

# Nine excerpts from *Buena Vista*, a book project

by Andrew Steketee

**WHY WE LIKE IT:** *Sometimes you can just sense talent rising from the page before you read it. This is the case with Buena Vista. Fish and fishing, humanoids, space and space stations, Thoreau and Jesus are just some of the turbo-charged leitmotifs that twinkle like stars in Steketee's precocious Brautiganesque constellation. As we move through this extravaganza of minimalism we stumble upon isolated plural realities—like funhouse mirrors—and the fragmentation of dimensions as we know them. The author's prosody is beyond autocombustibly beautiful. Quote: 'Beneath the Salvation Army portico a pantywaist with facial scars and bloodshot eyes brandishes his 42<sup>nd</sup> Parallel inscription.' And, 'This means Krishna drank from the sacred waters of La Cienega—poured his thick reptilian beauty into the galaxy./When you're ready I can take your credit card information'. Five stars. (The spacing is the author's own: we publish all submissions exactly as received.)*

Wrong Number

UNKNOWN MAN. Saw you called.

UNKNOWN WOMAN. I was calling someone else and hit your number instead.

UNKNOWN MAN. This is someone else.

UNKNOWN WOMAN. The other someone else.

I DON'T CARE IF IT RAINS OR FREEZES LONG AS MY PLASTIC JESUS IS  
SITTIN' ON THE DASHBOARD OF MY CAR

I pay close attention to the Plastic Jesus. He always banks into turns and jumps up and down in frenzied excitement when I crank up some speed metal. These are good qualities, but what he really has down is going with the flow, which is something we all should do. When you try to assert your will on a problem or situation it closes your mind to divine assistance. I never rig a rod until I'm on the water, regardless of what I saw or fished the day before. I listen to what the river is saying today. Most of the time she says, "Keep it simple stupid," which I assume Jesus would say as well. Although right now he's saying, "Stay out of the woods, because drunk white men are up there with high-powered rifles!" Hunting season is a good time to stay down on the river, where you're less likely to get shot. Like the Elk, the Browns get feisty as we drop into fall. You tie on big fur bugs with names like Sex Dungeon and Meat Whistle. You smash your flies against the bank and rip them out. Trout don't have hands, so they smack your bugs with the only weapons they do have—their faces. Maybe you hook one in ten, but the fun is getting them to chase. It's been suggested that Jesus was a dry fly fisherman, which I believe to be true, but I'm equally certain he would huck big fur bugs when the river told him to.

Live from the WORLD HEADQUARTERS

Kea C. Hause Esq.

## The Dog Shit

Every morning an overweight man watches the neighbor's dog shit in his yard. The overweight man says to the neighbor, Your dog is shitting in my yard. My dog? says the neighbor. Yes, the black and white dog, says the overweight man. No, it can't be, he's such a good dog, says the neighbor. But he's not a good dog, says the overweight man, he's always shitting in my yard. My dog? says the neighbor. Yes, the black and white dog, says the overweight man. No, it can't be, he's such a good dog, says the neighbor. But he's not a good dog, says the overweight man, he's always shitting in my yard. My dog? says the neighbor . . .

## Miscommunication

When you call she never picks up, so don't call anymore. (Telephones are for pantywaists.)

Walk to her house with a fountain pen and yellow notepad. Write in large letters: I

NEVER LOVED YOU. Hold it up to the window . . .

## Empty Light of the Sea

Unless you're an artist like Joel-Peter Witkin, willing to dissect violence, you must believe in terrible things. Things inside other things: squalls on the North Atlantic, early morning industrial accidents, tumors in newborns, etc.

As a child, after a car wreck near church, Witkin saw some girl's head roll against the curb.

Years later, he wrote about being the dead air trapped between two buildings, seeing and hearing two separate, but connected events: Southworth and Hawes photographing Lola Montez; a person being strangled.

Order opened: a woman's face repeatedly erased, two years compiling *The Atrocity Series*, severed head after severed head.

For the rest of us it's different. Getting high under power lines. *Buteos* surveying the ford. Trying to remake the vermiculations of our everyday lives.

Without death, or serious violence, it can't be high art.

It's why Jeffers cultivated coastline, corrected meaning with eagles, storms and the terrible empty light of the sea . . .

## Lonely Lonely Man

### One

Himalayan restaurant. A middle-aged man and his ex-wife sit in a booth and exchange paperwork.

EX-WIFE. I'll have the chicken tiki masala.

TEENAGE WAITER. Okay . . . *(Turns toward the ex-husband.)* And for you sir?

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. *(Looks at ex-wife.)* Tiki?

EX-WIFE. *(Looks back with contempt.)* Tiki?

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. Chicken tiki masala?

EX-WIFE. I said tikka.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. Sounded like tiki.

EX-WIFE. Who cares?

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. I don't think anyone cares. *(Addresses the teenage waiter.)* Does it bother you when patrons refer to chicken tikka masala as chicken tiki masala?

TEENAGE WAITER. *(Uncomfortably.)* Excuse me sir?

EX-WIFE. *(Gets up, walks from table.)* You're an angry, hurt person. Your relationship with me sucks. You're just booty hurt I'm seeing someone.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. I don't give a shit who you're sleeping with.

EX-WIFE. *(Walks further away, waves hand.)* It's finally time you got over me . . .

### Two

The middle-aged man sits on a couch across from his psychologist. On the other side of

the couch is a female doll, propped against a pillow.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. (*Looks at the doll.*) Is the doll my ex-wife?

PSYCHOLOGIST. Not necessarily . . .

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. My mother?

PSYCHOLOGIST. It's whoever you need it to be.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. That doesn't mean anything.

PSYCHOLOGIST. (*Leans back.*) What does it mean?

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. Nothing, it's a stupid doll.

PSYCHOLOGIST. That's good . . .

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. What?

PSYCHOLOGIST. The anger . . .

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. Is *this* the therapy?

### Three

The middle-aged man sits at a kitchen table, across from a photograph of his ex-wife.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. (*Addresses photograph.*) Better than a doll, but still weird.

PHOTOGRAPH. (*No answer.*)

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. You sucked as a wife.

PHOTOGRAPH. (*No answer.*)

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. And as a person.

PHOTOGRAPH. (*Dog barks outside.*)

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. The doctor says you're a narcissist.

PHOTOGRAPH. *(No answer.)*

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. That your pattern of behavior would be appropriate for a king in 16th century England, but not for ordinary people.

PHOTOGRAPH. *(Dog barks again.)*

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. I wonder how long it takes your boyfriend to come . . .

#### Four

The middle-aged man idles a sedan in his ex-wife's driveway. She hands him paperwork through an open driver-side window.

EX-WIFE. Sign the disclosure.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. I like your boyfriend's truck.

EX-WIFE. I have a right to be happy.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. It's good to be happy.

EX-WIFE. *(Leans closer with disgust.)* Don't patronize me.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. You should be happy, you look *(Pause.)* happy.

EX-WIFE. You never knew me . . .

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. I knew everything.

EX-WIFE. You're a lonely man. You're empty. That's why we're divorced.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. Does he wear boots and pressed jeans?

EX-WIFE. *(Taps index finger against the window.)* Lonely, lonely man . . .

#### Five

The middle-aged man sits in a restaurant with a red-haired woman.



RED-HAIRED WOMAN. How long were you married?

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. A long time.

RED-HAIRED WOMAN. *(Flicks hair.)* Do you still get along with your ex?

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. Yes, *(Pause.)* we get along great.

RED-HAIRED WOMAN. Oh that's good, it's so important to get along with others.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. Yes, it's very important.

RED-HAIRED WOMAN. *(Flicks hair.)* She'll always be a part of you.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. Part of who?

RED-HAIRED WOMAN. *(Smiles, nods.)* Part of you.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. *(Stares.)* We're divorced.

RED-HAIRED WOMAN. I meant the part of you that's not.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. What part is that?

## Six

The middle-aged man follows a woman into a restaurant bathroom. The woman walks into a stall and closes the door.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. *(Standing before the stall.)* They have me on Xanax, but I'm still not sleeping, and the doctor has me talking to a doll . . .

WOMAN IN STALL. Can I help you?

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. I guess the doll is supposed to be you.

WOMAN IN STALL. Excuse me?

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. He wants me to sit and talk to it.

WOMAN IN STALL. (*Raises voice.*) Sir!

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. A shitty little version of you.

WOMAN IN STALL. Excuse me sir, can I ask you to leave?

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. Whole thing is beyond stupid.

WOMAN IN STALL. I'm not her.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. I saw your boyfriend yesterday. He seems like a great guy, with his boots and pressed jeans . . .

### Seven

The middle-aged man talks to an old high school friend on the phone.

FRIEND. Dude, get out here . . .

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. This weekend?

FRIEND. You'll come unhinged.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. I'm out of town.

FRIEND. I'm the professor of authenticity.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. Wonderful line.

FRIEND. J [n]]]]] a profession, a passion, a platform . . . [sic]

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. Maybe say you're Jared Leto's speech therapist.

FRIEND. Later, didddleroo.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. Do you ever miss your ex?

FRIEND. O-t=====tookd Perch Ambient==, Zanaflex Alive, Dexilant and Lorazepam and a bottle of white, bottle of red, gissumaster . . . [sic]

## Eight

The middle-aged man sits on a couch across from the psychologist.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. Can we be honest?

PSYCHOLOGIST. Of course.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. I can't talk to the doll.

PSYCHOLOGIST. It's a projection, not a person.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. I could, however, burn one with lighter fluid . . .

PSYCHOLOGIST. (*Leans back.*) That's interesting.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. What, exactly?

PSYCHOLOGIST. Burning a doll.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. Feels like something I could do.

PSYCHOLOGIST. Let's not burn any dolls.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. Really?

PSYCHOLOGIST. I don't think so.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. Can I borrow the doll?

PSYCHOLOGIST. For what purpose?

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. To put in my bag and take to dinner.

## Nine

Himalayan restaurant. The middle-aged man sits in a booth with the female doll, propped against a pillow.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. No one ever considers the small details.

FEMALE DOLL. *(No answer.)*

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. We're told not to care.

FEMALE DOLL. *(No answer.)*

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. But they probably matter the most.

FEMALE DOLL. *(No answer.)*

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. The Austrians understood this implicitly.

FEMALE DOLL. *(Some dishes break in the kitchen.)*

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. *(Turns toward window.)* But this is nice—just you and me—and some well-deserved silence . . .

## Book Signing

Beneath the Salvation Army portico a pantywaist with facial scars and bloodshot eyes  
brandishes his *42<sup>nd</sup> Parallel* inscription.

To Davey,

Can't lick these hotty balls. Three culprits: 1) veedee 2) hog wool slacks 3)  
the brunette behind you.

See you at Toney's,

John Dos Passos

## Items Left on a Kitchen Table

1. Applebee's jumbo shrimp.
2. Weakside blitz package scrawled on a yellow legal pad.
3. iPod Nano, headphones, "Polyethylene (Parts 1 & 2)".
4. Unpaid real estate taxes.
5. Photographs of overweight children.
6. Plastic fern.
7. Raincoat.
8. Elmo sippy cup.
9. Sleeping pills.
10. Handwritten suicide note . . .

## Transcendental Meditation

Breathe, visualize, repeat the Vedic mantra assigned by our certified instructor.

Jig jug

Tig tug

Teene weene peene jon

This means Krishna drank from the sacred waters of La Cienega—poured his thick, reptilian beauty into the galaxy.

When you're ready I can take your credit card information.

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** Told through a collection of flash fiction, short plays, lists, letters and essays, *Buena Vista* loosely chronicles the author's journeys through California; his upbringing in Michigan; the freestone magic of Rocky Mountain rivers; meditations on Thoreau, art and the sea—all in a work of autobiographical fiction. Stylistically, *Buena Vista's* zeitgeist is driven by Lydia Davis's simple *ars poetica*: "You can't tell everyone the truth all the time, and you certainly can't tell anyone the whole truth, ever, because it would take too long."

**BIO:** Andrew Steketee is a writer, online content strategist and former editor of *The Flyfish Journal* and *MidCurrent*. He is the co-author of two books, *Castwork* and *Tideline* (Willow Creek Press), which received positive acclaim from *Men's Journal*, *Outside* and the *New York Times*, and won the MIPA Book Awards: Art/Photo First Place (2002) and MIPA Book Awards: Nature Honorable Mention (2005), respectively. His work has appeared in *The Flyfish Journal*, *The Drake*, *Entropy* and the *Mountain Gazette*. Andrew is the graduate of the University of Michigan and Western Michigan University, where he

studied undergraduate and graduate English. He has traveled extensively across the US Rockies, west coast, southern coast, New England, Canada and lives in Colorado.