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Poems by **R. Salvador Reyes**
Dumbfoundment; Flight Impulse; One of those strange satisfactions.
Selected Memoriography
What You Can Have Happen

Story by **Kipling Knox**
Speaking

Story by **Tiffany Peterson**
Three Break-Ins

Poems by **Kim e. Vollmer**
Diction and Syntax
In Media Res

Poem by **Kristin Sweet**
instructions for the broken

Dumbfoundment; Flight Impulse; One of those strange satisfactions.

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Rock

1 oxygen

2 hydrogen

∞ a certain kind of inexplicable awareness

- “There must be carbon in the rock,” I’ll say.
- Give the words out and build your water.
- Wait.
- Let rise.

It’s useless to ask where this derivation came from; it is unknowable. It’s all the last train out of darkness.

She’s on

Her way home, the glow outside

From an hour ago is inside

The lamp now—and that warm

Yellow here is so much like a

Dream that it’s I’m looking

Down from out there, part of that

Ink in the night speaking always

To the dark matter universe and all

Those thoughts leaking into

The expanses of space. When

Her car gets here I’ll

Want to remember all that, but

Forget it, so something can

Happen and the light will speak

For everything later.

Selected Memoriography

A dark sliding glass door, bright inside, a balcony stories up, lights from the windows on a building across the way—yellow stars on their side in the small world. *Inside of without a thought of an end.* Forest Park, IL: Living room, Two years old.¹

Thin cotton pajama shorts, and short sleeves and snaps, up late in the summer night on the couch, face against the screen metallic taste in my nose, soft blackness out among the blind pines, crickets. *Boundless or stillness.* Woodstock, IL: Family room, Seven years old.

¹Publishers information or imprint may be false or imagined. A painting from the parents' bedroom (Woodstock, IL: Four years old–eight years old) has also found you there.

A whole city in my mind. On fire
With the lights of the future—the embers
And red of when glass canyons will bring in all the orange light of the glimmering
World. I lived there for what time we live when everything will come to be
In our days, our days on the high ledges looking over it made me lose my breath to think
Of returning there, placeless.

What You Can Have Happen

Early

She thought about a garden sometimes.

It was out there, in her imagination, the way you see clouds but don't
look for anything in them *Things Ungrown*

At the sink, the soil rinsed into the drain.

If she could see it in repetition, the years to come of it, the slender hands pruning
frail and plump under warm water, the landscape of what things will be
revealed when the soil comes free of it *To Someday Be Without It
or Longing*

Late

What she doesn't remember now.

That she is always somewhere else, among the places that are left, what she
took with her inside of there, to whittle away all those days. *Time Remaining*

What you know now will take you
There. Some is even in the DNA. Some will be
Those small things you do, and think you are
Choosing, and maybe you are. But it will all
Happen anyway. You're in here now. You're reading

This.
You'll have to find your way out.

Speaking

At the end of some days you feel as if you have been speaking without pause since you awoke. And even though you have finally returned home and are no longer speaking, the noise of your voice remains: it echoes in the high, dark chamber of your mind. At the end of the day, strings of words race through that great chamber, ceaselessly, on a dense and tangled network of neural tracks. You can't follow all the strings at once; neither can you follow one for very long. It's just noise and chaos, and eventually your concentration blurs, but does not bring any quiet.

Among the strings and phrases, certain key words pop up and echo briefly in the chamber—they're punctuations in the noise. Some of these are words that you chose to use during the day, like "frankly," and "exacerbate." Other words enter the mix from colleagues or friends, words like "decouple," and "paradigmatic." Many of these words, and the phrases they build, embarrass you. The embarrassing ones echo more loudly when you are in bed with the fan running trying to sleep. In your fatigue, you find yourself repeating them, speaking them silently (rather than just hearing them, as before). And you wonder "why did I say that?" You think "that was a foolish thing to say, I would like to take that back." You cringe "why did I say it that way? Who am I kidding?" But because you are tired and because you have lost your concentration, you can't help but repeat the embarrassing phrases over and over. You get a perverse satisfaction out of the pain it brings. It is like wiggling a loose tooth.

You have cures for this condition. One cure is the glass of scotch you drink at the end of particularly wordy days. Scotch makes most of the echo go away; it replaces the chaotic noise with a pleasant yellow hum. But unfortunately, the effect of the scotch wears off and often you wake up in bed, with the fan still running, and the words of the day emerge again out of the dissipated haze of the scotch and they are often louder at this time and they ping against the walls of your mind painfully. Another cure is meditation or prayer, and you know that this is the most effective practice, but you are too often tired and meditation and prayer are no good after you have drunk the scotch,

which is much easier. The final cure is time. Over time, the words are forgotten, or they are replaced by new words, and they lose their impact. There are notable exceptions, where certain phrases, like "I don't trust you," increase in power over time. But typically, time dilutes words and eventually washes them away, you tell yourself.

So you will be disappointed when you learn that someone has been collecting all your spoken words in a massive file, along with files of everyone else's spoken words, in an infinite storehouse called The Library of Personal Transcripts. Your file will include every word or sound you have uttered since you were born. In the beginning, the file will read like phonetic nonsense. After several hundred pages—or screens, to be precise—recognizable words will begin to appear. Then the words will appear in patterns, sometimes phrases and sometimes fully formed sentences. Hundreds of thousands of screens into the file, during your teen years, some of the original phonetic nonsense will return; it will appear that there has been a regression. But then there will be bursts of complex and eloquent language, and then the words will rise up to a plateau of educated adult speech, and you will remain there until the day you are reading it.

You will be able to go read your transcript when they make all transcripts available to the public, after a clever journalist reveals the project to the world and, after vehemently denying the story, they are forced to explain that the Library does exist and subsequently are forced to provide fair and equal access. You will passively support an organization that calls for the destruction of The Library of Personal Transcripts, but this organization's efforts will fail, as the Library successfully argues that the project has been carried out in the name of science, with the aim of learning more about humanity and finding ways to improve the quality of life.

So although you are horrified that the Library exists, you will be inexorably drawn to it. So long as it's there, you will have to see it. And you will spend a day and a night in the Library, which is surprisingly pleasant

with blond wooden tables and indirect halogen lights and tasteful flat-pane monitors in rows as far as the eye can read, and where you are intrigued to observe that regular people work—and have been working all along—keeping the operation going just as floor managers and administrative assistants might work at a product packaging company. But the pleasant and ordinary atmosphere will not, in the end, mitigate the horrible seasons of emotions you will endure in 24 hours, as you page from screen to screen, from section to section, and part to part, scanning phrases and exclamations and converstations at random, remembering events and exchanges you had worked very hard to forget. And you will find it particularly chilling to only see the things that you have said, like “I’m a loner, that’s just the way I am,” or “To hell with MacFarland, let’s just go in there and show them what we got,” without seeing the words of the ones you were speaking to. But at other points you will swell with pride to see how carefully and thoughtfully you advised a friend, and even though their words aren’t there, you will remember them exactly and their words will ring in the chamber of your mind like a pure orchestral note. And then at times you will laugh and be astonished by your impromptu eloquence and wit under stressful circumstances, and although you know that these things took place, it will seem like a much more competent and intelligent person was speaking. In the end you will be thankful for the experience. You will feel rich and textured. You will know that you have grown, but that through time you are one.

So you will have mixed feelings to learn that your great grandchildren will not be tormented by the Library. You will be glad that they no longer suffer from the echo of their words at night. But you will be sad to know that they will not have a transformative experience brought about by the sum of everything they have said to date.

They will not fully understand your concerns, because they will not fully understand the concept of language, because they will live in a time when there is no need for it. In their time, people will look back on words as humorously crude and analog, a peculiar and primitive layer or filter between the way things are and the way we understand these things. Your great grandchildren and everyone else will share a mutual understanding of things. There will be one way, and everyone will know it, and so there will be no need for debate or argument or conversation. There will be no words; there will just be knowing.

However, a few will know about speaking. They will form clubs where they do the ancient practice. They will speak in a combination of different languages, and their pronunciation and diction will be imperfect, but it will feel like an art to them. They will feel as if they are creating something new, or perhaps something very old. People who come to witness these activities will often laugh—their instinctive knowing will be a wondering that we would translate as “they are moving their eating holes in a strange way and making noises and it is funny.” But the people who are doing the practice will laugh back, aloud, and say “I feel as if I am thinking on a new plane.”

~CIC

Three Break-Ins

The first time Laurie's home was broken into, the police were called.

It had been nearly a year since Laurie's roommate Kelly had broken up with Craig. There were rumors going around that since the breakup, Craig had started drinking a lot. He'd lost his job. He'd started smoking crack. Nobody knew what he'd do next. Laurie was impressed. She'd never been able to drive a boy to such extremes.

Around nine o'clock that night, Craig called for the first time. Kelly didn't want to talk to him, but he kept calling. When their other roommate, Anna, urged her to leave the phone off the hook, he started buzzing their apartment. He then alternated between the cell phone in his right hand and the buzzer under his left index finger. When that got him nowhere, he stood in the middle of Broadway and yelled up to her.

Laurie sat on her bed, watching him from the window. She rested her palms against the cool glass, her fingers splayed. The pavement under Craig's feet shimmered. He raised his arms up, tilted his head back and called Kelly's name. The dry cleaner's window behind him gave a hazy reflection of a streetlight. Laurie pressed her forehead against the glass and sighed.

Anna, who had to get up the earliest in the morning became fed up with the disruptions around 10:30. That's when they decided to call the cops. By the time the police showed up, Craig had disappeared. The girls gave a report and reassured the police that, yes, they would press charges if he were found.

What they didn't know is that as they were giving their statements, Craig was climbing over the fence in the alley behind their apartment building. As they were reassuring the police, he was taking the back steps two at a time. And as they said good-bye, he was pulling himself over the top floor door frame and onto their deck. They also didn't know that they had forgotten to lock the sliding door.

Laurie stood in Kelly's doorway trying to comfort her. "Just try and get some sleep." The words had just come

out of her mouth when she turned. And there stood Craig.

He nodded to her then turned to Kelly. "Baby, I just need to talk."

Laurie, confused and excited, walked back toward her bedroom. Anna had taken that same instant to check on how Kelly was holding up and they ran into each other in the hall.

Laurie's hands grasped Anna's shoulders to keep her from walking further. "He's in the apartment."

Anna looked down the hall and then at Laurie who nodded.

"He's in the apartment. Call the police."

Anna rushed back to her room and closed the door. She told Laurie later that she had taken the phone with her into her bathroom, locked the door, and made the call sitting under the sink.

Laurie continued walking to her room. Once she reached it, though, she had the thought that if the rumors were true, there was no telling what Craig might do. There would be little she could do to stop him, but she knew she should at least be there to try.

Kelly and Craig were sitting on the bed, quite comfortably, talking. Craig looked desperate, pathetic, as if he'd just learned his childhood dog had died during the night. As Laurie approached, he picked up the phone. He set the receiver back in its place and looked up.

"Man, you called the cops on me? Their gonna get me for breaking and entering."

Laurie stood in the doorway attempting to make her five foot two frame look imposing.

Kelly whispered, "You should've thought of that before."

Craig cradled his head in his hands. "Can I please have five minutes alone with Kelly?"

Kelly nodded her consent to Laurie who moved silently away from the doorway. She waited about thirty seconds and peeked in.

Craig shook his head. He whispered something to Kelly, tried to touch her face with his fingertips, but she pulled away. His hand hovered in the air for a moment before falling. He shrugged and stood. He walked past Laurie as if she weren't even there and walked straight out the front door and down the steps. She followed him out and watched from the landing.

Kelly ran after him, stopping at the top of the stairs. "Craig?"

He stopped and looked up at her.

"Where do you think you're going?"

He laughed, shaking his head. "You want me to wait for the cops?"

Laurie went back to her room to watch from the window. It amazed her that after almost a year, Craig was still in love with Kelly. That's obviously what it was, after all. Love. Pure and simple.

Laurie laid in bed that night with an empty feeling in her stomach. Once she thought she was going to be sick and made her way through the darkness to kneel in front of the toilet. Eventually she stumbled back to bed and slept heavily.

Nearly an hour late, Laurie woke the next morning and rushed to work.

* * *

The second time Laurie's home was broken into, there was no need to call for help.

When Kelly got a new job out of state, and Anna decided to move in with her boyfriend, Laurie rented her own

studio apartment. She enjoyed the privacy, but missed the conversation and entertainment her two roommates had provided. So she introduced herself to a man, Don, who was standing next to her under the bus shelter.

She had been sleeping with Don for about a month. The sex was incredible. Passionate. Intense. Savage. And afterwards, they both lay, breathing heavily, their sweat seeping into her futon. When she had to go out of town on business, she thought little about giving him a set of keys so he could water her plants. But she never asked for them back. And he never offered them.

One night, during a phone conversation Laurie playfully accused him of using her for sex. "Maybe I'll just have to stop sleeping with you to be sure."

"Then maybe I'll just have to break into your apartment one night and molest you."

Laurie's eyes closed slightly. Her mouthed pulled back at the corners. "Really?"

"Would you like that?"

"Hmmm. I guess you'll just have to try it to find out."

He tried.

She heard the key in the lock and sat upright, listening closely, forgetting for the moment that Don had threatened to break in. She heard the door open, close. She saw nobody in the dim streetlight that penetrated her window shades. She held her breath. Her entire body was tense. There were no more sounds. No shadows. Nothing. Her fingers pressed into the futon. She took a long, silent breath. She moved slightly, craning her neck so she could see around the corner to the door.

The shadow was tall, slender, moving its way slowly into the apartment. Laurie relaxed as she realized who it was, but she played the game.

"Who's there?"

He continued moving toward her, undressing as he did.

“Who’s there?” Laurie pulled the sheet up around her, backed herself up against the wall.

He climbed into the futon, pulled her body against his, rubbing against her.

He pulled the sheet away, quickly pulled off her clothes and slammed into her.

A couple of times, Don managed to sneak into the apartment without waking her. Soon, however, Laurie could sense his presence in her sleep. She would wake up before he even got the key in the lock. Sighing, she would turn away from the door to hide her wakefulness and pretend to be startled when he touched her. It was the same every time, and every time she would get to work late the next day.

She dreamt occasionally about that night Craig broke in. He was always out in the street in her dreams, his arms spread out calling up to Kelly. But he would be calling Laurie’s name in the dream. And it was always raining. Sometimes his face was replaced with Don’s. Sometimes it was the face of someone she didn’t know. But she would always be there, at the window, looking down at him and wanting to throw open the window and tell him to come up to her.

The intervals between Don’s late night visits increased. She only saw him once every three or four weeks. When she woke up in the darkness and heard the key, she would stare out the window, searching the street-lit pavement. She didn’t bother with the role playing anymore. Neither did he, for that matter.

One afternoon, Laurie picked up the phone and called her landlord. “I lost my keys,” she said. “Can I get the locks on my door changed?”

By the time she returned from work that night, there was a new set of keys waiting for her.

* * *

And the last time was an unsuccessful attempt at breaking into Laurie’s home.

Laurie woke up at 2:45 in the morning. She heard the familiar sound of the key in the lock. She sat up, held her breath, listened closely. The key was pulled out, tried again. Perhaps a different key. A third time she heard that rustling of the key teeth in the doorknob’s lock. Silence. She leaned, the heels of her palms pulling at the cool cotton fitted sheet behind her. She heard a car drive by. She waited.

Laurie swung her legs out of the futon and walked to the door. She pressed her palms against it. Standing on her toes, she looked through the peephole, adjusting her head so she could see a little bit down the empty hall each way.

She leaned against the wall. She let her body slide down and sat there, waiting. She wrapped her arms around her folded legs and rested her chin between her knees. She rested her temple against a knee. She closed her eyes. She looked at the phone. She stood. She pressed a button on the intercom that allowed her to hear what was happening down on the street—nothing. She closed her eyes again and pressed her forehead against the door, looked out the peephole one more time and finally returned to the futon.

Laurie couldn’t sleep that night. At five she turned on the television and watched the early morning newscast. A few miles away, in Old Town, there had been reports that a man was breaking into women’s apartments and robbing them, taking not only valuables, but also undergarments. Because there had been no signs of forced entry in any of the cases, women in that neighborhood were frantically changing the locks on their doors.

Laurie sighed and looked out the window. It was raining. The street glistened. A streetlight was reflected in the windows of the building across the street. She changed the channel to a children’s cartoon, showered, and got ready for an early day at work.

~C/C

Diction and Syntax

Tempting travel. If I could
pack up what I love, his talk, her song,
and go on purpose to one place
at a time. I'd tape each ticket into a
book. I'd press a feather or
flower I'd found, to hold each ticket down.
I'd dance and unpack my one bag,
just to touch what I'd brought along
to this port, that stand of stone. If I could
live for a time from one bag,
I'd know what I love, I'd know what I brought
along on accident. I could
make a trade for what I'd forgotten but
I couldn't go anywhere without his
talk and her song.

The day, the rain, the sweeping inside thoughts
they seem to float but are full of weight.
Like boxed letters, tied with ribbons of grief.
Or the guilt I hide inside my skin, the size
of full-grown child. I itch and try to release her
but she's a burden no one but I could go on loving.
The weight of what is wet, grass, towels, tears.
He said it was unbearably light to be. I say it is
the heaviest thing I know, being where love is not.

There are words, saucy and fancy, we tried to mix-in
to our lame language, our tame talk.
I sewed sequins to my tongue and kissed good-bye
the boy I always loved. It matters what order it happened in:
screaming sighing sequins. It matters
what tense we use, my sequins screamed and sighed.
But word choice matters most. Sequins make the ticket
stick. The great weight of grief. Heavy trinkets,
sewn with sequin-wings, can fly. Follow the metaphor,
the ticket is my heart, the heavy were his words; sequin tears
stain instead of dry.

In Media Res

Bk 2

I keep retelling the same story, scatter the
wind with it; I enter in the middle of things,
aim for balance by placing the outside of each foot
parallel to the other. I am trying to make a mountain
of me, one the wind won't blow over. No matter
how many ways the tale should end, there's really
only one way it should.

Bk 3

I am beckoned back and can't go alone to look—
I conjure an audience, for pilgrimage. Each mile marks
a year. Some stones we can't move. Others are surmounted,
but the pebbles in our pockets prove our fate. A trail
is made, is laid, that the birds won't eat.

Bk 4

I can't erase the line that shaped our jagged,
elemental over-lap. I can't combine the jaded ways
we face our separate days. Our past, in replay, has caged
us one from the other.

Bk 5

I claim to narrate, but anyone can read the dialogue
I disguise. Strands of memory turn
to shards of meaning.
We cut fate with this blade; You can't capture distance
(it keeps moving). One way or the other
toward an end or further from it.

Bk 6

The pilgrims' patience gives way, birds poke their pockets
for bread. They only stay on hoping for an actual outcome.
Each reader mistakes the journey for his own; at some point,
his visions will surpass what's being told. And he'll
have to tell someone, he'll just have to.

instructions for the broken

And you, again, are having dreams of being at a port

in Italy, in the pit of the dark, and you are just beginning to realize that you have lost

everything, your passport, your book-bag, the picture of your brother; and you are overcome, like a twenty-two year-old

college girl, in love, who feels she is helpless, crushed, destroyed, and split open,

or maybe she just feels kind of dumb, but regardless, will you listen: tomorrow, when you first wake

up, don't remember how you held his head to your belly, or how his body was small and gawky like a bird's, no

go straight to the spot you have made for yourself on the front porch

with a pen, and move that empty glass that is sitting like a lame duck on the bannister.