

Under Construction

Senior Paper

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Under Construction

Alyssa Vincent

Mr. President,
“railroad” carriages are pulled at the enormous speed of 15 miles per hour...
The Almighty certainly never intended that people should travel at such breakneck speed.

Martin Van Buren, 1829

PRAISE
FOR UNDER CONSTRUCTION

“Go off!”

—Friend

“I think I got, like,
what you were going for.”

—Same Friend

—Roommate,
silent treatment
week four

“Incredibly okay.
As in okay, incredibly.”

—Inner Critic

“I love it.”

—Mom,
hypothetically

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WINE LIST

Whites

Reception
wild berry with notes of oak 7.00

Nimbostratus
rich pear & cloudy nuances 8.50

A Couple Things You Shouldn't Do
lingering coppered citrus 11.00

Treat
raspberry & salt water taffy 14.00

For After All, Yeehaw
grass with unzested lemon 17.00

Reds

Cumulonimbus
roasted vanilla blackberry 8.00

Maybe...
fair trade ambrosia 10.00

Couch Apocalypse
strong tones of caulk 15.00

Poet is Cut off In Traffic
burnt pleather 16.00

Happy Medium
various unpeeled fruits 19.00

Sparkling

Nacreous
apricot & polar lights 9.00

A Couple Remnants of Past Lives
overwhelming combinations 18.00

Under Construction
fresh, metallic herbs 20.00

Transmission
essence 22.00

DISCLAIMER
FOR UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Please, let me take off your coat. Sit down, have a drink.
You're just in time for my turn on the stage
to strip.

Watch me let down my hair,
then grip the pole
with my left hand. I can be dexterous.
Watch me swing around
and around and sing
Moonlight. Moonlight. Moonlight.
Poets shouldn't like it
but they really do.

Look closely—
as I peel my skin
down one leg
and touch my toes. Go ahead,
stare at the muscle,
my pus-colored fat, then look
at my lidless eyes, my lipless teeth.
Do you like this, too? Me,
skin-wrapped sack of organs?
Oh come on,
I'm singing about the moon.

For after all what is man in nature?

A nothing in relation to infinity, all in relation to nothing, a central point between nothing and all and infinitely far from understanding either. The ends of things and their beginnings are impregnably concealed from him in an impenetrable secret.

Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* No. 72

Reception

In a small cottage
overlooking the mountains
snug under snow clouds
drifting slowly to nowhere
I watch Real Housewives.

Cumulonimbus

Under the nozzle
head bowed, shoulders burning
craving human touch

Nimbostratus

When the mud is soft,
shoes come off for a long walk
until I feel clean

Nacreous

An astronaut breathed
she felt small under the stars
the cold auroras

Maybe life really is all a simulation by

God, sitting here,
at a desk like all the others
working through the night,
helping the program run
but nothing runs right,
rapping knuckles on the screen,
spilling coffee on the keys,
tempted to pull the plug.
“Would serve you right.”

A Couple Things You Shouldn't Do

Don't be a know-it-all.
Don't be ignorant.
Don't be a martyr.
Don't be selfish.
Don't not be a little selfish.
Don't lose control.
Don't be a control freak.
Don't overwork yourself.
Don't be lazy.
Don't waste too much time.
Don't waste your life.
Don't live without purpose.
Don't obsess over having a purpose.
Don't wish you were younger.
Don't let age define you.
Don't let mistakes define you.
Don't make life-ruining mistakes.
Don't make trouble.
Don't make a fuss over trouble.
Don't always be contrary.
Don't always agree.
Don't make excuses.
Don't excuse poor behavior.
Don't forget you can't control his poor behavior.
Don't forget you just have to accept some things.
Don't make people's lives difficult.
Don't make difficult people your life.
Don't forget to dedicate yourself to helping people.
Don't dedicate yourself to people who only help themselves.
Don't lose sight of the greater good.
Don't equate the greater good to your greater good.
Don't be heroic to gain approval.
Don't miss opportunities to be heroic.
Don't think too highly of yourself.
Don't think too lowly of yourself.
Don't overthink.
Don't identify with your thoughts.
Don't identify with your possessions.
Don't identify with your accomplishments.
Don't let others decide your identity for you.
Don't expect life to unfold as it should.
Don't forget the universe is unfolding as it should.
Don't expect everything to happen for a reason.
Don't forget meaning is as powerful as humankind.
Don't overestimate how much your actions matter.
Don't underestimate how much your actions matter.
Don't go around believing nothing actually matters.
Don't always expect the worst.
Don't neglect to keep the worst in mind.
Don't drive drunk.
Don't let friends drive drunk.
Don't take friends for granted.

Don't let friends take you for granted.
Don't try too hard.
Don't not try hard.
Don't try to be the best.
Don't not try your best.
Don't equate your best with your highest standards.
Don't think higher standards are inherently better.
Don't disappoint people who matter.
Don't think someone doesn't matter.
Don't beat yourself up for making mistakes.
Don't make the same mistakes your whole life.
Don't mistake longing for love.
Don't mistake infatuation for love.
Don't mistake feeling wanted for love.
Don't mistake the love of love for love.
Don't always equate falling in love to true love.
Don't fall for scams.
Don't fall for white lies.
Don't fall for fake news.
Don't convince yourself love is a lie.
Don't convince yourself love is always true.
Don't forget love matters most.
Don't go around saying love matters most.
Don't go around trying to fall in love.
Don't forget everyone loves differently.
Don't make a habit of not saying I love you too.
mined life is not worth living.
Don't forget an un-lived life is not worth examining.
Don't let the pressure paralyze you.
Don't forget you won't always feel like this.
Don't spit in public.
Don't try to be cool.
Don't believe you're not trying to be cool.
Don't be such a coward.
Don't prove your bravery with recklessness.
Don't prove your rightness with righteousness.
Don't blame others instead of taking responsibility.
Don't blame others for your unpleasant emotions.
Don't swallow every unpleasant emotion.
Don't self-destruct.
Don't be immature.
Don't grow up.
Don't stop dreaming.
Don't stop at dreaming.
Don't settle.
Don't refuse to be satisfied.
Don't think not crying is maturing.
Don't try to be enlightened.
Don't not try to be enlightened.
Don't break the rules for personal gain.
Don't break the rules unless you know them.
Don't forget to let yourself take breaks.
Don't numb yourself every time you take a break.
Don't break hearts to numb your own pain.

Don't do hard drugs.
Don't be a hypocrite.
Don't be covetous.
Don't be petty.
Don't be stingy.
Don't be generous with everyone but the poor.
Don't think someone doesn't deserve love.
Don't decide you're some tragic exception.
Don't love parts of others selectively.
Don't love parts of yourself selectively.
Don't neglect your emotional health for attention.
Don't always focus on flaws.
Don't always let people tell you what to do.
Don't lack self-awareness.
Don't lack awareness of not being self-aware enough.
Don't assume you know what's best.
Don't assume your gut is wrong.
Don't assume you know anything you can't prove.
Don't assume the unproven can't still be proved.
Don't always refuse to ask for directions.
Don't always need someone to point the way.
Don't spend life doing things you don't want to do.
Don't whine about doing things you don't want to do.
Don't be a quitter.
Don't not know when to quit.
Don't forget the unexamined life is not worth living.
Don't be cruel.
Don't disrespect people's beliefs.
Don't let people disrespect you.
Don't let people disrespect people.
Don't be aggressive in a confrontation.
Don't be passive aggressive and never confront.
Don't only care when it's easy to care.
Don't only have faith when it's easy to have faith.
Don't judge people for caring or having faith.
Don't hope spirituality will solve your problems.
Don't hope rules will solve your problems.
Don't hope books will solve your problems.
Don't always be trying to solve your problems.
Don't ignore your problems.
Don't hope your problems will resolve themselves.
Don't complain when you choose not to change.
Don't forget your problems aren't the real problem.
Don't forget the real problem can't be solved.
Don't forget climate change must be solved.
Don't hold on when you're afraid to let go.
Don't let go when you need to hold on.
Don't let shame or guilt control your life.
Don't control people with guilt or shame.
Don't feel entitled to life turning out okay.
Don't feel entitled to fair.
Don't think justice can eliminate unfairness.
Don't think kindness can eliminate pain.

Don't stop trying to see this world for what it is.
Don't forget we only know a little bit of what that is.

Treat

Coppers whine, pirates yell, a fortune teller rings
my doorbell with finger-cramping fervor.
She is dressed in dark purple, coins rattling
on her skirt, her collar, her frilly sleeves.

Vampires pout, a princess trips, the ninjas
ding-dong ditch into the manicured trees
before a ketchup bottle arrives on my step,
staring up with the widest eyes of the night. I

kneel lower for her. She takes too much candy.
I imagine her: the ketchup, with me, mustard
walking side by side. Bye bye, she waves
and I wave back, turning off the porchlight.

Couch Apocalypse (Clock on the Wall)

Reflections in the murky water,
thin, thorny vines like cracks
climb on the crumbling wall
looming, nearly collapsed.
I still hear ticking. It takes me back
to our numbered days.

*Crossed-off calendar days,
swimming in warm water
racing, back to back
over concrete cracks,
splashing until we collapse
clinging to the pool wall.*

That hole in the wall
is a heap now. No more days
of “This economy!” (collapsed)
and forgetting to drink water.
Tumblers, memories, all have cracks;
Not one left to throw one back.

*You wrestle the remote back
and the clock on the wall
waits. You love those news cracks
relishing these doom days,
like a scuba diver in the water,
exploring the collapsed.*

The church collapsed.
Didn't we say we'd go back?
No, you drank the holy water
and I scribbled initials on the wall.
Such good days.
Such deep cracks.

*Ear-splitting thunder cracks—
our home, collapsed—in constant rain, I waited days,
even praying: come back.
Leaning against the tiled wall
in the tub, pruning in cold water.*

Silent ticking, widening cracks. I sit back
on the couch (collapsed), watching the wall.
Lost in the days. To the water.

Poet is Cut off in Traffic

red roiling veins,
dying stars have the same pulse
supermassive rage

For After All, Yeehaw

I.

*I'm a cowboy who never saw a cow
Never roped a steer 'cause I don't know how
And I sure ain't fixin' to start in now
Yippie-yi-yo-ki-yay
(Frank Sinatra)*

II.

The video was interrupted by a campaign ad.

III.

Q: What is man in nature?

IV.

A middle class hypochondriac. My father works in IT. The entitled type, passionate about golf. Unhealed victim of growing up the fifth son to poor, emotionally unavailable Florida parents.

V.

Nothing in relation to infinity, all in relation to nothing.

VI.

Mr. President,

VII.

Central between nothing and everything, a "railroad" carriage.

VIII.

A postman in Tennessee. My father's brother is lower class, conservative, and grateful to a fault. Lives with his wife and forty year old daughter. Infinitely far from understanding either.

IX.

My mother's father. He knew true poverty. Started working at eight, needs a hip replacement now. Never minded that his second daughter was adopted or gay. He cared that she died.

X.

And still, the ends of things and their beginnings are impregnably concealed from him.

XI.

*Yippie ki-yay
Motherfucker
(Bruce Willis)*

XII.

A: An impenetrable secret, traveling at a breakneck speed:

XIII.

The Almighty Yeehaw

A Couple Remnants of Past Lives

pine needles bent with snow
fresh white rice
a woodchip

four penguin feet
blizzard winds
egg

a lamb's two nubs
horns of the auroch
two Irish elk

salmon migrating
glints in a stream
desert gold wilting

scars on a humpback
an enemy squid
one very colossal eye

bones in an owl pellet
a half-blind hawk
mice skittering

string on a pinky
every string in theory
decaying pines

the seabed
luminescence
remembering

Happy Medium

the in-between, worse than pretentious specificity and worthless generality, shoddy attempts to reconcile our compulsion for conscious significance and our lack of unconscious free will, striving, so much striving, for the pinnacle of truth that is, in truth, some absolute wellbeing, perfection even in imperfection and complete understanding even in misunderstanding, and ego-feeding of sweet dreams, creative enlightenment dictating the direction of all things, all people, to a utopia of homeostasis, blaming fate for any failure, mediocrity, blaming me, a white answerless abyss

Under Construction

NOTICE

ALL PERSONS ARE HEREBY FORBIDDEN TO GO UPON,
TRESPASS, COMMIT ANY DAMAGE, INJURY OR SPOIL UPON
THIS PROPERTY, OR TO HUNT, FISH, TRAP, SET OUT FIRES,
RANGE CATTLE OR TO COMMIT ANY KIND OF TRESPASS
WHATEVER THEREON, UNDER PENALTY OF THE LAW AS
PRESCRIBED IN NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL STATUTES,
SECTION 14-159.6 THRU 14-159.9 AND OTHER LAWS
RELATED TO SUCH SUBJECT.

I keep walking.

My car is parked, my cattle are home,
I am a fish caught and cooked already.
Chain links are hardly literate,
luckily, can't tell me

I'm trespassing. As a tourist,
poet-tourist with special audio guide,
in-ear commentary on everything,
sticks, stones, mud, trees,
the calming breeze on this cool
Sunday afternoon.

These trees with the notices
aren't forbidding.
I am too alone to be caught.

Notice

*A pink plastic tie on a twig,
shadow squirming,
a dancing worm on the dirt.*

This walk is my most precious rebellion.
I must ignore the tenth notice as I ignored the first.

Notice

*A sprawling cluster
of spilt sun, of blinding bright
triangles racing along the Broad,
keeping pace with me perfectly.*

Beauty transports, sometimes speeding
in italics. Like a mall cop. Is that dignified?
Sure, if her goal is to do the damn job.

*The sinking sun stares
far beyond, to the edges
of this whole system.*

Another construction vehicle.
Look at the complex codes and signs.
Water rushing to the right.
Dense woods to the left, then—
a clearing—

*a great tower.
Four steel legs
rising out of the tallgrass*

facing that way just so,
stoic model of metal, dignified.
So there is love at first sight.

“Fuck it up nature!” I call,
because it’s a legend,

and I set out climbing like a child
teetering on maniacal, scampering
until I’m underneath, and look up.

*The lattice,
God, the perfect symmetry.*

Beyond is a path to the other side
of the horizon, a row of shrinking towers,
an infinite direction, beckoning.
I must turn away for now.

Beside me and far away, it stands:
whatever it is that keeps me walking.
Some kind of silence.

Transmission

Moonlight catches lines;
a girl sees a shooting star.
Though faint, the humming
sentinels of roads and fields—
they wink at her in the dark.