



Issue 14 Summer 2024

[Alternate Route] Issue 14 Summer 2024

Editorial staff: Michael Starr, Mindyrose Sinykin

Cover art: Jake Onyett(?)

Contributors ©:

Jake Onyett, Gale Acuff, Jacqueline Zalace, John Schminky, M.H. Austin,
Maureen Clark, Michael Singh, Reed Venrick, Susan Shea

ISSN 2767-0317

Please consider advertising with us.

Edited in California & Minnesota (USA)

Thank you for reading.

[Alternate Route]
Issue 14 Summer 2024

One day you're dead but then again you're not,

you're alive in the Afterlife they swear
at church and Sunday School and I'm only
ten years old so I go along, after
all they might know what they're talking about
and if they do then when I die I'll be
in a world of hurt, most likely Hell, where
I'll be punished forever and ever,
which pretty much equals Eternity
though it's not pretty, Hell that is, but then
my favorite colors are the colors of
fire—red and yellow but sometimes blue, which
in a way I am right now, blue for sad-
-ness because I don't want to die but I
am already, like we all are, born out.

I've decided not to die—I'm going

to live and not just live but dwell and dwell
forever here on Earth and never die
at least not so that you can tell but if
my body finally gives out my soul
will find a place to keep itself, maybe
inside a tree or pond or mountaintop
or one of those tortoises that live to
be two hundred years old or into rain
that falls and later evaporates, then
falls again and maybe not just as rain
but as snow or hail—I've got to go on
even if it kills me but at Sunday

School they say that none of this will happen,
which tells me how much faith they haven't got.

Sometimes I can't wait until I die just

to see what's on the other side of life
besides just being dead and nothingness,
maybe there's more and of course the church is
in the business of eternal life so
I always drop a dime onto the plate
and dimes add up, especially because
everybody else adds their silver and
bills as well and sometimes I've seen checks
float from their sinners' fingers and fall on
-to the coins below, then the plate is off
to the next poor soul and I wonder what
would happen if I practiced taking tithes
instead of giving and never got caught.
Like Judas, then, I'd have money to burn.

Honk if you love Jesus Christ

Four billion years ago, not six thousand
–not two thousand– pick up the fucking
book, see the man himself, Jesus Christ
lands his orbiter, his hunk of metal, his tomb
on a backwater rock; no life, no air, no crime,
no sex, no drugs, no rock and roll. Stepping
out of his proverbial cave, he invents fire
and cigarettes and bacteria and chocolate cake

and suicide. He rubs his hands together and claps,
inventing jazz and metal and EDM and K-Pop
and country music. He breathes out and creates English
and Pig Latin and Mandarin Chinese and hieroglyphics.
Don't forget the foot stomps that send shockwaves
through the rubble, erecting ziggurats and parking
garages and mega churches and trap houses and

playgrounds with swing sets, complete with little
kids swinging into the sky, watched by the man
–created by Him, of course– in the shitstained
sweatpants and wrinkled shirt with a compact Bible
tucked into his pocket alongside a piece of candy
and two condoms. Just in case. Thank Jesus Christ
himself for snapping his fingers to instantly develop
love and sexuality and assault, and don't forget

bombs, phallic bombs that he gives to the ants
he's created, used to terrorize other ants in the name
of Jesus himself or one of his cousins. Maybe Jesus forgot
though, sprinkling extra children on the ground
below the bombs, watching them scream and cry
and pray and die. And on the final day, Jesus Christ
sneezed out Roch Thériault –the Canadian Prophet–

and Jim Jones –Elijah, reincarnated– to spread the good word of Jesus and Kool-Aid and racism and please, don't forget to say your prayers before you go to sleep.

John Schminky

LAKE EFFECT

Sometimes I wonder if the whole deal is sort of like this comic book I read when I was a kid. It was about a scientist who found out somehow that there was this parallel universe where molecules vibrated at a different frequency than molecules in the regular universe. When he drank a secret liquid compound, he got the power to change the vibration of his molecules and enter the parallel universe or return to the regular universe whenever he wanted. When I was a kid the whole parallel-universe thing got my attention. I mean, the regular-universe people were walking around minding their own business, and they didn't even know that a bunch of parallel-universe people were right there with them all the time in the same location in space but in a different dimension. And the people in one universe couldn't cross over into the other one, and they couldn't talk to or touch the people in the other universe, or even try to, because they didn't know the other people were there. Except the scientist. He could drink the secret liquid compound and be with people in either universe. So it's like when you're with a group of people at your job or in a movie theater or something, and you're watching them talking and laughing and having a pretty decent time. You wonder if your molecules are vibrating at the same frequency as theirs, because it seems like they're not, and you don't have a secret liquid compound to help you do anything about it. So you're sort of on your own.

I'm not crippled or anything, but I'm sitting in this wheelchair because it's comfortable. It used to be Aunt Jane's. She used to live here in the house. She was actually my great-aunt. She died about thirty years ago when she was way up in her nineties. She was okay, but crabby. She never got married, and she worked in New York for just about her whole life. When she finally retired, she went down to Florida. She'd send us a box of oranges for Christmas every year, and Mom'd go crazy over them like they were a big deal or something. Everything was okay until she started to give her neighbors a hard time. She'd yell at them at night and say they were

spying on her for the FBI or the Teamsters. Finally the police called Mom about her, and Mom and Uncle Blake went down to West Palm Beach to see what was going on. Dad didn't go. He didn't care for Aunt Jane very much. When Mom and Uncle Blake got down there, they saw that Aunt Jane's apartment was a big mess. She had about eighty million flattened Cheerios boxes in her bedroom closet. Mom said her toilet looked like it hadn't been cleaned for a couple hundred years. So they got in a big argument with her about what she had to do and so on. They told her that the police were going to lock her up if she didn't come back with them to Ohio. She started crying and everything and yelling about how she'd rather go to jail anyway, but the bottom line is that they finally wore her down and got her to come up to our house and live in it, because she didn't have any other place to go.

I wasn't thrilled about having her around. I'd been accepted by Kent State the year before, but I decided not to go there because I didn't see the point, so I had to get a job at the mall and live with Mom and Dad. And on top of that I didn't have a girlfriend because I never found one. So I wasn't in the mood for Aunt Jane. But I just stayed out of her way most of the time. She lived in our house for about a year and a half. They made Dad's old office on the first floor into a bedroom just for her. But that took some time, so for the first few months they put her in Karen's old room down the hall from mine, because Karen had graduated from Kent and left town to marry Jack. That wasn't the best situation. Aunt Jane would wander around in her nightgown before she went to bed and sometimes she'd stop outside my door and knock on it. Sometimes I opened it but usually I didn't. It really made no difference to her anyway. She'd start talking about the FBI or Jimmy Hoffa even if I didn't open the door. That got to be a real pain.

Finally she moved downstairs into the new room and that was a relief. I just stayed up here in my room and stayed out of her way the best I could. Like I said, she was crabby. She complained about how cold it was in Ohio and things like that, and she complained that Dad played Dean Martin too loud when she was trying to watch her game shows. And she didn't like Mom's cooking too much either. That went on for months. Then she fell down and broke her hip when she was down in the basement utility room looking for a carrot. Really, that's what she said she was looking for down there. Inside the dryer I guess. Anyway, that's when they got her the wheelchair.

After they put Aunt Jane in the wheelchair things went

downhill for her really fast. It seemed like she had to go to this doctor or that doctor every other day. And she started to act like a real zombie. After awhile she really didn't talk very much to anybody anymore, and when she did talk it was really crazy stuff, even crazier than the FBI or Teamster stuff. And she was always making a kissing sound and trying to feed a dog that wasn't there. It was like her mind went somewhere and left the rest of her behind. The whole situation got to be weird, because right about then Dad was just starting to say and do little things here and there that made you think that something was wrong with him too. So it was a little bit like crazy in stereo for awhile. I just tried to stay out of everybody's way. Eventually Aunt Jane's legs turned purple, and they put her in Greenview because she was losing everything. She didn't last too long after that. Mom got all upset and made a big deal about it. When she died I got the wheelchair because they were going to get rid of it anyway. I carried it up the stairs to my bedroom, and I've been using it ever since. You wouldn't expect it, but it's really pretty comfortable. It's a recliner, and it's got a lot of padding. So that part of the whole Aunt Jane deal worked out okay.

The funeral for Aunt Jane was over at Mother of Sorrows. I don't go there anymore because I don't see the point, but Mom went to Mass there every Sunday until she got sick and left town to live with Karen and Jack. It seems like all the funerals I remember were at Mother of Sorrows. Dad's was there after he died at Greenview, and Mom's was there about eight years ago because Karen wanted it that way. The main thing I remember about Mother of Sorrows besides the funerals is that on Sundays when I was a kid Dad would drive all of us back to the house after Mass in the 63 Oldsmobile, and we'd have a big lunch while Polka Varieties was blaring on the TV.

The house is huge and old and made of brick with ivy growing all over it, and it has windows with thick lattices. It's dark on the outside and dark on the inside, and since Mom left I've been the only one in it. It's at the end of Walnut at a place called The Point, which is a high spot that overlooks the river just before it enters the lake at the harbor. When we had our Sunday lunches, we could look out the dining room window on the east side of the house and see the river, the drawbridge over the river, the Coast Guard station, and the docks where they unloaded coal and iron ore from the lake freighters and then loaded everything on railroad cars that went to the steel mills.

In those days I don't think anybody really understood what was

going on, but looking back I think the town had already started to go downhill. The steel mills in Youngstown and Pittsburgh were slowing down, so the amount of coal and iron ore coming to the harbor kept getting smaller. Eventually the mills crapped out altogether and the town got left behind. Fewer and fewer freighters came to the harbor, and things got seedier and seedier, and stores closed down all over the place. Now hardly any freighters come here, and there's really not much here in the town anymore. The Coast Guard station's gone. The rail center's empty. The high school at the harbor's gone. They bulldozed it and now the harbor kids go to the school downtown. And the harbor library's gone. And the mall I still work at is half empty and Sears just left.

A lot of people have left too. They decided not to put up with the empty stores and the lousy weather. We get a lot of lake effect snow here. The clouds pick up moisture as they come across the lake from Canada and then dump snow like crazy on our side of the lake. Sometimes it catches you by surprise. Before you know it you look around and the houses and the streets and the cars are covered with snow and you just want to go somewhere else. When it happens it seems like the whole world's getting covered with snow, but actually lake effect snow just covers a narrow band of land that's along the lake between Cleveland and Buffalo, and we're in the middle of it. So when lake effect snow's falling on you, you feel like the whole world's getting smothered, but really the snow's only smothering your little world.

I'm sitting in the wheelchair up here in my bedroom at the window on the north side of the house that faces the lake. From here there's not much to see except the lake and right now it's dark with white caps and dark clouds are coming over it like a wall that's moving. This is the kind of thing that makes a lot of people go away from here, but some people don't go away. That sort of hit me when I drove down Fifth Street when it was cold and still dark one morning last week after it had snowed the night before. Fifth Street runs down to the river and crosses the drawbridge. I have to cross the bridge when I drive to work at the mall. When the harbor was still doing pretty good freighter business, the buildings along Fifth were filled with people, but now the storefronts are run-down and only a few shops are open, and most of the buildings are vacant and have dark and dirty windows. A town with no business can't leave itself. It just stays where it is and rusts. I noticed the other day that a new coffee shop just opened up in one of the buildings near the river, but I don't see the

point. It won't make it.

Anyway, when I was driving on that morning last week, I thought about how lousy everything looked because of the snow and the ice on the streets and because of the dark buildings with only a few streetlights to shine on them. That made me think that when some people see that kind of thing it's like the straw that breaks the camel's back, and they just want to go somewhere else, so if they have somewhere to go, they go. But then I started thinking about something else, because when I was stopped at the red light at Fifth and Riverside, right there before you get to the bridge, all of a sudden this cat ran across the front of my car and then down Riverside on the right. I watched him run down Riverside and disappear into an alley by a streetlight. The red light turned green, and I had to go and cross the bridge, so I did, but I thought about that cat later on, and I'm still thinking about him. I don't know where he goes when it snows.

M.H. Austin(?)

A Canopy

A hat on the coat rack
But no inquiry
Ever-thinning is my patience
And my hair
For those who pay no mind to mine
And yet,
Ever eager to lie on my linen
Solitude is seductive!
With her gospel
And aptitude
With her unwavering
Sense of self,
And her vow
Solitude is seductive,
Her eyes bat and narrow,
Traces along the vellus
At the nape of my neck
Pleading me
To take her far away
She is sweet,
Like buttermilk
And cunning
I fall into her,
A siren
A canopy about me,
She triumphs again
How could I deny her,
For what has love ever done for me
That she has not done better?

Maureen Clark(?)

Since I Cannot Change the Events

I cannot change
the events that shattered me
into a million splinters
let me change the light
in which I see them
instead of a spotlight
in front of a skeptical
audience
let me sit
on a dark stage
with a gauzy moon
hung behind me
artificial stars twinkling
and let my face be hidden
so I can say
you weren't there
when the sky fell
you weren't there
when I stumbled
and the floor
gave way to nothing
you weren't there
but I ask you now
can you love me
and only then
in the manufactured moonlight
will I be able to say
I don't care
which you choose

Are You a Witch?

do you have a mole or a birthmark
did the butter sour on the table
did you try to predict the future
did you cast the evil eye

did you just receive an inheritance
mumble a spell form a verse
have you made a corpse powder
from the bones of an un-baptized child

do your feet point backwards
do you have a cat or some other familiar
are you melancholy do you eat goat meat
did you put your keys on the table

did you open and close the scissors
but not cut anything
did you cut your nails after dark
are you visited by the headache demon

have you created a curse tablet
were you unable to eat the cheese sandwich
have you cut the turf
from under a person's steps

to get rid of your husband have you
stripped naked rolled yourself in honey
and oats and then made a bread
which you made him eat
can you fly through the air
can you walk on water

through walls do you carry
any instruments of conjuring

do you have pins in your collar
have you disordered a man's mind
have you found one beehive
you are lucky if you find three
you are a witch

Sunday Brunch

I.

two does hug the fence
in my mother's pasture

not quite invisible injured badly
one missing a hind leg

the wildlife specialist won't even try
to relocate them

II.

across the table two widows
one experienced the other new

between the scrambled eggs and honeydew
talk about how to keep busy

the loneliness of the quiet house

III.

you can see the leg that is missing
when she feeds on the pasture stubble

and step hops into the underbrush
the second doe limps beside her

every movement draws attention
which is why this field won't shield them for long

is it too sentimental to think that they have each other
for company and that this pasture
is as good a place as any to die

The Fallen Feather

Where the dreams of soldiers
Still linger among the waves
And waves of sea grass(Basho)

A pelican soars over and beyond
The dunes—I follow, wandering up
From the tide that splashes my legs,
Stepping through the whipping dune grass,
As I move cautiously into the garden

Of carved, marbled stones, rising
Through waves of fog among rows
And multitudes of rows, and for a time,
I read every name, but the fading light
Rubs away the names and dates

And forgotten memories of others that rise
In fog crawling round my boots and legs.
I hear a chorus of muffled voices
Whispering a mix of spoken vowels
In wind-gusts, or is it Einstein's voice

Tuning into my ear worm, reminding
Me what we call "history," while certain
For the departed, reminds a grand illusion
For the living; all we know—ever know
On this page of metaphysical phenomena

We call "space and time," is the sea-
Swirling-present of what we sense
In these hours of coagulating night mist
And smells of an ocean's salty danger
Swirling and roiling behind, as I wander

Along the winding coast called Normandy,
Here I gaze up toward the pin lights mapping

The ocean's salty skin, as I feel the same chill
Wind that swept this coast in June 1944.

TWO

Wandering on, reading tombstones with
My flashlight on, I wonder if this human
Existence is not just a complex
Fiction of accidental cause and effect
That predestines rocks and waves

Of generations passing through,
As Descartes's great mind pondered:
Are we but flesh and blood robots,
Living out a scenario written by
Some invisible pen or will? Are we

Cosmic puppets controlled by alien
Or even mischievous forces? Such
Questions rake my imagination, as I turn
From the ocean wind, snatching
My hair toward the restless clouds

Churning round a waning moon, then
A spotlight shines through a cloud and
Guides my path up crumbling stairs that
Open the fog's curtain—I find myself standing
Before a marble crypt, looking ancient

As Caesar's Gaul, but the entrance
Shows a marble lintel gleaming
Bone-bright under glowing moonlight,
And as I step up closer, I visualize
A rusting, askew door with a broken
Chain, and lying there on the floor

A memory of flight: a pelican's feather,
As my bilingual ear worm whispers:
"The doorway opens to a fallen pilot,
"Bienvenu dans l'histoire du chagrin,"
Welcome to the history of grief.

Susan Shea(?)

The Genius of the Sea

On one of those warm, winter nights out
On the island called Key West, 1932 or '33,
When the humidity was lower than usual,
Steaminess mitigated by ceiling fans, but
Not yet AC, when Wallace Stevens couldn't
Sleep, disturbed by raucous bantam roosters
That mixed up their waking time, he saw
A false dawn brighten up one of the creamy
Clouds, causing a rooster to crow just
After 3 a.m. Stevens stumbled out
Among the colonnade pillars—suddenly,
Hearing singing; at first, he thought
The haunting voice, singing in French,
Came from a phonograph from a hotel
Room, but as he ambled further, he realized
The mysterious song came from a woman
Standing knee-deep in the high-tide surf.
She stood statue still, her arms stretched out,
A moonlit, ghostly figure looking like
Sculptured marble, but with a black mantilla
Over her head and wearing a shimmer-silver-
Sack dress, rather “passe de mode” and
Reminiscent of 1920's jazz-age style.
Stevens leaned on a pillar to listen to
The dramatic and melancholy woman
Facing the rushing high tide. Though she
Sang in French and he understood little,
He recognized her talent and training,
But he found himself liking that he knew
Near-to-no meaning, and few words,
Since most lyrics to popular songs were
Sentimental rubbish to him. But the woman's
Raw, “a cappella” voice fascinated him. But
Wait...was she contemplating suicide in that

Dangerous surf ? Would she repeat what
That film actress, Jean Harlow, had done?
He longed to rush out and speak to her, but
No, he wasn't going to wade into ocean water
On a half-lit morning at high-tide hour, so he lit
A cigar, lingering on, hoping she wouldn't
Finish, for she sang in such a sincere way,
Such an enlightened manner—but she
Was weeping. Clearly distraught, but
She also seemed mesmerized by some force,
Something she sensed in the ocean's sublime
Ambiance? Just a few French words, Stevens
Understood, as he turned, one ear listening
To the crashing tide, while the other—then
An epiphany flowed into his ear. Hurrying back
To his room, he snatched up stationary from the desk,
Grabbed a pen from his attache' case—scribbled:
“She sang to the genius of the sea.” The singer
Surely had sensed the divine emotion that a moon-
Lit ocean creates, and a refrain he now understood:
“Chantepleure,” to cry and sing at the same time.

Longevity

I could hear it coming
before I complained
about dying from
a hardship that just
landed inside my planet
I saw it sitting in my
father's mouth waiting
like Mount Everest
fitting so well
between his teeth
complete with banner
floating above it
ready to be unfurled
such are the
vicissitudes of life
his fireworks of celebration
shot high above my eyes
another climb
another time to get my boots
that only bore my name

Comeback

Let's not invite
crying-out-loud infants
to our suffering club
we won't be able
to hear ourselves
inventing ordered rows
engraving our downfalls
our comeuppances
our solutions
onto pocket-sized
obelisks we can carry
with us to prepare

for our next adversity
when we find we are
once again afraid
weeping on the inside
without words, ready to
just drool on ourselves

Pulsing

If I carry my sounds
in my skin
in my pores and riches
emanating hurts and hertz
I may try to avoid you
or see if I can share
give myself in sway
even when I whine
like a steel guitar
looking for your riddle
even though you say
you are just
a simple fiddler
playing notes
you cannot even
call your own
I know you are just
tuning up, vibrating
waves of only you
releasing signals
just as offbeat as mine
we can duet

