

# **T R I G G E R S**

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Several of these poems previously appeared in *Volt* magazine.

## **Preface**

I would not sing  
if I was afraid  
to exhale what I remember:  
the confidence called home,  
fuchsia and daffodils and tulips,  
abloom in my mother's garden  
where love is embraced  
in kneeling. Dry air exits  
between chimney and sky.  
Fire is my measure:  
to breathe delight, the domestic  
grown large, a pleasure, my song here  
without sense or forfeit.

## **Flight**

Woven concrete in articulate leaves  
precede the tarmac and launch:

the sky is blue, the horizon an eternal breach.  
It's early and birds float in the placid lagoon  
and warm sweat invades the swimmer's face.

The moment which both feet stand still.

The lone green palm umbrellas the sky.

The long seed stays dormant

while the sun slowly penetrates the crust.

Those who stop eating nourish nothing.  
To lick wounds open, to flourish  
on a flight of beauty, a little instruction, sorrow.

**City**

Into the city he saunters  
He sees torsos and eyes in the verticals  
of buildings, extended arms in the bridges,  
but nowhere her name

Drum beats collide and clear

He wanted to be rain or water  
to be smooth against,  
but in each neighborhood,  
it is a different face:

Liquid light her name.

Out on the street an angel  
coveting pain. Men and women  
hunger for his wings.  
Puddles and pot-holes  
propel the body into ceremony.  
Ravage or delight, what spills indoors  
will disappear with little public account.  
To call out tells us someone  
burns against the disastrous,  
though the sky is blue and quiet  
and the kid on the street kicks off  
on his skateboard to flip from the curb  
into an ankle-jolted - full circle - triple axle,  
while inside he combs his wings  
in preparation for the larger story.

In the Thelonius section of the Night Club

Intent without snapping our fingers

Feet balled to the floor

The air an optical rhythmic aisle

The music stands each fall over

Cats sleek as dirtied mauve

Move in triplicate, dark and gray:

It's not a Midnight where things go white

No one says quick a drink or opium

No one – eyes to the higher key –

Turns like now the fall of cracked glass

No one rushes the door.

**She**

The road stops short  
and there is no way to make payments

Plums for the wealthy  
orchestrate the white counter top

Ready to go for the picking  
the young and brown are plucked

There is always some dream of return  
even when the origins are damaged  
Affection is a lingering doubt

To slip unskirted through memory  
where Paradise is plum and scout.

She's seen Versailles  
and the Vermeers in Delft  
but nothing prepares her  
to acknowledge the back of his hand  
It was once and that was enough.

Hello and nothing more

is she,  
so quiet

not even the scar at her elbow,  
the pale silver arc,

an old blue morning moon,  
slivers to the heart:

In the spring wind the tree's young leaves  
percolate like whispering water.

Short are the days, don't even think,  
Short flowers, short death

The flesh of a young woman in spring  
when the would-be lover has left suddenly

Disappearance down to the root  
The silence of wind against nothing

A voice without an echo. A character  
called Age. With no rain on the roof  
the blue sky builds nothing. No longer young  
she listens to gather a memory,  
moss covered wood, the green thought.

In the Mountain Park, the high white waterfall – the waters blown –  
Rocket torrents – one fine white layer laced on top of the other –  
The *basso profundo* rumble, the trembling waters over brown rock  
The tornado called *a loosening God*.

You can smoke issues into a trail  
So far we have – the original fire

turns into a geranium

The tidal wave strikes the coast  
Homes and roads crack and crash  
We welcome the wild

It eliminates the stark, striped bow tie  
at the Opera  
Now the voices really fall

Her accent cuts the air like a torch  
A signature in sound illumines the trail.

She swims against stiff green water –  
each stroke a cut against aqua-velvet –  
suede streams cross her back:

Her hand grazes the wall into a flip-turn:  
her butt and thighs an hourglass follow through to pointed toes

pushing back against the blind  
hard wall - to go forward on impulse  
in which the equilibrium of her face  
turns sideways up and Belief  
composed and charged - races through the water.

**He Alone**

Two against two, he sleeps apart  
nothing physical –  
an amputee in mourning.

The daughter's foot  
massaged and extended  
on the parquet floor  
to perform a triple-axle  
in front of three sisters.

The sky between the thief  
and the stolen  
where anger and those  
who are not  
wrangle to part.

She reaches for the light bulb  
its wattage out  
The silver part on the window frame  
white French tulips at a tilt  
Her hands grip the chair  
a kitchen without odor.

No horses on the morning track  
Redwood burls from Northern California

slowly burn through the night.  
The heart of soundless desire

rolls in and out of the ocean's curve  
into a language – word by each word –

soft as flame in the low burning seaside grass:  
the tongue in full crouch against the clouded sky.

The gray rabbit on this side of the door –  
Animal or gift?  
Push your foot against the dark – heel and force:  
Crimson eyes in the orchard. Rabbit into rabbits.  
Inside the silver cage  
there's no other, nothing at the opposite  
which compels loss and no wings.  
Guns are numb but certainly provocative.  
Numb produces nothing: numb loss,  
numb forefinger and thumb.

One hand wraps around the bunny's heart  
The ears quiver to alert

His face, her face on the inside:  
Animal or gift  
Dip into the dark inside a smooth case.

The river slithers into and out  
A meadow in light and impoverished grass

Apples (ecstatic chipmunks)  
fallen with dry, dark bruised skins

As much hurt as released  
along the channel

Among the parched limb  
she grips the voluptuous trunk

So that he may return, again and again

Blue woven thread  
across white rises to loom.  
A spirit arrow crosses  
her dress. He is not that point

The diving board on which  
one unclothes to spring

The naked aspiration  
of a stuck man about to jump.

Love is an elastic timber  
with branches into the night

To tremble and become bearable  
is not a wish against the green

Water shakes and opens

Someone else wears the blue shirt  
You hold the broken body

What is lit across the evening sky  
slips into the mouth

You are not what you are:  
the tall man, his sweet shadow glides.

# Triggers

Nothing can be found, she says,  
beyond the eye's knowing.  
There is no halo in the darkness

Yet there is something real and gold,  
ecstatic and delightful north of California:

A border is eliminated  
and all that squiggles manages to converge:  
someone paints a green hexagon

to enclose a heart and then another.  
We have not talked in a long time.

Ocean on both sides  
Our island within

Three inverted canoes  
The beach:  
Five paddles make it serious

The shape of her – an olive hourglass –  
when she flips at each turn

The heart that does not leap  
is a mistake of the first order

The slightly dark mole  
at the edge of your lip.

Thin green stems  
in a thick clutch,  
crimson and white,  
a tree has no word for lust

*Go, get in line*  
*Can't you tell she's waiting*

The big bird goes quiet,  
the parrot loops a whistle

The turtle dips his green head,  
twice for emphasis.

Spring. He said *no limits*  
I will write my way through the trees.

Heaven is an Irish woman far away and given.  
What crosses the pillow is a sewn image

woven to the heart – high or low we are wed to that –  
a charitable sweetness matched with lust:

When you are blessed, you are really blessed.

Ascend and dive  
and don't tell me a thing  
I've got a good love on the loose

A wet madrone, skin peeling, its bone bare trunk

Never stop for thought,  
especially when the going's good

She's inside me, then out,  
tactile as a banana or something to munch

Spasms spring tender illuminations  
mauve and pink –

I am a young man now and a young man then:  
Live live live

Morning together in the kitchen  
Fifteen apple pies, peels thrown to the gulls  
Bury the cores in the garbage and finger lip the crusts.  
Don't call anyone. Who cares?  
Fortune is a crisp skinned apple  
Paradise a lick and a bite.  
*Apple, apple delight.*  
Coupling mounts to an unseen Divine  
Bodies sweat, grow thin, grow round  
Flesh, my body, yours, the open flower.

In love's bird there's a blindness:  
Everything is true. In love's suspense  
    only one heaven:  
Our faces go everywhere singing –

A California dinner on the quick:

Organic potatoes from Stockton – pink, beige, purple –

Artichokes from Watsonville – *pesto*, mayonnaise, or butter –

Green leaf lettuce from Gilroy – olive oil and balsamic vinegar

May and evening light is much longer

Fog turns the cool air in from the Pacific

Sweat from a hot day evaporates

The moon is swollen, the horses have run

One lone rider may protest victory

Only to lose the day and forever

While he who led hugs his horse

And says it was she not he:

Skill with submission to define

The moment by a nose and a length

Others bow, honor grace, and wait.

**Green**

Goats don't love the shepherd  
nor the order of flutes,  
but the grass champed, savored:

Wood argues against forest,  
branch by branch. Knowledgeable  
unlicensed green, naked,

a challenge to all the ornaments.

It's a day of friends  
Raise the pipe  
and close the curtain  
Ignore the despair of others  
Circle the pipe and praise fertility  
Our throats rasp lightly – an occasional cough –  
Breath by breath songs rise. Outside  
the continual humming in the woods.

A Bull measures nothing

Try a horn on your lap

To live and live again

The Condor perched on my head  
provides a victory of sorts

The flight forward is not foolish

Daily we make solid purchase

Eyes to the mountain we rise.

High mountain lupine  
Fold foot to trail, stone to stone, step by...  
The nature of new green, the coyote without others

Before the water falls and blows,  
a snow so white  
the gray and silver granite glows

To act against solid things  
Nothing is worse than a smash  
The delicacy of large things unfolding:

The orange-tipped, white-winged butterfly  
The lavender-winged spiral of the several  
The granite well of the reservoir, the cream, beige light.

Jump into the large, darkened bowl  
like a 19th century boy floated on a river pool  
Green the shadow from the overhanging tree,

arms outstretched, the chest arced back:  
The Devil may care with my naked body  
embraced by the cool; sweet light  
eliminates intimations of despair:  
God cares to sweep back my wet and silver hair.

The oaks in the mountain,  
the moss so thick  
there is no immediate finish

Thin morning mist  
dissolves off a makeshift bench.  
To be here, separate  
and together, as old  
and young as her thimble of wine  
once carefully placed on the tongue

while the weight of the hills  
falls down another slope  
and what is green here  
clearly matches a green there  
and a green once everywhere  
while what remains within  
goes out and what's in  
is also green

and he and she and I  
are neither young nor old  
but in a green wild  
resonant among each and every living thing.

## *Coda*

Milk my silver hair  
for all my thoughts  
turn outward: smooth  
showers calm tempest.  
Those who coast rise  
    over the rocks to  
ride combed waves:  
The interior life  
is neither green  
nor blue. The simple  
thought to know I've  
given up – word by word –  
the green in loving you.



Stephen Vincent lives in San Francisco. His most recent books include, *Walking* (Junction Press), *A Walk Toward Spicer* (Cherry On Top Press), and *Sleeping With Sappho* (faux ebooks, <http://www.fauxpress.com/e/vincent/>). His blog of poetry, commentary and politics is found at: <http://stephenvincent.durationpress.com>