



I WAS BORN JONATHAN
Christian Threlkeld. At the age of five my name became Christian Threlkeld Ballentine. At the age of 14, in 1997, I became C.T. Ballentine.

MY NAME IS TYLER.
I am in the fifth grade. I am in Mrs. Samson's homeroom, in room 4. My birthday is July 14th, which is the Fourth of July in France. I have never been to France, but sometimes I want to go there on July 10th so that I can have two birthdays in one month and get more presents. Also, July is good because we don't have to do book reports. Ha ha. I'm pretty sure that no matter what country I'm in I was born on the same year, which is 1997. I would tell you how old I am, but that's silly because I don't know when you would be reading this and how old I will be in the future. I could even be dead right now.

1997, the year that I was born, was also a book written about 2005, but it was written in 2007. This is my book report about 1997:

1997—A BOOK REPORT

1997 was a band, but first it was a TV show. It gets a little confusing, I understand. I was confused for a long time too. I'm not sure whether the band or the TV show or the book that I wrote my report on came first. The book is not very clear, which is why I don't know. But that's okay, because that is the point of the book. Here is a quote from the book: "Clarity is not necessarily truth and lawyers wear straw hats to the sandlot where young children sing the anthem of a new tomorrow. The anthem of tomorrow is the reason of tomorrow, which is unknown as no one knows what tomorrow will bring, which is why it can all be clear but no one knows what's true." I think that the main character is...

Oh hell...

So then these cats asked me, "So you think you have nerves of steel?"

I told those motherfuckers, "damn straight, boy, ain't you ever seen a man in love?" Then, quietly, off to Kerri, I said, "Here is the note I meant for you, darling," but then I said, "hell, that ain't nothing for nobody's heart to read." So I tucked it in my shirt pocket and ventured off into the road...

I aimed to show her that I had nerves of steel...

MY NAME'S
actually Caleb Pepp, and I say that redundant art is quantum physics. Also, I

think it's OK to spend most of your life hiding. The very first word I said to Kerri was "meep!"

She said it made her feel like anything could happen. She said she thought things would continue getting better until she stopped knowing me. I told her my last word would be "meep!" as well. Everything else, I told her, would be written on my heart. The rest was just bullshit, I said. "A jazz interpretation for something I will never understand. I call this piece, 'meep!'"

My best friend, Cody, says, "I just don't know if chicks will dig me wearing a hat like this." We tell Cody he is a weapon of mass seduction. It is true. Cody gets laid all of the time.

I tell Cody not to talk to me like I'm stupid. He doesn't get what I'm talking about, but he smiles anyway.

Cody tells me a story about this one time that he told a girl he was going to marry her. He thought he really would go through with it until he slept with her. After that he changed his mind. They never talked to each other again. Cody told me this story and it broke my heart.

I AM WALKING THROUGH
the forest. There is this turtle, nibbling at the ankles of another turtle. I think of a book that Kerri loaned me when she was in high school. It was about turtles and

romance. I think also about a picture of a turtle, which makes me think of Kerri. I am happy. I write Kerri a note and tell her this. I tell her I am happy with no one but her. I have never slept with Kerri. I wonder sometimes if I ever will. I wonder if I do sleep with her if I will feel like Cody. I tear the note up and continue having a broken heart.

I called Kerri from a truck stop. She didn't answer. I called her from the mall. Still no answer. I called her from my mother's house in Houston. She answered, but she had to go. I imagined that she was out with a different boy every night.

All of my friends became enemies. Every time one of them dogged some chick I saw her face on the black front door they closed each morning before we pulled away in the van. It broke my heart again and again. Kerri called. I told her what I thought.

She said her grandfather had died.

I called Kerri and told her she was like a mixing board, explaining that I loved trying to plug into her. Always sexual, she said. I didn't mean it like that, I said. Yeah right.

No, I said.

I asked her what music was playing. She said it was Gary Numan. I told her I was in San Francisco. Rock 'n' roll is obsessed with modes of transport, she told me. I said something about the Fricso britzka boom of 1927. She told me I was full of shit.

There is nothing in the world, and I mean nothing, I love more than hearing Kerri laugh.

TheHA
LeftND
thelefthand.net
Handmade Herbal Soap
Natural Skincare Products
Washing away last night's sins since 1999

PUT YOUR IMAGINATION TO WORK
PHOTOGRAPH BY MARY PETER MARK, ACCORDS REFUSING THEIR ACT AT 861 AT 801 IN DODGE, KUMTARAD, 1989

JOIN THE COLUMBIA COLLEGE CHICAGO FICTION WRITING DEPARTMENT.

YOUR STORIES. YOUR FUTURE.

OFFERINGS: **BA or BFA in Fiction Writing**, with specializations in *Fiction, Creative Nonfiction, Playwriting, Electronic Applications, Publishing, and Story Workshop Teaching* • **BA or BFA in Playwriting**, interdisciplinary with the Theater Department • **MFA in Creative Writing-Fiction**, with specializations in *Fiction, Creative Nonfiction, Playwriting, and Teaching* • **MA in the Teaching of Writing**, featuring the Story Workshop approach • **Combined MFA/MA Degrees**

Columbia College Chicago admits students without regard to age, race, color, creed, sex, religion, handicap, disability, sexual orientation, and national or ethnic origin.

WWW.COLUM.EDU

Columbia
COLLEGE CHICAGO



ONE DAY I TELL KERRI

that if something isn't true then it must die. I can't believe I told her that.

There is so much I have to learn, or else I will become redundant art.

For instance, if I have a great idea and no one wants to hear it, should I shut up and remain humble? Kerri thinks I need to share my great ideas, but sometimes she tells me to shut up. Actually, she tells me to shut up all the time. I don't know who to listen to. It becomes quantum physics, pure guesswork. All my songs are about Kerri.

I sleep with a girl named Mona. I come all over her tits. I try to take her picture and she tells me to fuck off. Kerri knows.

So Cody asked me to teach him to play guitar. I told him about the transition from c major to a minor. I watched his hands struggle across the fretboard. I watched his teeth bite his lips. "Caleb," he said. "You're a brilliant motherfucker, but you're a terrible teacher."

On Kerri's answering machine, I say, "I know you hate Mona. I'm sorry I made love to her. But it was beautiful. The moon, well, the moon was something as I kissed her. I wish it had been you I was kissing, but sort of I am glad it wasn't you because I hurt her. I used her. I told her that I was making love to you through her. She said that was wishful thinking. Then she told me to fuck off. She said it didn't hurt at all."

Wrote a song today that went, *If I could buy you everything / I'd buy everything for you*. I meant it. But I can't buy anything. To buy anything I have to break your heart. It makes for better songs. Mona is my muse.

I keep my eyes closed when you cry because I have nerves of steel.

Sometimes I wish I had never chased the fame. I wish I had only sang songs in church in third grade. I wish I had never made our love about a song. I wish the only song I had sang was one I sang in third grade. It was a big boring song about turtles.

Mona never says, "meep!" Not ever.

Always, the agent is watching me and trying to make his money. For a second he looked away and I whispered to the moon. It was easy, because at that moment, the world was very close. I remembered a

book, one Kerri had given me, about the world being close to the moon, back in the beginning of time. I smiled and told the moon my secrets. I told the moon how much I loved you. There was a dog, who was laughing...then the dog became a turtle, nipping at my ankles.

Cody told me about a dream he had once. "There were mountains," he said. "And a heart-shaped shadow stretching from the moon across a teetering bridge with loose wooden boards. You were on one side and Kerri was on the other. I told you that the seventh board was loose. That if you crossed the bridge, you would fall and you would die. Kerri looked at you and said, 'Well.' You crossed the bridge and fell and I suppose you died, but I woke up because when you started falling, I became you. Falling..."

That night I made love to Kerri for the first time. It was angry sex. Afterward, she told me that she hated me.

The next day I read a haiku for my mother. It was about moons and houses. I told her an expensive man wanted to produce our next album. That he would make us stars. Bigger than stars, maybe; big like the moon, even. I told my mother I wished that the producer could make us smaller.

She sighed.

"I AM AFRAID I AM BOTH a fraud and a failure." I say this, out loud, in an empty church hall, where the moon is overhead, but unseen. I wait for the reverberations to come back to me. All I hear is a car pulling away. I imagine it is Kerri's car.

"Electricity is a powerful thing," I tell Cody. "It can make steel turn red." He asks what I mean. I tell him there is an effect named after a character on a popular television show, or perhaps the other way around. Cody asks where I learned all of this. I tell him I read it in a book.

"How do I say this..." says Cody. "Oh look, your book is sitting under my drugs."

We laugh and it is like electricity.

To Kerri I say, "I knew your love for a second but it scribbled away, like a neutron, neutral and hiding."

"You steal every word I say," she says, not listen-

ing. "And turn it into crappy poetry."

I watch her quietly. Lately I've been seeing what people will do.

The agent is working closely with the producer. Lights are blinking everywhere. "If I record it," he says, smiling, "I don't even have to do it." The lights look nothing like the moon, which I tell him is what I want. He tells me to grow up.

I argue with the producer. He tells me he is an electrical engineer. I tell him I know more about electricity than he thinks. I tell him how steel glows red under the moon.

I go to church with my mother because she is sad and so am I. They sing 'Amazing Grace.' The line—*I once was lost, but now am found*. This line chokes me up.

All my best songs are someone else's. I tell the producer this. He laughs.

The producer says I am a smart guitarist. He says he would record everything I do and he could sell all of it. He tells me we would make lots of money.

"What happens," I say, "if somebody returns something I play, something which you have sold?" He asks what I meant by return. I tell him I have been reading about the eternal return. Nietzsche under the moon while thinking about Kerri. The producer says brains have no place in pop songs.

The producer is not as full of shit as he ought to be.

I began to spread my notes on the wind, careful not to lose any of them. It is not a hard task. There are only twelve notes.

I tell the producer I want to leave. I tell him I want to sit under the moon. "Why don't you just build the moon here?" he asked. "Why don't you stop being such a pussy and do your job?"

ART IS QUANTUM PHYSICS.

Today I wrote a new song and forgot it just as quickly. I called Kerri in my sleep. I don't remember what I said.

Kerri and I have a baby now. Under the moon, our fractured house has become a home. For the baby, I sing my songs.

END

CHEMTRAILS FOR ELIOT

by Doug Milam

I believe there is no magic; there is only what we do not know. In the morning my wife talks of the dreamworld. She tells me of the recurrence of a theme I cannot understand: women in conflict with women. Psychic warfare, some say.

My dream was a rare one: I remembered it all when I awoke. I was at a mall and for whatever reason had left a bag of new shoes on the curb. Perhaps I had stepped away to hail a taxi, I don't know. But when I returned to pick up the bag, it was gone, stolen. I walked out into the parking lot, looking for whomever had done it. As I came upon a van opened in the back, and several people talking over what I knew instantly to be stolen goods, a tall man with a mullet and a 'stache warned them that I was coming, that I knew. They then closed ranks and assumed threatening postures and said that there is nothing to see here. Intimidated, I backed away and went inside the mall to tell the cops, only to find that as I walked through a door the door became a stage curtain, and I was backstage amongst the grips and runners and they were the same

who had closed ranks around that van, and I was not allowed to leave but was pushed further along through another curtain which opened to a square room walled with black curtains and outfitted with folding chairs. I moved to open my mouth and was told by a woman that my complaint was not relevant here, that I would never find the new soles that I had claimed were mine. I was told to leave and was shunted through more curtains. I was then walking in the city, at night, alone. I hiked up fire escapes and looked at rooftops. I saw students entering libraries through back doors. And one by one they came, over walls, from the air, out of windows - the cabal of thieves crowded me and told me my time had come, that I knew too much, that I wouldn't be allowed to continue... and then in my fear my anger grew, and with my anger grew wings to gather the wind now at my back. I flew at them with rage, and the streetlights illumined what I had done.

I had killed them with my bare hands. I had killed all of them, one by one. I was as satisfied as I could remember. But there was a boy in the air, Luciano. He had probably come to look. Unable to dampen my rage I killed him too, for watching perhaps, or

because once the demon is let loose, be warned that it overtakes the soul. And then I awoke, disturbed but satisfied that I had killed. Satisfied that I had killed but only in a dream. I did not feel particularly well rested. Maybe it was the wine the night before. Maybe my body in meting revenge needed water, and death could not slake it. Some say DNA itself needs water to attune, and to atone I wonder what the right balance of life and death is. Some say in radioed sooth that "democracy is not a panacea; it cannot organize everything and it is unaware of its own limits ... it is no longer well-suited to the task ahead." I cannot yet wonder what is. I get up drink a large glass of water and feed the cats the meat they deserve. Life seems normal again, for a time, until I fall into the couch and back asleep dream again, that

From a universal history of the destruction of books the bepennded red-headed woman sitting to her right on the bus to work in the sunny morning interrupted her reading of "o weariness of men who turn from" and asked on the beauty of the clouds in waves and ripples in white ardor. The sun she said and squinted into the high haze-right blue where novelty lined up in lapped rhythm to the dawn of gnosis is knowl-

edge or science is knowledge and there is a difference in the layers we dare travel down, bathyspheres where light is heavy and the pressure is "to fevered enthusiasm / for nation or race or what you call humanity." The woman's question was not prohibited but her privacy or her stupor or her inversion for war would have away with it, done what deeds of men in holed hearts have done and silenced it to the stern rose of thorns bundled in Roman axes of six or twelve ranks deep. Were it not for the tales she had heard told only yesterday, of trails in the sky against which the pulpits of progress would never pronounce invalid but yet limp along at the end themselves like a hare just missed the trap, until ill from silver salts and bromides rained down that the agricultural year is done and no time to play her games but that of the velvet glove, move her to the cities and the sooner in starving domes live the death the velvet glove decrees of an April morning, of a god dare said and seen now made extinct with endless excuses to cowardice following orders to burn books, where people are burned in the end.

Visit Milam at www.reedandlink.com