

whiptail: journal of the single-line poem

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The Red Umbrella, 2024, pastel on paper, 9" x 12"

by **Jay Friedenber**

Tuna Salad With Extra Avocado

That car is there again, parked under my favorite shade tree. I unwrap my food and wonder who would drive to an empty parking lot, day after day, to eat lunch alone in their car.

brittle heart lines in the sand(wich)

Chaos Theorist

Every time I sit back
and listen to the cosmic energy
of an Albert Ayler or a Peter Brötzmann
I give thanks to the first
prehistoric fish to crawl past the line
where water and land meet
carrying the primordial memories
of the sea
of all the fire and ice that came
before all the moons and stars and
all the ancient energy
which has been passed down
throughout all of the millennia
across the family tree of
all previous living things
until it finally escaped out
of the horns
of a Pharoah Sanders
or a John Coltrane

trying out new colors horsehead nebula

Happenstance

Drowsy as the bee sounds, I carry the plastic cup with its makeshift postcard lid down the stairs to the back door. Outside, I tap the lip on a small squarish stone and out tumbles the bee like a velvety gumball before clambering aboard as if onto a life raft in a sea of grass. Slowly, bending a blade over the stone, a few drops of dew spill next to the bee. Have a drink, I say. And it does, regaining its composure. Looks like one doozy of a day. Make the most of it. Go on. I've done what I can for you. You're going to have to take it from here. But I don't know who is talking to whom.

neural canyon shaping other
river pathways each

A Mystic in a Suit

Rain slams one side of a corner office in Chicago,
everywhere the battle of dominance and non-dominance.
Global souls, too, join the majority, now party to the rain.

she texts me a bluebell I know a porchlight left on for me

Singularity

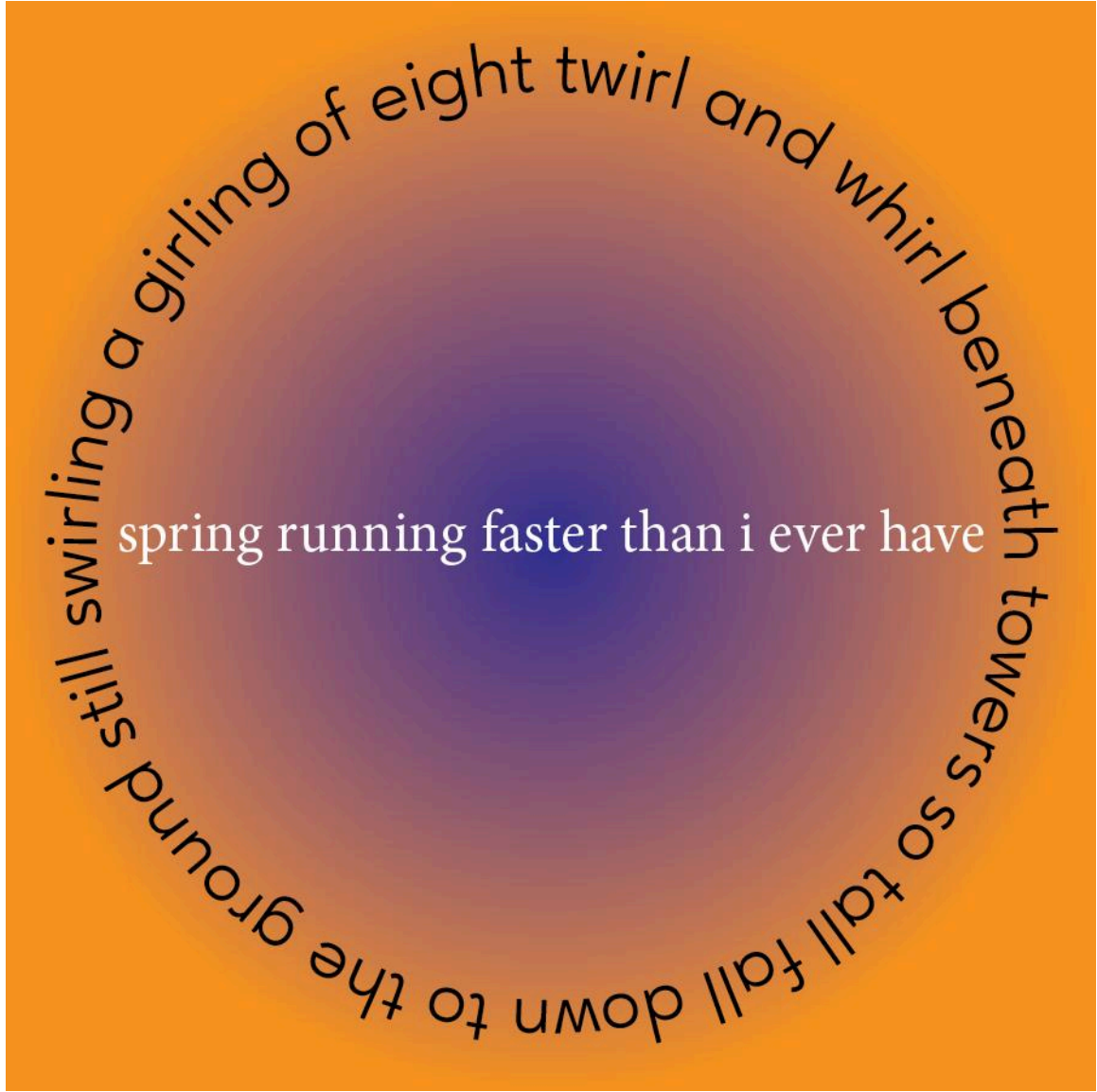
In a Colette-inspired suite we couple until a supernova but then a double pulsar confirmation of Einstein's special theory brings us to the brink of a Shakespearean tragedy where gravity would have pinned us to Dante's ninth circle but because of Heisenberg's uncertainty all ends well.

our geometry spoons us into a Venn overlap

The Collector

I place the last light of the day into my drawer with the care of someone who treasures rare finds. It feels like I am storing away a special outfit that I have never dared to wear. Yet another day goes by without being fully cherished. Tomorrow is likely to be the same. The journey always begins with nightfall.

back to drinking the birds



slap, dash

Lorax sticker on the other side of trees

::blind. : .crow::
piks(((skip)))piks.

boilerplate noon a tiger stalks the birches

echo. . .
Fate jumps in. scatters:scatters.

squirrely serif letters between acorn and oak

far away
::from machines::
indigenous leaf fill breath and sky.

Haibun on John Ashbery's *Haibun 2*

I, too, have considered the superiority of speedwell petals to the Atlantic and the cicada's eye to the June night, but only our Lilliputian coterie (I've always loved that word, and it really does describe us two, doesn't it?) truly finds them excelsior. You were right, you know, you always know. Our eyes meet. We can't stop smiling, our laughter burgeoning up, up, and away. The joke is they think we are the joke, but it's all right. We know them for the chameleon and the vampire squid they are. Of course, in a more important way, the chameleon approaches the squid asymptotically, and vicey-versey, until they are both plastic fantastic automata who keep agreeing that it is very important that their cacophonous fourteeners are called baffleheads. The difference is I can name that tune in three notes and my sparrows can say more with a caesura than their mannequin mouths can prattle on about for a whole chapbook. We both know the secret of the sparrows is geometry. The fact that we know the secret is a secret and it is a secret because no one else seems to want to hear it. I guess, at this point, it doesn't even matter anymore so I'll spill the beans: the hypercube of the two legs of an isosceles triangle equals the hypercube of the radius of the circle it inscribes.

Gonçalves' vermillion *la plume de ma tante*

Cardinal

black now white pines against sunrise
landing on a lamppost in the wind a crow
blossoming moon just leave it where it lies
white now black pines against moonrise
a burst of red space unties
katabatic winds breath from a shadow
black now white ash against starless skies
falling on a stump in the wind last snow

Concerto For Hydraulis And Microplastics

Doomscrolling a concert piano washed ashore in the Florida Keys.

shuffle this tired sea's hand melodies

Singularity *an erasure series*

the cartography of stars problem-solving

I. everyone / in the world / is a special kind / of genetic mistake

II. my mind / of disconnected episodes / is a thing / of grammar

III. underneath reason / a letter full / of shapes / & colour

IV. move the furniture / in your grave / sit at the table / with a white lie / and go to bed

clotting time the words we go through

Source: *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon.

afterpath

walking the woods after the storm . . . the old stone wall still holding its time-shifting
flow. squirrels leaping enjambments, knowing an inkling of foot can run gravity straight
up a trunk of the broken. flurries wrapping the fallen, the flooded, the wind-crushed.
weeping rock's eye out from the ledge pouring hidden springs of too much.
consciousness calling did you sing your heart raw in the storm? what root did you bring
to the wake of the pain? blue sky opening on wing. wind-hits still rattling the bones.
aftermath of memory . . . the windows of home, how they said we might hold or break
you, too, in our shattered glass

still cup
small lifting
drops crocus
in



The Bike and the Boats, 2024, pastel on paper, 9" x 12"

by **Jay Friedenber**

The Soul I Hold

On nights when the feels
like temp is in negative territory,
with clear visibility, I close down

the house and stalk
the night from window
to window, looking under

overgrown junipers, in frozen
birdbaths, through arthritic
canopies, and wait

for volcanoes of snow to erupt.
Tiptoeing across oak stained floors
through a dining room

with seating for 11 plus one
ghost, and unlocking double black
doors to a freshly shoveled porch,

I listen for a whimper, a meow,
a chirp, a cry. Empty-handed,
a scream of disbelief awakens

the raven burned into my forearm.
She stretches her wings from my flesh
and takes a short flight

around the hunger moon
before settling back down
into the bassinet of my arm.

more than skin deep hibernating in me

Aubade

I lie awake in your bed, watch specks of dust climb the shaft of light that has slipped in through a gap in the drapes. You drew them last night to keep out the real world.

birdsong already I trace the shape of your absence

Sea Change

Let waves wash over your trailing laces;
Let sand pollinate the flowers on your dress;
Let wind blow tears from both of our faces;
But make the world care that the world has one less.
Let tides sweep away all the shoe print traces;
Let raindrops bathe every bee on the flowers;
Let nature know that nothing replaces
The smallest thing when the small thing was ours.
So you gave a name to a skimming stone;
And I kissed the stone with my tenderest kiss;
And the stone kissed the sea and then sank below;
To be a reminder of all that I miss.
Now I stare at the ocean and grieve each day
Drowned in the thoughts of what fate took away.

still below the surface waiting for the wait to end

Baptismal Promise

Wade in the water to feel the beauty you cannot see
what now is made of, on the way to the near side of what's next.
I hope, brown grandchild, I helped you with my life of blood and prayer.

Father's Day all of us swimming with his ashes

Without

We pull into the snow-covered parking lot and slide on the unevenly plowed pavement. I open the trunk, get my husband's walker. Blown sideways against the car, we shuffle, heads bowed to the restaurant entrance.

Inside, we laugh with friends, eat steaming fajitas and enchiladas. Bright paper lanterns hang everywhere, and in our cozy corner, we try to ignore sleet pinging the window.

As we drive home, Frank tells me something is wrong with his shoe, but I'm tense, focused on the dark and slippery road.

a twilight of grackles our conversation

Back home, Frank says he lost his shoe.

I search the car, call the restaurant. Nothing there or even outside in handicapped parking. I go out in the garage, bang on the wall, shout out loud. How could he possibly lose his shoe?

He's lost his sight, hearing, memory, ability to walk and drive, watch TV. And now, this. My husband, the shoe person. Good shoes. Expensive shoes. Not long ago, he gave all these shoes away. His feet too swollen to get into them. How has our life come to this? My husband owns *one shoe*—a Walmart canvas slip on.

black ice what I don't see in the mirror

The next day, the restaurant parking lot is plowed. Piles of snow in the afternoon sun remind me of Monet's haystacks. The shapes are similar, each one holding the light differently. I sit a while in the car, bask in the warmth and quiet.

Something black catches my eye.

Bounding out of the car, I know—*the shoe*. Crystallized snow encases it. I pull it from the drift and hold it close.

that bright morning

when we were twelve and only we, ahead of the rest of the group, ran down the full length of the mountain and then, in the wait for the others to catch up, in the chemical rush of our sheer physicality, the way our bodies worked, arms flailing, knees shuddering, lungs pumping, the glistening of a light sweet sweat upon our upper lips, groped our way to a first kiss . . .

opening a parenthesis that doesn't close

at the far root of the sky

black hills blue grama the bruise my fathers left

bur oaks and water elms walk driftless folds of stone, weave ancient river psalms.
the great trees pray for red dogs to come home, to kiss the shortgrass again.
stonetorn feet rumble in the north. hard wind comes down now, first.
the sky will follow, tired old stars streaking his wet cheek.

time raining clear as midspring air

scowling father burling over quaking aspens, are you the thunderhead?
are you the great mountain, too proud to accept late spring gifts of warmth?
will i be like you, and slowly lose my water?
what cold star will hear your prayer?

an eldest daughter a big hard sun a loan

Non-Binary Breakfast Blues

Father interrupts, What about you considering my feelings?
I want to say, I've done that for 20 years, today's truth-telling time.
Instead, I smile and pass the marmalade.

a wildcat sharpens the ~ ~ ~ w h a t e v e r ~ ~ ~

[Burning Sugar]

1. an assortment of candy left on the table along with unopened bills. i want to buy myself some red red spider lilies or another fragrant type flower that reeks of vanilla or chocolate or something. there's much dusting i need to do as well . . . i need a man . . . i need a man (do i really?)

2. to be honest, i haven't thought that much — what i mean, is; i haven't fully taken in monman's absence. she's been gone since Mother's Day May 11, 2029. i remember the slate gray sky. the light rainpour. i remember monman's face not looking like her. i remember the night before when i leaned near her ear and told her how much i loved her, and how everything was between her and God. if she was ready to 'walk into the next room,' then we (my siblings and i) would not stand in the way.

3. driving along a narrow road in Charenton, LA. the smell of burning sugar canes. we're on our way to Earl's house. Earl is monman's *bo; they've been together off'n'on for some years. he's an unofficial father.

4. i've always enjoyed 'fathers.' sexually, there's something exciting about daddys . . .

seething

rivers

tonight

hearing

a

newly

arrived

family

at

the

oceanside

villa

next

door

5. full exploration of being a texas-born louisiana creole. of being black. of being queer.
of being man in this settler colonial project called Usania. at forty - i am still growing comfortable
in my skin. the twisting and turning of some of my limbs trying to find comfort in this skin. often
the skin tightens and sometimes slackens at will.

6. down the street, more homeless guys gather at the bus stop to smoke and talk the shit that folk on corners have a tendency to do.

**bo - "boyfriend" in Kouri-Vini*

Wrack

You've been courting disaster long enough. Isn't it time you got hitched? You in a suit of rain, with your lucky feet. She in her thunderwear, the ship that launched a thousand faces as close as the phone vibrating in your pocket.

beach bodies rushing to water a stranded whale

Ties that Bind

Tools of my trade: scalpel, knives, bone folders, needles, awls, cutting boards, straight edge.

Straight edge: 1. a piece of metal for cutting clean edges in a straight line. 2. “a subculture of hardcore punk whose adherents refrain from using alcohol, tobacco and recreational drugs in reaction to the punk subculture's excesses.”
(Wikipedia)

pulling stitches tighter a perfect spine



Beached, 2024, pastel on paper, 9" x 12"

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