

KIT SCHLUTER

JUICY ORTHOGON

**TWO CARTOONS:
“LOOKING FORWARD TO SUNDAY
NIGHT ALONE”
“TROUBLE FOR DARWINISM”**

JUICY ORTHOGON

To say there were only shapes would be true,
but misleading—I couldn't turn away
from the other thought, myself—but I would
never tell you you're wrong for rewriting
a fairy tale—besides—I couldn't taste
the conclusion, which made all the limbs look
fake—indelibly shiny—bones stuffed under
skin—searing, waxen genitals stuffed into
a too-small glass cup—say, the apartment
looks neglected under the exhaust-chapped
crescent—the sleeping passengers clapping
their clappers—chewing their lips—with
the breeze limited to half an hour a week,
I'm just glad it knows where to find us—
somewhere in the knowledge of language—
catching our lungs as they tarry, mid-
inflation—dragging indolently against
the bright—a tongue slurping its way over
a non-corresponding lip excites me
with its will to remain azure—its obvious
emotional disconnect—its will to
look—and look again—scouring the abject
footage against its better interest—re-lacing
the spoiled, blue grip of choked-up
words—say, the dead know our secrets—
often I've thought so—say, our sense of
privacy is the not-even-whisper slid
under the sheets—having become, like leg
hair, indirect speech—pounding their shrouds—
wringing them of anything remotely human—
ooh, stop chasing anatomy—while the
shadow of the swinging forearm regrets its

lazy showboating—and songs wedge under
pink wishing a cushion, which in time
swells to a mucocele—painless and
covert in the flesh beside the jaw—quick—
let me hide behind the whale’s scapula
while you pour sand into an open book
to keep the page—letting blood—auburn
and teal—rhomboid and fractured—saliva
collected—caries rinsed—if I could stop
talking *into* my ass—that would be a
third way—so, rupture my epiglottis—
and I’ll rupture yours—what’s that
rotten puce material—receding into my
hesitation—tasked with writing anything
so actual as today’s date—their fear
is a barometer of your power—and I
can’t say, “October” without the voice
inside telling me, “No, no. It’s only
July”—say, saying is a way of
serrating the passage of time—macerating
its pulp—filling the day with it—a condom
stuffed with rain-soaked newspaper—the pen
scratches with every mark as if to say,
“I won’t be giving up my ink so easily”—still—
the ink flows against its will—as I wonder
if it’s time to let myself bubble up
to the surface of this muck—if maybe
it’s even time to sculpt a little boy
of it—headlines eyeing the hand like a
bearded face in a tree—without memory—
no intention of looking at the page, but—
—around—so this is where I’ve found
myself—in raw sunlight—by the fourth week
of general burning—deploying shards of a
refrigerated retention of feeling—inhaling
you through the recumbent fiber of

the inner canthus—relief in spurts—
heavy with unbuoyant fruit—may seem
passive, but it's more effective than
the breaking of a fever—aching
in sour harmony—dulled by cobwebs—
dense with suspended fleas—say, there was
phosphorescence on the lake—say, the message
is too long to be impersonal—whatever its
language—say, it brings hard news and
you bow your head—and you prostrate
before it—and you age and the
face in the tree intensifies—that it's
time to explain the image of the forearm—
to turn away from the page—to admit
it's not a little boy who needs to be
here—a child of ambiguous—I don't
have the word—cutting off the spigots
of all the invisible houses—but tell me
again what I see—perched on the cliff
of this, the 100th line—tell me—I want
your cities of water—your daisies in the
sea like strange flesh that rains—bound
to sunlit days—hunks of sky above the sea—
I was surprised to encounter my first
intimacy with rain in a dream—that
half a decade of rainfall had accumulated
to nothing more permanent than steam
rising off flaming asphalt—the paragraph
gives thought a plausible shape—but here—
just say what comes to mind—the suture
is implicit—when I tell the truth I am lying
to myself—when I lie I am telling the truth
to no one—when I can't tell
the difference between—and the
hesitation itself is the answer

LOOKING FORWARD TO SUNDAY NIGHT ALONE

The clairvoyant widow is expecting a vibrator in the mail today.
Cleaning dead leaves from her gutter,
she throws a sopping clump at the duck-lipped mailman
when he says, "Sorry, no packages."

Now it's Tuesday, time to vote.
They walk together to kneel on an off-ramp
and huff a squirrel's corpse.

The widow lives alone.
The mailman lives with his well-read wife.
Someday the mailman's wife, too,
will be called a widow,
and she, too, will live alone.
By then the mailman
won't be living anywhere at all.

Wednesday morning,
somewhere along his route,
the mailman parks by the forest and undresses. Feels
nothing but loneliness. Can't remember
which of his orifices the doorknob opened best.
A sad bird screams food into the mouths of its young.
The widow checks her mail at noon,
though she already knows nothing awaits her there.

On Thursday, because his son is dead,
the mailman drives his truck off a secret pier.
Thousands and thousands of letters.
If he is not dead, surely he will be fired.
In her living room, the widow feels a chill.
"An angel must have eaten a chicken wing!"
she remarks, to no one.

Through the scrub of Friday's dunes,
fire ants haul the largest magnifying glass I have ever seen
over the shoreline.

Plumes of steam rise up as they march across the water.

The mailman's wife is digging a hole in the backyard
to cool her skin against the moist dirt.

The ants gather in a circle above the truck,
orienting the magnifying glass just so,
and the mailman is boiled alive.

"Is my mailman dead or something?"
the widow screams at the man on the radio.

Saturday at dawn
the ants return wearing little diving bells
to plumb the water
and retrieve the mailman's corpse.
With ease they unstrap it from the seat,
haul it to the surface, and
carry it into the dunes.

The widow spends her Sunday on the phone
with Amazon fulfillment services.
The mailman's wife scrolls the feed in the shade
of the hole in the backyard.
Picture the pruning of the mailman's fingertips!
Oh hands, you're so dependable . . .

TROUBLE FOR DARWINISM

“Maybe it is dangerous to live in a room without mirrors,” the Leather Count began, talking to no one. “Maybe, without them, what should be solid—the skin, flesh, hair,—behaves more like a liquid, sloshing beyond the confines of its brimming container.” His mother, so undisposed to taking him seriously that she had never looked him in the eye—
what color are they, again?—
brushed his head with a feather duster. “To help him keep his thoughts organized,” she justified in a whispered aside.

*

The Leather Count’s mother was made of rubber.
Her face was tanned, she claimed, from the light inside the refrigerator.
When she invited us in for a cup of coffee, the Leather Count continued his oration as we walked from his outdoor bedroom:

“Some speak of the miracle of aquatic life as a gift of another planet. ‘Octopuses with their genome far more complex’ than ours, floating nebulously through the dark with their papal skulls . . . An affront to human supremacy! I’ll gouge out my right eyeball, I’ll cut it into slivers on a god damn cutting board in the kitchen just to show you who’s really so complex.”

*

Revolting, the thirst for knowledge, paired with the thirst for blood.

*

Some days Marcel, a local orphan the Leather Count occasionally invited over for a meal, would bet me his dinner that nobody at the table was actually eating the food they brought to their mouths.

He was always right: they only pressed it to pursed lips.

I didn't mind going hungry.

*

"None of them has debt," he once told me, clinking his glass of soda in Morse code. I neither ate, nor had debt, but I stayed because I was in love with the Leather Count's mother, and I dreamt of hiding in a parka inside her refrigerator, of how she might go out of town a few days and come home, open the door in search of her favorite cheese—Velveeta, Kraft, Hood, my god—and find me dead there, my tongue gone a crazy shade of violet.

*

Summer came and, with it, the Count's 28th birthday. Out over the hill of the estate. Inexorably down to the sea cliffs. The whole town came out, if reluctantly. Among the festivities: ring toss, syncopated tuba troupes, ritualistic Bonsai destruction, legal consultation on divorce and other domestic matters, at an honest hourly rate. All phones were confiscated on entry. No photography allowed. Even the children whispered of his vanity.

*

"Give me one octopus who has drudged through Laurent Tailhade's tedious book on opium, one octopus who has translated the work of Juan José Arreola into any octopus tongue! Then we can start talking about who's worthy of eating my eye."

*

On the green, the Count touched dull blade to crystal glass, began to speak—but before his second word a shriek,

Marcel's voice!, a chorus of shrieks. "The wastrel's been bitten by a snake!" "Poor child,

he's gone unconscious." "Bless his soul!" Another child's croquet ball had rolled into what Marcel took for a gopher hole, and when he'd gone to retrieve it . . . Eventually, the boy came to. A doctor reassured:

"The wretch's bite is benign!" Marcel told us he had only screamed because a voice in the ground had spoken to him.

"But what did it say, little Marcel?" implored the throngs.

"That we have competed with the octopus for too long."

*

On Thursday, the Leather Count had Marcel over for lunch. After their meal, strolling the grounds,

the count asked little Marcel about the voice in the gopher hole,

but the boy, even after several explanations, could not remember the meaning of the the word *voice*.

*

"Give me two octopuses who have been caught making love in the family car and spent the night in jail . . . and give me those bastard octocops, too!"

*

"You see...," said the Leather Count's mother. "No, that is exactly it. You *don't* see."

"Of course I see, Claire—. Well, see what?" I asked.

"Outside yourself, the caps and coats hung—by the door, all my stuffed animals, their hands, the disgusting hair on your toes. *That* you see."

"I do . . ."

"But you don't see the expression your face makes when it's thinking of itself?"

What would it mean for my face to think of itself? I wondered.

"There you go again! So stupid looking. Seeing your face is more embarrassing than

hearing my own voice on a recording,

but it's worse, always there—right there on the end of your neck—like you think it's the only thing that matters.

Sure of itself as a fact, as 'a beast in a zoo, spiteful of its miseducation.'"

"I'll start thinking under a new star, Claire," I said, choking my words through tears.

"And which star is that? The one you painted on my wicker basket without asking?"

It was ugly, I admit.—I joked it looked how I felt.

"And how's that?"

"Like a caged elephant."

"Now you've done it!"

*

With every week, Marcel's memory faded. By winter no words remained except,
*a cloud of ink through which / a human hand passes, dividing its sphere / in a line more
abrupt than / the half-starless underside of the sea,*
and he arose, a shadow without metaphor.

*

*"Give me an octopus who gives a damn if he's wearing a loin cloth,
and another who fears picking up the ripe fruit along the snaking paths of his neighbor's
garden—
then we can start talking about who's worthy of eating my eye!"*