

# The Black Ship

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Monster

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Shapeshifter

Come-on from the Horse on 7th Avenue

The Surly Blondes of Earth

His name was Gord, and he used to run with the bulls

### **Anthologies**

A Verdant Green

# The BLACK SHIP

David Clink



Aeolus House

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Cover Image: Brett Savory

Cover Design and Typography: McNeill Design Arts

Author Photo: Alexa Carroll

Edited by Autumn Getty

Copyedited and proofread by Sandra Kasturi and Allan Briesmaster

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: The black ship / poems by David Clink.

Names: Clink, David, author.

Identifiers: Canadiana 20230559719 | ISBN 9781987872583 (softcover)

Classification: LCC PS8555.L5483 B53 2023 | DDC C811/.6—dc

Published by

Aeolus House

P.O. Box 53031

Royal Orchard Postal Station

10 Royal Orchard Blvd.

Thornhill, ON L3T 3C0

[www.aeolushouse.com](http://www.aeolushouse.com)

Printed in Canada

*For Alexa Carroll*  
*In loving memory—*  
*The stars will guide you home*



There is no greater unknown than the sea  
and no greater mystery than a lost ship.  
—Clive Cussler

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# I Waters



## **The Lighthouse**

You follow the lighthouse keeper  
up the winding stairwell.

Carrying an old prayer book for drowned men,  
she stops to look out a window.

Half-way up the lighthouse,  
you look down at the shoreline rocks.

In the shadows—  
faces in the sea foam.

You have both lost a loved one to water.  
Tears have left phantoms on your cheeks.

If this is a dream the keeper does not let on.  
Sheets of rain. Watching her lantern rise,

you climb in the wake of her footfalls.  
She never turns to see if you are there.

## Home

*The trick, he said,  
is to turn it inside out, first.*

And how many things start with turning?  
The mill wheel's paddles counting out the seconds,

its toothed gearing, the undershot;  
nude dancers rejoicing in another solstice;

the leaves in the wind;  
the hero returning home.

He was good  
at undoing complicated knots.

And the natives said: *Do not leave us behind.*  
And the strangers said: *This was never your home.*

The thoughts in your head:  
remembering the village at the base of the mountain

you called your adolescence.  
And always his smell, the touch of his fingers,

his muscled legs, eyes that received you in from the rain.  
*Start at the end, he said, work your way backwards.*

The hero in the wind.  
The leaves racing home.

## **Upon Finding a Letter Lost in Antiquity**

Tonight, in short sleeves,  
you find a note on the ground

written in a language dense as human bone,  
a love letter, if you could read it.

Instead of walking the letter home,  
kissing it goodnight,

you walk on, as so many others have.  
The storm front dissipates.

Somewhere, in another time zone,  
a copper penny is placed on a railroad track.

## Mirror Life

If you stare at an old, broken TV  
you will see things in its screen—

the pile of clothes on the far chair is a ghost  
with a finger at its lips. It speaks in stillnesses.

It tells you two things: first, be silent,  
there is more said than done in this world;

and second, it has taken your secrets to the grave.  
The next morning you find the TV in your arms,

its power cord—a tail dragging along the ground;  
its screen—a face buried in your chest.

And you toss it in the condo's dumpster  
along with other discarded ghosts.

A ghost is akin to a gust of wind—  
you have held a haunt's hand.

You spend sleepless nights  
trying to forget the ruffle of drapes.

To love a ghost,  
keep the windows and doors open.



## The Spring of Joy

When the first person found *The Spring of Joy*  
she was ecstatic.

The spring's waters bubbled enthusiasm.  
Sipping its waters brought pleasure to tired bones.

It made her feel whole again.  
Word spread—folks came from around the world.

Thousands waited in long, sinuous lines.  
People returned often,

fighting in line, jostling for position,  
and for those unable to return, depression set in,

a withdrawal—sadness owned the next day.  
A fence went up around the spring.

A sign on the fence said: "Danger, due to \_\_\_\_"  
and someone had handwritten in: "Happiness."

The populace ripped the fence down, tore into each other,  
blood mingling with the spring's waters. And yet,

people still put their mouths around the gushing hole,  
a blood-water mix finding its way down their throats.

**Do Not Engage the Sky.  
Just Observe and Report.**

It is easy for you to imagine  
clouds contain great intelligence

as they look down on sacred forests,  
on our profane wanderings.

Clouds have no definition for solid,  
no inclination to imagine their own deaths.

They've been here since the establishment of roses,  
the emergence of bees.

The wind is a great heron  
sweeping cobwebs from the attic.

Clouds have a long tradition of storytelling.  
And their cousin, the mist.

Clouds have emotion. Think storm, rain,  
what precipitated them.

Clouds have a language.  
Think cadence of thunderclap. Abandoned praise.

It was a cloudy day when I found you lingering  
under a unicorn cloud.

*This is an ancient world, you said.  
Tilt your head backwards, and see.*

## **The Dead Languages of the Wind**

When the storm is here we know no other season, and cannot think of a time when it did not chase us from our dreaming. We wander outside buildings, look up at the translucent dome, its ovoid shape made real by the particulate matter in the whipping wire-brush winds. But the day comes when the winds settle, and the sky turns a shade of blue seen on Earth, and one can go outside the dome, see the wind damage on ruins, and wonder how early generations survived. And we remember a time when we heard the heavens sizzle, like rain falling on the power lines of our youth. We thought the dome shield was failing. How we all gathered, held hands, started to pray, like our ancestors presumably did, those people gone forever except for what they left behind: the ruins stretched out beyond our reckoning, graves scattered on hillsides, graffiti, dental work, knee and hip replacements, the scrapbooks and cancer wigs. We know the storm will resume again, but we take a moment to look at scratch marks on these ruins, the dead languages of the wind.



# **II**

# **Bloom**



## **Rotted Stumps**

### **i**

There she was,  
the girl I loved,  
cross-legged, sitting numb in school,  
tears for the school mascot  
just arriving in pig Heaven.

### **ii**

Rick the naturalist,  
shrewd Rick,  
what does it really matter?  
You love a flower picker,  
an eater of nature.

### **iii**

Duncan smiled  
as he dragged tables,  
his uneven teeth talked  
of the one that got away,  
a rehearsed line broken in a stream.

### **iv**

I laughed  
when the pint-sized pirates  
found nettles and weed-grown fences,  
the rotted stumps that house  
childhood.

## **Gollum**

*For Janet Jones and Paul Salivar*

They found her in the yard, a newborn squirrel with large eyes and a grey, hairless body. She is three months old, now. She scrambles up and down the stump of your leg. You can feel her claws hold. She leaps from the extended branch of your arm to nearby furniture, people. The drape is a long-forgotten elm. On the news the other day: two lost teenagers were found alive on a country road after a cold night away from home. This room is warm as I watch this Tolkien creation perch on the top of Paul's head. I am reminded of sitting on top of my father's shoulders, touching the ceiling with my small, unknowing hands.



## **The Morning Paper**

The paper  
rose like a ghost between us

in the morning  
at the dining room table

you getting ready for work,  
me for school.

You used to go upstairs  
to the study

the paperboy  
seen through the bay window.

The morning paper  
at the breakfast table.

You, coming down the stairs  
getting ready for work.

Me, getting ready for school,  
the paper between us.

The sheets, grey and white  
that rose like a ghost.

## **The Call Not Made**

When I am very sick,  
and I think it might be my time,

I unlock the front door  
and keep my cell phone near.

I think of calling you,  
not to alarm you, just to connect.

I would ask you how your day was,  
and get lost in your life.

You would tell me of your daylight,  
how the sun shone in the office,

the designs for the Buddy Holly Museum.  
We'd make plans for the weekend.

Somewhere, in all of this,  
I just want to hear your voice.

## **Planktivorous Fish and the Structure of Pelagic Plankton**

I woke up, thinking of you,  
but it was a dream,

and, like many of the dreams I told you about,  
I hadn't woken up yet,

I was still dreaming.

Then I woke up for real, I thought,  
thinking of you, as I was wont to do,

but I was still dreaming,  
like many of the dreams I shared with you.

When I was still dreaming  
I fell asleep in that dream

and dreamed that I woke up  
not thinking of you,

and imagined we had never met,  
and I was with someone else.

Like many of the dreams I kept from you  
I still hadn't gotten up yet,

I was still dreaming.

Then, in that same dream, I wrote a poem  
about dreaming,

and woke up and forgot the poem,  
forgot I was still asleep,

forgot you,  
forgot I was still dreaming.

But, like many of my dreams,  
you were there.

In cleaning the apartment last week  
I found, written on a piece of scrap,

the title of an academic paper:

*Planktivorous Fish and the Structure of  
Pelagic Plankton*

I had planned to write a poem with that title.  
Unless, that memory, too, was a dream.

It was so long ago, years before we met,  
like so many things, forgotten,

the dreams I had, when I was young.

## **Two Things**

*For Alexa*

You and I are on the VIA train to Fallowfield  
when the attendant takes your order then disappears

—like David Blaine or David Copperfield—  
before we are finished ordering.

Is he having a Harry Blackstone Sr. moment?

Apologies are difficult for him. Magical acts are not.  
I want him to pull a Kit Kat bar out of a hat.

And a Diet Coke.

You want him to dangle over the Ottawa River,  
in a straitjacket while in leg irons, in a locked cabinet.

I think I have him figured out.

If I want to order two things, I have to tell him,  
up front, I want two things, and then itemize them.

I may even go a step further:  
I may say I want two things

even if I only want one thing,  
in case I think of something else as I order.

Next time he comes by I plan to ask—  
“I want two things: First, I want a Kit Kat bar ...”

And if he asks what the other thing is,  
and I haven't thought of anything in the meantime,

I could just say, "Oh, that is all I need!"

And as he was leaving I would curse myself  
for not ordering a Diet Coke.

And then I would turn to you, and say,  
"I want to tell you two things:

The first thing is, there was no abracadabra  
in my life until you came into it."

And if you ask me what the other thing is, I'd reply,  
"No, that's it. That's all I wanted to say."

## **My Mother's Bones Glow So Beautifully**

*The funeral director says bones glow in the crematorium's oven.  
For Blanche Katherine Clink, 1934-2019*

My mother has written letters asking for help.  
She is at the top of a castle,

surrounded by loved ones, needing rescue.  
My brothers and sisters and I are at her bedside,

in the hospital, and our closeness is suffocating.  
My mother struggles to breathe.

She's released pigeons, carrying her wishes,  
hoping one will reach its destination, and that

her castle will still be standing when help comes.  
These birds have nowhere to go.

They all fall, joining the other arrow-riddled  
corpses of pigeons scattering the landscape.

My mother lets down a rope of tapestries  
woven from a lifelong journey of collecting,

and as she takes that first step out, her bones  
glow in the late evening moonlight.

## The Equation

The answer to the equation is simple. Take the number of office supplies you have carried home from work, add the amount of time you have stolen, multiply by the times you let a friend down when they really needed you, divide by your age, and then subtract the number of times you thought of killing yourself. Once you're satisfied with the answer, write it down on a scrap of paper, take it to a mirror and hold it up so the answer is facing you. Look past the paper to your own reflection. While still looking at yourself, crumple the sheet in your hand, drop it to the floor.



# III

## Babylon



## **Arturo Escapes the Cabinet of Death**

*Burning things on stage is highly controversial.*

—Valérie C. Kaelin

Pacing the auditorium, checking sightlines,  
Arturo reflects on the trapdoors of his life, mirrors,

before the show. Through a gap in curtains,  
he sees the size of the house, plants in the audience.

Arturo, on stage, bids farewell to the spectators,  
steps into the Cabinet of Death.

And there is something in the wood.  
He can't see it, or name it, but he knows it's there.

When he emerges, barely alive,  
gasping for breath, for reason,

he slashes a fireman's axe into the cabinet.  
People try to restrain him, but he's swinging an axe.

That night he returns to the vacant theatre.  
He collects the shards of the cabinet, burns them,

the iron screws and bolts and hinges  
white-hot, a smouldering defeat.

## **This Is *The Babylon*, They Say**

*for Robert Colman*

### **I**

This is *The Babylon*, they say,  
bitter hands filling bitter gloves,  
frigid fingers holding knives  
for cutting into whale meat, into blubber.

It doesn't take long to know  
*The Babylon* is a metaphor  
for the long history of good intentions  
gone dark, gone pear-shaped.

At times the ship is at a standstill  
while its sails luff into the wind's gossip.  
At other times *The Babylon* lurches up and down,  
rocking port to starboard, port to starboard.

*This is the life!* you shout to no one in particular.

*Take a breath*, they say,  
as you puke into the icy Atlantic.  
You don't want to breathe in the stink,  
your gloves smelling of ruin.

## II

Dominoes is the only game.  
Shipmates pair off, each domino set distinct,  
carved from scrimshaw and whalebone.  
The figurehead on the bow parts the waves.

*Have you ever noticed that some women  
have one breast that is slightly larger than the other?*  
one of them asks. Some smile, revealing gummy gaps  
where piss-yellow teeth ought to be.

*'The Babylon' is a bully, another says.  
It knocks you down. It kicks you  
in the stones, the mouth.  
It takes your lunch money.*

*This is life, you reply.*

Pointing to the lights on the dock,  
fuelled by whale oil, they say,  
*that is the way home.* Or are they  
pointing at the harbour lights?

## **The Black Ship**

*After reading George R. R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire series*

*Nightfall* is a wooden ship  
painted black

with a shadow mast  
and darkness for sails.

At the dock, by torchlight,  
it offloads mystery and despair,

the threat of violence,  
bloodlust, and religion.

When the ship departs,  
a mastiff figurehead on its bow,

murky histories in its wake,  
it leaves behind a traitor in the ranks,

a cunning adversary,  
a former flame,

a seeker of asylum,  
the terrible density of jungles,

the confession of feelings,  
and choice.

We dream the ship will return,  
deliver the things it couldn't hold

in its belly when it first opened  
a wound on our shore.

As time passes fewer dream  
of the black ship and its cargo.

The last person who dreams of it  
refuses to leave the shore

until it returns.  
We stake her to the ground

and she drowns  
when the tide comes in.

*Let her dream of the black ship now*  
one of us says, and some of us laugh.

She didn't know we had everything  
we would ever need.

## **Disturbing Raw Milk in Ontario**

*(after misreading "Distributing Raw Milk in Ontario")*

You down a glass of milk and grow hooves.  
There is an invisible X on your forehead.

You fear the ramp, that far door,  
the box chute with the side-access door.

The man with the captive bolt pistol is out smoking.  
He has a sharp knife.

Your spinal column can feel  
the sympathetic vibration of a far-off bone saw.

He has a large container for the viscera  
and a dark keeper bowl.

He has not withheld your feed.  
And it is blackfly season. You feel safe.

But you know this will all come,  
this page torn from the calendar of instinct,

when he will hose down your body with cold water  
to get rid of any residual blood and soil,

when your heart will feel his hands  
squeezing out the remaining blood.



## **Murder Is a Liquid, and the City Is Killing Us**

When you look at the outdoor furniture soaked in sleet,  
when the cold is coming,  
when you embrace calcification,  
when you sweep dead flies from the sill,  
when you know winter is only a few blocks away,  
when sleet calcifies you with hate,  
when dead flies hate you,  
when murder is a liquid,  
when winter is here,  
when the person you love is still a few blocks away,  
when you embrace what liquefies,  
when dead flies accumulate on the sill,  
when the city is killing us,  
when liquid comes in the form of snow,  
when mandarin oranges sit in a white bowl,  
when you dislike winter, but mostly the cold,  
then, and only then,  
are you ready to talk of the flies' sill-bound deaths  
as the murderous ice storm embraces the trees,  
as oranges turn to liquid in the white bowl,  
as getting old calcifies us,  
as catacombs open their arms,  
as dead flies open their wings,  
as snow fills the crevices in your thoughts,  
as the one you love is almost there.

## White Teeth

The crone lives in a house surrounded by white teeth, and she keeps saying *the signs are all around us, the signs are all around us*. The sound on the roof could be rain. A dragonfly nearing a gas station where the attendant smokes while pumping gas is an omen, an assurance that dragons will return, their scales a rattling subway train, their wings a flapping carnival tent. They will strike, as lightning once did, at the Earth's mantle, breaking it to reveal a molten core, waking bears from hibernation. Signs are all around us. No one will be able to sleep, but we'll survive, she tells us, the skulls of newborns will still fuse, people will find themselves on volcanic land masses surrounded by unopened boxes. And the rain's hard knuckles will beat us down.

## **The Skull in the Aquarium**

*For Taedon Hall*

The skull is surrounded by liquid-breathers.  
It is a skeleton buried up to its neck in the sand—

a skeleton, you surmise, of a black-suited man  
who used to play jazz piano in the French Quarter.

The air bubbles take on a terrifying skein  
as fish glide through eye sockets and pass over glass teeth.

The skull in the aquarium thinks waterborne thoughts  
in its liquid reliquary, grasping how it feels

to have never been alive, to have never known jazz,  
the complexities of desire.

## Stopping by Railway Tracks

The moon watches  
a bus approach railway tracks.

The bus comes to a stop.  
The driver opens then closes the doors.

The air at the crossing  
carries wind, sound,

the expressions of midnight,  
children playing by the track,

their game of sticks as they rise  
above the grass, and at other times

wade waist-high through the ground,  
the insect sounds they make.

And another bus comes to a stop,  
its doors create a breath,

adding to the voices of midnight,  
the frozen rail, the clicking sounds,

missives from the midnight children.  
*It is cold here, in the past, they say.*

# **IV**

## **Unravelling**



## Back Story

*For Stanley Fefferman*

You like that every single word, image, and idea in my poetry has meaning and is put there for a reason, so when you ask about the plant in my poem and need to know more about it, its background, where it came from, whether it was a gift, I tell you that many years ago it was a seed in a meteorite that had travelled to Earth from another planet, an exo-planet that we now know as *Dimidium*, 50 light years away in the constellation of Pegasus, and it germinated, came into full bloom, and was lovingly cared for by a man who was regularly abducted by aliens, and during one of these abductions the plant was kidnapped by Somali pirates and then was knocked overboard in a howling storm. It washed ashore and was rescued by a Jesuit missionary and his wife. Years later the Jesuit died of toxic fumes while painting his semi-detached bungalow, and the wife, whose name was Constance, a Civil Engineer who could speak three languages, not wishing to be reminded of him, which the plant, through no fault of its own, did, left it at the front door of a local home and garden centre, which, unbeknownst to her, was run by cruel botanists (who happened to be shape-shifting identical twins) who were ready to call it quits because their business was ready to go into receivership due to incompetent management practices, the fickle markets, and a monsoon in the Philippines. When my girlfriend saw the shape the plant was in, her heart went out to it, figuratively, and she bought it and brought it back to health by playing Antonio Lotti's *Crucifixus for 8 voices*, performed by The Toronto Mendelssohn Choir, which was co-founded in 1894 to celebrate the opening of Massey Hall, and when we moved in together she gave the plant to me, a gift, a token of lasting friendship, a reminder that love endures, that love heals, that love can span solar systems, and love can bring two people together, despite everything. And how fortunate for

me that I painted these walls blue two decades ago, capturing so delicately the mood I am in now. And what of the shape-shifting botanists, what made them so cruel? You may want to sit down for this.



## **The Valet of the Shadow of Death**

Looking at the valet of the Shadow of Death,  
you puke inside your mouth, then swallow.

He is a jigsaw puzzle of lost people.  
Underneath his clothes are surgical scars,

the autopsy Y, the cut-off limbs from midnight  
surgeries. You hand him the key to your car.

Later, the valley of the Shadow of Death is in darkness,  
and the valet drives to the parking circle,

gets out, hands you the key to your car.  
You tip him, and ask him about his tattoos.

He is proud.  
He guesses the story behind each.

He wants to find his creator,  
the person who looked through bags

of medical waste, and with steel needle  
and nylon thread, sewed him into being.

## **Why Dolphins Are Eating Ambassadors from Other Planets**

Dolphins think shapes found in deep water  
are beings of light trapped by the ocean.

They are prone to depression, cynicism.  
They have seen it all before.

Dolphins continue to evolve. Like onions,  
their questions unravel in layers.

They think deep in shallow waters.  
History is a timed-release pill.

Currents bring fish from other planets.  
Dolphins feed on their DNA.

*Spaceships are so yesterday, one clicks.*  
*Our currents are gateways, another whistles.*

There are fish-like aliens swimming  
beneath the waves.

Dolphins are the first to greet them.

## A Star Is Born, with Crocodiles

That is the tag line for *Crocodile-19*,  
a film on Netflix you have to watch,  
like the movie about a rock climber  
whose arm gets caught under a rock.  
Bradley Cooper (who also directs)  
and Lady Gaga (the title track is all over the airwaves)  
are dynamite, the all-American family,  
blindingly white and hopeful, good shallow  
Christian folk bathed in the blood of Christ.  
This film for a generation, that speaks to us,  
who we are as a people and a nation,  
the film we need right now, during this pandemic,  
while we solve puzzles and order in pepperoni pizza.  
Amanda Seyfried plays the 12-year-old daughter,  
even though the actress is 35,  
something Olivier would have referred to as *acting*.  
She steals the show,  
her screen time mostly flashbacks.  
And your heart skips a beat when Seyfried  
goes over the fence they erected to keep the crocs out.  
It happens so fast.  
*That's my 12-year-old daughter*, Cooper screams.  
*She looks 35*, someone in the crowd yells.  
This tragedy playing out, taking its toll,  
showing, without holding anything back,  
warts and all, the ripping apart of a family.  
Cooper's best work.  
Gaga's best work.  
Seyfried's best work.

Cooper plays a former red-state governor  
who blames the previous administration  
for the barren shelves, the shortages.  
an intrepid young White House cub reporter  
played by Sam Donaldson, something Olivier  
would have called a stretch. He asks:  
*You were in power 38 months.*  
*If you knew there was no crocodile repellent*  
*why did you not get more? There was plenty of time!*

And Cooper is flustered—he cannot answer.  
Perhaps he is still haunted by his other big mistake,  
the time he did close to nothing during a crisis  
caused by global warming  
because he did not believe the science.

## **Medusa Reflects on the 2016 Presidential Election**

*For Halli Villegas*

Medusa sits in stone silence.  
She feeds mice to the snakes in her hair.  
She wants to turn Trump to stone  
for cutting benefits to gorgons  
because of their pre-existing condition.  
She is reminded of the abuse she suffered  
at the hands of men and Gods. She takes a pill  
for an election *lasting longer than four years*.  
And she wants to build a wall around Donald  
Trump's dick, and get Dick Cheney to pay for it.

## **A Celebration of Life for Baba Yaga**

Baba Yaga used to ask her victims:  
*How far can you run into the woods?*

Looking through the window, the visitants  
see dead children piled atop one another.

*Something needs to be done*, someone says.

*You can only run half-way into the woods—*  
Baba Yaga cries, emerging from her hut—  
*And then you are running out.*

## Silver

Put your feet up—  
close your eyes, drift off.

Of the thousand thoughts  
coursing through your mind

don't think of the one you fancy—  
you need space; space is finite.

Instead, maintain a detachment  
learned from observing rocks.

Dream of magnificent desolation,  
always coming second, a recent love,

and the silver moon of distraction  
indifferent as red roses.

*Quel est le prix du trajet pour la lune?  
Faut-il avoir la monnaie exacte?*

Our faces aren't tidally locked,  
they turn away sometimes.

When we turn away—images of  
Buzz Aldrin on the lunar surface.

Now, think of the person you fancy.  
Tell them space is infinite.

Tell them you drifted off.  
Tell them you think of them.

The moon says: *wait, don't leave.*  
The moon says: *kiss me now.*





# **V Blue**



## **Laurentien Coloured Pencils—Blue**

### **#6 Navy Blue—**

for the darker aspects of sky.  
“Blue Bayou” sung by Roy Orbison.  
The sound of blues over the choppy water.  
Blue Oyster Cult.

### **#7 Peacock Blue—**

for Easter eggs and peacock feathers.  
Puddles by the porch swing.

### **#13 Ultramarine Blue—**

for the cottage lake first thing,  
    placid in its sheet-like soliloquy,  
    a quiet, undisturbed glass.  
Don Cherry’s dog Blue.

### **#22 Sky Magenta—**

for the blue rake you swept the leaves with.  
Blankets with stars in the boy’s bedroom.  
The sky obscured by grey clouds.  
“Blue Bayou” sung by Linda Ronstadt.

### **#38 Aqua—**

for the waters just off the Great Barrier Reef.  
A mermaid’s tears tasting of salt.  
Wishing the Creature from the Black Lagoon  
    would storm the set of *The Blue Lagoon* (1980),  
    wreak havoc, eat the cast.

**#39 Ocean Blue—**

for her denim dress weeping willow-like  
in the early morning shine.  
The red canoe across the blue lake.  
“Song Sung Blue.”  
Ol’ Blue Eyes singing a duet with  
“Nancy (With the Laughing Face).”

**#40 Blue—**

for those jeans you wore back in the day,  
the door to the white shed, and that shade  
of blue you used to paint your fingernails  
and toenails with.  
“Blue” sung by Leann Rimes.

**#41 Blueberry—**

for the blueberries in the bush  
that time we went berry picking.  
Drinking Labatt’s Blue, the smell of fish  
charring on the grill.  
Cold fingers while ice fishing.  
Blue Man Group.

**#53 Blue-Grey—**

for models of aircraft carriers.  
Your eyes following me across the room.  
The sound of blues over the lake water.  
The blue Oldsmobile, driving down country roads  
with the windows down in the summer heat,  
“Bluebird Blues” by Lightnin’ Hopkins blaring,  
a trail of dirt and dust and sadness in our wake.

**#58 Turquoise—**

for the first colour that you ever loved.

## Science and the Formation of Fog

Science can explain fog, how it hangs  
like a hanged man,

its feet twisting in your hair,  
how fog can roll in—

like a generation ship arriving at its destination,  
a shore-bound trawler chockfull of fish.

Science can explain the daytime moon,  
even though it looks like a bit of cloud,

even though the moon belongs to the night,  
and the night belongs to a field of stars.

Poets see more than fog on a moonless night,  
on a moon-slivered night—

they see a spaceship carrying colonists  
to another world, entering polar orbit,

and they also see a trawler  
following the moon in on the incoming fog,

its holds full of fish voices,  
the poetry of today's catch.

## Leeches

The place cleans itself and the cars  
drive themselves but we are still the same,

driven by biological imperatives which first  
drew us together like the Moon and Earth.

We talk of the current precipitate  
whether it has changed in the last hour.

The radio is of alien design. The forecast  
is different on every station and wrong every time.

I have turned on ancient machines not of my making,  
asked sentient appliances to plug themselves in.

You made me ponder a rock skipping  
across water, imagine living in a simpler time

and dream of a world enslaved by bionic leeches  
bio-engineered and quarrelsome.

Love is a gravity  
pulling us whole and tearing us;

and I want to feel like I have time-travelled  
back to our first date,

and I am waiting for you to appear,  
my stomach full of larval butterflies.

## **After Midnight**

*For Harry the cat*

*After Midnight by Ian Burgham*

I take a boat hitched to my front door,  
tell Harry it looks like a storm is coming.

He knows I am leaving.

He retreats to his not-so-secret hideaway  
underneath the dining room table, above the boxes.

I am not seaworthy.

I close and lock the door, row to work.  
When I return, he has disappeared.

When he reappears behind the couch  
he has questions for me.

I was looking out the window, he says,  
when I saw a skyline of the dead,

a waterfall, the skeletons dog-paddling  
to the sound of the ticking kitchen clock.

They are exiled from their crypts  
and are now on a pilgrimage. Why?

They want to be memorable,  
I tell him, putting out fresh water.

The spires are the eyebrows  
of a fallen giant raised in prayer.

There is a reassurance in the black arts.  
A calm sea does not stay that way for long.

Harry knows I am learning—  
I am a sailor leaving wet footprints on a shore.

Cats know moonlight, moments.  
Black and white markings are a message.

He knows the weightlessness of space,  
other words for breath, the violence of discovery.

He sits on the top of the sofa  
looking out the window  
as if it were stuck on the fish tank channel.

While I'm at work:  
early light. Beams stretch, move, fade.  
Water splashes against the embankment.

All fish metaphors are wet.

To Harry, the apartment is recognition,  
plateaus to lie on, a graveyard where  
every piece of furniture is a tombstone.

And the water keeps rising.



## **A Premonition of Rain**

The skies empty.

On these days our umbrellas talk  
to each other in whispers.

They wait weeks for these days.

You can hear them.  
You bend in to listen.

*The sky is falling—*  
that is what they are saying.

But you look on the bright side,  
take a sick day, films and popcorn.

Just outside the window; the world—  
pine cones, pavement, cars.

The constant threat of sun.

## **Umbrellas**

Your words started like a soft rain  
and carried the ending of things,

a rainbow of sensation,  
longing, the need for tenderness.

I did not carry anything in my pockets.  
You could say I was bereft,

but I have never used that word.  
Until now.

Your words carried the end of rain,  
washed away tenderness and rainbows,

the delicate things I held in my pockets, my hands,  
bouquets and gifts I forgot I gave you until now.

There are words I have never used,  
and others I have used too often.

You could say I was bereft.  
Until now I would have believed you.

The hard rain will start again soon.  
And umbrellas will sprout like flowers.

## **Long Shadows**

After we say our goodbyes,  
on the bus ride home,

I notice the first bit of crisp air,  
blackbirds on black telephone wires,

a few silver pine among the green,  
purple heather in the grass,

hints of change in the leaves  
at the apex of trees,

a spider's web as it clings  
to October.

**I Was on My Way to Tell You There Is a  
Vast Machine Intelligence Plotting Our Downfall,  
Or, the Time Machine**

*For Michael Rowe*

**I**

As a child I was Rod Taylor in *The Time Machine*  
exploring the earth's past, its future.

Since childhood I've been looking for a way  
out of something.

A time machine can take you  
to a place you can live, the realities

in the reflective surface of a sphere.  
You draw it, as Escher did.

## II

Yvette Mimieux is Weena, an Eloi, with a gift, a flower.  
She knows the way to the subterranean caverns.

Jotting it down when the voice falters—  
the patterns of activity and inactivity

that sum up a life, a death.  
Love is used when there is no other word.

I am preoccupied with the contemplation  
of the future: events you will be a part of—

an artist growing old,  
an image reflecting on its life.

Alan Young, as Filby, asks what three books  
you would take with you.

### III

Time machines have moving parts  
and parts that don't, and redundant timers.

The skies have had trouble being consistent.  
Those long walks to school.

I thought of you in the kitchen  
two years ago—

the time you first noticed  
the absence of things.

The “Morlock look” is unconvincing,  
but that’s 1960’s special effects for you.

You wait for a time exposure photograph  
to complete its rendering.

#### IV

Time machines are oversized timepieces  
you step into.

The lingering doubts of a paintbrush,  
the strokes that make up a history, our history.

You come to this point in time.  
The sedimentation of memory.

The fly-by-nightness  
of living things.

Bill Ferrari created its steampunk sled design,  
rotating disk, rivets, crystals, and a brass plate.

## V

It started innocently enough—  
the conversation kept commonplace

as if there was no storm, no sky,  
as if there were no stars,

as if nothing out of the ordinary  
were happening.

But maybe I am wasting my time, Amber,  
your dark sunglasses hide all the wrong.

The future is a chair in a room, a picture  
on a wall, a reminder of what is still felt.



## VI

Richard Garcia's music featured tracks titled: *Fear*;  
*Quick Trip Into The Future*; and *Love and Time Return*.

You find a forgotten thingamajig,  
something you can't remember

that you never knew you never had,  
whatever the hell that means.

Homesick, we have grown into this,  
whatever this is, where the people we knew

and the things we did were just the air  
passing through our lives.

The sky was cobalt  
or some other shade of blue.



# **VI**

# **Manifestation**



## Art Made of Rock Can Last

Our marriage of sweat,  
this cartoon romance—  
this fiddle in a hurricane  
trudging through summer,  
swimming in the smooth afternoon.  
You shake your honey-peached breasts—  
water sprays everywhere.  
My smooth whisper.  
My appetite.  
My campfire.  
My dearest atheist  
pink as shadowfall,  
graceful as milk,  
faithful as an abstraction.  
My rock.  
My hurricane.  
My symphony of fiddles.  
I find a rhyme for Timbuktu,  
which is blue.  
You find taboo. And voodoo.  
Winter rock is harder than summer.  
Boohoo.

The garden screams of petals,  
hornets in the pear tree,  
the iron smell of iron things,  
the shadow of a Chevrolet,  
licking a chocolate ice cream cone.  
We rock climb.  
We go to a symphony.  
We happily lick happy skin.  
A spa day with my water goddess.  
A sugar-kissed cartoon.

The weather in the backyard.  
Purple is essential in the garden.  
Crush this picture.  
You are drawn to *anxiety* and *rust*,  
*repulsive* and *sordid*.

I am drawn to *ugly* and *void*,  
*scream* and *death*.  
*Reason* is a sweet blood  
burning through our veins.  
Smiling part of the day.  
The juvenile hallways of when we were younger.

The wind in your hair.  
A spring craving for dirt in our hands.  
Lick beneath a whirlpool of pillows.  
The spirit of sex, of foreplay,  
a bosom held in fifty percent cotton,  
your hand gripping my sex.  
Looking at the garden and thinking  
Heaven is on fire, on TV.  
Animal tracks in the wet yard.  
My vision of a lake of wax.  
The moon a piece of art.  
The moon is birth, rain.  
My love, we kiss and sing and stare  
and wish for puddles to skip  
in our Timbuktu silence.  
My sublime whisperer.  
My summer of sweat.  
My clouds. My rain. My crush.  
My iron peach.  
My skin of chocolate.  
My dearest moon.  
My abstraction.

## **How Noah Saved the Dinosaurs—a Litany**

*For George Elliott Clarke*

We talk through Canadian dreamless nights, how they are everything and nothing, the coasts shining with the remembered footsteps of the Brachiosaurus, and we act like loons filling the air with useless chatter, talking of Noah, how he not only saved the animals but the dinosaurs too, how he took them two-by-two, the ark burdened with the weight of commission; we talk through the Africadian nights, the T-Rex nights, the tar sand nights, time dilation, 65 million years removed from the cashless society, the paperless society, high society, the homeless; we gab about everything and nothing, including the Ankylosaurus, blackouts and candlelight, scattered clothes, energy conservation; we are loons discussing the latest gossip about the Dilophosaurus, the divine in everything, the flow of blood, the copulatory gaze, seduction; we talk of the shining Canadian coasts and everything in-between, of the Velociraptor, the poster children for desire, love, despair; we talk about Noah scolding the dinosaurs for eating the unicorns, hydras, gorgons and all manner of legendary beasts, yakking it up again about the Brachiosaurus, pulling out in time, screaming sex, premature ejaculate, facial shots; we talk of dinosaurs walking two-by-two, the Hadrosaurus, bug repellant, spray-on tans, gladiator films, monster truck rallies; we hear the useless chatter of the Triceratops, the soft silence of smoking jackets and tiny black dresses, cries of *you're on my hair* and the sorry that follows; we natter on incessantly until the Canadian dreamless nights collapse into sleep, the Stegosaurus of the founding fathers and rounding mothers, emancipation and suffrage, abandonment, dying young; we chit-chat on how we are nothing and everything, and on the Archaeopteryx, tailgate parties and trailer parks, dock spiders and cottage country barbecues; we fill the Spinosaurus air with a heart-to-heart about The Burgess Shale, the Loch Ness Monster, extinctions,

conspiracy theories and Christian Science; we talk of the nothing nights, the dream-filled nights, the Brachiosaurus with its face full of foliage that we keep returning to, how it never gave a second thought to the future, the coming of air pollution, rising waters, fossil fuels, mercury poisoning; we talk about every season, how they imprint on us, the British Columbia coast, the in-betweenness of living things, the Allosaurus of grassy fields, large screens, drive-ins, double bills; we are loons filling the air with useless chatter, the hearsay of Noah, how he kept above deck to get away from the stink of dinosaur, and we whisper about the Pterodactyl, overbooked flights, tweets, contemporaneous notes, and Burning Man; we spill the beans on the Pterosaur, speculate on space flight, the Canadarm, Chris Hadfield singing *Space Oddity*; and that we once walked in the shadow of the Apatosaurus, and how we now walk in the penumbra of The Big Bang.



## On Manifestation

*In the morning I saw the lilies  
nothing but brittle, tattered, colorless leaf scaffolding,  
and I was relatively filled with hatred  
for weather, season, and earth.*

—A. F. Moritz, “Manifestation”

## Act I

My hoe searches for you, Antonin Artaud, in the middle of the night, and I can almost hear the fatigue of your bones, your vertebrae cracking as you strain to listen. I want to know why you brutalized me with your tortured body and soul, the lilies sprouting from your misunderstood genius, petrifying me. Your lifetime spent trying to comprehend the chatter of beggar’s teeth didn’t make a difference in this culture of fatigue, and failed to eliminate any of the causes of human despair. I tire myself more than necessary as I toil day in and day out, seasons passing like loved ones, and all I have left is to think of you and take care of my garden,

*and to dance to the obscene precession of the equinoxes.*

## Act II

By rooting up my garden I am hacking at your body, breaking off your fingernails, fingertips pouring blood. I carve up your personal anatomy so I can package it for special occasions, sending parcels of your ears, nose, or neatly detached nostrils through the mail to ex-lovers. My cabbages are the talk of the company, and they live off your rotting flesh, embalming itself beneath the stage. The globe is our theater and we are not free in it, and the sky can still fall on our heads. As I cut your throat my hatred grows for nature, the weather, seasons, and the manure beneath my bare feet, and I finally know—

*where there is a stink of shit there is a smell of being.*

### **Act III**

Since the time of Ulysses men have tried to cleanse themselves of despair, only to find the race of prophets extinct, and they knew nothing, anyway, and they will never know anything of the true mysteries of the body. As my hoe breaks the surface and leaves ageless tracts of shining petroglyphs, there is no prophet to decipher their meanings. Our struggles on earth end in earth. All I know, as I pull on a stem with all my power, the flowers' resistance bending me double, is that a root is only a root if it stays underground, and

*I shall, for the first time, give things the shape of my will.*

## Act IV

In the depth of certain authentic waking nightmare states I dream I am in my garden again, chewing on the wet mud. I am a newborn, a child, and I put broken glass, brick fragments, pennies, old marbles, centipedes and worms in my mouth, and I say *let the dead poets make way for others!* As I tend my garden, prop in hand, I feel that I am prevented from uttering certain intolerable truths. But I speak, anyway, putting my mouth near the ground where you lie, and I say to you, in my actor's voice: "As the night turns into day and forgets, I will not be ignored. I am the sum of all my parts, strewn throughout this garden since childhood, and by returning here I can put myself back together by violently reconquering myself, by ending my despair." I put my ear to the ground and I hear your skeleton hands clapping, demanding a curtain call, venerating me, feeding me, and pulling me down by formidable suction; and this, my final act, will be to reintroduce my design in nature, and in the morning I will find a resting place next to you, in the lilies of the valley, and my hatred for weather, season, and earth will diffuse as

*I anticipate the unpredictable approaches of God.*

## **The Sunset Girl**

*For Clara Blackwood*

The sunset girl only comes out at twilight.  
A long, drawn motion of her heathered hand  
brings the determined badger,  
the hamster carrying the world

in its cheek pouches,  
the cricket with its long antennae  
listening for a distant echo of God  
while it plays a song of longing.

Cockroaches form a wreath  
she wears as a crown.  
They click and hiss:  
*We will be here long after you're gone.*

And anything that can fly does so:  
the flies that swarm, the bees that buzz,  
the fireflies alit with stardom,  
owls and their ancient wisdom,

flying squirrels truth-telling  
stories of the liquidity of branches,  
the bats and their herky-jerky accord,  
all to the song of the whip-poor-will.

The sunset girl's dappled hair of leaves  
falls gently on bark shoulders as she walks  
the shadowed forest floor beside the coyote,  
both with shapeshifting eyes.

And others form a line  
following them through the dark forest,  
the ocelot, opossum, and porcupine,  
the raccoon, and skunk, and cougar.

They snake a sinuous trail,  
passing a tarantula, a nine-banded  
armadillo, a red-eyed tree frog,  
and they all join ranks, fall in.

The animals that call the night their companion  
follow the sunset girl all around the world,  
as waking mice shake their weary heads,  
as life in the forest begins to stir.

## **Icarus Rising**

*For Ned Hagerman and Yaqoob Ghaznavi*

As Icarus rises the air thins,  
catches moments between each breath.  
He touches everything,  
becomes everything.

He is an Akashic priest in a trailer park,  
a canto nesting in a married woman's hair,  
the smell of a baby climbing out of a stroller,  
an owl sitting on a tombstone, his tombstone.

Icarus, as the owl, thinks  
the gravestone is an egg waiting to hatch.  
The owl dreams of a spring daffodil  
in an autumn cornfield.

A hibiscus plant thrives at the centre of a garden.  
Icarus is at the centre of every garden.  
When the air is gone the universe evolves.  
Icarus wonders if the Milky Way can be touched.

As Icarus rises, these are the thoughts he holds  
while his arms grow tired.  
While his arms grow tired  
feathers drift down like stardust.

As Icarus rises the air is skeletal, cold—  
his youth liquefies like candlewax.  
He muses how lovely life is before one falls.  
He is a ragdoll man with pasted-on wings.

As Icarus rises time slows.  
Nearly frozen, barely able to breathe,  
he wipes the space dust from his eyes.  
The people on the ground wave to him.

As Icarus reaches the apex of his flight  
everything seems so simple, yet, changing  
the smallest thing in one's life seems so hard!  
And at the zenith of his arc he sees things

no one will see till space flight,  
the picturesque planet  
shining against the black,  
how small people appear sometimes.

Icarus knows they will only think of his fall,  
but he wants them to remember that he rose first,  
before he leaves a distant burn in their memories.  
And he wants them to consider the daffodil,

hibiscus plants growing, autumn cornfields,  
the universe's expanding emptiness,  
a baby yearning to walk for the first time,  
an owl pecking its way out of a stone.



## **The Incongruity of Thorns**

### **I**

At the source of any river  
you will find a dark history taking root.

Dig the root out.  
Dig until you find the layers of slate

that once were worm dung.  
The slate has a voice, geologic, dense.

It speaks of surfaces,  
the mythic weight of the black-tailed prairie dog.

### **II**

We have become comfortable  
in the naming of things.

Let us call that layer of calcified worm dung: “slate.”  
Let us weigh a black-tailed prairie dog, call it: “mythic.”

If you call something poetry—it is.  
Growing up—poetry.

The creation of false memories—poetry.  
A cat or dog in the living room—poetry.

### III

Every sketch contains  
at least one truth and a thousand lies.

And not every invention is worth celebrating—  
just ask the person who invented dying.

As children we articulate independence,  
the way words sound.

How sounds can echo through time.  
We have taken off our shoes.

### IV

And then there is the day they call you.  
They have discovered a lost echo in a cave,

and they believe it belongs to you.  
They ask if you want to hear it.

And you know it's your mother's voice  
the morning she called to say your father's dead.

They put the receiver near the far wall,  
and you listen.

## Notes

“Art Made of Rock Can Last” – This poem was created using poetry fridge magnets.

“The Black Ship” – Some phrases in this poem, such as “a cunning adversary” and “a former flame,” were taken from descriptions of episodes of the 2011 science fiction series *Terra Nova*, about a family travelling from the year 2149 (where Earth is dying) back 85 million years to help rebuild human civilization.

“The Equation” – The idea of an equation summing up someone’s life may have also been influenced by Mick Burrs (may he rest in peace), who showed me numerology. One can apply numerology to the name you were born with, where you assign numbers as follows (in sets of 9): A = 1, B = 2, until I = 9, then J = 1, K = 2, until R = 9, then S = 1, T = 2, until Z = 8. When I do this with ‘David Livingstone Clink’ I get the number “100” which becomes “1”. From sarahscoop.com = *The number 100 is a powerful number. It represents new beginnings, fresh starts, and infinite possibilities. This number also symbolizes unity, as it is made up of two zeros joined together.* When you get a 2 or 3 digit number, you add those digits together, for example, if your number was 59, that would add up to 14 (first digit 5 of “59” + second digit 9 of “59” = 14), then 14 would become 5 (1+4 = 5). One can then take this final number and see what numerology ascribes to it. [<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Numerology>]

“On Manifestation” – Italicized quotes are from Antonin Artaud, as well as other phrases, and there are phrases from the Moritz poem cited in the epigraph.

“Silver” – The italicized words that are in French:

*Quel est le prix du trajet pour la lune?*

*Faut-il avoir la monnaie exacte?*

These are those words roughly translated into English:

*What is the price of the trip to the moon?*

*Do you have to have the exact change?*

More detailed notes are available on David Clink’s website, [www.davidlivingstoneclink.com](http://www.davidlivingstoneclink.com).

## Previously Published

Thanks to the editors, publishers, and award administrators!

Note: These poems may have appeared in an earlier form.

“After Midnight,” *Tesseract Twenty: Compostela* (Edge Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing, 2017). *The 2018 Rhysling Anthology: The Best Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Poetry of 2017* (The Science Fiction Poetry Association, 2018).

“Back Story,” *Strange Horizons*, September 21, 2020. *The 2021 Rhysling Anthology: The Best Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Poetry of 2020* (The Science Fiction Poetry Association, 2021).

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“Do not engage the sky. Just observe and report,” *The Dalhousie Review*, Autumn 2015, v. 95, no. 3.

“Home,” *Branch Magazine – Mythology Issue*, Spring 2013, Issue 10). *If the World Were to Stop Spinning* (Piquant Press, 2014).

“Leeches,” *The Surly Blondes of Earth* (Believe Your Own Press, 2002).

“Long Shadows,” *Queen’s Quarterly*, v. 124, no. 2, Summer 2017.

“On Manifestation,” *Algonquin Square Table Anthology 1995 – 1999* (Hart House, University of Toronto, 1999). *His name was Gord, and he used to run with the bulls* (Junction Books, 2001).

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“A Premonition of Rain,” *Poetry Ireland Review*, December 2016, issue 120.

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“The Valet of the Shadow of Death,” *Star\*Line*, Fall 2017; (40.4).

“White Teeth,” *Chizine*, Spring 2012. *Imaginarium 2013: The Best Canadian Speculative Writing* (ChiZine Publications, 2013). *If the World Were to Stop Spinning* (Piquant Press, 2014).

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the publisher, Aeolus House, and its poetry impresario, Allan Briesmaster.

Thanks to Autumn Getty for editing the manuscript.

Thanks to Julie McNeill for the design, and to Brett Savory for the cover image.

I would like to thank Robert Colman and Susan A. Manchester for providing blurbs!

Thank you to past and present members of Dr. Hero's Caravan; The Monday Night Poets; The Muse Cooperative; The Plasticine Poetry Workshop; and The Algonquin Square Table Poetry Workshop.

## About the Author

David Livingstone Clink (also published as David Clink) is a poet, poker player, and punster. He is the poetry editor (along with his sister, Carolyn) of *Amazing Stories Magazine*. He is a member of the CSFFA (Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Association) executive board, and Chair of the CSFFA Hall of Fame. His poem “A Sea Monster Tells His Story” won the 2013 Aurora Award for Best Poem/Song. He has been a finalist for genre poetry awards for many years. His poetry has appeared on five or more separate occasions in the following journals: *Analog: Science Fiction and Fact*; *The Dalhousie Review*, *Existene: Journal of Arts and Literature*, *The Literary Review of Canada*; *Lynx*; and *Star\*Line*. His poetry has also appeared in *Asimov's* (three times), *On Spec* (twice), and has appeared in the following SF anthologies: *Tesseract* 14 and 16 and 18 and 20; *The Rhysling Award Anthology* (ten different years); *Imaginarium* (three times); and *Dwarf Stars* (three times).

He has two collections published by Tightrope Books: *Eating Fruit Out of Season* (2008) and *Monster* (2010). He edited an anthology of environmental poetry called *A Verdant Green* (The Battered Silicon Dispatch Box, 2010). His third collection, *Crouching Yak, Hidden Emu*, was published by The Battered Silicon Dispatch Box in October 2012. In 2014 Piquant Press launched David's speculative poetry chapbook: *If the World Were to Stop Spinning*. His fourth collection, *The Role of Lightning in Evolution*, was published by ChiZine Publications in 2016. It was the inaugural title under CZP's new poetry imprint, KQP (Kelp Queen Press).

To find out more about David, go to [www.davidlivingstoneclink.com](http://www.davidlivingstoneclink.com).

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