Red Wheelbarrow
With special thanks to

Chris Dombrowski

Aimé Merizon

Mika Perrine
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Ablutions,
Willa Anderson
What a Woman Named Gregory Taught Me about Buckles (excerpt)

by Hunter Lawrence

He—She was a middle-age man—woman I met at an intimate awareness session one September evening. The church often held such seminars to educate the community of issues that might otherwise go unnoticed. That month’s topic featured three transgender speakers, and, because attendance was optional, three mono-gender listeners, myself among them, attended.

To describe a transgender person as one who delights in wearing the uniform of the opposite sex (or a cross dresser) is to call all religious people Jews, all rectangles squares, and all dentists pleasant. If I learned one thing from that meeting, it was that transgenders are very much their own people, serious in their pursuit to become another person, unlike the rest of us who simply do it on the weekends, or every other day if we work part-time.

The first of the auspicious panel was a female becoming male (or F to M), who wore a blue-and-white-striped chemise, glasses, and had shaved his head in an obvious attempt to jumpstart the process. The middle “woman” garnered not much attention, as she looked the part of a stereotype you might see on T.V.: unusually tall, bleach blonde hair, fake nails, Adam’s apple.

I would almost regret writing the last of the three women into these lines, were it not for the utter terror she struck into my heart. Her name was Gregory, an M to F, though you knew something went horribly wrong. I pegged her somewhere in the high fifties and her features were not of this world. She had an enormous head atop which scraggly strands of charcoal hair grew in patches, as if years ago she failed at braiding them. Her skin was a dishwater gray that showed premature liver spots, and she was fat, which, had she wore more generous clothing, I might not have noticed. As she was, however, you saw it seeping between the front buttons of her blouse, which had lost all innocence that morning. I wanted nothing more than to shut my eyes, tear it off her, throw it in a spin cycle and whisper it would be all right as Celine Dion’s, “My Heart Will Go On,” played in the background.

Her most memorable feature, however, was not her appearance, but her voice. When I first approached to shake—at the time—his hand I didn’t know what to expect. When he opened his mouth to speak, what tumbled forth fell somewhere between Golem from “Lord of the Rings,” or in lay
terms, lower Cronkite's voice three octaves, then toss in fifty odd years of smoking, and you might have a vague idea. Later, I was told the reason for this.

Gregory had a story to tell, and of course it was tear-jerking. All her life she felt trapped in a man's body, her parents died never knowing the real her, and she lost her job when she began the process of simply becoming on the outside what she felt on the inside. Was it too much to ask?

At the loss of her job, whatever it was, she became impatient. The process takes years, but hell hath no fury like a sort-of-woman scorned. She left the clinic that provided her hormones, and instead, found stronger doses on the streets. At this point in the story, she bent halfway across the table and bore into my soul.

"Never buy your hormones on the street," she said, "There's no way of telling what's in those things; one pill could contain a thousand milligrams, and the other, fifteen." Oh darn, I thought, and threw the bottles I purchased in the trash. Her knowledge was, of course, gained from experience. As she purchased more and more of the mystery bottles, her changes fell off schedule, and well, I could see the result. The result was Gregory, soon to be Linda, and the years had taken their toll. She was fifty-something going on ninety, but if she gave up the teenage blouses, she might have been able to pull it off.

The conferences, as you might guess, were always interesting, and each was unpredictable. They were held bi-monthly at a Unitarian church whose attendance was so low it couldn't afford to exclude demographics. The first time I ever announced my own disposition aloud was in a giant circle in which everyone gathered before the meeting, and it was there I first set eyes on Myke Paine.

He wasn't the most attractive boy by a long shot, and his WWE name should have told me he wasn't my type. He had blond, curly hair and a pinkish tint to his skin that suggested an oddly Irish origin. He was a sophomore and I a freshman, which, at the time, made us worlds apart. I was so desperate to prove my sexuality (mostly to myself) that, when asked my age, I declared I was fourteen and a half, which, despite its relevance, made me feel five again, the last age such distinctions may have actually mattered.

Myke laughed and told me he was sixteen, but all I heard was, "I've done this before, and you haven't," which only made me more nervous. Despite this, we had an incredible first date. This was not in any way due to him. I consider it incredible because of the rock-bottom standard it set for all dates to follow, though god-willing, not with Myke.
He took me to a sophisticated establishment of commercial and ideological exchange called a mall, in which a certain food court apparently had our name on it. In said court he found us a small two-seater table with neon chairs and a plastic surface you could see drink stains on. We put our coats down and he decided Five Guys was the appropriate cuisine to break the ice. It wasn't. To the contrary, it only managed to lather the ice with a thick layer of grease that would soon harden and leave him, but not soon enough.

We tried to converse over the roar of our surroundings, but to very little avail. We each knew what we were supposed to say, or had at least a rough idea. I went down the list of generic questions that became all too familiar in the years to follow. He responded generically: November seventh, blue, anything but country, nothing mainstream, my permit next month, an actor.

Each empty word that shot from my mouth deadened my soul. I didn't care about his birthday because unless it fell in the next two weeks, I didn't see it would much matter. I never understood how anyone could have a favorite color because they each look different to me depending on their surroundings. I listened to classical and the latest hits, and I wanted to be a cellist. We might have had that in common, art, but it was a stretch at best.

Despite the suburban-Irish look, the failed attempt at dinner, the lack of common ground, and the altogether disinterest, I still wound up at his place at eleven that evening. The only thing left going for him was my curiosity, which drove me mad. Never underestimate the power of self-delusion.

There I was, on his giant leather couch, facing a T.V. that, to no one's real surprise, was playing RENT. The stereotype nearly choked me, but I held firm, repeating my new mantra: "You want to do this. You want to do this. You thought you wanted to do this. Maybe you shouldn't do this. Christ don't let me do this." It was nearing the end of movie, the unintended effect of which left me panicking about STDs. I took a brief inward journey before the credits and surveyed the situation: You're fourteen and a half. Your parents dropped you off at a stranger's house. He's not the son of a senator. You're in a dark room. The movie's almost over. What the hell do you do?

I opened my eyes and found he had answered two of my questions. The movie ended, and, to chase away our mutual awkwardness, he put on a somewhat less generic film, though still appalling, Lindsay Lohan's, "Just My Luck." The other question was somewhat more pressing, and was answered by the migration of his hand to my belt. I pretended not to
notice until his lumbering fingers tugged at the buckle they couldn't undo. I laughed as though to imply he wasn't smooth, but it was entirely the nerves talking.

Stop. Because the imagination needs exercise, and this is not a romance novel, I will refuse to detail the evening's events any further. He might have undone my pants then realized he left the stove on, and narrowly escaped a fire. I might have pressed him to wait, then suggested a game of Canasta instead. It would be rude to assume we simply lost our minds with each other then woke up the next day searching haplessly for our clothes. Like Gregory, we were complex, an amalgam of impulses and emotions we didn't have to explain to anyone.

If you find yourself searching for moral or reason, I can offer but only a few: Locate your nearest LGTBQ chapter of a Unitarian church; check with your doctor before buying street hormones; and always wear an overly-complicated belt buckle—it just might save you some day.
2nd Emmanuel
by Imani Russell

I remember you being sewn into figments of my imagination. Like needles injecting burning liquid into skin I remember you.

Callused palms from monkey bars and, bruises from pinched skin of swings that squeezed too tight over under-developed hips. I remember you like the kisses from the sun against your brown skin.

Yellow merry-go-round sped round and round until little pieces of our faces got mixed up with the orange and yellow leaves that blew and I grew.

But you held a light within you that shined too bright for this world. The flames stole the breath from your chest and you burst, burned into another time zone.

You relinquished all right to sound and sight; and then your body was made into fertilizer for the flowers you planted, and you planted a seed in me....

One that grew into sadness, then sat under the tree of temptation and finally settled into forgetting the most important parts of you.

I remember the small things like your hands your skin your hair, but I don't remember the way you felt about me.

In your name I gather sadness and long to hear your voice again because throughout the years I have not been able to decipher your voice from mine.

And I can still remember the weight of your new wings pressed hard against my heart as your name echoed over the intercom.

I would have given you my heart and all the things an eleven year old could ever give but I didn't.
Baptism

by Emily Hittner-Cunningham

It is happening now in some public school gym. A boy asks a girl to dance and she takes his hand. She feels that she is doing this to save him. They move together under the sound of the music, strangers in a hostile land. The couples around them are as far apart as they can be, shy, barely touching, or else stand shoved up against each other only to shock. These two stand close enough for comfort (or solace), her head against his neck so that she could whisper a secret in his ear, if she wanted to. She says nothing because this is not where the connection is. Here between them is the double thickness of cloth and skin. She wishes they were skeletons.

That night she dreams that they are at a lighthouse. It is dark, and a high wind whips water against her face. She is lying flat against the cold cement of the pier holding the boy’s hand as he dangles and dances just above the waves. She does not wait for his hand to slip from hers. She lets go and she does not wait for his body to hit the water as she runs to the end of the pier where the lighthouse stands. For a moment, she stands on her toes arms stretched out behind and leaning into the wind before she crashes away as thunder. In dreams, these things can happen. She is not afraid for the boy. Someone will save him, but it will not be her. No one ever taught her how to save a drowning man. She leaves him to the fury of the water – no words, no goodbyes, no apologies. What a strange baptism for them both.
This is how you learn about love and cruelty,
swaying to music you will not remember,
holding the hand of a drowning man,
letting it go.
Love is nothing, nothing,
because here between us
is the double thickness of cloth and skin.
We should have been skeletons
dancing in the valley of dry bones.

Untitled,
Isabelle Rose
Night Swimming (excerpt)

by Niki Acton

Lily gets out of the water, naked and dripping, one house before her own. Elliot’s house. She hoists herself onto the dock and runs to the front of the house, roadside, hoping fervently that no cars drive by. Standing on the front porch, she tries to remember where the hide-a-key is. Elliot showed her once, but it was a long time ago. Before he’d even kissed her, back when she was just the annoying neighbor girl. She checks the usual spots—under the mat, on top of the doorframe—and eventually finds it tucked inside a plastic rock. She lets herself in, dropping the key unceremoniously onto the kitchen table.

She shivers, looking around. What is she doing? This is bold, even for her. It’s two in the morning and she is standing in someone else’s kitchen, wearing nothing and dripping on their tile. Another shiver.

She takes a deep breath. She checks in the hallway mirror to make sure the tears are indistinguishable from the lake water, then runs up the stairs as quietly as possible and opens Elliot’s door. She slips into his room and closes the door behind her. He is asleep on top of the blankets, a fan pointed directly at his bed. He wears only boxers. She has never seen him like this before. She has seen him in his bathing suit, yes, but the context was completely different. Now he is asleep, his arms and legs stretched toward the corners of his bed like the limbs of a starfish. Lily’s eyes trace the contours of his chest, slowing when they reach the waistband of his boxers.

She hadn’t meant to lie to Mona. It just slipped out during a game of Truth or Dare, and before she could take it back, Mona’s eyes were growing huge and she was clapping a hand over her mouth.

Lily loves that. She loves people’s discomfort, making them blush. And so she had kept talking, crafting a tale of how she and Elliot had done it in the bed of his pickup truck, watching Mona’s concern grow with a wild sort of pride.

Lily looks back at Elliot’s face. Prue knows. She hadn’t meant for Prue to find out, not ever. Lily couldn’t lie to Prue, not with the ease that she lied to Mona. She always felt that Prue could tell, that something in Prue’s stars was whispering the truth.

So Lily climbs onto Elliot’s bed, determined that Prue not catch her in a lie. She straddles him, her hands on either side of his head. He jerks awake.

“Lily?”
She kisses him, clumsy and awkward, holding herself up on her arms and knees. His hands rise to touch her back. He breaks the kiss.

"You're naked."

"Easy access," she says. Her voice is light, but she feels leaden, as if her every muscle is revolting against this act. Phrases, half-formed and in Prue's voice, flit through her mind. Shouldn't. Sex. Taking off your clothes for anyone who looks at you twice. Lily, you're fourteen.

His hands move from her back to her ass. Prue would say that he shouldn't be touching her there. She lowers herself until she is laying on top of him. She reaches into his boxers, her fingers shaking, and wraps her hand around his penis. Shouldn't. She pulls it out of his boxers and slides herself onto it.

Sex.

She gasps—it hurts—and he mistakes this for arousal. He is rocking his hips and she is moving with him and his hands are digging into her ass and she wants to tell him that it hurts and his mouth finds her nipple and she wonders why boys find this hot because that's what babies do and then he's shuddering and going slack and she knows that he's come.

She climbs off him, slides from the bed, and stands on his rug, naked and dripping with more than lake water now. She looks at him. He isn't attractive to her. His hair is carrot red and his nose is too big. Taking your clothes off for anyone who looks at you twice.

Elliot rolls over and balances his chin on a hand. His gaze starts at her face but doesn't stay there for long, working its way down. He is fascinated by her. She can tell by the way his eyes linger on her breasts, her hips, her legs, as if he had never seen a naked girl before. He shakes his head once, as if trying to wake from a dream. "So," he says finally. "Thanks for that."

Lily feels a blush spreading from her face down her chest. She is grateful for the darkness. "You too. You're way better than John." She doesn't know why she says this, but is satisfied when Elliot growls.

"John Heckman? That scrawny freshman?"

"He's taller than you are," Lily reminds him.

"He has braces."

"You need them."

They are silent for longer than is comfortable. Elliot is simply staring at her, his eyes level with her crotch. Lily would have spoken, really, she would have, but she doesn't know how to talk to someone who has left part of himself inside her.

After a few moments pass, she turns and leaves, padding barefoot
and still naked through his house and out the door. For the first time tonight, she feels exposed. She sneaks back into her house like she has dozens of times before, going directly to her room, where someone—probably Mona—has spread her nightgown out on top of her blankets. Lily, you’re fourteen.

Lily pulls it on and curls up in her bed. She listens for the sounds of Mona’s soft snores through the vent that connects their rooms, and when she is sure that her sister is asleep and won’t be able to hear her, begins to cry.

* * *

Prue is not asleep. She is not asleep when she hears the front door open and close, not asleep when she hears Lily creak her way up the stairs, not asleep when she hears the sobs from the room next door.

Instead, she is staring at the bottom of Mona’s bunk. She is staring quite insistently, as if the intensity of her gaze could wake Mona to deal with this crisis. Prue considers letting Lily cry herself out. Would it be so bad, really?

Yes.

Mona taught her long ago, right after their father moved out, when it seemed as if a different sister was crying herself to sleep every night, that you comfort people when they cry. Whether you want to or not. Whether you know what to say or not.

This used to be Mona’s job, almost entirely, but after Lily came home drunk and babbling about a friend who had kissed the boy Lily was in love with, the custodianship of their younger sister passed to Prue. Lily had not stayed in love with the boy for long, but at the time, it seemed as if her world was collapsing. Their mother had been out of town on another business trip, so Mona had held Lily’s hair as she vomited and cried, stroked her back as she fell asleep on the bathroom floor. Prue had hidden in her bedroom, a book open on her lap, her eyes fixed on the door. She’d fallen asleep like that, waiting for Mona to return and tell her what happened.

The next morning, Mona had climbed into Prue’s bed. Prue had rolled over, balanced her chin on a hand, and asked what was wrong. Mona was tired. That’s what she’d said. “I’m tired,” her expression and voice utterly spent. Prue didn’t have to ask why. She knew, and she knew that it was now her turn.

So, with the weight of familial duty firmly on her shoulders, Prue slides out from under her covers. The floor is cold against her bare feet and she fumbles before she finds the doorknob in the dark. She
should have taken this clumsiness as an omen, a giant flashing neon sign advising her to turn back now. Instead she keeps going, slipping out into the hall and the bedroom next door.

Lily's room is much smaller than Prue and Mona's, tucked into the corner of the house, an afterthought of a room that could have been used as a closet or a cramped office. There is space only for a small bed, which is shoved under the angled ceiling, and a dresser against the opposite wall.

Lily is on the bed, curled up around herself, face almost touching her knees. Mona would sit at the edge of the mattress, put a hand on Lily's shoulder, and ask what was wrong. Prue stands in the doorway and says nothing.

It takes Lily a few seconds to realize she's not alone. When she looks up and sees Prue, she hastily scrubs the tears from her face and adopts an inscrutable mask.

"What?" Lily snaps. Lily always snaps.

"I heard you." Prue does not snap, though Lily's defensiveness puts her on edge. "I thought you might want to... I don't know. Talk or something."

"I don't want to talk."

Prue takes a step inside and closes the door. She sits on the dresser. "I'm sorry about earlier. I didn't mean to be... preachy. Or whatever."

"Well, you were."

"Lily, I'm trying to help." Prue traces the edge of the dresser. She would normally trace the grains of wood, but it is too dark for that. She can only see the outline of Lily, the blurry edges of the white nightgown and a dark smudge of hair.

"I don't need you."

Prue stares upward, through Lily's skylight, hoping to find a constellation to steady herself, but between the time they returned home and now, the clouds rolled in, an opaque veil separating Prue from her stars. "Want me to wake Mona?"

Lily shakes her head. "Mona doesn't need to see me like this. She'd worry."

Prue gives a soft smile. Mona always worries, whether it is warranted or not. "So what took you so long to get back here?"

Lily lays back against the pillows and rolls over so Prue can't see her face. "Elliot."

"You went to see him?" At Lily's nod, Prue's stomach clenches. "You didn't have any clothes."

Lily gives a bitter sort of laugh. "Didn't need them for what I was doing." Her voice is not nearly as flippant as her words.
Prue begins to stand, to go to the bed and hold Lily, but loses her nerve. “You’re going to get in trouble.” Prue realizes this sounds juvenile and hastens to explain. “Not with Mom. She’s out of town too much to notice. But you’re going to get pregnant or something. You can’t just sleep with boys like that.”

“I thought he loved me.” Lily’s voice is muffled by a pillow, and Prue can barely hear it. “But he didn’t say so, not even after....”

“Seventeen-year-old boys don’t know what love means.” Prue knows this from her own experience with that lovely dark-eyed boy, the Brazilian exchange student with the name she couldn’t quite pronounce, who kissed her once and pretended not to understand when she asked for his number.

“They’re good at pretending, though,” Lily says, as though she was reading Prue’s thoughts.

Prue works up the nerve to crawl into bed with Lily. With a sob, the younger girl rolls over and presses her face into Prue’s neck. Prue can feel the tears, hot against her skin, and begins stroking Lily’s back, because, really, what else can she do?

Between sobs, Lily says, “I don’t want to grow up, Prue. Sometimes I think that I am, but it scares me. Growing up scares me.”

Prue clutches the white cotton of Lily’s nightgown, a gown she’s had since her tenth birthday. “Then don’t,” she says.

This advice is simple, impossible to follow, but somehow Prue feels better having given it, and if the way Lily’s body goes slack is any indication, she feels better having received it.
Por Algo Sera (There Must Be a Reason)

Based on the kidnappings that took place in Argentina in the 1970s-80s

by Kelly Clare

Por algo sera, the neighbors said as families were thrown in the backs of blue-green Ford Falcons without plates, thrown on the cool dirt of basement floors where they’d try to sink into the earth, turn veins to roots, hearts to just a knotting around the seed that started it all.

Por algo sera a boy said as his blindfolded sister felt the picana, each sharp electrical throb arcing her spine as doctors monitored her pulse, because, as the voices in her ear claim, we’re not going to let you die before it’s time, and we’ve got all the time in the world.

Por algo sera mothers whispered as they counted los desaparecidos, sweaty hands hovering near telephones, dreaming of their children’s severed toes, fingers, arms.

Por algo sera the doctors in the basements repeated. They agreed over a game of cards that the child prisoners were the worst, the wails, their eyes when watching the black-blue-red bodies of their parents. The doctors over dinner try to forget the dark eyes of the child in the blue dress, who was too much like their own hija sitting across the table, who won’t eat her vegetables and is asking for a pony, who scored an 91% on her last test and was rewarded with a new skirt, deep crimson.

Por algo sera. So many children, but they remember the one in the blue dress. No one knew a five-year-old could handle a gun, much less rest the muzzle against her thin skull, cracking it into the tiniest eggshell pieces.
Por algo sera, the doctors plead at night with the ghosts, whisper to the child’s family standing at the foot of their beds. We gave them food and water and time, they tell the fathers, the mothers, the watery-eyed shadows. We kept them alive, we were there to keep them alive. We had to keep ourselves alive.
Good Ol' Days, Pippa Adam
The Warbler with No Voice

by Sella Malin

The warbler is a bird that cannot sing alone. Caged separately, torn apart from the tight-knit mass of the flock, he refuses to make a sound. Voice slashed into bleeding stumps which sink and evaporate in the wind pipe, the warbler will simmer in silence and drown in the absence of his chirping aria forever, lest another warbler stumble upon the silent bird and reincarnate the ghost of his voice.

Reunited with one of his own, comforted by the warm body of his companion pressed against his feathers, his voice flows through him anew like a hot, heavy syrup, molding through his veins and trickling past his mouth in clear tones doused in sunlight—and the warbler can sing once more.

The song may be hoarse and croaky at first, the vocal chords rusted and thinned from disuse, covered in the dust collected from days of neglect—but once the warbler has relearned how to breathe and become accustomed to manipulating the strings of sound with the touch of his talons, his swamp of silence is forgotten, the dusty negligence rubbed clean and his song is as sturdy and strong as before, bursting with life through vibrant cracks.

Companionship is the cure for silence. But not all warblers are lucky enough to have the cure bestowed upon them. Some warblers never see another one of their kind after they have fallen away from the flock. The voices of these warblers have been dry and lost for so long that they turn to obsidian and close up completely. Their voices are dead, and now they will never sing again, not even if another warbler will finally find them and extend a piece of warmth.

continued
This yellow warbler sits alone, perched precariously on a mound of Galapagos tortoise droppings.

She is of the ones that have lost their voices to the bottomless waters of eternity. There is a desperation echoing in her hollowed eyes as her cracking talons cling to the peak of the dishwater-yellow mountain.

She once stood proud and beautiful, the yellow feathers shining golden the charcoal eyes fierce. But the fire has long been snuffed from her eyes, the feathers now dull and matted in dirt, every drop of passion drained from her body. She has reverted to consuming insects from within the manure, and she lords over the dung heap as though it is her disfigured child, possessive of the deformity to which she has tied her life.
Traveling Speech, Camille Grant
Brave Soul

by Sojourner Ahebee

In this lugubrious land
smack dab in the middle of Africa
where coltan and fighting decide to rhyme,
where the Congolese and its splintering neighbors forget
what they’re really fighting about,
you can obliviously dismiss the bitter buzz of Parfaite’s voice,
who’s had battles fought on her brave brown body
like she was the war.

She used to like her FuFu pounded fresh, obnoxiously yellow with
fish on the side,
the fish she would catch from canoes down the Sankuru River.
She adored those Sundays after Mass,
loud with the voices of the market folk.
Parfaite would fall captive to the dress makers who
had bounteous amounts of pangne, sold by the meter.

She had been carrying a basket abundant
with flowers when he had attacked,
grabbing her mercilessly.
In lieu of living her life,
her womanhood is savagely swindled with
the aid of a sharp bayonet and a mercenary’s penis
on the side of the road
while the cry of justice and machetes clash
in evil dissonance.

She, a steadfast spouse and mother,
mutilated, brown, all woman in a war torn country but
still standing,
returns home to her family with her story in mouth but
backs are briskly turned,
time does a wicked dance,
and she is left with a life inside her belly that kicks
and will never be loved.
She looks for work to feed the sinless Satan inside her stomach but none can be found.
Now, she’s trudging the plains of the Congo in search for the nearest women’s clinic, all the while her brave soul still moves along.
She’s hungry not for bread but for her mother’s voice.
Parfaite remembers those nights spent under the stars, like the one filled with hot gossip she had shared with Mama about Aicha; the smart village girl who dared to go to college.
Parfaite dreams of Christ—her husband and wonders if he too misses their embrace and what he’d think about the baby.

She arrives at the clinic and shortly after she’s been fed and spread open by doctors, they tell her she has HIV and this is what she’s suppose to believe?

She hops off the doctor’s table—runs into the open Congolese air which smells of fresh FuFu and frustration. The sun is obnoxiously yellow.
She heads to the Sankuru River, with its fish and murky green waters, ready to swindle her own life this time.
Sitting in the Park with Pigeons, Elizabeth Rennie
The Scattering of the Tongues

~Inspired by Brueghel's "The Tower of Babel"

by Kristen Kiernan

Your tongue bears the weight of herculean tasks, dear Brueghel. It must capture the harsh diphthongs of the Germanic languages, and recount the story of the fall of united humanity, who, when scattered, could not build a tower to reach the heavens or communicate without reliance on exaggerated hand gestures and well-placed silences.

It must cling to ivory teeth, scrape against sharp incisors, in order to blend the soft consonants of English and share with your audience the weight of inexplicable desire to touch the cosmos with eager fingertips. It strives to put to language the yearning in the pit of your gut to caress the nude eyes of Cassiopeia and then grab the wrists of the Gemini twins.

Maybe there are no words for longing, the desire too primitive, to ever glorify through silent plosives, or soft hissing digraphs. There is no honesty in growling allophones and prosthetic vowels. Instinct does not rely on language. Instead, it rests upon open palms and the delicate movement of sinewy tissue underneath soft flesh.

You guess that there was a time when goosebumps formed the alphabet, when arthritis intimated not only the secrets of rainfall, but of the entire universe, singing through the weary bones of your ancestors the names of all the stars. That immaculate tendrils of copper hair spoke the word of God, until scattered by His vengeance on clumsy, arrogant tongues.
The Formalities of Big Church, Melly Wirtes
C.C.

by Iris Samuels

Carbon copies of ourselves, we drift along endless tundra. There are heirlooms, sometimes, stolen memorabilia, we can catch sun in lockets, attempt to carve a bed for electricity in the walls and in the floors, but there are some beauties which can't be held, and we watch them run away from us like cotton in the wind, or time.

Carbon copies of time, we try to make a collage of broken tissue, fragments, sew together the flexing of muscles and the tight stretch of cloth on wet skin, when lightning strikes our lungs, diving headfirst into electricity.

Carbon copies of electricity, we are trapped in wires. We fly, like in human dreams, we collect memorabilia from the days when we lit fires for ballerinas, carved warmth for the numb bodies of hikers and hunters and search parties, looking for the originals, the black ink, looking for the drops of rain and the dead insects, fallen skin, and we are the followers, the eavesdroppers, the human roses, the dandelions, the hidden births, the subjection to gravity, the cry of a baby as it falls from the womb, the smell of herbs, when a tongue can turn pink and raw with desire, to quench thirst and warm bodies.

Carbon copies of bodies, we are the tundra. We let grass grow to our knees, we let the sun flow and hide like water, we run on a shortage of electricity, we feed off the meat we've gathered for the day, the hour, the time. Gatherers and hunters, bleeders, feeders, it's all a matter of give and take, supply and demand, truth and lies. We are carbon copies of lies, we carve beds for sunshine in lockets, we hold lightning in our bare palms. We pretend that we're cotton and the wind is blowing, blowing, blowing, blowing, blowing, until we are without mass, just flexed muscles and wind, carbon copies of wind.
so much depends upon

a red wheel barrow

glazed with rain water

beside the white chickens.

~ William Carlos Williams