



# Illusion of an Overwhelm

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NY  
Q Books™

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The New York Quarterly Foundation, Inc.  
New York, New York

NYQ Books™ is an imprint of  
The New York Quarterly Foundation, Inc.

The New York Quarterly Foundation, Inc.  
PO Box 2015 Old Chelsea Station  
New York, NY 10113

[www.nyq.org](http://www.nyq.org)

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First Edition

Set in Adobe Garamond and Garage Gothic

Layout and Design: Thia Powers

Cover Art: “Can You See Me Now?” © 2017 Thia Powers

Author Photo: Chad Weeden

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017936068

ISBN: 978-1-63045-048-9

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# Hallelujah Anima

*And is sin not  
a tunnel to God?  
—Anonymous*

Grace

*for Stefan*

In the beginning, a little blind spot,  
o little big bang, little blind spot  
becomes the universe, gives gravity a job,  
keeps you clutching your hand grenade,  
fingers twitching on the lever—  
*ok to think but not to throw ok to think but not to throw*  
Remind yourself: it's 2017, don't let 1971  
detonate in your lap, take out the living room,  
the house, the dream it's taken decades to find,  
years lost in the swamp & fire.

I'm not the first to experience  
effort as little more than a bunker  
to hide in while inconsequence,  
with its platoon of dead-ends & sabotages,  
marches its way, a monsoon  
rearranges the furniture, indifference  
cranks up the volume on the radio.

I don't like writing my own obituary  
while across town another part of me is christened;  
still, I wear *brother you better believe*  
*none of this is going to work out*  
like a suit of armor, like a drip IV.  
Like bulletproof wings I flap to find  
someone else already signed the contracts, delivered the mail,  
threw his body between the exploding grenade

& the rest of the world. My years  
have been punctuated by small salvations  
I can never explain, they arrive like sleep or waking,  
like going home the morning after the bunker's lost,  
always the morning after.

# The American Myths

*for R*

J scales a ladder up & up a steep pitch of memory  
toward a smallish star, writhing from the manhole,  
black son clawing through black film, his black eyes  
rolling across a patio as the guests applaud, sloshing  
their olives & gin. Dr. Kilgus hacks the London broil.  
After a group charade involving a breast pump & a

petri dish, J's mother's bound to the scaffold, his  
father sparks the Jacksons tucked beneath the tinder.  
J wails in a red world, witnesses the gluttony of fire,  
sensation as a second birth & first demise: root of  
ambivalence. A wet nurse in camouflage delivers  
the needle. J's scaled & weighed, paperwork's filed,

he's swaddled in steel wool, wrapped in cellophane,  
carted to an empty barracks on the outskirts of town.  
Someone croons the national anthem through a static  
intercom. Someone stages an aptitude test. J finds  
his feet, his hands, unzips his innocence like a clown  
shedding a costume. He steps forth a full-grown man.

*for SL*

Twenty-six years sober, I smell vodka in the tulips,  
aged bourbon in the blankets, water reeks of gin.  
Twenty-six years, still hear my dead mother calling,  
drunk in the hammock, drooling into her cleavage.  
She slurs *help me* while guzzling her Chardonnay.  
I see the white father in me, I hear his *no*, the way

he lowered his magnifying glass on every prayer,  
our petitions curling to smoke, he planted dread  
in my belly, a C-section / implant after I passed out  
in the ice shed. I'd wake in the driveway, gutted.  
Now I light the rood as he lit the rood. *No, I can't*,  
I respond, though I could, my dead mother in flames,

my show & tell: an iron, rusted nails, loaded dice,  
jujus found in the weedy backyard. Fast-forward:  
my wife spread-eagled in a shadowbox. I curse my  
white father's shimmering crown, a black son vowing  
to return home & avenge the women of his dreams.  
They call me *liar*, you watch I'll prove them wrong.



# My Gallery Days

To the pigs who sang in Hillary's walls.  
 Stuart trapped between studs, tuneless in the heat,  
 Carl panting in a doorframe, sick & shaking DTs,  
     grunting Provençal love songs  
     w/ a Long Island accent.

Ma sanctum sanctorum was desecrated by Photoshop.  
 Soul collage & music boxes, the vengeful goddess  
 popped from Hill's mouth, her Gorgon series in yell.

I removed the tank cover in her half-bath,  
     hooked a shriveled man who'd no doubt  
 drifted for seasons, sworn off his pocket watch  
     &ampamp eyes as dead as a cold call.

*Hill* I sd in white *you gotta set the boy free,*  
 Hill staring in gray, the miles tween Hill & me.

# Portrait of Us

I hear the gangs hollering near the airport  
 as I circle the house where my mother,  
 wry Medea, forever mumbles to herself  
 in a room stale with doilies & potpourri,  
 one more Valium behind the curtain, her voice  
 swallowed & swallowed until it disappears.  
 I watch too my birth in the white room,  
 breath was a conversion, a virus annexing the flesh.  
 A hundred arms emerged from the shadows,  
 a hundred urgent hands waving in the glare,  
 each pressing a detail, a snapshot, tags embedded in my memory  
 like a chain buried in asphalt. The sky observed it all.  
 Later there was a dance, I can't recall the moves,  
 I signed a contract in a wide doorway with no one around.  
 It was the first time I betrayed myself,  
 dancing alone across an empty dancefloor.

A moment ago,  
 you were tending a potted amaryllis,  
 we were discussing a menu for Friday,  
 whether fish or chicken, beans or broccoli.  
 I yearn for the details once disdained,  
 a sugar pack under the leg of the dining-room table,  
 the Persian rug we moved an inch to the right,  
 lightbulbs that needed changing.  
 Heartbreak's the beauty  
 we're handed is already seizing:  
 I'm in love with what I call *you*,  
 but these illusions, so hypnotic,  
 have no place in the clouds.

I staggered down a stairwell,  
 you were in a garden across the wind,  
 I needed to alphabetize what was slipping from me,

slipped into ether, incomprehension, as I pressed  
the last key of your number. The phone was ringing:  
I was calling you, you stood in front of me,  
perusing an x-ray. I was in a room that seemed  
too quiet, you were repeating, *hello? hello?*  
I careened through a familiar neighborhood, fumbling  
our lingo, searching for an address in the rubble.  
I thought it was noon, but all I could hear  
were oily trumpets sputtering in the background.  
I couldn't understand why so many comets  
were flashing across the set at the wrong time.  
I couldn't recognize the props I'd been given,  
the machines & urgent voices, the pen  
scratching across the clipboard, I couldn't  
find my boats in the water, couldn't gauge the current  
or nudge my intention toward a distant bank.  
All I remember is how it destroyed me  
to think no trace of our love could endure.