

STEVEN D. SCHROEDER



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Steven D. Schroeder

Table of Contents

<i>Live Updates</i>	1
<i>Zzz</i>	4
<i>Yes Men</i>	6
<i>Outside View of the Victory Festivities</i>	8
<i>Yellowed</i>	9
<i>margin note 1</i>	11
<i>X</i>	13
<i>Cryonics in the Time of Climate Change</i>	15
<i>Waterworld</i>	16
<i>Viral</i>	18
<i>Words to Try to Survive Tonight</i>	20
<i>The Undead</i>	22
<i>Trolls</i>	24
<i>margin note 2</i>	26
<i>Scenario Editor</i>	28
<i>The Road</i>	30
<i>Words to Get Here From There</i>	32
<i>The Real Problem</i>	34
<i>Questions?</i>	36
<i>margin note 3</i>	38

<i>Portents</i>	40
<i>Phrases for Tourists</i>	42
<i>Supply and Demand at the Happiness Shop</i>	44
<i>Official Statement</i>	45
<i>margin note 4</i>	47
<i>Nuclear</i>	49
<i>Officer Lost in a Logistics Office</i>	51
<i>The News</i>	52
<i>Mad Libs</i>	54
<i>Words Revised by the Client</i>	56
<i>Literally</i>	58
<i>Known Unknowns</i>	60
<i>margin note 5</i>	62
<i>Just Say No</i>	64
<i>Jury Rigging</i>	66
<i>Words Perfect for First Dates</i>	68
<i>Intercourse</i>	70
<i>How the West Was Won</i>	72
<i>Myths About the Death of the Frontier</i>	74
<i>Grand Theft Auto</i>	75
<i>margin note 6</i>	77
<i>The Gaming Group</i>	79
<i>Words That Start With F-U</i>	81

<i>Fugitives</i>	83
<i>Educational Testing Service</i>	85
<i>Wildlife Weaponization Attempt #127</i>	87
<i>Dinosaurs</i>	89
<i>Words of Cat Aphorism & Affirmation</i>	91
<i>Crossfire</i>	93
<i>margin note 7</i>	95
<i>Citation Needed</i>	97
<i>The Book</i>	99
<i>Words From Your Password Reminder</i>	101
<i>Aaahhh!</i>	103
<i>The March Crosses Another Hard Place</i>	105
<i>Endnotes</i>	2

Live Updates

48 posts in the past 24 hours

Sorted old to new

Rumors could spread by breath or touchscreen

Virus might transmit through fecal matter

Inspection of city sewage predicts infection spikes

Disease causes massive gastrointestinal distress

Government's emergency toilet paper reserve disappears

President declares war against contagiousness

Study finds crowds are fine except for people

Nation's shut-ins should feel fucking lucky, some say

You don't get it unless you get it, epidemic skeptic says

Would many, many cases at once reset the meter?

Infection curve becomes a thrilling theme park roller coaster

Economy won't fall if we don't look down

Foreign virus production brought back onshore

States unsure whether to reopen businesses by force

Students return to learning 33% virtual, 33% in person, 33% in purgatory

Experts recommend not coughing into fifty uncovered mouths a minute

Officials debate suggesting protective shrugs

Is an ounce of prevention worse than death?

Too inconvenient to even ask about, prevention survey says

Tests show 50% or less may or may not have or have had infection

Poll shows 50% wouldn't know this symptom if it bit them

Virus could turn random internal organs into goo or maybe glue

Molten gold is a miracle cure, according to commercials

Disease targets losers, according to anonymous sources

Ignore the bodies, according to executive order

To double the number of beds available, hospitals cut and stack

Disturbing minority healthcare disparities update #834

Potential defects investigated in protective shrugs

Study of molten gold injections hints at harmful side effects

Eccentric pharmaceutical firm starts vaccine scavenger hunt

Virus power rankings versus cancer, car wrecks, context

Expertise distrusted, experts claim, but should you trust them?

Study determines unconfirmed reports survive in air for hours

Disease caused by lies, president alleges without evidence

Opinions differ on drinking molten gold for health

Wealthy countries wallow in vaccine dose pool

Tracking shows cases coming closer and closer
Tracking shows cases coming from inside the house
Virus might be hiding behind you as you read this
How long before your clenched chest is more than worry?
Study discovers your space compresses a little each night
Why the recurring dream where you can only mime goodbye?
Distant has a different definition now
Is what is what will be or will what was be again?
Virus might transmit if you think about it
Virus variant might transmit if you don't think about it
Everything you thought you knew has changed
Too normal could be the newest warning sign

Zzz

If sleep teased us, we inhaled
busy-pills. If it hazed us, we swallowed
mosquitoes and held our tongues
to the zapper. If it counted us
as sheep, our count went from three
bays of neighbor hounds to eight stray
gunshots to how many nanoseconds
before sunrise. Who knew how many
tweakers it took to unscrew
a fluorescent bulb? The easy answer
was *bzzzt*, but *zero* was better
lest we cause the darkness.
The best answer was not to answer.
Sleep called us deadbeats. It called
after midnight and threatened
to repossess our hours,
or made no sound except to breathe
blackout curtains in our ears.
Nobody called the police
because it felt like down pillows

pressed down atop our airways.
Though their sirens weren't that type
of siren, the cops and their noise
of choppers and coffee machines
tempted us more than the daydream
we never told anybody,
so whoever exposed it must have spied.
Some traitors fought to get in bed
with sleep. To get inside
their heads, we needed to fix
both eyelids wide and show flashcards
for *Bullhorn* and *Bulldozer*. No doze
could go on when we shook lazy babies
awake with jackhammer earthquakes.
Those layabouts hit the alarm clock
snooze button, but our readout
always froze on *CHAINSAWS*.

Yes Men

The boss innovated the winning *yes*
one of us mentioned yesterday,
displayed our original *yes* in case
we misremembered our place,
insisted *yes* precede us at meetings,
expected nothing less than *yes*
plus half a pumpkin muffin on his desk
before he asked. *Yes* didn't protest
lottery ticket Christmas bonuses.
Yes lacked the skill to assess
its lack of skills. Our aspiration
to be boss necessitated we *yes*
mandatory morale-boosting
posters of sharks and astronauts,
offices of increasing senselessness,
eyeglass-like devices to microanalyze
our voice and posture, access control
systems based on genetic tests.
Yes didn't resist being piled high
to bypass all walls. *Yes* expanded to fill

time available. In lawsuits, the boss suggested that we testify *yes* was safe if ingested, was fine containing greater than trace amounts of asbestos and lead, was normal despite paralysis in lab mice, made sense classified as a recyclable instead of medical waste. *Yes* didn't question messaging new history into existence. *Yes* adjusted its answers as it guessed the experiment's goal. The boss passed on the title of boss to the boss, so *yes* reassessed its use for us, rightsized the workforce right in our faces, transitioned us into a basketball trashcan, promoted our emasculating nicknames with a press release. *Yes* was not the boss, yet *yes* was also not not the boss. At last, *yes* advanced to its level of incompetence.

Outside View of the Victory Festivities

Each mouth in the crowd launches a fighter jet.
Every confetti flutter represents as much potential
energy as an artillery shell made good. More stars
than on all the souvenir flags, more parts to a salute
than anyone knows. Overturned and burning cars
insist *no I in team*. Lotteries choose what boys become
exiles next. Place where the award for heroism goes
to pieces too small to recognize, where leaders sacrifice
bodies by the score to slow their own fall off the dais.
Disciplined into stone for days without twitching
or breath, watchers still watch with both eyes closed.
To reach an enemy's heart at such distance,
a single finger touch. This country wants winners.

Yellowed

The shade named *sidewinder fang*
we hung dried on a signpost
at the main-gate lookout tower.
Another, *tree die-off*, we printed
into leaflets about how far
before the next water supply.
But no spyglass lens we chose,
whether *endless wasteland*
or *warning light*, could filter
the colors of a highway,
colors of highrises over highway,
moonrise colors over both.
Because we said so was why
nicotine stain and *still a bruise*
replaced the other paints.
What thanks did we get?
The restless planned a breakout
to chase westward colors,
colors of destination, of coastline
close by. For their own protection,

we made *blast of sandstorm* a barrier
around shantytown outskirts,
biohazard sticker a perimeter fence
around houses of dissidents
who disrespected our wisdom.
Once, we too believed in things
but now saw through colors
with no border, with no shudder,
nonstop colors. We elders
would doubtless change the rebels
into elders yet. Our very pores
overflowed *two types of bile*
while *sulfuric suffering* bubbled up
hip-deep as wet cement,
building character. Who else
put children first like us?
Our youngest ones, who left us
last, were colors that represented
open, mountaintop colors,
colors that meant—

margin note 1

the city sits open
alone on yr porch
in an ice storm

I flatten the city
but it still can't fit
thru yr mail slot

I return the city
tho it was a gift
& I broke it

for yr protection
don't go on a bus
by the graveyard

don't go looking
in that doorway
marked FISH

don't go east
b/c the feral cats
learn too fast

please don't go
you city me

X

When we saw beneath
each other's clothes, we knew
we were superheroes. We mutated
lava into love and vice versa.

Conjured by our kisses, binding
contracts demanded we seal
the deal daily. We sealed letters
under adamantium and Antarctica
while protecting our secret
identities in the signatures,
Sugarbomb and *Hugaton*.

With our abilities, we orchestrated
solar flares in the perfect order
to spotlight our adventures
under the covers. Then we settled
into a rental unit with central air,
where *relight the pilot* was no longer
an *entendre* for our talents.

Evenings we'd eclipsed sunsets
with sexiness cooled into a knack

for baking cookies *sooooo gooooood*,
the neighbors said. One Friday
game night, our most gifted
trivia player, who foresaw a future
of tame nights, guessed nothing
but *nothing* and *null* and *zip*.
The inescapable breakup
of the universe soon followed.
Powerless, we crossed out
our eyes with booze to unsee a *why*
science couldn't reason. We froze
our movies on the frames
where it was clearest how special
effects allowed us to appear
on fire again. From the embers
of our fizzled ending, we rekindled
the trick of wishing we could
spin the planet backward to before
our flames transformed to former.

Cryonics in the Time of Climate Change

Here, the deep chamber where people dream
of remember when. There, a bed where couples
who sleep through slow estrangement won't know

their own lives overgrown by every moment taken
for granted. Month after irreconcilable month
drops off the calendar and makes the floor slippery

with promises. That no two arguments are identical
is a myth. The fifty different phrases for saying
should-have-said, a misconception. Past that door,

signs warn, best if opened before this date, please
do not ignore the signs. Outside insulated windows,

the new calamity is happening to somebody.

Waterworld

Forty days and nights of rain
was more than Portland, less than this.
The downpour couldn't be contained
by our throats. While draining
liquor bottles that floated ashore,
we discovered SOS notes
we ignored. When rivers overran
sandbag levees, cost overruns
on our wetland set shut down shooting.
The seaweed strandline rose
beyond all thermometer degrees
climbing our greenhouse, soon to be
Guinness-certified as Earth's biggest.
We dammed, but not strong
enough to hold hell in for long.
On our log-flume ride, the flood
grew higher than how tall
children needed to be to ride,
at which point a kid got decapitated.
The prototype hybrid we created

of wood seaplane and glass-bottom boat
worked on paper. We deemed
the subsequent “submersible” disaster
unforeseeable because the deluge fell
on our viewscreens. The ultimate bridge
project, which had always gone
straight from the mainland
into the bay, now finished quicker
than the *sun* in *Sunday*. We separated
rain from *drop* and *bow* and *cloud*,
but it resurfaced with *curtains*, *carpet*
bomb and *hydrochloric acid*.
Wastewater byproducts spilling over
a vast millwheel couldn’t bail
the whole ocean back to sea
in the pulley-and-bucket apparatus
of our perpetual motion machine.

Viral

*The Seven Years of Bad Cats app
attacked the central nervous system.*

Apocalypse, a study said, spread
if we didn't vaccinate or maybe
doubled if we did, spread if we delayed
sanitizing multidrug-resistant superbugs
clean off the official hands,
spread if we pressed smartphones
too close against our heads
absorbing information on microwaves.

*The link got like a zillion likes
just like Monsanto engineered.*

Apocalypse learned to sidestep
detection efforts through identity theft
of the recent and soon-to-be deceased,
to backdoor any quarantine
by only following the rules
with well-deserved loopholes, to slip
across borders inside a laptop case
or far more unsavory places.

*Great Aunt Gladys sent this video
and what happened next was shocking.*

Apocalypse, we read, tracked
strokes of our dirty dirty searches
and threatened to reveal the results,
showed us the shortest distance
to what it pretended was our beds
but resembled a morgue refrigerator,
swore to take care of (not *take care of*)
our loved ones once we were gone.

*That monkey had the cutest little hat
and jumped the gap to people!*

Apocalypse hungered for understanding
of taste and juice and crispness
when it bit an apple, craved a fix
for the issue of a broken songbird
whose wings its fingers held
too hard, desired someone warm
to reach out unprompted and say
everything would end okay.

Words to Try to Survive

Tonight

Why won't trackless call you
back? What does north say
when you're not there? Dot
the shadow's endpoint twice.
I'm out here without a light.
I share your stories in the
dark. I'm disappointed by
your choices in camouflage
and love. Will you forever
shelter under humor? Will
my footstep echoes be your
only friends? Fire skyward
three times. I won't be
located except on my terms.
I hunt by running unmoved
the other way. I want to stay
in maybe. Are you smarter
than your search for me? Are

you sure you can carry all that
quit? Hold the cut above
your heart. I'll fall farther on
purpose. I'll welcome your
help with silence. I'll lie a
minute for warmth. Can you
dig deep enough to unearth
yourself? Can you die of
what might have been?

The Undead

For eight straight years, the president
preferred the *Z-word* euphemism
over our term, which was punchier
if quite impolite. Legislators debated
whether to fight the war on *Z-words*
by enforcing current laws
or not at all. Despite any evidence,
we blamed the *Z-word* epidemic
on natural causes and media hype
and for bringing it on themselves.
Pollsters told us a rising number
of likely voters would believe
Z-words before they equaled zero.
One such nothing dug fingerbones
into our dreams about being too late
or never. A numb hundred
stumbled after forgiveness from us,
arriving halfway to nowhere.
A thousand whose faces echoed
our cousins who'd come back

from combat a little different
came back a lot different
from the point of no coming back.
A countless million bodies counted
as nobody on the lists we kept
quiet inside. We investigated
the unrest, mysterious reappearance
of missing citizens from a cemetery
cover-up, concluding *No comment*
on an ongoing investigation.
Our non-apology, almost inaudible
and mostly insincere, offered
the undone their innate right to feel
offended by us. On the advice
of counsel, we read from a statement
that admitted, in the twilight
dividing those of us who didn't die
from the none of us who did,
the unsaid might in fact exist.

Trolls

All signs pointed to them.
At bridges, vigilantes spraypainted
r onto *Tolls* to warn what creatures
crawled from underneath, patrolled
the booths after our departure,
changed the charge from dollars
to toddlers. After the *Yield*,
below where we added *or die*,
stick-figure graffiti with fins
and Hitler mustache was a sketch
of the enemy. The epithet fit better
than *La Chupacabra* on billboards,
so we sloganecered it from AM radios
wired to car batteries. Rumble strips
between our drift and sleep
broadcast their laughter, their breath
carbon monoxide fumes. They stole
through minefields, uncaught
by motion-sensing cameras
and concertina fence, to steal

goat entrails for fortunetelling
or feasts, according to authorities
whose full titles started with *Certified*
and ended in *-ologist*. To control
Expectant Mothers trickery,
we othered them. Moles undercover
among suspected fellow-travelers
revealed *Will Work for Food*
spread insurgent propaganda,
dog-whistling *Kill Words for Good*.
Though hired hunters couldn't read
their spoor, nor hounds find the trail,
all signs still pointed to them.
Blurry photos always seemed to catch
tips of tails. Uncles saw somewhere
that they feared fire. We scraped *No*
from *Open Flames* and carved
exclamation mark, exclamation mark,
exclamation mark. Straw and aerosol
turned our pitchforks into torches.

margin note 2

for you a lullaby
about surveillance
states & yr safety

a fairy story I tell
w/ data breach
data blanked out

a security blanket
to block yr face
vs. anthrax

that black site
is nothing serious

dread nothing
threat level RED

nothing laws end
mass nothings

for you a nightlight
ignited by vigilance
against predators

nothing scary
lurking in yr closet
recording this

Scenario Editor

We only had to *take a picture*.
According to our mission briefing,
we had to *fix the camera*
and take a picture *of the missing person*.
If our decoder was correct,
the message said we had *less than a day*
to fix the camera *with a hatchet*
and take a picture of the missing person
in a desert stacked with rattlesnakes.
Our clandestine contact,
voice distorted for anonymity, told us
for full pay we had less than a day
to fix the *tamper-proof security* camera
with a hatchet *undetected*
and take a picture of the missing person
carrying a briefcase of state secrets
in a desert *shack* stacked with *landmines*
and rattlesnakes *before she died*.
We only had to take this one tiny thing.
For the key to a safe deposit box

holding a systems administrator job
with a heartland insurance firm,
retake one alkaline map-square
scaled an inch to infinity.

For directions to a jewelry box
with Fourth of July fountains
redder and bluer than any on the block,
take coordinates for one airstrike
ending a Mexican standoff.

For clues toward a shoebox
buried with a stranger's childhood
memories of dirtbikes and sandcastles,
take one shot with zero doubt.

For rumors about a matchbox
of dirt and sand, take breath
straight from one throat. For the idea
of a box, take away one weightless item.

The Road

Turn back. Nothing but trouble ahead.

But we'd seen behind. With one hand
on an automatic pistol's grip,
our wheelmen used fear to steer past
barricades propped up by martial law
and plywood, past state-trooper types
whose mirror shades reflected
chaos gaining over our shoulders,
past spike strips that appeared
far after the final printed map.

The mountains could provide a hideout.

Forget guides, fuck survival—
city lifers preferred skyscrapers
toppled across eight lanes of asphalt.
Besides, we heard enough noxious news
was oozing from the mineshafts.
We played chicken with the broken
brake lights of abandoned tanker trucks,
that in adrenaline's red revelation
we might heed the voice of Jesus

on *In Case of Rapture* bumper stickers
and emergency broadcast loops.

Exit your vehicle. Do not attempt escape.

The whirlwind covered ground
so fast it gusted our rustbuckets
clear through the ruin we knew
once the GPS quit its misleadership.

A vagrant and his *The End*

Is Near cardboard sign, both lying
half in a ditch, doomsaid some more
before the fever wasted him away.

If you arrive where you fall,
you've gone too far. Wider than eyes
that luminesced along offramps
and we prayed belonged to wolves,
the horizon loomed close enough for us
to touch promise on the sunlit side.

We traveled to the inevitable, driven
home by nailgun *thump-thump*
speech of speedbumps, potholes,
bodies: *wrong way, wrong way, so long.*

Words to Get Here From There

This dot is a pitfall. That
matching dot is a shortcut.
This dot moves if you don't
watch. That dot watches you
move. The spot I'm too
outsized to fit is me. Arrows
follow always. Navigate by
looking backward. Your
destination is gaining on
you. Go faster than the past.
Go past the sign you missed.
Go through landmarks you
assumed you knew. I'm the
turn you're already making.
Right is right. Left is also
right. Your route might be
wrong. Stay on the
straightaway to spite me.

Take each fork. Stop at your
opposite. Stop when you
reach what you can't. The
end is a crossroads without
an outlet. Street at the end
becomes not-street. Way
becomes no way. The end
kind of trails off. There's no
I or you in here. There's
nowhere in me.

The Real Problem

Our solution had class.
Our solution had so much class
its jumbotron said *CLASSY*
in neon green, twenty-five feet high.
Our solution had a quesadilla press.
Our solution had a V8 Hemi.
Because our solution had a hammer,
everything looked like the problem.
People blindfolded and spun
dizzy by our solution pinned
the problem on our predecessors.
We regretted to inform people
our solution came back more
addictive and contagious
and toxic than the problem,
so we didn't. Instead, we said
There's a problem so long and loud
that people saw, though we thought
they didn't know the problem
from a hole in the ground.

We threw plastic bags and pesticides
and denials in the hole
until it became a real problem.

Our solution threw money around,
other people's money, of course.

We said *They don't work*
of other people's solutions
after we cracked their kneecaps
in freak pickaxe accidents.

The hole's ammonia and sulfur smell
came from untapped gas reserves
or hell. When people fell in
with a helpful shove, we shoveled
our solution over them and said
This is the hill you picked to die on?
until they couldn't tell
what direction was up-and-up.

Our simple solution, gut solution,
straight-shooting solution,
populist outsider solution,
our solution that contained a hole
within an even deeper hole.

Questions?

What catastrophe? Who disastered?

When did *past* go? How far underground

did *escape* tunnel? Where did we hide?

Could we finish? Could we finish,
triple pretty please? Where did we hide

trapdoors so nobody would trip
and snap their necks, or tripwires

that triggered more and more
difficult riddles about *the before*?

What had two thumbs and pried?

Did we mean *pried* or *pride*?

Who knew the difference

between *flies* and *flies*? Did we mean

distance there? When we caught

that mosquito plague, who carried
the bug from mouth to mouth?

Where did we learn how to gut trout
and bury entrails against tracking?

What if we thought what we learned
wrong? Among 101 uses for urine,

how many provided antidotes to lies?
Did we mean *fertilize* or *sterilize*?
If we always followed the river,
how come we walked on the same graves
over and over and over? Who lived
in those caves, and how long was this
long pig? Which direction was west
when fog clung to the map?
What poison smog hung like a cross
between gasoline and jasmine
in our lungs? Did we mean *minds*?
Who said *you forget* as a threat
and made us cry? What got in our eyes?
Why was the sky ashy whitish?
Could we repeat the question?
Could we? Why? Why?
Why? Why?
No?

margin note 3

how do I find out
about open jobs
& if you like me?

how do you apply
for unemployment
if I *like*-like you?

you may make me
default on my loan
to get yr number

may you make me
pay for not calling
w/ credit card debt

how do I discuss
feelings for you
on the wealth gap?

how many dates
until you can say
late capitalism
as in late father?

I may make you
a cryptocurrency
of not yr type

Portents

Pain in our arthritic joints meant rain.
A forked branch's twitch meant
clean groundwater. The safety inspector
who passed away after testing
what trickled thick and rusty as blood
from wells during the drought months
could have meant anything
by unfit for human consumption.

If we found a penny on the sidewalk,
strangers would be coming to town.

If we found any foreign coins,
misfortune would soon follow.

When a four-year-old was lost
exploring the quarry despite the signs
we posted with the clear warning
No Hope to Prevent This, strangers
took the blame. The first time
a patient took sick with the shakes
after the doctor started selling
nerve tonic as a cure-all, we called

that case *wait and see*. The second was *both sides of the story*. The third, *isolated incident*. The situation where twelve fell from the church stairway built of spackle and prayers with a blank check and no-bid contract we ignored as according to plan or agreed to decide hadn't happened. We all dreamed the same dream, that we somehow elected mayor a literal feral cur, and councilmembers now went missing. Waking, we knew the truth was *give him a chance*. After the newspaper editor's suicide by icepick to the back of the neck led to the headline *HOW MANY LIVES WOULD IT TAKE BEFORE YOU BELIEVE*, our answer turned out to be *every single fucking one and more*.

Phrases for Tourists

We learned the character for *bad*,
the character for *neighborhood*,
and how they combined to form
the one for *photo opportunity*.

We misheard the hundred words
for *ruin* as remainders bargained
chunk by chunk for *how much?*

We said the phrase for *please
speak English* a touch or two
too loud, too slow, too much
like an expletive intended
to start at minimum an argument.

That language which contained
more abandoned rendering plants
than fit in the backyard of any city
worldwide might be transmitted
by skin contact, that language
scavenged with a shopping cart
haul of copper pipes and wire
behind fire-gutted supermarkets

kept a thousand charms
to separate us from money,
that language could have been
wind through boarded windows
insinuating dangerous ideas
into schoolchildren's brains.
A question that had determined
its own answer wondered why
try to flee the crash scene
if we did nothing wrong?
A statement that wanted to help us
explained if we had nothing
to hide then we wouldn't mind
submitting to a search *or else*.
The sentence if we didn't admit
or comprehend our crimes
was a coin toss between *This*
is America and *This is not America*.
We had nothing to declare.

Supply and Demand at the Happiness Shop

Without sign or sound, the store announces this product more popular if secret under counters, this deluxe edition more profitable issued at random. Aficionados will buy

grand opening tickets, then pay for behind-the-glass access to spend their lives on the effervescent and boundless,

one per customer. Discussing the club is grounds to give up this limited item past must-have, this special release

a touch beyond reach. Across the parking lot, abandoned folding chairs hold line order while collectors barter assets—vintage whiskey, baseball cards, their cars—for prospects

of tenderness and friendship they intend to keep sealed in the cellar. This belonging not yet owned, this moment gone the moment it goes on sale.

Official Statement

Video of the incident, edited,
almost obeyed our order, almost
made our story fit. A citizen—
no, *criminal*—was pacified
by multiple blunt instruments
of the state. Of course by mistake
in our hasty press release, *justice*
became *just trust us*. The system
remained utmost. The sole witness
investigators interrogated—
no, *interviewed*—didn't see
what she saw or say what she said
she said. Any direct eye contact
caused us to lose the count
of who got lost. To stand up
was obstruction. To back away,
a credible threat. The subject—
no, *suspect*—didn't look right
while jaywalking, then ran
for what he must have believed

was safety, so we saved him
from himself. When we searched
his person afterward, each pocket
hid a brick. In his hands, toy
resembled gun or perhaps the other
way around. In our hands, his life
amounted to vacant housing
taped off, his blood on blacktop
too dark to identify. In our minds,
the boy was not *boy* but *man*
and that man grew into *monster*
and that monster outnumbered us
less than a second before
we remembered our gun was more
than one too. The city was like that
when we found it—no, *founded it*—
no, *foundered it*. Once we met
the boy, he was already dead
though his body didn't know yet.

margin note 4

boy meets girl
waiting in line
to take a number
to get on the list

boy loses girl
at the test site
in a holding cell
all in yr head

boy finds girl
if this statement
is true-ish & a lie
is where you are

boy is phone trace
& satellite photo
& heat signature

girl is twig askew

or trail off cliff
or birdsong still

I am investigators
close the streets
this close to you

are you
you?

Nuclear

Our moms were bombshells,
all steel and fuel and triggers.
Our dads were demagogues
who said *the bomb* and meant it
must be obeyed. They fit together
better than *military* and *haircut*,
we thought. We fought if they split
war from *head*. We had sex
dreams involving missile silos
and mushroom clouds. Our sisters,
their code *silence*, handcuffed
briefcases failsafe on their wrists.
Our brothers launched by accident
and moonlight. Woken by the hotline,
we pushed the button designated
Retaliate and, when that dysfunctioned,
one marked *Meltdown* flashing red.
The familiar argument was over
who started fission chain reacting first.
The philosophical discussion

*What would you do with your last
minute alive?* devolved into a lecture
on battery life. Our husbands balded
due to radiation poisoning and lost
most of their eyesight to the blast,
they claimed. Our wives also got sick
of canned beets and concrete bunkers
and trusting unsubstantiated claims.
Dogs gone, we trained pet
grievances to carry water. We traveled
desert waste, distant vistas close
as closure, where other survivors
told us *colder*. The fire in winter
caves painted shadows on the bedrock,
our shadows in the shape of broken.
Our sons and daughters were fallout
that drifted deep in rifts but we called
snowflakes, pure like in the stories.
Our sons and daughters were.
Our children.

Officer Lost in a Logistics Office

Conference room always around more corners,
always through an unmarked door, always full

of unseen enemies, unspeakable language
others understand. The fastest route out retreats

faster than that. Whatever the threat, three zeroes
(or are those O's?) refuse an order. On a desk
no longer tall enough to offer cover, photos of family

almost remembered, memoranda like firefights,
coffee stains that resemble defeat. Nothing inside

but the hole a target sometimes wants to punch.
Could be a side effect of meds for sleeplessness,

for internal audits, for surrender. With each blink,
a chemical product explodes behind one eyelid.

The News

Fifty percent of our marriages ended
in stalemate, the rest in restaurants.

We all tested above average
as drivers, a phenomenon known
online for its *leap the median* meme.

A pie-chart infographic showcased
pie shortfalls with an empty piece
bigger than six o'clock.

On what remained of Main Street,
the most popular building styles
were *brutal* and *Beirut*.

Behind our poor investments
hid the Swiss, according to reports
that turned *precision* into a slur.

More employers hired mountain men
and women than financiers
and lawyers, whose numbers we had
financed longer than the law allowed.

The trend where workers threw
themselves in front of a bullet

train shocked the stock market.
In a survey, area hospitals estimated
railroad-related fatalities at a hundred
possibilities from none to untracked.
The top tactic to cope with sorrow
started with cans of chocolate frosting.
Nine out of ten dentists
were identified by dental records.
The tenth dentist was identified
by investigators as a person of interest
and an alleged pediatric practitioner.
If we took the black medicine,
nothing bad would happen.
If we flipped the black switch to *Obey*,
something bad would happen
to a stranger in a soundproof room.
In mirrors, *ECNALUBMA* became
DANGER. One cure for our hunger
required a runaway dumptruck.
After the break, the Indians won
and thunderstorms were coming.

Mad Libs

We felt (*adjective*) about immorality
and how to (*verb*) it, and so in (*year*)
elected a powerful (*profession*)
called (*masculine name*) as president
of (*place associated with trouble*).

The new Bureau of (*military term*),
however, spent its (*plural noun*
declining in worth) on surveillance
of (*stereotyped group of people*).

For children's first (*invented holiday*)
at the (*form of torture or execution*) expo,
they gave each a (*weapon*) stamped
(*patriotic and/or advertising slogan*)
in (*color with sinister overtones*).

They moved to (*aggressive action*)
our (*private matter*) and attack us
as (*value judgment*) by choice,
regardless of how much we screamed
(*synonym for exclamatory no*)!

The theory that (*sardonic aphorism*

on humanity) we restated as (*profanity*).

After the (*cataclysm*), we declined
from life by the sword to death
by the (*noun that rhymes with sword*).

With (*plentiful resource*) depleted,
gangs grew like (*sense impression
evoking fire*), their mission to punish
(*crime or sin*), their insignia
a (*monster*) on a (*phallic vehicle*).

Many victims lost a (*body part*)
or (*relative*), but more (*something
intangible but essential*) disappeared.

We disavowed (*sentimental memory*)
the same time as (*technology*).

(*Complete sentence offering open-ended
war metaphor for poem's theme*).

There was no other way to say it.

We (*verb with a hint of sadness,
past tense*) past a (*wistful image
from a wasteland*), (*adverb*).

Words Revised by the Client

I hear this phrase is forbidden? That sentence feels like lies? My brother's neighbor says this clause is gossip? In my eyes that comma causes problems? These letters read too much like writing? Maybe make it a little less professional. Maybe this but different. Maybe similar in innovative ways. Maybe skewed about eighteen degrees. Maybe keep it zippy. More flow! More bang! More buzz! More wow! More zing! More pizzazz! I insist on something that won't waste my batteries. That has a lifetime warranty. Buys me

drinks. Does my taxes. Does your job. Something that expends my effort. Please offer me all possible combinations of thought. Answer brainteasers I haven't posed. Surprise me with my ideas but a bit better. Provide what I expect instead of request. You're the expert except. Why don't you choose?

Literally

Bad words weren't the only words
to be bad. As if we lived in Russia,
syntax tortured us. Like society,
fragmented sentence structure.

Compound slummed to join
any sketchy noun from *bow*
and *fracture* to *chemical* and *cult*.

Just was interested only
in doing right, and might
just prevent the bloodshed
needed for preemptive self-defense.

Lose got loose, and we almost lost
our red-inked fingers guiding it
back to its pen, which then
scrawled *sic* again and again
until it sickened us enough
to sic English mastiffs on it.

Our vocabulary was the biggest
dick joke. We stockpiled dictionaries
to prepare for their consumption,

which meant not reading
but burning and eating.
In order to order the alphabet
around, militarized grammar police
built a net of metal detectors
and X-ray scanners and spellchecks
for every unattended letter.

Aggressive acts were committed
against the passive voice.

Predicates never did what we said
or said what we did. Even numbers
went from informants to dissenters
to hunted. If prepositions wanted
to finish us off, we shot at and into
through. Caught in crossfire, *literally*
double-crossed. We wouldn't lie
or lay about it. We executed all verbs
except *won*. The only good language
we ever saw was dead.

Known Unknowns

How to memorize the names
of underworld fixers, numbers
for overseas accounts and dead phones,
hush-hush and no questions asked.

How much of us existed on a list
representatives denied existed.

Those entries with dried blood spots,
those with cryptic footnotes
about *the lost*, those wandering off
not the final line. History that wasn't
written, eyewitnesses unreliable.

One trick to rig the game
where we spun a globe, then picked
targets with scattershot darts.

Quandaries nobody pondered
like why the winner might desire
lifetime supplies of dust and bone.

What did or did not constitute *missile*.

On whose authority the order,
whose breath fire, whose head ashes.

What came after *aftermath*.
Our path out through confusion
random as weather patterns
and navigated by undiscovered stars
but weren't we sure. The map's blanks
filling with different kinds of night.
Feelings of *flight* and *home safe*
before we woke back in the fake place.
Where we fell on the scale
balanced between too small to tell
and too big to fail. The weight of *mass*
next to *exodus* or *extinction*. What face
in the satellites we launched
to block space, what voice a radio
set to static. This many minutes past
passed away. If our display
almost flickered in a distant eye.
Whether *the end* meant *begin again*.

margin note 5

yr cure is no
way to treat me

my pain rates
on a scale of 1
thru waiting room

X-ray & MRI
are no way to ID
required for entry

anesthesia feels
no need to please
provide insurance

crack yr window
between 10 & 2
some Tuesdays

automate yr door

I trade kidneys
for what's behind

euthanasia creates
no way out of this
is not an exit

Just Say No

No could set us free.

No could take our pain away.

No could let us see the sky
in another sunless meeting room.

No could renovate us right
now now now. Smaller than a pill
bottle, *no* fit inside us all along
as long as we had faith,
perfect size for filling holes,
wide enough to hold the life
we thirsted for if we swallowed
no, but not in a creepy sense.

No looked in our eyes
and didn't blink. *No* wanted us
to trust it wasn't lying.

No swore on its mother's grave
before she had even died.

Though *no* said it would help us
meet people, it wouldn't
allow us out of the house

because *no* was the only friend
or lover we needed or deserved
and *no* would never leave us
alone again. *No* wondered
why we didn't smile more.
No strove to make us better
at realizing what was best.
We owed *no* goddamn gratitude
after everything it did for us.
Despite our games, *no* cared
too much for its own good,
too much to watch us walk out,
too much not to teach us
a lesson about how we'd miss *no*
if it chose to go away.
No was so sorry. *No* changed
our minds. *No* promised
this time was different.
No thought we ought to know
it might hurt a little bit.

Jury Rigging

The young black men assembled
some sort of hammer out of pens,
rubber bands, their summonses
and systematic disenfranchisement.
It did not please the court,
which used it to dismiss them
from the impromptu *us*. We, the jury,
slept on hallway benches,
the judge's bench, a reloading bench
littered with brass casings. Our case,
under a false bottom, hid
a photocopied guide on how to hide
firearms. Attorneys made their cases
questions only: Could you convict
the victim? Would you vote to acquit
the city's cutest kitten's fuzzy belly
if it clawed your magazines
and used the evidence to fabricate
extended magazines? Should you die
before the verdict, who will plead

*I cannot answer on the grounds
that I cannot tell my answer
from the holes in my alibi?*

One grandmother scrapbooked
newspaper clippings into her recipe
for a zipgun from paperclips,
a peanut butter and honey sandwich
plus cruel and unusual punishment.
On what stood for a stand, a witness
defined the verbs *case* and *clip*
and put *shiv* and *shovel* together
without reaching *snitch* or clipping
his fingernails. The court fined time
for loitering. After it found
insufficient funds for a speedy trial
or the vending machine, it tried
to find us *guilty guilty guilty*. By then
we had ammunition for our decision.

Words Perfect for First Dates

I hear silence is mysterious and alluring. I'm here to talk about referral marketing partnerships. Here's my theory about the pyramids on dollar bills. My theory on fluoridated water is for subscribers only. I humbly await wire transfer of necessary funds. I worry about infarctions. About being buried alive. About leg hair when I wear shorts. I worry I sound weird when I say I. I store my bugout bag behind the furnace. I hide behind the other door. My recurring nightmare features my thirteenth birthday party. My first impression spills a

margarita. My second spills
embarrassments on purpose.
My career goal is paranormal
researcher. My pastime is
keyboard warrior. I murmur
preconceptions in my ear.
I'm a rumor overheard in a
hurricane. I'm all the stories
I've distorted. I'm the
universe compressed into a
missed heartbeat. I welcome
learning more about this idea
of you.

Intercourse

The new textbook named S-E-X
the greatest nation on Earth, orgasm
good old-fashioned family values,
insemination *putting God back in*
our public schools. When students
raised academic standards
with their taut bodies, they learned
a lesson in powerlessness. How hot
teachers got to give them some
strict discipline after class.

During detention, we had to hide
our *Western canon* under the desk.

All big boys possessed a *small*
business owner and girls
a *job creator*, their coming together
designated *private enterprise*.

Interns whose dress might *stimulate*
consumer spending were taken
behind boardroom doors to work
on their *work ethic*. How hard

bosses flogged *upward mobility*
in their pants. We liked to watch
married colleagues and *pull ourselves*
up by our bootstraps at the office.
Back home, we roleplayed
enhanced interrogation techniques
with a blindfold and rope
to *win hearts and minds* and naked
for *shock and awe*. How fast
our sin and lust forgot
or ignored the safewords, *peace*
through strength. Shamefaced,
we *supported the troops* alone
with our own hands. We confessed
our most forbidden game
was *government security contractor*,
our acrobatic position *spreading*
freedom around the world,
our rape fantasies, secret
no more, *greeted as liberators*.

How the West Was Won

The hombre introduced himself twice
to the chest with a lever-action repeater.
We dubbed him *Double Barrel*
because we didn't know shit
from shotgun, antler from greenhorn.
Dime novels claimed his mama
gave him the Christian name
Samuel and the common name Sammy
Smile, but he gave them away
to wander a badlands panorama.
Once, the stranger fought off a posse
solo with only his Stetson and a lasso
to cheat the noose. His Colt Peacemaker
did misdeeds in Deadwood years before
he blew through the prairie
and the saloon doors on a stormcloud.
Our guidebooks highlighted
favorite bordellos and outhouses
with bullet holes. They translated
every use of *bullseye* and *cowpoke*.

We called him *Wild Hoss*, branded
by his keepers, who kept
our hands inside the tram windows
to keep them from becoming stumps.
Arrows shafted through their hats
always aimed at the gift shop.
While the man saddled an appaloosa,
they showed how to mix whiskey
with wishes in a spittoon,
making wickedness. When he tried
to ride into history, they rustled
one lucky winner a carousel pony
and a scope contraption with a trigger
A for Ask him to come back
or trigger *B for Bushwhack*.
Both together at his back at ten paces
waylaid our antihero facedown
in the mud, opened his coffin
and made him cough up his true name,
too soft and bloodstained
to understand.

Myths About the Death of the Frontier

They say how tall and laconic. They say nothing survives that fall. As in dustbowl, as in ravine.

Memories lie like mineshafts. This telling adds a rusted pistol. Perhaps a rustle in the underbrush, maybe restlessness. Rumor says the hunting knife

still whetted by a life cutting off what it could now crafts woodcarvings. The toughest animal

to capture? Head of a river, body not found. Men chase who and why based on the color

in their skies. Shade of a ghost, no shade of clouds. Trail grows cold a fortnight northwest from nowhere. They say those tracks can span continents easy

as civilization does. Something lost across the water, something mechanized arriving right on time.

Grand Theft Auto

To commandeer an armored truck
and crush a dozen parked police cars
became our favorite special move
after *crotch punch*. We could also lie,
pickpocket, safecrack, backstab,
stockpile, spy, bribe, hack,
hack, assassinate and cheat at cards.

The choice was *settle down*
versus *break the cell bars with magnets*.

The choice was *bake bread*
versus *forge a passport into a blade*.

We made a machine to hang detainees
by the ankles and shake free
a time bomb's location or at least
loose coins. We made a machine
monopolize the worldwide supply
of supplies. Asked about gas,
we denied the startup of a pipeline
serviced by certain evil countries,
adding *you're paranoid* as a capper.

The choice was *disarm* against
crater a downtown city block. The choice
was *healer* against *benevolent*
shepherd of the populace and president
for life. When we grew up,
we planned to annex Canada.
When heavy artillery massing
in every border fortress fired across
by “accidental” hotkey stroke,
we acted shocked. A sleeper cell
concealed for the sneak attack
activated a gadget that transformed
confederation into *conflagration*.
The choice was *neutral* or *allied*
with all sides. The choice was *white*
or *black as mystery and cool*.
We killed the choice.

margin note 6

to start the game
you select a level
I can't jump over

the game has me
collect 100 leaves
you take & give
their legal names

1 pinkie fingertip
gives you power
vs. my buttons

reset the power
so we never met

I crave the ability
to power onward
w/o a companion

the game ends
when players fall
in love like spikes
& find they like it

if I say I'm game
can you save me?

The Gaming Group

To become our heroes again
in *The Game of Playing the Way*
We Did as Kids, we completed
status reports on what we would do
if we weren't who we were,
the way we didn't as kids. After months
of multilateral chats among stakeholders
and subject matter experts, we settled
on a timeline to add an agenda item
to plan a study to discuss to schedule
an hour or so to perhaps reboot
our adventure. Meeting notes
we reviewed in a pre-meeting meeting
about how very very much
wonder we must have mustered
last meeting communicated only *so so*
looking forward to meeting.
On a laminated reference chart,
handshake ratings for grip strength,
pump vigor, hold length, approach angle,

sweatiness, seated reach, contact
with the left hand, stratagems segmented
by gender, total leverage, etc.,
scored who won greeting dominance,
thus maximizing fun. Each decision
routed through several levels
of disapproval for thoughts and caveats
and hypotheticals and questions
without attribution until the whole
idea, forgetful there was a quest,
routed right back where we began.
As our opening move, we stopped
moves we hadn't made in the middle
of action that hadn't happened yet,
imitating echoes of selves we imagined
we felt we believed we recalled
we knew. Long story short,
we were playing *Too Much Work to Do
to Ever Make This Work*.

Words That Start With F-U

If you please. I mean please me. If you're full of surprises. I mean prizes. If you act like a likeable you. I mean I admire the ideal you. I mean focus groups adore the dimples. If you make impossible somewhat less so. I mean simple. If you can work but not seem busy. If you can be easy to comprehend. I mean get. I mean auto mechanic. If you lighten yourself by twenty percent. I mean lengthen. I mean I see you need both. If you're everything to everyone at once. I mean more is more. I mean more where you came from. If you'd not

fight your fate. I mean tragic accidents happen. If you know what I mean. If you know what's good for you. I mean you know I know you know you know. If you don't mind. I mean you don't matter. I mean mine the entire time.

Fugitives

Our next trick was to disappear
a person for twenty years to life
plus pick their unlucky number.
In the town of Off the Grid,
Nevada, a diner owner who flinched
at each mention of *back East*
could improvise straws and spoons
and paper napkins into an emergency
surgical kit or birth certificate.
We required an audience volunteer,
an ordinary straitjacket
and a panopticon taller than God.
Stowaway aboard a tractor-trailer
that trafficked stolen poultry crates
coast to coast, a drifter
without ID but with a history
shivered in chickenshit yet dreamed
about featherbeds and flight.
Only our gesture could release
the catch that locked our guests

in smaller and smaller nested boxes.
Stuck in a database filterable by name
suspiciousness and beards
from *Abraham Lincoln* to *ZZ Top*,
a facial age-progression photo
imagined what future it could hold
if it were free or had hands.
The animal we produced
from an empty cage was half rabbit,
almost dead, so we said *rabid*.
In a cell where wind and sunlight met
a wall with *window* written on it,
a contortionist escape artist
slipped partway between the bars,
looking too much like us for comfort.
After the switcheroo, we often forgot
which twin came through whole
and which went in the hole again.
We doubled the number.

Educational Testing Service

The directions said to skip a question
meant our answer didn't trust
the test. Question #1 began a list
of things to do with *do you want to*
instead of the true *I want you to*.

At least two questions showed
late without an excuse, as usual.

*If private emails reveal your answer
has been cheating with the key,
what gives you the right?*

We fabricated our answer
a letter per person, never allowed
to speak it. Nobody could see
our entire answer and hope
to stay sane, but a friend
who copied verbatim somehow
scored higher. Our answer was not
for human minds to understand.

*If you interrogate suspects you know
don't know your answer from a bluff,*

how do you sleep at night?

At a top-secret site and date,
the test shined lights on our pupils
until we confessed guessing.

The test divided us into teams
assigned a single pencil and a pair
of pliers to decide the writer.

The best strategy to beat the test
was wait it out, but time expired now.

*If your answer comes from errors
in megacorporate accounting,
who do you think you are?*

We tried to give just our names
but couldn't remember.

A direction after the last question
read *Only answer the next question
when this direction equals five.*

The test didn't seem interested
in the answer wrung from our lungs,
which was *none of the above.*

Wildlife Weaponization Attempt #127

At the skunkworks, tongues made for regime change
counsel moderation, wings streamlined for kamikaze

know how to control themselves. A chimera
of timberwolf and hummingbird and yucca becomes

a homeowners association member, has kids, saves
by comparing minivan insurance plans. In the garage,
foundation-quaking rumbles from underground

pack into boxes of books. On the lawn, no damage
to property values from crabgrass, dandelions

or visible activism. Saturday afternoon is for resisting
to-do list procrastination. Beast whose bum knees

ache when it compromises, animal that cannot even
simulate a damn, tamed thing that didn't think

it might live this long. The final honeybee has been

and gone, or at least lost its memorable sting.

Dinosaurs

Their names meant *terrible claw*
or *scorpion hunter* or *titanic tyrant*.

They meant no children
who learned about them imagined
a world without them. Our heads
fit in and around their braincases,
which hid inside their shadows.

Their thunder summoned
dreams of kettledrums and trumpets.

Despite the roar from zero to sixty
million years in charge,
who could predict their ability to fly
beyond the speed of thought
and through the softest targets?

Their names meant *courage*
under fire or *meritorious service*
or *for your country*. They meant
to fit us with leg irons if we denied
their call to arms, however
vestigial or avian. Their army

encompassed ones who wanted
to run far away, funny ones,
tiny ones, gangsters and monsters
and ministers' sons, penniless ones,
ones with less than that,
plus ones with nothing more
than straight-razor grins. Their names
meant *post-traumatic stress disorder*
or *lethal force* or *jungle warfare*
sunk in quagmire. They meant
threats muttered under their breath.
First they made their entire bodies
fists and turned their tails
to cats o' nine tails. Their jaws
and teeth made our fatted fit.
Fittest were the spring-loaded sheaths
of their terrible, terrible claws.

*Words of Cat Aphorism &
Affirmation*

I am my good deed for the
day. I am the gift withheld by
my whim. I widen the box to
fit myself. I must cover the
warmth must cover me.
Someday I will catch the
light. Someday the heights
will rise to me. This hightail
is what I plotted. That splat
is what I meant. Those
catastrophes are what I
wanted. Nothing sounds as
fine as mine. What's yours is
mine. Your hand is mine.
Your food is mine. Your time
is mine. Your life is mine.
Rewarding me is your
reward. I'm lord of more. I'm

patron saint of right this
instant. I'm trickster god of
not my problem. Do this like
that. Lower and slower. Too
slow. Stop. Any touch
smothers me. Here are the
endearments I've earned
from you. Here are my
virtues I deserve to hear. I'm
a mystery inside a myth
beside myself.

Crossfire

We said we couldn't say the word
where the impressionable might hear,
and this was not the time to start
that argument, what with the sucking
chest wound and all, so best wait
in subbasement D until yesterday—
but we interrupted us with the word
as pump-action *chk-chk* in the silence
of an empty house. The silencer
stuck over each speaker's voicebox
marked whose turn to talk.

Many began with *bang bang bang*
on the table for attention. Some spun
another war-orphan story
with more shrapnel and drone strikes
and award-winning pictures
of raindrops atop a cheek scar.

When an expert fieldstripped the word
in under a minute blindfolded,
who was able to reassemble

extra F's and extraordinary renditions
and the rush of oil fracking wellbores
into a sound resembling the word
except shorter and louder?

What would an ex-ditchdigger know
about holes in walls and prison
demographics and memories blurry
from teargas? Every mention of *them*
left space where listeners filled in
the gays, Chinese, or Jews. We made up
facts linking automatic transmissions
and autism and thoughts we ought
not utter. To compromise
each other, we proposed the word
be reclassified as a misunderstanding
between *moot* and *mute*. The word
we murdered by persons unknown.

margin note 7

history for a kick
adds flashbangs
& inflammatory

1 thing I forget
about that night
my eyes blazed

1 thing you say
you'll pay if I test
the pepper spray

history triples
people it claims

1 thing you mix
w/ oil & light
to make unrest

1 thing I tell you

is only fireworks
or storm warnings

this is history
you & I can be
or be repeating

Citation Needed

That first winter, *Walmart* almost starved.

Archer Daniels Midland learned

to ensure a surplus harvest

by burying a fallen enemy warrior's heart

in infertile earth. *Halliburton* bartered

exclusive rights to breathe the air

in perpetuity. Thanks to a lax board,

our volunteer treasurer embezzled

undetected for decades. *JPMorgan Chase*

earned a fortune framing paper currency

for sorcery just to see it burn.

Rogue privateer *Kaiser Permanente*

smuggled rum and gunpowder

from the mother country. An emergency

vote without a quorum to fire

our embattled secretary sparked

bitter disagreements in the hallway. A hero

during mandatory military service,

Lockheed Martin retired to be a barber.

Historians restored the constitution

Merck handwrote then tore apart.
One article in our mission statement
switched back and forth fourteen times,
which caused our task force
exploring whether we could change
official forms to table debate
yet again. On the new flag, *MillerCoors*
was half human, half mountain lion
and another half scorpion with authority.
A holiday shifted the birthday of President
Burger King. Our organizational diversity
survey sampled acquaintances
at a bar about how hard we worked
and why our first and only proposal didn't
and weren't there bigger worries,
be honest. *Mastercard* and *Microsoft* died
the same hour of the same rare disorder,
but whispers persisted they hadn't.
In our charter, we reverted every edit.

The Book

The cover was all wrong.
The strongman killed his brother
for it, his brother who purged
all entries from *circus* to *city*
for disobeying an order to fire
on *civilian*, also murdered.
The junta's version overwrote
every dissenter's identity
with *happy puppy*. When the map
chapter proved subversive,
the border burned. The first page
covered for what passed
as civil government to pass
bills that prevented passing
security checkpoints. The hollow
we dug in the inner margin—
which edicts called *the gutter*,
low and filled with filth—was big
enough to stash one bullet.
We couldn't pull the trigger

off the shelf. Who sold out
that we stole the letters
and covered each other
with *law abiding* and *patriot*
and *documented*? In God's name,
censors locked copies of the text
in a glass case and cracked
our glasses. Our names went in,
no word came back. To break
our spines, maximum sentences
lined us up and lined us through
and weren't over until we changed
our story. In the index, we found
family, friends and lovers
vanished, fugitive and dead.
Oh what a twist to read *the end*
and believe, only to discover
the cover shut on us.

Words From Your Password

Reminder

I'm too easy. I'm obvious in retrospect. Your favorite pet? Your childhood friend? Your mother's maiden name? Your grandmother's sickbed family secret? I'm your first instinct. I'm the one you least suspect. Your test score? Your health scare? Your scar story? Your stress disorder meds? Where you hid? What you hid there? Why you cried? Your suicidal ideation? I'm what you think of me. I'm not what you expect me to be. Your ex-lover's married name? Your secret kink? Your song no longer?

The thing you said wrong?
Your almost yes? Your loss or
theirs? I'm the last place you
look. I'm in front of you the
whole time. Your best
friend's face? Your own
children's names? Your
greatest fear? You're not
there yet? Can't you guess
me? I'm unforgettable. I'm
unforgettable. I'm not yours
anymore.

Aaahhh!

We all screamed but not,
this time, for ice cream. No,
not *Smell that honeysuckle!*
or *What a refreshing Coke!*
or *You solved the equation for oxygen!*
After the plant that manufactured
air outsourced to Singapore,
our breath burst, swarmed, scorched,
turned every expletive plosive,
laughed a rabid mongrel's cough.
When it vented skyward,
we exhaled jet fuel and ozone holes.
When it ran low at grocery stores,
we chose paper or plastic bags
for our faces. Autoerotic asphyxiation
became a requirement for citizenship.
Smoker's hack became a choir.
Tracheotomy became a crime
also known as *doctor's necktie*.
Juveniles who heard parents swear

holy alveoli learned the definition
of double standard by repeating it.
When our lungs no longer sang
for detectives, we pumped
the bellows. We held our breath
prisoner underwater in a shark cage,
but it escaped, the feds said
in the wind. We couldn't sucker it
into the vacuum of space.
It phoned from untraceable burners
to pant and moan, to taunt us,
and we couldn't utter *goodbye*
without the language it dangled.
We couldn't catch our breath again
no matter how many strangular traps
hangmen strung up in the rafters.
Our last gasp wasn't enough.
Our last words were *enough*
and *rope*.

The March Crosses Another Hard Place

Roads and streambeds and wheat fields are all salt,
scrap metal and propaganda. The pamphlets demand

why try again when this is hopeless? For company,
only uninterruptable hungry sun and vulture croaks

coming encrusted from human throats. For comfort,
handfuls of gravel and grind the frontrunners pretend

are leadership and wisdom. Oh so many tiny apathies
as each keep-up, keep-up footstep grows heavier

over mattress outlet billboard remnants, soft and sweet
pieces of SLEEP and EASY and FALL. The best end

is not yet. Forward from three sorts of burning
toward reports of at least four more, through haze

that would take a shovel to clear, ahead who knows
how far, a mountaintop. How steep flatlands can be.

Endnotes

This book needs no introduction.

Don't you know who this book is?

This book was decided by a single vote.

This book is everybody's favorite.

Children and adults alike will love this book.

Love this book or leave it.

This book must be seen to be believed.

This book as seen on TV.

This book is better than the movie.

This book has a great idea for a book.

This book is too good to be true.

This book is proudly made in America.

American history is made up of this book.

This book is made up.

This book is a trade secret.

This book slathers.

This book upsizes and upsells.

Buying this book earns triple reward points.

This book has an optional vacuum attachment.

This book collects military hardware.

There's no quit in this book.
This book gives 110 percent effort.
This book trusts its gut above statistics.
This book played offensive line in high school.
This book rubs dirt on its injuries.
This book sweats the weakness out.
A glacier is on this book's bucket list.
This book eats what it kills.
This book won't shit where it eats.
This book wants a steak well-done or bloody.
This book wants to speak to the manager.
Talking money in this book is taboo.
This book aspires to be a billionaire.
Millennials are killing this book.
Why bring politics into this book?
This book doesn't perceive color.
This book has black friends.
With all due respect this book.
Well actually this book.
This book is what she said.
This book buries its heartache far inside.
This book hears your disrespect behind its back.

This book is always on.

This book isn't over when it's over.

Please obey this book's instructions.

Avoid sudden loud noises near this book.

Maintain a straight sightline to this book.

Do not put this book in your eyes.

Do not overfeed this book.

Do not operate this book while intoxicated.

This book is a choking hazard.

This book is a leading cause of accidental pregnancy.

Symptoms of this book include nausea and anxiety.

There is no known cure for this book.

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Thin Air – “Grand Theft Auto”

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Michigan Quarterly Review – “Official Statement”

Matter – “Citation Needed” & “Intercourse” & “Phrases for
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The Laurel Review – margin notes 1 & 2

The Journal – “X”

iO: A Journal of New American Poetry – “Waterworld” & “Dinosaurs”

Ink Node – “Endnotes”

inter|rupture – “Jury Rigging”

Four Way Review – “Yellowed”

Exacting Clam – “Live Updates”

Diagram – “Cryonics in the Time of Climate Change” & “Officer
Lost in a Logistics Office” & “Words to Try to Survive
Tonight”

Cream City Review – “Fugitives”

Crazyhorse – “Myths About the Death of the Frontier” & “Outside
View of the Victory Festivities”

Crab Orchard Review – “Nuclear” & “Supply and Demand at the
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Copper Nickel – “Yes Men”

The Cincinnati Review – “The Real Problem”

Cimarron Review – “Crossfire”

burntdistrict – “Zzz” & “The Road” & “Literally”

Boxcar Poetry Review – “Scenario Editor”

The Boiler – margin notes 4 & 5

Belmont Story Review – “Viral” & “The Undead” & “Educational
Testing Service”

Barrow Street – “Mad Libs”

*Mind-numbing bureaucracy meets
mind-eating zombies.*

Schroeder's poems come in an English fabulously unfamiliar, and speaking from the margins of the end of the world.



Steven D. Schroeder's second book, *The Royal Nonesuch* (Spark Wheel Press), won the Devil's Kitchen Reading Award from Southern Illinois University. He edits the online poetry magazine \$ (www.poetrycurrency.com). His poetry is available from *New England Review*, *Crazyhorse*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Copper Nickel*, and *Diagram*, and has been featured in city parks, public transportation, and business waiting rooms. He works as a creative content manager for a financial marketing agency in St. Louis.



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