

**SUSAN M. SCHULTZ**

**FROM MEMORY CARDS: SIMONE WEIL SERIES**

**20.**

*The object of our search should be . . . the world.* A crow nips at the tail of a small dog and, because it's a Vine, he never stops. Vines are wanna be trees, but they lack spines. Trump says Ferguson is as dangerous as Iraq; my Cards cap carries a terrible history. Don't touch Cambodians on the tops of their heads, I remembered as I touched a child's soft hair. Her friend kept his cut hair in the hole of a tree beside a reservoir; they visited at least once a week. I went to see purple flowers in the woods near our house because I wanted them to be mine. Someone said they were weeds. Sometimes an aesthetics is not about beauty, but about being. The earthworm's wisdom is involved in soil. Saijo spent his last years simply noting the weather's passing. If we're lucky, what's sacred shifts from metaphor to fact.

--18 May 2016

**21.**

*One does not play a scale for the sake of the scale.* One cat bats at a band of light on the tiles; another sleeps on the red chair, eyes tucked under her left front leg. Doves murmur in back, birds of a higher register in front; the wind participates in it all. My sentences lay down track without presuming to know direction. The hardest assignment of all was to do nothing each day. Guilt, like a thin layer of plastic, adheres to your self-license. You have no right to sit and stare when there are teas and perfumes to sell at the mall. Condos for the rich rise like toadstools from the Ala Moana parking lot. The park between mall and the sea has filled with a tide of tents and tarps. Toadstool is to fungus as penis is to man. The beauty of function so outstripped by this wall of unblinking glass. What you see from it cannot possibly be yourself.

--19 May 2016

**22.**

*Beauty: a fruit we look at without trying to seize it.* It's my argument against a certain kind of poem, one that charts conflict, then steps outside as if to say "I quit." A man was beating his son in the bathroom of a pancake house in Williamsburg. As they walked out, my friend stared at the father. "You didn't like what you heard?" the man yelled. No, and no, and no. What counter-balance can memory make, a man listening back to hear my friend say no. No doesn't leave the restaurant, stays still-in-movement like snapchat. Kindness, like trauma, repeats itself. But it needs first to pierce the skin.

--20 May 2016

**23.**

*To see each human being (an image of oneself) as a prison in which a prisoner dwells, surrounded by the whole universe. A Republican senator claims we are an “under-incarcerated society,” by which he means there aren't enough private prisons. My student is a private person who wears a mask. I was astonished when others finally saw the distress in me. The prison-house of language is no place for such conversation; it's what we can't know that's true. But in its absence, sit down on your cot and bask in the glow of sunlight as it strays across a bare sink. Eyes are the locks of the soul. A crow bar would blind you, so pour honey on them. No guard can open that slick sweet lock; he meets your helpless gaze with his own.*

--21 May 2016

24.

*It is better to say 'I am suffering' than 'this landscape is ugly.'*" The Chinese poet said he suffered and I envied him, not for his suffering but for the word. The gap between suffering and our words for it is like a trough in the Ko'olau; even rain can't fill it with enough light. Early morning wind and birds conspire an ambient sound. Brssss, Sangha would say. Was he ever sick, his aunt asked, and I said no more than most kids. The cousin who shared his rounded face carried a cell phone. I caught a ride on her motorcycle, zig-zagging down a thin road between densely packed thatched houses. The village stood on a point of land; up the rutted road people kept thousands of ducks in pens. What's ugly is not land but what it hosts: genocide, HIV, a brother missing in Thailand, another whose face closed against our gaze. We nursed our clouded glasses of tea; in front, Sangha held a framed photo of his dead birth-mother; his grandmother quietly placed her hand on his leg then pulled it back. We know there's been a wedding and a funeral since. When asked if he'll return, Sangha says he got to leave.

--22 May 2016

**25.**

*The temporal was only a bridge.* Radhika asks what apostrophe means and I say “O bridge!”: that doesn’t refer to hours the governor closed a bridge out of spite. Power is a means, yes, but it’s also mean--the way a lack of commitment masks itself as indecision. She fears the cruelty of breaking a non-commitment, asks the newspaper ethicist what she needs to say. A world-renowned professor sexually harasses his foreign students. The question we pose is so obvious we hardly need ask it. She wonders what is more cruel, the saying or the not-saying. If the bridge had an end, we could never get off it, gulls arcing beneath us as we worried over concrete spalling, angled for repairs. The man whose shrill shirt balloons never lands, hangs in the air between roadway and the river. We have stopped him cold with a single syllable, calling into being what never ceases to die. The lyric is a lie.

--23 May 2016

**26.**

*Every separation is a link.* A tall unshaven white man in ankle wading pants carries a metal pail from Times to the crack seed store and down toward Subway. I'm buying banana bread outside the plate lunch place from a shy skinny kid who plays lineman on his football team. His mother doesn't know if that's offense or defense, but she knows he has six cousins and a brother who also play. Before she comes out of Pakela's Plate Lunch place with change, the man with the pail walks by and asks how much. \$5 I say, and he says, "not this time, not this time." It crosses my mind to buy him a loaf, but I don't. I watch him walk past with his pail. As I open my car door I remember the bag of toiletries in the back seat. I gather together shampoo, toothbrush, moisturizing cream, and set out to find him. I circle the parking lot three times. He's gone.

--24 May 2016

**27.**

*We have to try to cure our faults by attention, and not by will.* I looked down at the First Folio's open page and read, "to fleep perchance to dream." When a dyslexic businessman looks at street signs, he sees letters but not where they belong. His only order, memorized. My student's sentences flit from hurt to hurt like hummingbirds. I ask him to look at what he's leaving, but that's for a later age, after the slowing down of synapses (and their attendant asps). The dream included snakes, but they were shedding skin rather than flashing it. Earth is covered with our molting: shell casings, bird shit, flat tires, a pile of wood where a single-wall house fell in on itself. To attend to this is not to reverse animation, turn tragedy into farce. It's to rest in the particular moment of our dying. The envelope arrived from Thailand with hardly any address on it: my name and place of work. Ithi's memory book; flip it either way and he smiles. Dead "by his own hand" at 33 on this Good Friday. I fucking hate symbolism.

--i.m Ithi S.

--27 May 2016

**28.**

*From the past alone, if we love it.* A pretend eternity, like the Saigon theme park full of giant concrete Buddhas, where the rides were mostly broken. If movement is fun, then this was monotony. The tea was sweet, though, and we ran into each other on the wooden bridges. If this was a theme park, then our theme was dysfunction in the shadows of a curiously permanent impermanence. A tall ferris wheel jerked slowly over the abandoned roller-coaster, like admin over a humanities department, or athletics over pure science. The Galapagos has a thriving tourist industry; if you wait long enough, you evolve into the person of your dreams. But that's too long to wait, so stop time, before you speed it up. Your flower will bloom as quickly as one Rothko gifts into another. Crystal meth metonymy. He saw young men with the hearts of 80 year olds. Our kids squealed their joy from inside the tunnels of Cu Chi.

--28 May 2016

29.

Just back from Vietnam in 1971, he drove down the narrow road to Miloli'i. The sea's deep there, so they fish in the old Hawaiian way. From one hut he heard the most beautiful music. Points toward the stage: that guy, Led Kaapana. Saved his life. He remembers this song—must be getting old. Scots-Irish-Chinese-Hawaiian. Hawaiians used to welcome everyone in, he says, his arms stretched out in a circle. His family sold his land. Money, he says, rubbing his fingers together. Money. Bought land in Waiahole and grew papaya. But then the Agent Orange; he points to his chest, up and down. Sounds so good, eh? A-GENT O-RANGE. The jungle was a comfort to him, but then they walked out into the bright light. We killed three million of them, and they killed 58 thousand of us. The Chinese fed their hungry. (He's Chinese you know.) His great-grandfather was Scottish but spoke Hawaiian, fished the windward coast. That small church at the Marine Corps; he founded it. They all died of disease, no matter who they were. His unit came after the B-52s laid down their carpets. They killed the ones who were terribly wounded, had to. One guy tried to enlist for a fourth time, but they didn't let him. He remembers this song—must be getting old. He forgets things now. Puts down his coffee cup and walks out the golf course side of Honey's Bar and Grill. It's owned by the Presbyterian Church.

--29 May 2016

30.

*Belief in the existence of other human beings as such is love.* The sentence is tyrannical, though its content isn't. Once upon a time, we moved eagerly toward the goodness of the full stop, trusting in its fiction, content to rest there like a family on vacation. It's our happy place, he writes; the photos of sand and beach umbrellas testify to his confidence. "She's in her happy place," a caregiver said of my mother, long past clauses nested between commas. The sentence stays with us, like a mother at the side of her sick child in a bathtub, bringing her a pail. But what happens when we leave is mystery. We must love what is not there, Weil tells us. The voiceless person flickers between here and not-here like a sentence whose tenses suddenly shift. Alzheimer's grammatical form. It's ok if you let go, I said once on leaving her, as if she or we had volition. Five years ago her body had begun to close down. When I got there, the caregivers said talk to her, but there was nothing left to say.

--30 May 2016