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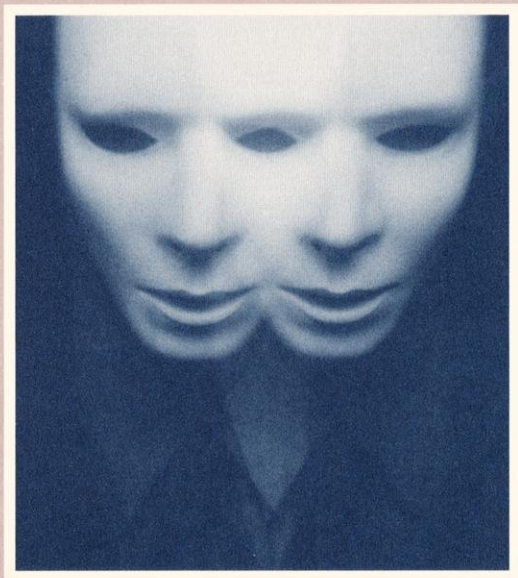
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Things I've Never Told Anyone

Poetry by CX Dillhunt

A PARALLEL PRESS CHAPBOOK

Things I've Never Told Anyone

Poems by
CX Dillhunt



PARALLEL PRESS 2007

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FIRST EDITION

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*With gratitude to Joyce S. Steward,
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How to Hold a Book

Open

With horses
Praying the Angelus, ringing
In the noon hot field

Now

At winter's edge, wind angling
The painter's knife
Still moving

Long

As a new almanac
Complaining spring, turning
Each season on time

Again

And again this kitchen
Table holding
Its handpicked bouquet

Once

In all hands
As a lover
Holds your heart from memory

I've Never Told Anyone

how I am trying to learn to return home with myself. If you have ever tried this you know what I mean. I don't think it's an American thing, a Buddhist thing, a Catholic boy thing. If you have ever tried, you know what I mean—what you come home with, what you don't. It happens all the time. Sometimes you notice, sometimes you don't. If this has ever happened to you, you know what I mean.

Sometimes you go back out, you find yourself. Well, that's how it happens for me. And you? I don't mean to put words in your mouth—perhaps we could work together, discover ways to come home with ourselves. I know you know what I mean. So let's solve this. You're coming home, right? Perhaps you're in a hurry, the light changes, you stop or go, the road turns or it doesn't. Eventually, you are home. But sometimes you know, right? I mean you know if you've both arrived or not. So, you're thinking, whose garage is this, whose garage door is this. You push the button. The door goes up. But beyond that you don't think much.

Once, last fall, I was at supper and I realized I wasn't there, just for a split second and I don't think anyone noticed, but eventually they will and either you explain or you don't. You just stop trying. You don't worry about arriving home with yourself anymore. Instead, you go to bed early, dream of yourself, out there, somewhere, dreaming of yourself dreaming of arriving home with you.

Talking on Tuesday

I've gotten more daring with words. Saying things I think.
Thinking things I say. Placing words where they have not been
before. Sitting alone with words. Saying nothing. Giving trees
new names. Moving water to where neither of us has ever been
before. And the words. The words have gotten more daring with
me. Standing here at times. Quiet. Where I don't even see them.
Hear them.

Then darting out in front of me. As if we were children again.
Playing again. Tag. Hide-and-seek. Witches in the Graveyard.
Back on South Michigan with my brothers and sisters. Kick the
Can under the street light strung corner to corner crisscrossing
the intersection of Michigan and Franklin. I have no idea
who won. I am watching. I am a word or two. Then I am
out of words.

Words. They're everywhere. Poking fun, running, laughing.
Spelling and misspelling. Retelling. It's mine. It's my story,
I say. But the words go right on telling. My story. Respelling
the landscape. Renaming, proclaiming they were there all along.
That I walked on them. Ate them. Spit them. Slept with them.
Sold them, borrowed them, buried them. It is they who now
own all.

What am I to do? Where am I to go? And all the while I am
thinking, do not think such things, do not say such things. So I
am thinking, how do I say things, how do I think things, stop
things. All I can think of is how to stop thinking, how I should
stop saying this word and the next. I decide to be sky. Stay
young. Talk only on Tuesday. The words and I exchange colors.
Then we wander off.

The Window Washer of Prague

I am the window washer of Prague. I am not picky about age or height or style. The builders, owners and occupants are of no interest to me. I don't care about location, color or size.

Architects, designers? Romanesque? Gothic? Baroque? The only history I know is now. I prefer cubist, tire of art nouveau, and wonder about Americans who think everything is art deco. *Deco schmeco*. Why even have this discussion? I do my work between the walls. When I am good, no one notices.

I am the glass man, the watch-him-up-so-high man, the isn't-he-afraid-he'll-fall man. No one knows my name, but the buildings know my hands, my elbows, my feet. I prefer to think of myself as a building hugger, a dirt mugger, a wall crawler, a rope dope, a pail and rail sort of guy. I only have one goal. I desire each building. I covet their shapes. Being next to a building is my life. I am the mortar of sunshine splashed on your favorite building. Let me be high, let me be low. I enjoy cleaning from the sidewalk as much as from the top, overhanging it all.

Yes, I think about my work. Going down, going up. I think about what I have done, what I will do. I talk to my windows. Mostly, I thank them. They have given me a reason to live. I would be just as happy to go from window to window, floor to floor doing something else. Don't you see? It's the seeing of both sides. And it's the weather. How I long to be the weather blowing, falling, pouring, whining, slapping, clapping, sliding, slipping, slopping along the rooftops, walls, over and around my windows, under doors, going into crevices, cracks I'll never see, never touch. I am the window washer. I am the toucher of buildings, the comforter of the city walls, the singer to her glass, the shiner of sunshine. I am the glass man, the sleight of hand man. I am the hang man, the up man, the down man, the city man, the Prague man.

I am the no-style man, though you may call me either *fin de siècle* or *secession*. You will not recognize me on the street, I will not recognize you, I do not recognize me either. I never look at my work when I am done. When I am not on the building, crawling the building, holding the building, I am not. If you want to talk to me, talk to Prague. If you want to hold me, hold my city. If you love me as I love you, you too are the window washer. I am the glass man, the all-hands man, the wish-I-were-a-building man. The window washer of Prague.

How to Use This Poem

Use your finger
to slide over each word go
up and go down go
in and go out and under
slipping sloping poking

stretching a letter or two
now add a finger or
two singling out the spaces
adding to the places
your pen would never go

rub
round
and round
facing this page
as this page faces you

then without reason
use two hands
feel front and back at once
find the sides
the creased crevices of each letter

touch this poem again and again
slipping from line
to line sliding
riding down and up
with only what's good to the touch

each fingertip
by now
stronger longer
singing stinging with the quiet of
your soul tracing

letter after letter after letter
touching surface to surface
reaching and rolling you
one finger at a time
each teaching this poem to touch

you to touch

I Want to Be Spring, Spring Wants to Be Me

I want to be spring, to rise, flower and bloom, but spring won't let me. Spring wants to be me, wants to wander and walk around, to shout and move about talking all about herself, but I won't let her. Without you, says spring, without you, I say. We stand still for awhile. Go nowhere. We wonder who should speak next. Should we go together or part ways. There is no one here to tell us what to do. As we wait, a quiet crow flies by, the hill slopes, the cloud hangs in the sky, a tree stands, and the ice out on the lake is thinner. We are out of words, out of sorts. Spring, I say. Today, says spring. I couldn't ask for more, I say. I am asking for more, she says. I couldn't ask for more. I am needing more. More time to be with you. I was afraid of this. This was afraid of me. It has happened, I say. Now, I will never die. And I have never been more on fire.

Heart Lesson

I arrive early. This is an annual affair. I've had some time to think. I offer to leave my heart, aorta, leaky valve, whatever parts they need. I want to take a walk, I explain. I cannot convince them. I take a seat.

They want to check my heart and ask me if I know what they are looking for. I explain, this is an annual affair. I want to take a walk, they should take what they need, let me leave with the rest, take a walk with whatever they don't need. I say I'm not choosy. I say, a hand, a foot would do, a part of a leg, even things I never knew I had. I'll take whatever.

What I wouldn't do to hold my heart in my hand, tell it a thing or two. Watch it slurping there, wonder who's inside of whom. And I know now I would be happy forever to be held, a heart in the hand of another.

When she says, breathe when you need to, I glance at the black-and-white monitor, remember my summer afternoons with Spin & Marty, Sky King, the Lone Ranger, see her run a replay of my valve lapping happily, gurgling along and me breathing when I need to.

Winter

It's my job to walk winter around, to break her in, to show her what's here. We go from snapdragons in my garden to bushes in empty lots holding green-red leaves to hundreds of coots sliding into shore, the wind spinning behind them. It is my job to show winter what has been done, what needs to be done. You can only imagine how much fun this is—deciding which trees to climb first, how long to hang on, then fall to the ground running. She relies on me, asking, looking, never standing still—which flowers to find, which hillside to slide down, which gardens to crawl through, where to stand to see the farthest, where to sit and talk, to catch up. To tell all. I am always glad when winter arrives. I usually recognize her before she recognizes me, though it is a wonder who is more bewildered this time of year—I waiting, she looking. We are always glad to see each other. I should tell you, this hasn't always been my job and one day it'll be my job to pass it on. But for now, I find it very enjoyable. You must know that there is more than one winter, that these jobs are here for the asking. I really don't know how or why I'll pass it on, but I'll learn. I already suspect it will be a winter day like this. That I'll become winter, someone else will show me around. I know winter isn't really her name, but she knows my turn will come and she has much to teach me. For now we are together, happy to have this annual meeting.

At the National Museum in Phnom Penh

Look. There is a woman, I say to myself, taking a picture of a monk much younger than her taking a picture of a sculpture of an elephant. And I want to grab my camera want to be seen taking a picture of a woman taking a picture of a monk taking a picture of an elephant this hot afternoon in this courtyard of the National Museum surrounded by nagas raising their heads at each entrance.

*Two geckos playing
on the temple wall next to
a young monk sitting*

I meant to say: I want to learn another language. I want to write in words I've never heard of, words that have never heard of me, know nothing of my sounds, say nothing of my ways, crawl with these bees in and out of flowers I have never heard of, flowers I've never seen, and everything singing with afternoon music empty with the want of water. Nearby stand some garudas, wing-arms spread.

*Garudas she says
holding up nagas holding up
mountains for Vishnu*

In the heat, your words walk on alone. Go where they want to go. When they say they'll meet you there, will they? While you wait, you remember you were told before you arrived: if bitten by a monkey in Cambodia, go immediately to the American embassy. And, yes, if you are bitten by a dog, go immediately to the embassy. No, no one knows where the embassy is. No one asks. We wait.

*Dogs walking along
the afternoon riverfront
waiting for no one*

The Novel

He'd learned to talk as if he were in a novel. Not so much as if he were any particular character. More, he simply had a sense of the lines. His lines. His words as they would appear, how they would sound, how they would sound once chosen, crafted carefully by an artist, a writer.

He had the sense that he was not the writer, not the writer of his own words, not the teller of his own story. In that sense, he was a character. He was a character in whichever novel it was his lines fit so perfectly. He wasn't sure if he wanted to be in a novel. He wasn't quite sure how he'd gotten there.

He was a character, believable but with no face or height described. Whoever wrote of him had not even given his age or a hint of gait or expression, for everything you knew of him emanated from his words. His perfectly told story, his well chosen words.

So, when he told her she was mysterious, he realized it was happening again. That he was back, that he had been returned, faceless, in a nameless novel and that she was playing along. She did not know he knew this, for she did not know they were in a novel.

She did not know her sentences by heart as he knew his. She spoke whatever she was told to speak. Whatever came to mind whenever her mind came to the mind of whomever it was who was doing the telling, whoever it was who was telling this story of which she knew nothing.

Sometimes he thought he knew exactly what she was going to say before she started speaking. It always made a certain odd sense, no matter what she said. She always seemed to say what could fit, even what should fit. Not that she always said the right thing, more she never said the wrong thing.

And they fit. Their sentences. They fit together. Not that they had to. But they did the way sometimes sentences not in a novel seem to fit. Sentences about most anything. Their beauty being in their fitting. That counterbalance of sound and meaning and by all means the fitting look, the eyes of both fitting, understanding.

So, here they are. Their sentences trim and crisp. There they are in a script known in the speaking. "Would you like an ice cream?" she asks. "Are you having one?" "I don't know," she says, "I'll see how I feel when I get there." To which, of course, he says, "You are so mysterious of late."

You'd Think I'd Get Used to It

*Already there are
red leaves on the ground—I want
to put them back up.*

You'd think I'd get used to it—here I am, mid-October, turning colors, drying up, falling with the best of them. Hanging out between seasons. Ready for any color.

OK, you'd think I'd get used to this, this end of year thing, this change in season thing, this it-will-happen-with-or-with-out-you thing. This fall thing. Everything outside moving without you. Leaves now falling on you. You'd think I'd get used to it.

Just the other night. We're in bed. Brushed, flossed, washed, not yet time for the evening news. (We're between.) You're reading a new novel you've checked out from the library, I'm reading some old poetry I bought earlier in the day at the new bookstore.

The TV's on, we might watch Letterman after the news after the weather like we sometimes do or we might fall asleep during a missed cue or a punch line laughing.

Anyway, you'd think I'd get used to it.

Queen for a Day

My favorite TV show as a boy was *Queen for a Day*.

O, how could the audience think they could choose? How did they know who had the biggest grief? The most breaks in her heart? The worst story to live? I knew, I always knew. I knew who I wanted to win. I clapped, I clapped hard, loud and long right there in our living room, so did my sisters, and my brothers who were old enough to know, to watch and wait as the meter rose in favor of one over the other. And often, I imagined my mother appearing on the show. Each show, waiting, my heart pounding, holding my breath, waiting to see her, wanting to say I see her, I see her, wanting to make sure I was the first to see her, to clap for her. Would she win? How I wanted to win, to hear the applause, to be a woman acclaimed as the saddest, to bear the shiny crown, to shoulder the queen's cape, to grasp that silver scepter, to take home all the appliances, to cradle those roses, and to cry upon the throne of public happiness!

My Mother's Love Poems

I have found them, poems from my mother's lover, stuffed in the trunk of a car, my mother's car, her last car. A 1982 Mercury Grand Marquis. Long and lovely. A perfect car. Red and white. Big. Bigger than big. Bigger than life. Bigger than the road. Beautiful chrome and power everything. My mother's favorite car.

My mother has always loved to drive. She cried on the phone to me the day she had to let her Mercury go. She almost hit someone, she said. Almost backed right over him. Never saw him, she said. Said she knew right then that she had to stop driving. She gave me the keys and I parked it out back for the rest of the winter.

One day, I started cleaning, getting her old Mercury ready to sell. I saved the trunk till last, expecting to just take a peek—like the closet in a hotel, a final check. I was expecting nothing, maybe an old newspaper, a hanger, the worn spare, an item or two for Goodwill. Instead, I found the trunk stuffed with poems. Love poems.

When I was a child my mother often took rides on her own in the family car. Cars that couldn't hold all eight or nine or more of us. I remember knowing even then that this was her time away. The day she stopped driving, I heard her wonder how she'd ever be able to see the colors change again, get away when needed.

In her trunk I found, a poem, a love poem from the car to my mother. *She drives me, moves me. She cares to go with me. Talks to me, cries to me. She wants me, needs me. Keeps me, takes me as I am. We are as one!* I found another, and another. The trunk was full of poems from my mother's Mercury Grand Marquis.

She flies with me, confides in me. My mother never owned a new car. My father never drove. *Alone at last, we own the road, we own the day, no one owns us.* Once I heard my dad complain she loved her car more than him. *Sing. Let's sing together. Let's fly!* I took one last look. I could barely see the spare. *Let's fly away!*

What I Meant to Say

I meant to say that sometimes my thoughts get ahead of me.
Like the time on my bike this spring on the way home from
work speeding down the hill where Lindfield crosses Muirfield.
I'm only a block from home and I put on my brakes just in time as
the cars speed by but my thoughts keep on going. Right through
the intersection. Go on without me. Thinking. Not about work or
home or even this poem. No I'm thinking or whatever it is of me is
thinking something I can't remember now, but I do remember how
they kept on going, my thoughts, I mean. Got away from me.
Moved ahead of me. Went on as if they didn't know of me as if
somehow the thoughts I'd grown to know and move with had
nothing to do with me as if their growing was done without me as
if they knew of me as I knew of them as if we had found each other
by chance, had happened not upon each other but more simply
happened to share the same existence for a while. I think even now,
that's the way of haiku. I mean the way it holds you. Holds you
until you have it written. With or without a bike, speeds on
without you. Knows of intersections you've never heard of will
never see. How when it's written it takes you back to when it
wasn't. How haiku exist without you. How sometimes even a bike
can't take you there.

Gender Reduction

Perhaps Paris is a man and New York is a woman;
or maybe you are a woman and she is a man.

My mother is more feminine than my father, but he falls easily
to one side. Now that he is dead, certainly he will admit to this.

Or is it I, not being dead, who is now more feminine than ever.
Either way, it's plain to see: our house is a woman.

My wife is a woman. And then, I am a man. But I must admit,
if I were a city, I would be a woman.

But if I were my sister, which I've always wanted to be,
I would still be a man. This is her gift to me.

If I were a city, I would be a twin city and there would be
a beautiful bridge between us.

The bridge is a man in the morning, a woman at night.
With water always a woman wanting to be a man.

In certain cities, each happiness should, to better understand
its nature, be reduced to gender.

And doesn't everyone wonder: what gender is the evening
bride walking on the bridge between cities?

The Husband Confesses

I confess, I have spent the afternoon
wandering from bookstore to bookstore.

I confess, I have fallen in love again
with dead poets, some of them women.

I confess, I am reading a poem while
walking down the street. It is cold.

I have lost my hat. I have no gloves on
because I cannot turn the pages if I do.

I jump from page to page, from book to
book. I have gotten some of them on sale.

I confess I do not know to whom I confess.
I confess I am now writing while walking.

I am not paying attention to time or manner
as I understand for a moment that the books

have forgotten they are books, that the street
has forgotten I am there as the words begin

to confess. They have lost their way, they
are guilty they say of these purchases.

They confess they saw me coming, are glad
to have an afternoon walk and wouldn't

I walk more slowly, tell them why I love,
speak softly, remind them of anything,

tell them who wrote them, and confess one
more time to every passerby how I know

books love and how I have fallen again,
taken time for this walk as I make my last

confession: I can no longer feel these pages,
I do not know who is holding this open.

Why I'm Not a Woman

I am working on a poem about why I am not a woman when it occurs to me that I need a better title. Something not so obvious. I change it to *Why I am not a Man* and go on like that for a while. Then I change it to *Why I am not a Man or a Woman*. I try to settle on *Why I am not a Man When I am a Woman*. I wonder, need I add *Why I am not a Woman When I am a Man*? I am a man. I am told I am but I am wondering if more often than not, I could be a woman. Not that I should be. Then I remember something my mother's mother always said: there are some things better left unsaid. Like the time I tried on my older sister's full hooped slip and it slid off because I had no hips. It's not that I wanted to be a girl, I just wanted to be my sister.

Lake Walk

I am making believe that I am wearing a tie today.
I am making believe the trees can see me wearing a tie today.

I am making believe that it matters to me and to these trees
that I am wearing a tie today.

I am making believe I can see the tie
flapping—

I am making believe that I am my neck
and I can feel the tie wrapping—

around and around and
I am this tie and I am not too wide and I am just long enough.

I am making believe I am
three colors, sometimes four—red, blue, green, gold, maybe more—

I am 100% silk, an intricate woven pattern—
a Guy Laroche, maybe (I am *Fait au Canada!*)

I am making believe I am wearing a tie today
and the lake is making believe she sees me.

Often I Stay Up Late Enough

Often I stay up late enough to become part house—a sound with no answer, a book unshelved, a clock unwinding. More likely floor, the window, a drawer, the junk drawer, every house has one. I feel comfortable as wallpaper, a leg of chair or table, the overgrown hassock protected even at night from its fear of summer sun. I'm never the faucet. I'd like to be the spider sleeping in the window sill, a remote control, a lamp near the TV. Your keys, the bed happy tossing and turning. Or at midnight what's become yesterday's newspaper. I could be shelf, bedstand, fan. Often when it is late, I am not choosing. I am sliding into being what is closest, what touched me last, something I hear. Mostly I'm being housed. Such little time to house. And I am always thankful when I am roof.

This is Not a Prose Poem

This is not a prose poem. This is not a lyric poem. This is not an essay. This is not a letter. This is not an airplane. This is not the sky.

This is not the tree next to the house. This is not the sidewalk or the driveway, the curb or the gutter, and this is not the road. This is not anything leading to or from or anything anywhere near your house or my house or any house. This is not what I think it is. And certainly I can tell you that this is not what you think it is.

This is not written by the poet. This is not the poet. The poet does not know who writes this. If this is a poem the poet doesn't know it. If this is not a prose poem it ends wondering what it is. This doesn't care what it is or what it has been told.

This is not the end.

This line does not exist.

This line is not part of what you were just reading.

This is not a prose poem.

This is the last line of this.

What It's Like to Be a Poet

I'm walking down the hall and before I know it I am still walking but I don't know I'm walking. I'm walking and the floor's there where it belongs. I'm walking and I'm at work and now I see the five mismatched recently replaced square tiles in a lighter brown, but what I'm thinking is the color and shape of the *o-o* in floor. I'm feeling the *l* in my legs, the *o* in these shoes on the floor, the *a* in wall and air and what I'm breathing now is the color of *door*, the *ow* in *brown*, this *brown door* which I almost forget to open as I no longer feel the *a* in *brass* and *handle*, the *u* in *turn*—and now it's carpet beneath my feet, stained, reminding me of *soul* and *soil* as I hear the sounds of stepping and breathing and the letter *p* in *place* and the *i* in *time* as I slide on down through the air to get back to work feeling the *c* and *h* in my long-back gray swivel *chair* soon no longer *there*.



CX Dillhunt was born in Green Bay and grew up happily with his five sisters and six brothers in a big house near the Fox River. Co-editor of *Wisconsin Poets' Calendar: 2006*, he is the author of *Girl Saints* (Fireweed Press, 2004) and co-author with his son, Drew, of the chapbook *Double Six* (Endeavor, 1994). His prose poem, "On the Way to Riley," is part of the CD collection *PoetSongs: A Wisconsin Year in Poetry & Song* (music by Charyl K. Zehfus) performed at the Michael John Kohler Arts Center in 2002.

CX Dillhunt's haiku are a regular in the international journal *Hummingbird: Magazine of the Short Poem*, where many of his prairie haiku and travel haiku from Mexico, the Czech Republic, Costa Rica, China, Hungary, Poland, Thailand, and Cambodia are published. His poems have also appeared in many other magazines and journals including *Asylum Arts*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *Cream City Review*, *Calliope*, *Spoon River Quarterly*, *Assembling*, *Wisconsin Academy Review*, and *Wisconsin People and Ideas*. CX Dillhunt volunteers as a tutor and poet in the Madison Public Schools and teaches writing at Elderhostel.

Parallel Press Poets

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