

**Kevin Rabas: Writing Sample: 10 pages of sample poetry**

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**POEMS (9) (10 pages of sample poetry)**

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## Fall Up

Gunkle and I had this big mirror between us, hefting it into the back of his blue pick up truck. Gunkle's part retarded, a giant in blue jeans and green Crocs, wearing a white t-shirt with battery acid on it. His glasses are thicker than my thumb.

So, we grab hold of this monster mirror, and it glints, and we both look into that mirror, noticing the clarity of that blue sky and those green sycamore leaves reflected so perfectly that it appears you could just dive on into that mirror and sink into the sky, and we think the same thing. "You could fall up," Gunkle says, "and just keep on falling. Nothing would stop you." And that was the way of it. Gunkle's mind was now my mind, and I was in that mirror falling on up through those white smoke clouds headed towards an orange sun.

Gunkle and I stacked box bed springs on top of that mirror, and some branches from out front, and I could hear that large mirror crack, but I think Gunkle and I could still see it— that vision of sinking into sky, drowning with only the sun to hold us up.

### **Lisa's Flying Electric Piano**

Her full-sized electric piano flew out  
of my father's pick up truck.  
I was driving. Somehow, the base  
detached from the keyboard,  
and it all went flying into the busy  
intersection of 47<sup>th</sup> and Main.  
No one hit it, and Lisa said,  
"Let's just throw it into this  
dumpster," when we had carried it  
out of the road. "No," I said.  
"Let's take it to your new apartment,"  
and we did. When I turned it on,  
the power eye glowed red,  
but it did not play. The next day,  
I found the volume slider,  
turned it up, and it played perfectly.  
Aside from the scrapes from the road  
on its key cover, it was fine.  
I practiced tying knots, roping things down,  
and I dreamt, at last, of turning corners  
slow, and of a keyboard  
rising in flight and floating across town,  
playing a well-known sonata.

## **At the Jam**

*Jardine's, 1996*

The tune is Freddie Hubbard's "Little Sunflower,"  
with its double-time latin section.  
Quick everything gets loud and fast.  
I can barely keep up, and as we  
lean into this blazing tempo,  
the bassist playing on the tips of his fingers now,  
hunkering into the brown body of his bass.  
I start to lose count, the quarter notes  
scattering like pigeons up from the sidewalk  
and into the violet sunset sky, clouds  
swirling into dabs of watercolor paint.  
"Play out," I think I hear the bassman say,  
and I raise my stick heights, the tips of the sticks  
raising almost to my chin, my hands pumping  
as if there is water to be found  
deep within these drums.  
I listen again, and he is repeating, his voice  
louder now, "Lay out. Lay out," and I allow  
the rush of the rhythm section to stampede  
past me, leaving me silent and motionless  
in the darkness, seated on another drummer's  
crooked-legged throne.

**For the estranged; the ones**

the door shuts to with a wood  
and metal click; to the lonely;  
the ones who would be  
lovers, but their loves walked off  
with the pretty, with the slick, the rich;  
to the ones with five string guitars who  
play and save for that snapped  
sixth string; for the drummers  
with beat up drums  
who keep their heads tuned  
the best they can and play soft and wait  
and wait for that crescendo and fill it  
with grain, with water, with blue fire—  
with a crowd of new hands: hands  
and wheat, hands and wheat, hands and wheat;  
to the ones you ignore, but never  
ignore you; this poem of love  
is for the ones, the estranged; this poem  
full of my loneliness and nights  
spent alone in the dark, new-moon nights,  
coal-colored nights, nights where the owl call  
is for you; I hear you; I see you; I will be  
with you, when you open to this page; yours  
will never be nights alone; my voice is here  
with you, across time, across space; and when  
you sing, I am here—on rhythm guitar, on bass,  
on drums, on harpsichord and violin.

## **East off Highway 77, Dusk**

Heather light, evening light,  
lemon rind light, hand hold light,  
quail hovel light, goldentime light,  
first kiss, fishing hole light;  
this is when the starlings fly  
into shelter belts; the hawks  
find a branch, land, wait  
for prairie mice to come from holes  
and cast swift shadows  
in the tight grass, for wings  
to flourish and lift; one dive  
and it's done; we all eat this light up,  
bask like children on lawns in last light,  
the light at the end of the earth;  
sun sinks, earth crests, and the sun's done.  
Twilight and its small stars come.

\*Ekphrasis on Dave Leiker's digital color photo (2005): "Flint Hills Side Road, Under a Clearing Sky after a Storm, East off Highway 77 – Morris County, Kansas"

## **At the Curtis Café**

*in Stafford, Kansas*

When I die, I will rise in a small town diner  
with a seat that faces the Main Street window,  
and all of the silverware and waterglasses and tabletops  
will shine with afternoon light, and I will know no one  
who comes in through the front door and sits and eats.  
We will all watch the street lamps illuminate  
the uneven brick street and wait  
for afternoon to pass on into evening, full of shadows  
jagged and irregular, the street filling up  
with darkness in the way coffee fills up a pale coffee cup.

## When the Writers Gather and Drive

*AWP Austin, for Amy Sage Webb*

Amy, a foodie, says she knows about this great place outside of Austin, and we gather around my car in the Hilton parking garage, which is lit like a cave. We can't get the child's seat out, and so Amy volunteers to sit in it. I have on my first pair of roper cowboy boots since I was 12, and I floor it, unintentionally, and we barrel out of the Hilton parking garage and into the purple Texas night, four writers looking for fine food on the outskirts of town, down and around lots of curves and rises and falls in the road, Amy, perched like a baby bird, in my toddler's child seat. Like a scene from *Wonder Boys*, movie of writers and their cars; Grady Trip's trunk holds a dead dog, a tuba, and a set of suitcases perfectly, just like in the ad. Although I'm driving, Amy is in the lead, saying, "Go left here. Now straight through the next two lights. Now right." Bart is in the backseat with Amy, and he says, "There are almost no families with siblings who are writers. The Bronte Sisters, the Brothers Grimm, they are the exceptions. We're alone in our families." "But we're all brothers and sisters here," someone says, and Jeffrey tilts his ballcap back, and I step a little harder on the pedal, and we scale a series of small curves. Like a rollercoaster climbing, we make our way up the mountain and to the restaurant that looks like a cabin from the outside. Inside, it's finer than the Ritz, and we take shots in the entrance, using my disposable camera, pulled from a pocket and snapped into light. This is the life you never hear of, the once a year gathering of the birds, of the tribe. There are a bunch of us, say 8000. But we live all over the country, and there seem to be no two in one town, people who choose paper over television, legal pad and quick pen script over that email or Facebook you're just dying to write, people who watch and write down what the neighbors do and do not do, who record the town, in secret, for about 35K a year, and sink into ecstasy when a small press picks up what they have written and prints it, and it stays in print, in a few libraries and in the homes of friends, decades after that writer passes, a record, a sketch of that time, traced and retraced until it almost takes on paint, the way revision works. Someone spent a lifetime writing and rewriting a moment, a scene depicting your life, and that someone is speeding down curves, in a loaded car, full of wine and fine food, the best meal they may ever have had, and that is the way of it, once a year, when the writers gather, Webb in the coxswain spot, giving directions, as the car sways and rumbles, writes its way into the oncoming night.



## **Eden, Or Lucas, Kansas**

as told by my uncle, Charles Keller, who gives tours of the place

*"You know where I live? I live right next door to the Garden of Eden. Up the way's Paradise, and you go down about a half a mile and you end up in Hell Crick."*--My grandmother, Bertha (Keller) Rabas

Your father's mother's people lived not far  
from where old Dinsmoor lies now.  
Your grandmother  
fed old Dinsmoor's badgers gingersnaps  
Sunday mornings while Dinsmoor mixed cement.

Some called it sacrilege,  
some sacrament.

But Dinsmoor was 64,  
and figured the Lord  
would forgive,  
knowing he had so few  
flexible years left to live.  
Already he was stiffening.

Evenings, before turning in,  
Dinsmoor worked  
backyard aloe balm  
into the cracks in his hands,  
fearing his fingers just might crumble  
under his wife's pillow during the night.

He'd spent his whole life  
planning the place,  
the cabin stacked and mortared  
using concrete logs,  
the ziggurat for his body  
and the body of his wife,  
the shed, the garage, the planter,  
and Eden above.

Every year,  
while Dinsmoor built out back,  
we had to borrow  
just to put the wheat  
back into the ground.

I thought what he built  
would last forever.

However, at the start of autumn  
when it rains  
you can see the faces  
of Dinsmoor's statues  
erode so slowly  
it pricks your own skin  
to watch.

No one knows  
how to mix the mortar,  
no one learned the secret,  
so the arms are falling off of Cain,  
the legs off Abel,  
the breasts of their wives  
are crumbling, Adam's cane is crooked,  
Eve's hair has fallen,  
and the snake's in need  
of complete repair.

## **Lightning's Bite**

Watch out. The lightning might come down  
and bite you, my son says, and we look  
to the gray, weighted clouds above us  
that look like they are carrying heavy sacks  
of hail or rain. Or snow, but it's too early for that.  
So, we hold out our hands, and look for the droplets  
that should come, and there are none.  
So, we look to the trees that wave and bend  
and to the branches full of big green leaves,  
branches that look like the necks of great dragons  
twisting and fighting, when all this really is  
is wind, and we go home, go inside, and watch  
as the lights go out, and we listen to the storm above us.  
It is like standing under a bridge as a train goes over.  
But this train keeps coming, and rumbling, and my son  
puts his hands over his ears. I take him in my arms,  
and we do not tremble. We laugh.