Segue 9: Fall 2010

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Segue is published once a year in August. We accept submissions of high quality fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction between January 1 and April 30 (closed May through December), and writing about writing year-round via email. Before submitting, please read past issues to understand the sort of work we publish, then read our submission guidelines.

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The luxury of consequence

BE INERT
We were in the 90 day program,
Getting rambunctious with a therapeutic dog
On the soft, forgiving turf.
47 days and nothing stronger to drink than
Air.
It was that relentless Pacific almost-cold with
The hills as shaved brown rolls of bloat and the ocean
A swarm of infinity marbles.

We had let shit get away from us;
We had oil wealth; we
Had moms that only appeared publicly in
White satin gloves. We
Threw pennies in the garbage, dropped
Quarters on the ground.

BE COMPLACENT
W.H. was there, to no surprise,
But spent most of the days with the
Double-digit relapsers.
We recognized him from when he was younger and
Not caked in red burst capillary sheen and
Barnacled by time. But
Decay clung to all our faces like windblown sand.

I recalled his book
Walk Like a Woman, and that it taught me how and why
Not to care and not to want to.
It did wonders for my posture; made
A graveyard of the Earth.

BE POLITE
I was looking out the window and you were standing
By the sink, a detached
Chunk of light.
The help was talking too loud in Spanish;
A tree outside caught a cough of wind.
Its waxy leaves twisted to show their  
Pale beneath.

We had been talking about the difference between  
Thirst and hunger:  
Hunger for knowledge, thirst  
For revenge.  
There is something I need, you said,  
At the window, by the sink.

BE COLORLESS, ODORLESS  
We had run into doubt before,  
We had seen it  
There.  
We had lips of fathers, eyes of mothers,  
Noses, somehow, in between.  
We saw them see it.  
I think we saw them see it,  
Filtered like breath through teeth.

We were astonished and regarding the  
Amplitude of life.

BE MASSLESS  
I’ve killed people, I know it. I have  
Somehow made them die.  
So has W.H. You can see it in the black  
Bones of his eyes.

So have you.  
They were living and then behind us:  
Our blind dumb swollen wake.

I can see it here. From  
Adobe Villa, number 6 on the morning of  
Day 48.
Man with gun

That was a time in my life in which every Palpable moment felt like waking from a dream, putting A thresher to reality. Perhaps it was

The medicine, putting clear Windexed curtains to slip and Tremble around everything. Every moment, waking, And sometimes in mid-speech, thinking:

This Is It

I was maybe 29, ineptly trying to hold down all Those rising things. I had that older, bitter girlfriend, Janine, with the silver spray paint hair.

I had the only independent tuxedo rental business in Southern Pennsylvania; I swear I was barely conscious, If at all. And Janine, she

Frowned and she meant it, had skin like dried apple Sauce. I’d awaken touching it, confused, to the stares of Lunching secretaries and receptionists, who were everywhere

Then. Out the windows of moving vehicles that were some-How controlled by me, my tight white hands clutching Cyanotic at the wheel, through the tinted dead mist at

The Susquehanna Gorge. My kitchen ensconced in Electricity, my city entombed in snow, brown and last week’s. Me in the mirror and Janine, frustrated:

Of course the mirror works

The new pornography will be just this, I think, People recognizing themselves. Men in plaid holding The angles of their elbows. Women in

Nightgowns testing trees outside their bedrooms For hardness, structure, real vertical life, for treeness with The pulsing, throbbing pulp of their hands.
From his memoir, *The Attributes of Loss*

(One)
Sleeping after lunch until the afternoon gets
Real dense and cobalt
Blue and starts to collapse on itself.

Opening the window, just
Adding depth to the silence, with the (Two)
Shadows of sounds quaking around in its
Bowl.

I was a businessman, a managerial consultant,
A strategist and a
Logician.

Listen:
(Three)

My insides are cold and foodless and
Starting to get warm.

My face is red with loosed blood. I must
Be dreaming.

What I mean to detect, lying there, is the
Movement of
A tree in the wind, half an
Exclamation.

(Four, Five)
Half the life breathed out of me.

I have entered rooms with podiums, American
Flags and lunchmeat stacked into
Hydrants of flesh, into white-pink (Five[again])
Mirrors.

I have purchased matching jet-skis, a
Waffle iron, furs, cheese by the
Wheel.
Someone else’s laundry. (Six)
Someone else’s fumes of laundry through
Time and window,
Computerized flower aroma riding warm
Front’s ridge,
Breeching my person.

(Seven)
I have, in the past, made myself more
Clear.
But never about what I have been
Losing all this time.
(Eight)

Ok,
Try this, you big
Child: count
Slowly to ten, let ten seconds go by, ten
Hollow thuds and tell me: do you feel
More or less alive? Do you feel more
Or less?

(Nine)
It could go either way, couldn’t it?
Author Notes

Eric Arnold grew up in Texas and now lives with his wife in San Francisco, where he is currently training as a psychiatry resident. His poetry and short fiction have appeared or are forthcoming in many print and online journals, including New York Quarterly, The Saint Ann’s Review, Elimae, The Labletter, and Rust+Moth.

About the Work

I like to think of the poetry I write as casual observation and passive experience, amplified. If you (here I go in the second person …) turn up the volume of the dull and droning world loud enough, you are given a swarming mass of perceptual data. Not just the car salesman talking to his wife on the phone, but the flapping swats of the giant American flag, the raw daylight soaked by the tinted showroom windows, the slight vibration of the linoleum floor when the air conditioner kicks on. You filter out some salient pieces of that data, trying again and again until you arrive at something of a pattern, something with its own skewed physics, something like the start—but never the completion of—some great truth, a personal science of perception and emotion.

The challenge is to find a way to balance the acts of focusing, to create the content of the work, and abstracting, to create the affect and tone of the work. To somehow deliver a summation of the poem’s emotional and physical architecture that is striking but not overbearing. There is the task of having to give weight to each word line or stanza without weighing the whole piece down. In writing “From his memoir, The Attributes of Loss,” I had fallen asleep with the window open. Try it: open a window into a tranquil spring afternoon. The wash of noise in near infinite space can be somehow overwhelming and debilitating. How does one describe this helplessness? What physical laws does one ascribe to it? I can start with pure descriptive narration or raw emotional outburst, but I’ll ultimately have to draw a map between the two if I hope to achieve anything with the work.

Poetry is a deeply personal exercise. I can hope my work, my personal science, resonates with others, but I can’t ever count on it. It is a way not to be bored by the world around me, a reason to look out the window and a reason to look at the window itself, and the streaks of condensation in its corners. And then sometimes, if you are receptive, the act of writing or reading poetry can reveal the outline (or perhaps the shadow) of a bridge between the emotional and physical worlds. From Yusef Komunyakaa’s “Blues Chant Hoodoo Revival”:

bad luck isn’t red flowers
crushed under jackboots

This is the start of the great truth that you will never be able to see, describe or understand fully. It is a glimpse, that’s all.
Eric Arnold on the Web

porchlightzine.com/2010/05/01/porchlight-issue-4/

http://tinyurl.com/2apaqkf

www.rumble.sy2.com/stories/five_arnold.html

the-otolith.blogspot.com/2010/04/eric-arnold-two-sermons-lawton-ok.html