

MEGAN MARTIN



NEVERS

Fictions

NEVERS

MEGAN MARTIN

NEVERS

CAKETRAIN
[a journal and press]

CAKETRAIN

[a journal and press]

Box 82588, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15218

www.caketrain.org

© 2014 Megan Martin.

Cover art “The Sisters Zénaïde and Charlotte Bonaparte” (1821)

by Jacques-Louis David. Courtesy of the Getty’s Open Content Program.

Printed in the United States of America.

ISBN 978-0-9888915-7-9

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| On a Cellular Level | 1 1 |
| Ten-Year Retrospective | 1 3 |
| Atrocities Nobody Has Ever Heard Of | 1 5 |
| I Invited the Foxes | 1 7 |
| How the Novel's Going | 1 9 |
| Vibrant Lively Shiny Fucking Fishes | 2 1 |
| Writer-Narrator Plummet, Dies | 2 3 |
| Fuck You Too, Person I Loved | 2 5 |
| Wiggling Grayish Flab Layer | 2 7 |
| People Are the Worst People | 3 1 |
| A Bride Outdoes Me | 3 3 |
| A Pink Anything Can Revive | 3 5 |
| A Muse Fails | 3 7 |
| Why I Insist I Am Not Her | 3 9 |
| He Means Well | 4 1 |
| I Am Sorry for Your Loss | 4 3 |
| Pashmina Exile | 4 5 |
| Forever Bloodcloud | 4 7 |
| Bourbon Pony, Needlejerk | 4 9 |
| A Creature unto Me | 5 1 |
| How You Get Love | 5 3 |
| Fourteen Thousand Thumbs-Ups | 5 5 |
| The Fifi Time | 5 7 |
| Sick Black Jellies | 5 9 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| And What Is Wrong with Spells? | 61 |
| Another Muse Fails | 65 |
| Don't Fucking Move | 67 |
| Hot Tub Doomsday | 69 |
| A Smart Girl | 71 |
| Hey, There Goes an Airplane | 73 |
| Warning Label | 75 |
| Secret Park | 77 |
| Cinders | 79 |
| Two Foxes | 81 |
| A Cowgirl Is Something that Matters | 83 |
| Beside These Detestable Cheeses | 85 |
| Satisfaction of Process | 87 |
| Poetry Pool Party | 89 |
| For the Life of Me | 91 |
| Both of Us Know Better | 93 |
| And Another Muse Fails | 95 |
| Whatever Dad | 97 |
| Brilliant and More Brilliant | 99 |
| For the Bears | 101 |
| Worldwide in Jungles | 103 |
| Papyrus is Not Potato Chip Flowers | 105 |
| Stalking Prettiness at the World's End | 107 |

Thank you to the following journals where pieces from this collection have appeared: *Ampersand Review*, *Compost*, *Fanzine*, *Heavy Feather Review*, *Hobart*, *Kill Author*, *Wigleaf*, *Black Warrior Review*, *The Collagist*, *Housefire*, *La Petite Zine*, *MAKE: A Chicago Literary Magazine*, and *The Offending Adam*.

On a Cellular Level

I REQUIRE so little of myself in an age when everyone is famous online. I just want to eat red meats and do headstands on the discomfort of my own dead lawn.

I do not want to “give back.”

And things happen when we are kids. And so fucking what.

You arrive. You do things to me, mean things, which are new and exciting.

Sometimes when I am beside you in a forest and your hair is neatly parted, or while I am snuggled inside your orange hoodie, there is so much meaning in the world! For example, you just said “rat’s nest” up here on top of the plastic factory and slapped my tit

and a glorious smog sunset materialized like a bloody surprise party just for us.

I would like to announce to everyone down there that as you hug me closer until I'm a dainty cloud in your mouth, you are the most amazing creature ever to straddle this planet. I would like to note how truly amazing and breathtaking it is that so many of us are still alive, how despite eroding sequins and lost hairlines, we continue to bloom and rot and bloom, on and on and on like galaxies and bacteria and ants.

Ten-Year Retrospective

I SPRAWL on a lawn in the heat. Nothing comes along, nobody. Every day people die on lawns in bikinis in front of bystanders who don't realize they're dead.

I think deeply about this, as deeply as one can on a lawn. I think about how I might end up in the news.

Today was a huge gash in the atmosphere: B. purchased a steak the size of his face for an occasion he'd invented to coerce intercourse. It bled all over our countertops. It wrecked his mouth red.

As a child he won a prize for his sculptures of woodland creatures, but things had gone wrong with me too. My outfit was stupid! I was waiting for the television to tell me what was going on.

Next week I will “throw in the trowel,” I thought. I will plead assistance getting anything into my mouth, picking knee socks, etc. But I am me: I will put on knee socks despite it, I will put on knee socks despite it, I will put on knee socks despite it, the ones with flamingoes, the ones somebody else I loved who loved me more gave me once. They will uplift my life, my looks.

B. refused my napkins, so I said, “Fuck you, B.,” and crammed ass into this unflattering bikini.

What was really going on was this: on television this idiot woman was releasing a circus chimp into the dead of Africa.

In retrospect, I was far too blonde to be killed by such a lawn.

*Atrocities Nobody Has
Ever Heard Of*

I SHOULD BE ADMIRING and appreciating the Cloroxed whiteness of the shower curtain you Cloroxed yesterday in a fit of love. It certainly is a miracle: the whitest, most disinfected shower curtain upon this rotten earth. In Cloroxing you have protected me, valiantly, from fungal infections, waterborne pathogens, and countless other order of death-dealing microorganism.

I should thank you.

But instead, another man is here in the shower with me—and it is exciting!

Don't worry—it will never work because we're both selfish Capricorns and between us we'll have seventeen thousand cats and

won't be able to afford litter because we'll work "rewarding" low-wage jobs that allow us ample time to make our shitty garbage art.

Okay, okay, the exciting man in my shower is imaginary, but he is based on a real man I saw in a YouTube video of a protest. He was one of a number of intense boy activists screaming into megaphones. He had a fuck-me heart-attack look on his face as he yelled words that have been yelled all over the country and world for ages. I imagined marching beside him, stabbing the air with a sign expressing some timeless message of outrage, or curled up harmoniously in the grass with him, singing embarrassing political songs.

Since I saw this man, I have been seeing the world differently. I am unhinged about the shower curtain because the company that made it supports asshole rights, as do the owners of every bleach company. Plus Clorox is evil on the water supply and poisons cats and babies worldwide by the barrowful. There is Clorox in the meat that's clogging your intestines, too! And somebody from Clorox who bathes in money for a living will probably garnish my whole bank account and Caketrain's whole bank account for printing this tiny little story in this tiny little book that like ten people will buy and two will actually read.

Later I'll send an email I shouldn't, asking my exciting man who he is when he doesn't have that sign in his hand. I'll ask him to have coffee. I'll tell you I love you. I'll worry about running out of eggs.

I Invited the Foxes

“I INVITED the foxes into our home, sweetheart. I couldn’t help it. I saw them outside frolicking all over each other in the sun, and their oily pelts caused such a hankering!”

Why are the foxes dancing so mechanically as I play R. Kelly in their honor? Indoor foxes are such a disappointment: rubbing B.’s overpriced conditioner into their robot-fox fur, bleaching what they call “the filthy backplash.”

The stainless steel gelato maker is so new and alive, the Cabernet is so new and alive, the sedate gray paint is so new and alive! The indoor foxes champagne-toast everything in our home from the Jacuzzi.

All of their object-worship makes me itchy and claustrophobic. I enter the scrap of woods at our yard's edge, take off my heels and stockings and dress and let my body parts smash and grind angrily against the earth. I hardly notice B. towering overhead, sunblocking me.

“Darling: I am so eau natural! Sniff me! Behold my oily shiny nasty pelt!”

B. makes a sneery expression and picks bark out of my ass-crack. He too is new, and in this moment even I am new, so why this lonely, blank stretch now, when I ought to be pinning his wrists and lapels and face to the ground?

Inside, the foxes find my mother's mother's potholders and dance around the kitchen, boiling something from a jar on the stove I've used twice.

They shove huge, creamy spoonfuls into B.'s mouth and he says, “Mmm, ooh, mmm.” He gulk-gulk-gulks the Old Fashioned they've mixed, his throat bulging like he's swallowing apples whole.

I stand on tiptoes in the window and wait for his jugular to unzip, to spurt all over their furry snouts.

How the Novel's Going

MY STRONG BELIEFS about what is absolutely fucking not a piece of art prevent me from making anything a person might actually want to read.

“So, how’s the novel going?” my friend who is not a writer said the other night.

I had been writing the same sentence about the narrator’s boyfriend’s failed poem over and over again for weeks.

It is like eating something you spent a long time growing. You eat its beauty. It is like eating your own baby.

Or it is like when my sister Philomena gave me that hummingbird music box. At the time I adored it, but now I can see it is pure idiocy.

But then everything was ugly today because I fucked everything up again.

Last night my other friends slumped bored over the hot stories I'd spent all day slaving over. They stared silently at my words as they clattered their icy drinks in unison, mixing them, making them worse. I could see them getting weaker before my eyes and could do nothing about it. I kept imagining their organic gardens and luxury baby strollers and tidy futures wilting under a fiery, mean-spirited sun.

At home I prepared a very exquisite suitcase—hard-boiled eggs, sketchbooks, fishnets—and then, crippled by longing for everything else in the room, unpacked it again, returned to my desk.

*Vibrant Lively Shiny
Fucking Fishes*

“HE WAS TERRIFIC!” you said about the loveseat salesman.

I wasn’t listening again.

My hair smells like an attic, I thought. My teeth feel cavernous and wobbly. My teeth are *no bueno*. Either I am dying this instant or I will kill myself in a bathtub at some later point.

“Wasn’t he terrific?” you asked as an arm and a leg fell off.

I do not want any furniture in my home ever, not ever, never, I thought as we moved the love seat inside. I do not want a home. All my life I’ve believed I am the kind of person who should live in a tree house in the South of France, having thrilling, drunken affairs and eventually plunging to my death.

As you nailed the leg and the arm back on, the living brightness of your aquarium was so dissatisfying.

“Why do your fish always look so good and energized and like tiny, pulsating sex-suns?” I said.

You said something about their planty diet and the kindness of light and spacious purified water and safety from predators and not having to be anywhere but there as you nailed happily and with pride.

You were good as gold and pretty like a collie! Some night at an earlier point, your beauty assaulted my mouth until I choked on the goodness of you!

Yum!

“You’re terrific!” you’d say to me over and over again, even when I’d stand in the shower all day, wasted water sliding over me.

Your fish looked good because they weren’t people, were yours, weren’t me.

Writer-Narrator
Plummets, Dies

I WENT into the woods and built a tree house in which to write, and also live, and also escape your wrath, because writers are poor, lazy, cowardly infidels. I could not concentrate on my story due to bird-racket, perfection of sunlight, etc., so I shot the birds and boarded up the windows and—

Shit, I hate when the narrator is a writer.

I only write because I want to talk about myself all the time. And also because I cannot tell you to your face that I love you furiously when I imagine you in dreams, but by daylight I care about you only to the extent that you offer clear improvements to my mental health.

I could talk about the other day at the beach, about how blue, how idyllic, etc.—but honestly, I spent the whole time fiercely hating your weird haircut and imagining the bottom, the murk no light could reach.

Inside the tree house, the narrator begins to feel cheap and claustrophobic. Her only chance is to chop the boards to splinters, tear the wall of leaves apart like an itchy blouse and plummet.

And really, we're all better off.

*Fuck You Too,
Person I Loved*

“FUCK YOU TOO, Person I Loved” is something like the title of something I wanted to write once but didn’t.

Instead I found myself at the helm of a glass gondola.

In the second scene, the gondola got smashed by an iceberg. There is a climax waiting there, but I am not the kind of idiot who believes every ruined thing should be plotted. Anyway, right now is what’s incredible: at the bottom of the ocean is a glass gondola wreck, brilliant in its tortured, inflexible angularity.

The idea of destroying the gondola before I went anywhere is what really mattered to the story. There is potential in the questions left in its wake: why did you—why would you—try to set sail in a boat of glass?

I did not want to talk about my gondola, how it came to be, what it was, or what it meant. That shit is so boring to me! “Fuck it,” I said, and I went up the street for a drink.

Oh, I forgot to mention—our sad city is inhabited entirely by dull, ugly, famous, oversexed writers, all of whom refer to themselves as “poets.”

Singlehandedly, without oxygen tank and in the dead of night (of course!), one of our fine townspeople tornadoed to the seabottom and glued the busted gondola pieces together in the blind darkness with his own all-powerful spittle, which seeped into the gondola’s skin like some unearthly balm, allowing it to catch the light, illuminating the ocean like a stained glass sun. The city’s residents voted to deem the glass gondola I’d wrecked—now tidy, repaired, transparent, functional, redeemed—a symbol for life and art.

Why would I try to set sail in a boat of glass?

Because I could not understand why I could not.

Wiggling Grayish Flab Layer

I AM NOT OPERATING like I used to. There is a something wiggling inside me, adrift in my cells like a sea sickness.

I did not want to call you. I put pills inside me.

“Pills will kill it,” I said to no one.

On the phone with you, I tried to do something normal like recite recipes I’d learned from the internet, but I was not sure what that meant or could not remember something or something failed.

“I killed it and you killed it,” I said. “But that’s okay. It’s better to take terrible care of most things. You learn in the end that you don’t really miss them.”

I said other things I didn’t mean. I said you were the worst thing that ever happened to the entire apartment complex.

“I am going to hang up now,” I said.

I had said this before.

You said okay.

I held the cat for a very long time. I said, “Cat, I just want to make artful things so I can feel like part of the universe again.”

But I lie to the cat. It is so often too hot outside. Plus there is always masturbation or television or pizza, and I am not an especially clever person.

I was just pretending to talk to the cat. Certainly you knew that, but maybe you set the phone down.

“Cat,” I said, “sometimes I want to move out to the woods alone and let all the meaning out of me and not care that I have no meaning anymore. Do you remember how before the flab layer, when I went out into the world, I was electric and everything around me was electric, and when I recorded it on cassette and played it back into the air, I and you and everyone in the neighborhood could feel the universe tingling and vibrating around them?”

I didn’t hear anything.

“Do you remember, Cat?”

I placed some cigarette butts in a row.

“Do you?”

The cat approached: flea-bitten, insubstantial, ugly, she nudged into the space beneath my moist, cigarettey hand and lay down.

“I am not hanging up,” I said. “Fuck you. I am not going to hang up.”

People Are the Worst People

YOUR SISTER IS a Jesus person I can get behind: I can see his badass light in her hair and skin and children. I'm sure it spills from her darling vagina, too!

I keep trying to make stories that could do Jesus to a person—that would keep doing Jesus to you, over and over—but other whores' stories do it instead: soak us in their juicy, euphoric thrills, then abandon us on the roadside.

Fourteen hours later, a slab of beef-gorged Iowa muscle arrives and goes on and on about the farmhouse with the huge front porch and garden and bunker full of doomsday ammunition and eons of land where he and his wife will fuck endless babies into the universe.

He has invented and inhabited an image of perfection. It has green grass and has never seen anything unlike itself.

If I were your sister during this story, I would be experiencing some kind of enormous awe for this person so different from myself, who sees joining forces with another human being to make a slew of new and redundant human beings as a supreme act of love. I would see him as someone brave, rather than just a stupid everyday person.

I read this story to my mother while she's frying chicken for my father's dinner.

"I read an interview with a writer who says he solves all his characters' problems like equations," she says. "He uses a compass to make plotlines that are perfect circles!"

"Mother," I say, "I would never employ a compass except as a weapon."

"Suit yourself, honey," she says, slapping blood out of the chicken with her spatula.

What she means is: an empty and childless and husbandless life of putting words on paper is what I get for attending a liberal atheist-run institution and reading too much about the decrepit state of low-income vaginas worldwide which are eating her hard-earned tax dollars and jeopardizing her vacation fund.

It is my mother's story now, and I'll admit, she's right.

A Bride Outdoes Me

MINNESOTANS WERE PUT OFF by the breast hat on the bride's head. Their faces drooped to their spaceship phones when she came down the aisle on her unicycle, all asparkle, leotarded, in those pedal-pumping fuzzy thigh-highs.

I wasn't sure why Minnesotans were invited, but then I was.

My best friend suddenly became a Minnesotan: she wears dress pants and drinks juicered vegetable juice and lives in a fucking house now, too. I like to remember a time when we origamied naked in the woods with Kant and matching shaved heads.

"If you have ever wielded pumice, do not lay eyes on my feet," I had to say to her the other day. Then I didn't know what else to talk about.

At her wedding I got weddy-minded and dug a little of my own grave in the imagining, but I at least did not picture a dress with so much surface area that I appeared legless.

I pat myself on the ass for remaining “real” and “unchanging” all these years, for continuing to believe so goddamned ferociously in art. “I will keep on believing so goddamned ferociously in art,” I say, especially on days when I cannot think of a single reason why anyone would wish this on herself.

But a bride has outdone me again. I linger in the stagnant air of midlife. I let the ants in the zipper-door in order to feel them, not to understand.

A Pink Anything Can Revive

THAT CELEBRITY KID IS named Gandhi and he certainly is a Gandhi! See how that teen-superstar haircut tries to eat his face from all sides? He came out of his superstar mother's vagina not especially long ago!

But there is another marvel over here. It is me watching television. I have lost one dangly earring but still wear its mate. I am what my mother calls a "trooper."

You've canceled again. You are feeling self-important enough today that you realize I am beneath you in many ways.

A pink anything can revive sometimes.

"How is it that you cannot and everyone else cannot?" I said to you on the phone.

All day I had been on the couch, looking out the window. Before you called, I watched a sparkling woman and her rose-colored baby walk by, and it suddenly seemed possible that there could be a magical something out there waiting to lift me up that would not be waiting on any other day.

I remembered that time as a kid, that rabbit's foot in the gum-ball machine, dyed yellow and black, those little leathery pads of skin, so fresh it was still leaking blood. I wanted it—oh, I fucking wanted it. Right then something was happening that was meant just for me!

Instead the phone rang. I explained the memory I had not thought of in so long excitedly into the receiver.

“When it came out it bloodied my hands,” I said. “It was so soft, so warm.”

A Muse Fails

“WHAT A BATCH of bad breath! Jealousy is my sun! Jealousy my ooh-la-la!” says the narrator who is of course a fucking writer.

I am left dejected by Harry’s ripped-off story about parquet floors and a marijuana-addicted writer—also named Harry—who slides down all the subdivision’s Slip’N Slides in one night.

Harry says the story I inspired, which ends with the writer-narrator philosophizing about pizza from heaven for sixteen pages, wasn’t good, so he brought on Mrs. Potter, pinch-hitter, known for the kind of denouements that my stories no longer have.

Mrs. Potter wears only professional black pantsuits, and her denouements are always epiphanic: her revision ends with the narrator coming to understand the Slip’N Slides as a symbol of

his addiction. This allows him to finally marry his 18-year-old girlfriend, Sheila (daughter of the next-door neighbors), which in some convoluted but transparent reversal transforms him into a sexually satisfied adult, redeemed daily by his new fix: the green smoothie he drinks for breakfast.

In my version, I had already shot Harry's skull wide open in paragraph one.

Why I Insist I Am Not Her

SUZANNE, the award-winning poetess, wrote a line that gave me a dream where my ex was a torso hopping around in a bookstore and I was picking him up and hugging him and sobbing and feeling all the sadness in my life and his life at once.

The next morning I vowed to pull the same stunt: inspire a suicide in a perfect stranger.

Uncertain of how to upheave anyone, I wrote a story about Apple Jacks and turnstiles and barracudas in pink sunglasses smashed all over the highway.

When Suzanne reaches, her poem reaches back like the Sistine Chapel's ceiling. For me, writing feels like simultaneously stabbing and being stabbed.

When you and I were in Rome, I don't remember what happened, just that we didn't go or try to go to the Sistine Chapel. My memory, among other things, is fucked. Probably we were wasted. And maybe we walked around town and looked at buildings and shoes we could never afford and I held you up while we stumbled home.

All of which was the same thing we did every day in our town. I didn't see a problem with it at the time. Or rather: I didn't have the guts to write it down.

While Suzanne reaches, is ever reaching, I spin a yawn that goes whoop-de-do in a lax breeze. It is what I like. It is a flaccid little pinwheel of failure.

Megan Martin is the author of *Sparrow & Other Eulogies* (Gold Wake, 2011). She lives in Cincinnati with her boyfriend and a bunch of cats.

Fiction \$9 US

“Megan Martin’s muscular, gleaming prose contends with how we as humans cope with the itchy banality of reality. Stuffed with imaginary men, future bathtub deaths, sick black jellies, meteor lettuce, and vaginas full of Jesus light, *Nevers* emerges from the tension between what is real, what is perceived, what is felt and what is completely imagined. What makes Martin such an amazing writer is that it’s hard to discern the differences—and it doesn’t even matter.”

Melissa Broder, author of *Scarecrow*

“*Nevers* is that feeling you get when you are suddenly inside yourself, looking around, going, *Hey, that’s my coffee mug. That’s my pen. I am me.* It’s like standing in your childhood home as the walls are replaced with snapshots of the same walls. This is a book, only it has a mouth.”

Lindsay Hunter, author of *Don’t Kiss Me*

“In Megan Martin’s fantastic *Nevers*, we encounter the situation of a book that is conscious of itself. This seems right, because the life in its pages is conscious of itself, too—all at once, from a dozen slip-sliding angles, the whole a shimmering phantasm held aloft by an act of voice so clean and real it can squash your heart.”

Scott Garson, author of *Is That You, John Wayne?*

“This book could breastfeed a twelve-year-old boy. This book could have an adulterous affair with an undiscovered marsupial species. This book could write online dating profiles for Wyoming’s vast population of robot foxes who have been widowed by hit-and-run crimes. This book is not about the apocalypse, but it has that I-got-sick-of-my-boyfriend’s-nose-hair-and-Sartre’s-giving-me-cramps-and-the-only-way-I-can-think-to-stall-the-imminent-threat-of-mass-extinction-is-by-adopting-a-feral-cat-and-aren’t-we-useless-and-fucked type of apocalyptic glee about it.”

Tessa Mellas, author of *Lungs Full of Noise*

CAKETRAIN

Box 82588, Pittsburgh, PA 15218

www.caketrain.org

Cover image by Jacques-Louis David

ISBN 978-0-9888915-7-9

