

# TRIBE OF TWO



**POEMS**

**DAVID SPICER**

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Tribe of Two: Poems  
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First Edition

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This collection is a work of the imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

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*For Delta Leo*



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## THE FIRST TIME

I saw Delta Leo, she drank  
a carafe of pinot grigio  
in a Sicilian monastery. *A sedan's  
waiting in the village  
down the road*, she told me.  
Starving, struck by the aria  
of her beehive hairdo, I asked  
for a café recommendation.  
*Oh, that's easy*, she said,  
puffing on her just-lit cigar.  
*Down in the cove, under five ladders,*  
The Nightingale. *Full of virgins,*  
she added, *just your type.*  
*But I'm a virgin, too*, I lied.  
Delta Leo said, *Come on, we'll scatter  
them and have the place to ourselves.*  
*No argument. I insist.*  
The pianist played *Hotel California*  
as we sat at an alabaster table.  
I proclaimed my love the next day  
with a bucket of lilies and dove feathers.  
*You're my angel*, I said, and she laughed,  
rearing her head more beautifully  
than the prettiest horse in Sicily.  
*Don't be a Puritan*, she said. *Let's fuck  
and get it over with.* We didn't stop  
until our cottage rent ran out two days  
later when we both tossed a towel  
to the other, and she said, *Let's go  
before the monks tattoo us.*

## CAREER CHOICES

Lisa Lou, why'd you call yourself  
Delta Leo? Was it because your father  
encouraged your high school cheerleader  
tendencies, even when you dropped  
out of tryouts? After that, I bet you  
refused to surrender to anyone's Nazi dreams.  
You could have been a cancer doctor  
or a criminal lawyer like he was.  
He prosecuted the Lindbergh case,  
didn't he? No slab of beef, you chose  
to mentor girls in a dormitory, the nexus  
of their world, cooking bacon for them.  
Your father disinherited you after you  
stole an uncle's Packard with whitewall tires.  
Your brain, no Timex watch, ticked  
more like a Patek Philippe. Then you  
belly danced, ignoring catcalls from Greek  
perverts. That's when Delta Leo  
became your moniker, your hair darkened  
to the blackest shade of black, and I met you  
in your goggles. You dreamed of cirrus clouds  
floating above the shores. That's what you  
told me. Who was I to doubt?

## A MUSE WHO HATES MIRRORS

You call yourself a beast – yet you  
love Debussy on the turntable.  
In our bungalow overlooking  
the reservoir, we talk about Russian  
Front winters or different hues  
of cherry wood. Cats chase dogs  
and a sad astronomer gazes at you  
through his retractable telescope.  
Wearing a beach towel  
over your pale thin body,  
you grin when I untie its knot.  
The terry cloth falls to the floor.  
You call yourself a hag-cow:  
I see nothing but beauty in your eyes –  
*They're so large I could surf there, I say.*  
You laugh. No, they're sapphires  
that dazzle me. You straighten  
your wet cascades of black hair.  
Delta Leo, I can't call  
you a taxi until I guide you  
to the balcony, while elms hold  
their torches, lighting the way  
to the sunrise village  
where I take you, the daughter  
of Venus and Mars.

## **DELTA LEO REMEMBERS HER NEPHEW**

The rain pattered on the Winnebago  
like blue jay droppings.  
Driving through the Black Hills,  
Delta Leo and I aggravated  
each other, intercepted non-sequiturs.  
A Thunderbird flew ahead of us.  
*Drink that cider, Peppermint Boy!*  
I ignored her.  
*Let's climb up Lincoln's nose,* Delta Leo said.  
*Oh, Delta, pretend you're a mermaid  
and eat that eel.*  
She asked, *You got any Queen?*  
a second before "Fat Bottomed Girls" thumped  
from the speaker.  
*Can we go...*  
*Ice fishing? No,* I interrupted.  
*Hey nephew, get out here,*  
Delta yelled above the music.  
Nothing from the back.  
*Hey boy, you gotta navigate us to Texas!*  
*Delta, I said, don't you remember?*  
*He ran off with the widow wearing  
that satin jacket. What was her name?* I asked.  
*Preen,* Delta Leo said.  
*Her jacket had two polar bears on its back.*  
Up ahead four faces loomed.  
Delta Leo ate some cottage cheese, saying,  
*Well, I got tired of him bummin'  
my cherry sours all the time, anyways.  
I hope their tongues meld forever.*

## HIDEAWAY

Foreigners in Italy,  
you an Iberian flamenco  
dancer and I a professional  
clown from Brooklyn,  
we revealed too much  
to each other, decided  
to run to the first country  
on the globe you touched  
blindfolded. We moaned  
and sighed in that mountain  
cabin, loved liked mutants  
with malaria. Our jackets  
were tattered, we ate steak  
and shared Scotch, heard lambs  
bleat outside. You said,  
*You're a beast.*  
I said, *Yes, Delta Leo,*  
*I'm a cheetah, not a dog.*  
*Ride me like the Appaloosa I am,*  
you said. You weren't my  
sister, so I did. We groaned  
and cried, listened to Puccini  
backed by a radio symphony,  
each day a new day of love.  
Each other's guardian, we forgot  
about the two-inch copy  
of *War and Peace* on the night table  
and slept away our great escape.

## **DANCER I DANCE WITH**

near the shallows, where gulls decapitate fish  
like mad surgeons, you, my friend, my lover,  
Delta Leo, wearing your blouse and skirt of scarves  
luminescent in the mist, you endure and tuck in worries,  
like that favorite outfit you love to wear at sunset.  
No girl, no cook of beefsteak on a farmhouse stove,  
you marry the white crow and the rooster holding hands,  
a new kind of ceremony in the convent's courtyard.

Oh, Delta Leo, thank the gods you're not my sister:  
then we couldn't thread needles at all, or tango  
with the wind near a ditch. I look at the moon  
and see you, pretend the sunrise is a welcome stranger.  
Thank the gods you're Delta Leo, dancer I dance  
with in my thoughts, singer to my soul, my wild heart.

## NEWCOMERS

We scavenged after the Vermont village blizzard,  
slept inside Daisy the Impala, sharing  
a stolen raccoon coat. Then crashed the car.

*This ends our honeymoon*, Delta Leo said,  
so I found a lonely trailer, inside it a revolver  
and wallpaper with bear trap patterns.  
The first night, we read *New England Terrorist*,  
about a strangler, a bastard at birth who existed  
in a shack. The author nicknamed him  
*Mr. Panty Hose*, in honor of his strangle weapon.  
Frustrated, Delta Leo hurried outside.

I held her, murmured love moans.  
*What's wrong?* I asked. *I feel him*, she said.  
*Who? Mr. Panty Hose.*

*I'm not him*, I said. *Says you*, she smiled.

The next day the racetrack loomed.  
Pulling over in our stolen neon green  
Road Runner, we yanked down our balaclavas,  
kicked in the door of the money-counting  
room, pointing the revolver at the three men:

*The cash, fuckweeds!*

The rinky-dinkers handed us 5K. We waited  
in the trailer for the sirens, the loot lasting  
until the lights didn't, so we fixed Daisy.  
The newest newcomers, we moved  
to the next pile-of-lumber town, and robbed  
its bank, dreading cops who never came.

## MESSAGE TO A MUSE

Delta Leo, I've not studied the great pyramids at Giza,  
nor strolled in a ruined room at Kilchurn Castle.  
I haven't smelled irises or listened to your favorite pianist  
seduce the sonata you asked her to play the evening  
you bonded with the lover you called yours forever.  
I haven't tasted escargots in Viennese restaurants,  
never straddled an Arabian under a thunderhead  
when the moon wore a linen mask. I did light  
a candle for you languishing in the cell  
where enemies kept you. I've endured  
jagged-reef gazes of judgment  
and hailstones of hatred rained on you.  
I offer this thought as I tilt the snifter to my lips:  
the brandy of romance escapes the darkest dogs.

## TOGETHER AGAIN

Just escaped from the Arizona joint,  
I brought you jonquils for romance  
as you leaned into the wind, tied  
against the Joshua tree in the blizzard.  
You resembled Venus in white,  
Delta Leo. Did you pray  
to the purest power, whiter  
than snow? Cold blue roosters  
coughed, and you played  
your violin, then ate a strawberry  
crumpet. I marveled,  
*We're in no desert, Delta Leo.*  
You answered, *Moses was a tramp  
without a knapsack.* I ate peaches  
and truffles, cut the nylon rope  
around your legs with an axe.  
*We need more fishermen,*  
you said, and we jumped  
onto the Caterpillar seats,  
whistling *Dixie* and riding  
down the hill on this year's  
coldest day of white smoke:  
mourners who forgot their grief.

## OUR TOWER

I've never tasted venison,  
octopus, nor fried sweetbreads,  
haven't sipped hyacinth tea  
in a French treetop parlor.  
But I've gazed at you dancing,  
your dragonfly nightgown  
falling onto the cherry wood floor  
of our cabin bedroom before we  
made love on the feather bed.  
We woke to morning bells  
on the shore. We don't need a horse  
from our stable to hunt for shells,  
nor a map to find a widow  
in a straw house across the beach.  
We only need to kneel  
on the tupelo's shadow,  
watch seagulls swoop up crows,  
and scamper to our tower  
and reinvent heaven.

## HOME SWEET HOME

Delta Leo, you wore a freshly plucked pimperl  
in your white silk blouse pocket on the balcony.  
The donkey Peregrine ate unhealthy alfalfa  
and I snatched the first two evening fireflies.  
That day we harvested pumpkins  
from our valley farm and welcomed children  
afraid of lightning. Your grandmother  
baked rhubarb pies and told us to plunge in.  
We Bowie-cut two slices, emptied them  
down our wide throats with the blade,  
gasped with pleasure from its sharp heat  
and the melted butter on the pie. We turned  
the kerosene lamp's brass knob and saw  
the leper the color of a ghost, a messenger  
from the priest's shack. He appeared  
at the door once or twice a month.  
You stared at him, asking, *Yes, Dominic?*  
*Come, now!* he whisper-shrieked. We hurried  
down the stairs and followed his crooked sprint  
to the stream. The panther in his black  
glory-feasted on the priest's faceless body,  
licked his nose and chin. Then he growled  
and escaped to the mountain's copper mine.

## SENTINELS OF LOVE

Oh Delta Leo, queen of the violin,  
black-haired lover of Chaucer, commit  
to me: love isn't a gallows in the storm  
of life. Remember the time we viewed  
the moon as a round whale, then a crown  
on the night's stars? You ate that loaf  
of bread, including the crusts, didn't  
gain a gram. Your bones outshined my  
brand-new riding boots. You don't suffer  
much, Delta, but I do: when you cling to me  
you drive a bulldozer through my heart.  
I crumble as you brood after we couple.  
Don't be a miser of affection  
when we can't decide  
whether to vacation in Jerusalem,  
Little Egypt or a hay barn in Iowa.  
Remember when you played Bluebeard's  
Sonata for the hunter who shot an elk?  
I cradled my shotgun. Your eyes  
glazed: you said to him, *Your life  
is now an earthquake, scumbag.*  
I didn't squeeze the trigger.  
He laughed at you, offered you  
a pastry and a kiss. You sneered.  
We walked backward, away from him.  
Yes, you and I are sentinels of love.  
We dazzle that whale of a moon,  
that crown of thorns on the stars.

## **DELTA LEO, MY HEART AND JOHN COLTRANE**

In the last year of the last century,  
Delta Leo said, *If you want to hear  
your sad heart explode, listen to some Coltrane.*  
I knew then she was lovelier than lovely.

In fact, I don't know if anyone else had told  
me the ways that music could change  
my star gazing and moon dreaming habits.  
My only witnesses? My ears and heart.

Anyway, my heart won't explode, I'll have ears,  
and besides, I need to reread *The Aeneid*  
on a thunderstorm day when I feel heroic.

I'll think about the last time I saw  
the crows love and close my eyes to Coltrane.

## THE MENAGERIE THAT GLISTENED IN OUR EYES

Delta Leo's swan, Frankie,  
ate boiled eggs every day  
as we gazed from the porch.  
Delta Leo stirred her brush  
in the turpentine. Our eyes  
glistened when we watched  
the pond, daydreamed our  
menagerie: a centaur named  
Mallet drank ale, Shine  
the bear growled at the stein:  
*Give me some!*

Delta Leo was a sleek  
buffalo and I a blue wolf.  
We'd eat linguine, olives  
and broccoli from fine lilac  
china on that porch  
and celebrate Easter.  
Icicles stared at the frozen ground.  
Our daydreams persisted  
like forest fires. The next day  
we trudged to the hilltops,  
the animals behind us,  
even Frankie and Mallet,  
not to mention Shine.  
We called the moon a fool  
for following us day and night.

## **AFTER YOU SLEPT**

You recounted your dream, Delta Leo:  
a prince named Pasha, I drifted  
down the Nile, persuaded you,  
a slave, to forsake the deity  
of empires, revolutions, and generals.  
Interested in our withdrawal,  
our advances, retreats to deserts  
and islands, you loved the fabric of that lie.  
You said I told you I'd destroy my rivals  
in order to travel through the river  
in your body, its marble columns  
feeling my flowing invasions.  
*You were a barbarian, you said,  
and presented me with roses at the steps  
of your villa called Jupiter.*  
*You ravaged me with tender thrusts,  
smiling like the last soldier  
from a massacred battalion.*  
I listened to your narrative  
in the kitchen overlooking the Gulf  
of Mexico. A different time,  
almost another world. Too bad,  
Delta Leo, we're not in a dream now,  
but I'm a gentle savage – I'll smile  
like your prince, and hold your rose  
bouquet any day you choose,  
on a desert's outskirts.

## IN OUR TWIN SLEEP

the ibis and the lions circled  
both of us: yes, we dreamed them,  
like a pair of strays mating  
on the outskirts of Paris.  
This city, not Paris, insisted we stay.  
In the city we found each other,  
you with your bassoon and me  
and my guitar. Snowfield grackles  
cawed in our memories.  
What did we need? Morphine  
to placate our pain like an ocean.  
No morphine around, though.  
I might as well have been Jean-Paul  
and you Simone. But no, my carpenter's  
soul floated in the mist of moths  
near the hospital. What perfume did you  
wear when we straggled from the moors  
toward music and drugs? Then we saw  
them: two lobsters floated in a tank  
of a café bordering a cemetery: *The Spindle*.  
*A sign?* we asked each other. Would we  
survive or wake up in the hospital  
waiting for the morphine nurse?

## DREAMSTONES WAITED

Forgive my monologue, Delta Leo.  
I miss that time you dyed your cascaded hair  
auburn outside New Orleans, invited  
me for quince crepes and ate them  
with shish kabobs in a plantation boxcar.  
You played *Blue Suede Shoes*  
on the out-of-tune piano while I banged  
on a tambourine and we sipped Merlot  
from Styrofoam cups. Then you found  
diamonds in a black velvet pouch:  
we were rich! Twenty of them,  
one for each buzzcut bastard who camped  
out here before they skedadled from the sirens.  
Your premonition was correct: we found them  
under a cat-demolished davenport, and damn,  
did we celebrate: you refused the rack  
of lamb from the butcher-cook at *Alfonzo's*  
and ordered a hotdog. *Gimme a tube steak!*  
you said. Thirsty, I added, *A Vodka Salty Hog!!*  
We offered to wash dishes instead of paying  
the \$432 check. The night suffered  
with us until they threw us out like a pair  
of wild sorrels. When we woke at dawn,  
nineteen dreamstones waited for us  
in your navy blue panties.

## TRIBE OF TWO

You knew how I felt about you.  
We understood that and laughed  
at private jokes about old lovers.  
On our journey through the Midwest  
daylight, we discovered the no-no  
of roadkill on a blacktop. I'd protected  
you in your cascaded brunette mane,  
and we huddled like two tourists  
in a phone booth. But lingering  
at the best hotel in Chicago, we stole  
a carton of Lucky Strikes because nothing  
scared us: not eating McDonald's  
French fries, not the dwarf riding a hog  
in the mall, nor the burning  
chapel outside Knockemstiff, Ohio.  
We lip-synched to the Stones singing  
"You Can't Always Get What You Want,"  
took turns reading *Ariel*.  
No, though we rode on the same bus  
in matching maroon corduroy outfits –  
me in my greased red-headed pompadour  
and you slurping on a slushie's straw –  
we got what we needed,  
a tribe of two.

## **BEFORE I FLEE THIS ARCHIPELAGO**

I love my church: chartreuse shingles adorn  
the vestibule roof, and on the Sabbath,  
I don't explode during my sermons. Today,  
though, a lunatic fed my hawk, Sherry, arsenic.

When the train whistle signals like a tuba,  
I see someone burn Our Lady of the Terrace.  
Delta Leo, evil pranks like this prod me to place  
red daffodils in my vase on the lectern.

I pray every day that any torch lit will tremble  
like a weak chain and the lake will drown  
the arsonist, but my last vision predicts Sherry

will survive: an immortal virgin near the trellis.  
I'll find my beloved hatpin – a swan with ruby  
eyes – before I flee this archipelago.

## **PICNICS AND AIRPLANES**

When I think of you, Delta Leo,  
a thick ache throbs in my groin  
as I remember that last day with you:  
a blue crow played an accordion of wind  
and you raked your fingers through my hair.  
You wanted a cheese steak, grapes, avocados  
to soothe the craving you had for my skin  
and I for yours. You needed to catch a plane.

When I knew you were a moody river,  
I wondered if I'd ever see your eyes  
again, sad as a Picasso model drinking red wine.  
That day I couldn't feel the scarves you'd wave,  
those scarves of golden flamingos you loved  
this morning as you hurried up the stairs of time.

## UNTIL OUR REUNION

Delta Leo, I heard you call me from the tugboat,  
*You're an Alpha, I'm an Alpha, we both invent  
new worlds from new words, where our souls float,  
where we soar, rebel comics who don't repent.*

You drifted downriver, waving at me from the barge.  
I yelled back, *Let's meet at the beach, ring the bells  
when we see each other and sing our songs that tell  
stories of love and danger to the world at large.*

I wait for you, Delta Leo, finishing these love-vignettes  
before I baptize and appraise myself, wanting to accept  
my life as a new snowfall every day, empty of regret.

One day, when cornfield magpies caw cries,  
we'll reunite, fanning smoke from dazed eyes,  
and hold each other under the throbbing skies.



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*The Orchards Poetry Journal*: "Sentinels of Love"

*Yellow Mama*: "After You Slept," "Delta Leo Remembers Her Nephew," "Hideaway" and "Tribe of Two"

*Note*: some of the end words of "Delta Leo, My Heart and John Coltrane" are identical to those on page 45 of Terrance Hayes' *American Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin*.

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

A former medical journal proofreader, David Spicer has poems in *The Santa Clara Review*, *Synaeresis*, *Reed Magazine*, *CircleShow*, *Chiron Review*, *Gargoyle*, *The American Poetry Review*, *Ploughshares*, among others, and in *Silent Voices: Recent American Poems on Nature*, *Perfect in Their Art: Poems on Boxing From Homer to Ali* and *A Galaxy of Starfish: An Anthology of Modern Surrealism*. He's been nominated for a Best of the Net three times and a Pushcart, and is the author of one collection, *Everybody Has a Story*, and five previous chapbooks. The former editor of *Raccoon*, *Outlaw* and Ion Books, he lives in Memphis.

## **ABOUT THE PRESS**

Founded in 2008 by poet Seth Jani, Seven CirclePress is a literary micropress. Its flagship publication, *CircleShow*, is published twice yearly and showcases some of the best writing from around the globe. The press also publishes a select number of books, chapbooks and anthologies. For more information about the press and its publications, visit [www.sevencirclepress.com](http://www.sevencirclepress.com).







In David Spicer's *Tribe of Two* the poet, struck by "the aria of her beehive hairdo," encounters his wild, erratic muse. He spies, pursues, then hooks up with this irreverent, energetic woman he has often imagined. These twenty-one exuberant, but tender poems are a joyride from the couple's first encounter to their inevitable parting. No yearnings are secret and any crime, real or imagined, becomes part of the texture of the raunchy good times they share. These lovers are equal in appetite and part of Spicer's gift is that this pair is experienced as utterly beautiful and enviable. For this crazy time, they are each other's guardians in the unpredictable wilderness of a difficult world. *Tribe of Two* makes vivid passion's endurance in memory and whether you are 17 or 64, reading it is likely to make you smile.

—Jody Stewart, author of *Ghost Farm* and *The Red Window*

The print may be black-and-white but David Spicer's lines rise from the page in full color, vivid and unpredictable. *Tribe of Two* is a ride that strains at the speed limit while holding its course through a relationship that thrives on cultured irreverence. The imagery is a universe of imagination, one star shining more brightly than the next!

—David Chorlton, author of *A Field Guide to Fire* and *Bird on a Wire*

*Tribe of Two* by David Spicer offers readers the chance to revisit the times they too were in love and all was right with the world. In well-wrought poetry, with joyous leaps, Spicer reminds us how life can be.

—Simon Perchik, author of *The Gibson Poems* and *Almost Rain*



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