



SHERI REDA

STUBBORN

Stubborn

Sheri Reda

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God Makes an Omelet

Morning has broken.
First me, then you, then the country
strewn to the left and right, spoiled
most certainly, salvageable perhaps
indispensible for what
 the blackbirds keep
 heralding,
the hopeful song they sang for the dead of night,
and the morning as broken as yesterday—the same
 song sounding
 tired and tireless—
broken as the first illuminated day
 in Eden,
where sunlight played in the future ruins.

First Love

Nobody loves the First Amendment more than me,
Nobody. I love it so much I want to grab it by the pussy,
dive into its muff. Maybe that's not appropriate,
that's not right: no one has hair down there anymore.
Only I do. I have lots of hair. My hair. And it's tremendous,
soft. The media is so jealous of my hair, but that's OK,
It's normal to be jealous, jealousy is normal,
and I'm a normal guy which is why
I want the first Amendment like that
though of course I don't mind a little variety,
everyone wants a little spice once in a while,
so I'll take out another amendment now and then—
3th, 4th, 5th, . . . 13th! that's a good one.
I'm taking out that one as we speak
but there's nothing like the First,
which you never forget by the way. That's true.
That's very true, Sorry, Melania. But the First
is truly special. A tremendous experience,
And you don't want to share it. You want it
it all to yourself. That's natural. That's how it is.
And no one loves the First Amendment like I do.

The outward sign of something much, much worse The fact of him is like sinking into bed after a long day, not naked but anyway plagued by the sharpness of crumbs from nonfood you have eaten before crashing with no time for meals and having discovered you are so hungry your back aches, you got up and grabbed seaweed or some old pizza or yes, crackers, though it's trite and now they're biting into you, the crumbs, spreading over you with each uncomfortable turn—

You sit up to spot clean, only to find that the fact of him is not crackers in the bed, it is some kind of palpable pimple in a spot you can't see without contorting, a spot you can reach, if you try, but just barely, an orphan spot you can touch but which you don't usually, it being neither front nor back but just there and now sporting this insistent swell. You squeeze and it has no effect.

Deciding not to disturb the fact of him, you are careful how you dress, careful not to irritate the spot, though it sits there where your bra strap wants to be, and you can't help bumping up against it now and then, sneaking a peak in the bathroom mirror, which is the only way you can see it. And your fingers can't stop trying to know it. You decide it's a wart.

It stands apart—a prominent part of you, the fact of him gains presence but does not multiply nor deepen. Maybe not some kind of alien, not a viral visitor, but some other kind of thing that grows with your knowledge and not your consent. You pretend while you can that the fact of him is a mosquito bite or hive, and you try to scratch it off accidentally, but it won't come off. It will only redden, angrily, and you wonder now whether it's a cyst that will come to a head and burst but not yet, not for a long time because by your untutored attention you have inflamed it and disturbed the body politic's process for ridding itself of toxins.

You worry now the fact of him is not a cyst
but the beginning of something else, the outward sign
of something much, much worse. You don't say,
won't say the word aloud, but its syllables enter your mind
like an earworm and you walk to the rhythm of the fear
it sings. Because you always knew you would die someday,
but you never dared think how, and you wonder now whether
you are touching the seeds of your death.

So you take the fact of him to the surgeon, who rolls
her eyes, certain that the little thing you've got growing there
is not worth removing, that the scar you will bear
is worse than the fact of him. But you insist: cut it off,
you say. Cut—burn—away the fact of him. You will
nurse the wound, protect the scab, oil the scar, and never
again be smooth and clean. Never once free of the fact of him
while you wait, phone in hand, ringer on high,
for the call that says what's next.

Off the Rocker

dear God, I used to say
sitting safely in the lap of a loving Nonno
my curly head trusting His shoulders, admiring
the way He pulled the golden fob from his pocket
so I could listen to the ticking: *t-tk, t-tk*
as he rambled and raged and drank
a little too much, then
later: Dear God, a careful call
to a cryptic uncle I knew would visit
both glories and horrors. So then it was
Hey God: *blah blah*, tears, *blah*, invective, *blah*,
to no reply. And now I utter
dear god, like holy shit,
like what the hell, like what the fuck, like
the exasperations of Mrs. Maloney
excusing and excusing
her deadbeat mate—once a looker, so
much promise in the man. *And lah, those eyes,*
like the clear blue skies . . .
or maybe (she says) *it was only me.*

11pm we

swaddle ourselves in the approximate
solace of thinking people
ride inside that roar that rumble that whine that
sigh

in the ripping of the air overhead.
in the thunder that doesn't portend.

&

let it loofah the liminal drift
into dream we go
without protest without singing

without saying
there will be no nightingales.

Not so Bad in Lincoln Square

Not so bad, only a stabbing
this time thank god. Kids
knew each other. Didn't live here
thank god. Bought half-deflated helium
balloons for the telephone pole,
dollar-store saint candles
for the asphalt. Nailed junk
into the wood. It'll go
out with the other garbage thank god
when Thursday rolls around.

A Good Laugh

A Mexican man who is short, and smiles, and wears a *Columbo* coat is squatting on the large front lawn in front of the large high school that used to be Lane Tech

where my uncle transferred after he hung a guy by the feet out a fourth floor window of his old high school in the Italian/Ukrainian/Polish ghetto on the west side. Or is it hanged? It all worked out. The guy lived; my uncle got his apology; we all laugh about it to this day.

Now it's Lane Selective Enrollment High School, no more wood shop. Auto shop. Sewing machines. Only college requirements now, in the same mis-numbered classrooms under the same WPA murals between the same flat blarings of the eighty-eight decibel buzzer declaring the same five-minute passing periods. With a pretense to privilege: now the windows gleam.

The man's raincoat is mostly open, belt swaying, cerulean blue shirt buttoned nearly to the top. Gray dress slacks pressed but damp at the hems. Leather shoes bent. Toes bearing his weight as he reaches in to the long, clear plastic bag, pulls out ragged chunks of bread, and tosses them like stemmed roses, toward the scores of self-important geese plonked down here on this last of the pastoral schoolyard lawns. They honk softly, but will not deign to adore him. He smiles anyway.

He's not like the other one, the brown-haired little Croatian fellow escorted off the fake prairie at the AT&T corporate campus for trying to wring the neck of a goose. That man wasn't smiling. He wasn't angry. He was hungry, he said. "Are they yours?" he asked the guards. They got a kick out of that one. Laughed, and the Croat laughed a little too. The guards chuckled again when they told the story, said they laugh about it to this day.

The Work God Gave Us

(A Thanksgiving Dinner Conversation)

TV was better in black and white (gobble, gobble)

*Back when gothic towers fell to plain old flats,
neatly boxed, along with drafty old fireplaces.*

We had spare buildings, square buildings

buildings that could count: four plus one

extra, right under the nose of the building inspector —

*because prefab was just a wild and "Bless us oh Lord"
fabulous dream, but a destination in the making,
like the stars*

that were once out of reach, but now, by God—this vision
will show what a man can do, change what a man is, make a
man—*gimme some mashed potatoes*—into a god

with a small g, of course and girdle the continents *unite*
them with one continuous audible sigh of untarnished awe

establish the pre—take it, will you?—preeminence

of American boys American soil American resources

from America to space

*will be ours And we always need more space. Hence, the
three-car garages*

*in Prairie Crossing's unique new development
combining the best of the past and the present,*

*porches and private ownership, farm-fresh food
and quick access to the Kennedy-Dan Ryan,*

whoever the hell that politico was—where'd the gravy go?

*Hence, bigger boxes, and quickly, before we drown
in the stuff we are not attached to but need to safeguard
our health our status our jobs our economy once meant
doing without, just ask your grandmother over there:
Saturday nights they used to eat pancakes, **imagine that,
from little bits of flour we had left over. We'd pool it,
you know; we had to—and my, we had fun. We couldn't
afford sitters, no one even thought of it; the babies
and the children all came along, row upon row of them
slept on the bed and giggled all they wanted.
As long as they didn't disturb anyone, it was fine.**
Those were the days, I'll tell you. *The Depression,
the War. . .* Life was hard then, not like now,*

You have it too easy for your own good, none of you
hungry. *Oh, but we are; Uncle, we are. Hungry exactly for
pancakes with a little honey and powdered sugar—no one
could afford real maple syrup. Hungry for a card game
and a little song, a little shot didn't hurt you and maybe a
cigar, organic because no one had thought yet to poison our
pleasures so we wouldn't have to share. Pretty soon we won't*

*have to share our food our drink our planet with anything
but each other—*

bad enough, with the shape the world is in. Kids
killing kids in Arkansas, Kentucky, Florida, you name it.
Remote villages in Denmark, in Scotland *home of fine
whisky and kilts and Scottie the down-home rocket scientist;*
world's gone mad *and the transporter is down, or more
correctly, not up yet.* Agitators civil rights, equal rights,
women's rights, gay rights, what is this trans rights? *the right
to healthcare to work to eat—* I'm not saying it's right I'm
saying you can hardly blame a guy *for losing his sense of
direction:*

*our windows are small now, you see; we have some trouble
with security these days—social, yes, of course, but
personal, too.* And all the self-pity in the world won't help.
People waste their time online when they should be fighting
fighting, eternally fighting the evil that threatens our way of
life, France alone proves it: You can't get away to Paris
anymore. And you can't blame a guy for losing it—that's
fine, that's enough—what the hell, it's a holiday, give me
another serving—*Destroy them to save them?* I know
what you're thinking—not for me, I can't have sugar—
there are things worse than dying.

There. I've said it. TV in the 50s was black and white, so was the **Law, but life was colorful! You haven't forgotten, have you, the clothes those pickaninnies used to wear!** But the world is still black and white underneath, always was, always will be, *father son holy spirit amen*, and what people insist on calling a rainbow is nothing but a slick on wet cement. *All those gray areas you see are nothing but stains*—just give it to me black—and if you are a real environmentalist, you'll work like I do to get rid of the filth lying around in the gutters for free. *Mr. Scott was a softie, but the world was different then . . .* and make the nation an example again: *tidy, if not as large as it could be.*

Once in a while, you have to clean up, take inventory, throw out what you don't need. *We don't need any odd angles, weepy spires, rainbow puddles of sentiment regarding national brotherhood.* Cain and Abel were brothers, you know, and always will be. *Keepers we are not, and neither are our brothers; **we are not meant for nursemaids but for angels** or successors to the angels, made in God's image after he realized his first mistake.* Everyone makes a mistake now and then, *even God*, and God won't mind if we cheat a little, fill in the cracks, *leave someone out to snack on later. . . God cheated, too:*

when he took Adam's rib. Things have never been right since then. Admit it, something has always been missing—
It's our job to set things straight. It may not be pretty, but it's the work that God gave us. And we'll finish the job, by God, you like it or not."

Go Ahead

Stuff yourself. It's a hungry century.
Wade through eddies of commercial cajolery.
Let toxic concoctions topple
into your borrowed capacious cart.
Get wet and cold and lost.
Shove your nose into the fecund fallen
remains becoming soil, becoming a home
for your windblown bones.
Sniff out the mammal you know you are.
Listen for the ugly little things
with wings. Shiver with the naked
branches slugging up through crunchy air.
Discover your ripening terror, and the world's
implacable calm, and your need for nothing
else. Chase your dervish tale until you find
a new god waiting for you
to throw it all away and dance.

Fat and Somewhat Happy with Vilsak and Perdue

So get on with the pre-apocalyptic shopping:

flowers / flatulence / fear of food.

What can you buy that will keep you alive?

Organic is better, but you can settle for BST-free cheese

(if it comes from Wisconsin and not the glowing

West Coast).

Look for the ☉-BST symbol.

And the Master's Mark sign to make sure your kids are not getting that nasty radiation still leaking from Fukushima

(except when they go out

for pizza).

It's true there's actually no double-blind fool proof that radiation is bad for you but it's hard that it's hard not to think about Sadako during dinner.

You have to let up when you buy for a party: the taste is the same

no matter what you spend:

And you don't want to come off like a lunatic and those people eat that shit anyway and so do you when you're at their house.

You can eat what they call conventional avocados—

It being the convention to apply poison first, ask questions later,

most don't get through

their skins so much thicker than yours—

sneak your fingers into the goopy green dip

when you think no one is looking and lick it off

not even bothering to *think*



about the lesion-and-hemorrhage-inducing Flavr-

Savr Tomatoes with the anti-freeze flounder

genes, mercifully discontinued because they killed

the rats that ate them.

You do have to skip the tox-alicious chips,

or peek at the bag for  or -GMO labels
to avoid the extra layer of poison they
spray on the roundup-tolerant corn

- or the glu-FO-sinate-resistant corn
- or the GLY-pho-sate-resistant corn
- or the corn with the Bt bacteria built in—
either

—Cry-1-A.105 (MON89034),

—Cry-I-Ab (MON810),

—Cry-I-F (1507),

—Cry-2-Ab (MON89034),

—Cry-3-Bb1 (MON863 & MON88017),

—Cry-34-Ab1 (59122),

—Cry-35-Ab1 (59122),

—Cry-3-A (MIR604),

—or VIP-3-A (MIR162)

which is also in your lovely retro cotton dress
(though that too may be discontinued like
unsuccessful apparel and dessicated lords because
the pink bollworm and the Florida army worm are
already resistant.

And the Bt killed some more rats. Or some
others).

Othering is alive and well these days (*Hey!* Tom Philpott
says

the Obamas

and the Bushes

and the Clintons

and the Romneys

all secretly eat organic foods.

But the Trump glow speaks of a new aesthetic, and
anyway—so, a few rats have died. Who wants rats
eating our corn? Fuck ‘em. Let ‘em die like the
rats they are.”

Who says rats and roaches have to inherit the earth?
They're not the meek.

But back to the oil (in the chips—remember the chips?
Remember, *I told you*, you'd have to skip the
chips?)

The oil in the chips might be GMO, so it's best to use your
fingers when no one is looking .

There! A snack! And it's OK, you're not that
hungry,

and they have 🌱 organic micro-distilled bourbon
and gin onhand.

Of course, the kids can't drink gin all the time,
even if it makes them smell nice, like Christmas,

So I'm standing as if in supplication, peering at the good
old-fashioned ice cream: is that you, there, churning with

- propylene glycol,
- ethyl acetate,
- yellow dye #5
- and hold the vanilla, but not the vanillin— a very
good lice killer, I'm told, vanillin:

I scream, you scream, we all scream for—OK skip the ice
cream,

but pick up some whole and low-fat and skim and two-
percent

(just over a buck at Jewel, if you don't mind

- the GMO hormones
- that give the cows infections
- that require the antibiotics that are more useless
every day)

I limit my angst to four horsemen:

- **Jewel** for cheaper bread and jam. Except when
Mariano's has a sale.
- **TJ's** for bananas, pasta, chips, and apples,

(and a bite of the samples 'cause they taste so good). Pizza, too, though we hate that kind.

- **Stanley's or Caputo's** for produce—organic—I wish it were laced with coke like the watermelon they sold in the 90s.
- **Whole Foods** for the dry goods: no union but fewer poisons. Whole paycheck? Maybe—but say, we've got a choice:

Poorhouse or hospital? Rickets or cancer?
Twenty years from now, when we're all dying
from a cell tower or silicon disease
we don't know about yet, will it matter?

No, no one is pure. Not even

Barak, Michelle,

George, Laura,

Bill, Hilary,

Willard and Lenore,

Or Casey Wessel—came down with leukemia

today.

Four horsemen—and still no meat to be had.

You can go to the farm and inspect it yourself,
unless you want one of those USDA self-inspected
chickens—racing chickens, speeding along the
production line
at 175 birds per minute, at 3 per second, like

“We don’t need no stinkin’ inspections.”

Or—Direct from *60 Minutes*, compromised but still
kickin’—

- The fish we get “from China” (in four–point type).
It feeds directly from the chicken’s ass:
Their crates, arranged in a tiny Chinese Alcatraz,
suspended over a man–made pond.

Yeah, its gross to you and me, but think of it
from Dante’s fish’s point of view:

Manna rains down, still warm,
from poultry purgatory up above.

- And the garlic grown in sewage.
- And the cold medicine full of fecal bacteria.
- And the Silks that are fresh from chemical baths. . .
. . .

Just. Like. You: Your sweet little a carcinogenic soup
Starring lead, the adorable twins chlorine and fluorine,
and formaldehyde (29 names for formaldehyde, and
gee she looks well preserved).

And don’t forget A-ZO-di-car-BON-amide—get it
while you sleep! A-ZO-di-car-BON-amide—get it
while you sleep!

And just in case you’ haven’t had enough—
you can get it for free in your favorite fast food:

That foam in your mattress so comfy you can eat it
up, for a limited time only at

- Subway.
- McDonald's.
- Arby's.

Only not in Europe & Australia, where its not even allowed in their yoga mats or shoes. Whatta they afraid of? A little asthma won't kill ya.

This the poor can't afford to know. But *you* know, though you're getting poorer by the minute. So on to Cassandra's problem, and Eve's: How can you un-know it?

- Ignore the Caen study showing cancers in rats? It was after all retracted by the journal itself, run by Richard Goodman *nee* Monsanto. They said it: "No definitive conclusions can be reached."

The rich though, make it their business to know. Pandora makes 'em kill the rat. Or maybe it's Hades—who yeah, was a kidnapper and rapist but really did love her, Persephone, our sister the resister.

It's time we became resistant, too. It might be enough to eat rarely and spare:

- meat once a week
- fish once a month
- rice rarely to sidestep the arsenic still in the soil we spray with new stuff now
- fruit to avoid the acrylamide baked into those
 - chips,
 - cookies,
 - crackers,
 - cereal,
 - fries.

Another list, but at least this time we know the words.

(Better, maybe, if the chips are organic,
if the fish swim in fecal farms—or wild & free
off the hot coast of Japan?)

Anyway organic's got pesticide drift, curable

only if you by a driftcatcher—opposite of a dream
catcher, catches garbage where you stand.

Anyway cassava's got cyanogenic glucosides,

Anyway acorns can be toxic in large quantities,

Anyway a pound of greens three times a day means kidney
stones and a sluggish thyroid.

Anyway anyone ever eat too many beans? I know:

we're human and we're all doomed anyway.

But it's still gross when Tom's sinuses swell up
from too much of the weird-ass big-protein in the wheat
we invented in '71.

Or when Zak throws up after fish from China
and the vomit takes the finish off the hardwood
floor.

Or you develop an allergy to eggplant, which you
love so you keep trying it anyway—and you only
react when the eggplant's non-organic.

That you was me. Here I am again.

I shop in the valley of the shadow.

I know now I can buy three things.

I could thank you,

- Sauget which once was Monsanto, and
Syngenta/Pioneer/Dow/BASF/Bayer.
- And
AquaBounty/ArborGlen/ArcadiaBioSciences/Men
del/Targeted Growth.
- And lovely suburban City of Wood Dale, thank
you more,
for spraying right inside our summer-night
windows.
- Thank you Mom, for the color-coded meals, the
DDT-laced meat (Grade A: you tried so hard!)
But I wish I never wished I were an Oscar Meyer
Wiener!

Thank you thank you—there are more—but I'm
running out of time.

Thank you thank you thank you all
for making it here to the Pre-Apocalypse.

Thank you all for sticking around, so we can all go
down together, sticking together, we can all get fat
& somewhat happy till the sores set in.

New Bethlehem

Early March. Ice
smears the skylight glass,
caps the obdurate droppings
of some ugly winter bird.

Oh no! cries the six-year
old when summoned
to awaken.
The lattice work of
vertical brush scrapes
the too-pale sky.
Echoed calls from the departed
crows bellow and dead–
dead–dead–but not asleep,
the city continues to bump

and grind. Padlocks
open, motors crunch
and whine, the old
fire bricks shiver
and hum along Elston,
where industry still rattles

And one lone octagenarian
sweeps her stoop
company clean. Intent
upon the raw cement,
she sees, hears,
countenances no one:

she's stubborn, like
those cinders that cling
to the deep black
tar paper roof
and shine, shine, shine
in the dark
as if to light the way.

from Glenwood, Colorado

Yes incarnates darkly, wet, hot, larger than lungs,
veined with ochre and granite and some peacock presence.

Falls like neglected tears, drips its own walls and sky,
gurgles when you walk inside it.

Thrums the hollows beneath your feet.

Glistens of course in the dark, grows labia,
which seekers swallow down.

Defines the folds of the intestinal tract, draws out
those poisons you willingly consume.

Secrets broken-hearted soldiers,
succors spouses safely dead.

Survives and resides in the ruins.

Courses out into the big idea, flows under the doorway
shut tight by commercial interests,
sponsors the darling lambs ear
poking up through cracks in the parched soil.

Two-thirds destroyed it returns a tide.
So steady yourself. Wait.

this

It'll never be better than this. Resurgent
aches in your cervical vertebra, shoulder, gut, will
subside for a breath or two, allow you to rest
in the certainty of movement, the passage of time.
Let you train your vision from horizon to ruddy horizon,
feel however falsely some thing happening. Relief
will effervesce in the brain that so sorely wants
to get it right. In one place or another, no pain
for a moment holds sway, though
by your blood or the blood of a brother, lover, savior,
turnip, troubles will ever emerge. Inflation, infection,
inflammation, insurrection will erupt in your own house
with the next dip, crash, catastrophe, near miss
leaving you crestfallen, desperate,
hopeful, happy . . . it'll never be better. You could die
live and die and you'll find yourself
struggling because you've come here for this:
come here to waggle as warp or weft in the creation
of arcs and reversals and pretend
endings patterned perhaps but maybe not
played out until you bleed them out
into legend and act, as if it matters.

Heterophany

Don't fool yourself. It's not the wind you hear dying
and rising again but the sound of passing cars
and the wheels of luxury trucks crushing into bits
the inferior asphalt the city has purchased
and laid down in homage to business as usual.

Ancillary, not collateral, damage.

Everything gets broken for a reason, though
sometimes the reason isn't good enough,
is a miscarriage of meaning, is misbegotten, resented
unheeded, forgotten, accidentally, willingly or stubbornly
misread. And sometimes it slips away on the wind.

Like innocence.

You never thought you'd miss it, but it was better when
the ravens awoke you rudely calling their territory,
masterfully and with careful calibration, belligerently
if you think it's all about you. Which it is not: is that clear
enough to penetrate your grief ?

Not. about. you.

It was better before West Nile killed the ravens, crows
and blue jays, the robins and the odd yellow finch. Better
when the loudmouths shouted you out of bed and you swore
out a wish for this moment, this morning, this room
of your own. Be honest: You did. And you're sorry
as if it mattered.

Sorry about nothing seared into sidewalk or memory.
You can't recall what filled that yawning gap
before the bulldozers arrived and wiped your mind clean
except for the nagging sense that this white space
all around you might be just a little bit your fault.

Begin again: Listen better:

there's the wind slipping under cars and heavy trucks,
diving and rising again, playing in traffic with friends.
Not sighing, nor groaning, just breathing in
and out, in and out. In and out: LA burgers:
birds in the bush: bellows: lovers: gods at play.

Locofo Chaps

2017

Eileen Tabios – *To Be An Empire Is To Burn*
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John Goodman – *Twenty Moments that Changed the World*
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mLEKAL aND – *Manifesto of the Moment*
Garin Cycholl – *Country Musics 20/20*
Mary Kasimor – *The Prometheus Collage*
Iars palm – *case*
Reijo Valta – *Truth and Truthmp*
Andrew Peterson – *The Big Game is Every Night*
Romeo Alcala Cruz – *Archaeoteryx*
John Lowther – *18 of 555*
Jorge Sánchez – *Now Sing*
Alex Gildzen — *Disco Naps & Odd Nods*
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Kristian Carlsson – *The United World of War*
Roy Bentley – *Men, Death, Lies*
Travis Macdonald – *How to Zing the Government*
Kristian Carlsson – *Dhaka Poems*
Barbara Jane Reyes – *Nevertheless, #She Persisted*
Martha Deed – *We Should Have Seen This Coming*
Matt Hill – *Yet Another Blunted Ascent*
Patricia Roth Schwartz – *Know Better*
Melinda Luisa de Jesús – *Petty Poetry for SCROTUS' Girls, with poems for Elizabeth Warren and Michelle Obama*
Freke Rähä – *Explanation model for 'Virus'*
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