

As If These Things Were True
Leif Halvorson





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Dedication:

Mike Tuggle, who pushed me over the edge of poetry
one more time.

Marjorie Perloff, grand critic, who saw the first
"knuckleheads" and replied, "Don't let the bastards
get you down!"

David Koven, anarcho-pacifist Beat inspirationist
Who tells me, "Don't let the bastards get you down!"

And Ralph Metzner, PhD, who gets the pithy spot,
the high seat, who said, "Just write about it!"

Artwork by Erik Halvorson



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As If These Things Are True
(Little Boy)

it's enough to live as if these things are true:
August 6th 1945, 8:15 am

the red brush pastes the summer
brown california grass

thunder has brought us here
up from the firmament

who has torn this island
this vast continent asunder

to grapple with frailty
scent of one red flower
hard afternoon heat

The Apotheosis of Knucklehead

when she came out of his trance: sex,
it was cabbages in the garden
which gave him his first clue.
the goddess of Cruciferae,
her kuan yin spirit of emerald mornings

a spiritual vortex
quite clearly these are eyes
a smile on her favored mouth
whirling above one chosen head
and other mature autumn cabbage heads
left attached, for some reason,
neglected
throughout the harvest.
that cabbage was a woman too

and she sang, she sang
and her verse
carried such truth
as is rarely found.
my garden oozed mud
beneath my raptured knees
for days and days
as that cabbage sang the most
beautiful song to me.

st. henry won't believe it
says such visions are the result
of childish imagination,
or at best, dream:

"until you somehow
find out better." and knuckle answers:
"it's enough to make you
think you've lost your mind"

Dialogue Upon The Unbroken Ground
(After the Word)

At first the wasps refused to listen,
All I got back was a big buzzy raspberry
Ripe with overheated nuance and threats.

Beneath the sheetsteel and aluminum
Its hive mind writhes & pitches angriest

At the noonday sun. Finally, I tell it
To mind its manners. I tell it

“You are all very wonderful but if
You come in that window, or sting

visitors to your space, I swear I have no choice
But to chase you out of there;

I’ll kill every single one of you.”
Guess what? No wasp has flown in since.

They know I mean what I say
Although I have to remind them now and then.

The same goes for the meat bees
Nesting in the ground beneath the lonesome pine.

This is a language between worlds
An articulation inspired by the calamity of the word.

As we learn to speak we learn to forget
Our ancestors are dreaming us.

I can hear the righteous complaint
Warble from the bookstores
As Buddhists who persecuted
Pantheism where ever they found it
Rise in terror;

I growl at them from the bushes
Promising to eat their bananas
And rake their ashes.
Toots died a in fire by the roadside
Like he always said he would.

“Fuck! Wind her out and lay down a nice long patch!
What have I got to loose?”

Skin brother in whiteskin town.

Doctor? Does one not learn the language of Ravens
And Crows by performing ceremonial excubation?
I dream the vineyards will not destroy me

As the world around us
Is torn apart for love

We live in an aluminum house where finches
Dance and lizards cavort

Beneath the furniture.
In a 24x40 trailer,

We are the last tenants.
28 acres will be sold

And our house bulldozed
for a million dollars.

A spirit praises each day
Remember a fine woody noon

Far Away and go where the word rests
Before the beginning of fathers and mothers

Furry belly, wonderful berry
Tongues ambling across
The green meadow. My best friend,

Aforementioned, sometime now
Deceased, called Toots, was Ojibwe
And Menominee.

And when the sun burned him
It burned him bad. Furless bears
Nothing to protect us
From the economy: We blood!
Paw the sand country! We blood!
Raise a cordite prayer
Against the railroaders! We blood

Praising the Creator
A quarter ton lead projectiles
In Scrub Oak memory of the White Pine.

My pink skin gave us an early warning
Kept away the county sheriff; I always
Burned before Toots did
Before Toots was burned too bad.

Later, for Toots and his people
I ferried braves retreating
Wounded Knee past FBI
Checkpoints, through the humid

Midwestern night woods. In a 64 ford wagon
Once, one brave said he knew

I saved his life
And in return shared his ancestors:
If not for you, just another disappeared red nigger.
You might not want all of them, he said,
But I'll give them to you anyway,

I didn't believe him until the voices came,
Long after he vanished beneath the foliage
North of Turtle Lake. More and more as I grow older

I hear his grandmothers and aunts
And uncles and grandfathers and cousins

Speaking to me. Sometimes they
Have conversations with my own ancestors

All those Norse and Celtic, Gaelic speaking
And Pictish families from

The Land Without Words. I am learning
To pick a story and stick to it.
Worlds are waking and sleeping.

As the walking stick struts the hazelbush
And the sunfish gutted and sweet-smelling

Flips into the hot frying pan
Of recollection, All of our Relations,
Toots and I whispering toward a red clay morning,
It seems we have always
Lived close to the soil

Elegy For Clementine
Who Hanged Herself By The Neck, Age 28

Who named the rock serpentine
the sandpiper at the edge
where surf creams the shore
advancing and retreating toward
a seasonal tideland
moon strung to her mind

A tiny cellular niche is our time
a fantasy, hydrostatic between grains of sand,
rung, pulsing overtones between the hush,
hung intervals implied beneath a perception
gratis upon these shores
articulated by no decree, no margin.
day grinds upon day, sentimentality has no substance.

Your hair was bright in the shadows and dark in the sun.
You told me you loved the sun and sea air.
We sing our living here, and ask for recognition
each mind particle
reticule of color
winking each past the other with a resonance:
her name is Tongues; She is called Tongues;
Mother of Tongues,
She is Glossolalia! Glossolalia!
Her belly echoes our multitude, eager mouths
for musical air, a pair of voices, a trinity, a chorus
polarity of revelation or despair
at intervals, ultimately, individually for each one of us
into a terrible and awesome harmony--
we take what song we can
each rung stone and molecule
and moiled in this surf exists no passion

sucking us clean, no sensuality, no blame
no breath, everyday of the rest of our lives
chanting the same office, genuflecting
for no particular satisfaction, looking for god

These lines of metal laid within the serpentine
taste of nickel beneath the tongue
may not be plotted, body is ashes
flung upon the wind to sting back the tears
the eyes against the western world,
the mechanarchy, history, woman and death

A dead gull upon the hard rock lintel of the cliffs by the pacific
smashed shell, a fish drowned in air, cliché flung high
element to the weeping sand,
"Glossolalia ! Glossolalia!"
tears melting,

taste her tears,

salt,

Star dust in them and in the rock
within this coastal bone compressed by eons
pressed by time until all traces of living
from the ages of the world none remains.

yes, Starbright, Clementine, their dust also falls to the earth
as your dust falls
throughout the ages
whispers of fire drinking and glimmering

Beyond the bright
our sun invisible by night
naked darkness clothed in lace
to whom the Goddess turns her face
endless light in endless dark
each bright knot a wink in time
will cinch at last upon this rhyme

Knucklehead Gone South One More Time

little knucklehead
paces the asphalt on highway twenty five
clinton tennessee just a short drive
breathing in his belly
down the asphalt
on Sunday morning
the forces marshaled against him are formidable.

{knuck clothed in} times energy
his papa of the (inter cortical layers
where the imagination grows like a muscle from youth)
brain pan
black
over his pale skin. from oakridge due west.
in the coffee shop a sign says, "maybe we're just
lazy hillbillies but we sure make a hell of a bomb"

[he black
jeans
and a black t-shirt

{papa g*d don't be afraid}}
times written with a dot meaning period meaning

the end of your sentence: divided by
how do you spell "O"?/1 =

somber

his belly sore regrets last nights lafrog
cars on the godway sound like chains
papa, he say, "give me a home where the buffalo roam."
it's the only nature he knows
outside in the weathering sideboards

between the rusting tracks
and a hard place
papa he wants violets
and a songs suspended to the sun and the rain
and the long moon
on poles
buckskin once again on his bones

Truth Beneath Structures of Myth

pale, supple, and rather petite
(our families belonged to the same church.
she was sixteen years old) people who saw her

said she was a pretty corpse.
us kids could peek in the window cracks,
boarded up matte black plywood,

but you could barely see the tables.
she was two years older.
she had wavy red hair. he was lithe,

splendid, with muscles like ropes
and did carpentry on the side.
on Saturday mornings, eating cookies

and nestle's quik
on the front stoop she lived
in my memory. my grandmother's

bungalow, between the two mortuaries,
settled neat as a pin. the tossing elms
in grandmother's yard nurtured

twilight. the grass between these trees
grew wispy, moist, and tender.
i moved to the dismal swamp when i turned twenty.

rattlers so large they invited eros,
slithering night shadow and sunlight
cross-dressing through the underbrush.

the columbine at night catches in the
throat and straps passion
to the rough bark of sappy yellow pine.

lust prickles dark like holly.
to have been invited to partake
of such a place is a gift; slice deeply,

the rivers run incarnadine, tincture
of cypress root, myriad veins, blood of trees.
to have been invited to partake

of such nectars as this you start
searching early, before eternity serves you a bad
habit. believe in more than sunshine.

you have to love early, like fungus.
symbiotic vision is born and buried prematurely,
where it begins, with the absence of breath.

i've always carried her with me,
reaching at once for the soil
and the sky, transcended gender.

when she walked down the street
I thought about soft strawberry sodas
and felt sugar deep in my belly.

they said mr. haugen caught his
new assistant embalmer
on top of her on the table.

when mr. haugen caught him
messing around, neither of them spoke.
the carpenter got off her and left town.

it seems i've always had a taste for earth,
soil in my loins, and a budding desire
to dig for my supper. on warm summer

days i'll plant myself naked on hilltops,
let the sun finger my hair, the breeze
caress my testicles. darkness rolls slowly

over the land, the balls of my
feet rooted to the moon.
death did me a favor.

they said she died suddenly, in her bath.
that chocolate milk, when I sat
on the cool brick stoop

always tasted like roses
---those giant elms were babies
before the whiteman came---

nourishment for more than my imagination,
the chocolate milk trickled
deep and cool. As I tongued it against

the roof of my mouth
I could feel myself growing.
they hushed it up

Little Knucklehead in the Tennessee Highway Rain Again

hitchhiking the future
as nebulous
as a missionary's soul,
reminiscing about the past.
cars go past
more chains on the godway
leon russell over the radio, knuck
remembers being a baby in wisconsin.
In fact he remembers before he was born
the voices the choice the marriage bed
ma mas torpid belly
it's not the weather that takes him back there.
now you couldn't trade hope

for a weed

these days, not roadside chicory,
not broom, not ragweed, not a golden rod,
To slick
not even marijuana ---
--Her honey

lovely fucking weeds
all of us

Mission Of Capital

(Now a word after the Sponsor and Laureate Pinsky
on Jim Lehrer News Hour)

Mission of capital
Protect us from ourselves.

Mission of capital
Measure my poems by the liter
Pump me dry
Pay me pennies to make sweet poems to you
And use me as an easy segue
To a soft segment about execution in Texas.

Mission of Capital
Drive me to finance again.
Draw from the coffers of my soul
The power of endurance
To anguish under the sweet slavery of the Word.

Mission of capital
Thine corporate will abides with me
And comforts me in holy prisons, where I have been
Throne down for smoking marijuana;
Holy mission of capital protect me from myself.

Dress my black brother in White! Left! White!
And drape me in reactionary shades of grey.
(If I'm not a black romantic idealist, jail me anyway)
Mission of capital
Cut down old forests! Play Monopoly with my DNA!

Grow Whitmanesque poems into the future
Line by Line, chemistry prosody infinity,
Scan me in Midland fields of sway, corn fed sway --
Oh multi cultural bliss! Oh Christmas tree and Karaoke Lights!

Prosperity bankers sons and daughters,
Lords and Ladies, sugar daddy lend me
The sonorous nectar of Mercedes,
Mission of Capital, to ride another swift sunset;
Then decrease our working wages quarterly
That we may worship thee in sweetest poverty,
Mission of Capital
Mission of Capital.

Muy Linda

1

I am an Anarchist from the North transplanted
To a Marxist garden. In the rainforest many
Species are transplants like I am We survive --
Oranges, for instance, gone wild, tart flavored,
Many colorful birds from disparate tropic systems

But nothing from true North. In practical terms
I am alone. Some of my companions call me "Ya, Ci"
Referencing my Midwestern gringo Spanish
And also "Morgan" to the companion

For Whom I am his future Tag Team partner
As we tour the world federation wrestling
Capitols of Las Americas, "Sud! Centro!
Ci, Morgan! We will make millions off the ring!"

An exercise in the divestiture of Mind.
Of my Mind. This is not El Norte. Here I
Learn the coital dynamics of the South,
Learn to identify shifting patterns of strange attractors.

There is a woman who calls herself an adventuress.
Dangerous for me from the North as well,
She displaces all modesty
Wriggles in the sand ready to receive me.
Downtown she certainly is the CIA,
The FBI here too. And in her wooly triangle
The DEA, undoubtedly

Do not remind her. I recognize her as I gather
Her silhouette into itself, lunging
Palm light clutches dust, throws gold upon tongue
There is a safe place in the sky ever facing darkness
An adventuress never grows there from the East.

I am empty as a prayer by palm light
Yet feel sanctified by gecko dancing,
Shabbat of the decomposed and generation.
A White Ghost deserves suspect protection.
If I place simply one foot beyond holiness
I will remain merely another stranger in a very old world

2

A gecko is everywhere always watching.
Predominantly public, it guides the body politic,
Always the constitutional impetus
That unsettles all notion of personal privacy,

While a lusty beach is tonight far away
Beneath palms, as if radiating their own full moon,
I am cooking a chicken dinner for survivors.
When we hear engines on the road

Run out the back door
Down the veranda stairs
And into the jungle.
When your patients have escaped

If you have time you run down
The front road and set the mines.
As I care for these tender tortured wastrels
I prepare a meal to remember. My mouth waters.

"Everybody in the United States has it easy,"
I have been told by some. Wiser comrades
Roll eyes heavenward at this ingenuousness,
Some whom have once been US enlisted men.

I reply with stories about Wisconsin childhood.
Families on reservations surviving or not
Deadly cold sheltered only in old automobiles.
There are always those who will not

Disabuse secret hope, I mutter
En Ingles, "Come hell or high water."
Other companions are Indio,
Bank fires of wrath at the truth of it.

Those from the US military grow
Grim with recollection. "Their armed forces trained us
And now we can fight them."
My patients are important enough to deserve chicken.

Tonight these companions are far away.
Maybe they will appear at the last moment.
My commissar, who gave me the chickens
To cook, was once a chef in New York.

He has a hard time believing this Gringo
Can do anything useful. The Cuban doctors have told
Him I am a paramedico, a medical doctor in training
It is not so easy to convince him I cook.

He says to me, "You will find mines in the closet,
Grenades and automatic weapons. Do not mine
The front road if it will put you in danger.

You will grab the weapons and run
After your patients into the forest.
The oldest boy knows how to shoot.
If he has to. Do not leave weapons behind.

You must not let yourself be captured.
Everywhere the gecko are dancing
Bounce heads eagerly, do a sexy dance.
Geographical contrasts become vivid.

I become a lizard of the south.
A northern skink is the only lizard I have known
Well, never gets enough sunlight,
Despite defenses, is easily captured by birds.

I grabbed one once when I was a boy
By it's tail and its tail popped off.
If I tried to be a skink in this forest
No tail, hiding, I'd be some scorpions dinner.

The gecko survives fierce sunlight
By appreciating the sanctity of darkness.
Which is always available from the South.
Death comes from the North

The Northern part of me
Says this can be true. Some gecko change color
At times catching the light, glowing green,
Mirroring sheen of ocean water, brown house beam

Or mountain rainforest afternoon high above,
Clouds below. There are many more birds of plumage
In the forest than chicken ready for the oven.
And too many people eager to catch and sell them.

Displaced by the machinery of Capital.
A sorcerer from Nicaragua has taught me
How he is learning to talk to honey bees,
"Like the Whiteman the honey bee is not native here

But it she is useful and we can learn
To live with her." I am directly not referenced
As a Whiteman. I am often teased for a gringo
But nobody calls me Whiteman.

Just another Spirit: Don Metito,
A native sorcerer has been teaching me,
Demonstrating the wonders of the jungle.
No sane person would eat gecko
No matter how many there are.

When you dig for roots watch for scorpion.
The forest is more than an image,
It has no edges but one, Ortega, angry thorn,
But a friend when in need.. I too am learning to talk to it.
I can sometimes find a banana if I try hard enough.

Happy Earth Day 1999

100 species bit the dust
A fact withdrawn from the eye

From the ear
Tactile impressions
May realize no memory

(every day and each day)

from small dying, the death
Of large animals, 100 species extinct

Forever
Amigo

dead

The Mutant Comes To A Decision And Divides

Blue fire goes up from earth
White fire down from the stars
Tree sap rising pulses so evenly
The cells come to a decision and divide
By every division the old body
Becomes the older body
The new body slithers sideways to its destination
Tangles up in the roots, mutates toward the sun.

What grows, divides the mind
Earth closing back on itself
Sigh of hip settling
Stretch of the imagination
Dodecahedron taking upon itself
Two possibilities
Bent upon one purpose
Reaching hard
Without effort
For no particular reason.

Knucklehead Forgives

little knucklehead
forgives the king of kings.
my middle name is hank.
the very thought of bloody goblets
makes his twinkies
twitch
and his piggies get the stretchies
and charley horses
all down his thighs.
plaster gold gilded kneebones
and painted eyeblobs---
they've left
the poor fellow
hanging
all these many years.
little knucklehead
would like to yank
the poor
fellow
down.
saint henry
is my name
rescuing sinners
is my game

