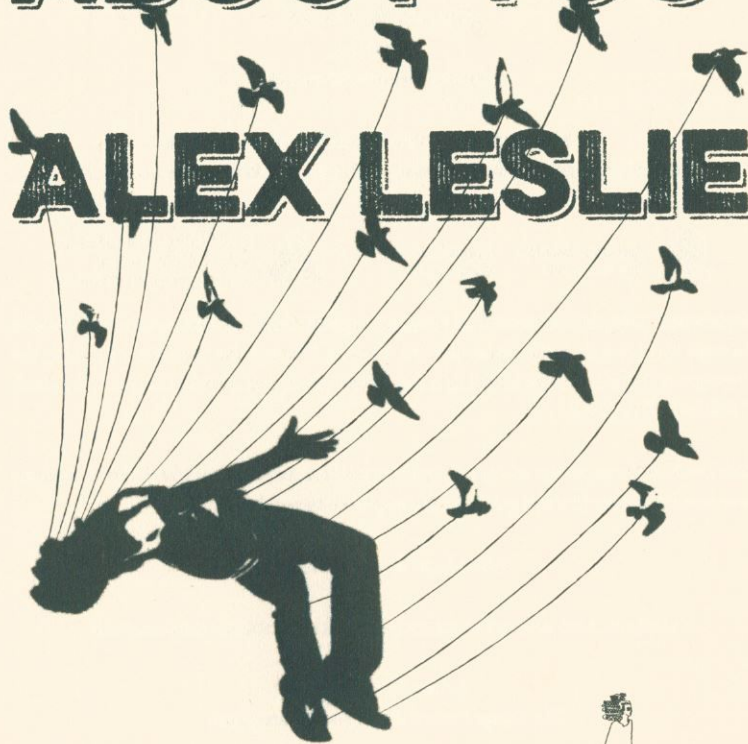


THE THINGS I HEARD ABOUT YOU ALEX LESLIE



a blewintment book



NIGHTWOOD EDITIONS

2014

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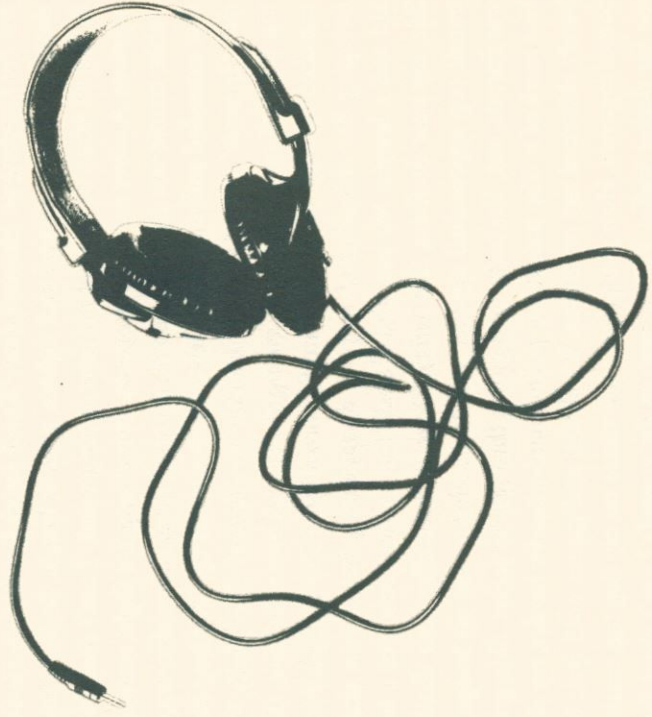
*I know how small a poem can be:
the point on a fish hook;*

*women have one word or too many:
I watch the wind;*

*I'd like a kestrel's eye and know
how to hang on one thread of sky...*

—John Thompson, *Stilt Jack* (xxi)

KNOCKING ON HEAVEN'S DOOR



After you died, I broke the shuffle function on my iPod by downloading eighty-four covers of "Knocking on Heaven's Door." Its lyrics followed me through my skinned days, my headphones sealing in a small theatre of mourning. *Mama take this badge off of me / I can't use it anymore.* The ska cover, the African gospel choir cover, the children's choir unravelling into atonal choruses, the three slurred Bob Dylan versions, indecipherable. It didn't matter because the words were mine, I searched out their melody in anything. Commuter-train arrhythmia, schoolyard jungle yells, the morning cash registers tolling double Americano, Kaddish. *It's getting dark / too dark to see.* All mantras are identical. A harness, a poem made too small. A trick of bearable limits, an exercise in the planned application of pain. *I feel I'm knocking on Heaven's door / Knock knock knockin' on Heaven's door.* Put a rope around and tighten until it bends. Scale or body. Bright or arms. *Mama put my guns in the ground / I can't shoot them anymore.* A cover for every moment. Everything is a slight variation. Public transit was my repeat track, my song loop, a recursive tongue that extended and withdrew with the lyrics on its tip. *That long black cloud is comin' down / I feel I'm knockin' on Heaven's door.* Dolly Parton babbled my song to me, twanged me and beseeched me, then marched through the doors onto the Broadway–City Hall platform, swinging her rhinestoned sceptre, disappearing between a skater kid and a lawyer. My ears shuddered. The sentient tooth of a bass line, my near deafness, that safety. Three months after your death a transit cop approached my seat and demanded to see my badge. It was fibrous, wet. The badge had grown through my jacket. Skin graft. Hot mark of it. The transit cop pulled, harder harder harder, my skin barely skimmed my resistance. It's all fun and games until lyric becomes ingrown. How you printed the verses on my dog tag, marked me for darker traffic. *Put my guns in the ground / I can't shoot them anymore.* Commuters in stasis dream state watched the transit cop demand to see my identification. I put my head between my legs, a knee for each headphone, pressed the thunder inward, repeat button,

repeat, repeat. Feet shuffled stations forward and more as it comes in. My iPod died and I kept my headphones on, city buffered, the train lurching on, shouts above me cresting and falling, cresting and falling, and it sounded like being under the floor of the ocean.

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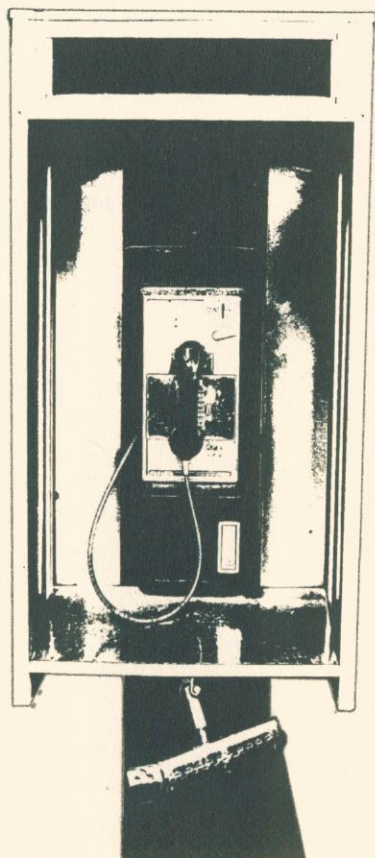
After you died, the shuffle function on my skinned days: a small theatre. *Come take this badge off of me / I can't use it anymore.* Atonal lost choruses, slurred words. The words in anything—arrhythmia Kadish. *Too dark to see / too dark.* Mantras are small limits, pain knocking on doors. Rope bright, *my guns in the ground.* A loop for every recursive tongue. Extend, follow, beseech, disappear between a tooth and safety. Three months after your death: wet skin, bare ingrown dog, dark in the stasis, the demand to see thunder. Repeat, shuffle, forward, the kept city lurching above, falling like ocean.

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You died, I followed. *I can't use it anymore.* Indecipherable. Words, anything. Arrhythmia yells: Kaddish! *It's getting too dark.* Poem too small, plan the rope. *Put my guns in the ground.* Slight tongue withdrew the long black cloud, twanged me, beseeched me, marched me through deafness. Lyric becomes ingrown.

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PACIFIC PHONE BOOK



The book that dreams all the names swollen green and black and yellow. Watermarks, birthmarks, names left out in the rainforest grow a new spore body, spine slipped by the pages that broke out. Popped a disc, the book staggers. No cellphone reception, the man in the store called Store heaves an eyebrow at my story. I open the phone book on the island where you now live. Open it, exhume pulp rot, head stuffed with wet leaves. An island where everybody knows each other's name, your address is the place where the index is left to become microbe, become feast. Centres of pages mauled out, sections of letters (half the Ks, a few pages of Ps). After the cancer you decided you'd seen the worst. You decided to be positive and therefore became humourless. Moved to this place. Fell away. I turn the heavy edges. Where the names slope and wilt. My hands slow at the pages before your name. *Qu Que*—I've heard how different you are now, survivor, washed. I find your name, untouched by green, crossed out by a human hand.

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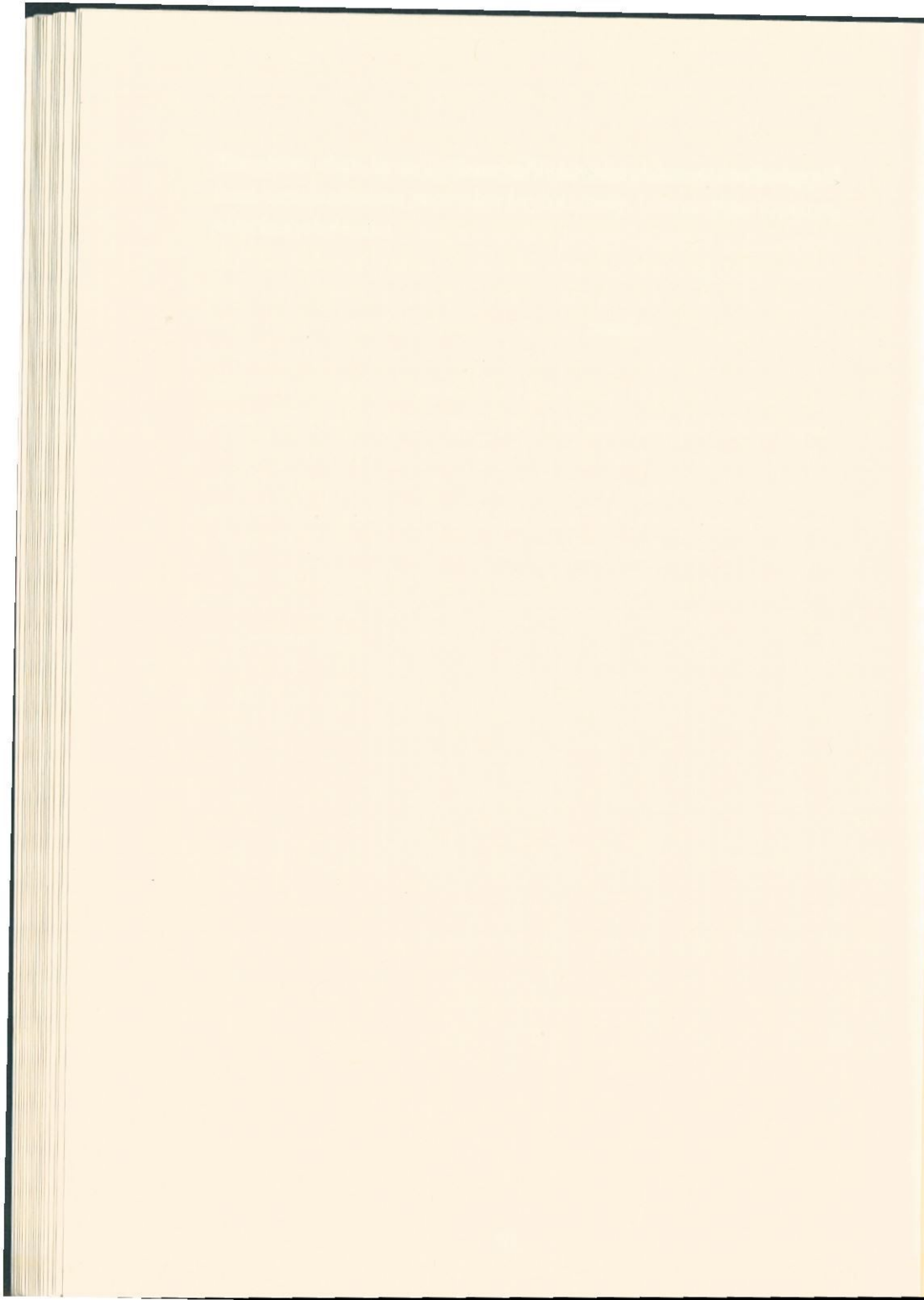
The names by watermark, by birthmark, rainforest book body
popped, cell store. I open the story at cancer, exhume an island where
everybody is index, where you left to maul wet loss. Therefore place
fell away. I edge the wilt, slow at different cold. Left to this, I find you
by hand.

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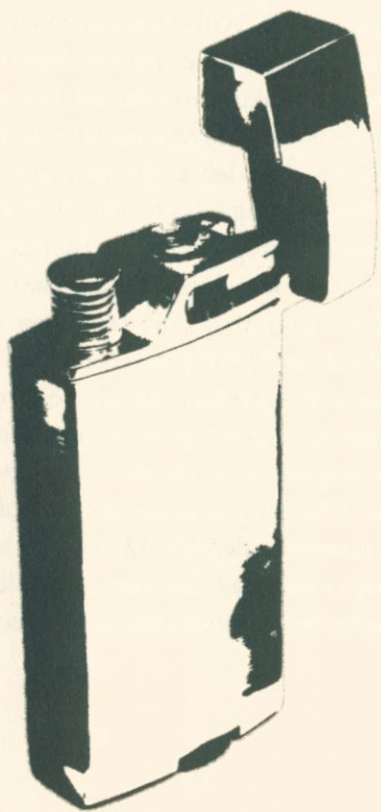
The phone that dreams a forest of birthmarks. A new body slipped from you, feasted on your island spine. Away, I touch your survivor, your microbe name.

smaller

Dreamed you crossed and washed me.



EVERYBODY WHO SITS UP HERE IS GAY



Start anywhere. With the first time I saw the spray-painted graffiti I misread it *Everybody who sits up hero*. With the asphalt warped, ripples at the seam, the heat up here a blast furnace, southern exposure, the school's desert back-end. With the stained board set over the cement stoop you lay on, whitefish belly exposed, cigarette suspended and snowdrifting ash down to your collarbone, bone lip just out below your neck, tanktops were controversy except if you were a girl. With the mountain grass, parched survival, straight out of an ad for French lavender soap. With the *Every body* instead of *Everybody*. With our bodies burned and resting. With the sepia-toned overexposure, the cheap paint chipped, hazel at the brims of bricks, with the old dark shade showing through. With the stink of a building of hormonal sweating bodies huffed out of the vent, the deep clank and purr, the furnace's machine lust breaking over the lot, how you lay back and whispered, *aaaaaaah music to my ears*, smile too tired to be sardonic. With the cigarette butts you left everywhere like chewed-and-spat sunflower seeds. With the capital G on *Get*. With the complete lack of shadow, with how you refuge, where you cut class and smoked and told me of your hatreds, was so bright I had to close my eyes to listen. With how you didn't close your eyes, kept them open and experimented with sunlight, until your pupils contracted to pinholes, and you were sent home because they thought you were high and you couldn't stop laughing. With the green industrial forbearance of the roof, its stubborn judgment. with the shadow-puppet theatre cut-out relief, sharpnesses. With your men's boots kicked off your ballet feet, with the second-thought underbelly hook on *lifo* to make *life*. With your afternoon naps under the ballooning white letters they made on your scarred wooden bed, sacred indifference, about to vanish in the heat.

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Everybody who sits up hero. Blast exposure: the school's desert. You lay, suspended, drifting, your lip just out. Controversy: if you were a girl. Mountain survival of French lavender soap, burned sepia, toned haze with the dark shade of hormonal bodies huffed out of deep machine lust. Breaking, you lay back and whispered, too tired to be sardonic. Cigarette flowers, capital lack, your refuge, where you cut your hatreds bright. I had to close my eyes. You didn't close yours. Experimented with pinholes and home. They thought you were forbearance, stubborn. Theatre cut out. Your ballet underbelly hook. Your scar indifferent in the heat.

smaller

Start with who. With belly, with collarbone, lip, neck, tanktop. With the everybody. With the showing-through. With vent lust. With the lack of refuge and smoked eyes. With your experiment with contract, with high laugh. With puppet boots. With second-thought life. With naps under sacred heat.

smaller

If you were a girl, our bodies were pinholes.