



AN UPTON THOROUGHFARE PUBLICATION

I will ingest poppies and wake up
tomorrow an arboretum.

PART ONE: WONDERFOLK

ALICE

Alice: soft-eyed cetacean
feeds on warmth and amphetamines
cryogenic freezer
four floors down

Hair banana peels
Hands dead starfish
Skin traintracks
Eyes trainwreck

Alice: down the hall
did did did you know?
found her stealing sugar cubes
found her turning on faucets

Nurse's log, May fourth
twelve forty-five
there's DRINK ME
on all the morphine

THE WHITE RABBIT

Morose mammal

too much spent curling around your ankles
blood is the yellow of poisoned fetus
now is the now is the now
numerals pulsing back of harebrained brain
but I wait for no one

Chronos' courtesan once

thought I was living for fucking forever!
perhaps I am, still
just dying in the attempt

THE CATERPILLAR

Gravity's made me a magician of the most uncommon kind. Promethean blood, yes, but under safe human skin diaphanous insect bones glow and twist.

Slickitysmack schoolboys and their stickysweet girls know where to find me: the path of inky phosphorescence my breath lays gives them no cause to wander. Green lips with their salamander teeth make them uneasy, maybe, but they are not so pretty either. Nothing's more godless than the size and color of human eyes: so round and spongysoft, smelling of wet soapstone.

Newcomers are my favorites. Tremblypanicky centipede feet, hands twisted like party streamers, a little less forceful, a little more eager to impress. What's it like? How's it feel? Hanging shoes on my stare, curling into a smile that's taped at the corners, I teach them of the shape and taste of Wonderland.

Sweaty nails hide the rank dust of human infatuation. MariJUana, heroooIN, cocoCAINE, how silly their terms are! How very easy they are to please!

I am not guilty, and I am not without compassion. Before they go I wet their lips with laudanum and the roots of their hair with saffron. At night, following the windy bellows of their laughter, I roll into their windows and give up my real magic into the selfish shellfish curl of their ears: technicolor Wonderland dreams.

THE MAD HATTER

Haven't got my hat no more
somehow been granted
looking glass
strange lucidity

Madness, my Quixotic concubine
you of the flared corneas
you of the vermilion heart
holding the sky in your hair
suffocating birds

Humans don't take kindly to you
algae-blooded beloved
strapped
wrapped
brain mapped
slapping you down to linoleum
with voice of galaxy vibrations
why do you not protest?

eyes don't love questions
postmarking Return TO Sender
sanity warrants no response

THE QUEEN AND KING OF HEARTS

Vestigial humanoids crrrank joints
paint nailsfacepropriety
wind up hairfleshidea
stench fishywishywashy

GIRL hands her song her teeth her bluebell dress
flowers through buttonholes

Congregation of a chemical people
polyp hearts and doll parts
talking as if vomiting
feeling as if liquid

LET her pickpocket me at the ferris wheel
whatdoesitmatter? salt water taffy girlsmell

Cortex shelled babies crrrunch claws
chewing at earthbowl and skyboom
plasma charging off elbows
primordial medulla all down back

OH look through swallowing throng
yes yes I do hands on backs on pardon me's
gone she's gone gone

ALICE'S SISTER

Fish's face was a seabed emptied of water. Whale bone skin swelling and deepening, becoming sluggish eyes and amphibian lips with no discerning features in between. It was never clear who came up with her nickname, maybe a nightshift nurse grown dizzy and blurry on thick fluoride slabs and bedpans. In any case, it was a universally accepted fact and an easily contagious one: even the receptionist three floors down knew, and she herself had only been able to see Fish once, and that was the day they had first brought her in. She had been younger, half-covered by a sheet, but her harlequin green hair got tangled in the wheels and her drunken siren eyes stared up like the world was cupped in the tiles of the ceiling. Her lips had been shaped into a perfect little circle, and though the paramedics dropped to her side and cooed baby words into her ear, they had not understood. Haunting an Arcadia of shushshushblankness and the roll of IV poles was not what Fish wanted, but it was what she got. It didn't matter that she was a schizophrenic or that her yellow hair had been violently discolored by the pool in which she'd tried to drown herself. For months afterward the women from the maternal ward would come up the stairs, still bloody, legs swaying in wide circles, intent on having the mermaid bless their babies.

Whenever Fish's sister came, however, the nurses were especially careful to address their patient only as Alice. The sister was a certified public accountant with orthopedic shoes and straightedged fists. It was for none of these reasons, though, that for the residents of the third floor Fish's sister would stay a legend much longer than Fish herself. Fish was a diluvian nymph, but it was her sister that magnetized. Her face a constellation strung together. Watching her coax Fish's electric laugh from the influx of her hair, dragging out currents from her soggy lips, it became clear to them. Dropping white coats and sterile hands, tossing back doors and opaque sun, they fell five floors to Wonderland.

THE CHESHIRE CAT

vacuum
breathing the bends
beating the supernovae
leaking their light curves
into your bomb palm

lived for a while
in the fever of your plane
in the arm of your core
both nucleus and blazar crane
both plucking pieces

being here now
won't take apart pangaea
won't fight for your incarnations
screaming me narcissus
but I like being alone

here? here
my fingertips sphere
my voice cosmic echo
your glacial cry may span galaxies
but this epoch of mine sings

PART TWO: DETERIORATE

HAPPY HOUR

Honey, you're drunk
elbows swimming on tabletops
smile ripping like a candy wrapper
spare square picture frame
shoulders pressed to the wall

It's you and me and the fan blades, love
warming your booze
warming to your theme
yolky placenta your shell
stuck to your hands
stuck to your barrettes

Bloodstream's blurring, dear
want to take you to my doorstep
maybe wash your hair
wrap you up
feed you cereal

MAP

Don't cry little cartographer
press your fingers to the inside
symmetrical rushgush blue plasma breathing into
myopic humanoid heart you've let bifurcate
despite evidence to the contrary all is never lost

SUSPENDED ANIMATION

Genetic imperative restart
Strangelet nymphet running
up and down corridors
wanting for whalesong
feeding for inertia

STEREOSCOPIC VISION

At the traffic light, she drums her nails on the dashboard. The inside of her Camry is a conch, murmuring sea sounds and zipping up the rain on her windows. She looks up at the mustard-colored interior and wonders why she doesn't have a pair of fuzzy dice. Medium-sized, green, bouncing on strings long enough to put passengers at ease, and maybe also long enough to impair her driving. Only slightly, mind you, so the Camry could scuttle into a fire hydrant or a tree. Just a little shock, like when a bone you didn't know was wonky pops back into place. A tree would be lovely, especially at this time of year. The leaves would cast an orangish yellowish glow on the upholstery.

She doesn't get letters anymore. Opening the mailbox is like when she gets a free subway ride because the ticket machine doors were stuck open or when a bone she didn't know was wonky pops back into place. She wonders when she'll see you again, and will you still teach her how to play chess like you'd promised. The trees are yellowish orangish. Are there trees where you are?

On weekends she drives the Camry to a home improvement store and spends several hours

categorizing the color samples in order of preference. Often a color will remind her of you. Chartreuse for your hair, or slate's gray for your book bag, or fire hydrant red for your bedroom walls. She intends to leave before seven, pick up dry cleaning, buy a pair of fuzzy dice, a postcard, a letter. Send you a letter. She has your address somewhere. You had dictated it to her over the phone, and she had written it down on a dinner napkin.

On the way home she goes through the opening act of your favorite opera in her head. Madame Butterfly, she thinks, though she can't be sure. All she knows is that the sound is like opening a mailbox or scuttling into an orangish yellowish tree. Maybe she'll send you a tape if she finds your address. Your face is like driving or a dinner napkin or a letter, common to her. The day has become the kind of cold that your whole body revolves around. She feels her shoulder blades suddenly pop into place. She thinks of you and whether there's light where you are.

BACKWARD

Cavity as wallpaper
as sheetrock
as sidewalk

Moving as seeping
as breathing
as leaving

Mouths of animals hold superlatives
hold rawness
hold love up to the light and magnify

FRANKENSTEIN

Hands held up but don't come back down
tied to the air conditioning vents
where I kneel on your knees and open you up
fill your liver with reason
fill your kidneys with virtue
fill your feet with intention

I don't know how to let go
but I will
and I will write your name
on foggy shower glass



Em Saraff is the woefully corporeal counterpart of Harper Koenig, with whom she shares half a brain, half a room and a strange liking for the classification of Protozoos. As in most symbiotic relationships, they are pretty ambivalent about each other. Sometimes they write (Em holds the paper and Harper the pen) and sometimes they hold chair-throwing contests.