



PRINT // DOCUMENT

SPOOKY ACTION AT A DISTANCE

POEMS

Gregory Crosby

the trouble with bartleby
in collaboration with
the operating system

SERIES TWO





SERIES TWO

for Abigail

PRINT // DOCUMENT





I WAS GRAVITY'S SLAVE

I was full, I was desperate.
I pulled the night over my head,
a plastic bag, & the Milky Way
just fog from my last breaths.

I remembered, & I forgot.
I watched my brain cells expire,
wondering who would brush my hair
while I slept, waning, never to wax.

I grew sleepy: I was awake.
He stripped the darkness from my face.
No one will ever know my side.
The tides never ask, *But why? Why?*

First I beam, then I cry.





A FATHOM

I wake up feeling oceanic, wavy.
You could say I joined the Army to see the Navy.
In my ears, a titanic roar, unspecific.
I'm feeling peaceable if not Pacific.
Something crests & subsides, something
inscribed becomes watery, unwritten.
(I must seem very deep from where you're sitting.)
At the shore's skin, I draw back my hand.
Everything I touch turns violently to sand.
My speech is also rather salty. I often feel
somehow faulty, but the flaw is hidden
in the spew & spray. I'm paralyzed
by my constant motion. I bring up
a storm, & everybody prays.
My head's a rim of fire. I'm jealous of the sky
(the only person I admire). Opaque as winter,
I become clear when I slip through fingers
& linger in tears. I see you have a conch
held at one ear. I suppose you want mystery,
a mermaid, murmuring, *The sea, the sea!*





A boy on the beach stares & stares; says,
But that's not me. There's a ship in a bottle,
& on that ship a message in a bottle,
& in that message an SOS, but it's not a signal
of distress. It's something vast & ancient & strangely
current. It's the undertow *über alles*.
It's a peg leg made of flesh, a seagull
gulled, a horizon nonplussed.
I have no history, only secrets (& blooms
of plastic). I drift. At every sunset, I tend
to make a scene. I'm tapping on the outside
of submarines, dreams. I slip into sleep, slowly,
from sea to sea, from you to me, sea you,
sea me, sea always, the green-gray waves,
always against & of the grain, waving,
a smile & a frown, drowning, pulling
each other down without ever
going under.





FASHION FORWARD

Plaid is all the rage in Purgatory.
Paradise is a periwinkle sock.
In Limbo, the infant eschews pink & blue
for the darkest red diaphanous smock.

Down in Hell, black is the new black. Also
the old black. It goes with everything.
Tattered swatches of houndstooth cling
to two out of three Cerberean mouths.

Valhalla's a faded concert jersey:
Iron Maiden, unwashed & quite holy.
The undying cottons of Elysium
turn dingy, but only very slowly.

Skin, it seems, is always ready to wear.
Eternity wants a tailored look.
A seaming. Flares, cuffs, eyelets, hooks.
Skulls bending toward their boutonnières.





IS THERE A WORLD FOR THAT?

I came to my senses, but my senses
were no longer home. Doomed to wonder this
world, I wandered why this should be so.

I tumbled headfirst from language-in-use
to language-in-general; the general
gave the order for an orderly retreat.

Yessir, I said, sounding the retweet.

Chickens & swallows collided as they
converged on home. There it is again, home.

Homely, says the mirror. Homily, says
the homily. Tautology isn't
inborn, it's taught. A tightrope throbs inside
my brain. What's the opposite of solipsism?

When everything only exists outside
of yourself, including you. Is there a
world for that? Can someone look that up?





MISS NOVEMBER 1979

Miss November 1979,
I was going to ask, *Give me a sign*: a Dangerous Curve,
an inverted Yield,
a historical marker in a field
that reveals its secrets once you're up close.
The center unfolds for another dose, a glossy whisper.
The center still holds.

Objectify, your honor. Everything precious
winds up on a shelf.
Everybody knows how to signify.
Your honor, this answer is one I won't dignify
with a question.
Still, I'm compelled to speak & say & ask.
It's a lonely task.

Miss November 1979, you have, for far too long,
been far too kind to this mind's eye,
a once & future thirteen-year-old boy.
It's impossible for you to be coy. You're the soft focus cliff
from which I once leapt—from shy to rapacious
is but the smallest step.
At night, I read you by a light long dead, & I
soaked you up the way water soaks a stone; undressed,
you wore me away to the bone, with your perfect skin
airbrushed to paper,
the mysteries of the flesh turned paper-thin.





In the folds of the eye, something begins.
Desire & dread bend towards their ends; through you,
Miss November 1979,
something makes amends.

You're now fifty-four. Time makes no amends,
but please, take your bow.
What can I ask that I don't already know? Luminous bodies,
their eyes all aglow. Signifier & signified are one;
the forest for the trees, ain't we got fun.
How many signs can this mind's eye stand? If I forget thee,
may I forget my right hand.
With all this I begat the sorrow of joy.

Miss November 1979, let me say:
In the imagination begins experience.

A powerful deceiver, yes. I remember.

In experience begins death, too, but I see right through death
to you. I'm looking through you, too. I know
where you've gone:
into them all.
Those dead stars, those live eyes, still shine.

The dead eyes, too.
The lost.

Ah, I remember what I wanted to ask you,
just in time,
if you don't mind awfully much,
O Miss November 1979.





PROMENADE

It's exhausting, all this waiting around
for betrayal. Oh look: you've got mail.
Remember the last century? The rest?
Centuries like bad yearbook photos,
the feathered hair, the mullets of the past.
Lipstick everywhere, & not just traces.
Once, there were more than three graces.

Use your imagination like a spade
overturning the fresh earth of a grave.
A fresh grave is an occasion for a song.
Someone always yelling JUDAS! in the hall.
Snow banks of data, snow drifts of noise.
You pin the corsage to the past's white breast.
The future spikes the punch, & strikes the tent.





SANS SERAPH

His suits were immaculate, though they puckered at the shoulders. He opened a discotheque called The Head of a Pin.

He did okay. His loneliness was his sword; his shield, a good CPA.

He drank like Dean Martin, first for show, then for real. His handwriting, no one could read. His accent was mid-Atlantis: sunken, glittering, unreal. When he smiled, the bouncers began to sweat. He announced the DJs with a flourish both baroque & Stax. At five in the morning, he wiped down the mirrors himself, cerulean eyes afloat on wisps of fine white dust.





SONNET IN THE SHAPE OF HIGH WATER

The aquarium floods, but no one escapes.
From darkened tanks we emerge blinking, dazed.

We take perverse pride in being unfazed,
but we are not unfazed. There are the shapes,
bobbing, caught in drains, wrapped in drowned drapes
torn from windows that once held views. Razed,
the shore extends in both directions, waves
of wood mirroring their gray brethren. Lakes
live now in the stairwells of the subways.

It will take days to restore the power,
they say. But the power never went away.

It's always there, at the edge, the limits
of what we glibly call *another day*.
The switches & signals we deem *minutes*.

It takes so little for them to surge
over the glass lip of what we have,
the form we have made & unmade,
the bed in which we sleep, like creatures
of the deep that have no word for *depth*,
no word for *water*. That only understand
the word *high*, as in a progress, swollen,
& watch with eyes as big as dinner plates
as that word,

that world,

rises.





THE BRUSH OFF

A flick of the wrist, a twist in the tale.
A simple twist, but not of fate.
A woman was once a twist, but not now,
nor a skirt, a broad, a doll.
I still call you doll, but I'm trapped
in the long ago & far away of now,
the retroactive, the *gee whiz, you're swell*.

Do speed freaks go speed dating?
Do tweakers live tweet their lives?
That big baby, America, she cries & cries.
She's only calm when she can play with your gun.
In my first Sears portrait, it took credit cards
to distract me, just long ago & just far enough.
Look at that smile, indebted to time itself,

a long-term loan in slow default,
minute by minute, cell by little gray cell.
My best friend said, *All of life is an after-party*.
It's true: your parents had a party, & they didn't
invite you. Of course, you still showed up,
& here you are, addicted to meth, or addicted
to *Breaking Bad*. Either way, don't be sad:





There's always something rather than nothing.
Isn't that nice? This isn't how I started
off. Instead, I drowned horses
in mid-stream, leaving me soaked
with two dead horses racing swiftly downriver,
long ago & far away. The winner's circle is a delta.
Or so I keep telling myself.

The mysteries of sex. The futility
of futurity. Faster, Daddy, go faster.
Higher, push me higher.
Daddy's tired.
Someday, we'll look back on this,
the moment's sire. The exhausted nation sleeps.
I'm trying & failing to keep her

at arm's length, my head still on her shoulder,
just before she shifts out from under & rolls
in the dark toward the white cliffs
at the end of these sheets, dreaming me
out of existence.

Long ago & far away, doll.

I twist inside this comforter,
this quilt of candy stripes
& dead light.

I turn to the manifest destiny
of the wall.





THE CAT'S IN THE BAG, THE BAG'S IN THE RIVER

Match me. Sitting in the back of the ghost
of Horn & Hardart, stirring coffee, cold,
while sunlit rain stabs the air with gold,
chock full o'naughts. In walks the corporate host:
Mickey, Elmo, Hello Kitty, the toast
of Broadway photo ops, the oversold
icons of innocence, with hours untold
waving, waving, while they slowly roast.

One by one, they begin to cut their throats.
Soft brown faces gush out, smiles of relief
on nesting doll heads, eyes tiny & black.
It's a living, down here in the life boats.
Time's never squared. It redeems no thief.
We claw & yowl & drift inside the sack.





THE CONTENDERS

I'm half-asleep, but which half I don't know.
A glass house, full of the stones you've thrown.
Robbers in the cellar, dancers on the floor.
Love is innuendo, & money just a door.
The owl in the attic never asks why.
Under the eaves, the wasp whispers *Hi*.

I'm dreaming again, I can't seem to stop.
It appears that I'm the victim of a plot.
Somewhere, someone is filing a report.
I never know just where to sit in court.
When the long day's done, we are undone.
There's always a next time, until there's not.





POEM IN THE SHAPE OF A VOODOO DOLL

Four is not *Forty*.

No one here misheard or misspoke.

You, who have baited & switched,
& shrugged & hidden behind watery eyes,
have wronged the wrong person this time.

This time, you have made the wrong person cry.

This next line is the needle at your throat.

This line, the next needle at an angle to your spine.

This line at your shoulder

& this line at your shoulder
are two needles to hang up your coat.

This line is a knee-buckler,

this line a stiletto, reversed.

This line is the sort of elbow grease
that makes you drop your knockoff purse.

This line pricks the shroud of your heart,

this line pulls your pulse apart.

This line makes it difficult to breathe.

This line can only be removed by *please*.

This line is poised at the tip of your tongue.

This line, the last—

—has only begun.





THE MORTGAGE

It was moving day, so we kept very still.
A shoebox of photos sat inside the phone.
Next to your coffee was my sleeping pill.
Down the stairs came a Predator drone.

Meet the new house, same as the old house.
Out in the garden, an army of gnomes.
On the floor, the top button of your blouse.
In every room, yes. Now it feels like home.

When we were married, we were only wed.
Now there's no telling who begins, who ends.
I'm not sure who's saying *Let's go to bed*.
A voice in my head? And so we ascend.

Line the cabinets & wash down the floors.
Put up the mirrors, hang the plaster saint.
I lie with my head on your chest of drawers.
They can smell it on our breath: fresh paint.





THE INVITATION

A portrait of the heart as a glass piñata:
the blindfold makes love with a baseball bat, kisses
sugary red shards held fast in tiny wet fists,
forgets the animal, the shape, that once held it
in place. The sad donkey brays I don't need a tail,
thanks. You smile with white-frosted lips, the memory

of cake a faded tongue, collapsed inside your jaw.

It's so difficult to forgive your family
for their incomprehension of who, what you are.

In this poem, no one from your family appears.
You're safe here. It's your party. What shall we play next?
At midnight, you'll be older. That's all, nothing else.





DRINKING SONG

Every heart is a cosmological constant,
an equation to make the theory come out right,
a tremor of votive light behind a bottle of
Absolut at a bar too dark for anything
but texts sent & texts received.

It's so loud you can't hear yourself drink.
You press End, and the world disappears.
When the screen goes dark there's only the mirror.
Every glance births another self.
There's any number along the top shelf.

This could go from bad to worse,
said the scalpel to the sponge,
the doctor to the nurse.
You nurse a beer but not back to health.
Dead soldiers rub shoulders, spreading the wealth

of glass, glass against glass, clinking.
This is where boredom does its thinking,
& you, you're pure thought, & thoughtless.
The funny thing is, you're never drunk.
You're the pigeon on the subway stair,





the only being that understands the sky
& the underworld are one. Anything can happen,
so nothing ever does. Torment is for suckers,
& bliss just the veil the dancer never drops.
It was a party until someone called the cops.

No one ever calls the cops.
Have another. Have an other, if you must.
That dark bottle is thick with dust.
Paul holds it up to his face, & looks at you,
& winks. Every night is another End of Days.
This one's on the house, he says.





THE YEAR OF THE TIGER FARM

Tiger, tiger,
dying ember, & streaks
of ash: this is your year. You remember
the Jungle? Now remember
the Future (which is a Jungle),
one you can't see for the trees).

Remember that She
is waiting for you.
She wears a mask
on the back of her head,
& dares you
to take a swipe. The Future,
She's just your type. Tiger, tiger,

burning burning

for aphrodisiac, for a skin
to decorate our dim & fearless
symmetry: for everything we destroy,
we create
one more thing
that can't be replaced.

When you're gone, you'll be
way gone, smoke in the grrrrrrrrrate.
Yours is the immortal
paw, eye.

Oh! Oh... here She comes....

She's a man-eater.





WHERE THE BONE IS BURIED

That was the dog that didn't bark; when he
opened his mouth, television came out.
We named him Cable. He ran round the park,
a flying saucer between his teeth.
Tiny voices cried, *We come in peace!*
Gloved in plastic bags, our hands attended
his procession. His big eyes were sad,
but he would not beg. Growling or smiling?
Who's to say? Mostly, he played dead, better
than a ghost in Shakespeare. A warm body
at the foot of whose bed. A pricking of ears.
The future looks like it's on a long leash,
but it's not, he said. Andromeda spiraled
at the edge of the lawn. From the doghouse,
we watched the sky fall. *Just for that,*
he woofed, *I'll never speak another word.*
I'm afraid he means it, the barman sighed.





PORTMANTEAU

Never guesstimate the length of a rope.
Measure, for pleasure, the measure of mind.
Words like pale limbs, a world enough to bind.
A very late brunch, chillaxing sans dope
but much dopamine, a spork full of hope.
The afternoon blooms, a very rare find.
Melt meets *weld* to become *meld*, now confined,
now free: redefined. Such slippery slopes.

The girl Rossetti sent is here, in hand.
She hates portmanteaus. She has her own words.
She does what she wants. She chooses her sighs.
She asks that you make a list of demands.
You oblige, cutting the rope into thirds.
She says, *Oh, you...* Ohu? Oyou? Oh, but her eyes—

worlds, combined.





BRONZEFALL

The shedding, summer skin, a phoenix light. This world
is where you fumble for the switch, for the candlepower
that corrupts, absolutely. Praying for moonlight,
the pretense that she is a friendly ghost.
By moonlight, a burden lifted.
The bonfire thumbs its red
nose at the Atlantic.
Ah, love. Again?
Again, agape.
Only a hermit
can see into the heart
of a galaxy these days. Close
your eyes. Watch her burst, red
purple red. Wait for the wheel, turning,
coming round again. She, her. Someone, &
someone else. Buried in the flames of a white, white-hot,
sundress.





AND WHAT IS A JUKEBOX? AND WHERE CAN I STAND BY ONE?

Time has done its work: I'm no longer
holding out for that teenage feeling.
Longing is a shadow, always stealing,
always long. I'm no longer stronger.

I'm much stranger, but no stranger to this.
This is the distance from earth to sun.
Why would I watch an eclipse when I am one?
All this, my epilogue to a kiss.

Whoever by starlight, the light long dead,
the permanent eclipse that slips upstairs.
They are all in order, my affairs.
Tomorrow never knows. That's what she said,

she said.





HE FILLS OUT THE APPLICATION WITH A SINKING HEART

Between the lines, again. I'm not there,
but I am. Hanging by your long threads,
clinging to the embankments of your
enjambments, a less than wily coyote
gazing, mid-air, at that impact to come,
down upon the desert's painted floor.
I don't care. I'm always warring with
warning signs. I'm worn, but I'm wearing

a smile, pained, & genuine. Kiss me,
why not. This is how we fall: I swoon,
& you let go, watching. I'm the other
shoe, & I've been waiting forever
to drop. When you hear the thud, sleep,
my where, my who, my why, my why not.





MONOGRAM

Another world is always possible, but not yet.
Running, still, to stand still, twenty-five years out.
When you are old, you grow young from the inside-out.

Ask me, I won't say no, how could I, just as he sang it.
Racing though my veins to where memories can't wait.
Wonder and wander, separated at birth by regret.

After the first regret, all the rest fade to a nothingness.
Rest a minute, your restless head on this cage, my chest.
Whatever you do, don't move until your arms fall asleep.

Across the room, the muted self smokes its mute cigarette.
Ruthless, it combs the long minutes for its lost ruthlessness.
Waiting, it lights the next one off the last, chanting like

Aretha, Chain chain chain, chain chain chain... and there's no
Risk to play, no tiny armies, no continents ripe for conquest.
Won, you've won the day, and the night, and the day again.

Also, I'm tired. I came the long way around, blindly.
Reasons are legion, but they, too, eventually fall away.
Walk with me as far as you can, toward another season,

another passing. Now I am the passenger, and I ride and I
ride. Twenty, thirty, forty and five. I make my next-to-last
wish, and lean, as before, ever, toward a blur of fire.





AND THE LAMB, BUT ONLY MUCH LATER

The morning's arm of light sweeps the table
of painted knights & china & papers,
sending everything that isn't you or I
to the floor. Walls into windows, a door
into adore. March files out, & we are
risen, but not quite yet—beasts in bed,
we raise our heads only to admire
the valleys in our pillows. This, our veldt,

a canvas called The Breaking of the Fast.
We are in like a, out like a. We are
lions lying (or is it laying?), wearing
human faces, my mane undone by your
nuzzling. In your ear, I whisper & roar.
You ask for coffee, & the tall grass trembles.





SPOOKY ACTION AT A DISTANCE

Impermanence from permanence,
sound from plastic. A scarf, a shawl,
a shroud of static.

A sundial in the dark of a school night
told me this about love:

that there would be dancing
in the dark, walking in the park,
& reminiscing;

that piña coladas were the key
to all mythologies;

that even in the depths
of a so damned depression
you could set your sights
on Monday

& get yourself undressed...

A voice from the future
said sad songs say so much less

than you will come to know.





Turning, turning, AM amidst a.m.,
round & round... the child's hand

is farther than the man's. The Seventies
are over, man. The Seventies

are eternal. The voice said,

*Everything that's lost
will be restored,
& then lost again.*

*The radar understands
what the grid cannot imagine.*

*The shadows cast themselves, while
tomorrow daydreams tonight.*

*Everything that's lost
will be restored,
& then lost again.*

Someone found a letter you wrote me.

They read it on the radio,
in the voice of the Future,

& I heard it just today.

The DJ translated it as
entanglement.





Separated by a million songs,
but not the speed of light...

& you gazed up at me,
& the answer was plainly seen,

felt

before it could be understood.

Every measurement agrees
that we
spin counterclockwise.

You & I, observed, by... ...

Mystery, static. It does,
& does not, matter. Everything

restored *last chance*
will be lost *last dance*

& restored *tonight*





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GREGORY CROSBY's poetry has appeared in several journals including *Court Green*, *Epiphany*, *Copper Nickel*, *Leveler*, *Sink Review*, *Ping Pong*, and *Rattle*. In 2002, as a poetry consultant to the City of Las Vegas, he was instrumental in the creation of the Lewis Avenue Poets Bridge, a public art project in downtown Las Vegas. His dedicatory poem for the project, "*The Long Shot*," was subsequently reproduced in bronze and installed in the park, and was included in the 2008 Anthology, *Literary Nevada, Writings from the Silver State* (University of Nevada Press). The recipient of a 2004 Nevada Arts Council Fellowship in Literary Arts, he holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the City College of New York, where in 2006 he won the Marie Ponsot Poetry Prize. He is co-editor of the online poetry journal *Lyre Lyre*, and currently teaches creative writing at Lehman College, City University of New York.

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is pleased to make physical

The PRINT DOCUMENT

SPOOKY ACTION AT A DISTANCE: POEMS

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SERIES TWO





DOC U MENT

/däky_əm_ənt/

First meant “instruction” or “evidence,” whether written or not.

noun - a piece of written, printed, or electronic matter that provides information or evidence or that serves as an official record

verb - record (something) in written, photographic, or other form

synonyms - paper - deed - record - writing - act - instrument

[*Middle English, precept, from Old French, from Latin documentum, example, proof, from docere, to teach; see dek- in Indo-European roots.*]

Who is responsible for the manufacture of value? Based on what supercilious ontology have we landed in a space where we vie against other creative people in vain pursuit of the fleeting credibilities of the scarcity economy, rather than freely collaborating and sharing openly with each other in ecstatic celebration of MAKING?

While we understand and acknowledge the economic pressures and fear-mongering that threatens to dominate and crush the creative impulse, we also believe that now more than ever we have the tools to relinquish agency via cooperative means, fueled by the fires of the Open Source Movement. Looking out across the invisible vistas of that rhizomatic parallel country we can begin to see our community beyond constraints, in the place where intention meets resilient, proactive, collaborative organization.

Here is a document born of that belief, sown purely of imagination and will.

When we *document* we assert. We print to make real, to reify our being there.

When we do so with mindful intention to address our process, to open our work to others, to create beauty in words in space, to respect and acknowledge the strength of the page we now hold physical, a thing in our hand... we remind ourselves that, like Dorothy: *we had the power all along, my dears.*





THE PRINT! DOCUMENT SERIES

is a project of

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