

Andrew Faulkner



Need Machine

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for Leigh

TRUMPETS ON MUTE

As if a kidnapper slunk off with sound
in a burlap sack. The ransom note:
sheet music for 'Taps' scratched into a vinyl 45.
These are the trumpets we like. We turn
the static up and roll the top down.
Let's do doughnuts inside the compound.

Deep concern shows itself in funny ways:
the faces of most sitcom actors.
We've been cruelly typecast for years.
April is a versatile name and easy to spell.
We say, *Out, devil*, with conviction.
Valve, stem of music, better intentions

on video loop. In dog years, we've aged
considerably. In the computer age,
we're already obsolete. The Real
spends a lot of time on the DL.
We never tire of the banana-peel skit.
When we say, *Out, devil*, we totally mean it.

RATS

In the walls, running along pipes
like a mob of white blood cells.
Sometimes things aren't okay.
Rats in the pantry, the kitchen
of the mind. Rats in the mortgage, rats alive
and scurrying like a renewed fear of death.
Long in the teeth, long in need.
The change-purse hearts of rats under the floorboard.
Rats in the upper tier of the stadium, peering
over the railing, rats raining down
on the field. Rats in the maize, the long grass.
Rats underfoot, rats descending from overhead
like it's Baghdad, 1999, and there's oil to be had.
Rats the necessary gears in the mower.
Rats only one or two removes from us –
that is, they're delicate and obnoxious
and consist mostly of water. Hanover rat,
brown rat, sewer rat, brush its shoulder off
because a rat's a pimp too. Norwegian rat,
water rat, rats always the missing multiplier.
Researcher John Calhoun built a perfect, rat-sized
studio apartment and the rats he leased it to
drew and redrew themselves over generations
until they more or less evaporated.
Wharf rat, Old World rat. 'RATS': worth a whopping
four points, though given a random assortment
of 100 tiles, it could occur again and again and again.
Can you imagine playing with rats your whole life
and then, like Calhoun, being asked to meet the pope?
But Pope Paul VI was old by then and no longer steely
or spring-loaded. So while you consider rats,
with their glass-eyed guts that never shut,
don't forget the rest of us poor unblinking sinners.

THE LOBBY

The Holiday Inn sign issues the kind of light
you inhale through a dollar bill.

On the fringe of the parking lot, it's a lot like
the Wild West: a grave Corolla rusts,

and someone pisses on an oak at dusk
as if his urine were an axe.

I commission a new scent to enter
rooms before me and pat down its occupants,

confiscating cellphones and sketch pads.
It's not paranoia if your interest is academic.

I'm flannel-mouthed. Produce a sweat that lingers
like a waxy second skin. In the corner, the last American-made

pinball machine grazes on quarters.
But the concierge doesn't care. His yawn is wide and full

as a luscious lash arcing over the eye of finance.
That's a mouthful, over the phone. Can you say that again?

The piped-in music swells like teen acne.
The concierge nods solemnly. He can, he can.

ICE CREAM WEATHER

Two coffees deep into Sunday. Cut flowers
a little wilted, *désolé*. Subscribers' attention
lather-whipped by a crossword

for an hour, maybe two, then the mind,
which is its own beast, trots off
to a corner and licks its genitals.

Deft as an ASM-114 Hellfire, that stalwart
of air-to-surface missiles, the radio
inserts a hook in the lip. The July sweats

are at it again. I know what you're thinking
and that's not it. The air conditioner
with its idiot whirr locks silence

in the closet. If it's good
maybe it can come out later
and we can all have ice cream.

DON'T FORGET TENT PEGS

Low, stubbled hills. My boots
sweep the brush.
The air kicked like a dog.
When birds perch on a slipstream
I think, *I know what animal I am.*

I've made an orange scrub-scoured
tent my home. At night, shadows rise
like Whac-A-Moles and when they do
I name them what they are: orange
porcupine, jar of orange pencils, shrub.

In the tent, I'm an island and everything on it:
Mosquitos. Dead citrus tree. Lemonade
stand. A long-beached whale

repurposed as a hut. At times I step in and wear
the bones like skin. Except they're bones,
and when it rains I wonder where it is
my skin has gone. Is this what it's like
to be wet inside?

WING

The east wing of my heart rises like a hot
air balloon. The west wing descends like bad
news on the oblivious. The radical wing
of my heart sets fire to the stock exchange.
The silent wing gestures like a museum.
The wings of hope trade away several promising prospects.
Winging it at the press conference,
despair tells fans the team wouldn't
have made the playoffs anyway. As a right-winger
I've scored several goals and lowered
your taxes. As a left-winger, I'm here for you.
Attention all passengers, this is the captain speaking:
that thing on the wing is the old god, the small god,
all the thieves and lawyers, every good deal you've made.
Ladies and gentlemen, this is what keeps us aloft.

MODERN LOVE

I passed, lonely as a damaged package
in a discount bin, through a number
of difficult months. I couldn't roll
my windows down or get a seat at brunch.

I took the high road, back streets,
stuck to shops in the mezzanine.
But the switch that toggles my factory settings
is a finger loitering between a door

and its frame, caught between 'delight'
and 'just missed an 80%-off sale.' My tongue grazed
like an ATV, and then you sidled up like an IED.
I'm on my hands and where my knees used to be.

According to my horoscope,
love is a thug with piano wire.
I've strapped dynamite to your heart
and jammed a bit between your teeth.

How bored you must have been
before you met me.

RUSTBUCKET IN A FIELD WITH FLOWERS

The glitzy thing must have hauled itself
to the far side of the ditch and rolled over
like a pregnant dog about to burst.
Once described as *zippy* by salesmen
who use *German* as an adjective.
As a minor roadside attraction it has its charm:
cottage-bound families let their cameras
jaw at the hull. A squat bunker
that rain lugs into its rust years.
In the back seat, running on fumes,
field mice fuck like teenagers.
The glove compartment's loosened maw
is a small bed for a clutch of heather.
It's been standing at the road's doorbell
for what must be years, a rough and unexpected
bouquet thrust briefly into a skeptical life.
A mechanical bull that, in a stunning reversal,
hogties you with awe.
But it's what people want: flowers.

CHORUS

‘The hour is an enormous eye.
Inside it, we come and go like reflections?’
– Octavio Paz

Welcome to Toronto, on whose craggy beaches
the Argonauts land, and lose, and repeat.
Sweat in a brow of Astroturf, Astroturf a cold cloth
pressed to the forehead of a fevered hour.
Are we sometimes frigid with envy? Exactly, actually.

I’m here. Ahem. I’m ready. Last night a friend was married
in the echo of a rental hall in Scarborough and I celebrated
by cultivating a slow headache. On the dance floor I swayed
in the great electric light of four-four time. In an earlier hour,
there were three of me: me with the untied tie,

me in the mirror, left-handed, wielding the tie like a cudgel,
and me in the eye of the hour trying to figure out the tie’s
secret handshake. Toronto the Half-dressed, the Business Casual.
I’m not the first to say this but an hour isn’t enough.
And then the hour coming to a close,

always closing like a salesman, by the bucketload,
by the pailful. Our skylights, our hatchet-like bylaws.
The timber of our ambition. This morning the QEW
is a meadow of cars in which I lay my headache down,
traffic limping like a waitress working a double in a cast.

Which isn’t to say there’s not money in pockets,
obviously by Bay, and in the hills and parks and echoing
like the subway cars shuttling folks from hour to hour,
the underground life, crumpled transfer in a pocket.
I’m here. I’m ready for my costume, my ridiculous prop,

the walk-on scene by the fountain. I'm in relief
like the conclusion of a pregnancy scare.
Oh, what could have been, in an hour made
and unmade, bloodless as an insurance claim.
City of equivocation, Great Equivocator by the Lake,

Toronto the Retailer, the Beast from the East, Middle Finger
to Western Sensibilities. Toronto: whole hog, gassed up
and living better by living in a condo. This little hour
antiqued on Queen St., this little hour drank O'Keefe's.
And this little city from block to block, from hour to hour.

It's not that I don't like the slump and drag of Sherbourne and Dundas,
the slow exodus to Forest Hill, Richmond Hill, Vaughan Mills.
When grandparents die we bury their bones and leave.
It's not that I don't like the concrete tomb where the Blue Jays play,
the days' earlier hours when I pilot towards lunch

or the afternoon's flashy bits of circumstance that steer me home.
As if in the naming we could make a thing: Rosebank Dr., Progress Ave.,
ash in the mouth. The hour a cadaver on which we practice
and practice again. It's the Hour of Being Hauled to Attention
at the Corner of Bloor and Wherever; someone's just been hit

by a car, and for the feeling of his feet aloft, above him
in the hour's air, he thanks the driver by introducing a fist
to the car's windshield. In these ways do we bridge the gaps
between us. Hour with a worm in its molar, with mud on the mudflap.
At our feet the evening gathers like litter,

a hot little mess spied in the hour's mirrored eye.
And around each corner another wildfire of strangers,
insistent as a commercial break: we're here,
we're burning up, come find us.

YOUNG LIBERALS

There's so much I want
to do. No, serious – fearlessly
stick my bronzed head
into a photograph's wide jaw,
for example. That's leadership.
You can really trust someone
who does that, and I want
to be trusted. People love people
who build roads, and love
is the greatest virtue of all.
St. Augustine said that
before he was fed to lions,
lions that appraised him with the eye
of their throat and found him wanting.
But appetites are not to be ignored –
not when they're so logical,
and not when campaign buttons
come so cheap. I'll start where I start,
but given the bulk discounts,
why not go for it all. Just think of it –
trust and love and, failing that,
at least one of the two.
Here, let me get a pin for you.
The pleasure's all mine.



If you can't hear the sound of a heart,
half-buried, grinding like a pulp mill
then try a stethoscope. In one valve
and out the other, as the textbooks say.
A capacity for sadness is an incredible letdown.
I'd rather see the whole litter
of puppies neutered and be done with it –

where was I going with that?
I told you I get lost in low light.
Cute little thing with your use of both hands,
help me finish this off. Puppies:
you can't take them to the museum,
no matter how much the kids plead.
Just imagine the bones they'll drag home.