

New Poetry from Michael Chang



Friedrich Wilhelm Karl Kuhnert (1865-1926), "Bowhead whale."

the secret life of simon & the whale

the boy inches close to the water
barefoot backpack slung over one
shoulder
he plays with the sand dips his toes in
his name is simon
simon is my human
i quote mean girls: "get in loser, we're going shopping"
he giggles
he likes ranch dressing but sometimes the buttermilk is too
much for his stomach
he enjoys wong kar-wai's movies but would rather talk
about steven universe
when we play hide-and-seek he wants to be found because he
loves me
i take him to school he hums along to my songs but prefers
katy perry
we watch tv
i tell him how unrealistic the show shark tank is
he looks at me quizzically
we change channels then go to dairy queen
he doesn't say things like white whale because that is
derogatory
just like how we don't talk about sushi or climate change
he shoos screaming babies and barking dogs away from me
when we go to coney island we speak in russian accents and
fall over laughing
i ask if he has been following the news
he says someone is being mean to him at

school wants to know what to do
 i quote kate moss: "looking good is the best revenge"
 he shows up the next day looking spiffy
 he has a slick yellow raincoat
 so i won't get wet when we hang out! he says
 i smile
 he offers me half of his sandwich and i am happy
 i tell him about my creative writing class
 he teaches me how to tell a joke he is a
 master of comedic timing i am no slouch
 i tell a joke about hiding the minibar keys from lindsay lohan
 he laughs but mostly because i act it out it is an
 oscar-worthy performance
 he wants to offer me some goldfish crackers but thinks twice
 he hands me a hot dog with mustard and relish instead
 we watch the sunset see
 the dolphins showing off again
 he asks what i'm dressing up as for halloween i say
 zorro he makes a face
 he says he couldn't decide between a zombie or an astronaut so
 he is going as a zombie astronaut
 we test our knowledge of state capitals but he falls asleep at
 lansing
 i say i got called for jury duty and explain what
 that is
 simon says you have the right to remain
 silent he bursts out laughing
 i reveal that lobsters are the kings of secrets they have
 dirt on everyone
 the hoovers of the ocean
 he thinks i mean the vacuum i guess that makes sense too
 for my birthday simon brings me a red velvet cupcake
 my favorite kind
 he asks how old i am turning
 i say 30 wow! that's old! he says
 i tell him that whales live up to 200 his eyes
 widen

what will we do when we're 200, he asks as i
wipe the tear from my face

fists of harmony and justice in 3 acts

i really believe in cities and
connecting people you say real
heartfelt

make me your nasty woman i say staring into your eyes

my intergenerational trauma is my parents live in
silver lake you say earnestly

mmhmm i say not objecting because
you are cute

so this is what it means to have a
moment of madness

you have come to the right place you have
so much to hide

perpetual war tell me your
secrets get me in trouble

obsessed
paralyzed the clerk will call
the roll

*

i regret to inform you that you will not be
home

in time for dinner with your wife no matter how often
she calls

you will put your phone on
vibrate then turn it off

you will stay over we will get drunk things
will happen

then you will leave
still thinking about me

swallowing you like an
eclair

*

in the movie of my life i would like to be played

by emmy-winning actor james spader

although i am not white

as they remind me

at every turn

statement of evil corp

for immediate release
press contact :: lucifer morningstar
(666) 666-6666

new york, ny :: we do not comment on personnel matters : but
we will train our gaydar on you : hands steady like a
surgeon's : locked and loaded : prickly pear margaritas : we
are certified analytical geniuses : with an absolute pitch for
fine poetry : objects in the mirror are closer than they
appear : due to a lack of evil representation in the media :
we have no equivalent : who the hell is from chambersburg, pa
: we guess someone must be : thank god it's not us : haha god
: we will make you famous like rodney king : a splash of the
coffee : grey flannel by geoffrey beene for men : when we
think of our life together : we imagine you in a suburban
parking lot : loading seltzer into the trunk : looking fresh

to death : you have to buy our product to know what's in it :
we won't get into specifics : we don't want to set a timeline
on this : who gave you that information : we'll have to refer
you back to them : it's early days : this is going to be a
process that takes place over time : we were for it before we
were against it : there have been discussions : we will not
entertain hypotheticals : we are not going into tactics
techniques or procedures : this may be an iterative process :
that is above our pay grade : we want to stress that this is
pre-decisional : there is a plan but plans have to be flexible
enough to survive first contact : it may be OBE (overcome by
events) : we have not been given release authority : it is not
yet approved for action : we are on a conditions-based
schedule : all options are on the table : we will continue to
engage with alliance partners on a range of activities that
will ensure maximum lethality : please only quote us as senior
evil corp officials or persons close to senior evil corp
leadership : 9 out of 10 dentists choose evil corp : we are
your anger managers : very legal and very good : our revenge
makes us wise : let us look at you through our designer shades
: our product has been endorsed by kate bush : no, she is a
freshman at kennesaw state university : a real georgia peach :
we find your () faith disturbing : your lack of taste does
violence to our senses : your very being is inimical to our
existence : go somewhere else for that washer and dryer set :
bitch : we will take you to the cleaners : what do you love :
what do you hate : if you could live inside a tv show which
one and why is it lucifer on fox : who are you : what do you
want : we are on pace to find cadence : the quiet you hear is
progress : thank you for shopping at evil corp

october 6, 2019, remarks as prepared for delivery

i informed mister river barkley last night that his services
are no longer needed in my life. i disagreed strongly with
many of his suggestions, as did others in the administration,

and therefore i asked mister river barkley for his resignation, which was given to me this morning.

although i appreciated his jfk jr vibes and his assertion that his dick is his biggest muscle, he never did my laundry. he failed to deliver to me macaroons in every imaginable color or call me his pocahontas and he my settler.

he cast serious doubt on his intelligence by detailing the depth of his feelings in support of the vietnam war and the draft. the public was regularly informed of this.

his choice of veal over fish was totally inexcusable. i was equally appalled when i encountered tickets to mariah carey in his diary stained with sperm and electric blue ink.

he never recovered from the unusually loud guttural noises he made during sex. he was unconvincing when he said he loved me, often in a voice that suggested he was far away or underwater. his declaration that tulsi gabbard should win the democratic nomination was similarly off-putting.

he was unable to tell me how many planes are in the sky or if it is true there are more people alive now than have ever lived. he declined to feed me more jello shots despite our school motto *possunt quia posse videntur* (they can because they think they can).

he embarrassed me by getting into that fight with his truck and losing. subsequently he had his arm in a cast which stank to high heaven.

admittedly i will miss the firm underside of his thighs and the steady scaffolding of his sex. i am however comforted by the truth that nothing is better than breadsticks with the menendez brothers.

i thank mister river barkley very much for his service to our country and my happiness. i will be naming a new mister river

barkley next week.

thank you!

(don't pretend you're sorry□□)

acid taste like

He started seeing Sam everywhere.

Sam, who called him 'beautiful,' eyes like liquid smoke.

Sam, who stood perilously close as they poured the wine.

Strong yet gentle, blond-dusted hands.

Sam, who wore the plaid shirt, frayed khaki shorts, and beat-up loafers on their bodega run.

Chestnut-brown bedhead, cheeks rosy on their porcelain face.

The one he wanted to hold him, the one he hoped to make less lonely, the one he followed home.



Life was hard enough without a Greek chorus of Sams second-guessing his every move.

Haunted by his exes, he wanted significance.

He cried into his champagne, tired of questioning, tired of pushing back.

Acceptance sounded so good, like a drug.

Boy was with Girl.

Kind, inquisitive eyes the color of concrete.

Brown hair (of course) slicked back, shoulders firm, torso wide.

Girl freaking out, some low-rate drama.

Boy's body, a boar ready to charge.

Girl in the bathroom, Boy's expression softened—

Freed,

Granted a reprieve,

From performing masculinity.

Boy looked over, smiling as if he understood.

So tantalizingly close,
All he had to do was reach over,
Before Boy slipped back into character.

He imagined bringing Boy dinner, roast chicken and potatoes.
They would eat in silence, as if any stray sound might tip her
off.

Bellies full, side-by-side on the bed—
Striped pajamas,
Sheets that smelled like her,
Growing braver in the dark, bodies ablaze with feeling.
Skin, lips, tongue, there for the taking.
He raised a finger to Boy's lips and gently pried his mouth
open, inserting his finger.
Play it safe or swing for the fences?
Snatching Boy's receipt off the table, he felt a sickening
swirl of desire—
Like standing in the eye of a hurricane.
This little victory made him happier than he'd felt in a long
time.

Throwing up in that Waffle House, acid stinging his throat.
Outside for a smoke, his socks mismatched and his hair wild.
GO BACK TO CHINA, someone yelled, speeding past.
Possessed by cultural restlessness,
Always searching for a way in, a way out.

He decided that his favorite word was 'possibility.'
Even hope doesn't seem as surefire a thing.
Possibility is hope plus.
Nothing out of reach.
Maybe.

He unfolded the receipt, admired it.
CUSTOMER: SAM ____, it read.
He noticed the digits, the urgent scrawl.
Penmanship tight, compact, economical.
CALL ME, it said.