

Daisy Atterbury

RELIEF ROUTE

The Kármán Line
(excerpt)

I would like to write about the commercial space industry but I find myself smoking instead.

Spaceport America, SpaceX, Virgin Galactic, Intergalactic.

*For ay thurst I, the more that ich it drynke.*¹

I think of Petrarch, book in my hand. What if Petrarch were speaking to the land itself instead of his beloved? (*For the more I thirst, the more I drink.*)

I'm reading in the waiting room to pass the time. I've seen the cancer posters on the wall. They make cancer look almost friendly. I know the tropes.

Who needs a realist waiting room!

o

I conjure my vision of Petrarch and his unquenchable thirst for Laura. There she is on a poster: a woman in a French shirt. A child with a golden dog.

¹ Francesco Petrarch, "If no love is, O God, what fele I so?" (trans. Geoffrey Chaucer), *Il Canzoniere*.

Let's say I fell in love at first
sight.

Let's say I found her already married, turning
down my advances on the banks of the Rhône
and refusing my stakeout.

Here you are, sick. *Allas! what is this wondre
maladie?*

Have you visited @Land_of_Enchantment?
Y/N Have you practiced
@Lifestyle_Evangelism? Y/N

“If we fail to heal what Karl Marx called ‘our
metabolic rift with nature,’ it will just go on
without us.”²

o

Two Westerns:

dawn must always
recur

four guns to the
border

o

I recall my aunt's news that the La Fonda
hotel has just renovated its tile bathroom—
the bathroom you could use if you knew what
you were doing downtown.

You'd go down a hall, past the restaurant, past
the lobby, past women with white hair and
silver jewelry.

² Lucy Lippard, *Undermining*.

Pretend you're not, that you have nothing to do with the women with white hair and silver jewelry.

thank god I'm
not

running into
you

Now the bathroom is white and grey and spotless.

o

Because of my interest in space as opposed to say literature or self-defense I attend a panel at the Santa Fe Institute.

"Intergalactic": a presentation organized by the creators of Batman on space as the next frontier.

Someone at the panel jokes that the driving impetus for going to space is testosterone.

I could escape my body right now if I only could.

Except I do every
day.

dystopia
(medical)

an abnormal position, as of an organ
or a body part

also called
malposition

o

“To be sure, the man-made satellite was no moon or star, no heavenly body which could follow its circling path for a time span that to us mortals, bound by earthly time, lasts from eternity to eternity. Yet, for a time it managed to stay in the skies; it dwelt and moved in the proximity of the heavenly bodies as though it had been admitted tentatively to their sublime company.”³

Calling all lovers of chaos, dynamic systems
and all things nonlinear!

What will be my intro to
Chaos?

Is it “out there” or “in
here”?

What are Nonlinear dynamical systems,
what is a “chaos teaser”?

o

Hannah Arendt points out that an event like
the 1957 launch of the satellite Sputnik might
have been met with universal celebration if it
were not for the

*...uncomfortable military and political
circumstances attending to it.*⁴

I imagine the sense of relief (eerie collective
relief) at the signs of man’s first attempt to
escape his entrapment on this earth—his
“imprisonment,” as she sees in the papers.

³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*.

⁴ Ibid.

o

Laura died at age thirty-eight on April 6,
1348, twenty-one years after Petrarch
first saw her.

Scholars believe she died of black
plague or tuberculosis after giving birth
to 11 children.

The silent tree against the stucco. To
breathe the pollution and soot of other
people's waste.

i'm more than
bifurcated

i could hold your
head

o

Many years later, the French poet Maurice
Scève visited Avignon and opened Laura's
unmarked tomb.

The story goes, Scève unearthed a lead box
in the dead muse's tomb.

I've looked out over a mountain range and
unceremoniously caught my breath. I've
followed my step by step instructions.

faced off with an
enemy

stopped up your
spill

killed terra
nullius

o

In the box Maurice Scéves found a medallion.
Etched into the medallion was a woman
clawing at her own heart.

Laura Henriksen

Every curse and every wish came true
just like you said they would. I tried
to go, but here I am. I thought I was
on a road until I looked down. In my
heaven, all feelings are met and matched
with equal intensity, and all the angels
either play guitar really well or not
at all. And they're always with you,
nodding their heads in encouragement,
like, Go on. It was in the name of love, it was
in the name of art. It was then I saw
I was crossing a bridge, all things
unfixed. I listened to the same song
over and over again, testing my love,
ready for all pleasure to buckle under
need. I could sit on this hill and watch
the trucks go by forever, all day. They say
it'll be worth it, but what even is it? Home
is where the flower patterns blur
into faces mouthing *No future* as you
try to fall asleep. What was it
you said? Destiny is what happened.
Well it didn't have to. All that singing
for what.

Laura Henriksen

Hélène and I are at the mall, drinking sodas
and chewing the straws by the center fountain,
waiting for night to fall, for nothing in particular,
for a love so great all suffering and joy become
limitless. After the mall we'll go home and
watch *Hellbound: Hellraiser II*, our favorite
movie, and speak again as we do every night
about Julia, the evil stepmother, who from her
trembling murderous vacuum of desire in
the first installment emerges into the sequel
skinless, triumphant for a time, getting blood
on an Armani suit in the all white living room
of her new occult doctor lover who's so full
1980's cocaine at midnight cocaine at noon.
Hélène and I love Julia, the chasm of what
she would do for love or fun, and as we take turns
walking to the fridge and back we declare her
again our monarch, the queen of hell. Or we'll go
to the grocery store, hover over the tiny
floral department, take pictures of the bouquets
pose with them as brides. Hélène, I'll ask,
where do feelings go once felt?
And she'll say they stay right here
admiring the carnations, state flower
of Ohio, the tulips, likely the cause
of the first economic crash, and the lilies
common symbols of innocence after death.

Nadia Misir

Carnations and Cellophane: Notes on Intimacy and Christ's Flowers

“The carnation is probably native to the Mediterranean region but its exact range is unknown due to extensive cultivation for the last two millennium.”—[New World Encyclopedia](#)

i.

Carnations get something of a bad rap on *Sex and the City*. On an episode that aired during season six, Charlotte escapes from her dinner date at a Chinese restaurant to Carrie and her boyfriend Jack Burger's table. She complains to both of them that she knew it would be a bad first date. Why? Because he gave her a bouquet of carnations. “They're filler flowers,” she laments.

But what Charlotte dismissed as a filler flower has become my focal point for understanding love, lust, and faith. Carnations are one of those childhood markers that litter my memory, they are something of a constant: not good, not bad, but an important vessel for meaning-making.

I have had to dislocate my faith, and how I imagined I was allowed to love and lust from patriarchal spaces like the mandirs I grew up attending on Sunday mornings—spaces where worshippers prayed with carnations and other flowers. I have grappled with these questions while watching television shows like *Sex and the City*—a show that I knew even as a high school student was problematic, was not about my New York, that did not reflect what I, or the women around me, looked like, or sounded like, but that still sparked moments of alternative imaginings of how and who I could love.

My commute each day from Lefferts Boulevard on the A train in deep Queens, in roti-shop-and-Guyanese-Chinese-restaurant-bar Queens, to my high school located near Broadway-Nassau, the financial hub of the city, taught me that. My New York, my journey with faith and love is a series of culturally dissonant moments. And they all seem to hang off the delicate jagged petals of the carnation.



My job when my family holds a jhandi is to string together seven red carnations with a needle and thread to create a mala.

ii.

Carnations have long been vessels for meaning-making by all sorts of people: poets, lovers, children, parents, royalty, florists, mourners, worshippers, bodega owners, Hallmark card creators. I am no expert, but carnations do have a better reputation than Charlotte led me to believe all those years ago. In thirty-eight words Oxford Reference online sums up the flower as being “slender-stemmed,” and possessing “narrow leaves,” “swollen stem joints” and “several dense blooms with serrated petals”—a definition that reads like poetry. It is of the family Caryophyllaceae and the species *Dianthus caryophyllus*.

Gjertrud Schnackenberg has used the carnation as a motif of grief in the haunting elegies she has written about her father. “The Latin blossom,” she calls it, invoking the Latin meaning of carnatio: *flesh*. Schackenberg too locates faith in the flower. The speaker of [“Supernatural Love”](#) identifies carnations as “The flowers I called Christ’s when I was four,” and describes their clove-like scent as “Christ’s fragrance through the room.” Here, carnations become a symbol of Christ’s crucifixion and recall the belief that carnations grew where Mary’s tears fell.

iii.

I cannot reconcile how I choose to love and lust with the faith that is taught in the spaces I was told to pray in growing up and that is okay. My faith lives in my mother’s hands before she prays at her altar. I make the ritual of watching her prepare carnations for prayer my religion.

On some Sunday mornings she lifts bouquets of carnations bunch by bunch out of white buckets filled with water lining Liberty Avenue. She inspects each head, looks for wilted petals and debris. Sometimes, if I’m home, it’s my job to unwrap them, detach the flowers

from the green stems, gently wash each with cold water and fill a metal tari with the blooms.

The stems remind me of a crane with green legs. Sometimes my mom prays with these carnations. Each bloom is a prayer I turn into a sin. My religion is not praying at the altar in a language I cannot understand. My religion is washing each carnation head, feeling the water catch between the petals like parted lips. My religion is reveling in reaching a point in my relationship with my mother where I can be transparent about who and how I love, and she does not shame me for it.



I hoard a friend's purple carnations at dinner and pretend they are mine.

The shame I have internalized comes from my community, from what they teach us about how to be a Good Indian Girl, from Bollywood movies that glorify the Good Indian Girl, from conversations where girls are shamed for “wilin’ demself out,” from conversations where girls are shamed for “not knowin dem limit,” from conversations where girls are forbidden from dating Black men and women, from the pandit who told me it is forbidden for a woman to attend mandir or perform pooja while on her period because it is unclean. I wanted to say what you describe as unclean allowed for your waste of a birth.

A male relative of mine was a pandit—a man I was not close to, someone who I never saw smile, always in a fedora hat, always, it seemed, mildly annoyed, a man I thought of as being the embodiment of patriarchy. I asked him when I was 7 or 8 about why all pandits I knew were men. “Can’t I be a pandit if I really wanted to?” I remember asking. Memory is often cruel. I remember the emotions and what I might have said, less often than I remember the other party’s words.



A space for prayer during a jhandi is set up with flowers and other material objects.

I internalized that it was a sin for me to feel pleasure at the hands of another person. I internalized that it was a sin for me to feel pleasure at my own hands. Shame makes its home in the most unexpected places and carnations, for a long time, signaled that. I have cobbled together a patchwork kind of faith rooted in mundane material objects and motions of the hand, in feeling pleasure. Let my God, if there is one, be a fairly compensated gardener and flower cutter, a wielder of sharp shears, a being who can grow, but also cut down.

iv.

When I think of carnations I think bodega, I think of those Sunday mornings when we double parked outside of a West Indian grocery store to buy bunches of carnations to take to mandir as offerings, I think of the statistics that illuminate unfair labor practices in the countries the United States sources its fresh cut flowers from: Colombia and Ecuador. I think of these headlines: “Where Do Bodega Flowers Come From?” and “There’s a 1 in 12 Chance Your V-Day Flowers Were Cut by Child Laborers.”

I think of the history of cultivation, the imperial nature of gardening, of cultivating a garden and how unnatural it is unless it all runs wild and the insects are allowed to eat holes into leaves. When I think of carnations I think of my Chinese-American aunt’s horrified facial expression when my grandmother brought a bouquet of carnations to the party hall on Atlantic Avenue for her wedding reception—carnations were reserved for funerals in her family.

I think dyed petals: electric blue and Gatorade green. I think petals that resemble crumpled up tissue paper and jagged edges that look sharp but feel soft. I think of all the ways that it is both outlandish and not to dye flowers colors that do not occur in nature.

When I think of carnations I think of the woman who sold them with two young children under the tracks of the 7 train in Jackson Heights. Laid out on the concrete were individual carnations, cellophane, wrapping paper and rubber bands. Prune, bunch, wrap, repeat—a labor we do not see, but that exists in every white plastic bucket outside of every bodega and flower shop.



A worker sells flowers and carnations in Kadıköy.

v.

But what does it mean to turn to metaphor? To explore questions of the body and pleasure figuratively? Am I hiding behind the what ifs that wrap similes and metaphors and idioms in a confectioner's sugar instead of saying explicitly *I am not a virgin, I enjoy sex, I take birth control, I am not married, I have no interest in being a Good Indian Girl?* I write about intimacy and personal experiences in a very specific way: shrouded behind lofty imagery and lyrical lines. I am afraid of writing simple sentences using concrete language to describe how I love, how I hurt, how I have been loved and been hurt, how I am vulnerable. I cannot write how I have transgressed, so I lean on metaphor, on images like wet carnations between my mother's hands. What does it mean to turn an image of patriarchy into an image of resistance?



A corner store in Jackson Heights sells carnations and other flowers.

vi.

By the end of that season six episode, Carrie Bradshaw's boyfriend Burger breaks up with her on a post-it note. After waking up next to an empty spot on her bed, she gets up and flings the vase of pink carnations he brought for her. It is a spectacular act of rage. For everything else that is problematic about that show, [that scene](#), devoid of all sound except for the water of the vase running off the table and dripping down to the floor, and the lone carnation hanging haphazardly by its head from the table, is something I carry between my ribs.



Filler flowers only, please.

Mirko Mondillo

November night.

This deep dark, black
by bitumen,
regional road, - just one
light
glows just
right in front of you
and in the somber lump of its traversed
stretches: stray dogs, their barking,
(unglued and bleached) ads,
invocations to the saints, some *God's here* -,
this one: which seems having
on its sides, - if you think
at that as an huge face,
if (here) a singular vision
could make itself universal
(here) the personal vision-,
which seems having on its sides
the horses' sight-sewer,
that clenches the sight
on the road,
right in front of itself..
In the cruise time
riding the bus,
- badly backseated
on the seatback,
as a square
into a circle,
on my side: a woman:
too much eau, on her,
and too much stifling,
when I wasn't on the break
(a dark-full body)
and he wasn't on the telephone,
the driver: "... I'm good, I...
are the kids asleep?"-,
I tried to take some rest
on my humerus, on my wrist.
Why then?, because
[...]
...going house-to-house

offering Gas and Energy
when at home those books of mine
drip my father's,
blood,
and his chill, suffered in December,
and his resting,
lost at the marketplace.

Stefano Morello

Queen Anne Serenade

the Samoan Dean Moriarty
never wasn't going to stop
— he's guessing yellow
is her favorite color,
seafoam green
in-between junctions,
blue stop signs
in Hawaii.

what did you see in her?
astounding metabolism
and all the unconcealed.
a blind taste test
— pick wisely!

swipe left,
swap middle names,
hands clapping.

they're all dancing, on tv.

Stefano Morello

read loved you name it

quietly -
we happen at night,
like other unrealities of life,
we wait
in vain
to grow out of
this state of trance,
this feeling of if,
this impression that,
possibly, we exist
only when read
by someone,
which is not often,
not for long,
not by very many

Suzanne Goldenberg

CAME
AGOG
MONO
EGOS



CORE
OPEN
PEND
ENDS

GAPE
AMID
PINE
EDEN



ROPE
OVEN
PEND
ENDS

PAGE
AWAY
GAZE
EYED



FATE
AIRY
TRUE
EYES

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Suzanne Goldenberg is obsessed with bodies of water, language, the transformation of waste and dismantling carceral states. She has exhibited her work widely and published poems in the collection *Anguish Language, Writing and Crisis* (Anagram Books, London 2017), *Leaf Litter, U.S.* (vol. 5&6) and her chapbook *HELP WANTED*. She curates The CRUSH Reading series at the Woodbine Collective in Ridgewood, NY.

Laura Henriksen is the author of *Canadian Girlfriends* (THERETHEN, 2019), *Agata* (Imp, 2017), and *Fluid Arrangements* (Planthouse Gallery, 2018) with Beka Goedde. Her writing can be found in *The Brooklyn Rail*, *LitHub*, *P-Queue*, *Foundry*, and other places. She participated in The 92nd St Y's 2018 Annual 10th Muse event, selected by Eileen Myles. She received her Master's from the CUNY Graduate Center in 2019, with a focus on American Studies and Gender Studies. She is the founder of the Bernadette Mayer Feminist Reading Group, and the 1981 Feminist Reading, and is the Director of Learning & Community Engagement at The Poetry Project.

Nadia Misir is a writer from Queens, New York. She is a former Asian American Writers' Workshop Open City fellow. She received her BA in English from SUNY Oswego and an MA in American studies from Columbia University. She is pursuing an MFA in fiction writing at Queens College, CUNY. Her writing has been published or is forthcoming in *Open City Magazine*, *No, Dear Mag*, *Kweli Journal*, *QC Voices*, *Papercuts*, and *Poetry*. Follow her on Instagram @nuancednadia.

Mirko Mondillo is a PhD student in Modern Literatures at University of Siena. His fields of interest include: use of essayistic writing in fictional contexts, literary theory and critics, contemporary Italian literature, Italian-American literature, American literature and literature in English from former colonies. He has published essays on Walter Siti and John Maxwell Coetzee and discussed on David Foster Wallace's use of uncanny and Wittgenstein's philosophy and on religion and desert in Erskine Caldwell.