

# PRUNE JUICE



ISSUE 6 SUMMER 2011

# **PRUNE JUICE**

## **Journal of Senryu & Kyoka**

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**Editor : Liam Wilkinson**  
**Features Editor : Bruce Boynton**

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

I feel I should tell you that, since the last issue of *Prune Juice*, I have owned, used and managed to break no less than three mobile phones. The first was an iPhone – perhaps the best little gadget I ever had – which suddenly stopped functioning as a phone. I'll never forget the nugget of wisdom bestowed upon me by the helpline operator the day my little gadget decided to stop making calls: “Well, you can surely do without the phone function, can't you? I mean, iPhones aren't really for phoning people with, are they?!”

Then there was a brief flirtation with something called a Qwerty phone. I didn't mind so much that the keyboard was designed for people with hands and fingers that hadn't grown since birth, but was rather frustrated by the fact that, in order to call somebody, I had to be standing only several feet away from the them. In essence, the Qwerty phone was no more reliable than a couple of plastic cups and a length of string. Indeed, the phone expired after being dropped only once on a carpeted floor.

More recently I acquired an Android phone – a suitably-named device that really ought to get back in its spaceship and sod off home. In the two months that I have been using this phone it has required around twenty reboots, two hard-resets and one new battery. It also appears to have forgotten everything I've asked it to remember – telephone numbers, photographs, notes and reminders have all been suddenly wiped. Owning this phone is rather like caring for an elderly relative who knows you from somewhere but can't quite put their finger on it.

What amazes me is that, when I purchased each of these phones, I was led to believe that they were 'smartphones'. This is the same 'smart' that we would normally associate with leading physicists and chess players. However, I'm left with an acute yearning for any dumb, stupid, idiotic device that might promise the basic ability to make a phone call.

My reasons for leading you down this crazy-paved path of personal frustration are inspired by many of the senryu and kyoka that feature in this edition of *Prune Juice*. Whether it be our phones, our computers, the Internet or gaming systems, modern technology has become so much a part of our daily lives that our senryu and kyoka have become just as necessary as the vents down the sides of our computers. Let's hope they prevent any overheating.

To begin this issue, I'd like to extend a warm welcome to Bruce Boynton who has become Features Editor of *Prune Juice*. I'm thrilled to have Bruce on board and am delighted that, for his first feature, Bruce visited *Prune Juice* founder Alexis Rotella at her home, where he interviewed this eminent poet

and artist and discussed, amongst other things, her stunning haiga. Alexis appears to be having more luck with technology than I do and has begun using an iPad to create much of her haiga, many of which are included in Bruce's fascinating feature.

Many thanks, as always, to those writers who submitted work for this issue. I do hope you enjoy it.

Liam Wilkinson  
*July 2011*

**Melissa Allen**

bandshell  
Dad pretends his mistress  
isn't

ceramics class  
my well-shaped  
lies

I lick a stamp,  
pretending it's your cheek—  
you taste like  
every other boy I've ever  
sent love letters to

**Jocko Benoit**

His palm's heart line  
Is as long  
As a shot glass is round.

The indifferent couple leaves  
Lemon slices  
Sucked dry on the bar.

**Maxianne Berger  
and Mike Montreuil**

me? old?  
I swallow my foolish pride  
and smile  
at the boy on the bus  
offering me his seat

a bronze frog  
on a bronze lily pad  
verdigris  
such a fitting end for  
her prince in shining armour

## **Johannes S. H. Bjerg**

not quite into  
tribal etiquette – Basho headbangs  
to a Zappa concert

Bashos frog  
Zappas rat -  
work for the crypto zoologist

Zoot!  
damn frog  
won't jump or sing!

**Bruce Boynton**

preparing  
the Thanksgiving feast  
illegals

waiting room—  
I glimpse eternity

August afternoon—  
as I doze, my shadow  
sneaks away

nude beach—  
I can't hide  
my excitement

**Mark E. Brager**

first robin -  
the border guard checks  
her entry visa

a leaf blower  
tidies  
the zen garden

blue sky...  
not even Bashō  
wrote every day

New Year's Eve -  
we set the alarm  
for midnight

## **Bouwe Brouwer**

snorkelling  
upon surfacing  
laughing gulls

argument -  
the laptop switches  
to screensaver

Picasso museum  
the distorted faces  
of the visitors

## **Helen Buckingham**

single again  
counting my blessings  
in the 'five or less' queue

**Tony Burfield**

one-shoed man  
chasing a shoe  
down the creek

half-lotus  
full breath—  
ant on my chin

## **Kirsten Cliff**

seeing faces  
in the scan  
that aren't the baby's

monday morning blood test  
all the old men  
reading women's magazines

## **Toumani Coates**

small town recession  
historic b and b  
now just a b

haiku moment  
they look at each other  
yours or mine?

**Ky Cochran**

after Thanksgiving  
mom hides  
the scales

## **Bill Cooper**

while daughters negotiate  
the banana split  
melting

**Aubrie Cox**

raspberry jam  
grandma asks  
if I'm still  
doing that  
poetry thing

second snow  
two stars fall  
off the Starbucks logo

sour grapes  
my in-laws buy him  
a drum set

## **Costis Demos**

the only downside  
to bungee jumping, is getting  
the hang of it

blazing argument  
and the punctual wordsmith  
falls into a comma

the cherry blossoms  
will be going on a strike  
from haiku appearances

## **Margaret Dornaus**

password update:  
no more “secrets” left  
to answer

## **Curtis Dunlap**

rapture frenzy—  
everyone  
left behind

plucking hair  
from my ears  
she loves me, she loves me not

these new faces  
in my dreams,  
who are they?  
and why do they know me  
so intimately?

pharmacy drive-thru  
a 'Push For Service' button  
labelled in Braille

## **T.J. Edge**

unpredictable  
this season of hidden ice  
and falling on my ass  
i threaten winter with red hands  
winter laughs

lunar eclipse  
the repairman  
hitches up his pants

lunch  
a daddy-long-legs studies my skill  
with chopsticks

garbage day  
three crows  
do the macarena

leaf litter  
a squirrel bullies a chipmunk  
one icy look  
and i decide  
it's none of my business

## **Bruce England**

Dana Delany  
didn't know the glove size  
of her boyfriend  
so she asked the salesman  
to put his hand on her breast

## **Claire Everett**

Mother Nature  
knows in her heart  
when the hills  
are this quiet...  
they must be up to something

money talks...  
when we walk home  
under the stars  
even Orion  
has tightened his belt

winter bones  
the sun moves slowly  
round the house

Again, I fall asleep  
wearing my reading glasses  
as if my dreams  
will look better  
in close-up

feeling my age...  
not even  
the energy  
for the run  
in my tights

## **Seren Fargo**

not even a kiss  
from my date—  
I suck out  
the pimentos  
from a jar of olives

**Bryce W. Fauble**

Whistling bird  
can only mean  
my shoe missed

**Al Fogel**

dentist chair  
the hygienist removes  
my bluetooth

moonlit evening  
my girlfriend and I  
holding hand-helds

winter solitude  
all his facebook friends  
deleted by mistake

## **Terri French**

football season  
he passes her  
his credit card

gym parking lot  
he finds  
the closest space

even my old Slinky rests  
after  
three  
steps

glass bottom boat  
my son asks  
to turn the channel

## Sanford Goldstein

“will you  
please button your lip!”  
her father says--  
his daughter takes out  
her sewing kit and starts searching

listing  
all my published poems  
for the year,  
discover they add up to  
a me I didn't paste together

each time  
he meets his aging uncle,  
the old man says,  
life is three-fourths joy  
life is four-thirds pain

told  
he would be dizzy  
until he dies,  
“How long is that?”  
the patient asks

giving up  
on humor for a week  
by avoiding poems,  
I drink two tall glasses  
of prune juice with buttermilk

## **Sanford Goldstein**

to his girl student  
he meets on the campus  
a misuse of words:  
he thinks he's saying "How are you?"  
it comes out "How much?"

woolen cap on,  
red scarf around the collar  
of his winter coat,  
he goes into his study  
to memorize some Japanese

I sit  
in my cold Japanese study  
without any fire,  
it's for Prune Juice I type  
out my chilly humorous songs

## **Jennifer Gomoll Popolis**

meditation CD . . .  
programs running  
in the background

all the piercings  
that never healed . . .  
reunion

Hopper exhibition—  
a throng  
of lonely viewers

**Joyce S. Greene**

in low rise jeans  
she struts through the office  
too young to know  
gentlemen stare hard  
but ladies' stares are harder

**John J. Han**

elevator—  
waiting for two minutes  
for a two-second ride

out of boredom  
he sends himself a text  
it isn't delivered

he is proud  
of the neighbor's mansion  
next to his small house

**C.P. Harrison**

shading her smartphone  
from the sun,  
she checks the weather

**Natalia Kuznetsova**

vanity  
among men and women -  
in this  
we have truly achieved  
gender equality

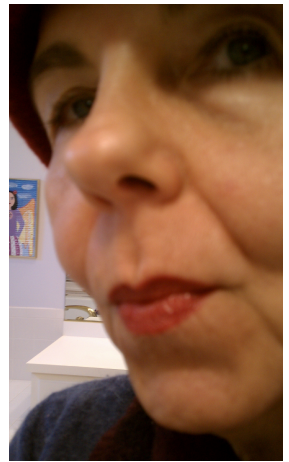
## **Angie LaPaglia**

in the liquor store  
the guy with the ponytail  
selling me my long way home

Victoria  
you haven't fathomed  
the secret

buckling Barbie  
into her pink Jeep  
my daughter  
congratulates me  
on my blog traffic

*Meeting...*  
*Alexis Rotella*



by Bruce Boynton

Our featured poet for this issue is Alexis Rotella, the founding editor of Prune Juice, former President of the Haiku Society of America, practitioner of acupuncture and Oriental Medicine, interfaith minister and prize winning *haijin*.

I e-mail Alexis to arrange the interview. “What is your schedule like?” she asks. I say I have retired from the Navy and my time is flexible.

“It will be a long day for you,” she replies, “We’ll see that you get lunch. Are any foods *verboden*?” I say that my enthusiasm for fish is restricted to Chicken of the Sea but anything else is fine. Alexis immediately responds with a senryu:

He’ll eat anything  
says the sailor  
but fish

I have to search a bit to find the house, but when I see a statue of the Buddha, sitting patiently on a rock beside the front door, I know I’ve come to the right place. Alexis greets me warmly and shows me around. The house is spacious and light from an early spring fills the rooms. Oriental rugs cover the hardwood floors. “There’s always room for another oriental rug,” say Alexis. We sit down to work while her husband Robert prepares lunch.

Prune Juice: Most of your senryu and kyoka are humorous. What makes things funny to you?

Alexis: I’m a triple Capricorn with Capricorn on the ascendant. (She pauses.) Is that Greek to you? (I have to admit that it is.) Well, we goats have a very dry wit. My family speaks in senryu so it just comes naturally to me. I don’t try to find humor in things, it’s just there. I’ve been an observer of body language since childhood. There’s a big disparity between what people say and what they do.

Prune Juice: Many of your senryu contrast appearance and reality, allowing your readers to see the human being beneath the mask.

Alexis: Yes, I have always been one to look behind the mask. Some of my writing appears sarcastic, but I encourage the reader to dig deeper to see what lies beneath. We’re not here to skim the surface.

Prune Juice: Some reviewers have called your poetic jabs merciless and one even professed fear of meeting you. Others have said your work resounds with compassion and empathy. Who’s right?

Alexis: I don’t know. There’s something in me that likes to burst balloons. It’s not that I’m not compassionate, but sometimes we have to burst the balloon to see what’s behind it.

I’m not a scholar and don’t try to be. I don’t really know what I do; I just do it.

I get on Twitter and just tweet whatever comes into my head. I don't always know where my ideas come from. Sometimes they come from dreams. I just hold a pen and stuff comes.

Prune Juice: You seem to be as unsparing of yourself as others in your work. Here's one I particularly like:

Reading the poem  
I threw away,  
the garbage man.

(Looking for a Prince, 2008)

Alexis: That actually happened when we lived in New Jersey! Many of my senryu are based on real events.

Prune Juice: Whose humor resonates with you, outside the world of poetry?

Alexis: Oscar Wilde. He had a very sharp tongue, too. Also Byron Katie. Here is a quote from her: "Reality is, and if you fight it you're going to be miserable." She is a modern day woman but has the wisdom of a Zen monk. There's a tremendous amount of humor in her books. I can relate to Gary Larsen, too (The Far Side cartoonist). Sometimes I get pretty far out there.

Robert signals that lunch is ready and we sit down to a delicious meal of chicken curry, chutney and grilled peppers.

We chat about our life experiences and Alexis complains that while she has pruned her book collection Robert has not, and that he has over 100,000 pounds of books in the basement.

"There's not 100,000 pounds," he says.

"Oh yes there is!" Alexis retorts. "I'll show you." After a dessert of strawberries, mascarpone and espresso we all troop to the basement to see the books. There are thousands of books, shelves and shelves of them, like the stacks in the library, books on every conceivable subject: travel, astrology, religion; I even see a volume on demonology. I suppress the urge to linger and read the titles. We look at the clinic where Alexis practices acupuncture and Oriental medicine and then it's back to the interview.

Prune Juice: You seem amused rather than annoyed by those aspects of the human character that drive the rest of us crazy. What gets your goat?

Alexis: That's a hard question, but one thing is intolerance; not letting in new

ideas. I've seen that a lot in my practice of Oriental medicine. Another is poets who write in longer verse and do not acknowledge haiku poets, but are very ready to take our ideas. It doesn't bother me so much anymore, but it did when I was a beginning writer.

I've encountered a lot of backbiting in my career. There is some of that in every field but with the haiku / senryu community being so small it's been a real ride. Sometimes I feel like I'm in a bumper car. When I showed up on the scene in the 1980's some poets welcomed me with open arms, but others were nasty. It was as if I had upset the apple cart by injecting humor and humanity into haiku. Haiku is not just about birds and bees and frogs. There are people out there, too.

Prune Juice: You have created a community of haijin on Twitter and a new way to share poetry.

Alexis: Yes, I get on Twitter in the morning and I'll write a line and then someone else will write a line. We play off each other and write for each other. Nobody writes for themselves. If there was nobody around I wouldn't write and I don't think anyone else would either.

Words are very mysterious, aren't they? I sometimes wonder what words are? What is language? It's a bunch of sounds strung together. But those sounds have such a profound effect on us.

Prune Juice: You have had considerable success working in haiga. Unlike other haijin you use senryu with your haiga instead of haiku.

Alexis: Yes, there must be other poets using senryu in haiga but I don't know any. But when I'm writing I don't decide whether it's going to be a haiku or a senryu. It just is what it is. I don't have any preconceived notions about what's going to happen. It just happens; it comes together like a horse and cart. There are too many poets who try to write from pure intellect. It doesn't work; it's boring. Your heart has to take over. You can't fake it.

Prune Juice: When you use senryu in haiga is there a danger of the work turning into a cartoon?

Alexis: I'd like to show you a book. (She goes to the next room and pulls out R.H. Blythe's "Senryu". The book is filled with hundreds of senryu illustrated with Japanese line drawings.) This is one of my favorite books. Look, they're all cartoons. (We spend a few minutes studying it, and sure enough, the haiga do look like cartoons.)

Prune Juice: Have you tried haibun?

Alexis: Yes, I have three haibun in “Black Jack Judy and the Crisco Kids” (Modern English Tanka Press, 2010), my book about my husband’s childhood in the Bronx, but these are the only three I’ve written.

Prune Juice: What are your work habits? Do your ku come to you in the midst of life or do you sit down and work on them?

Alexis: No, I never sit down to write. I wake up early, make some coffee and then see who’s on Twitter. Maybe I’ve had a dream with information I want to impart to my fellow Twitterati. I’ll write that down, read something someone else wrote and we’ll go back and forth, almost like writing a renga. After a couple of hours I’ll get on with my day, but as ideas pop up I’ll tweet them. I seldom send things out to journals anymore. It takes them too long to make up their minds. I like the instant gratification of putting something out there and having one or two people respond to it if it tickles their funny bone.

Prune Juice: Your senryu seem to flow out of life itself like a continuous stream.

Alexis: My earliest haiku were about my childhood and my Russian Grandmother. Some of these were collected in my haiku memoir, “Musical Chairs” (Jade Mountain Press, 1994). (This book be read on line at: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/20448023/Musical-Chairs-by-Alexis-Rotella>.) I wrote another book, “Middle City” (Muse Pie Press, 1986), containing both prose and haiku about growing up in Pennsylvania.

Prune Juice: Where can the best senryu be found, in the dark corners of the human experience or in the light?

Alexis: The best? The best senryu can be found in the shadows, in the dark crevices of life. Blythe quotes a poem about a woman in the market place with sores on her face. It’s something you don’t expect to see. That, to me, makes it powerful. There’s lots of light in haiku, but if you want senryu go into the gutter. Follow the homeless; look at people’s body language. Don’t be afraid to write what you see.

Prune Juice: I’d like to see what you’re doing with your iPad.

Alexis gets out her iPad and shows me dozens of pictures she’s painted, some with haiku or senryu, some unlabeled. She encourages me to try, but my efforts resemble finger painting more than anything else. We play around with the iPad a bit and then it’s time to go.

Alexis: Do you need to use the restroom before you leave?

Prune Juice: Yes, and I'll try not to subject myself to another one of your witty senryu!

The priest comes to bless  
the house and pees  
all over the toilet seat.

(Simply Haiku, vol. 3, no. 3, Autumn 2005)

Alexis: That's another one that really happened! Twice!

To cut  
or not to cut  
the daffodil.

My iPad thinks  
it can spell better  
than me—  
maybe I should give it  
some chocolate.

I wait for the wind  
and then I howl  
so my neighbors  
won't think  
I'm mad.


Crows  
talkin  
trash.

The bird  
with no name  
all day at the feeder.

At a dinner party  
the woman  
whose family  
still fights  
the Civil War.

SWEET CORN  
on the side of the Japanese truck—  
no corn to speak of  
just the sound  
of the words.

Blind date—  
not expecting  
the white cane.




*The icing  
on the earthquake  
disaster . . .  
snow.*

**Alexis Rotella**

**Piping hot  
she serves him  
porridge--  
the bear she spent  
the night with.**


**Alexis Rotella**





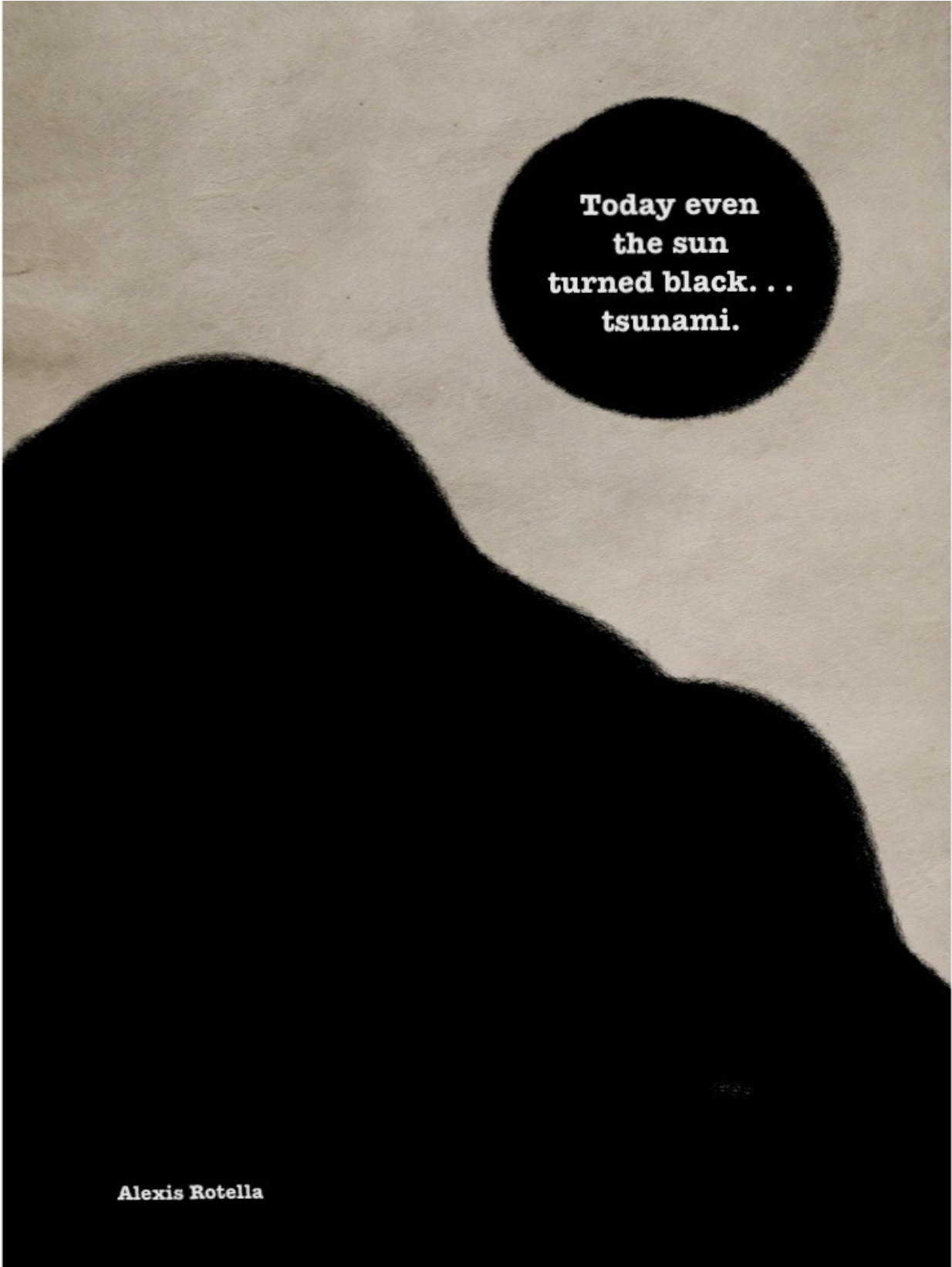
*Grow old with me  
you said  
a moment ago.*

*Alexis Rotella*

An oil painting featuring two ripe, yellow pomegranates in the foreground, resting on a vibrant red surface. The pomegranates are rendered with visible brushstrokes, showing their segmented texture. In the background, a bright blue sky is filled with soft, white, wavy clouds. A large, pale yellow sun or moon is positioned in the upper left corner. The overall composition is simple and evocative, with a strong color palette of yellow, red, and blue.

*A breeze  
from the ocean  
taking with it  
my sins.*

*Alexis Rotella*



Today even  
the sun  
turned black. . .  
tsunami.

Alexis Rotella



**G.R. LeBlanc**

New Year's Eve—  
wishing my new shoes  
weren't new

long sermon—  
through stained glass  
the light

snow storm  
all the puzzle pieces  
look alike

## **Kris Lindbeck**

First real kiss  
September night  
sitting in the grass  
embarrassed by my braces  
(and his tongue tasted funny)

\*

Change of life:  
all the guys who think she's hot  
are geezers

**Chen-ou Liu**

*how will you*  
*get food on the table?*  
she stares at me --  
as always  
I boil poems to eat

(for Ishikawa Takuboku)

alone in the attic --  
reading *Joy for Dummies*  
late into the night

hearing  
my cry in her cries...  
lottery results

recession...  
the care giver he hired  
doubles as a mistress

## **Bob Lucky**

new birth certificate nothing's changed

growing old—  
a little extra bleach  
in the whites

first light  
a barcode tattoo  
on her neck

yoga retreat new age music gets old

plastic surgeon  
the laminated hours  
taped to the door

I try not to look  
when she leans over my desk  
to ask a question  
I grapple with the meaning  
of nothing between us

## **Bob Lucky**

out of the troop  
one baboon edges closer  
to the road—  
if only one of us  
had a camera

**Andrew Shattuck McBride**

struggling with a  
new tech manual  
it's all geek to me

at the acupuncturist's—  
waiting on  
pins and needles

digital dating—  
your iPad  
or mine?

teaching  
creative non-fiction  
at the prison—  
prose and  
cons

forces of  
nature,  
my cats  
abhor a  
vacuum

**Dave Moore**

the way  
my mother-in-law  
sucks out oysters  
so not  
an aphrodisiac

he and I  
just nod at each other  
lost in women's apparel

**Susan Nelson Myers**

teetering on the edge  
of womanhood -  
six-inch heels

empty winter nest -  
discovering a new drip  
in an old faucet

## **Christina Nguyen**

once again  
down on my hands and knees  
I tell myself  
morning sickness  
is worth it

campaign signs  
for the green candidate  
litter the neighborhood

mother  
carves the pumpkin  
grimacing

## **Polona Oblak**

did i say too much?  
the squeak  
of his hearing aid

night owl  
nothing in the fridge  
to stop her husband's snoring

we work together  
but hardly ever meet—  
the colleague  
i see twice today  
at the loo

**Marion Alice Poirier**

new father  
a sigh of relief  
over baby's red hair

**Patricia Prime**

dentist's surgery  
photos of his holidays  
on the ceiling

I open her recipes  
suddenly mother  
stands beside me  
flour on her cheeks  
and on her apron front

## **Claudette Russell**

new waiter  
courtesy  
not on the menu

yoga class  
so  
twisted

disappearing act  
wishing  
you had one

third glass of wine  
he still  
looks the same

lunch date  
I order mine  
to go

meditation  
getting somewhere  
without directions

## **Jacqueline Seaberg**

Parking  
was better when  
the neighborhood was worse

Flashing  
engagement ring  
at Mr. Way-Too-Friendly

Three-year-old  
dancing through the cafe  
asks her dad for my sandwich

**Stanley Sicheloff**

I'll make  
no more sacrifices  
to the American Idol

**Valeria Simonova-Cecon**

while pooping  
my dog takes the shape  
of an ideogram

## **John Soules**

national geographics  
the inheritance no one  
wants to claim

facebook  
trying hard to keep up  
with myself

**Laurence Stacey**

Thanksgiving dinner  
we mute the program  
on Indians

psychic hotline  
she puts my future  
on hold

bowling  
with perfect form  
on Nintendo  
my grandfather's  
arthritic hands

**Craig W. Steele**

indoor cat  
heaves hairballs on my pillow—  
gifts of silken fur

college dining hall—  
I eat breakfast alone  
with twenty people

Valentine's Day  
special gift in my pillbox—  
Cialis

20 years silent  
i write my first haiku  
again

sunny mid-March day  
cures my wife's winter blues  
turns her thoughts to love—  
for Christmas I'm giving her  
a sunlamp

winter  
is not summer lost—  
bare branches  
make it easier to spy  
on neighbors

## **Lucas Stensland**

a bartender  
I don't recognize  
knows my drink

he returns  
says the bartender  
the prodigal drunk

listening to Leonard Cohen  
at the gym  
I burn 463 calories  
and twelve percent  
of my joy

## André Surridge

wispy cloud the teen's first beard

one side of his face  
more sunburnt  
taxi driver

she removes his tie strawberry by silk strawberry

my wife  
removes the salted cashews  
chiding  
*they're supposed to be nibbles*  
*not gobbles*

**Vladislav Vassiliev**

before  
the cleaning lady comes  
she tidies up the house

christmas play  
Jesus waving  
at his parents

## **Neal Whitman**

brief  
thong  
beach

## **Dick Whyte**

out of work  
he folds the gas bill  
into a paper hat

**Liam Wilkinson**

at the meeting  
the hourglass figure  
of the minute taker

I tell her that  
laughter is  
the best medicine  
but she gives me  
the silent treatment

the priest  
gives evolution  
the thumbs-down

## **Rodney Williams**

old hippy searches  
genealogy sites...  
still finding himself

dessert menu–  
a new couple risking  
sticky date pudding

**Juliet Wilson**

on the dance-floor—  
you make not speaking to me  
into an art form

the striped hat she made—  
when he no longer wears it  
she'll know it's over

## **Sophia Winehouse**

stuck in traffic  
wondering if I left  
my vibrator on

changing lanes  
my sister tells me  
she has a girlfriend

peeling off the sticker  
I park wherever  
the fuck I want

**Caroline Zarlengo Sposto**

his chronic laughter  
and cannonades of wisecracks  
prove he is saddest

late night diner  
teen boys eat burgers  
and discuss girls they almost met

## **Spiros Zafiris**

much cajoling  
and meticulous care  
are ever demanded  
by my computer--it may  
just drive me back to women

alas, the years have passed  
the lady on the bus  
was all hot  
for the young Russian  
and not for me

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