

**THE FRAGMENTS WERE SO MANY THAT I
COULD HEAR THEM**

Salutations upon you, little one. Where have you been so long that your instruments are no longer analog, and your hair, destroyed by the sun, is like a nightbird in its rapturous invisibility? I was in the garden, taking your disappearance into consideration like the disastrous terms of a loan, when reality entered the picture. Attendants, attend me: these soft metals, ponderous in the summer, cannot pin themselves to my lapel on their own. I do not like it when things come out of hiding. I encoded your absence in my memory for a reason, how you traded our guitars to a dictionary salesperson, and how we stayed up late in the aftermath learning how to spell. Sometimes I have stood in rooms of talking people, listening involuntarily. That is a modern career. Well-funded, I entered the garden. I destroyed the sun. I entered reality like an expensive and counterfeit picture.

FIELD 20

I was reading the book about the relentlessness
of grief when I heard my downstairs neighbor.
Even though we are drifting in this time
when everything is public, we still cannot know

the interior of those public things, and so there is
a privacy still afforded to apartments and trees.

I heard them making noise. Hysterical with loss
or gain, I could not tell. I am reading the book

about how everything is a fiction. I am tracking
exclamations through the walls and floors
but when I begin to listen, nothing sings.
We cannot know the interior of public things.

SEALED MEMORANDUM CONCERNING OUR DECISION TO HARBOR CRIMINALS IN THE SUNSHINE

The person died not knowing what they knew. I saw them in the far end of my kitchen, watching the trees. Having given up offering them forgiveness, the representative of the sweepstakes pulled me aside in the slowly flooding foyer, the waterline imperceptibly lapping at our soles. "You need to pull them together. They've spent too long at the window by the refrigerator." The representative was beginning to cry, but not about this new and absolute impasse. Neither of us acknowledged the knocking at the front door, the pace and timbre of which were so chaotically improvisational that it could not have been the work of a single fist, nor two. When I swam back to the kitchen it had changed, I no longer belonged there, and the person was wandering a low grove of snake plants. It turned out (they told me in a letter two lives later) that the offered forgiveness had been contingent upon a codification of the future, line by novel line. Oh person, there is something deadly serious about linoleum floors. I'm sorry I never shared it with you.

PSALM 8,000

The cause and manner of my death have officially been released
The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner has ruled them both to be undetermined
I adjust the brim of my fascinator
I am forced to retire from the poppy field
I make myself lie down in espresso factories

FLOWCHART FOUND UNDER THE SEAT OF A GOLF CART IN A HAUNTED HOUSE IN A REMOTE PROVINCE OF THE IMPERIUM, 1995

The yes, no-like, carried me into the wheat. I upturned a lilt in the medicine, devoured a ballot. The waiting room was just waiters pounding tallboys, cigarettes pulsing rainbowically. I have been spelling words futuristically lately, a bit of web caught in my cob, like radar. Given enough time, definitions and tenses reverse themselves, unpretentiously, a convenience of matter. I bedroomed in the life of my own house but does that mean I haunted it. Ninth me on the meet green. The song of the lyrics came to me complete: *The customer is always left to their own devices.* C of key flat. I was dollared many hours per pay to frighten people, imperially. Would it mean very much to you if I said I was gubernatorially sad. The low rose sunlike, double-click. Call me a goner, how there were laurels rotting in my chest, flowchart of will this make me feel good. And I happen and happen. Faster. Until my birthday gives itself a birthday for its birthday. Candle, blow me out. Yes, and/or no.

HAPPENED, A DIAMOND

In the ivied alley, within earshot of the sea, I met a person painting over a mural. There wasn't much left of the original image, and as they were applying the final few strokes of ultramarine, they (noticing I was bored) told me a story. The painter had grown up between four retaining walls, in a tent on a single square of road. In other words, it was a small plot of pavement capable of bearing travel. "My parents climbed up over one of the walls one day, to go looking for game. When they returned they were somehow younger, and I hadn't been born yet!" Contained in the timbre of "yet" was a signal that the story was over or just beginning, but by that time we had fallen under the power of a new regime. A 128-point buck was ruminating on the ivy, and a police cruiser sans police fled, oceanward, the scene. This is a three-player game.

COME OVER!

After all,
quince and quantum physics are in the public
domain now

ALEX TRETBAR

Alex Tretbar is the author of the chapbooks *toofarwandered* (Tilted House, 2026), *According to the Plat Thereof* (Ethel, 2025) and *Kansas City Gothic* (Broken Sleep, 2025). He works in the Center for Digital and Public Humanities at the University of Missouri–Kansas City, where he is currently studying the archive of early volumes of *New Letters* (1934-1951) and assisting with the Kansas City Monuments Coalition. Recent work can be found in *Cleveland Review of Books*, *Denver Quarterly*, *VOLT*, and elsewhere. He teaches creative writing at Chillicothe Correctional Center, a women’s prison in Missouri.