UNDERSTUDIES

poetry by

ted Stimpfle
UNDERSTUDIES
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For my mother
Julia Grunza Stimpfle
1921 to 2000

First edition

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"Watch Out for Obscure Publications"
UNDERSTUDIES

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Obscure Publications 2004
"How long have you been missing?"

"I've been here all along."
conflation 1

So I said there is no god, but god. Mothering-fathering spirit. Unknown compassionate……. I have an affection for scholarly precision but sometimes I speak in broad discriminations though no one has ever called me eclectic. I have simply forgotten a library of experience, of information. In a crooked poker game, I did lose to Smiling Conflation and am now dumbfounded. He had fifty sneaky partners and hundreds of hidden cameras surrounding me. MY resources were laughable. In the end he told me I was the stage understudy of a more encompassing version of me, and I had to endure the malicious reviews, a self-absorbed audience of one sleeping man, and the green-veiled woman who locked herself inside the ticket booth and is telling everyone to stay away.

--- Grey flakes of imperial ash big as garbage can lids are in a swirling slow-motion fall. Slow burial and clapping hands from the waking dead.
Did I wake in the sun was my first thought. No. It was a NASA mockup of the moon and artificial light was pouring in on me. I was wearing a purple loincloth and a spaceman helmet made of 5 ft. strips of aluminum foil. We were going to make sure every American thought we had conquered the moon. Cameras ready, and Action: Trembling waves of expensive media intelligence criss-crossed the landing site and my liquefied bones began to ferment. Flies, digital, one by one landed on my tongue and I swallowed them for ten minutes till my bubbling bones acclimated to the creation of this Animated and Patriotic wine. Stumbling I made it over to a fluted roman column and dizzy held on to it—I heard murmurs above me, “Where did he come from? Call Hoover and the actors union.” I threw-up a red and white colloidal substance on a cardboard moon-rock and fell over.
Push hard push the director had yelled, I could kill that scrawny bastard. Freed of a prison sentence and given money for top-secret experiments. Hidden behind walls thick as red tape pasted to the invisible gates of C.I.A. headquarters. C.I.A. just an outer box. Inside, bloodless acronyms nest, one buried within another, box within box, till this room opened up with me inside. The A.N.D. running this Lab. Here, 20 ceilings beneath the C.I.A., but not under the ceiling of our most untouchable Agency. Here, cuz my husband Jim forged my handwritten legal name on illegal documents, cuz I had a two bit attorney; a prison term long as the F.B.I. story of Jim's one man crime-wave. He vanished. Whoever he was. Cuz I failed at suicide and flew back a healed synesthesiac hearing Green call me its sound is an avalanche rising toward the mountains peak. The touch of aluminum foil tastes as if zealous puritans have tied a witch to my tongue and set her on fire. They say my brain is important & unusual. That the Final Director sends memos about me—The lying nurse said I gave birth to a scrambled, disoriented alphabet. 3 hallways over my child seizes my face right now. Odd gifts the U.U.W. can use. You, child, listen up. The director pretends to love you like a son. His people raised him with one ambition: to eat supper everyday inside the final, ugly Macro-acronym.
Wrapped up in Napoleon’s black bath towel is one, gigantic, flagellating, sperm. Here is an enthusiastic era, progressive and attempting genius. Here are grandest formulas, unorthodox and swirled to perfection by secretive hands. Nameless hands belonging to colleagues of Jean-Nicholas Corvisart the royal physician. There were 9 bubbling injections given and a blue vial of concoction swallowed. Corvisart attends this gothic delivery. Hears the Emperor mumbling in sweaty delirium the words pierce & peace. Attends to Napoleon’s fever assured it is politics bleeding towards a robust and necessary kingdom. The Emperor is unusually short and ready to inseminate a Continent. The single bruiser of a gamete is already swelling up and growing longer in the bathtub. It’s 1809 and a few Austrian peasants scratch at their lice-ridden heads, puzzled, as it swims up the Danube creating unusual wave patterns that shock one cross-eyed fisherman into leaving for America. A naked Italian woman, mother of 3, standing in the Tiber feels something odd bumping and sliding against her legs as she soaps her arms at Dawn and gets the hell outta there. In 1812 the same event occurred to a blind shoemaker named Yuri, swimming in the Volga. The French nation commemorated it with a triumphant medal; but substituted an engraved and retreating naked river-god running out of the wavy Volga, frightened as a new psychotic handed food by a fork-faced devil cooking his own feet. Yes, Beethoven, Shelley, and science are in a trajectory aimed toward a postulated miracle. Yuri never splashed in the Volga waters again. The Emperor’s majestic, saurian sperm entered into Russia where it froze solid after Moscow burned. Siberian winds, harsh snowflakes gathering in a heart of their own, a blizzard feeling all that glorious French death—When fossil hunters find it 5 thousand years from now, will they understand Napoleon’s sorrow? His admiration for the ferocious Muscovites, his overblown seizing of fate, the sperms undiminished but comatose desire? Understand Napoleon’s strangling nightmares about getting shorter as he aged to a dwarf?
A Note for Whitman

The snake with American, crossed-eyes and a dollar sign between his gaze, on his smooth lower brow, is startling the poor. Bombs, the complicated expensive kind, are being shipped around the world. The sophisticated pull of futures, bandaged in thorny clouds floating debris in heavens shorn of any blue skies—is toxin to the simplest wings. The earth complains daily and the feet of the poor ache from trembling rumors. Taxes to be taken, weapons are shipped, the economy has a pulse related to war. The body of a nation is a complicated machination. The snake with a dollar sign between his crossed eyes and who moves with well-oiled sinuosity, smooth and hissing, has struck. All the troops of poisonous songs at the U.N., march again in daily media. O Walt, lover of the poor and huddled. Damage, confusion, impossible tears. Nations, Walt, are insane
All my friends thought I was playing the role of a monk. Simple explanation. There was a true bewilderment at the constancy of my sacrifice, astonishment at the extent of my erasure. My house shifted to bank accounts not mine. Health was waning. 0 0 0. Nothing remained. Recourse to lawyers was frantic and futile. Circumstances had forced me to trust a brother's word. Yes, he wiped his ass with it. Cleansed of some debts, he was reinvigorated. Stupid Me, apparently, resembles a monk: because recognizing me as one more shabby and homeless man is an intolerable act of sword-swallowing. Well, bring out the bearded lady, the fire-eaters, the man so skinny he can slide down his own asshole. Send out the whole unbelievable troupe from behind the curtains and let the eyes go open. Friends, join in. I lost the equivalent of fifty years laboring to a Barker of Lies: the dog-faced boy biting at my ankles. I go and burn the robes of a non-existent monk. The flame is a juicy orange.
Olden MacGroin had a charm, he-i-she-i O. And in this charm he had identities, she-i-he-i O. Identities here, identities there, here a name, there a name, everywhere entities. Great Nature the inseminator with his overshadowing aim to multiply that equals 1 you and 1 me. Once upon a time, Smiling Conflation told me that others can be a way through. Miniaturized i-thou circuits charged to a preposterous entanglement with almost everybody. Understudy that I am your face is the fire where my raw attention is cooked-up. You’ll die one day as Incinerator MacGroin ashen the roots of a crop’s seasonal flames...burnt wisp...A Face is a christened Ship of Fire launched to the Ocean’s Body at dawn. Does a spark unfurl each time attention abandons itself forward? Unknown Compassionate, your seamless touch: on weeping cherry leaves&every thought&on each voice&rolling trucktire sound&the feel of feēt on ground&violet phlox scent at evening&ordinary taste that sends this satisfaction. Your seamless touch: exactly where nothing interferes with anything else and differences are a perfectly, tangled knot. Let me locate and enter the spiraling weather pattern. Through the days of dizziness born of circling nights, help me recall the other who calls or is silent. The constant lie moving forever around us is necessary—MacGroin, what were you thinking? What? There are too many differences, our indifference a vast globe. Doubting, failing, a step forward, again, and another step forward inside that struggle for a Good so miniscule, so small......is this your idea of the directions of history? He-i she-i O.
Low attendance in our grandstand this year. Gladiators and souped-up cars brought together, for a matinee Saturday afternoon; it angered our bull-headed financial manager. Combat and V-8's no longer sell tickets: grease, smoke, limbs torn off in the loud, demolition phases; costly helmets embedded in twisted Chevy grilles, rubber smells and blood slick ground; 3 prongs of a trident stabbing along a windshield ebbing glass; screech sounds of microphone feedback. —Bulthead took off to think things over, a Mexican vacation. He returned with a new dream in a wooden cage. I thought I saw bright, Mexican fabrics in tight stacks, until it began unfolding. Released it went floating from the grandstand entrance to the other end, 4 tiers of wings, not stacked on top of one another, but arranged in the way 4 temperatures of water stratify in a shifting column of water. The feathers: a library of rainbows written onto the air. No end to varying frequencies, to color, and my god it was big as a small cottage. Bulthead said it liked him. It appeared flying through a close, tangled jungle in an easy floatation of 8 wings, landed in a tree above Bullhead who was lapping water from a clear spring. It coasted above him as he approached his truck just beyond the monstrous tree line of the jungle. I asked, "What is that?" Bullhead said, "I don't know. It's not exactly a gigantic butterfly, it has thick feathers. It's not some kind of bird, there isn't a head or a body. The colors remind me of fish scales in light, or a math problem solved by Renoir. It smells...smells...exactly like upwind blueflag. Irises." By this time, Bullhead was pacing back and forth, one hand holding a sharp tip of each arcing horn, as if horns were curved antennas that could be adjusted to a finer, signal reception. "I think it's luck," he said. "Luck?" "Yes, simple good luck, the kind that flies on 8 unrealistic wings." He shrugged his huge shoulders and his scruffy eyebrows knotted together. Up above air rushed down ruffling the fur on
the length of my back. You felt air coming down like swooping, dry rain splashing all around you. Bullhead and I looked up and saw the... it was circling about 7 stories above the racetrack in front of the grandstand. Rainbow feathers stronger than a Mack Truck brainstorming the sunlight and everything not tied down, lifting a bit as air displaced the atmosphere for more than a hundred yards. We did a constant show for one week and got enough seed money for another project. Bullhead sold the grandstand for us for 700 bucks. It had swooped and cruised slowly in a sine-wave circle over the racetrack—off and on, on and off, whenever it had the urge. Showgoers came and went. No brash spectacle, just a whole lot of mild staring by the local populace. After 5 days it started drifting southward more and more. None of us at the grandstand wished to try and control the 4-Tiered, Wing of the South, as we began to call it. Hell, all of us wanted to get outta there eventually. It hung around with Bullhead for about 2 more weeks, coming back from its forays southward, and... sleeping on?... vacationing on?... or thinking in Bullhead's back 10 acres like some undiscovered, prismatic alphabet generating a scarce knowledge.

One morning, at 8:30, I set down a book on how to build greenhouses, and walked out to listen to what sounded like wild geese overhead. It was an organized, honking gaggle and there in back of it, though up higher, were the 4 pairs of wings. They had taken slight leave of each other and assumed a triangular formation, like the geese, one at each point; and behind that arrowhead, was the last pair lolling and drifting in the lack of air resistance. I was reminded of 4 high, Chinese kites constructed with jewels that had fallen from benevolent winds—the air's living jewels. I knew it was heading back. Later on I saw Bullhead. He snorted, I howled, he pawed the tablecloth, I growled. It was our way of dealing with loss. We discussed our plans for building some greenhouses. Bullhead said, "We'll use some of that earth on the back 10 acres. That... whatever it was... left me fields of wildflowers. You can't believe how things grow back there now. It looks like a quiet festival. What do you really think it was?" I said I thought it was evolution's loveliest instigation of feathers onto flowerlike wings. Bullhead said, "Yah, that sounds about right. Here, have some more coffee."
1981-2000: A Quick Story

She was 60, somewhat worn out, but doing o.k.; a working sales-lady in a department store, when her thoughtful son—the stable, ambitious one, her son, gentle as remembered childhood days—decided, she was 60 years worth of lower-class failure.

Educated to perfection he gave to her the prize of his superior voice. Now she was a hated servant in her own house.

After 3 months of this cold surprise, her blood pressure was on the rise. The brain struck by loss of air in hemispheres of neurons strangled: each side of her living body, twisted, was tangled-up in dying.

19 years later at the funeral he commented, “It was about time.”
In that room crisis flipped its pages
And ice-specks were flung out
each speck 'a frozen letter,
Till the pages were fulsomely blank breathing, asleep.
He's in a transmission fluid stain glistening near the curbside. He hides inside STOP signs. Hides in a child's red t-shirt he saw flying after a bounced football (he told me). He's received shrewd letters from my fellow lawyers skewed toward absolute lies. He has postal-traumatic stress syndrome. Utility Bills sandpaper his rough interior to a raw look. My friend gets frantic at the footsteps belonging to mail delivery. He's 51 and he's hiding in the bathroom where a working radio is stationed. Real-Estate taxes are delivered on his stolen house. Weeks pass and I open them up, the taxes he's supposed to pay that turn him into a breaking bullet aimed at the invulnerable thief. He's hiding in a box in the cellar. He said he hid in a tin can gleaming in the gutter. He worked hard and got his punishment. He was a Caregiver 3 shifts a day for years and Caregivers get shit and taken advantage of and that's that and nothing else. He's crouching under your carpet now and in the mouth of my sick mother. There, behind endless truck shadows flattened at 12 noon. His head (he wrote me) is now hidden in a 2 foot tall soybean field resting on his right ear listening as time scoops layers & layers of him away till everything else is a fierce back-hoe and he is invisible, plain dirt.
What to do? How to go on waking in the morning?
Back there, behind the sun, some whispering that insists it needs a tongue?
Not-me as can be, it flakes like snow and buries words.
HOW DO THEY GET THEIR SHOES ON

What do the unconsolable do to keep on going? How do they get their shoes on in the morning, their shirts or dresses?

They move with the space around that concretion keep feeling it as if it was a rolling marble moved by the space around the marble in slowest momentum.

Do the unconsolable act from negative blessings? Has senselessness been so beaten into them for such a long time there's no possibility for living except to shoulder making a best-of-it, that never works—is always doubled-up in its own decline?

****

The moth that is tied to being a moth, in a painting I saw. Wings fluttered apart with painted interiors that held it together. The rope that looped up behind its thorax and suggested it was tied to the post on the left side of the painting; a stripped stick from which it could alight and tattered as a rag shorn from a rag still fly in a short burst to the surface of the paint.

It looked unconsolable and independent in its loss. Vital in the saddest being of a painted moth.

****

Does it allow a few of them to move their eyes about; here and there, across the landscape finding an open moment which enlarges, and some sentience leaps through the darkness we live, to a serendipitous darkness—purposelessness and purpose both are written on cellophane touched to fire...and are gone for a while?...and they want to say, “This salvaged beauty....we are to rise, again?”
****

I don't want to call up the 20th century of death-camps and perversities and outrages.
I don't want to go back toward my useless consoling of a new widow whose husband's tall skeleton jumped all the way through a car accident into a permanent grave.
I don't want to go back to the Vietnam veteran setting his military clothes on fire (he was wearing them) among us hippies in the Parkway,
I don't even wanna go back 2 weeks ago to holding the pulling-away hand of a severely ill man who threw away all his medications,
I don't want to...but it's here, squatting on my hunched shoulders.

****


I'm acquainted with an elderly man who is sure there is one simple reply—too much suffering happened for too long a time. Please, don't ask him to tell his dormant story; unless you're a practitioner of listening closely. It's an epic dismemberment rushing to end.

****

My stopped feet send out pulsing of radar waves that encounter the mistakes and reverberate the steps behind my stationary heels. Some serious apprehension is a wave low in the body's cells. It foretells that those previous, unsound steps are what is coming. Backward or forward it's like the word radar; it stays the same.

I know that if there are no resources in any frame-of-reference, the unconsolable is prospering in its ashes. Alone, in a car, a voice
exits your mouth and heads for a dilemma: the throat’s scratched terribly by screaming: it must quit eventually though it’s not a choice. To move again in life is to encounter what happened before.

I think of William Blake so close to his own experience—wavering flock of fire feathering-up around his immense innocence as he walks through London.

Does the unconsolable make someone sweat the small stuff less? Is it good for something—like a distance, a tolerance able to take the endless vanishing going on in the daily, stupidity-continuum? Or is it a stone, mountain-heavy, that would need an earthquake to move it? Or a stonelike pulse as if the sun were rage blinking off and on?

Among a 30 year book collection (I can’t rely on that library anymore: it’s foxed papers, mold, and ashes) a page on transformation translated into american english said: The stone of the unconsolable draws little attention to itself The story of the unconsolable that is an invisible fire and all around it the winds shove the lake’s surface in crossing wavelets as if remembering...

*They get in shirts. They get in dresses. They get in their own shoes. By their own rested hands or others determined to help. The morning deepens towards impossible daylight.*

Unconsolable earth.
Untitled

for Jasmine Hoskins

She suffered
the examination
by fireflies

they found
her darkness
worthy

A Recent Flower

Its silver blossom
resembles a 56 Edsel grille
after a head-on collision
Here’s the day from a scanning of the promised no-mans-land; it proofreads heaven into dust, it collects watery gobs of prominent dead.

It rebuilds history in a famous tower of text that is slimy with reinvigorated cells; towers that last a second, slide, slip, as run-amuck cells pursue erratic ends, and collapse as fast as all the interrupted signals are slung in a curving vortex sleeve to emerge in desolate OZ. Scanning is listing the overrun costs that are written in troubled script; you’ve seen it, red ink, red as a face peeled by fire on T.V. honestly, the accounting is also on T.V. Here are all the resources left in dumps abandoned to a rat’s happiest days picking offal with the connoisseur’s careful deliberations.

Leave bones to crumble, there are other choicer, tumbled out gobs. The day has been grueling as a King novel narrated by Raggedy Ann. She’s talking from inside some castle where they torture dolls with stitching pins. Ouch constituted more than half the words. Let’s sleep by a flooding river tonight or near tornado country and hope for the best of the worst. No deal. Micro-tears shorn from meteors rest on a flat-bed truck hauling debris to Great Bethlehem where smelting-down runs the grieving to a conclusion that is uncomfortable for everyone and therefore, normal postures can be taken up again, the next day begun with trumpets, fixed as bayonets, on our rested foreheads and playing “On the Sunny Side of the Street.”
Note 1

A man marries a woman who brings out the worst in him. After 10 years the consequences make him frantic.

After 15 years there is nothing at all he likes about himself. She too, is having her share of trouble.

Note 2

A two-legged dog I know has a valuable bone in his mouth. He tastes it and is in love. It possesses the same, small breadth, depth and fallen height, as his mind. He’s comfortable biting it. Impossible to dislodge it: impossible to take it from his mouth.

Note 3

A sensation, then a perception. Is it dense as the mind perceiving it? Yes. Dreaming away, day-dreaming away, the burdensome weight.

Suppose the mind is working in a finer range of energies. The perception of sensations is less dense—it passes into awareness as a quanta of energy that enlivens awareness, is additional.
Note 4

The small business. The necessary things that have to be done on the busy list. The busy list—to say it is to be stung by the relentless buzzing in my chest that's alarmed as I think about all those 1001, one by one tasks that perpetuate my smaller nightmares.

Note 5

What to do facing the low basin of the Insecure?

Worst of all, this inferiority buried in our biology, has frightened, aggressive postures to be tapped. Drink, someone says, it's nothing but my fearless piss. It's released during the most banal of interchanges between men. I am lately sickened by this stupidity.

I should resurrect a flexible and lean sarcasm; or observe it as a one-eyed man in countries of the blind.

Note 6

To the bottom of my shoes till there is no shoe. To the tips of my hair till there is no hair I am what I was, recognizable.
You couldn't notice
any scar tissue on his neck.
There was no primal
necklace of abrasions to be seen.
His head had thoroughly reinstated
its position on his tall body,
easily turned to the right, or left.
Maybe the loss had never occurred;
or a healer skillfully shoved
all murderous memories under-
neath a Persian carpet somewhere
in Istanbul. His hair laid down
long over his hunched shoulders.
The expressive hands full of gestural details
earlier, were worn-out, asleep, in his pockets.

He was still crazy for music, though he was
definitely a photographer, a chronicler of things
and events—white clouds stippled his eyes,
black topiary engulfed his mind, or visa-versa
—always the peaking weather of a moment.

A few days out of each week his eyes
bagged, full of sleeplessness, distress,
overcome by hard work requiring
the momentum of timelessness.
He sometimes lived in his darkroom,
supervising himself, going from one negative
to a negative, searching the dark room for black
and white images to light up in a completion
he remembered. The temperature of chemicals
carefully watched; the aperture settings he jotted
down in notes are read again; and light conditions
in the seconds a negative was gathered. The paper
process: immersion in chemical developer; a bath to stop
the fluvial print flowing with silver fish that darken;
a chemical fixer to embrace the image; a lengthy water wash and a working print
adds one suspended moment to this curving river...

A focused affair of light measured and breath walking a dark surface. He'd come out of the darkroom at morning light as if he'd finished running a marathon above the hills of Greece; go out for coffee, his tired eyes dressed like beggars on trial for vagrancy.

Sleep was a cave that brought back his laughter; and he laid down in it blessed to death. He told me he often dreamt of children, odd children so happy, their blue hair rolled and giggled in music as they talked amongst themselves. Said the scar on his right jaw line was all that remained of the infamous singing head-thrown-into-the-river incident. It had been one woman, not a gang of maddened women; he said one enraged woman was enough to kill anybody. His head had struck a casual turtle cracking its shell in half. A turtle embodying Apollo, who was observing and escaped through the crack as a scaring flash of himself. He pointed to it. A thin, burnt mark on his jaw line. What life does to us, he said, shaking his head.

I speak to him through a lens of curved morning, attend to his remembering. "...was washed away by the river as I reverberated my lamentation: the visible and invisible relations in cross-currents between men, women, sorrow, stones, birds, power, mountains, love, skies. A broken music settled its cracks in all things, and my eardrums turned to water.

I am in awe of music's resources, but photography is where I am. I spent my first months photographing an exposed egg at one hour intervals to hatch an eye. Saw it was all about light and breathing embraces of shadow. Then did eggs so lightly cracked it looked as if 2 ant antennae had tapped on shells, smelled a fresh whisper. That small difference.

Later, snapped 22
this earth unrolling its shadows. I posed one hard-boiled egg cut in half: unpredictable textures of soft shades drifting in...

He allowed me to look through some numbered photos:

1. a public statue declaiming a visible silence, its gray tones somehow pitted or porous as bread.

2. a young couple so obviously in love it runs like ichor in radiance around them. The print is restrained, stately.

3. 3 people in a long exposure gazing at each other in a room which is filling up with smoke of white ink and gray, blown snow.

4. a heavy-set man in an expensive suit. He's handing a small package (lighter in tone than anything else) to the viewer. He looks serious. The background is all drapery; vertical tubes.

5. 5 pictures of stones, stones, stones. None are bigger than a man or smaller than a hoof. 2 nude woman lay across them like rivers. Postures of ease, sleep; or cast down and pretending to be fruit.

I missed him at the diner for a month or two, then bumped into him last week at a coffee shop. It's going okay for him: got a job as a wedding photographer to pay the rent, has a few aches and pains, loves his new Persian cat, feels positive about a young woman with unusually bright-brown eyes, is fascinated by the sham of political campaigns, studies new cosmological paradigms, goes to the chiropractor for a painful, stiff neck.

note: silver halide crystals in photographic paper are catalyzed by a chemical developer, darkening the face of the crystal as it becomes silver metal, and allowing an image to form. A stop bath halts this process.
Let's sleep by a flooding river tonight or near tornado country and hope for the best of the worst. No deal.
Holding Connie 25 Years

for Connie and Mary Remaly

Red as Jesus Strawberry. The fire-baked clay heart you mailed to me: a shimmering, green leaf sprouts on each side as wings: your true airborne earthy art

I hold you here like paper
holds fresh flowers pressed
inside a thousand-page book
20 or more plum memories,
each with your specific look:

the way your heart flies so well
revealing the sky is your face

Connie, remember my cracking voice?
Your attention didn’t wander or hesitate—
wounds spreading out worse than unfolding,
Catholic maps of a theoretical, punishing place.

It hurt you: how Julia and I were chased
from war to war. As if we were washed up
again and again, on some burnt shore
rolling in sulphurous waves and medical waste.

And always you offered yourself
forward with no criticisms, not a trace
of guidance—You had no gigantic plans,
except 2 hands to help. Your specific face:

the way your heart flies so well in it.
The way your heart flies so well in brown eyes.

Inbetween old leaves, other pages
of this book, is you laughing, laughing.
One hand up over your wide mouth
in its final stage of full
and conspicuous, womanly HAAA!

You saying, "I shouldn't be laughing Ted." Stories of dumb, chaotic, human lives: mine, a husband's, stranger's, friend's, a child's, whoever. Your slender body in a fine sweep of shaken hilarity. Sometimes your hand rose in front of your mouth because the loud, uproarious, shorting laughs were crazier than a dream—no embarrassments in a happy crowd.

Your constantly, graceful self was itself surprised—rose branches shaken overflowing with yellow as winds scampered around... it was our playful, human minds.

Hand over your mouth, laughing! In memory's path a favorite, living flower.—Your specific laugh:

the way your heart flies around so well in it, brown eyes. Upon your face's laugh lines your heart flying so well.
County Nursing Home

A cry which endangers them. White-as-fleece uniforms issuing from a closed mouth in a cry.

Do their ears crumble with a weight of ashes? No. The newly Dead's speech is not a problem.

Simplest truths are a zero-consequence diagram for County Home Workers. Disinformation gangs.

Unspoken rules which are grounded in nothing but complying with this foundering edifice.

Pulling wool over the eyes is advantageous to our sheepish nation. Make-believe compassion.

Supervisors have so many tricks up their sleeves, their arms no longer have to work and are unseen.

An overly critical family member is to be driven into exile, far enough. The resident alone for care.

Scheduled neglect: Accidents: Doctor ed sincerity. Thorough as any terror collapsing a living body.

Is this a voice exaggerating? No one believes these words are a documentary. She's dead anyway.

What I now understand, helps no one. All the events of our lives are faceless, distant cousins.

If only everyone had to risk a dismal life there, spent in a count of months at 25 years of age.
Dependent, fixed to aphasia. Being an old hag.
The blessed senses swallowed by a fierce decay.

All this annual flesh absorbed in a careless mess.
I understood the limits: not this institutional cruelty.

The old, the injured half-blank, are needful windows.
We go on as if no one is wrong. What are we? They
are busy mandibles doing a job. Shredding the wrinkles.

chorus of seven

If everyone had to risk a helpless life there
captured for a count of months at 25 years of age?
If only all faces had to risk a helpless life there
captured for a count of months at 25 years of age.
What if everyone had to risk a life there helpless
captured for a count of months at 25 years of age?
What if all of us had to risk our helpless lives
captured for a count of months at 25 years of age?
What if all of us had to risk our lives as helpless residents in a rending of months at 25 years of age?
What if all of us had to risk our helpless lives there
imprisoned for a count of months at 25 years of age?
If only everyone had to risk a helpless life there
captured in a count of months at 25 years of age.
Spring of 2000

I watch the high river that exists only at this time, precious as a flung diamond to the poor, waiting. There’s her enduring face rippling )))))) for a while on smooth surfaces. What she endured goes no further than her end, though I memorized her face of sadness. Inscribed it the way 3 barking dogs can shove 3 A.M. ears & eyes to hell. Dropped in a hospital bed in early Spring, her blood pressure had dropped, but she was ok. “She’s gotta have a glucose check, she hasn’t eaten anything. She’ll end up comatose from the insulin.” The calm nurse assured me and assured me. I came back within a single hour or 2 and a nursing shift changed hands in that time.

My mother was not responding at all, her comatose face was a sweating ruby. A 2nd shift nurse said that no test had been done. A one minute test. Her sugar: a souring 12. Her temperature fallen to cold 92. Emergency: a shift supervisor hurried up with tubular units of glucose to infuse. There would be permanent damage. I made sure they knew how badly they screwed-up. The probable consequences for Julia’s body. She came out of it the following night with her face settled into a fatal sadness. It resembled a withered melon, or the dark surface of soured wine in a barrel. Days later my cousin said, “I’ve never seen her look so sad or tired. Never like this.” Now her clenched-jaw reflex was doubly uncontrollable. Getting her dentures in or removing them
almost impossible. Her face snapped shut. Eating was vast trouble. She tried, she tried, but her small jaws locked tight on any spoon full of food; she bit down, before any fork could enter her mouth. She tried. The new facial expression gathered loneliness in the air. It was weeks 'til her assaulted body was capable of anything else. Eyes, nose, cheeks, lips, confined to a dying blossom. A deep downtroddeness stabilized this face among her 8 other faces. Predominant, it exerted the pulling of the future towards her. It is not forgettable. A dilapidated house crumbling in on itself (Lost blossom). Face fallen to a permanent crunch of crying but, no tears at all.
The Blue Orifice

A marionette blares a toy horn: downward strings double as strands of skyward blood. A fog enters pulling up details till there is one somber music attacking the faintest shapes.

I see that Nothing has produced offspring: the curls of the fog twine for an hour in air releasing a dissembling and blown perfume no one believes in but it lives everywhere.

I think this is the only continent forsaken by plants and animals; a stony recording of thrown rocks listens to you with an eerie silence and incompatible voices. To know this lasting sham of the ocean breathing charging at you with imperceptible stones rolling from the blue orifice opening in the waves. Among the fog, music, and wavy rocks a pregnant pause imitates your family—children of nothing planting an escape, and calling father, farther, fog...
Once, famished—and now a delicate thread of hunger. It's all that's left. This posture of ascetic predictions; the appetite fading to sensations of another lighter color. The boss over the world made it this way (railway schedules of predation). I accept the blustery wind pushing forever at nestled strands of weathered and sun-dried gut caught in tree branches till they become wild fingers or loose flags. It is clear that War is merely an exaggeration of our ordinary lives.

It is now clear there is no space for anything but a thin, wavering, bread line made of crumbs; delicate pastime of emptiness; desire slipping around in sad air for purposes unknown. Desire flies lightly above the windy grasses and moans like a cow beheaded for a trophy hamburger. Insinuated in this transparent hollowing of a being, one scent is waving in whispers; it sustains the orders of life. I give in and accept the boss's framework. The natural killing that is a world; that ghostly scent robed by body and gravitational hair.

(all around it is a vast, crushing over-production of space)

Here, that dwindling, underfed scent is ascetic; but not less than a trapped mouse's little, bloody mouth.
...and I had to endure the malicious reviews, a self-absorbed audience of one sleeping man.
A small room. The light rolling to slanted bars of evening time. My pupils rippled out till they begged for description: 2 round sponges sopping wet; or dual mandalas submerged in waves of sad clarity. You knew in that room winds boiled, and shoes woke in fire. twin cataracts flung out of a downpour choked the water system, while the perimeter beach of stained-glass eroded in bits, till only the one colored castle remained in the revealed sands. In that room you settled into a knowing—a lack, superseding the need to turn away and run. Pears rolled off the tresses of morning and down the southern hill. You ate a little, then continued. What could disturb us so perfectly that our mustard-yellow back-streak was re-enlivened into a lion’s tail? An animal had alerted us to a conscience blowing wind through our several heads. Once, I heard a woman say that her dying was not just for her. I listened with an ear singular as a solar flaring. There was a dance and we were all invited for each other. In that room bees waited for a German farmer to bring smoke. In that room crisis flipped its pages and ice-specks were flung out, each speck a frozen letter, till all pages were fulsomely blank, breathing, asleep. Each afternoon the room gave me one heartfelt slap across the brain: failure was an oaken door intermittently branded by lightning flashes; no one ever left, no one entered. Busyness of light. Thunder’s knocking. A small room.
Vertical

At ladder top, a mild vortex turns.

Tears flee up ladder rungs,

some fall again, splashing.

It rests in mud. Red polliwogs.
If pondered it rose-leafs the 2 eyes, and the ears shrink noises to a minim. Touch, is not pressing, though light wind carries a wisp; a singular curl of time which entangles. And is there taste? Slight citrus in hollows deeper than a brain can drink. The smell is of apportioned air, breathed in.

Who knows'how long there is to ponder? Off past the familiar lights goes a dwindled eye, you shake off the rest with a powerful, wet dog's turbulent, twisting motions. The dryly, disturbed air is doused. Life thrown to the 360 spaces of shadow through a body weeping—Awakened by candelabra flickerings under cool stretches of shadow and trees. “How long have you been missing?”

A coastal view collects itself. Humped waves of traveling violinists curled forwards in crescendos of water. Each lands upon the beach and plays ascending scales to the deep, it's a movement of rainbow arches leaving and bending into water as dolphins. Sand-prints are hearts. Starfish beat. This music isn't for me or you; it gesticulates, on my right side, to the Sun. Throws shadow on my left which weights the air, preparing the rain for brackish entry. Clouds are nodding yes to spilled textures of wind. A slanted falling and a forthright incomprehensibility of salt shivering everything to a radiant body. Fathomless violinists listen to the percussive waters, the percussive leaves, the showering riches. In those moments there's a useless question—“What is it that you have been missing?”

The Sun upon the ground and trees, trembles lights as it clears through leaves. A fading gull-note lifts off a driftwood-violin, a bleached feather
sings: a free and weightless sound that gravitates to the Sun. What is heard is less than a shadow and more than light. It's Space relieved: without crimes of distance, or contradiction. An almost touchable nothingness in this brief, boundless flight. From here to there: a discernable fiction pacing a prayer rug. Five moments meandering through unexpected, echoing fire. It's the Sun. A curling ear aware in a listening sky. Sun-chime.

The whole of it fits like a bright, beloved ear into our conversation,

"How long have you been missing?"
To the bottom of my shoes
Till there is no shoe.
To the tips of my hair till there is no hair.
I am what I was.
Recognizable.
Ted Simpfie is a writer living in the northeastern U.S.A. He has worked as a construction worker, a house painter, a carpet cleaner, a roofer, a notary, and as a caregiver to his disabled mother for a long time. This is the first selection of his work.

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