

A DWELLING

A sense of self is made
from imagined fragments.
The only way the selves
communicate is with post-
its, strings, & some kind of
bird. None of us completed
the trainings, so silence
between me's. What ifs,
like that, they pile into
stackables, & each a puzzle
of a thousand pieces.
To finish them all is not
realistic, so I only find
the shapes I like & keep it
moving. Sometimes,
it's about color, and others
are dependent on how I woke,
how I feel my body move
through spacetime that day.

My life revolves around
collecting these pieces,
& yes, I've completed a
number of these puzzles.
Enough to say I shouldn't
say I know I've wasted
away, off up in the corner
of the little room in my face.
In there hangs a picture of
no one you should know
in particular. A picture &
a mirror & nothing other
than a bed & a spot to piss
& dump & wash my face
feet buns & yes the rest
but please stop. Done. I've
said more than what's fair
about my assortments, &
please don't forget to forget
where you stumbled.

REMOTE

Sometimes, I look at what surrounds my body for an opening line. I'll hold my head in my hand and face it at an angle toward a window. Now, one car sits parked and beaded with wet and sun. How to decide if the clouds are advancing or retreating depends on where you'll be in an hour or two. So, I waited about 5 minutes, waited and cleaned the earbuds from their ring of grime, and by then, they were all out of frame. An hour later, when I changed locations, I saw the fleet, only blocked by surrounding land. With this view, set now eye to eye with the tallest buildings, from a distance, to take it all in, I see that we've been invaded by dark whites that look to have a flat base, while the tops, classic cotton balls. Hi. Do you know where I am? I'll give you a hint: At the top of an actual hill. A top with a small lake of water at its center. Now, a lady with two small dogs off-leash. She allows them to roam the tree line. She whistles, and they regroup without noticing.

VISITORS

It's never really us locals;
you won't hear us--never
speaking of it too often.
A few more weeks until
it's mostly gray all over.
I think it's due to reaching
exchanges, fumbling, and
landing on weather chats
and exotic hand gestures.
Hear them discussing moods
and colors. Elbows point
wide, taking room. Check in
with us mainly by eye
contact to make sure. Locals
seem at peace when days
turn toward shade. Soon,
browns and muted greens
lost in snow. I want to be
clear: The others are more
than welcome, even though
there are few dialogues
with us while buying up all
the pastries and mugs in all
the cafés. They seem to think
highly of wearing cloth gloves
and scarves. You hear them,
how their joints scream
as they shuffle from cars.
They mean well, stay long,
leave unannounced and
crumbs from their cakes
and jam bars. Their fingers
cram in their mouths: *Taste
this brambleberry filling.*
They offer their hand, and
it seems rude not to kiss
their purple palms.

MEANWHILE

I've been practicing extended eye contact with my wife. It's been helping with our nonverbals. We've always had the practice of exchanging platonic hugs in the kitchen to remind one another of our friendship. She has been saying to use nicer words. I tell her the chemtrails are vibrating guitar strings. She likes thinking of when we were dating and how I still don't have much to say. I ask if that's a problem, how I have less to say. I think the problem is with biting my tongue and cheeks at night. 5 minutes of not breaking eye contact seems like the night before a field trip. In gaze, the shades of her face unwind into a May in second grade, a trip to the Rose Garden when Mom chaperoned. We had to cross some roads, she made our group hold hands, and before she looked my way, I thought I wouldn't even reach out.

BLUE LIGHT

The blue crack glows out
the laundry room. If there's
light there's air I heard once
from *This Old House*. Cool
air seeps out the laundry room.
The basement is different
after daylight savings. Seems
finished with sandpaper, the
smudge glow in old films when
a lady's on screen. So, the
basement seems like a lady
is standing slightly off-
frame. Like lightning, blue
crack has me on my knees,
turns my hands royal purple.
I call it blue light sickness.
I bathe in blue light sunsets.
I wonder if it's early enough
to dance before the dinner.
I wrote "Ask *This Old House*"
inquiring more about the
blue light and the moon
and if either has to do with
my dancing in the dark.
They never aired a reply,
and besides, I don't care
for their expertise. I speak
from jealous daydreams
of my wanting to cut tile
into elaborate shapes.
Watch a decent tile cutter,
how they never measure.
I desire that faith but rooted
in self-defense, leaning
toward knife skills-
between *West Side Story*
and *The Iron Chef*. Like
opening a man's gut just
for Maria. Oh, Maria.

Who would throw a life
away to kiss you twice?
The pool hall scene is filled
with fleeting innocence,
but I don't recall it correctly
because I once dated Maria
in middle school, and perhaps
only because of her name.
She almost had me wanting
to cut a man. Something
about that name. Maria
brings me right to blue and
finished ladies in sandpaper
light. I hold my breath in the
presence of the blue, and
I pray to the giant ball of lint
and repent to my God in an
exhale. How should I know
when I went too far? Perhaps
I should admit I've been
skipping church to do more
laundry, to have a bit more
time in blue, and been buying
up more socks to feed the dryer.
A barrel of footies for the glow,
for more blue, bluer royals
and purples, which means more
violet until the beast rings.

COCO

Something about what I'm not.
Now, about the season the trees
are in. My body is in a space
at all times, so here are some details
about my whereabouts. From here,
assume my dress. Assume I'm not
new. I ignore the presence of
mind, & first, steady my body,
my hands. No cant's & not's here,
but time to be & time to leave.
Hmmm mhmmm hmm. It's okay
to be singing to yourself. At night,
the last memory I have is rocking
my body; don't know where that
habit begun. I'm worried when
I'm not surprised at waking.
To the public, it's called feeling
low. A doctor calls it you should,
you need, you know. What I know
is the sound of these birds, but
their names, I do not. It seems
knowing that is doing too much.
There are few things important to
my breathing. Too much in the news
overnight. What it was was just
another tight revision, new casting,
& episodes that go & go. Someone
& their dog have come & gone.
What I heard is the name Coco.
When they were, they went over
to that tree, growing fireball fruits
that cover the earth. Arm reached
& selected one, & said, Coco,
did you know I can eat this fruit?

A THEORY WITH MANY NAMES

With everything happening at once,
it's raining somewhere, which means
someone is left standing getting wet.
Now, we have two types of people:
Those who choose and those without
a choice to remain. Now pick one.
From here, we now have information
that can serve as a component in a
formula that's loosely tied to a theory
that I already know you. With a few
interchanging variables, this works
out the same with different types of
pastas, and when and how long it takes
when one chooses to cook one. Between
rain and who's a certain kind of pasta
eater, that's pretty much all America.
A few weeks ago, I took a linguistics
questionnaire, and it told me exactly
where I am. This was enough reason,
and I figured I should begin to cook
up a theory to prove why I don't see
the point in traveling. Did you know
if it's spring, and it's raining, the higher
likelihood there will be a pasta dinner?
Of course, this is all theoretical, so,
I feel my job's nearly done, but it's clear
where this research is headed if it gets
into the wrong hands. It's a theory of
freethinking. Well, more like a theory
of wet windows. Seeing, but a bit more
distorted, though one should have some
idea of what's on the other side. Between
the rain and the pasta, please take into
account sleep. You should be able to
guess that in the formula, the symbol
for sleep are Z's, not to be confused
with dreams, which account for most
of what we don't consider when we're
going through daily motions. A theory

of seasons in a place that experiences
all four in their purest form. A theory
of Rochester, New York, where day
can slip into abstraction, like any place.

AARON BANKS

Aaron Banks is a poet who lives in Rochester, NY, where he was born and raised. He received an MFA from Warren Wilson in 2022. He works at the URochester in their McNair Scholars Program (TRIO), and teaches poetry workshops at the Rochester Institute of Technology. He has attended the Bread Loaf Writers Conference since 2024, returning as part of the administrative staff in 2025, and will again in 2026. He is seeking publication of his first poetry collection, *Cottonwood Man*. Poems from the collection have been published in *Leavings Literary Magazine*, *Zócalo Public Square*, *The Swannanoa Review*, and in *Obsidian* (forthcoming).