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HSTQ: FALL 2024

Adoring Decay
Taryn Allan

She would like to believe in alchemy
In progress from putrefaction

The city is a composite of wounds, she thinks
Scar-tissue the chrysalis of rebirth
Accounting for the misery she sees
Extracting hope from hopelessness

She sees a man praying in McDonald's
Lips forming silent incantations
For a meal of ersatz offerings

In the queue
Faces like stagnant clay
Pinned beneath the strip lighting

From this non-place of super-modernity
The obscure mysteries of shadow, dispelled utter
In their place, a moribund permanence
The anomie of abandon

She flees
Tries to leave behind the sublunary
In search of the promise of decay
Beautiful, natural decay
The withering adoration of time

Instead

She finds only the detritus of the never-ending now
Out beyond the centre and the suburbs
Derelict buildings, faded, retaining
An anonymous integrity
Underpasses, office blocks, factories and bridges
Met with rust-dementia
Disassembling the disassembling

Yet

People still live here
Those we'd prefer to believe
Dissembled themselves
Masking their failures as sickness

In their dementia-rusted faces
Living beyond purpose
She sees only truth
The dead-end destiny of us all

In extracting the hope from hopelessness
There remains only the dissembled lessness
of a disassembled world

Dipping Sauce is a Terrible Name for a Porn Star
Ryan Quinn Flanagan

The first day of Fall always makes me think of John Milton baking cupcakes in Baphomet stilettos, real cockroach killers from the school of entomology. Black lace like naughty place settings poisoning the well with a contortionist's deceptive haste. Dipping Sauce is a terrible name for a porn star, don't you think? Even if such appellations are anatomically correct. And the Live, Laugh, Love crowd is a dunk tank full of piss and piranhas. I watch them get torn apart in reverse collage while the giant Ikea clock on the wall fakes another end times orgasm with pumpkin spice napalm over everything. Amish house skeletons growing erect in fields along the highway. Tailgaters and sodomites rushing up from behind. Looking to pass on the double line with power steering and unsavoury gestures. I throw on my indicator to intimate a great turning to nowhere. Robert Johnson's cigarette breath while the devil plays all his records backwards looking for command-and-control centers with "missiles like sausages." A straight carnivore in vegetarian times, as the swipe right Clantons get cleaned out faster than a bank vault full of expired hand sanitizer.

The Smallest Brewery in Germany
M.P. Powers

I have just bought
a large brown
beer from the smallest brewery in Germany
and am now sitting at one
of their outside tables
across from a currywurst
trailer.

I get out my sketchbook.
I get out a pencil.
I scribble an outline
of the two old ladies sitting to the left of me.

They are eating sausages,
fat ones,
dipping them lengthwise into little sunlit pools
of mustard.
Dipping and chewing and talking with their mouths full.

I start in on their hairdos, but my view is suddenly
obscured by an old man on a bicycle.
He squeezes his airhorn to announce his arrival,
takes off his helmet,
starts chaining his bicycle to the pole.
Then he picks up his phone
and talks to someone.
This lasts for quite some time,
and when he is finished, the two old ladies
are getting up to leave.

I look around for someone else to draw.
Four dour, deranged, alcoholic faces – a parody
of Mt. Rushmore –
leer at me
from the table against the wall.
A middle-aged waitress floats by.
An elderly man appears in the doorway of the little brewery.
He is wearing khaki trousers that are soaked
about the crotch
and down the insides of both legs.
He has pissed himself,
it would appear.
But it's nothing that seems to matter.
He carries his beer toward
the currywurst trailer
sits at a little table over there.

Next to the trailer, on a little plastic chair,
the proprietor is sitting,
his belly resting on his lap like a medicine ball
someone has placed there.
He looks exhausted.
He looks like he's eaten too much of his product,
all those sausages
roiling around in his guts.

I dig my eraser from my backpack,
get rid of the old ladies,
and start where the sunlight licks the side
of the proprietor's fleshy
jowl. Then I get in that massive maw,
the two little outspread legs.

I am almost finished
with the outline when
this beautiful young woman
(the first shot of beauty and youth I've seen all afternoon)
rouses him from his plastic
chair. He stands up, lumbers lugubriously
into his trailer which sinks a little
when he steps into it.

He then deals her a sausage,
a large, pale one.
And now others come, more customers,
one after another,
a long line of Germans
anxious to be fed and I'm left
there with my partly finished
outline and my dark
brown beer.
I take a sip and forget
about the drawing.

I write this poem instead.

Butts in the air
Jason Melvin

Mom said she liked my new poem
the link posted on Facebook
she scanned the room
then her smile disappeared

I need to talk to you

said in a pained whisper
her head nods toward the empty kitchen
away from the rest of the family

She pulls in close and whispers
almost a cry

I scrolled down and clicked on something
Did you know?

a dramatic pause
she's searching for the bravery
to say the vile word

P O R N!!!!!!!!!!!!

just saying it weakens her knees
I can't help it I laugh

This was the wrong reaction
Her: (*In her best whisper-yell*)

I'm serious!

Me:

I don't know you must've clicked
on something you shouldn't have

I think of the poem she's talking about
a little slice of life moment
published on a respectable site
not like the trash I've published at HST

my nonchalance has her concerned

You don't understand
I saw their vaginas
their butts were in the air!

I don't how she expects me to react
with anything other than knee buckling laughter

What if your kids saw it?!

my youngest being 16
I have to assume
they've seen some porn by now

as my mom storms off
huffing as she goes
I ask

So, where exactly were their butts?

Sex in Hell
Tempest Miller

Flame geysers shoot up your crack,
and tether –
hydrophobic to your colon.
You lay on your leather coat atop a rubbished stone.
Dirty Dick, bf, rubs clotted dirt over your pecs.
He licks his furnishings off you
in round and round the garden like a teddy bear circles.
He adjusts, fidgets, scuffles.
He sodomises you 1) with a roadsign and 2) with a rainbow trout.
He whips you with a flannel he bathed in fire.
He inserts olive-oil-lubricated dirt into your trachea
with a whole fist
and then goes to do the same in your colon.
He sojourns his white cock in your ass.
The white of Hell,
the white whale he is,
floating over you one-eyed, pentagonal, askew.
You shit out fire-dirt-geyser-oil onto his cock.
Your stench of fecundity overwhelms his disgust
and he cannot whiten further.
He laps at your black-haired aestheticism,
saying he's never seen someone with so few wrinkles.
He grips your meaty handlebars –
you were razor-thin but you drank from sewers and fattened.
He puts his ass onto your face.

You feign non-reciprocity,
you push him off so that he falls into the seas of Hell,
that lap at where you lay
on your biker jacket,
diseased,
post-modern
fine art
punk
who looks like a sordid shrivelled field mouse.
You turn away from him
as he emerges charred and bloated.
You drink absinthe,
you gush to him, still turned away, in Flemish
about how you think his cock is a stinging nettle
up your shitty shitty shitty pulsing colon;
and how you adore it,
how you don't get butterflies but whole murders of crows
and how a part of you is chomping at the bit.
But not tonight,
not for the hundredth time tonight.

The YouTube gurus tell me to live in the moment
Michael Ashley

but how do you do that when there are
so many catastrophes to ruminate on?

the ones I built up ahead of time
that I constructed brick by brick
scene by scene
until I could clearly see that anvil swaying above
on a thinning slither of rope

the ones which I lived in that moment

the sharp edge of the anvil descending
compressing the air above my head
the skin slowly pressing itself into my skull
the tiny crack as bone enters flesh

right now here I am sat watching a YouTuber tell me
how I should live in the moment

running my hand down the rough upturned base
of the anvil

a dark reflective shadow
its circumference pushing itself out across the floor

the warm gore gathered around
my naked toes

The European Tour
Alan Catlin

Her idea for a gap year was
to save all the tips she made
working as a cocktail waitress in
an upscale pub and from some soft
core hooking on the side. Soft core
hooking, to her, meant causal tricking
without a pimp, casual hints dropped,
beverage napkin dates, cell phone
numbers exchanged. "I like the older
guys. They have more money,
are more than likely married,
and don't ask questions and, man,
they expect the same. I don't do
perverted. Not for money anyway."
Was planning on doing the European
tour, on her back, first hand, in depth
research for a *Baedeker's Guide to Getting Laid*,
she was going to call, *Do it on the Rails: Getting
the Most from Your Euro Pass and Have Fun Doing It*.
Something like that, anyway. If that didn't work
out, her back up plan was a Sociological study
on the sexual habits of the horny European Male:
You Don't Need a Translator to Have Good Sex.
Sociology wasn't her major, and she
couldn't write worth shit, but that
was something she'd worry about after
the research was finished, and recorded
in a diary she'd lose somewhere between
Buda and Pest. Thought protection during
intercourse was "for wimps, was like playing
Russian Roulette with an empty gun,"
when it was more like playing with one
chamber empty, high stakes stud poker
with someone else's money,
drawing a card for an inside straight.

Jade Palmer
Cum and Cum and Hate

No one really knows
how they end up naked
in the bartender's bed,
but I do remember we talked
about what happens after we die.

Red solo cups in a studio apartment.
Cheap, familiar gin.
We settled on a sort of agnosticism,
something purple and eternal that we'd never truly know.

Then that inevitable shift to on top and under.
His hands splay around my ribcage.
I'll be the first to admit I bit my lip too.
I tell him, "use a condom."
He tries to barter, "just the tip."
Then my feet on his chest
like pushing off from the edge
of a swimming pool. I beg the sweetest "please."
He rolls his eyes, spits that corner of foil.
Now I can smile when commanded,
"open your legs."

Fucking hell.
Some of the best dick I've ever gotten.
Fireworks in my lower back.
Somehow, it felt like mango tastes.
Then

hands fan like dove wings
above my hip bones and he says,
"I want you to have my babies"
and nails curl into my back and
"two of them" harder now I say,
"absolutely fucking not."

and his hand
reaches for the condom
that's strangling him and I
start crying not for any
virtuous reason but because I know
I have to push away when I
want it so bad. Could you just
stop talking, please? Maybe just
face fuck me so hard I can't
think anymore. Just choke me until
I feel purple and the last thing
I see is you throwing the condom
across the room. I have to be
ruined to enjoy this but I want
to enjoy it so badly *daddy*

yes that's what you want to be called *daddy*
turn on the fucking lights *daddy*
I'm going to cry while I put on my clothes *daddy*
no I'm not that beautiful *daddy*
no I don't want to finish my drink *daddy*
I've never felt like such a good girl saying "no" to so many things *daddy*
I'm going to carry my sweater and jacket and belt and toque
in my arms like a little baby as far away from you as possible *daddy*
this is the closest we will get to dying while still being alive *daddy*
I want you to know *daddy*
that I'm going to take an Uber home absolutely soaking my panties,
go up to my apartment, put a condom on my bright pink dildo,
and fuck myself with it while thinking about you
and being really fucking confused about it *daddy*
but I'm also going to close my eyes and take the condom off
in between thrusts and hope to god I feel the difference
so no one else can ever do what you tried to do to me *daddy*
and I know I will cum and cum and hate
that you have everything to do with it *daddy*
oh and *daddy* I hope that when you do really die it is
completely and utterly
black

Tennis Socks
Damon Hubbs

It was the year we gave up rooftops for boat decks.
You had fallen for Auden
and that man with golden talents
O what was his name —Thom, John

sucking cocks in your tennis socks
from Good Harbor to York Beach,
you thought you were the woman
who invented love

but love couldn't save me, or you
so we drank at the 525
like Hamlet's gravedigger-clowns,
unaware of our own errors

unaware that all the boats are named Grady
and that Pedro pitched Don Zimmer to the ground,
unaware that Toby died
and Holly crashed her car into The Oceanside

searching for Mercy Street in the Magnolia dusk—
It's not there, baby. It's not there.
You served aces and I
fished white blossoms from your hair.

Poughkeepsie
Damon Hubbs

I'm waiting for the poem to come.
I meet Paul for a sandwich in Poughkeepsie
and try to dash it off on the train like one of those poets
who can write about strawberries in Mexico
when they're on the way to the bank
at 14th Street and First Avenue

but it's no use. It just sort of bangs
around like Nagel's bat
and I don't know what it's like
for a bat to be a bat.
I haven't seen Paul in a while.
He looks like a Borgia

and is off his face
about some girl he's nicknamed Dark Odessa,
asks me if I saw the news story
about the kayaker upstate who faked his own drowning
so he could abandon his family
and flee to Europe with his girlfriend

Paul has a gleam in his eye that people don't have
when they eat a sandwich in Poughkeepsie.
These are urgent times, I say
and the bats in their barrettes and tunics of silk
are like fifty honest prostitutes
clutching chestnuts between their legs.

Why Even the Deaf Sing
Brooks Lindberg

7 times 70 the
condom tears and
7 times 70
I only
am escaped alone
to tell thee.

Melville had whales and Shakespeare.
Hemingway, bulls and Melville.
Bukowski, racehorses and Hemingway.
Schopenhauer, his jizz on bare breasts.

And me,
I've children
outer-darked
roving desolations
for explanation.

The children
of course
being poems.

The womb
of course being
your eyes.

We read as we fuck—
desperately

fine with flings
though craving what
we could ferry to
the grave.

The Word Kept Word
Brooks Lindberg

I've mistook
whores
for whores
pimps
for pimps and
reading between the lines as
reading between the lines.

I've mistook
what I love
and that I've loved
but never
what I hate
or that I've hated.

At Goodwill once
I saw a one-legged veteran
rise from his wheelchair
drop his shorts
and piss on a crucifix.
As they wheeled him out
he yelled
he wished he had
two cocks
so he couldn't give
two fucks.

It's hard to think
he could've been mistaken.

fork in the road
Johnny Scarlotti

she comes up to me in a rusted banged up honda civic
as i'm emptying my piss cup in the bushes next to my shitty car
i've been sleeping in this sketchy parking lot
for the last couple weeks
i light a cigarette
i'm so depressed
she says 'do you have one for me?'
'no, but we can split this one'
we pass it around
'i'm hungry' she says, then gives a look
'i'm not in the mood' i say
she says 'come onn'
'not today' i say, as she comes closer
puts her hands on my chest
brings them down my waist
we go into my car
and she swallows it
i fondle my gun
she gets out
and she says
'see you tomorrow?'
'...ok' i tell her
fuck
i don't know how to end this

The Horror We LoVe, The Movie We LiVe
Casey Renee Kiser

It all starts when we let *it* in;
plants a flag under our skin

The Thing must be You
The Thing must be Me
The Thing must be *Us*
in each other's company

How the distance takes our shape
when we don't choose a form to
just fucking communicate

Lights out; crawl around within
No surrender *for the win*

You're suspecting Me
I'm suspecting You
They're suspecting *Us*;
Seeing red when we are blue

Last swig of that J & B;
Let's end this here with the flames
The *real thing*, we'll never see

time is a flat drum circle
Karl Koweski

I've reached an age
where I can look back on my life
and remember a time
when the Oliver Stone directed
Jim Morrison biopic
The Doors was not considered a comedy.

I saw it opening night
in a theater in Lansing, Illinois.
I took a girl from the high school
sociology class we shared.
she enjoyed the movie well enough
and she liked me,
but I was too dumb to realize.

I walked out of that theater
fundamentally changed.
I knew I needed to procure
a pair of black leather pants
and a conch belt.
I needed to study Nietzsche
and learn to write poetry.
I wanted to be a shaman
and a lizard king
and lead a pack of dopers
in a frenzied drum circle.
except I had no rhythm.
I was born into tone deafness.
leather britches were prohibitively expensive,
and I never met anyone
of First Nation heritage
kind enough to loan me their soul.

doing drugs was relatively easy,
as simple as getting on people's nerves
by continually spouting goofy non sequiturs.
as a result, women maintained
a respectful distance.
I bought an anole lizard in a little cage,
but it soon escaped.

my hair fell out
before it could really grow out.
Nietzsche didn't do it for me.
my attempts to start a religion failed.
I could write poetry,
more narrative than lyrical.
when the words flowed
I felt a spirit move within me,
more Polish than Cherokee
harboring an aversion to rhyme
and hippie drum circles.

Write a Poem About Us She Said ~ Noel Negele

It's not love
it's something more simple,
less demanding.

She has a small room
in a bad neighborhood
with a small kitchen and a pleasant bathroom
and the washing machines are in the basement
and the air conditioning
is included in the rent
so we keep it on
all night and all day long.

She only has one chair to sit on
so she drags it next to the bed
and sits on it
and I lie in bed
and I keep the ashtray on my stomach
and we talk and talk and talk
and we laugh and laugh and laugh
and we remain silent
as much as we talk and laugh.

We drank all five wine bottles
she had bought with her money
(she works, I don't)
washing down 6 xanax pills each
and smoking camel cigarettes
until 6 or 7 in the morning
at which point she lay beside me
and we had a wonderful time
fucking for a while,
and then we fell asleep,
as the shutters where down
and no day light
intruded the fine darkness of the room.

Nothing can harm us
as long as
we are kind to each other.

I woke up at 16:00 in the noon
and she had already been up from 12
and gone down to grab coffee for us
and she was listening to her music on the balcony naked,
sitting on the only chair-
her beautiful legs over the railing
and on the nightstand
my not so cold coffee anymore awaited.

I got up from bed
heavy from the alcohol
and the anti-depressants
and went to take a piss
and when I returned
I lied on the bed again
and she lied beside me
calling me lazy
and she kissed me
and I rubbed her clit
and she said: "No, not like that. Like this."
and holding my hand lightly
she guided my fingers over that wonderful pussy of hers,
and taught me how to make her cum with my fingers
which took some time, and when she did
I put my cock inside that wonderfully wet cunt
and I fucked her for some time
and at the end
my dick got soft and tired
and she put it in her mouth
and gave me the best blowjob,
the kindest one I've had,
and she swallowed my cum
and she said: "Let's take a bath together."

Her bathtub was small and we had to stand
and we began washing each other standing
“It’s going to take a hell of a lot of shampoo to wash all this hair,” I said
“You have to collect it,” she said
and I washed her head
as she washed my cock
which was still a little hard
and we kissed
and I washed her back
watching the lather
slowly travel from her neck to her beautiful ass
and she washed my chest
and I washed her thighs
and she washed my face and my ears
and I washed her cunt
and she washed my hair
and I wrapped a towel around my waist
and she wrapped a towel around her breasts
and we brushed our teeth
with her toothbrush.

She said her toilet leaked when she flushed it
so I said I’d fix it
and I opened the cistern
and I plugged the hole
from which a plastic button was detached
with a tampon I took from her purse
and as she cooked spaghetti with squid
I yelled at her from the bathroom
the problem and how I had fixed it
and she yelled back happily that I am a genius
and I felt proud
and returned and smoked and drank one of the three
beers she had bought that morning
and I said those pills really were something
and said too bad she didn’t have any more
and she brought the plate and put it on the chair
and dragged the chair in front of the bed
and then lied next to me.

“Aren’t you going to eat?” I asked.

“I’m not hungry,” she responded

and I ate while she watched smiling and smoking and drinking

“Is it good?” she asked behind her crossed thighs

“It’s very good,” I responded
looking at the curves of her lips
while she smiled

It was very good
everything was very good
and the world itself was on hold
and waiting to close in
and death trembled each time we laughed
and I felt three centuries younger
and we both knew
we would lose the magnificence
when we’d separate
but we were too brave to whine about it
and at 21:00 in the night
I got dressed and opened the door

and turned and kissed her
and her eyes were knowing and understanding
and clever and clear
and she said: “Goodbye.”
and I said: “Goodbye,” and I left
I left
I left
all the brightness that life had for me that day.