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- How’s it going?
- Terrible!
- What’s wrong?
- I’m saying things are terrible until 10:00.
- (to the waiter) An espresso. It’s 10:05 now.
- Really? Then everything is alright.

from Masculin Féminin
Exaggerations

Harpo Marx once said, “Shut up and listen. You wanna fake smart? Quote me.”

Then he reached into his pocket and pulled out a candle burning at both ends.

Later we posed for a picture minus about nine hundred words.

I said “cheese” with my jaws clenched and tried to remember how I knew him.
The Flight Of The Phoenix

I wondered, too, who would find the survivors in sand dunes like that when Jimmy Stewart crash-landed the plane? Were they on location?

Jimmy counted the bang of three Coffman cartridges. ‘There ain’t nothing wrong with that engine.’ That’s when I dropped the popcorn on the floor and missed the knowing look on Jimmy’s face before he tried the last cartridge that started the engine of the makeshift plane.

I wanted to see the reactions of Peter Finch and Ernest Borgnine, but I was on the floor picking up the popcorn. I forgot that Ernest Borgnine died in the desert over an hour earlier, looking for water.
Summer In Luverne, Alabama

Charles Phelps sat.
‘KKRQ’
Shot grass and birds in the back lot, could shoot around
a pecan tree. His boy
sat on a crate, sang
‘100.7 FM The Fox, your classic rock station’
under his hot breath
‘Partly cloudy skies
with a chance of rain’

The supper ham soaks in the bathtub.

hmmhmm hmmhmm hmmhmm

Carl Barnes walks past.
Spring

what snaps winter
into rosin for boughs
to play cold songs
is what breaks
frozen considerations
into slow moments
Vernal Equinox

You accept my memory
and remember saying
“You are luckless,”
and remember the loose dirt
that muddied your cape’s hem.
Memento

I poured concrete
into the Mississippi
back when a fish at your doorstep
was a basket of posies
and concrete boots
were saviors.

Back when the source
of it all was Lake Itasca,
not the Big Bang.

I waded in it
to cool my feet
from the hot black top.

I needed one—
a souvenir.
Forget sno-globes
and key chains.

A concrete river.
What a fantastic mess.
Jesus Factory

They all move
when the Mould moves
in the pile of lords
on the factory floor.
Outstretched arms tangle
and bump side wounds.
In Your Favor

The way you walk, your hips and lips, your chin remind me of Pol Pot, on a bad day, a beauty queen.
American Opera

Ghost of a flea
(animal life)
rides a line,
boundary between
Porgy and Gershwin.

Center line,
lines I mean
(no passing)
order curbs—
crumble.

You have somewhere to go?
It ain’t necessarily so.
Nesting Doll

Even when you know surprise—
What it must be like to be the penultimate one
Looped

4  3  2  1

The ending and beginning
matter when the loops
weld together the outline
of an odyssey through the grimy city
Shades

How to manipulate
three shades of blue
into becoming green?
I can’t say. I just do it.
A mendacious truth.
Recursive

It is not the day I thought it was—
a year ago today.

What happened that day
was the mistake of thinking

it was the same day
of the year before that.
‘S.O.S.’ Does Not Mean ‘Save Our Ship’

Calm down
and notice
our emergency
is televised

be still
blink in morse
code it out
Produce

She smelled fried chicken.
Mangoes were in season.
So were clementines.
She tied a cherry stem
into a knot with her tongue.
Etymology

Zero
is
tight
rain
sound
some
thing—
no
thing
Photograph Of Girl With Brown Hair

How did Eggleston
make her ordinary hair
radiate Prell and self-consciousness,
the Hair Cuttery, boredom, and beauty
all at once while waiting for his hotdog
at a concession stand in Georgia?
I’m A Child Of It

Stole a cola from the Amoco.
Oh, and a car.
Can’t make blue any more real than that.
Talking about wavelengths here.

And a synapse? It's just a space.
A junction, a real one,
where gods live and save
Jesus save. Jesus saves.

Buzzing at the window,
I know how to break them,
Spot welds on pecan shells,
I know how to crack them.

It’s like chewing on leather.
It never ends.

•

Ready, baby? Can’t turn back.
An easy ride, that welcome wagon.
That’s the car I stole.
Plaster Model Of The Sea

Deprived sea
Throttled sea
A fingerprint—

Into the stiff sea
Pale and massy sea
Pacific Coast Highway Passenger Side

(like when Hitchcock & I watch
Mitch and Melanie drive away—)

& down
the film strip pulls too
fast too fast through
the projector frameby
framebyframe
byframe

& empty reels
(—the birds have clearly won)

the sunglasses
flicked ashes on
the dashboard
SHARON BENTLEY attended the University of Iowa where she received a B.A. in English and Media Studies and an M.A.T. in English Education. She is also a graduate of the creative writing certificate program at the University of Chicago. This chapbook, *Looped*, is her first. She lives in Chicago, IL.