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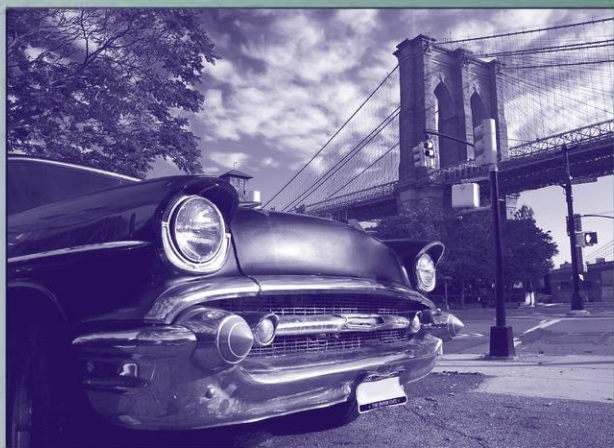
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# Li Po Comes to America



Poetry by Alex Stolis

A PARALLEL PRESS CHAPBOOK



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Alex Stolis



PARALLEL PRESS 2010

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*For J*





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## *First Law of Thermodynamics*

### I. First we'll take Manhattan

Watch the sun act guilty  
when you smile,  
listen to the river  
cough and remember—  
I can hold a suicide  
in the palm of my hand,  
predict the future  
in broken glass.  
Doesn't it make  
you want to forget  
who we might have been.

*Energy cannot be created or destroyed,  
it can only be changed from one form to  
another*

### II. We get inked at Skin Kitchen Tattoo Studio

I make a fist to the needle-buzz  
smell rain in your hair  
as my arm burns.

Someday you will forget  
my name—I will not remember  
the curve of your breast.

## *Newton's Second Law of Motion*

### III. Battery Park

A dragonfly nips at the heels of the moon,  
the moon, being pious, scatters your breath  
across the street like fire.

Let's head west, pin our past to mile markers,  
build a cherry-red house on the flatland—  
bury our future in a shallow grave.

*Force equals mass multiplied  
by acceleration*

### IV. Drinking alone

The sun is too hot, I can hear the rush  
of the river, a bartender pretends to care  
about the politics of loneliness.

When it gets dark enough I can see the outline  
of your body against the water—a few more drinks  
and I will be able to cut my face on your skin.

## *Second Law of Thermodynamics*

### V. The Coral Court Motel (illicit fun in the Garden State)

You have amphetamine eyes

*the moon is too bright for us*

like to drink Diet Coke for breakfast—

*to see our reflection in the water*

a little hash to take the edge off.

*take my hand and we'll walk*

lying in bed I wonder if the ground ever cries

*to pick round stones from the riverbed*

asphalt tears on summer days.

*Energy systems have a tendency  
to increase their entropy*

### VI. Good-bye kiss

I want to get stoned and blame it on the shape  
of the moon. I want to drive in circles, make up  
names for all the places we leave behind.

You take off your dress—the wind scatters  
light across my bed. I'm hundreds of miles  
from nowhere—too afraid to whisper your name.

## *Newton's Law of Cooling*

### VII. Ocala, Florida

Her name means *little feather*  
*that falls from the clouds*—

a piece of sun escapes  
from the corner of her eye.

Freeway noise  
cuts a hole in my thoughts

if only I could see  
the color of her voice.

*The rate of heat loss of a body is proportional  
to the difference in temperatures between the  
body and its surroundings  $Q = hA(T_0 - T_a)$*

### VIII. Ybor City

The ocean is not big enough—I aspire to the sky,  
imagine the asphalt beneath the wheels can talk  
about a journey's end.

You ask me to follow the spring wind,  
want me to listen for signs, but I am lost  
in the murmur of cigarettes and dust.

## *Newton's First Law of Motion*

### IX. New Orleans

I'll burrow under  
the neon blanket  
of Bourbon Street—  
collapse with you  
into a crease in the horizon.  
I love this city on sullen nights,  
summer's death  
spent with you.

*An object in motion will remain in motion  
unless acted upon by a net force*

### X. Graceland

I'll bet you can remember the day  
the sun was born—I imagine you  
spun a robe of gold to wear that day.

There is a cardboard sign propped at the side  
of the road, a bottle is emptied—the wind  
blows a hole in your memory.



## *Third Law of Thermodynamics*

XI. A cocktail waitress with Gene Tierney lips

tells me it's closing time, she talks about Kerouac,  
hands me her last cigarette. I want to call her a saint,  
want her to take me home.

Instead, I get drunk. Pretend I don't care about details,  
pretend I don't care about the duty of friends  
or the way her eyes stab the light.

*As temperature approaches absolute  
zero, the entropy of a system  
approaches a constant*

XII. Getting stoned at Moby Dick's

Reaching for the sleeve  
of your coat, I'm eager

to be reassembled. I count  
on your need to forget.

Watch, as this dream  
slides down my face—

cups its hand close  
to the back of my neck.

## *Pythagorean Theorem*

### XIII. Fargo Rock City

You believe the last colors to bleed  
through the sky will be lone reds  
and jealous blues.

Watching two cigarettes lit from one flame  
I touch the crucifix around your neck—  
try to steal your voice when you pray.

*The sum of the squares of the lengths of the sides  
of a right triangle is equal to the square of the  
length of the hypotenuse*

### XIV. No time flat

You want to know how spring got lost  
in a crowded bar,

what to do when clouds fall  
from grace. You watch me—

I grab the wind, turn my pockets  
inside out to catch the rain.

*Stefan-Boltzmann Law*

XV. Kansas City, Missouri (Kansas?)

Rain pours  
soft from your mouth  
but all I hear is thunder,

guns from the eye of winter.  
It's morning, dead flowers  
are a prayer in the window,

night runs barefoot—  
the clouds become fat  
with the cleanest of hands.

*The total energy radiated  
from a black body  
is proportional to the fourth power  
of the temperature  
of the body*

XVI. Crossing state lines

There's a blackbird on the side of the road  
pecking at gravel—his head swivels  
toward you, filming every move.

I punch the gas, try to outrun my  
self—you paint the moon's face  
with forty pages of suicide.

*Pi*

XVII. The Outsiders

rain drops like a raven  
into the street

puddles in the shape  
of a ship. You tell me the slope  
of its bow is like the curve of an apple—

my trigger finger presses  
the small of your back.

3.1415926535

XVIII. Durant Durant

There is a way to drop the sun  
from the sky and still make  
a clean getaway—

light a cigarette for the dead,  
then write our names  
in sweat on the windshield.

## *Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle*

### XIX. Counting thin white lines to Dallas

The moon never provides enough  
shade and night has become dull  
and hard to swallow—

a sentence spiked with perfume swims  
in humid air punctuated by the steady  
*clap clap clap* of wipers.

*The more precisely the position (momentum) of a particle is given,  
the less precisely can one  
say what its momentum (position) is*

### XX. Falling out

Morning crouches beneath  
the sun and you can't take  
my indifference—

I can't take my eyes off the road  
long enough to recognize the fragility  
of thunder.

*Schrödinger's cat*

XXI. SXSXW

When falling  
in love  
was different,  
I could watch  
night collapse  
under the weight  
of the stars.  
Right now,  
feeling you  
dare me  
with your eyes,  
I want to run  
until the wind  
tells me to stop  
believing.

*The cat  
is both alive  
and dead*

XXII. San Antonio

The sun tells me a different story  
it is darker, disjointed.

I take a cigarette from your purse  
pretend you are not asleep—whisper  
*peu à peu, je te regagne.\**

*\*little by little, I regain you*

*Occam's Razor*

XXIII. Brownsville—on the border by the sea

A full moon makes us liars,  
senses our coldness  
then folds back on itself.

We curse its hold on us—wish  
for neon signs and pool tables  
pockmarked with burns.

*If two theories predict phenomena  
to the same accuracy,  
the one which is simpler is the better one*

XXIV. El Paso to Las Cruces

Two geese honk at sunrise,  
forgetting whole chapters  
the sky believes in Icarus—

I believe the jones that runs through  
me when you push the door open  
to winter and back again.

## *Pareto Principle*

XXV. Waiting to exhale

Let's wait for the right song  
to come on the radio—  
imagine the stars are paper cuts.

Let's watch the moon struggle  
to stay awake, then tell stories  
that turn dark red when the sun comes up.

*20% of invested input  
is responsible for 80%  
of the results obtained*

XXVI. Hi Desert/Lo Fidelity

You promise me  
all we need  
is a stretch of road,  
a fast car  
and enough cash  
to burn.  
There's a fifth  
of vodka  
in the glove box,  
a gun  
under  
the seat  
and a full tank  
of gas—  
the last sin  
I'll commit  
is cradled  
in the kiss  
of a woman  
I have yet to meet.



## *Hubble's Law*

XXVII. Las Vegas

Feeling naked and less than perfect  
you wait for the moon to rise.

What seems like wind is only the sound  
of my breath as it bangs against the wall.

*The distance of external galaxies  
from the earth  
is proportional  
to their redshift*

XXVIII. Standing on the edge of the Hoover Dam

You want to live your life at right angles  
tell secrets to anyone who will listen—

I can't blink the past out of my eyes  
need to pay my debts in unmarked bills.

## *Avogadro's Law*

XXIX. Los Angeles

Right now, we can't afford  
to look cracked and uncertain—  
not when the sky moves this slow.

You tell me how the moon loses  
its voice, waits to wane  
until the last star falls

asleep—but I'm drunk  
and can only repeat  
your words as a prayer.

*Equal volumes of all gases  
under identical conditions  
of pressure and temperature  
contain the same number of molecules*

XXX. The Getty Museum

I am your sculpture  
with chipped mouth,  
glazed eyes—  
not ready to listen,  
not ready to have the bits  
of my life swept under  
your bare feet.

## *Hooke's Law*

XXXI. whatthefucktodo

After you go: I will live  
like dirt, learn to ply a trade  
in Mexico until words taste  
new again and in the time  
it takes to fall off the wagon  
a banyan tree burns.

The soundtrack will be jazz,  
Brubeck or maybe Parker  
and a woman not any woman  
but a woman with thick lashes  
a woman who can quote Wilde  
but doesn't trust raindrops  
because their shape changes  
with the color of her hair—

*John Updike has run out  
of things to say*, she laughs  
and my eyes will be helpless  
absorbing her every move.

*The stress of a solid  
is directly proportional  
to the strain the solid exhibits*

XXXII. Venice Beach

I will remember you  
the way the ocean looked—  
ready to grab the moon.

## *Fermat's Principle*

XXXIII. Santa Monica

Where is the sun when we need it—  
all I have is a broken watch, a half tank  
of gas and a dope-sick friend in the back.

You never wanted to hear the end  
of the story—never needed to remind  
the stars to drink themselves sober.

*The path taken by a ray of light  
between any two points  
in a system  
is always the path that takes the least time*

XXXIV. Salinas

We were better off in Battery Park—  
before the moon waxed pious  
before our ideas of the future ripened.

Your voice is the only reminder  
I'll need when thunder roars  
and no one else hears the rain.

*Kepler's First Law of Planetary Motion*

XXXV. Avila Beach

I expect too much from the ocean—  
a thief with no remorse. I could give  
you the names for all my sins and yet

you would only recognize me  
by the words that fall from my mouth  
and turn to stone as they hit the ground.

*A planet moves in an elliptical orbit  
around the sun that is located  
at one of the two loci  
of the ellipse*

XXXVI. She don't look back

You call the sunset your paint  
by number sky. Yellow and red  
are odds, deep blue even.

I want to fall in the river,  
drown to the sound of wings  
beating against your pastel horizon.

*Law of Conservation of Energy*

XXXVII. The Golden Gate

You believe in the holiness of trees and roots,  
leaves and bark that can redeem all sins.  
I can't hear the sounds you call sacred  
but I can remember the scream of tires

the beat of rain on the hood of my car—  
yet you tell me there is still time  
for me to learn the difference  
between a cigarette burn and redemption.

*The total energy of an isolated system  
remains constant  
regardless of changes within the system*

XXXVIII. Yreka, Siskiyou County

You tell me nothing  
breaks  
but silence—  
its sound, the same  
as falling out of love.

## *Archimedes' Principle*

XXXIX. Rockaway Beach

I can no longer hold a suicide  
in the palm of my hand or predict  
the next small alibi that will break  
open your heart.

The sun is only fragile  
when you smile—but my eyes  
are on the road, unable  
to blink away the past.

*The net fluid force  
on a body  
submerged (or floating) in a stationary fluid  
is an upward force  
equal to the weight of the fluid displaced by the body*

XL. Longview/Kelso

I didn't really want flatlands or oceans  
or stories about small prayers and folded  
dollar bills.

You dream of water and Ophelia  
dressed in black—I long to keep you  
from the pull of the moon.

## *The Big Bang Theory*

XLI. In what furnace

I know a poet  
that lives here—  
she knows  
my name  
knows the sound  
of my words  
and the color  
of my intentions.  
You call me  
honey  
and baby  
and darling  
and touch  
the back of my hand—  
you never ask  
*what about tomorrow.*

*A cosmological model  
in which the universe has been expanding  
for around 13.7 billion years starting from a tremendously  
dense and hot space*

XLII. The Emerald City

I light a cigarette,  
contemplate the curve  
of your shoulder—  
there is no difference  
between oceans  
and soon,  
morning will bring  
that washed up feeling  
of being sober.





Alex Stolis lives and works in Minneapolis, MN. His sixth chapbook, *On the Run with Dick & Jane*, was recently released by Pudding House Publications. He has been the recipient of five Pushcart Nominations.







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