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The Book of Acts, and: Based on a True Story, and: Scale,  
and: “Fire Destroys Beloved Chicago Bakery”

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Callaloo, Volume 39, Number 2, Spring 2016, pp. 298-301 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/cal.2016.0071>



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## THE BOOK OF ACTS

*by Nathan McClain*

began with a group of grown men,  
the disciples (whose bodies I cannot help  
but picture slim as street signs), huddled

in that upper room awaiting the return of another man,  
who promised to never leave them, who said he'd come back.  
And they waited. Believing he would keep his word.

I spent god-knows how many days outside,  
plinking nickels off a fire hydrant near the curb,  
where a man, who was not my father, parked his raggedy

pick-up, and blazed by me up the apartment steps.

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## BASED ON A TRUE STORY

by Nathan McClain

From China the long and supple  
One-winged peehees that fly in couples  
—Guillaume Apollinaire, “Zone” (trans. Samuel Beckett)

I want to explain how peehees braid their necks,  
but you probably won’t believe me—  
so instead, I’ll tell you of two men

who sit across from each other  
in the coffee shop, each craning the lamp  
of his body over the newspaper, the crossword section,

one chewing the tip of his eraser before  
passing his pencil to the other; they search for words,  
these men who, for all I know, may be brothers

(that said, they could easily  
mean anything or nothing to one another).  
And if they are brothers,

I want to believe that when they get stuck,  
one picks up his phone and dials  
their father; their father who, I hope,

is a man with answers but, more than likely,  
is a man trying to call back a word himself.  
Who *isn’t* trying to call a word

back into meaning, into use?  
Like “father” for instance. Dear father. I have  
multitudes of crossword puzzles. I need your help.

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## SCALE

*by Nathan McClain*

At the Griffith Observatory,  
which you mostly like to visit

alone, there is a seismograph,  
and beneath it a plaque that reads:

“When two plates grind  
against each other, tensions

build. Eventually, something  
has to give.” You jump

on the seismograph; its  
needle, which has scratched

in red the weight of everyone  
who’s come before you, doesn’t

register your weight. There is no one  
to tell you it’s broken;

you’d always wished it to be broken.  
If this Earth is your home,

if it’s crumbling under you,  
how saddening to know

how little you matter.  
Not that this is news to you.

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## "FIRE DESTROYS BELOVED CHICAGO BAKERY"\*

by Nathan McClain

How is it that you misread "fire"  
as "father"—*your* father—  
come back from the dead,

to sweep, like hard wind, through the building,  
to smash, with a Louisville Slugger,  
every pastry with which you'd pack

your sweet little mouth, then  
flick a lit match into the trash bin?  
The entire building

will have to be demolished  
because the father took hours  
finally to be put out;

it was a stubborn father. *Your* father  
who once, outside a grocery store,  
warned you against asking

for anything inside, so you have learned  
to keep your appetites a secret.  
And how good you are: refusing,

in the drive thru, the hot apple pie  
(two for a dollar), choosing  
the house salad over french fries.

But maybe this is why  
they all leave you, why you can't  
let him rest in peace. The real question is

not why your father would do such a thing,  
but why you smell him in every ruin, every  
smoldering heap of ash and brick?

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\* Originally published in *Quarterly West* (Fall 2012).