

Alexander Shafer

& THEN SPRING CAME BLOWIN' IN

the oklahoma wind blows hard today
& faintly smells of dog piss, so surely
spring is near.
but i welcome the scent.
i love the scent.
the scent of winter's diminishing grip
on our wardrobes & driving habits.
endless trees along every walking
path, which sprouted only death
during winter, are littered w/ palm
sized white flowers, like single scoops
of vanilla ice cream.
you don't notice them most of the year.
they are trees.
until spring, then they're dogwood.
each gust blows the oklahoma spring
scent up my nose & the small white
dogwood pedals fall on my hat & shirt
sleeves, like weightless hail.
a few finches hopscotch the bits of
resurrected branch, rejuvenated
w/ the same sappy pulse, pushing
up the dog piss flowers.
further on, the form, a single blue
bird splits the sunbeams saturating
the concrete at my feet.
down the block i pass a bum sleeping
in a garage entrance.
his t-shirt covers his face & crown,
exposing his fat front sparsely

sprinkled w/ hair.
another bum, chicago, been kicking
around the corner for years, asks for
money.
says he'll wash my windows & my rims.
i'm on foot, i tell him, & haven't got rims
anyhow.
up ahead is the boneyard at the end
of the neighborhood, where dogwood
surrounds the fence from all sides.
a locked gate at dusk caused me to climb
the nearest tree.
dogwood.
high enough to look over the fence, i
take a final handful of branch & total
a flower or two.
nearly knocked a gravestone on end,
but stick the landing.
standing straight & opening my hand,
i look down at the mutilated flowers
as dog piss ran down my wrist to
elbow.
it's springtime, oklahoma.
better than winter in oklahoma.

WHEN JIMMY PAGE ALWAYS HAD A BOTTLE
OF JACK DANIEL'S IN HAND

-after a photograph by Neal Preston

through black & white a basket of fruit, a jug of water & little else litters the table stretching from the bottom right frame. john-paul stands in the middle, dressed in black as he smokes w/ his left hand, holding his right bent as if injured or mechanically reviewing meticulous bass scales to saturate an indianapolis crowd, like a shower. choking on smoke, struggling w/ words or lyric, robert, the only one facing the lens, is bare chested & moments from the stage, but w/ closed eyes. a man hunches between, coated black back in view. he could be bonham or manager or roadie. either way, his shoulders sag & back bends from road burn. the cinderblock wall, painted white, subtly illuminates the careless folds of light colored trench coat. as he sits, his face is perfectly shaded & obscured by jimmy's elbow, cocked at a 90, emptying a black labeled bottle of bravado in his mouth as he leans back further than the chair allows. gazing like a wall-fly, the trench coated man's eyes, his only visible feature, pop & protrude at jimmy's 90. all a total mistake of aligned stars in the back stage universe, taken in a single shot, like rock-n-roll. this is what everybody sees. zoso clad jimmy w/ black hair curling down his back, drowning a bottle, conjuring licks & riffs, bent bow solos. not jonsey in black, not bare chested robert, not back turned bonzo, not preston or his camera, & certainly not ever the out of place human-fly sitting in his tan trench coat, face skewed by jimmy's appetite for lightning.

AT NW 23RD & SHARTEL

in another world, i could've ran him down
in my big black jeep.
thrown his plain blue baseball cap
across the intersection. torn the
pockets from his pants, ripped the
buttons & burned the back
of his coat from skidding the street.
knocked his thin metal cart
on plastic casters
full of carefully placed black trash bags
from his hand to the curb. spraying
the cart's contents, like a fire-hose,
from that pothole on 23rd
to those tire marks ten
feet down shartel. i might've watched him
in another time or place,
as his baltic blue eyes run to rusty rose.
& as the long white beard
covering his mouth & chest turns
a pink
to a red
to black, & blacker
w/ every hack of that impossible cough.
maybe in an alternate universe, my hands
would shake dialing for help (or maybe
they wouldn't) as his
quivered w/ diminishing life.
maybe.
but today, sometime in late january,
a crimson compact turning left ahead
causes me to slow. & in this universe
he is an old man in blue jeans,
a black coat, blue baseball cap, w/
a long white beard, covering
his mouth & chest, w/ his life
meticulously bundled in black
trash bags, stacked on a thin metal
cart, which he pushes on plastic casters
across nw 23rd & shartel.

LIKE A GRAPE CAKE

i sat opposite a
wild haired friend,
who wore someone
else's clothes, on
bar stools as we
sipped cold glasses
of beer, brimming
w/ head.
at night,
hip suburb kids
in tight shirts
litter these
bar stools
looking for other
hip suburb kids
in tight shirts
to fight or fuck.
but at 3 p m
only the
disenchanted
dawn this bar.
"there are certain
things that just
can't happen in
the world," he said,
denying a smoke.
the whore can't
run for office.
the octopus can't
squeeze the dirt
of dry land in
its tentacles.
some folks can't
think.
cracked roads can't
feel anything.
kids can't
tie shoe laces

or wipe their
noses.
band-aids can't
really heal wounds.
college freshmen
can't write
short stories.
carpenters can't
cook brisket.
he stared me
up & down
through the
bottom of the
glass as the last
foamy drops
ran down his
throat.
"take me," he said,
replacing the
empty to the bar.
said he'd never
run fast,
never eat
mushrooms,
never warm
the heart of
some girl,
or her
mother's heart.
he'd never make
a film,
never throw
shot-put,
never be a
railroad worker.
i suppose he's
right, in a sense.
i'm as likely to
make cakes
from grapes

work in offices
w/ padded walls,
drink instant coffee,
remember to water
the plants,
go to war,
exchange stocks,
have children,
sing soprano,
build houses or
bulldoze houses.
sometimes
somethings
just can't
& won't
happen.
might as well
better myself
against the
cannots w/
poetry.

WE ALL DROP THINGS

like white dishes & clear cups,
a flower vase or 3 inch pieta
made out of clay & they all spray,
like water from a hose, when
they rapture on the ground
from the hand of the clumsy fool
or the raging bull,
either way we all drop things.
& ink drops slowly on paper,
like, snow before pages & pages
drop into leather. paint drops on
canvases, like rain, & the folks
who like rain, drop the cash on
canvas. we drop eyes on pages,
on canvases, we drop knowledge,
like sages, before we all drop out
& leave college. both burn-out &
graduate drop it all like a magic trick.
we drop 'em all, from highschool-
wouldbes to collegecouldbes.
we drop girls &
friends & dogs from roof tops
to bitter ends, like some
impossible joke making us
choke, till blue in the gut &
throat. & if you drop 'em
once, drop 'em twice.
we drop time in thoughts,
time after time, like walnuts
into paper cups to sort later,
or drop time dead, like a dog
in the dirt, w/ six bullet side
shooter. but time is a cat,
dying again & again to be
born again & again to witness
everything dropping to an end.