weed-seeds

poems by hal cobb
# table of contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Prisoner Pant</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weed-seeds</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>insouciance</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apollo greets eos</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lightshow</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lamentation</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reality shots</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i'm a grown ass man</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my father's roses</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing Fall Creek</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pendleton Pike</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hands</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>legacy</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>labyrinth</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>salsa meditation</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not just alcatraz</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no offense</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>only the lonely</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fundamental query</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the thought of you</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wonder</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wonder too</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wonder why</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>haiku (or two)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a few haiku (mind you)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vincent</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Prisoner Pant
(after The Secretary Chant by Marge Piercy)

My ribs are bars of regret.
From my heart hang
chains of regret.
Razor wire crowns my head.
My chest wells with sorrow.
My feet are lead weights.
Drag. Clank.
My head is a cacophony.
My head is a courtroom
jammed with judges and juries.
Hands pressed together
grasping at faith,
failing flat.
Crash. Burn.
My stomach distends.
From my mouth spew silent screams.
Hollowed, emptied out,
humanity drained.
Dreams die.
Hopes hie.
Find me an egg crate
for I have become
a shell of
a man.
weed-seeds

dwindling dew-drenched dandelions
desire diaspora; daintily dipping and dancing
bending biddably in the brisk breath of a breeze
forever focused on fulfilling their fate and fortune

graceful geese glide over razor
wire while wispy weed-seeds waft
through chain-link fence blown beyond
the vast human wasteland of incarceration

rousing wary words to swirl in my head
prompting phrases to propose perfect pairings
and importuning imposition of imaginable images

private poems plead to be put to page
aspiring abandon, long lusted for liberation
far from the ache these same few acres accrue
rife with detachment, disappointment and desperation

forever chained to the past and prior pain in a
weary warehouse of the discarded to count down
chalk-marked days of judicial judgment called justice
discouraged, disparaged and disheartened disjunctions
out of sight, out of mind, unwitting world rushing on

carefully crafted cadences cannot cope with containment
expectantly folded, enveloped and stamped
then sent forth to seek fulfillment on their own

wordsmithed weed-seeds wishing
to root in friendly, fertile soil
beyond banal banishment
insouciance

the wild ramps
weighed down by
remnants of april showers
seem heathered against the
recently thawed kentucky bluegrass

vibrant violet volunteers
proclaim their purple praise
beneath chain-link and concertina
heedless of their prison yard rooting
fulfilling destiny despite imperfect placement
weeds

apollo greets eos

eyearly morning sun backlight
a pristine periwinkle panorama

cool, crisp cockcrow air
careses chilled taut cheeks

refreshing flared nostrils and
rejuvenating stale night-air lungs

stirring sluggish, sleepy senses
with a dew-drenched dawn

diamond-like droplets iridescently
reflecting rapturously radiant rays

the charioteer of sky teasingly tips his hat
at the quintessential queen of morning
lightshow

the benefit of the boring
white-washed, faux rough hewn
lumber formed concrete correctional facades

is the blank canvas they provide for
the dancing lightshows of dawn and twilight
in this unimaginative, junior-college-like campus
wrapped in twin razor-wired, chain-link enclosures
dropped on an old garbage dump on a former farm amid
the otherwise unsuspecting Kentucky Bluegrass countryside

red sky at morning spreads a new kind of warning
reflected first by the aluminum flashing edged flat roofs
then the bare backdrop comes to life with corals and saffron
as swathing strokes of amber, gold and magenta irradiate daybreak

red sky at night portends a prisoner's delight
as purpled hued transverse shocking pinks
to quench flaming reds and burnt umbers
peripheral sunset brilliantly illuminates
the khaki clad compound perpetually
locked down in daunting drabness
lamentation

they stand tall across a hidden creek beyond not one
but two twelve foot chain-link fences strewn with scrolls of razor wire

they rise above the enclosure, a grove stretching wide along the hillside
scaling up a grassy meadow to a railing and cornfield above

I long to sit in their shade, feel rough bark against my back
strain to hear sap circulate as the breeze rustles through leafy boughs

I want to sidle up the trunks, hang from the branches
and sit cradled in the nurturing crook of nature's limbs

a junior high choir teacher once coaxed
“I think that I shall never see a poem a lovely...” out of me

but today, words are my only solace
and a found leaf pressed between journal pages
is as close as I can tangibly get:
a prisoner pining for outlying trees
reality shots

the early morning storm clouds
give way to the piercing rays of dawn
the rain washed atmosphere clear and bright
fresh air cleansing night locked lungs emerging
for the first morning trek on a recreation field track

the rain glazed grass glistening as the
outlying trees wave in the welcoming wind
above the grove, a faint rainbow in the southwestern sky
drops of rain weep from nowhere in the cloudless, sun-filled heavens
joyously transcendent in the rapturous radiance of dawn’s refreshing re-creation

the swallows cease their saturday summer song
as the peace and quiet of a pristine prison morning
is pierced by cracks of gunfire echoing this shallow valley
past the grass and gravel moat between twin concertina-capped fences
up the hill, beyond the glen, across the empty fields, a firing range for correctional staff

my reverie disrupted by reality
there are guns in them-there towers
the pickup truck perimeter patrol is packing
endlessly circling like a vulture seeking carrion
ready to take the life, at least this morning, I savor
i'm a grown ass man

don't talk to me like i'm a child
he added from behind a mask of masculinity
a caricature or machismo trying to convince himself
as much as anyone else he knew what it was to be a man

bragging of the baby-mommamas left in his wake
how he never held a real job 'cause he could hustle —
of the guns he had, the threats he made, the things he took

i think of my undereducated, underpaid, underappreciated father
who juggle three and four jobs at a time to keep a roof over our heads
keep us well clothed, well fed and still send money to his widowed mama

all the while caring for five kids, all by the same woman, his partner for life
quietly paying for the doctors, dentists and optometrists of childhood
tending to the yard, his garden, making cakes for our birthdays
still finding time to take us fishing and teach us to cook

and never once did he complain or have to defend his manhood
to a bunch of inmates in a prison yard chow hall line
my father's roses

it was a treacherous, beautiful thing
to exit the backseat driver's side of the '57 Chevy Bel-Air
when dad would park it in the driveway next to
our crackerbox house on Schoen Drive

there was a twelve inch
strip of dirt between the foundation
and the concrete driveway alongside the house
carefully amended with fertilizer and planted
with half a dozen or so tea roses

he attended to them
in ways he never tended to us attentively
pruning, dusting, debugging and deadheading
coaxing from thorny branches fragrant blossoms of
bright whites and ivory to coral and rhodamine

we could never just throw the
door wide open and bound out of the car
like on the passenger side with its grassy knoll
between the driveway and the neighbor's house

you had to judiciously nudge
the door barely open and squeeze
through the slightest slit possible as not
to scratch the paint on the Chevy or, god forbid,
cause any damage to his precious, prized roses

if you forgot, you not only risked
scratches and gashes from the wicked, vicious thorns
but a smack upside the head or the miserable commission
to retrieve his famous skinny belt from his bedroom closet
or to harvest a switch from the forsythia bush
out back to wrap around the legs
of the bad boys of summer
Fishing Fall Creek (after Nighttime Fires by Regina Barreca)

When I was seven in Indianapolis we drove to fish at Fall Creek. Rarely all seven of us, usually the three boys and Dad. Sometimes Mom would tag along. I hadn’t the patience to fish with a cane pole and its red and white plastic bobber, nightcrawlers dug from our garden as bait. I’d take a sketchbook or hike the muddy trails around the tributary of the White River. It was my father’s favorite fishing spot. Once We lined the trunk of his car to smuggle back remnants of a sand bar to fill the box at the bottom of our backyard swingset slide.

I made titillating discoveries on my solo hikes that would make my young heart palpitate and my innocent mind race: discarded underwear, limp and slimy fat balloons, little square silver wrappers littering the pathway. I’d also find lures and bobbers dangling from trees, yards of fishing line dotted with clamped on lead weights. I’d liberate them from leafy limbs and place the new found treasures in the family tackle box to stow the guilty secret of the other furtive finds.

Those times Dad would arrive home later than expected, he’d say he stopped by Fall Creek for a little fishing. No one questioned him when no blue gill or crappie accompanied him home. I was in high school before I heard about Fall Creek, around the same time I discovered a stash of magazines in the trunk of my father’s car with names like Blueboy, Honcho and Mandate. One of the junior high English teachers had been busted along Fall Creek. Something called lewd behavior. Echoes of homos and queers in the haunted halls of high school pricked up ears and made my heart palpitate and my not-so-innocent mind race. It took me years to admit that two and two do indeed make four, to grasp my father’s draw to the banks of Fall Creek. Fishers of men cast for more than crappie.
Pendleton Pike (after Snapping Beans by Lisa Parker)

I snapped the seat belt into the silver buckle
in the empty space between my father and me.
I was home for the weekend
from California, for my brother’s wedding.
James Taylor sang, “You’ve Got a Friend”
as I pulled from Oaklandon Road down
Pendleton Pike towards town.
He’d been Chatty Cathy at the house,
proud papa with all his brood under his roof
for the first time in years, since my divorce,
since my coming out, chef and master of ceremonies
for the celebratory weekend,
coordinating catering for the reception,
he’d asked me to drive him to town to pick up last minute supplies.
The small talk died off
as the new development along the highway
gave way to the cornfields of my youth.
The silence between us grew, both of us staring at
the road, not daring to look the other’s direction.
My mind was screaming as the silence roared,
ASK HIM NOW! CONFRONT HIM NOW!
All I could muster was a meek, How’re you with me now?
He’d refused to come to the phone for months
when I’d call home, my mother taking her turn
as intercessor between prodigal son and wounded parent.
Part of me wanted to tell him
I understood why he beat me,
trying to beat it out of me like
Uncle Milton tried to beat it out of him;
that I knew he didn’t do it maliciously,
that he hadn’t purposely tried to traumatize me
and drive me out of my body, that I forgave him.
The other part of me wanted to pummel him
and make him suffer the way he’d made me suffer.
Part of me wanted to affirm the
best parts of me came directly from him,
from our affinity, and that I was
happier now than I’d ever been.
The rough hand that had earlier
crafted delicate roses out of
the creamiest icing in the world
for the towering wedding cake
seemed to search the empty space
for cigarettes he no longer smoked.
He said, You made your choice.
There was no accusation in his voice.
In between the lines I heard, And I made mine.
hands

those are my hands
etched on her gravestone
one hand holding a thirsty cup
the other pouring a quenching pitcher
"serve on another with love" it says

designed by her hand for a
national church convention
she carefully posed my hand
holding a pyrex custard dish
as she sprawled and crawled
across the living room floor
shifting to find the right angle
hurling frustrated threats at me
to still my twitching hand
as my fingers cramped

at other times, her tiny hand
clasped tightly in mine
felt small, but far from helpless
"baboon grip" she called it
I, secretly scared to let go
she was the one who
was going to save
me from myself

her hands caring, capable
mine nail-bitten and anxious
hers hands sure and fluid
mine tentative, choppy
always second guessing

her hands unsuspecting
mine desperate
hers trusting
mine hopeless

she filled my cup
as I filled her tub
she always strived
to quench my thirst
I, in turn, squelched her
she offered me living waters
I gave her a watery grave

her hands always
served me with
nothing but love
my hands mistook
saving her from me
as the same

my hands are still
nail-bitten and anxious
she always saw
more in my hands
than I did
legacy

it was my job
to provide her
a world of safety
instead, I filled her
world with fear

it was my job
to protect her
from monsters
and bogeymen
instead, I was
the channel

it was my job
to hold her tight
when she was scared
and dry her eyes when
fearful teardrops fell
instead, I brought
horror into her life
and clouded her eyes
with unspeakable terror
and left her to cry alone

it was my job
to be a soft
place for her to fall
to be a source
for lightness and joy
instead, I have become
a hard spot in her heart
bricked behind the shame
of a different name I secretly bore
and swore I'd never pass on

I've become a lump
a horrid heavy weight
secretly carried and carefully
hidden not just from herself
but from her world

most fearful that she
might more than
sound like me
look like me
act like me
she might
be like
me
labyrinth

winding into the great unknown
I drop all pretense of knowing—
slowly, silently, sinking step by step
beyond the belly of the beast
into the bowels of my being

I return to the womb expectant
of rebirth, renewal, realization—
the consistent cacophony of confusion
quieting as I follow a winding pathway
previously and prayerful paved

walking alone, I sojourn with others
embracing affinity with those
who have walked this way
before in awe across the ages—
I remain uniquely and quietly
on a present path of my own

the journey inward, uncharted—
each tangible stride follows
a flowing map clearly marked
each carefully laid turn snaking
private pilgrims to promised lands
of stillness, quietness, inner sanctum
where resides the still, small voice
awaiting attention, awareness, and
the inherent knowing of inner godliness
salsa meditation

my hands will smell for days of onions, garlic
and jalapenos despite repeated washings after slicing, dicing
and mincing with my trusty lid-o-matic and plastic picnic knife
essential utensils of a prison prep chef in a concrete and steel cell-cum-kitchen

I love the feel of a ripe, juicy tomato
the fresh earthiness of chopped green pepper
the abundant aromas attack my olfactory senses
tempting and teasing my palate with anticipatory explosion of first taste

and in that moment I am awakened, enlivened, emboldened
transported from bland greyness of confinement to full sensory recall
of my essential humanity
not just alcatraz

I hear them before I open my eyes
raucously and joyfully heralding the morn
why is it birds always sound happy, contented?

of all the places on earth to choose to live
they've picked this place of concrete and steel, fences and razorwire
nesting in any nook or crook or cranny in this warehouse of misfits and malcontents

using their avian charms to bring out the best in the worst of the worst
hard-core convicts siren-seduced from antisocial and selfish ways
to feed the birds with tuppence of bread
no offense

it must be okay
to be prejudiced
hold a bias against
a whole class of people
just as long as you say
"no offense to anybody"
mrs. california said so

a bigot can hold on to
her hatred and phobias
as long as she smiles and says
"that's just the way I was raised"

ergo, son of jim crow should be allowed
to hold on to his prejudice, bigotry and flag
as long as he streaks his hair and bleaches his teeth
"such a fine looking young man, that's just the way he was raised"
his daddy and granddaddy and great granddaddy must be so proud

now poor miss california's been fired and she's crying foul
"tolerance is a two-way street" she self-righteously proclaims
chiding the untolerated to tolerate her intolerance...
someone should've raised those people better
only the lonely

the bees are busy
doing their busy-bee thing
in fields of clover blossoming beneath
my idle feet dangling from a bench too high

a pair of butterfly flit and fly
playing a round of butterfly tag
or is it a seductive dance of romance
mocking me, alone with my thoughts and pen

a train’s passing whistle wails
a gaggle of geese glide overhead
a jet’s distant stream trails the sky
as I sit solitaire in the same spot still
fundamental query

anticipation unfulfilled
unspoken promise denied

bruised heart, wounded ego
bewildered soul craves understanding

does stone cold law
brittle parchment, crackled ink
usurp the power of the word made flesh?

is the word not love?

is not a lover's tender touch
a passionate embrace, soul's
response to spirit's breath?

are not lovingkindness and compassion shared
the divine lifting, exalting the mundane?

self-named keeper's of light
trace shadow on the ground
call it unadulterated truth

yesterday's shades are not today's
as sun transverses a revolving earth
its tilted axis ever changing the horizon
causing shadow to shift minute by minute
hour by hour, day by day, never the same

and yet you continue to heed
the clamoring of cloaked charlatans
tuning out your own intuitive intelligence
and the soft whispers of your still, small voice
and every cell crying out in your god-gifted,
divinely created and wholly-blessed body

to give vacant, vapid voices credence
and silence the supplications of your
suppressed body, harnessed heart
and repressed soul, as every
ounce of your beloved being pleads
for revelatory recognition, rescue and release

why are you still shrouded and sheathed in the shadows
sitting on your hands, when you were created to run
arms wide open, naked and joyous in the sun?

now tell me truly: is truth ever found with
back to the sun and downward gaze?
the thought of you

last night
I resented the void
that was your side of the bed

I hated you
for the absence
you could not control

I decried
the unfairness of fate
railed against my brokenness
	onight
I drift off drowsily
lost in the thought of you

your presence
palpable, overwhelming
enveloping, all encompassing

I recognize
your ever present presence
in my full and everlasting heart

and I know
wherever your heart is
I, too, dwell there forevermore
I wonder

who decided a button was cute
or tested rocks (boxed or not) for I.Q.?

who decided a pin was neat
or checked a doornail for a pulse?

who interviewed the insect to
ascertain if he were contented in a carpet?

and who was it that fondled the witch
and lived to tell the temperature of her tits?

I wonder too

if an apple a day
keeps the doctor away
how many apples does it take
to get him to make a house call?

I wonder why

the stone turning stoner
could find no stonewort
on the river rolled rocks

he was neither stony-faced
nor stone-hearted as he searched
for spot-on stones for his stonework

but as often is the case for the stoned
his brain went stone-cold, stone-dead
stonewalling the stonecutter’s stone search

so he returned to his stonemason shack
in his stonewashed jeans to stonily munch
stonenground snacks from a stoneware saucer
haiku (or two)

revealed unaware
a kimono akimbo
a peek-a-boo breast

a kilt akilter
an alluring enticement
the question answered

a few haiku (mind you)

I am not my mind
I am not ego or thought
present with presence

the thoughts drifting by
are but as clouds in the sky
transiting my mind
vincent

I don’t recall if it was
don mclean or mr. doversberger
who first introduced me back in the ‘70’s

was it radio waves waiting the words of
“starry, starry night” accompanied by a mournful guitar
or the dulcet narrative tones of a high school art class slide show

art history and pop culture converged in a sad, despondent song
and the reverential oration about a desperate man who could not, not paint
I listened to the stories but could not comprehend any more than adolescent angst allowed

an arthouse screening of “vincent and theo”
later informed me of brotherly love
the artist yet tossed between
obsession and depression
still I could not know

an unexpected trip to new york city —
a strategically planned excursion
to the museum of modern art

the minstrel and art historian had me insufficiently prepared
as my emotional knees were knocked out from under me
my soul never knew someone could sing out so clearly
on canvas with dynamic and fervid swaths of paint
so completely full of compassion and knowing

I at once felt awed and overwhelmed —
enormously empty and inadequate —
as insignificant a grain of sand —
measureless as drops in ocean

he drew me in, mesmerized by vibrant color
bright and alluring as blazing sunflowers
cool and serene as iridescent irises
seduced by the lurid dance of
night sky moon and stars

his perpetual moment, his welcoming eye
the presence of his pure unbridled passion
captured, challenged and informed me

he understood all I longed to know
illuminated what otherwise
could not be expressed

he felled me with wonderment
he made me pensively ponder –
would I ever know passion so intoxicating?
could I ever understand the blessing and the curse
of being so completely and creatively obsessed?