

# DENVER

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# QUARTERLY



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MICHAEL ANANIA

## As though

*for Elaine Galen*

as though the pine sap  
smudged into your fingertips  
mattered, you scrub at it;

blue spruce branches piled  
at the culvert, bright November  
air, yellow strains of maple

along the drive; things  
begin, endings, for example,  
like sleep, one thought

and then another, darkness  
chilling your arm, memory—  
and in a slow instant,

like a radio switched off  
still playing—what is  
remembered as forgetfulness.

LAUREL DIGANGI

## All My Children

The cab drivers all want me to have babies. They don't care if I'm married, don't care if I can afford it; they're persistent. Other strangers mind their own business—the hairdressers, masseuses, cleaning ladies, chiropractors, waiters and bartenders. Only the cab drivers say, "No children? How come?" to which I reply, as sweetly as possible, "I never really wanted any!" This turns them into philosophers.

"But children are what we live for. They're the reason for our existence."

"Maybe that's why you're here," I could say, although that sounds sarcastic, as does, "If I were a man I'd have children, and probably more than one wife, too." But that would just confuse them.

So I say I'm too old, and of course they ask how old, and I tell them, and they say, that's not too old; plenty of women my age are doing it. They sound like car dealers. "If you don't act now you'll be sorry later," or, "It's not as expensive as you think."

And it's not like I initiate this conversation. Not like I say, "Could you take me to City Hall; by the way I have no children." The cab drivers just ask me outright, or the subject comes up in unusual ways, like, the Middle Eastern guy who thought I had a baby in my backpack.

"You scared me there for a minute," he said, "when you threw it on the seat like that."

"No babies here. Wanna check?" I unzip the backpack, hold it up to the rearview mirror. My newspaper falls out. We both laugh.

"You got kids at all?" he says, and it begins.

"No I don't."

"None?"

"Nope." I resist the temptation to check my handbag and pockets.

Then he says, "Whatsamatter? Don't you like kids?" and for some reason I get silly and say, "No, I don't like kids. They're stupid and practice poor hygiene."

I can see his expression change in the rearview mirror. "I'm not talking to you," he says. For the rest of the ride we say nothing.

But I do like children. I like horses, too; I just don't want to feed one and pay its boarding fees for the next twenty years. So the next time a cabdriver asks me about my children, I tell a serious lie.

"Chastity's four and Prudence is two. Both look just like their daddies." I shove pictures of my cousin's children in the cabbie's face just as he's trying to merge onto the highway. "My mom's taking care of them now 'cause they get on my boyfriend's nerves. Also 'cause she lives in Hillside which is a better place to raise children than Chicago and as long as I'm in rehab I can't watch them during the day anyway."

The driver is of East Indian origin; or maybe Pakistani. "I have two boys," he says.

My next driver is of African descent but a home-grown American guy who's got his carseat pulled back real far, like a recliner. I'm carrying my briefcase today and wearing a suit, so I introduce him to Andrew and Tiffany, who are currently in the care of their live-in nanny. "I really can't afford cabs," I say. "You'd think as an account exec I could earn a decent income, but by the time we pay for the nanny it might as well be minimum wage. How much do you think nannies earn?" I don't give him time for a response. "Four hundred dollars a week! Plus I get home so late and the kids are so tired that my husband and I barely spend time with them, let alone each other. I can't remember when we've last had sex."

The driver is intrigued. "Four hundred a week? Just to babysit? Maybe I should be a nanny!"

I become proficient at inventing children. Some mornings I'm a forty-two-year old great-grandmother of Theodore, born prematurely. "It's difficult for twelve-year-olds to carry to term, you know." Other days I'm bragging about my precocious nine-year-old Franny, so mature we trust her to care for three-year-old Roger while we vacation in Belize. "As long as we bring her back a conch shell she's happy." When in a blue mood I masquerade as stay-at-home wife and mother of eight-year-old twins Ben and Jerry. "If they knew their dad was humping a junior investments manager they'd lose all respect for him," I whine to the husky driver with the Irish surname. "If it weren't for my boys I'd be in divorce court right now."

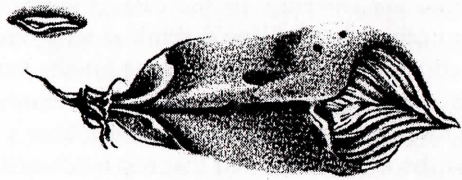
All these children are wearing me out and by the time my next driver, a Hispanic man, asks me about children I tell him that my

husband's sperm count is too low. "It's supposed to be fifty in a million," I say. "His is only one in a million." I have no idea what this means but neither does my cab driver.

"Have you been to the doctor?" he asks.

"No, I counted them myself."

He asks if we've thought about adoption.



## The Long Exile of Dean Reed

Dean Reed was born in 1938 in the United States, but he spent most of his life in Europe. He was a member of the Beat Generation and a prominent figure in the New Wave movement. Reed was known for his flamboyant style and his work as a writer and actor. He was also a vocal advocate for social and political issues. Reed's life was marked by a series of relocations and a constant search for a home. He spent significant time in France, where he became a naturalized citizen. His work often reflected his experiences of displacement and his search for identity. Reed's legacy is that of a man who bridged cultures and challenged societal norms.

Reed's journey was not without challenges. He faced discrimination and was often the subject of controversy. Despite these obstacles, he remained committed to his art and his beliefs. His contributions to literature and the arts are still celebrated today. Reed's story is a testament to the power of resilience and the pursuit of one's dreams. His life serves as an inspiration for those who seek to transcend their origins and find their place in the world.