

FOUR NEW POEMS
BY
STEVEN DUONG

RAMPAGE PARTY PRESS, 2025.

Tattoo

I tattoo Maggie on game day. We attend
a school with remarkable defense in a state
where hogs outnumber us. SPILL YOUR GUTS means
tell all, leave no depth unplumbed. Once a bad lake
ruined her eye so she got a Fetty Wap
tattoo & a new eye. Once her dad raced cars.
More than once actually. His job for years
was to win. This week his daughter shelved books,
taught children to teach themselves about stars
& weird bugs, Formula One, the nature of grief.
I don't really feel it, she says. No pain. The wound
grows quietly. How about now? I say.
We do this for hours: I ask her to be honest
and she tells me she is. I'm hurting no one.

Tattoo

Tak says it hurts a lot more than last time,
so I down the voltage. There. We're golden. Left
unchecked, I'd ruin my friend, this man I love
but rarely call. At eighteen we lived lives
that barely made sense, even to us the livers.
He flew here from Delhi but his fake said
Cleveland. Don't get deported, I told him.
Cheers, he replied. We drank to as many things
as we could then: friendship, empires on fire,
the hard facts of joy. In my other language,
cute means *easy to love*. That's Tak. I can't
not love him. The man bought me a rig just so
I could carve ACAB on his leg. Anyone
who would uneasy our love is a bastard.

Tattoo

I'm still easing into this bastard love.
I draw Clay a cloud & a map & when
they say, How about a cloud map, I whip
one right up. A cloud field & a big cloud
sea. A road from Cloud A to Cloud B. Meaning
nothing, really. All I know is Clay loves
these small things & is willing to live forever
with how I imagine them. Every few days
they draw a map for their friend Trevor & Trev
sends back a poem. Or vice versa. I barely
know them but it makes me so damn happy. All
that back & forth. I carve clouds in red & black.
I imagine them floating to Nashville, Portland,
Baltimore, fat with the sort of rain we live for.

Tattoo

More salt. More fat. More rain. I live for pork
stew & five or six friends with worms for brains,
tossing the same twenty bucks back & forth
like an unpinned grenade. Happy bird day, we
sing. Lucie tells me she misses me more than birds
can possibly say. She's at a loss for birds.
Even if Dylan loaned her his parrot, she'd
be stuck there in her loss, flightless & blue
as hell. I was eighteen when I wrote her
a song called "Swell." Power chords, lofted bed,
I miss you so much I feel fucked in the head
& so on. There's a solo. My brother drums.
When I touch my bum leg, I hum the thing
I made her. I replace the ink with more ink.

