

Red Lemons

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The more the blossoms the more you suffer.

— FRANK STANFORD

## REWINDING AN OVERDOSE ON A PROJECTOR

Blacker. Black. The foam drools back  
up his chin, over his lips and behind his teeth.  
The boy on the floor floats onto the bed.  
Gravity returns. His hands twitch.  
The heart wakes like a handcar pumping faster and faster  
on its greased tracks. Eyes flick open.  
Blood threads through a needle, draws into a tube.  
The syringe handle lifts his thumb.  
The hole in his vein where he left us seals.  
The boy injects a liquid into the cotton  
that drowns inside a spoon. He unties the leather belt  
around his arm, pushes the sleeve to his wrist.  
The wet cotton lifts, fluffs into a dry white ball.  
The flame beneath the spoon shrinks to a spark,  
is sucked inside the chamber where it grows cold,  
then colder. The heroin bubbles to powder.  
The water pours into a plastic bottle. The powder rains  
into a vial where it sleeps like an only child.  
All the contents on the bed spill into a bag.  
The boy stands, feeds his belt through the loops.  
This is where I snip the film and burn it.  
What remains are the few hundred frames  
reeling: the boy unlocking a bedroom door,  
a black jacket rising from the floor, each sleeve  
taking an arm like a mother and father.

*ONE*



## WRESTLING SEASON

I was made from Hawaiian Punch ice-cubes  
chicken breasts & cauliflower ear Sir Newton's  
Law of Motion drilling double leg takedowns  
sprawls shucks fireman's carry I was made from  
garbage bag t-shirts cherry Skoal black spit  
filling water bottles in the back of classrooms  
I was made from ritual a bouquet of boys  
pissing on the other freshman & I that lettered  
in the locker room showers I was made from  
HOME & AWAY meets jogging up & down  
a bus aisle to sweat out the last half-pound  
before a whistle blew so I could try to pin  
the same weight of bones & meat to shoulder  
blades the crowd cheering in one collective  
mouth of thunder the spotlights above pouring  
down on all this strategy to make a shadow  
disappear



A B R A C A D A B R A

As I nod off from the junk,  
J grasps the dead:

his stringy vomit, a pale  
pink face, an ambulance arriving

with two magicians.  
J's on the couch

thinking he'll hover,  
weightless, soon.

One magician holds J down.  
The other feeds a catheter

up his nose, down the esophagus,  
into the stomach. J shakes

as the poison vanishes.  
The finale ends and J's carted

out the front door, a prop  
they've handled many times.

## CIRCULATION

My father told me every blood cell in the body is a dream, and when we drift off to sleep a single blood cell enters the dream chamber at the center of our brains. And then we dream. I have donated dreams before. The human body roughly orbits 724 trillion dreams so there are plenty to spare. Dead dreams are passed through urine and feces. Sewers are full of dead dreams. When my father sawed his thumb off he held his dreams in with the shirt off his back while driving himself to the hospital. He no longer has a nail. It was incinerated with other medical waste inside a rotary kiln that burned an unimaginable amount of dreams. In Hebrew school I pricked my finger with another boy and we rubbed our dreams together. The first dreams existed in the green sea. They were salty. They dreamed up a great vein. When they had veins they dreamed of organs, then bones, then flesh. When I dragged a deer from the side of the road, its last dreams stained to fur, I dumped it inside a forest where maggots in their celebration filled to the brim with those dreams and exploded like firecrackers. Nightmares are not kept inside our bodies. They have not built the Eiffel Tower. They have not baked a red velvet cake. They wait beyond the night in a pitch we cannot hear, like a still pond and all its eaten.

## TRACK MARKS

A caribou stretches its hind legs  
    along the open tundra  
into a pair of white fangs.

Black dots flap above  
    slitting holes in the sky  
as they wait for blood to break the rind.

You said a tree line  
    can disguise the two of us  
like moths tucked between bark.

Each night we chop the trees  
    until the haft of the hatchet  
becomes part of our palm.

We watch Death drag his briefcase  
    through the dark field,  
closer and closer to our soft flesh.

LIFTED, OR THE STORY IS IN THE SOIL,  
KEEP YOUR EAR TO THE GROUND

I've been watching videos of Russian teenage boys  
climbing ladders to the tops of radio towers,  
doing chin-ups and flips on railings of skyscrapers,

dangling off cranes by only fingertips as if the world  
below them was completely absent: Buddha's meditation  
inside his nothingness. Through the camera lens

mounted to their heads I see visible cities: the distorted  
people and small buzz of automobiles becoming ants  
in slow motion returning to their cement-steel colonies.

The street grids below create order as the people age  
closer to their destination. These boys don't wear gloves,  
don't chalk up their palms while Death's waiting

to swallow them if they slip. When I lean over  
my apartment balcony I want to jump. This is called  
*High Place Phenomenon*—confusion and fear, a cognitive

dissonance, an internal cue of plunging off the edge  
signals the brain to back away from the danger.  
But these boys blinking on the screen eat clouds—

would climb to heaven if it existed, only to climb  
out of it, and out of that. Now, I've been eating spoonful's  
of dirt, slowly bending my knees toward earth in mid-

conversation, holding eye contact as I talk to whoever  
about whatever like water. I crouch down, spit the spoon  
out my mouth, claw the grass leaving an empty patch,

then dig into the dirt and eat it like air. Each day the dirt  
piles inside me like a mountain. Something dangerous  
like a mountain. Like the tiny zoo lodged at the back

of my throat repeating *feed me*. And I do. I feed the animals  
well, but keep eating the animals because of how hungry  
I am, and before I know it, the animals escape:

a car floor soaked with giraffe heads, iguana mush,  
and a menagerie of rainbowed feathers. For years the world  
went mute, birds didn't sing or I ignored their song

because I needed to subtract the beautiful things,  
until the garden inside me, until the garden inside me  
flowered a shovel, told me to dig, and I dug and dug.

SYRINGE LEFT IN A HOT CAR

This evening cuts like childhood—

my fascination with edges, sharp things.  
How I filed spokes off bicycle rims,

tucked pocketknives between fingers:  
pinky and ring, ring and middle,

middle and pointer. Walked on all fours  
stabbing the backyard grass. I was a lion

stalking the plastic flamingo  
that would spin in the wind. I'd wait

for a gust to rotate my prey once,  
twice, three times. Then pounce.

All the *sunlight* splashes in.

*TWO*

RED LEMONS

My friend kisses a silver Jesus hanging below his throat—  
My sister's friend wore a pond  
like a crown; he handwrote her a letter  
before fading beneath water. If god were a spider  
I'd toss the Big Book at it. In a sober house  
I puked bricks for an entire year, stacked them  
until they took shape of a normal kind of me.  
I'm soft as tomentum.  
There's a woman I'll always love in a cave's-mouth-sipping-moonlight  
kind of way. Her face is a guillotine.  
How I love sharpness.  
There are no clouds swollen with souls in outer space.  
An artist carved the underworld onto stone.  
My niece draws lemons in red marker.



## HUNTING SEASON

I didn't know where the first bullet went.

You stumbled a good half-mile,

laid down, eyes cracked enough to see my outline  
as the sun lowered from its braided rope.

I had to shoot another one, but this time your skull  
rang in the key of F sharp. We counted

the jagged tines of your antlers, loaded you  
onto the gator's bed. I smoked cigarette after cigarette

on the ride back, thought about hell and the redness  
of your wounds. You were not to be a decoration,

but meat stored in a freezer. We hung you upside down  
as blood dripped into a tin vat, and there,

between your antlers, you dreamed a forest so dense  
and dark, movement was impossible. When I'd eat you,

I'd eat only you. No salt or pepper. I'd press you  
to the flame and all those trees you winded through.

## URINE SAMPLE

M fills a condom with clean piss,  
ties it off around a rubber band.  
He takes off his pants and shimmies the band  
up his thigh, like a garter.

A deer walks in on hind legs.  
It howls its intestines out.  
The deer is a body with important holes.

I am in Saint Paul,  
far from home, three months sober.  
My body feels desiccated.

M is shedding his body. His body,  
one giant peachbruise dribbling venom.

Anyone can buy clean piss online.  
M buys it from the sober house next door.  
An old man peddles twenty ounce Gatorade bottles for ten bucks.

M is filled with holes.

Beneath his blanket he shoots heroin  
between his toes, within his fort  
he floats toward that yawn of light.

## APHRODISIAC

I bought a bottle of powdered seahorse pills

at a head shop,  
where I haggled the price down

by five dollars, but still paid too much.  
I busied back to the house

and googled the subject: twenty million seahorses  
ground down each year,

an ounce of seahorse worth more than  
an ounce of silver, and I'm glossing over

at least ten other ostensible facts  
about seahorse powder.

Later I read of the fish—  
struck by their courtship rituals

it's no wonder these pulverized creatures,  
crammed into capsules,

parade their residual affection  
as they course through the bloodstream

of men with little libidos.  
I could paraphrase

from what I gathered on Wikipedia,  
however, the paragraph

on seahorse courtship alone is a poem itself:  
"When the female's eggs reach maturity,

she and her mate let go

(no stanza break)

of any anchors and drift upward,

snout-to-snout, out  
of the seagrass, spiraling as they rise.”

I'm now obsessed with seahorses.  
There's so much beauty in them

and the word seahorse.  
I like that I can spell *seashore*

from *seahorse*.  
I like to picture the word *seahorse* swimming

too quickly, the letters rearranging  
and letting go of the *o*,

where it drops to the seafloor.  
The word now spells *bearses*.

I like to think that each one  
of these gelatin capsules

carrying these seahorses  
are hearses. I fill a glass of tap water

from the kitchen sink,  
place three hearses on my tongue,

and tow them into another sea.

## WORKING THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE

Begin with a 10,000 volt cattle prod.

No.

Begin with silver and its sheen: a double-edged blade slicing a throat.



Or begin where the carcass floats into air, its shadow traveling across linoleum.

This room is called the kill floor.



The color red spills into a steaming trough.

The color red spills into a steaming drain.

Light crashes where the drainpipe bends.

Light crashes into the color of night brushing its stars.

In this process the color red could be



imagined as the color of eyes fastened shut—.



Red rendezvous at a pink lake.

The pinkness of the lake is based on length, depth, and the amount of death contained.



There's a blue-green machine that twirls and whirls.

Due to this rotation the water cycle is born.

The pink particles evaporate in the pink lake to the color  
nothing.



## SOBER HOUSE

I loved the grass driveway full of cigarette butts—  
the screened-in front porch  
with the burnt plastic Foldger's ashtray.  
I loved all ten of us.  
I loved all nine of us.  
I loved the kinked words of *lights out*,  
how each bedroom was a double,  
and the bathroom garbage bins  
were full of semen-crumpled toilet paper.  
Our days were boring and we needed to explode.

I loved all eight of us. I loved all nine of us.  
I loved our house meetings  
and the house manager with gums  
full of chew, gutting or swallowing spit  
like a thirsty subjugator  
without a horse in battle,  
because our days were boring  
and we needed to explode.

Some relapsed, others disappeared.  
I loved all eight of us.  
I learned the names of flowers  
in funeral homes: chrysanthemums,  
gladiolus, lilies, roses.  
I learned to stay awake at night  
because the days were boring  
and I needed to explode.  
I loved all nine...eight...seven...



*THREE*

## TESSERA CT

On the 19th turn.

I count the colors of infinity.

I'm the ugly.

A lost shape happiest in silver moonrain.

Like a purple monkshood.

A friend's overdose.

I stand inside night's coma.


Like a wasp boring through the pulp of a black cherry.

I send you feelings from the wound.

A graveyard's turbulence.

I'm dark dark woods.

The slow drip of magic hours chained to the heliosheath.



A nurse's pressed stethoscope.

The pit of butterflies flapping inside my chest.

One bent wing.

A murmur.

My heart's a levee with a leaky valve.

Ribs cracked open.

Valve sewn shut.

Ice-chips melt in a white styrofoam cup.

I pinch some into a ball.

Like a daddy long-leg's body.

Head, thorax.

Abdomen fused together.

Place the sippy ice onto my tongue.

Click a blue button for more morphine.

I'm nineteen with broken ribs.

A big zipper down my chest.

My heart's seen the glow of artificial light.

Now it wants eight eyes like a spider.

It wants a mouth with sharp teeth to bite.

I just want more morphine.



A pill bottle follows, hollows.

Refill.

Swallow.

Opiates and volts.

This is crazy.

Floating over the wasteland's sky.

This is crazy.

Like thunder falling into the seafloor's amnesia.

Weeks collaging.

Into broken spokes of a wagon's wheel.

The many sounds of needles.

Kissing my father's cheek like a pale green vein.

The weekend recluse.

The pale green vein.

I swear I'm not.


The tesseract—.

I'm a shape I no longer feel.

No longer see.

A vulture circles its own shadow.

Across Death's chain-link fence.



Stab after stab of vein.

I tread waist-deep through the muddy water.

Gut fish with a field skinner.

How the blade gleams.

Bonewhite in moonlight.

I chew their violet hearts out.

Pink, blue, black organs too.

Suck blood from my fingernails.

I fasten two torches for horns.

Ignite each wick.

Light spreads.

The way rain gashes a hole for another cloud to bloom.


The horizon spills from three pitchers.

Land.

Sky.

And Death's finger tracing my blood.

Like a river growing inside a fish's eyes.



Repetition's blunder.

Like a purple monkshood.

A friend's overdose.

Unarticulated tiny roots.


The split of two poles.

I keep company the wild things.

The thaw above my skull.

The snowflake's ribcage.

Pierced by the pink tinge on a salt's crystal.



I'm the thief wolfing the night.

Linger like twilight between skull and skin.

A throat slit like lips.

I'm the flood inside my body.

The flood outside my body.

I'm the red flower in the red field.

I crush the red flower.

In the red field.

Because of the way it makes the deer feel.

I crush little delicate things.

Full of flavor.

I pluck the seeds off my body.

Until I am seedless.

It feels like a deer stomping a red field.

I toss the seeds beneath my bed.

Where the field grows red.

Where the deer grows.

Stomping the field red and red again.




All these angles, all these angels.

Stamped bundles of h. unflapping.

The shape of dead friends I encounter.

The good terribles.





Inject—.

For a moment the emerald prairie is caribou.

In the shape of thunder.

Sliced apples naked on the plate.

Bruise into a snuffed torch at the cave's end.

The wind's whistle over foxholes.

Reeling the salmon upstream.

It all blends fortuitously.


The bloodroot crumbles into a thousand dirt petals.

The river's static.

Black spoons.

Cotton balls.

Inject—.



Every time a booby-trap.

This is war.

War with self.

War with daybreak and belladonna powder.

From the axe grind.

Sparks blinding eyes.

It's quicksand.

Don't wiggle, be still.

Tap the hair-trigger.

Plunder hours.

The clandestine clock unfolding.

Bone and muscle.

Into a lost trail.

Tall grasses whipping.

A twinned hell in and out of mêlée.


This is no bravery.

No warrior or purple heart.

Come out from the brush, little boy.

Drop your rifle.

Hand over everything your body owns.



Eject—.

Sick of this.

Facing it.

Calling my sister in a language of doubt.

The family meeting.

A mountain in Connecticut.

*High Watch Recovery Center.*



The body settles like a new tombstone.

In the pouring rain.

An ache like a river.

Knifing fog.

The shrapnel of hours' ricochet.


As starfrost glazes the Detox Unit.

I'm trying to think of just one beautiful thing.

The red ice.

Beneath the cook's meat was once a cloud.

Grazing Siberian wildsky.



Rehab's sunglasses.

Fog everywhere.

A circle of aluminum chairs.

Twelve stairs.

Fog everywhere.

Twelve stairs.

A sober house in Saint Paul.

The heap of junkies on the smoking porch.

Days collaging on the smoking porch.

The perfume of morning.


Meetings at West End.

Bill W. and his band of misfits.

Riding horses with blue feathers.

Towing wagons full of desert.

Serenity.



Courage.

Wisdom.

Flakes of winter.

Poison stashed under a white rug.

Under heaven.

He knew where the knife was.

He knew how to slice the cloud.

A deer with dyed cherry eyes.

Repetition's blunder.

Like a purple monkshood.


M's overdose.

Inside the sky beneath the ground.

The language of maggots.

The river shutting its eyes.

Stoneflies swallowed by the tide.



Dreams stampeding across my bone-ocean skull.

Night and day now.

Serenity. Courage. Wisdom.

Meeting D.

Looking like a vine.

D.

A pack a day.

Cathedral Hill.

D.

The second floor nook at Nina's Coffee Café.

D.

D.

Riding bikes in snow.

Moving out, moving in.

Her eyes bright.


Like two aces, face up on green felt.

Days I stare at them.

Like an arrow drawn by men who can't sleep.

Our song a wild horse.

Struggling up the undertow of a cliff.



The foxglove stuck between my teeth.

The arrow.

The bullseye.

I'm writing this because I'm alive.

I'm the ugly.

Chained to the heliosheath.

Avalanche of winter.

Moving out, moving in.

The apartment on Grand Ave.

The shape of being alone.

Nights cold as piano wires.

Sober beneath a carapace.

A pack a day.


Repetition's blunder.

Like a purple monkshood.





The purple monkshood.



Long walks with a blank mind.

Blue lights on a blue bridge.

Walking.

Large spoon with a cherry.

Walking.

Large green chair on Smith Ave.

Walking, walking.

Calling Mom.

I love you.

Calling Dad.

I love you.

Sisters, I love you.

A flight to Jersey.

Quiet sober.

Graveyard visits.



Back to Minnesota.

The shape of being alone.

Sharp angles.

In a past life I was a blue blaze of sky.

In a past life the blue bottom of a flame.

A distant afternoon lost in sleep.

Counting sobriety.

2013, the grey winter, grey snow.

Blue plant by the window.

She names it Tesseract.

Conor and whisky.

Winter and its complex shadow.

Like the dead friends I talk to.



I stand barefoot on knifetips singing to dusk.

Singing to the river.

Singing to the arrow and its bullseye and the secrets between them.

Like a tiger-pit.

Like a purple monkshood.

I keep company the wild things.

The thaw above my skull.

Singing, singing.


If you can hear me singing.

If you can extract these knives from my feet.

Place them in my palms.

Let me bleed into a star.

Scratching what's unborn.



I know it'll all vanish.

The perfume of thighs after sex.

Ivy climbing.

Constricting bricks to rubble.

Clouds spilling.

The moon pulling the sea into itself.

Light in a window at 3AM.

Light in the pale flint sky.

All these angels.

This orbit.

That orbit.

# *FOUR*







the Brick of Creation  
like an apple.

## BRICK

Layer after layer of oyster shells  
stitched into riverbeds, scraped by the hands  
of brickmakers collecting clay beneath,  
rolled in glassy sands, pressed into molds,  
pressed over and over, aglow inside a kiln,  
stacked on brick buggies, towed mile upon mile,  
springing up churches, schools, clock towers ticking,  
rows of exclamation points, commas, periods  
at the edges of cities, a community of ellipses  
where laws are decided beneath pillars of brick,  
a foundation of brick, fireproof, huff-and-  
puff proof, wolf-proof, people licking the salt off  
each other's brick faces, licking bricks  
like lollipops, a field of lollipops sprouting  
from rock and blood, soot and ash  
to shield the winter's wind  
that scoops fistfuls of switchblades  
as it blows over white lakes,  
scoops fish hooks and god's alarm clock  
still ringing from the sun's rim, the same wind  
now cutting across purple faces  
at bus stops, blue fingers inside black pockets,  
the wild mane of parkas stampeding  
above city sidewalks, briefcases  
filled with gravy soup, ladle after  
ladle of the dull gray brick day  
dripping through office windows,  
prisms peeking out at dunes  
of snowcapped street corners  
the children climb as they exit  
the school bus to bloom  
into something still soft,  
still wild in the world.

## ELECTRIC CAVE ART

Soured blubber mixed with  
charcoal or ochre or hunger,  
lines curving a contour into the  
mouth agape,

bushy legs stretched in a sprint,  
the beast pinned to granite.  
A caveman rubs his finger  
against the sharpness

of his spear, stares at the  
painting of his bison until  
some blood leaks out. He licks  
his finger, tastes a star.

At age eleven, I was an amateur  
in Microsoft Paint.  
After school I'd sit for hours  
at the computer

with 28 color palettes. I was  
well fed: hotdogs, nuggets,  
lots of ketchup. I had no  
interest in painting food,

but obsessed over Bruce "Little  
Phoenix" Lee. I dragged  
my mouse into a shape of him  
wushu butterfly kicking

on my father's Dell monitor.  
When the caveman  
rubbed his finger on the sharp  
stone he couldn't think

of anything else, but the kill.  
Starving, he painted his food  
for the small taste to get him  
through this maze of stars

still  
burning above  
our heads.

A SUN WITHOUT PLANETS

dreams of a seed

waking up the landscape

into a moment  
belonging to nothing

but its narrow slice of light

walking its growl  
over a blue bridge

a child spits off of

## HOMETOWN VISIT

They climb the gate  
with sleepwalking  
fingers. Moving with  
the surface,  
the Dead stagger low  
like moth-

wings doused with raindrops.  
Nightfall,  
a cinerary. In the cemetery,  
on a cold stoop  
of the only mausoleum,  
the Dead fall

one by one, sparking  
my chest  
as they spill into me.  
And then  
the stars disappear,  
the trees disappear,

the earth. I'm not sure why  
it's in this order.  
If I carry them beyond the gate,  
they'll be free  
from this place, able to wander  
godknowswhere.

I never do find the way out  
of course.  
I have to shake the Dead from me,  
like a dishtowel  
that's wiped shards of glass off  
a kitchen floor.

When the silver-white stars

resurface  
I hear azalea petals  
in conversation  
with the wind.

The earth  
  
comes back. The ground  
with bitter grass  
fastens this body  
to an orbit,  
and I'm inside of myself,  
the stars

paint me into dawn.

## NOTHING GETS CROSSED OUT

Right now on the front porch  
the blood moon is splayed across a newspaper of stars.  
I feel their cortege of kisses.  
I feel the bleached car lights driving past,  
each face an anvil  
I'll never know. I feel the color of confusion.  
The roots of childhood buried in the backyard.  
I feel the kite I let go of at Belmar beach  
and the years it took to wash up on another shore.  
I feel the dark alleyways of countries  
I'll never visit, the imagined  
tang of their cuisine  
and purple words for *lavender, iris, plum*.  
I feel the books that stained my teeth  
as I sipped slowly on fine lines like Sangiovese.  
I like how drunk I can get from words.  
I feel centuries of grief in the line  
"wherefore art thou Romeo." I feel grief.  
I feel this empty bottle of wine  
sleeping between my thighs.  
A green glass glowing by starlight.  
Its contents I now possess inside me  
possesses me to wrestle the phone  
out from my pocket  
and call you, but you can't answer.  
I leave a voicemail. *Come back*, I say. Distance  
is separated by two syllables.  
One left in my mouth.  
The other already in the ground.