

TRIPTYCH

KYLE DARGAN

1. REVERENCE IN THE ATOMIC AGE¹

Pair me—lay me
covalent—with a breathing
body, one that will not laugh
if I proclaim *Salvador*
Dalí was god
come to frolic upon earth,
a body who will allow
my fingers to scribble inert
scriptures across its forehead
as Dali brushed Medusa's visage
over Gala's blank brow.

Looking into his wife's eyes
turned Salvador soft, not stone;
rendered him flammable.
I want that—this world
already full of statues.
My tongue is a plinth
piled with plutonium
isotopes waiting
to be split with a kiss.

¹ After the later work of Salvador Dalí, particularly a photograph of Dalí painting "The Medusa of Sleep" on his wife's, Gala, forehead.

2. PORTAL OF DARK ENERGY

From one side—reaching—
a trunk with naked roots.

From the other, another trunk,
another flourish of roots. Infinity
—a thin mirror screen—separates,
marries both ends.

And within that merging pane,
two unseen treetops—leafy
and aching for sun's sustenance.

No shining will be served.

This is the portal of dark energy,
the gate all black birds
must dive through
to dye their wings
the hue of the universe,
hue of light's utter omission.

With no foliage to rest within,
birds instead perch in rebar nest
at the portal's apex, flapping
to dry their feathers. There is
a sacrifice—quills shed
and fall with their new dark weight.
That is the toll for gaining freedom
to cross between dimensions on wind—
buoyed by so much light devoured,
digested in their plumage.

AUGUST

DANIELLE EVANS

In summer the oranges are still hard and green, and before kicking them up and down the schoolyard, the younger boys take their thumbnails and meticulously peel off spots of thick green skin, patterning the oranges like the soccer ball that the older boys monopolize. Don Bernardo keeps promising to bring a second ball when he comes from the city on weekends, but each Sunday he comes back smiling and empty-handed and very sorry that he has forgotten. Under the bushes behind the school there are piles of mutilated oranges rotting prematurely.

Yadira does not really care about the soccer balls. She is fourteen and getting too old for all of that, even if it doesn't show yet. Beneath the pleats of her plaid school skirt, which she is allowed to wear to town on weekends, now that there is no more school in the foreseeable future, her knees are still chalky and bony.

It is the start of June, a day after the letter's arrival. The letter was not unexpected. Yadira's mother promised, when she'd left ten years ago, that

she'd send for her eventually. Eventually had come. Yadira would go to Veracruz and get a factory job. Leaving is nothing special anymore; half of the people Yadira grew up with have left—for Monterey, Tampico, the U.S if they had family on the other side. Still, she had expected small changes to prepare for the big ones: weeping, rainstorms. Instead the weather had been warm and mild, and her grandmother's only instructions had been to wait. Her brother would send money for her bus ticket in August.

Yadira's mother sent a blender with the letter, which had been delivered by cousins passing through. Yadira plugs the blender into the outlet in the storage room and spends the afternoon smushing flowers, leaves and berries into a brownish confetti. Push, whirl, push, whirl. She expects someone to yell at her for this, but no one does. Grandmother, who still grinds the corn for tortillas by hand, will never use the blender anyway. Perhaps she does not care if Yadira breaks it. Perhaps, Yadira thinks without believing, she does not care if Yadira leaves.

In late July the rain stops and the heat becomes sweltering. Projects are abandoned all over. The explosions from where the highway that goes

into Xilitla is being expanded through the mountains become less frequent, as the construction workers take more breaks. The highway must get bigger, because in Xilitla, tourists are beginning to trickle in. The tourists have mostly come to see Las Pozas, an attraction built by a crazy English man, who maybe meant to finish it and maybe didn't, but there was no telling because he died leaving a series of half filled pools, and stone staircases to nowhere. Yadira has seen tourists brought to tears by the mere possibility of falling.

Some days Yadira goes down the narrow and rocky path leading to what she still thinks of as her mother's house. She touches the splintering wood and closes her eyes and remembers her mother making tea and humming softly. The melody is familiar, but the face is indistinct, its features blurry. Yadira must focus in order to conjure up her mother's face and place it on the memory woman, and even then it is the face of her mother as she looked when she came to visit two years ago; she cannot remember her mother's face before that.

In August the rain begins again. It comes without warning. The dusty yard is mud in minutes. When the women find they are soaked anyway, they begin walking up the road to the fountain in a group, dragging the clothes they have been unable to wash during the dry weeks. Yadira begins to take her own clothes, but grandmother says, “Yadira, pack them,” just like that. Her ticket has come.

The only time Yadira has been on a bus is when she went to visit her cousin Elena for her quinceñera. On the way to Jalpan she had pressed her face against the window to watch the green and blue hills roll by, but the vibration of the window against her forehead had given her a headache, so she pulled away until they arrived at the Jalpan bus station the big bright sign greeting them: WELCOME TO JALPAN. TOURISM BENEFITS US ALL. PLEASE TRY TO APPEAR CLEAN AND DISEASE FREE.

Yadira is not sure how Veracruz will welcome her. She knows from that trip that she will be cold on the bus, and hungry, so she leaves her only sweater outside of the bag in which she has packed everything else she owns. She walks down to Margarita’s house to buy tamarind candy for the journey, but Margarita’s curtains are closed. Light slips in through cracks in the wood,

and the glare on the jars bleeds the candies into a blurry rainbow. Yadira walks inside and takes some candies, leaving change on Margarita's stove.

Outside she sits in the damp grass to pull the plastic off of one of the tamarind candies and lick the creamy, spicy inside. Trees close off the light from overhead, and it seems like night for a few minutes before it actually becomes night. The sky cracks and the rain comes again, but Yadira cannot bring herself to get up and walk home. It is the rain, she tells herself, it is the cold, it is that the mud has washed out the path, but she knows that it is none of this, that she is finally crying and it will not stop.

Finally, she is walking, then running, uphill to home. By the time she arrives she is soaked and filthy and smells of wet grass; her tears have given way to angry sobs. She stands under the awning outside the kitchen and collects herself, sniffing, flattening her hair, wiping the mud from her legs. She feels as though at any moment she could disappear.

PLAYING SOLDIER

MICHAEL KIMBALL

I used to ask my father if he ever shot the enemy when he was in the Marines. He usually wouldn't answer, but sometimes he would explain to me that it was war and it wasn't like what happened on television. Then my father would get one of his rifles out of the closet and lay it into my open hands. He showed me how to hold the butt of the rifle against my shoulder and let me look through the scope as long as I didn't put my finger on the trigger.

**

For years, I would put on all-green clothes and play soldier. I went on top secret missions in the backyard. I took cover in the bushes and the shrubs and in the tall weeds at the back of our lot. I protected the house from neighbors and trees and falling leaves. I protected the house from people walking by on the sidewalk and cars and trucks driving by on the street.

**

Once, I was playing soldier with my father's rifle in the living room. I had already sighted the lamp through the scope and then the television when I noticed my father had fallen asleep. I pointed the rifle at him and his face got huge. I centered the crosshairs between his eyes, but I didn't slip my finger off the guard and onto the trigger. Instead, I just mouthed, *Bang*.

**

After that, I started to imagine different ways my father might be killed. I imagined my father falling asleep while driving and dying in a car accident. I imagined him going through the windshield and being beheaded.

**

I imagined my father getting shot and killed in a hunting accident, then being left out there in the woods.

**

I imagined my father out fishing on a boat that was sinking and my father not being able to swim. I imagined my father thrashing in the water and then the water being still.

**

After reading about Gary Gilmore in the newspaper, I imagined my father getting shot and killed by a firing squad. I imagined each of the bullets hitting him and his body slumping against the wall.

**

At some point, my mother told me my father had never served in any war, had never been in any kind of combat, had never fired his rifle at anything besides a target. My mother told me my father had never shipped out, that the only fighting he ever engaged in was at home.

**

GODFOUGHT

REB LIVINGSTON

bully of the ha-ha kind, phoning pink to black, hick fight, fighting the attraction, the wretched humanoid fights the invisible baby kangaroo, difficult to fight, inside or out, I didn't come to fight, escaping before the fight, perfect strangler, deputized, dangling cat fight, fighting against the fight,

how many battles must a protagonist incite?

like the cowboy era, covert prairie women, freshly laid eggs, breakfast for everyone, cows running down the highway, cows on the side of God, healthy cows grazing on the sickly grass,

something to watch,

nothing to see today, we all agree we need to fight, lobbyist for the lobby of God, how real the strangling, farmhands shaking hands, beforehand, hand-out, handling baggage, handbags all around, handling the dead, hazard lights, handling the situation, handling delicately, hands are full, hand grabbing touching, manhandling, hands in the sink, hands like the jagged tooth of God, shriveling,

crotch punching, hand in mouth, oozing, sunlight on fire,
godhandles, his infected points of light,

consumption by lightning,

lightening up, submerging and drowned, getting fired, fire under
water, tea lamp on fire, fire on the hill, hands catching fire, the
protagonist sometimes uses fire, finding fire, escape, hazard, works,
the whole house, manifesting inside a hand hose, renovations,
nothing is burned, on fire, alarmed, heard fire, suffering damage, gas,
breathing,

fire in the fireplace,

recurring theme, four directions reaching toward God, disappointed,
at some point the weather impedes, agreeing and pointing, my father
used to buy his cigarettes from there, dark clouds, hang gliding,
attacking by cloud time, visibility, a cloud front with a name, stuck
because it's cloudy,

pop of hat head, sitting under a tree wearing a floppy hat, a
construction hat with lime wedge, hello to the transparent lady in
witch hat,

nodding ahead, still head, head down, headline, heading to Italy,
around head, heading back, above head, place your head between his
feet, heading towards a clandestine bridal shower, head count,
heading home, having sex while listening to Radiohead, shaking head,
injury to head, headband, headscarf, headpiece, wolf head, smashing
his head against the sheep, a Christmas wreath for a head, snakes
shooting from heads, a baby born with only a head, a reptile head
rising from a skull, my father used to be possessed by a reptilian alien
too,

what mythical creature would you be?

I'd be a fairy living in an ancient dense forest, celebrating Christmas
as fairy barfland, godspree, I always wanted a fairy doll in my image,
godtripping, you can tell a lot by answers, there is no answer, walking
away without answering, the ins and outs of answers, retail therapy is
an answer, man answers, godpassage, the answer is 9 out of 10, her
answer isn't what they're expecting, editing out the lamer answers,
answering the phones, not satisfied with this answer, no answer, the
first of ten answers: zombies and vampires, it's what's going on down
there, it's classified, it's a fairy living in a crystal,

my father began as a tiny fairy trapped in a dark crystal,

traveling by old-fashioned plane, risky, sky full and blimp-like, silent
Strativinsky and rare board games, nuking the rainbow, fading to
scary movie, edgings, the misplaced baskets of laundry, pirates on the
horizon, godspeckles to the eye,

wiping down soot and smut, roach and smoke, a separate game for
the smokers, presumably while high, vanishing,

dream-of-Jeannie-ing through godthirsty man hands,

invisible partner, child druids, forces changing paths, invincible
pounds, varieties of rocks, the invisible walls keeping us apart,
invisible again, indivisible, no heads under God,

or hats,

IN THE SKY CATHEDRAL

AMBER SPARKS

Watch the screen now. Something is ending. Words fly away, leaving us behind with “long ago” and “far, far away.”

If words are the best we can do, isn't our best a failure of sorts? Can't we still admit that? Can't we tell each other that our symbols were better, when a bird meant the landing of love? When shifting rock stood for drought?

When the enchanted ship pulls into port, we will greet it with our toes curled up inside our shoes, hiding our apprehension even as we weep for our losses. The water will lap calmly at the bier of the faithful sister, held to a higher standard than god. The water will wash away the blood she spilled, the martyr's death of understanding and incomprehension. The girl makes a pretty corpse, a thing to drape with flowers and garlands of green and white. The water is clean, is pure; it is a bright spark on the surface of the planet we once lived on.

From the heavens we watch, a fondness like warm bread spreading through our insides, and we dream of the dance hall music Eliot couldn't kill. Wood and water, a tight hard knot on the waves. A sword emerges from the pool and we breathe a little faster, confusion and desire surging through us like smoke. There is joy in this remembering. There is joy in our sudden understanding that we do not belong to this time. We undo our robes and lay bare in the sun and haze, mistaking symbol for symbol and having trouble remembering what tool to use this time. We have forgotten how to use these bodies. These bodies, white and cool in the mist, glisten like the water, like the scales on the sacred fish, like the opposite of this whole sun-drenched side of the planet.