

SAID  
NO ONE  
EVER



*poems*

GREGORY CROSBY

# Said No One Ever

Gregory Crosby

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*Said No One Ever*

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First Edition

*To Whoever*

*(or, as Abigail put it, “You can dedicate it to whoever you want,  
but I know it will really be to me.”)*

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## MELODRAMA

March wears a tall black hat  
& twirls its blacker mustache  
& ties to the tracks the Spring  
(in the watch in the step)  
that's forced to rescue  
*too late the hero* itself.  
Curses, foiled again.

Lamb is a lion that bleats  
*I'm the king of the jangle*  
& holds the door open  
anew (after *you*, O flood)  
for something wicked  
(this way to the pricks):  
an hourglass, full of blood.

## ST. VALENTINE'S HOSPITAL FOR THE CRIMINALLY INSANE

Everything is beautiful, & then it goes off.  
Every kiss is *you've made your own bed*.  
All the bombshells are blonde on blonde,  
until they dye themselves red.

Hold me in your mind, O Venus,  
for I know your arms are gone.

Everything goes off; wrong wire, always cut.  
Every kiss is shrapnel, working its way out.  
All the bombshells are red on red;  
only their roots show blonde.

Hold me in your arms, O Venus...  
for you know my mind is gone.

# IMMORALTY

*Russ Meyer (1922-2004)*

Without the valley, the hills, cupped & straining against the horizon, would be nowhere, man. There would be nothing to echo chrome throats, throttled. Varla's sneer. The sound and solid effect of Mr. Bone meeting Karate Chop.

Between the curving slopes, vision cleaves to itself. Lucky man who knows what he likes: a take-charge voice wrapped in leather, stacked. Through mascara masks, vixens affix their high-beams on the prey. We're all of us down in the mud,

honey, but some are looking at the drive-in stars. *Don't put me in some museum. My films are ever-living. They'll go on and on. They aren't ever going to die.* Skin flickers. Beyond the valley, the vale. Slower, now, Pussycat. Sleep. Sleep.

## VOX & ECHO

I.

I am drinking a glass of water called *song*.  
Each syllable is clearly understood:  
my heart in my throat, carved out of wood.  
To ask *who is speaking* just gets it wrong;  
every dummy must trade on his mystique.  
In nightmares, I'm the one who comes to life,  
but he's the one who's married his own wife.  
Some virtuosos make a table speak,

but all I can do is declaim a soul  
I cannot prove. I am at one remove,  
like you. It's all the same from where I sit,  
chair or knee. I am the remote control.  
It's cut into my smile, deep in the groove.  
Something threw its voice & you, I, caught it.

II.

But I don't want to go fast. I want  
Eternity curled up in my lap.  
Arms light as light around my neck.  
I want to strain against her thighs  
in their stockings, pitch black: the pleasure  
of pressure, a treasury of dark  
matter, visible with gravitas.  
All energy is dark when at rest.

Say you'll wear the white stockings.  
Tell me like time. Say you'll be opaque  
when I am away, sheer when I am near  
(but I am never away). Whisper it  
in a voice only a ventriloquist  
would throw. Dummy up. *Say goodnight.*

## HIGHWAY 44

I drive a sleek '67 Indignation,  
& raise my alarm like any good father.  
My daughters are all the more beautiful

for being always unborn. I lean on the horn.  
The world parts like stereo & channels me forth.  
I drive a sleek '67 Indignation,

& rev the engine in these empty lots;  
at night, the high-beams, wide-eyed with fear.  
My daughters are all the more beautiful

for meeting my gaze in the rearview mirror.  
I'll turn this care around right now! I shout.  
I drive a sleek '67 Indignation,

& leave a lost key in the ignition.  
No thief would dare steal a glance once stolen.  
My daughters are all the more beautiful;

the silence from these back seats is golden.  
Nothing in the glove box but a pair of gloves.  
The rust of a '67 Indignation  
is the daughter I all the more should love.

## CEREMONY, RITUAL, WHATEVER

The Hydra-head of lust, frustration:  
*Cut off one, two shall take its place.*  
He didn't know that word, *lustration*.  
He had to kill the look on his face.

Cut off one, two shall take its place.  
To vacate is not to take a vacation.  
He had to kill the look on his face.  
His heart could overthrow a nation.

To vacate is not to take a vacation.  
To run is not to become a race.  
His heart could overthrow a nation.  
*Absence* is not the same as *space*.

The Hydra-head of lust, frustration.  
He looked up that word, *lustration*.  
Absence, never the same as space.  
This *whatever* must leave no trace.

## POEM FOR THE RELIEF OF FALLEN WOMEN

This wishing well is bottomless.  
A penny from heaven would drop

all the way to the Indian Ocean  
(Not China, as you were always told)

to land in the hand of some fisherman  
as he guts some great, gasping fish,

its eye a coin emptied of value.  
They're always grasping something,

men. Always holding anything but  
the bag. You, you're holding a knife

at an oblique angle to the world,  
away from your body, every body.

The cutting board is a map of erasures.  
There are all these onions, waiting.

The setting sun above the sink turns  
their tight shawls of white skin pink.

But they are merely onions, not fish.  
You spit out the hooks. There is no wish.

## FORWARDS, ALWAYS DOWN, NEVER LEFT OR RIGHT

You'll forgive this falling back on myth.  
I've been smoking too much labyrinth.  
I smoke Minotaur brand. I'm a Minotaur man.  
The white thread is just serpentine smoke,

or a line of chalk along these walls. Falling,  
stumbling, wiping out, I wipe it out with  
empty palms. The Minotaur's face is calm.  
An exemplary reversal of personification!

The center will be reached, by and by.  
No one gets out of here a lie. The story  
knows more than it's telling. You'd be  
amazed, the things it knows. You'd be

lost, if you knew the things it knows.  
The Minotaur falls beneath my blows,  
& I, in turn, beneath blows, blown out,  
exhaled. The walls turn, & turn again,

& turn away. They have something,  
still, to say. They turn your gaze.  
At the center, there's a little gate.  
They say, *One day, we'll go straight.*

## BACK ON THE CHAIN GANG

This is why we can't have nice things:  
bears chase the bulls while China shops.  
Ah, unbearable lightness of bling!

Everyone waits for one-eyed kings.  
The sharpest corners wait for shins.  
This is why we can't have nice things.

Night swallows day, a poison pill;  
stars gleam along a platinum grill;  
the unbearable lightness of bling

brings all the lepers to their stumps.  
The best money crutches can buy!  
This is why we can't have nice things:

he who has the most toys, dies.  
Nothing gold can fly on golden wings.  
Ah, unbearable lightness of bling!

The goblet's Cristal, the light's pewter.  
Diamonds speak only in computer.  
Baby, here's why we can't have nice things:  
the unbearable lightness of bling.

## PANTOUM FOR THE UNPUBLISHABLE POEM

*Let the so-called deterioration continue. Let me  
become an unpublishable poem. —Jillian Brall*

This ink isn't so invisible, not yet.  
Winter's been canceled, too warm by half.  
There's the black cat, back from the vet.  
The ice cracks as you sink into the bath.

Winter's been canceled, too warm by half.  
Your veins are warm with flowing ink.  
The ice cracks as you sink into the bath  
& cool the fever you didn't know you had.

Your veins are warm with flowing ink:  
tonight you put down the tigers of wrath.  
Cool the fever you didn't know you had,  
& have another drink. Start, stop, think.

Tonight you put down the tigers of wrath.  
The black cat limps across your path.  
Have another drink. Start, stop, think.  
The pen, it's chattering like teeth.

The black cat limps across your path.  
Just your luck: the gathering storm.  
The pen, it's chattering like teeth,  
but the words, the words, are warm.

## THE VIOLENT METAPHOR RELAXING AT HOME

I am the blood in your mouth that forms your tongue.  
Every day is Doomsday. I roll *smite* & *smote*  
round my cracked lips & taste copper & smoke.  
I smiled to see your eyes shine when I spoke  
of *smashing, destroying, cutting down* those  
who spoke otherwise, my teeth gleaming gray  
in the chambers of my gun, my jaw locked,  
loaded. In my furnace, I beat my hate  
into a red-headed stepchild, stupid  
but strong. He can take you out at forty yards,  
or he can get in close, real close, the way  
I do when you switch the set on, my breath  
artificially sweetened. *Enemies,*  
I breathe. *Remedies!* You know what I mean.  
They pay me well, but you pay me better,  
in still-soaking bags of small severed ears.  
I am your final answer, & I grow  
like cancer, from throat to shining throat.

## WHAT SHE WAS LIKE

Like, you know, the collapse of glass. Like the dirty mirror, the truth at the heart of a false embrace. Like a dictator deposed, a dry drunk, a day short, a dollar late. Like an iron soul in a bronze age. She, like, wrote a thesis on the impossibility of crows (the crows had something to say to that). She was like everything that burns out but never fades away, all frozen sea, no axe. Spoke in transparencies, eyes opaque. Was a masochist, Jackson Pollock's "Autumn Mist" tattooed across her back. Like the loneliness of the lighting rod, the shadow of the ladder you've walked under, a future that fascinates for being long past. Said, Precisely when love floods us, the tide goes out. Said, Better to swing on a star than swing from it. Said, I won't tell a soul, as no one has one. Said, And if you pass the salt, the salt passes you. Like, you know, a joke. Was the prisoner of sex, shot while trying to escape. Like, escaped. Said, There is a way of being I haven't mastered yet, as if being could be a slave. She was like the fog, the shore, the cold, wet rocks, the lighthouse keeper's blind room. Like the quiet of the empty tomb, the resurrection of this, of that. Like the lady or the tiger, but mostly like the doors. Like, you know, the love that dare not speak its name, so it gave the torturer yours.

# YES

Vowel in the throat, the one that separates mystery from mastery: sometimes a question, sometimes a command (open me, wide). *Thy mouth was open but thou couldst not sing*. Where does voice go but silence? Standing by the tunnel's dark O, waiting for the train; a rumble felt in ancestral bones, lush, overgrown. Hothouse sound. Vowel reclines on palate, waiting. Softer than time's bomb, ticking away. All speech goes, unspoken, until it has its say. Vowel, receding, a gathering wave. Dying into a word (but which way?). Listen. Cover your ears. Vowel, coming, the back of, the tip of, *ob*—

## THE FINAL HOLLOW EARTH THEORY

Suppose it's true: as hollow  
a sun unending but for  
There's a hole at the pole,  
have to learn the hard way:  
waltzes rock & leaves  
to the center, to a con  
Throw in some dinosaurs,  
*Symzonia, Pellucidar, Skartaris*  
dark. A wish to be a mole  
you are: burrowing into  
as dully as a skull kicked  
what you expected. You  
for inner life. You gaze  
descent carved through  
deep time, & imagine  
white: a star, or the snow  
never arrives. It's the end  
Utopia. It's that smoky  
downdowndown

as a heart, & lit from within,  
the Land of Awful Shadow.  
amidst frozen mist, but you  
somewhere, a diamond drill bit  
an empty dance card. A journey  
cavity instead of a horizon.  
why not. Names for this—  
—roll off your tongue into molten  
beneath a mountain, & here  
light, the earth reversed. It rings  
hard by a boot. This is not  
are singularly unprepared  
back along that long line of  
crust, mantle, the locked dust of  
you can still see a pinpoint of  
flake of light from a train that  
of the tunnel. It's that empty core,  
god, that heartless sun that beats  
withinwithinwithin.

## THE YOUNG MARTYR'S LAMENT

O God, You lit the fuse while I was cradled  
beneath my mother's heart.

Too late, Your face, in faces I will shatter—  
& now I fly apart.

## APRIL, FOOL

Hopelessness is a luxury. The day  
I bought you violence for your furs I fell  
completely, thrown under the omnibus.  
The pavement glowed for hours, opaque curbs  
where the gutter meets stars slick with oil  
& there is no standing. A one-way street,  
this. Surely, there was a first spring, when first  
the cooling earth tilted toward its millions  
of years, as if to say, *It's not so bad.*  
It is spring for a while, even when crushed,  
especially when crushed. You pin violence  
to fur & give a lift to passersby,  
*not me, not yet.* Spring a crush, the city  
a crush, hope a crush, & I, smitten, smote.

## LIPSTICK, TRACES

Whenever I think of lipstick, I think  
of Marlene Dietrich, shot in the back  
at the end of *Destry Rides Again*,  
& falling forward into Jimmy Stewart's  
embrace, she wipes the red from her mouth  
with the back of her hand & dies into  
one, pure, unpainted kiss. I always wish  
he would grab her wrist, & fasten his  
mouth against her scarlet (even in black  
& white, Marlene's lips burn redder  
than all the memories of roses)  
& smear her all over his decency,  
his cheeks, flushed with it, kissing her as if  
her blood soaked his sleeves, the bullet hole  
black beneath her heart; not just the powder,  
the echo, of a blank from a prop pistol,  
somewhere in Hollywood, 1939.

## YOUR HANDS MUST BE HELD IN A NATURAL POSITION

You cannot hope to mystify your audience if you do not remember this: there is nothing up your sleeve but the will to produce, transform, vanish. It's called legerdemain, which means *light touch*. It is showing something by means of misdirection. It is suggestion. It is power, of. Wherever thou go, eyes goest. It is the ghost of belief, back from the grave of existence. It is, at last, an audience under the influence of itself. You are nothing, nothing but the mirror for this. This is the trick that always, never, works. Do not falter. Practice. This science depends upon the smallest detail, the tiniest held breath. There will be no assistant, no one, ever, to hypnotize, saw in half, levitate. There are only the gestures that gestate these mysteries, infinite. Rap the cabinet. Reach into your hat. *You will begin to understand the great power. . .*  
*‡ what mysterious thing gives you this power.*

## SAID NO ONE EVER

*Where do you turn for consolation? Probably to a movie, something with Barbara Stanwyck. Well, she's sort of a poem: something soft then steely then soft again before turning to steel forever*

in that great magnetic field of language, the one made of pictures, the one that destroys every compass just by entering your eye, & words, too—every tongue

merely a spinning needle in a movie where a meteorite lies just below the surface, waiting to unleash upon the unsuspecting something *Not of This Earth*, something

like a poem, but with a zipper clearly running down its back. This abandoned drive-in theater of Here, Now is a lightning field; everything waits for the lightning. Is this consolation:

the waiting or the memory of waiting or the memory of once seeing the lightning yourself? Of capturing it? Barbara Stanwyck, immortal in a slow oblivion,

a secret held by fewer & fewer, that fewer still will recognize. Some days, it seems recognition is the only consolation: at least at the movies you know

what it is you're looking at, even if the compass is useless, & you're lost in the dark. Sometimes the clouds really do part & there's the moon, in all the constancy of her consolation,

glorious black & white, soft but steel then soft then ice. A glimpse of the moon is consolation, said no one, ever, as the lightning gathers in the hollow of her throat,

a throne no one & nothing can ever overthrow, not even the dark that says nothing & the darkness that says it all, in a voice of, & not of, this earth.

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*Maudlin House*: “Stilleven”  
*Noctua Review*: “Now (or Later, You Know, Whenever) Voyager”  
*Oddball*: “The Note”  
*Other Rooms*: “Parable & Analogy Search the Bedroom for Their Clothes,”  
“Your Hands Must Be in Their Natural Positions,” “MTV-theory”  
*Paradigm*: “& Our Paths Through Flowers”  
*Ping Pong*: “The Shark Messiah,” “His Heart as a Barrel of Monkeys”  
*Quarter After Eight*: “The Surge”  
*Rabid Oak*: “America’s Oldest Fridge Still Keeping Cool, “Less is More,  
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“Over Air

## About the Author

Gregory Crosby is the author of *Walking Away from Explosions in Slow Motion* (2018, The Operating System), and the chapbooks *Spooky Action at a Distance* (2014, The Operating System) and *The Book of Thirteen* (2016, Yes Poetry); his poetry has appeared in numerous journals, including *Court Green*, *Epiphany*, *Copper Nickel*, *Leveler*, *Sink Review*, *Ping Pong*, and *Hyperallergic*. 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). He is an Adjunct Assistant Professor at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and teaches creative writing in the College Now program at Lehman College, City University of New York.