

THE SECOND YEAR AT THIS ADDRESS

The starved cat in the alley lets out a sound
three times larger than her body,
again and again. I've never seen it, only heard
her voice hurl like an engine that can't

roar to life. I know she is only hungry.
That the men who arrive before dawn
to absolve the dumpsters of what's still
good to eat are hungry too. These days

I see appetite everywhere: the sky starved
of planes, my neighbor starved of touch,
the man smoking up the block, who has never
looked me in the eye when I pass, hungry

for his own thoughts. In March, the city
paused like a photograph while all of us
were out of frame, behind doors, drilling
our gaze through peepholes. That stillness

hasn't left even as we've roused back.
A year ago I moved from a perfect-looking
house. No one saw how sad I was.
Each room a museum of my thoughts.

So still you could hear a breath give up.
Now, the alley beneath my window crawls with life
but only when I'm not looking. Each day
I've lived in this apartment, the sky performed

the same color show without fail. When it
rained last week, it shook me out of dreams.
I remembered who I am. Or, really,
who I'm not. I've spent this year pruning back

desire like vines snaking across ground.
What are they seeking, anyway? A street map
resembles a diagram of the human body.
We just can't help ourselves. I get it.

Too much I've built in my own image.
Too much about myself I've assumed
bore repeating.

FIRST HAND

1. *Love Lesson, 1988*

The pistons of his hands fire into my chest, point blank
the first time a boy I like has reached
for me and like the men who come
later shows me how to lie
down

2. *Calculus I*

My true age is factorial
this year x last year x year prior and so on
Tug my hand and I multiply around you
a garland of gently used paper dolls

3. *Handwritten*

I wrote a one-sentence memoir in response
to the death of someone I wanted to die
It is 4,000 pages long
and counting

4. *Marriage Vows*

The harmed adolescent in me honors
the harmed adolescent in you
hand-in-hand

5. *Calculus II*

Zero exists only in concept
You can never have nothing
You can never touch nothing
You can never be nothing

6. *Love Lesson, 2019*

His hands know just one language
Every verb means push

7. *Disavowed*

The root of *hand* is *manus*
A man's origin is emptiness
Two men in love mean one
must consume the other
hand within hand

8. *Lessons, 1988–2019*

The echo of an injury will speak
while the cavern remains split

NIGHT SHIFT

Here is the city
empty of people,

day workers tucked
in beds like telegrams

full of bad news, minus signs
where their eyes should be,

night's torn sack of stars
spread out like blood diamonds

on jeweler's velvet, each one
a tired ghost

dissolving in a streetlamp's
unthanked glow.

PROJECT RUNWAY SONNETS

1. *Heidi Klum critiques your work.*

This really was your opportunity
to wow us with your vision. Honestly,
this look falls flat.

I like the silk rosettes
along the sleeve, but what's up with the neck?
It looks like something's choking her, like hands
around her throat. The blouse is off. She can't
conceal her boobies while she walks—it shows
off everything.

I like the color, though.
I could see this at the Grammys. It's got
an edge, an attitude. You really shot the wad
on this one. How much did this cost to make?
It looks all right,

besides those few mistakes.
It's cool, except she looks a little fat.
You have a point of view—I'll give you that.

2. *Nina Garcia critiques your work.*

You have a point of view. I'll give you that.
Your detailing's impeccable.

Your styling's
bland and matronly. You should've scrapped
this look and gone with something else.

And while
we're on the subject, please explain these shorts.
I don't know who this woman is, where she
goes. Does her job involve a pole? Transport
us somewhere new with what you make: believe

impossibility. Just kiss a frog.
To me, this looks a little “catalog.”

And more importantly, I have concerns
about your taste. Does it exist? Or are
you happy to design cheap looks like those?
It takes a special girl to wear these clothes.

3. *Michael Kors critiques your work.*

It takes a special girl to wear these clothes—
she’s fun, she flirts, she’s ultimately coy,
exotic.

What’s this business with the shoes?
She’s like an extra from *Siegfried and Roy*
on Ice. This seaming also needs some work.
I’ve heard of ruching, but come on—you have
to put a little effort in. Don’t shirk
construction in the interest of a laugh.
It isn’t funny.

Fashion is a biz.
It’s just like how Diane von Furstenberg
described New York—she said, *It’s all there is*.
You have to be like that—inane, absurd.
But what I’m seeing here’s too *Golden Girls*,
too *Dynasty*,

and not enough *Thorn Birds*.

MEDUSA

He tells me I'm handsome
in the chat, unlocks his pics

to reveal a carousel of horse-sized
dicks. Wants to raw me
until I bleed. I demur,

suggest we don't trade skin
on whim. *You're not so hot,*
he says. *You're bald. You're fat.*

*I could never fuck someone
with a gut like that.* He blocks me,

screen goes black. Reflected
in the glass: my monstrous face,
looking back.

POEM BEGINNING WITH A PHRASE FROM ERNEST
HEMINGWAY'S *THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA*

Kill the stars.
They don't even shine right;
take them down.

Take down the drapes of night
from their pins in the sky.

Shut down prime time TV shows,
restaurants of convenience,
happy hours, and all
the rush hour traffic.

Black out the clocks, their
shocked faces, their white symmetry,
white lies. Black out
the city.

Move more daytime where night
used to be. Make more workday hours
so everything gets done.

Slip off dress shoes.
Unbutton suits; unknot ties.
Abandon off-brand purses
and wash off our
too-similar faces.

Destroy the music of doors
clicking shut behind you
like the exclamation of an empty gun.

Kill all the ears; suffocate
any surviving dream
before it starves.

CHARLES JENSEN

Charles Jensen is the author of the poetry collection *Nanopedia* and six chapbooks of poems. His third collection, *Instructions Between Takeoff and Landing*, was the Editor's Selection for the 2020 Akron Poetry Prize competition and will be published in 2022. He received the 2020 Outwrite Nonfiction Chapbook Award for *Cross-Cutting*, a diptych of essays that hybridize memoir and film criticism. The City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs designated him a 2019-2020 Cultural Trailblazer, and he is the recipient of the 2018 Zócalo Poetry Prize, a Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Prize, the 2007 Frank O'Hara Chapbook Award, and an Artist's Project Grant from the Arizona Commission on the Arts. His poetry has appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Field*, *The Journal*, *New England Review*, and *Prairie Schooner*, and essays have appeared in *45th Parallel*, *American Literary Review*, and *The Florida Review*. He founded the online poetry magazine *LOCUSPOINT*, which explored creative work on a city-by-city basis. He hosts *The Write Process*, a podcast in which one writer tells the story of crafting one work from concept to completion, and with Jovonnie Anaya co-hosts *You Wanna Be on Top?*, an episode-by-episode retrospective of *America's Next Top Model*. He lives in Los Angeles and directs the Writers' Program at UCLA Extension.