



True Crime

Jasmine Dreame Wagner



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ONE CLEAR CHANNEL

We can stand here and talk until the cows
turn blue, I'm telling you,
it's moth-eared from here on in.
I can read you like the back of my
dust jacket. I'm watching
everything you do
with a fine-toothed comb
and I know you're watching me
like I'm a hawk. I'll catch you first
by hook or by ladder. I'll shoot
the wind out of your saddle.
I'm not the one with his ass
in a noose, a duck out of water.
It's time you bite the bull
on the tail and look him in the eye.
I wouldn't be caught dead
with a ten-foot pole
and I sure as hell wouldn't burn
the midnight oil from both ends
of an angel. You stick out
like a sore throat. I hope
you get your curve ball
straightened. Don't you know
you can't change the spots
on an old dog? It isn't like falling off
a piece of cake or stepping up
to the plate and laying all your cards
on the table. You're a wolf
in cheap clothing, green
behind the ears, and goddamnit,
people are dying like hotcakes.

MEN DISAPPEAR

Men disappear through an exit
into the cornfield, and when the
men disappear to look for work,
men disappear in all directions.

Men disappear in nervous, jerky movements.
At sea, emergency teams of
men disappear following arrest by military
intelligence. Men disappear

and only their ideas remain.
In the blink of an eye,
behind closed doors,
a month later,

white longboats of men
disappear on Sundays
to watch football.

“Men disappear? Can’t see that being a problem.” -Julie

Some come back.
Most don’t.
In the distance, they
submerge and resurface in a cloud

from the fruitful soils where they were born,
from the film after the splice at frame 207,
from the clubs week after week and into faded
obituaries. Who shot those boys? Those

men? Disappear.
Someday no one will march there at all. Waltzing
men disappear without a trace
before the war,

into the bowels
for 2 to 3 years, and when they come back
they are missing
their power boats and rifles. They creep,

crawl closer.
They're about to settle
the score
in a flash of sparkling light.

Men disappear
into a restaurant.
Men disappear
into a garage

where man becomes his own standard.
You can't hide
the truth in nylon, men are determined
to go out with a bang, but

men disappear from history.
Can you describe the typical black mariner?
What happens to men on the day of reckoning?
Shall I not, on that day make the wise

*men disappear from Edom, and understanding
from the mount of Esau?* -Obadiah
"Men disappear once they learn
of a pregnancy. Just my opinion." -Heidi

Men disappear
from TV, website
statistics, genealogy.
"Even the Vatican's

model of family life lacks
a father." -catholicsforchoice.org
Men disappear from the concourse,
up the staircase with her luggage.

In the backyard, they smoke
cigars in the dark.
Each year, buried by ore, these very men
vanish. Riverine civilizations

emerge from the foliage,
foiling other men. They attempt
to fly airplanes over certain heights. Human
rights organizations claim each time the pilot extends

his hand: "Luck to you," he says. "You'll need it."
Men disappear in the general analysis, leaving
Homer alone
as the masculine abdicates.

Researching the Well of Sacrifice.
Into a beam of helicopter light.
Flitting through the tall sticks.
Men disappear into the skeleton

50 years after they tell their wives they need to go
to the store. President Johnson:
Well, it depends on the kind of men, Jim.
Men disappear after apologizing for everything.

NEW MAPS OF NATIONAL ABSENCE

You know the laity
& priesthood of wasps; you know the penguin credo: the elite

still swarm

@ 40000 feet, I'm telling you, ((like Shakespeare,))

she kept the baby.

She borrowed her momma's jacket for art.

She's wearing the shirt with the alligator logo
& Angel #1 is leading

her to the edge
of the massive cantilevered roof

where bongo typefaces scream
of twin boundaries and 3-dimensional pinning

& I'm telling you— now
don't get dizzy— after her

comes a man stumbling
through the butterfly ceiling

of the 1/72 scale vacuform model—
into the screech, into the sodium—

into the air where it is thin & waif-like.
This area aligns with column 61.

It rises up the spinal ridge of the continent
like lace

imprinted in the casement
windows of a high-school gymnasium

between the propellers, propane leaks & bank vault seams
in the walls of the First Class pressurized cabin, where

she, he, you, and I are
now.

AS SURE AS ALL PENDULUMS REVERSE THEIR SWING

1

We drive to work and cannot remember
if we turned off the stove. We, being human, turn off
the highway and click on HOME.

We call collect.
We find exactly what we need,
no screwdriver, no battery!

2

We lock the door.
We spread out over three lanes
as we, in our physical presence

provide social prohibition and evidence
of misdeed, but State isn't ready
for We today

who demand an innocent island adventure
who expect each moment to bring changing light
to this slot canyon behind the echoplex.

The system observes
motion on a screen and adapts
to the waving of trees...

3

as prayers progress into altars
simple maintenance
spreads a warm bath mat

in the place of the foreseeable
future— sculptured instruments
with theater lighting traversing

scalar fields— no wings
no identifiable markings/cardiology
conflated with hydromechanics/Pleasure

in the Astrodome— as summer wears
on, we practice fire, tornado, tsunami, quake/
We assist

with the ribbon-cutting of centuries—
half-centuries/
months/

days/
Our atlas folds
from sky

to sky

4
Most of us
spray or swat flies.
Some cook fish alive.

Some in a race to quill
the quilt some must escape from.

5
Some societies have no interest in the moon.

TRADITIONAL LITERATURES OF THE NATIVE AMERICAN

What do dream dictionaries really do?
Prescribe medications for ectopic raccoons?
Words drowning in air, in concrete birdbaths?
Manuals of medicine, truth and lies
pointing to copyright in the babble of birthdays?
Someone stole the cookies from the cookie jar.
Someone was disciplined and punished
in Rome, in the Greek style, also known
as mayonnaise in the southwest US of A.
A light in the attic. A lighthouse in Attica.
Xenophobic behavior causing sledding
accidents in northern New England's adolescents.
Mao Tse-Tung on Guerrilla Warfare.
Dress for success. Leave Las Vegas.

Dress for success. Leave Las Vegas.
Lose yourself in Yonkers, or in someone
else's malted. Visit Canada's Maritime Provinces.
Learn to speak Russian in 20 minutes a day.
Our last good chance: our waking minds
in praise of Cheers, our journey into Cyprus,
silver on the tree, on syntax, on the piano.
All the king's men say maybe I sing
of the hitchhiker in the heart of Harlem,
the missing piece, the lion in the marshmallow
suit that loved the circus. I sing my beloved
accountant. Goodnight, taxes; goodnight, spoon.
What do butterflies do when it rains?
What butterflies ultimately do is avoid it.

What butterflies ultimately do is avoid it.
A storm is no trivial matter. A raindrop
to a butterfly would be the equivalent to you
or I being pelted by bowling balls tossed
from the I-beam of Harry's local construction
demolition derby, which is actually Professor
Harold's experiment in twelve-tone hyperreality.
Nothing exists with respect to the butterfly.
Take a cue from the butterfly: find shelter.
Become an aerial acrobat because you can.
Perfect that design for the invincible arterial
flying machine, because the airplane industry
is going out of style like the lambada
and no one will marry a sucker who can't dance.

No one will marry a sucker who can't dance.
Even the alligators in the sewers can dance.
John Goodman can dance. Why can't you?
Ask an expert. Ask your doctor. Call today
for more information on how to remove
kerosene, oil stains, elbow grease. Gas is down,
guess that means Sir Dumbo's in town,
tailored and elegant in merino wool
available in navy, pewter buttons finishing
those luxurious garments your husband
will love. His evening elegance erases
his shoddy everyday plumage. His raggedy sweats
embarrass you. His substance abuse embarrasses everyone.
Good thing there's a sale on diamonds!

Thank goodness there is a sale on diamonds.
Imagine wearing a ring that is permanently polished.
Guaranteed against scratching with a lifetime
size exchange. Love it or leave it
within 30 days. Explore how art, mathematics
and science meet in the timeless expression
of slaves rendered exquisitely in cloisonné.
Does it remind you of the grapes of Napa
the summer of the 1998 vintage? Tell me,
what ape stole the keys to the department
of toxicology and set all the radicals free?
This is not a case of necromancy, the background
material for the obits is written in advance
and stored for posterity.

CONCERTO

If the minerals in the soil form a union.
If the horizon rakes them back.
If the sky is glass.

If dying stars pulsate at audible frequencies
and with the cicadas in moonlight resonate
at the F note above middle C.

If they detonate.
If they clip the wire,
freeze the LCD.

If the libretto of the zodiac fails
to bring the mangrove to its knobby knees
as the Everglades freeze over with bursitis.

If the possum is truly dead.
If the headlights are in the deer.
If the porpoise has jumped the shark.

If the runaway galaxy is charged
with truancy and held in detention.
If the tusks of the woolly mammoth are carbon-

dated and wed to the exoskeleton of the crab.
If bees matriculate into the university
as moths huddle at the kerosene lamp.

If the redwing blackbird dupes his scarlet badge
and flashes unscathed into the graduate
bar. The possum is dead.

The deer is in the headlights.
The porpoise has been trained to aim,
fire. Ash. In the marshes, in the reeds

across the coastal lowlands. In pines
born-again as coal slag. In spines
of balsam firs where furs

stage interventions in parking lots
of supermarkets across the nation.
In the rice paddies, giraffes.

In the fields of yams, giraffes.
An incompatible joystick
in the maw of the axolotl.

OUR BODIES WITH THEIR RADIOS

We became
so much less than this.

We became so much less
than forests.

Spun out from a Cadillac
in a dead winter dusk
in a snow that sparkles

like fake-snow snow,
our snowglobe footsteps
our snowglobe footsteps, spun out

like deer
from gas
needle tracks

of freeways—
Where first there is snow,
then there is shadow

like a sugar
tooth cavity
erodes to a root

where the missing & wanted have angled out of their hues
and into the missing/wanted posters
and into the overcast newsprint

and into the dead
letter office.

(Here— a blanket

catches in a clothesline: nihilism.

O spring!)

Spring, I am
loitering

at the dead letter office. I am
nihilism as a dead letter office because I am
language as a dead letter office

and I am language as arboreal decadence
and I am the forest as an American President
and the bird is a pretty little thing.

I roll my cigarettes the way the debutantes roll them.
I wear epitaphs of gold lamé.
I dye my hair the color of the rainforest.
I pray in microwaves.

And it is true...
The instrumentally mapped world.
There is a pear inside the pear— to know
the difference, one must taste...

And it is true
we invented a cleaner vacuum cleaner
that cleans carpet constantly
without all that cloying cacophony...

It is true
our stop-motion videography
catches criminals coughing

as cults condense crystals
geological miracles and where we have none
we invent some— tanzanite, it's beautiful,
but is it ambitious?

My appliance of low light,
my Plexiglas globe,

the lens where I sulk
for a year taking washed-out doubled-exposed photographs of animals
in the glacial redshifting of constellations...

It's true
the lens bends
the mirrored hull
of the department store security camera
where I have arrived to fisheye the inspecific...

And it's true
my sentiments linger
like the plastic petals of flowers
in the corner discount store

(I barter with coupons.
You offer a chipped, porcelain rabbit
that doubles as a land mine)

familiar as weather's late departure
and I am interested in failure as concave curvature
and I am interested in failure as /amour/armour
and I am interested in rabbits as belated party gifts

because I am interested in the animal
as a kind of sustenance.)

Where first there is static,
then there is snow.
Where children engineer a stadium of snow.
On my back in snow,
my hands in its telescopic pockets,

the blueshift snow, the racial snow,
the snow that sparkles like fake-snow now,
the cocaine and Pepsi snow,
broken banjo snow,
novacaine snow,
security snow,
snow snow
snow...

the television snow
the post-election snow

Where the mirror in the elevator inspects
The mirror in the ceiling suggests
The mirror in the table.

Where pink roses—Where frozen rivers rip—
Where wind rustles a black feather bed—
When all such images are personal.

When the personal is the most
almost all of all of us hopes for
as a tree quivers when touched by wind.

(the jet stream yawns across the sky. . .)
do you remember. . . when red wasn't yet
the color of fear

when we sailed
whale-watching

for sharks that look
like whales, as children

fumbled the snow, tumbled
on top of themselves

in a checkerboard romance.)

(O, Candy Land—
O, Chutes and Ladders,
Monopoly

My marble,
my thumbprint)

we once
were forests.

TRUE CRIME

What is a bouquet of flowers?
Is it an invasion

of privacy?
Is it true crime?

We trail the scent
of orchids as though hunting ivory.

Our daisies denuded
of ornamentation, each petal pulled

towards one sun, a poise
in essence, utilitarian— until—? Is it fair

to sever
what blossoms? Flowers gone

brown, then white against the window
like sugar spilled

on a forest floor.

BECAUSE THE SKY

is
chocolate

Because the diner
is lit
like an embassy

Because the counter
is proof
we are penetrable

Because hunger
orders
the largest plate

Because the waitress
loads cakes
into the revolver

Because the cherry blossoms
aren't real
Because what isn't real
is permanent

THE PASSING OF THE DEED

It begins with a small wall.
A fifteen-year-old girl with a peanut allergy

dies after kissing her boyfriend.
He is left

with a mountain of pollen and raw honey.
He wakes with red welts all over his body.

This is the parable of tractors
in the fields.

Novice outlaw, allergic
to chocolate and flowers.

Swarm that settles
on a cherry tree.

We cannot save ourselves
with good deeds.

If we truly amend our ways,
if we truly practice justice between a man and his allegory,

the most honorable thing about that man is
his hum.

Jasmine Dreame Wagner's first chapbook of poems, *Listening for Earthquakes*, was selected for publication by Rosmarie Waldrop and is available from Caketrain Journal and Press. Her second chapbook of poems, *Rewilding*, won the 2012 Ahshta Press Chapbook Contest, selected by Cathy Park Hong. A recipient of grants and fellowships from the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, Connecticut Office of the Arts, Hall Farm Center for Arts & Education, and The Wassaic Project, Jasmine teaches creative writing and songwriting at Western Connecticut State University.