

STEP ELEVEN

God sits on this cushion in this mobile home,
on dusty carpet and beneath drawn curtains as I walk back
and forth among the weeds of my worst ideas,
my best. I'm reminded to stop and to remember,
just remember, remember something. Come into focus,
draw a line from here to God. I say God because that's easy
to spell but I can't capture what I mean when I say it.
See, there's a pile of shoes behind the cushion, see,
a stack of shorts beside that. Those are easy to capture,
they are so there. For God, I am a stack of shoes,
for anyone else, I am a cushion on the floor.
Whatever debts I owe, let me
find my way through them. Whatever
harms I've done, let me
make a way to repair. I sit on a cushion
in a mobile home, fixed to a floor that shakes with my shifting
attempts at finding my focus.
Focus on something.
Remember something. God is a mist
and I am air in a droplet.
God is an ocean and I am not. The cushion sits
in the middle of this room.
I do not appear to be
sitting on it.

I THINK MY DAUGHTER IS MOVING TO MAINE WITHOUT ME

Tomorrow is coming. Here we go. Big days are coming.
And what do I know? I know what I've been told.
Thus have I heard. But I've only ever seen fingers pointing
not fully really learned. Tomorrow my only daughter
will climb into a school bus. In just a handful of months,
she will climb into a plane. Not too long after,
I'll climb into a different plane. We are none of us heading
to the same place at the same time. We are all of us watching
different clocks. I try winding mine back. I try
bending it forward. Nothing I can grasp is truly mine.
And everything is out of my hands.

But, today, we walked together in Carmel sand
as the bay made waves out of the gray-lit sky.
And she, she put her eleven-year-old hand in mine,
held it, for more yards than my fifty-year-old heart would dare
to ask and she asked me without words
to just be there, in that soft and salted breeze,
to just for always, to hold onto these days. Tomorrow
is coming. And absolutely too soon.
Already in bloom, the beached seaweed strewn beneath our feet
bursts when we stomp it, salt watering the sand,
and we keep to our plans.

UNTITLED

Deep down dark dank and devoured. Devoid
and bereft. Depressing and depressed. Bemoaned. Behind.
Belittled, dim. Because. Now bemused. Once
befuddled. Once done. Before was a sunset, here a stone lifts.
Once was once bouldered and now is rolled aside.
A great breeze grins in the cracks of the mind. A great smile breathes
in the abstracting tide. Lifted chin. Hand-held heart.
Shakers and rattles and bells. Open wide. Say a song. Sing a prayer
to the all left behind. Bemused was befuddled.
Arisen high and dry. The ceilings are rolling back their eyes.
What has changed? Only everything
one more time. No more wondering why.

YOU MAKE IT TOO

If I start right now I can finish this before I die
and it's one thing done at least I think I'll live to the bottom
of this page but there's no guarantee no fucking way I'm not
getting used to it though I'm getting to know it very well this life
is but a dream isn't that so my grandfather would say isn't that
so and sometimes he'd say instead is that so and is that so
and he was a fucking saint and goddammit he died too
and the dogs all those dogs and the cats and my daughter's horse
and my other grandfather who was a major ass and my father
god take his bitter soul and both of my grandmothers and some friends
not many yet but they will and my god just make it stop
already the dream careens on and the roads intertwist
and collapse and they crack and we snap and I have had
my fill of it please take me now it's unbearably bright
and we're flashing back and the world is on fire fuck today
was 117 degrees and five minutes ago the power grid blinked
and dropped everything around me and then five minutes later
it came back big drama big plot points major narrative I did not let it go
and apparently you just can't you cannot let it go
but it goes on without you and we all keep dying right in front of each other's eyes
in between meals we go our separate ways and forget us
just forget us just forget us it's a dream of becoming what we can
be in a moment of wild ecstatic release
release me and I will release you
but I won't no I cannot
I cannot let you go om mani padme hum I cannot let you go
so go on then grow up and move on it's ok don't mind me
see I'm getting to the bottom of the page see
I made it
now you make it too.

IT REALLY WAS A LONG YEAR

It really was a long year, a sad procession
and I limped from a broken home to an unbalanced trailer
and my heart was no help and my only help. Now, I sit
cross-legged on the trailer's creaking floor and sometimes I reach
my emptied palm to my chest and I cover that heart
and I thank it and I tell it that I'm sorry. Many things have not worked out
and many more, I'm sure, are coming down the pike
so hold on heart and I'll hold on to you. When the Buddha said
life is suffering that's not actually what the Buddha said
but it kind of is. Life is kind of a lot like suffering
at least that's what we seem to be made to make of it.
We fall in love with the ideas we fall in love with and those
ideas fall apart as we watch them learn to stand and there is
nothing really nothing to hold onto and in fact holding
onto just seems to speed up the falling apart. And cause
is inevitable and effect causes the next cause. In effect,
I had a really long year because I tried really hard not to.
Not to oversimplify, but the truth is it's truly simple:
what we push away moves away, what we don't float on without us.
The Buddha sat down after trying too hard and the world
kept spinning beneath him. The tree kept treeing
and the ground grounded. Grasses grew grasses in the breathing air.
His lungs welcomed oxygen and the oxygen
met his blood. His blood did what blood does in his heart.
I can hear him exhaling when I exhale. The Buddha had
his share of long years too.

STANZA BREAK

Never now nor then nor ever. I hold the keys but can't find a door.
Inside the incidence a light arrays. I fold the page into a folded page.
It's all really confoundingly simple and I hate that I hate when it isn't.
Still comes to this. The dog gathers his bones. Scratches his neck
and forgets them. Now then and always sits. I sit too with closed eyes.
What sneaks in is smaller than a slit between upper lid and lower
and shaped like a new moon in September's last night sky.

I believe in the space between. Empty fills out meaning.
The message dreams of connecting the dots between what we are
and what we are not. And I dream of letting that be. It's all very easy.
See, stop. Stop and see. There's a little trick in every glass of water.
It makes its point as it passes away.

FOR EMMA

It's been a while hasn't it and things have changed
and that remains the same. Today I'm counting my fingers as blessings
mount up all around me. Like look at the sunlight that lets us look
at the blessings we can have with just our eyes if we have them
and I do! I do have eyes! And right now they are seeing the sunlight cast
tree shadows across the street. I am seeing with the eyes inside of my eyes to the world
I just really want to see. And I do! I do see that world!
I am sitting in my car which I love hearing music which I also love
waiting for my daughter who I absolutely love to roll into view
on a bright yellow bus. And then I will see her.
As some other parent pulls up beside me
and actually nods as if she knows. We all know. You know too.
There is more to be grateful for than not.
The days keep spreading out like fresh sheets across the world's open bed.
And there's room for all of us to crawl up in here
and rest before we move again. My daughter is on her way
and maybe so is yours. Our lives are breathing away. Our hearts
keep beating. Our lungs keep collapsing. And refilling.
We are only dying little bits at a time. We can all do this together. We can all do this
apart. We're all fine. I believe the sunlight. I believe in time.
Here comes the bus. We're perfectly fine.

ERIC KILLOUGH

Eric Killough was raised in Tryon, NC and lives in Morgan Hill, CA. His work appeared thirty years ago in *Whiskey Island* and another journal whose name he can't recall. He is a 1998 graduate of the MFA program at Arizona State University in Tempe, where he studied with Beckian Fritz Goldberg, Norman Dubie and Jeannine Savard. He is also a graduate of UNC Chapel Hill where he studied poetry with James Seay and Michael McFee. Killough has a couple of other degrees and has had many jobs. He works remotely as a librarian for a very large law firm based in Chicago. He would like you to know that he loves his daughter, Emma, his partner, Tara, Tara's kids, Olive and Elliot, and each of his friends and his family around the world. He tries to write, practice meditation, and show up for his life every day. He thanks Pete and Jeff for sharing these poems with you.