



We Sing You, Jimmy Sky  
Deirdre Dore

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dancing girl press, 2009

Cover: Clay Blancett

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Special thanks to Susan Musgrave, James Linberger, Scott Odom and Rebecca Loudon for writerly encouragement.

Also many thanks to Clay Blancett for the generous use of his art, created with the help of his daughter's footprints.

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### I am Reading James Schuyler's Hymn to Life

Aloud one page a night, to my own one, my mister,  
my grumpy bastard. Nine pages, nine days  
and though poetry is not his thing he acquiesces.  
The groaning starts immediately at *strangulated hernia*  
and persists until *tonsils on a chest of drawers*  
and he squawks, *enough!* Thank God for thunderclouds, big  
lusty lions that scuttle the coercive heat, all growl  
no rain. A canoe bangs over my mister's weir,  
fiberglass scrapes and paints a boulder lurid & green,  
bird sounds. The Kettle River purrs

as I roll Hymn to Life into a baton to swat  
at wasps swarming a big fat roast meat dinner.  
Our guests didn't show and we're alone,  
summery and deathlike; July is not  
usually this ideal.

## Blue John

My brother-in-law was raised on a Montana farm, and after the cows  
teats were pulled, pail filled and cream skimmed off for butter, the 6 kids  
were fed the milk. I could say force-fed because they hated it;  
sour with dudgeon for the cream they craved they called it blue john.  
And that's how day two's morning sky freshens,  
with the colour of thin milk.

At 5 AM while the clumsy world sleeps,  
I spot three deer below the weir in the rushes;  
a doe and her big twins, bright as buffed oak.  
They are not crossing the river so much as weaving and circling  
in and through, presenting a minuet or a sarabande,  
a separating and coming together again  
that makes a pattern only they know the steps to.  
The doe lifts her head every few moments  
to scan for trouble, some scent or sound that doesn't belong

and perhaps she senses that I'm watching  
through my mister's binos, the ones he hunts with.  
But I hold no rifle now and the bob and dip  
of their heads feels as close as breath.

That evening we get through the whole second page:  
trees - blue jays - a woman collects June roses.  
Each year the same but different. My mister settles in with this.  
I'm thinking of the river and its sameness and difference,  
not year to year, but moment to moment.

The dog steps on a frog sleeping under the tea towel  
dropped on the patio last night.  
Every night the groggies, every morning the new resolve.  
This dichotomy between evening and morning,  
the plans we make large as houses.

## The Ordinarity of Midday

My grumpy bastard shouts and growls while I vow  
*never again*, the river runs over dots and blocks of rocks  
& we squabble in a heavy canoe; as usual we've waited  
too long and bump along the bottom  
padding against a wind, the sky fills  
once again with black threat  
till we settle and maneuver, pull up on a sandy cove  
in front of a deep hole where only one deer has tracked.  
Sandpipers chirp from the opposite bank  
& we snatch our clothes off  
not for sex but to dive, and swim. In big childish letters  
my own one scratches into the sand, DEE'S BARE BAR.

None of morning's sober resolves, nor evening's  
extravagant plans are about. It is midday.  
Midday is the doing.

That evening, Page 3 of a Hymn to Life in hand, we juggle *gravestones*  
and *periwinkles* against our own obdurate thirst. Thirst wins.  
I mix a gin and tonic with a splash of vermouth,  
my mister's got some rum & coke thing going.  
He says, *I'm sorry honey that page you can throw out the window*  
*3 is just a lot of bullshit and filler.*  
Bullshit and filler. Hmmm. So far page 2 is winning.

Like the Eliot reference thrown in helter skelter.  
And suddenly I realize this is Schuyler's response to the Wasteland.  
Cruel April and all that talk of where they've been. Hell and damnation  
and I want to yell cheater cheater corny cheater  
which is really funny seeing as I'm riffing off Hymn to Life which  
is riffing off Wasteland and why not go directly to the source?

Ospreys patrol the river. Sometimes one will grab a fish  
too big to haul up & out of the water,  
claws caught he'll be dragged down  
& under to drown  
though personally speaking I have never seen it.



Page 4

*What's happening! Your reading is deteriorating!  
You gotta keep up the pace! What are you doing?!*

I'm paddling in the river, just lazy criss-crossing the kayak  
back and forth against the current  
looking for the submerged golf balls we shot, my dog  
swimming after me from one side to the other,  
her wide-as-golf-ball-eyes pinned on me.  
He's making rock pile habitats for the fish,  
everything he does is measurable.  
The neighbour appears on the riverbank  
stumbling about the rocks, old and tragic  
in shorts and sneakers, his wife is ill.  
My mister tells him about his toothache, the tooth that  
was pulled, old man says I knew this guy  
had an infection in his tooth  
it traveled down his body and ate all the cartilage in his eyes,  
two weeks later he was dead! And I see instead of knees  
I've written eyes.

Later back at our Hymn my grouchy mister shouts  
*Start at the Lincoln Memorial line and go from there!  
I'm waiting!*

His whiskey hiatus is over.  
As long as we're critiquing, I say, I'd like to critique you as an  
audience & I give you minus ten for being obnoxious & rude.  
The blackbird won't stop squawking.

We drove up into the wasteland yesterday  
yes I said wasteland  
it's the fresh logging scars and scrubby pine  
and rutted road makes me say it,  
looking for huckleberries.  
We found the bushes but barren, the dozen berries  
rattling around in the plastic tub. I ate them, no pic.  
But along the way 2 separate beautiful does,  
appeared, lit from inside & glowing.  
And the lake, Nevertouch, immaculate  
virginal, dark, blind. The lake is an eye  
like a river is a wing. Someone has built  
an effigy, no I mean cross, a memorial on the little island.  
Cement and plaster of Paris and plastic flowers.  
He wants to pull it down, it is defacing the island,  
but I stop him.  
The ride home is slow going & I fall asleep.  
The day feels wasted, hot and buttery.

Schuyler hid a surprise for us amongst the rain,  
wind and petiwinkles, just after the Lincoln Memorial,  
my own one says read it again, that bit about the stroking.  
I do. Do you know this bit?

The cat's ridged skull, her lifted thighs,  
& the word he's waiting for  
finally *fucked*.

*Okay, he says, I didn't hear that, it's absolutely  
better than I thought it was*  
and on the strength of the stroking of the cat's skull  
or the thighs  
he now ranks page 4 as number one.

A roving of fog crosses the river & when we get to the cabin  
the dogs growling and hip-checking each  
other along the way, we find the place  
so warm against the chill  
of this summer day that I am overcome  
with longing for what will be gone.  
The log jam that forced a sandy beach to form  
amongst the rocks downstream, how many years did  
we swim there? He burned the jam & it's all rock now.  
Even the children, even the friends.

The river gave it up so freely, then  
before we could grab & hold tight took it away.  
At the cabin I find a recipe for wrinkles-  
fresh butter, essence of turpentine & mastic.

## The Fifth Page is Missing

Folded up somewhere in a pocket wet or blurred it doesn't matter,  
he ranked it high though, the highest yet but how much  
will be remembered?

It echoed something & I want to find it because I have already asked  
does a measurable life have more value? I mean output,  
simple tasks on a daily basis:

- 4 feet of rock work
- 6 cedar planks milled
- 3 terraces boxed in those same cedar planks

My horse's belly is crusty with bug bites and she lifts her  
lips in a grin when I scratch her, then groans, orgasmic  
when I ride her bareback into the river.

A spray of mulleins in bloom straight as gate posts grow on the trail.  
My mare bites the tops off and eats them.

I need to outfit my saddlebags:  
water, sesame seed snaps, pliers, pad, pencil, hoof pick.

*Here is my name in Greek:*

Δαρδός

I'm slow and dumb today because we went to the neighbour's last night and  
round the fire drank wine & the thing I remember was

the moon poised above the giant yellow pine  
in a corny stunning display  
the pine pointing it up like a black arrow in the dusky sky  
& then the very next moment it shifted  
and me and Alec were the only ones who stared  
& he's 4.

It's time to close the windows against the heat & here is the page, saying  
Rock Creek & bison & quattrelling & shampoo & something about time &  
water & just yesterday we drove to Rock Creek & I shampooed my hair in  
olive oil and egg & vinegar & lemon juice & today it looks dirty & no we  
didn't quarrel about when to leave,  
my intractable mate merely beeped.

There is no point, we are not hungry enough to make one.

2 boxes of fruit are left on the doorstep from the man  
who prowls the valley with men in woodsy camo  
who come to hunt and kill;  
apricots & green peaches for cougar & bear.



## Doldrums

She doesn't have many years left and she wants them to be happy ones.  
Who gets to decide?

Just don't ask us to move you again, her son, my own one,  
my clear one tells her.

*I was vulnerable then, people were making my decisions.*

She's booked an overnight at the Fontainebleu  
Assisted Living & again the tears.

Page 6 is relegated down to the bottom of the pile  
based on some blather about daffodil blooms being no big deal,  
we disagree & for once agree  
but I am distracted, a teary message left by my daughter  
& now there is no answer.

The hummingbirds buzz the gladiolas that are just beginning to bud  
and yesterday a kingbird. Mother-in-law's pared down now,  
the piano, the brass tables, the 1999 Buick Lucerne  
all gone.

*Try to be patient with me. We try.*

My father in NY remembers when Robert Moses tried  
to build a bridge from

Oyster Bay to Rye, all the infrastructure, bypass,  
highways were in place - *I could have visited Bubby every day*

he said, *every day*. Would that have kept his brother alive?  
Would his death have been more bearable?

Phone calls. My mother gets stuck in a parking lot  
conversation with Helen. Ilisa dead, Samuel dead,  
cancer & heartbreak. Shy or booming it's always there.

*Cœur de Lion.*

We sit on the rocks by the river & drink beer.

My neighbour is young and brown and blonde.

I have nothing to say to that. It's always been such.

The kids go by on tubes, unchaperoned, the youngest  
only three and all the rapids ahead, the low

slung branches, the rocks. It's good haying weather.

Everything else feels

like waiting. Alpha beta gamma delta,

Carson translates fragments of Sappho,  
*girl, sweetvoiced*

but the facing Greek surely says *Parthenon adyton*.

*That girl in a paper crown, brown*

*the way she wanted to shake that baby*

*who snatched it off but*

*sank to her knees instead too abject*

*to object, her eyes I've never seen anything  
so beautiful. Dreams mock summer  
with Nazis & rifles hidden under coverlets.  
No escape. A woman  
in a baseball cap walks her black  
poodle on a leash. Everything else runs free.*

## NO GO

No hot tub. No whiskey. No hymn.  
Baseball.

*Look at this honey, they got 2 games on side by side*

*Who's playing?*

*I dunno but the pitcher's lousy.*

The secrets of page 7 stay unrevealed.

I suspect it will be more of the same:

weather, weed & flower, Washington DC

& death. What hymn to life can eschew death?

I paddled the kayak upriver in the afternoon.

Portaged it over the shoals, nothing Palm Beach about it.

When they sprinkled old Tom's ashes from the bridge

the Minister slipped and dropped the whole damn plastic bag

intact to float downstream high and white in all its self-

conscious radiance, a swan for the curious

and the tourists.

## Lucky 7

*lalalalala*

Jesus.

Again the daffodils? Again the dandelions?  
Which would not be so so bad if the drippy  
nose hadn't surfaced - *this goes to the bottom  
of the heap, there's a whole pile at the bottom  
of the heap, if it weren't for the larch tree -*  
we both roused for the larch  
though 'greener than greenest grass'  
was a bit much.

*The seven samurai the seventh seal  
7 pages, 1 1/2 to go  
my bald fellow says can't you split the difference  
or get this over with?*

The morning is spent in a larky tourist  
town, which used to survive on orchards  
& vineyards alone, but now brags jet skis  
& sundresses & sandals & RV parks.

We buy  
white cherries, Rainier's, golden & streaked in red  
soft fruit & softer girls  
they overrun the place.

Here bounce tits galore, walking 'round town in a bikini -  
Caucasian & hetero  
East Indian, Portuguese & French Canadian.  
Everyone banking, parading or picking fruit.

In the orchards, the apples are still coming,  
hard as balls, cherries gone  
& not one bookstore in town  
not even one.

Are beautiful girls less treasured now?  
There seem to be so many of them.  
Where did the homely people go?  
The messy & hairy ones, with big noses & knobbed hands.  
The ones who've cracked & split  
open & sealed time & again.

The wind blows through this place all winter  
dives it back to the desert.  
That is the covenant it keeps.

## Promise

Chilled from the dunk, the swim, crabbing along  
the bottom, *here it's shallow, here deep* then groggy  
with wine and waiting we finally stuff it  
all back into its wherewithal, the red pot  
blackened on the stove, left over corn,  
untouched chili, plastic chairs  
dump the ice, feed the dogs & go home.  
Jimmy Sky's poem waits & though my buddy balks I insist,  
& promise that this will nearly end the Hymn  
to Life. *And it's a rain thick pear tree childhood.*

The whole river bby was a no-show,  
oh you have too many friends my Princess  
of the Hay, you with your moonshine Prince.  
The river did its own thing never flagging,  
a warp of snake scooping minnows,  
flock of mergansers running before the tubers.

Once wet sweetly wet I  
swore that I would not be disappointed  
*I'll be relieved*  
apricotmealcake venisonchili cornonthecob hordogs  
notwithstanding. We'll be eating it for a week.

The river never manipulates it floods & runs & dries & dams  
rocks & shoals & osprey  
feathers have muscles you don't know what loneliness and disappoint-  
ment are yet  
with youth on your side  
keep it as you can

One remembers when it was otherwise, when youth  
clung to us, that's the part that stings.  
Another covenant that won't be denied.

Hey, I know the Greek *alpha beta*  
wanna hear it?

Thought not.

But there is, as you know, something appealing  
about being forgotten & left  
to a river's devices.



## Jimmy Sky

Sun gone, moon yet to come, a purgatory, dissonance  
of ritual and routine. And there it is: the Japanese cherries  
the dripping sun, the young trees, and god bless him  
Washington DC again & a sinus headache.  
*Jesus he must live there, my bed-mate says, who the hell cares about  
Washington DC? And it's true who does?*  
But something touches me in a way  
best left unexamined.  
*Okay so he rumbled on and on about spring  
but I still don't like it.*

The dead branches on the young pines by my garden  
guarding the rhubarb & blueberries  
they formed a latticework, a net, a veil of sticks  
pokey & protective both  
that was just right, & now they're gone.

Lollipop farm. For all his wildness my mister has suburban  
sensibilities. It can't be helped. He must leave  
his mark, tame it, the river, the woods. I'll u s i o n.  
*In the corn water I pulled from the river and set to boil  
squirmed a pinhead minnow,  
my own one tried to save it and I didn't.  
That needs to be told.*

Sweet companion, a nuthatch came at me yesterday; I was watering  
the gladiolas spiking up into the heat, rose & white  
washed out & dusty when she flew hard  
straight into my hand, then swerved away  
to perch on a branch. She stared at me then.  
There was something in her eyes I never thought  
I would see in a songbird's. Nearly rage  
& she came at me again.  
I left her then, and bowed, laughing, *forgive me.*

I've got Jimmy Sky's Hymn to Life rolled up, swatting  
at wasps swarming the roast pork congealing  
on the picnic table by the river, fat & sweet the meat & much more  
than we can handle, the two of us, alone.

That man of mine berates me for lighting the inaugural  
fire in his new bbq  
with garbage paper, so I take off on my bicycle,  
the sky is so much wider north of here, and there's the moon,  
the one we left behind, half full. Our neighbours' fence is down,



for years like that, long strands of wire lie coiled in the weeds  
springing & looping in menace, my dog pants  
& races behind me to keep up.

A clarion call of donkey, then crow, animal sounds  
and the cyclic crunch of wheels on gravel.  
A spitting & autumn lands.



Deirdre Dore's poetry and plays have been published and/or produced in journals and on stages in the USA & Canada. Originally from New York, she now lives with her husband alongside a river in British Columbia where she catches horses, pursues an MFA in Creative Writing and works with trees.