

**VANILLA SEX MAGAZINE**  
**ISSUE ONE**

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## **KINDA BLUE**

(Joseph Mains)

The natural pattern is

a hemistich

of speech of iamb—I am a blue pain :

botox all your lips till they're softsoftsoft

fuck two three one spondee here we now go

dactyls and then blow. Careful, hear your soul

spill out listen whatever your name is

listen I'm bringing a box of your bones

a black black box transubstantiation

undone little wafer eucharist white

pills of rich jazz aficionados

the boys the boys the boys the boys the boys

An O! feeling kind of blue balls mymy

LA then Boston Phoenix— Catholic

bad boy in a good boy suit. Now listen,

when I think of myself, I think of myself

on tv.

## ***The Kind of Person I Am? Not Good.***

(Jamie McGraw)

For example:

A girl in my ninth-grade gym class calls me fat,

I piss in her soda bottle.

I find the world's well-being to be frivolous  
compared to my own.

I eat meat.

I've killed some spiders.

I masturbated twelve hours after I was raped,  
and I came.

I blame the victim.

I fantasize about his death.

(pour scalding milk on his cock,  
watch it roar rose, glinting phallus,  
my hangnails pare off its pelt,

I bottle-feed him the membrane)

I shun self-deprecation.

I'm disinterested in friendships.

I quit paying attention to our conversation  
fifteen minutes ago, I lied, your music,  
your art, your wit, you, it's not good,  
but, hey, call me.

I backed into some cars, didn't leave notes.

I let a woman pamper my cunt,  
solely because she said I was beautiful,

I loved a drug more than my mother--  
in fact, I mainlined it in a funeral home bathroom  
while she sobbed over her father's corpse.

So, when I die, I request that Death crawl,  
drag his rawboned body to my side,  
and I request it be protracted,

foreseeable, and in hindsight, preventable.

Because I'm unimpressed with quickness,  
with abrupt tenebrosity.

Suffering is,  
it has always been,  
the point.

## ***11 Ways to Turn Your Man On***

(Justin Evans)

1: Blow his mind with this sneaky move: stand behind him and stroke his penis. This positions your palm flat against his member's sensitive underside, the same way he grips it when he masturbates. Then do a few things he can't do himself, like whisper in his ear or kiss his back.

2: Kiss and lick your way down his torso, stopping short of his penis, then give him a smile and work your way back up. Repeat several times until he begs for mercy.

3: Practice regular breathing. Focus your mind on you and your man's pelvic rhythms. Counter them in your breath. His member is a dog's matted wet legs playing in the wake on the ocean's edge. It is night and no one can find you here.

4: While he is inside you, tell your man you're going away for a little while. Close your eyes and imagine fingers reaching out from you. They slide out nail, intermediate phalange, proximal phalange, wrist, palm, all followed by a long, sweet arm, like out of a sleeve. Your Pelvis contains an incredible machine, which, by perfectly designed engineering, your body quickly and effortlessly creates another human out of stored mucus you've swallowed in your sleep over years or decades. Feel this machine's single piston pass its energies and manage its fluids. Feel it create and push this man out of you, piece by piece. Then when it is finished, open your eyes. There he is, your child, fully constructed and loving you. Bark at him violently.

5: Start off with a purr or an mmmm, or simply breathe heavily. Then up the erotic ante by whispering, "I only enjoy this because I enjoy you"

6: The roots of the poplar reach deep into the moist earth. Silent. The sky is black.

7: Surround yourself with dogs.

8: Spit on him while he dreams. Rub it gently into his skin while describing yourself on all fours, sunburnt, following a trail through the shadows behind apartment buildings.

9: Steam things up at home by moving outside the bedroom and doing it on top of a sturdy table, kitchen counter, bathroom sink, or hood of a car that's parked in your garage.

10: Cook meat, drink whiskey. Look at something beautiful and do not talk about it.

11: Something shakes the dust out of its fur in the crawlspace, then whimpers back to sleep. Below the layers of the earth there are only more layers and then the surface on its backside. Strangely you do not drown underneath all this air. Strangely the roof's beams have not rotted and fallen. Strangely your eyes have become adjusted to all this light, and all of this darkness.

## ***A Job***

(Adam Whittaker Snavely)

I painted the summer before I got married.  
Nothing artistic, mind you.  
I painted flat colors  
on flat classroom walls,  
and was paid to do so.  
Antique white, driftwood,  
I painted the cathedrals of knowledge  
“Practical Beige”  
because the people who run elementary schools  
are evil,  
and prefer the brains of their students  
at a room-temperature mush  
before dining on them.

It was a job.  
I woke up at five,  
which seemed like a time  
at which God was still asleep,  
and drove to work  
in the purple half-light.  
It was a job.

My fiancée was amused  
and annoyed  
by my dread  
at the impending hours  
of globbing brown paint onto a brown brush  
to swipe onto a door frame  
that was a slightly darker brown.  
“Wow. You really hate work.”  
And I suppose she had a point,



that I should take pride in my work,  
and maybe the children will rush into their classrooms  
the day of their return  
and run to the wall,  
caress the wall,  
worship its semi-gloss smoothness  
with their underdeveloped fingers  
and snot-filled noses;  
they will praise the painter  
who rolled this wall,  
and the Sherwin-Williams  
who provided this latex-free paint,  
and the originator  
of latex-free paint,  
without whom  
the undesirables with latex allergies  
would creep back into their uneducated caves  
to itch at their ignorant hives.

But it was a job,  
and I hated it  
because if you love a job,  
you call it a career.  
Jobs are for hating.

So I continued waking up at five,  
and kept picking clumps of color  
from under my fingernails,  
because if you can't love a job,  
you can still love the work,  
and you can love the wall  
shiny with wet paint  
spread over dingy concrete and acrylic  
to make it look new,

and you can brush into every pore  
so those little assholes  
have one less thing to stare at  
in Math.

## ***Coca-Cola Red***

(Prewitt Scott-Jackson)

A mangled stowaway creeping towards the noon o'clock train barely negotiates the all aboard leap.

Bandana+stick carry-on luggage carries a stamped out passport, a lighter, a stubby pencil and a journal as I dream of discovering zilch in a foreign desert gulch humming the Blues on the blue-hued caboose between stops.

“Terminal,” whispered the doctor as she solemnly bowed her head.

Most terminal patients simply eek it out in some stale death-black hospital room, but not me ... like eggs, plans hatch.

My son smuggled my corpse out of that bus stop to Hell, dropped it off at the airport. Scrambling together a vision quest, a walkabout in the Hindu Kush; that's how I want to end it.

I seek nothing in particular, only that which might combat my distaste for the waiting, that dastardly wait for Den Mother Death.

Another stop. I bury myself in a corner while train conductors conduct symphonic searches with their hands and eyes.

My smell likely gave me away.

“What are you doing here?! This is a restricted area!”

“I'm sorry, I'll leave. I'm sorry...” but not before I swipe the shiny canteen from his utility belt!

“Stop, thief! You bandit!”

Despite my decrepit state, I manage to outrun the podgy conductor.

As my brain succumbs to REM tonight, I will experience the last dream of my life.

[Two unbridled unicorns fight to the death. In the backdrop, rainbows blanket the Hindu Kush whilst the beasts color the ground in Coca-Cola red. We all bleed red, even the cryptids bleed red. Oscar Golfed with Mike. Uniforms optional, as Romeo & Juliet perfected the Tango. Personified not-so-cryptic radio call signs sing out to me ... wake up, wake up, wake ...]

“Wake up! Wake Up!”

“Who? What the what?” The conductor stands over my *Castaway* frame, his four friends are parked behind him comfortably resting atop their bridled donkeys.

My smell likely led them to me.

The conductor speaks again, louder this time, finally fully capturing my attention, piercing through my morning-eye-booger daze.

“Hudud! Sariqa!”

“What?! I don’t understand,” I plead with the donkey cowboys.

“He says he will take one hand for retribution, for theft.”

The conductor strikes down with a swift swing at my wrist.

Coca-Cola red.

The sight of this hardly fazes the men; they peacefully smile, give a kick to their asses’ asses and turn away. The conductor spits on the ground then follows suit with his friends, exiting the gulch, leaving me to moan and twitch.

“To my son:” I write with the hand that remains attached.

“My vanity seems unmatched. My illusions are just that, they are mine.”

“Do not be upset at the way in which I died. I chose this.”

“My son, you, well, you will always be the best of me. The lightness in me is you.”

“I’m sliding down now, slipping away.”

“Minutes are small hours, remember that my son. Remember that always.”

## ***To the Pretentious Fuckboys in My American Lit Class***

(Katelyn Claesson)

This is a public service announcement to the fuckboys in my American Lit class:

1) you are not alcoholics, you just want to be.

2) congrats: you read Ernest Hemingway like everyone one else.

3) hating a woman doesn't make you a good poet, loving one does.

4) Hemingway bought the gun he used to kill himself at an Abercrombie and Fitch.

5) the last thing you bought at Abercrombie and Fitch was a polo shirt in the 8th grade.

6) you don't know shit about Hemingway.

## ***Fuck Vanilla Sex***

(Lofidel)

“Poetry’s just not my thing anymore” pinch Pabst Blue Ribbon  
bottlecap between right hand index  
and thumb, bend into mute landfill seashell,  
I don’t care what it’s telling me  
I feel like the ocean when I hear myself these past fourfive months  
crashing on all my beloved rocks and mutating shores  
unilaterally breaking/stoically observed.  
Baddreamchurn of saliva drying at corners of open mouths,  
oozing genitalia, ravenous hands, awkward  
positions bravely held in war against boredom/awareness of self.  
Looking up, sky  
looking out, city  
looking in, organs--  
the absent magic in each a refutation of magic in the former.  
Today I am simply crestfallen, low-res b-roll of ocean in winter,  
breaking again, ripping me back, away into myself  
camouflaging deep into someone  
else’s unrelentingly so-called beauty

***scrumptious***

(Victor Anderson)

am i hungry  
you ask.  
you've made something for me,  
you say.  
unbuttoning your plaid slacks.  
you arch  
your back pressed firm  
raised above carpet  
the waistline slips down your thighs  
grazing past your pussy  
lingering by your ankles  
soon to be peeled away by me.  
repeat.  
only this time  
lime green underoos  
kicked away by you.

dinner has been served.



## ***Cavan Hoose Was First Chair Saxophone and Very Clumsy***

(Pretty Baby)

I was a genius child  
That is undeniable  
Gap between incisors that you could drive a Tonka truck through  
First day of school  
So nervous I puked  
Pure orange juice n lucky charms  
Only to find  
My shitty-pantsed colleagues  
Philistine  
The kind of kids who taught their  
Starter Pokemon HM's  
Or hadn't memorized Good Night Moon yet  
2nd grade and I'm holding dominion  
Learned forgiveness from starting a Dragon Ball Z discussion group  
(All of my peers had so quickly pardoned Piccolo for his misgivings in the original series)  
Taught them why we hate Frieza so much, psychologically-  
He was Goku[read:a young boy's only real god]'s perfect foil  
And, months later, how the common thread in the series  
Of the quest for immortality was in fact inherently villainous  
As our mortality is our only universal common ground as human beings, whom we all agreed were  
good,  
And any attempt, let alone a murderous one, to compromise that solidarity was an attack on our  
very species

I didn't mention to them that I was going to live forever

4th grade started eating more than lasagna and getting bored of boys  
And terrified of girls  
But all attempts to work my gender fluidity chart into show-and-tell were decided failures  
Told mom her God was dead and learned the phrase, "can of whoop-ass" from the film Waterboy,  
Sandler's unequivocal magnum opus

[This was months before I'd see *Punch Drunk Love* and pen my essay trilogy, "Punch", "Drunk", and "Love", which only moments upon the latter's completion I would burn in a fit of self doubt, the flames accenting the scarlet letters "P" and "U" pinned above my heart ("P" for "Pedantic" and "U" for "Uninspired")].

5th grade I graduated elementary school with honors and left an uneclipsable legacy of 562 Gold Stars, 42,347.5 AR points, and 323 missed school days

No possible authority could be bothered by the truancy, as it was apparent that my personal research

And thirst for self-actualization\* (as I had delineated in my hundreds of crayon-scribbled excuse notes)

Easily superseded the necessity for patronage parade that public schooling had become.

I had "lost" the state spelling bee earlier that year after being

Given the word, "Neuropsychopharmacologist"

And spelling out "F-U-C-K-Y-O-U-M-Y-I-Q-I-S-1-7-5"

In the 14th round, the last of three participants

The only one who didn't write the words out in air with my finger

6th grade saxophone first chair

Got into Wordsworth

Learned the profundity in brevity

Saw Cavan get stabbed in the hall

Friend died in a house fire

Brother beat up father

[A pause from studies to experiment]

7th grade first cigarette from mom's carton. She'd never noticed: hated it, did it again couple hours later 'cos I felt the same as earlier

8th grade all friends hate me

Thought they were jealous

Me

Just asshole

Summer between 8 n 9 drank first time  
Can't remember much after

18 got a phone text my girlfriend

23 passed out back taxi

## ***Healthcare.***

(Alex Lacey)

Somedays I want to climb mountains when I wake up. I choose to spend four hours in the public library instead, because the way things are working out, it may not be open in the foreseeable future. I hear open chatter about Healthcare.gov. “Remember, the deadline is April 30th. You still have time to sign up.” I smoke a cigarette once a month, on the the first week. I like to feel the nicotine inside of me. I should climb this building in front of my vantage, I think some afternoons. This is a civic mountain of metal and wires. Somedays I feel bigger than a mountain. I am a mountain with different veins of blood rather than veins of rock and minerals. I am the mountain of myself. One day, like this library, I will not be standing. The fire alarm wakes me from a corner nook, someone has been smoking in a restroom. I spit on the concrete outside on the sidewalk as we all shuffle out. I don’t like the taste of smoke, not that there was any—I don’t even like the thought. I’ve only got ten days to sign up on healthcare.gov.

## ***Night Prayer 5***

(Justin Evans)

1: The world is round but you might not notice that the world is round if no one sat you down and told you. I read somewhere that a significant percentage of Russians believe the sun revolves around the earth. You can't blame people for that. One day, someone will think you're stupid for believing in plate tectonics or the eighth law of thermodynamics.

2: God has many names and is a very nice person. She wears camouflage all the time so we never see her, but we can talk to her and she'll listen which is polite and nice of her to do.

3: Everyone in the audience is very handsome or beautiful, or both. I would like to have lunch or coffee with each of them. However, I do not like the way they look at me, or their pointy noses, or their bad posture. Except for Sarah, she has the most wonderful posture.

4: This is my favorite poem in the world. When I first wrote it I was very tired and sweaty. When I first read it I was very happy with myself and the formidable power of the English language.

5: Tim Benton is my best friend in the whole world. He reads really good books and he's smart and gives good book suggestions. If any of you meet Tim at a bar or at the Bouchon Creperie, where he works, you should try to be friends with him. Say something clever about star trek: Next Generation, or mention the Michael Chabon novel you were thinking about buying. He also watches good movies and plays Frisbee golf.

6: This is definitely the best poem I've ever written. Before I came here William Blake called me and asked me if it was finished. I told him it was and he sounded really happy about it. Normally I would find such a reaction insincere, but from what college professors have said about him, I figured he really was happy I finished. I was surprised because I always thought William Blake was dead, but then I thought: well, I always think Bob Dylan is dead, so maybe logic is fallible.

7: Barbara Milligan is from Carboro, Michigan. I thought she was very beautiful until I invited her to lunch. I made her a bagel with pimento and chives, which she refused to eat with her shirt on. Chest, stomach, shoulders, breasts were covered in tiny scars like a tangled plaid. While she ate she would stick fingers in her gums and rub spittle across her naked torso—which I can only

assume, was in order to attract the miniature rodents and cats that claw at her checkered flesh in the dark. Regardless it was a fantastic lunch, and when we had finished our bagels and white wine, she put a hand over her heart and told me “I hate you much more than I love you, but I love you”.

***Light Therapy***  
(Joshua Johnston)

The only movies  
I enjoy watching  
are those that are so old  
I can be certain  
every member of the cast  
is dead by now,  
that way I know everyone  
is telling the truth.

***Haiku***  
(Joshua Johnston)

A class of children  
in a wildlife center  
studying a fox skeleton,

learning about  
decomposition.

Their lives, like everyone  
else's, are little  
Lars von Trier films.

## **CRAIG/SLIST**

(Joseph Mains)

And justice for all Don, sad, said. Justice  
is just a bedtime story was the title  
M4M&Boys so let's rent a bus  
en route to Chicago AWP bile  
colored trees out the shadowen window  
do leaves feel lonely when they see their dreaded  
*neighbor falling?* Do I want this? No. Do  
I need this? Yes. *Filler, Buster* I said  
like want a ride un/cut pocket slut the  
truths is : we're dumb and blonde and English-free :  
Kum-n-Go in Iowa—stopped for pho  
recited Jay Z and Phillip Sydney  
we dropped'um boyz off at Magic Gardens.  
Call us: we'll beat you like Tonya Harding.



## *I'm Related to Woodrow Wilson*

(Katelyn Claesson)

and I'd rather be buried  
in the south  
60 years from now  
under scorched soil  
and limp limbs  
of petrified oak  
share ground  
with unmarked slave graves  
housing  
skeleton  
hands  
that built everything  
i was taught to be proud of  
raise that tethered flag  
stitched Together  
by some Chinese woman  
with fluorescent light eyes,  
spindle fingers  
and freedom

## ***On Leaving Your Cats For The Weekend***

(Keegan Bradford)

The cat are really fucking up the kitchen today  
Every time I turn to throw out my lemon scented pledge wipe  
The white one is back on the table  
Scattering her fur across the surface, pawing the air in my direction  
Begging for a caress, even though she knows she will receive an admonition.  
The black one is fragile and shy,  
And is stuck beneath the dishwasher.  
I tell him he has gotten himself into the mess so why should I get him out  
He mews, his eyes so wide, a world of danger suddenly real to him.  
It is not all blanket covered couches and bags of clean laundry  
For frolicking, it is not buckets of socks and tousled bed covers  
It is not the warm place between two sets of sleeping legs.  
It is the single lamp left lit for them while we are away,  
The small circle of light where both cats curl up [together]  
Forsaking the food in the bowl and the chance to climb the counters  
Waiting for the dark to recede and the key to turn in the lock  
Waiting for the return of legs for them to wind around  
Crying over and over, We thought you'd never come back.  
We thought we were alone.

## ***Sundown at the Ranch***

(Gregory Lee Sullivan)

He puts his hands on his wife again.

“Not now, you animal,” she tells him. “We’re in the kitchen.” He had no true intention of starting something right then. He’d just been trying to get a rise out of her. He was slicing up a cantaloupe, she a melon. Though they could have afforded to crank up the air, they used a large metal fan sometimes when in the addition. But a little sweat’s good for you, especially somewhere like Crawford.

George will stand out there, look out, and watch the evening sun reflect off his grass, God’s grass.

George Sr. used to say to him, “Far as the eyes can see, George. Far as the eyes can see.” And they would both stare out at the land.

“I tried, baby,” George said to Laura one night recently. “I tried but I fucked it all up.”

“People forget anything, if you give them enough time,” she encouraged him, stroking his head.

George saddled up to her, touching a breast through some clothes. Laura was still fully dressed, thumbing through family photos on her iPhone.

Lately, George has tried to stay low-key.

“You weren’t bad so much,” Laura said to him, “it’s just anybody in your shoes, they do so much, some good, some bad, and people tend to stick on the bad a while.”

Laura was more mad at Jeb than George had been after Jeb had just a few nights earlier leaked that family email chain to somebody at the paper, the one that had the self-portraits George had made showing the former president’s stubby feet emerging from the bath water.

“Bob Dylan paints,” said George, lying back.

“I know,” said the former first lady. “But I don’t think it’s that. It’s that how you imply your nudity but don’t show your private parts since you’re only implying it. I think it’s endearing, you know, how you manage it. I think most people would find it all endearing, but you’ve got to know it’s strange, if only because of who you are.”

“I didn’t have my private parts in there,” George said.

“Right, it was a bubble bath.”

“Yep.”

He cuffed Laura to the bed. “The safe word is *WMD*,” he told her.

They have a normal side, too, the side a lot of their close friends, George Sr., and George's momma know. They could all imagine them in their post-coital scene, if they chose to, nice and warm, sitting in their big Jacuzzi in the ranch house in Crawford with the big crucifix hanging from the wall. They don't mind it when it's hot in there. George watches steam drift up just beneath the cream ceiling tiles. There is love in the tub and some sadness, too. There is tremendous uncertainty in the room. There is doubt. There is a man and woman reconnecting with one another after a long, special season of madness, close as they've been in years. Laura farts in the water, and George farts back louder than hers.

“Mine are worse,” he says, with a laugh, slapping his hands on the hot water's surface.  
“That's always been true,” Laura says

## ***Teachable Moments***

(Howie Good)

1

It was my last class of the day, and I happened to mention the philosopher Hannah Arendt. I started to write on the board *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, the title of her famous book about the banality of evil, but some professorial instinct made me turn around and ask, “You know who Adolf Eichmann was, right?” The twenty-three students just stared. In the silence I could hear laughter coming from out in the hall. I waited the length of a teachable moment. Then I asked in a small voice if they knew who Hitler was.

2

This isn’t any ordinary day. Anything can happen. Backyard chickens can peck foxes to death, and a drunk traffic cop arrest a drunk driver. No one is safe. That sounds like bullshit, but it’s not. People stand in the black dust, talking, breathing, wondering at it. They lift their kids up, say, “Look! Remember!”

3

I’m just standing outside the Humanities Building. The smoking man wearing a baseball cap that says Vietnam Vet on the front in bold gold letters nods at me, something that might mean something or nothing. A girl with pink hair walks by staring down at her phone. There’s a breeze, and it smells of damp earth as if coming directly from attending a sad little funeral in the rain.

## ***Vietnamese TV Stardom and Rice Paper***

(Nicholas Santalucia)

I said that I wanted to be on TV. The guy next to me at the bar knew someone. Vietnam just works like that.

A month later I got a call from a Vietnamese woman who told me to meet her at 5 AM to film an episode on banh tranh in Phu Hoa Dong. In imperfect but confident English she said, “And find more information to introduce about the show.”

I asked her to text me everything, because I had no idea what she was talking about.

Bang trang is rice paper used for spring rolls and a bunch of other Vietnamese dishes. Phu Hoa Dong is a “rice paper village” an hour outside of Ho Chi Minh City. This is what I got from quick search and all I knew going into my Vietnamese television debut.

\*\*\*

I was driven into the countryside by a cameraman and the producer--a manic pixie Murphy Brown. She was the only person there who spoke English and was far from fluent. I didn't know where we were going until the van stopped on some country road lined with bamboo racks. An old lady there changed into nicer pajamas before we started filming. The producer fed me lines in Vietnamese.

“Co oi, chau dang lam viec duc khong?”

I didn't know what I was saying, but certain that I was butchering the pronunciation, tones, and everything else. Nevertheless, Co Hien took me by the hand and led me into her workshop. The little room had dirt floors and was sweltering hot. It was full of those bamboo racks, a bowl of rice batter, and a low brick oven built around a vat of boiling water. I was sweating through my best TV show host shirt.

Co Hien explained what everything was and how it worked, but I don't know any Vietnamese. Ignorant, but it makes every day living here an adventure.

The producer was not happy that I was so visibly sweaty. For the first ten minutes in that room, the back, collar and armpits of my shirt were several shades darker than the rest of it. For the rest of the day, the entire upper half of it was black and clinging to my body.

“Next time you wear the different color,” she told me, and in between shots she made me stand outside and flap my collar. When the cameraman was ready she’d remind me “Make your face more comfortable.” After so many times, simply “Nich. Face.”

Watching the footage a week later, I’d see what she was talking about. I was slack jawed and dead eyed, visibly wondering what was going on (with rice paper, this show, my life, etc).

I’d spread the batter on the skin over the cauldron, smooth it with a ladle, put the wicker lid down, smile at Co Hien, and when she said “Da lan,” I’d try to peel off the cooked rice paper, always fucking it up. This went on for too long, and eventually we had to move on. Without a single successful rice paper to my name, we went down the street to a banh trang factory.

Chu Son built his factory, the rice batter agitator, the steamer, and single conveyor belt, himself. Presumably when he was much younger. Today he’s an old man with a bad arm, and before filming we all sat down with him in his garden. He asked me something with “Viet” in it and I thought he was asking if I spoke it. I told him a little bit—“Chup chup.”

Everyone laughed. “He asked if you come here to date Vietnamese girls,” the producer told me.

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There was just one fan in the warehouse and the producer pulled up a chair and made me sit in front of it while everything got ready. After a few blue-smocked workers passed me and laughed, I stood up.

Chu Son talked for solid ten minutes, pointing at everything and telling me what it was. Now I decided to appear more natural by smiling and nodding and saying “Okay!” Later I’d see: not at all naturally.

First I loaded the plastic sheets onto the conveyor belt. I tried to go really fast; Chu Son said, “Number one.” It felt good. Next I cut the wet rice paper and he kept telling me “Very good.” I started laughing, and thanking him, and saying into the camera “This is harder than it looks!”

Then I had to stack the sheets at the end of the conveyor belt. This did not go well. They came much faster than expected and started falling on me. Chu Son called workers over to help. It was sort of a Mike Rowe meets *I Love Lucy* moment and for the first time that day I appreciated how crazy the whole situation was. I leaned into it.

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I hammed it up. Wrapping up the segment, I asked Chu Son for a job and laughed like an asshole. The producer had us go back to Co Hien's to reshoot with my new found confidence. Unfortunately, it did not last.

Co Hien's daughter was there now and the old lady let me know with a smirk that we were the same age, which threw me off. The uncomfortable expectation, the fact that I was filming a TV show at her house, and then the producer started fanning me and I felt like a villain.

Still, I cracked some jokes and managed a successful piece of rice paper. And at the end of the day, when we filmed the show's beginning in town, I ate some spring rolls more expressively than I ever have before. A passing teenager asked me for a selfie.

So I got to check off “Get on TV” from my list of things to do while living in Vietnam, and while I wasn't stopped on the street the day after it aired, I had something to show my parents from my otherwise delinquent lifestyle. When the producer called a few weeks later and said “You come to chom chom farm with me,” I kept the strange train going.



## **Brown Stew**

(Adam Whittaker Snavelly)

At the Amish Market  
in Bird-in-Hand,  
which is a real name of a real town,  
I am hurried away  
from a carriaged horse,  
because it is also real,  
and it kicks.

And my Mom explains  
that they're all real.  
The hats and beards  
and grey eyes,  
the voice speaking in declarations  
to which his throat attaches  
cast-iron question marks.  
    "Peas? Cabbage? Carrots?"

She tells me  
that's how they worship.  
That's how they get to God.  
I ask her why  
they don't pray instead,  
and she doesn't answer  
just looks at the county route  
bending to meet us.

"I guess it's extra," she finally says.  
I guess we didn't need extra.  
We had cars.

Brown stew that night,

lazy bubbles popping in the broth.  
We blessed it,  
but I stole a bite during prayer  
and let the saints  
roll across my tongue;  
visions of the Father:  
    Peas, Cabbage, Carrots.

## **Swollen hands**

(Jamie McGraw)

The asylum light  
does little to conceal  
my blown veins  
violet splotches golden spatters  
viridescent Rorschach tests

(Diagnosis: acute psychosis  
related to recreational drug abuse)

I see a cerise bird  
large and phosphorescent  
He spits lorazepam  
onto my tongue

Father focuses only on my swollen hands  
Cool to touch  
Toxin- filled  
Pale Ghost Hands

I see a cerise bird  
hovering above my bed

Father I promise bees  
swarmed my naked body  
stung me blind  
expired at my feet  
I know it was dusk  
and the moon donned  
a pale red crown

Father I recall

swelling ever since

## ***Medicine***

(Georgia Hertz)

I draw my blood daily  
and try to burn the bones  
until they are charred and chalk  
and crumble in my hands.  
You and I, we do our best to help  
and seldom ask for anything  
in return. And yet, when we  
need help ourselves there is  
no one there to catch us  
before we do make ourselves bleed,  
before we stoke the coals and  
feed the oven with our ribs and our  
spines. The cactus conserves water  
and so do we, by drinking  
booze instead—I must not let it all  
go to my head, and neither can you.  
You and I, we are alike, and  
that is why we must stem the  
flow, not pick each other's  
scabs, let the ovens cool.

***Postcard for Frank Stanford***

(Joshua Johnston)

They shot me from a cannon, brother,  
and then they pushed the cannon over the hill.

They went down to the river to wash their faces,  
and their faces came clean off in their hands.

***At the Paradise Theater***

(Joshua Johnston)

Tourists, when confronted  
with the local audience's tradition  
of rushing the stage after each performance  
to bludgeon the new leading man to death,  
were often quick to read into the act  
some malicious intent. In reality,  
the patrons hated the actors no more  
than the excited child hates the piñata.

## **EXCEPT YOU ENTHRALL ME I'LL NEVA BE FREE**

(Joseph Mains)

When you out with it and inside I waste  
away a nice heart white suit & baby  
blue sedan pew sat still down the cold way  
desperate behind, a Henry crew cast  
manifolded you wing me Donny D  
like I could shake my free hand free cuckold  
like goathead or fake sweet Caramello  
—orb of boyz&women on Clinton St.  
Stand up, motherfucker. You're no god  
damn if you are. I'll finish your poison,  
write you a strut. Seine is a river Poseidon  
your puss, two-faced percher born again sod  
who's done me wrong & long willed it be so;  
but those whom I fuckest, hath you lisped *more*.