this

is the first time we're tasting together!" His purple smile seems permanent. His built shoulders lean in.

"Say, did I tell you how you almost killed me?"
"Dad, what the hell are you talking about!"
I nearly spume purple viscera

against the front of my glass.
"I was driving along Foothill, you know, where all the power poles lean over,

and I wanted to call and hear about your race. I worry, you're such a maniac on wheels. Anyways, as I'm clicking through my phone

I look up to see I'm on the wrong side of the road and veering towards a telephone pole. Holy shit!"

"Why did I bother pulling you out that day so you could fly through your windshield at fifty-four?"

Life must have splashed into focus when sucked into a hungry third-world current with a twelve year-old daughter. He boomed.

HELP!

HEEELLP!

His roar floats over thundering Waves, white rolling walls, an undertow pulling back

with greater force, a losing game of tug-o-war. I elbow through rasping fronds

to a deserted black sand beach.
Only one head bobbing in the heaving water.
"Where's Stas?" My mother's

instincts ignore the jagged volcanic rocks and bristling purple urchins shearing the bottoms of her feet

as she run's into the spiraling water with eyes-up for my sister. "Wait...I see her! STOP!"

She crawls backwards through sharp rocks with straining eyes fixed on the two heads, as if looking away would submerge them.

Grabbing a lumpy boogey-board I run past her whimpering, jump into the surf.

Wind milling arms and a stomach eviscerated like a squeaking corkscrew. Kick past suspended boulders,

each steep wave cresting concealing the two heads choking on salty water.

I reach them. "What's up?"
"Ivan, this isn't a goddamn swimming pool!
We're getting sucked out!"

Looking past my dad, I see fourteenfoot walls beyond the eight-footers Pounding us now.

Five pounds of waterlogged foam for over four-hundred pounds of tired weight wasn't enough.

I croaked out hasty instructions: "Everyone lie flat on the surface. When a wave comes hang on tight

and kick. Don't let go."
Another set bears down,
the first wave inhales Stas

into seething foam. Her blonde hair dissolved down into the grey water.

Dad's big hand dives, grabs her sputtering frame with an iron vice grip.

A big set rolls in, ten-feet cresting over us and pummeling our bodies into a rocky seafloor.

Eyes distant in swirling Bordeaux,
"It took you a half-hour to get us out.
That never would have aired on Baywatch!"

The Napa breeze exhales, tumbling a stained napkin against gnarled trunks, prostrate under a sprinkler torrent.