

J. HOPE STEIN is the author of the chapbooks [Talking Doll]: (*Dancing Girl Press*) and [Mary]: (*Hyacinth Girl Press*), both forthcoming in 2012, and her chapbook *Light's Golden Jubilee* was a finalist in the 2011 *Ahsakta Chapbook Contest*. Her short film, *The Inventor's Last Breath*, based on her full-length manuscript about *Thomas Edison*, was screened at the 2011 *Cinepoetry Festival* at the *Henry Miller Library* in *Big Sur*.



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PROLOGUE

For All You Scribes and Mummies

New York City is holding her breath—a harpoon piercing lung. (*I lob you.*)
The mind—a cloth snagging on rail (*mustn't kiss*). In twilight, her silhouette
is tombstones (*...but kisses are medicinal*).

In the bodies of day her buildings grow towards light. Each organism
clings towards coral reef for urge.

*Take a flower from your grave, give it to a girl who wished to have
known you better. Watch the passers-by walk curtly your pavement.*

*Take a flower from your grave and shake them by the hair—no one
is breathing.*

CORNER OFFICE

CHAPTER 1 .

Cleo

—I'm dressed in jasper-reds and turquoise silk.

I bleed honey, lotus, sycamore.

What am I?

—*The square of sky through our window.*

CHAPTER 2 .

A Dwelling Place (Limestone calcite alabaster)

They say so many
of us are dead now,
soon there will be no
more land to bury us.
Instead we will be laid
to rest in city sky -

scrapers. In our offices!
which makes sense
if you think about it—
We all start in a cubicle.
Mon-Fri & occasional
mash potato.

The brightest
promoted to
corner offices.
Leaders who
can take, skip

& mash. So many
of us dead now,
soon. Only four
corners to each
floor.

CHAPTER 3.

Alexander & the Deities

Sometimes he
took pictures
of me—The parts
he could see from
his desk and emailed
them to me:

A close-up of the left side
of my face pressing into
the receiver of the phone,
fingers cradling the morn-

ing coffee mug, eyelash,
chin leaning into palm.
Despite all syntax certain
shapes want to be inside
each other. He took a picture
of a picture of my mother.

We lived like this in our cube.

CHAPTER 4 .

Figurine, statuette

Cube: solid of 6
congruent faces.
Partitioned. 190
sq. ft. wall-less-
ness. Our cat *Papyrus*
has yellow eyes.

CHAPTER 5 .

Cleo Drinks Love Potion

You like to compartmentalize.

Compartmentalize? You keep people in different spaces inside you and claim they have nothing to do with each other.

Compartmentalize? (he said it again pointing to an unhinged file cabinet).

Yes, that's you.

CHAPTER 6 .

Alexander Admits It (Occasionally, I remove your brain through your nose)

Sure, I've thought about fucking you in my desk chair, silently not to disturb the neatness of your yellow summer dress. Silently not to disturb our colleagues in surrounding cubicles. You putting small paperclips in my hair, your hands suggesting the rocking of my skull. You straddling my lap, my bare ass in my desk chair shapes suctioning into each other— We would continue to make the sounds of good business. A conference call with Coca-Cola, an email to Citibank, a spreadsheet of year-over-year gross profits. You elevated in my lap, your face clearing just over the cubicle partition just visible enough across the office, your expression dismembered like a poet who's fallen out of favor with her king.

CHAPTER 7.
Grey Granite Sphinx

I started to walk
and felt something
tug at me—a fin-
ger through my
pant-loop where
a belt should be.

We lived like this
in our cube.

CHAPTER 8 .
Ballad of your Boss

Don't hesitate to serve your boss.
Sit quietly and he will come to you.
The blessing of an employee
is in the corners of her mouth.
The blessing of a plot
is in its time of being worked.

When a great boss says "I kill you"
lay your head across his laptop.
Throw your documents in the river.
This is how we measure time.
The blessing of a plot
is in its time of being worked.

Do not despise small documents.
Do good for your body, but
there is no one who does not die—
Do not delay in your office.
The blessing of a plot
is in its time of being worked.

Be a cat in your boss's presence.
Do not give a wary look
towards the elevator door—
You do not know the length of your life.
The blessing of a plot
is in its time of being worked.

Do not hesitate to serve your boss.
Do not linger without enquiry.
Put myrrh on your head, dress in fine linen.
Sit quietly and he will come to you.
The blessing of a plot
is in its time of being worked.

CHAPTER 9 .

Cleo Staples Her Finger Over Her Boss's Lips

—Shhhhhh

Genius Genius
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CHAPTER 10.

Alexander Drinks Arsenic

He sent a picture of my
uneaten lunch. The seeds
of a pomegranate look like
fish eggs from a distance.
The picture of the picture
of my mother was no longer
over his desk.

What are we?

—A guitar?

—*No. a calendar, a calendar—
Now what are we?*

CHAPTER 11 .

Office Memo

At this moment we are only quark soup.

Those with offices form planets
and dwarf planets. Those with
cubicles become the nearly
200 moons or continuing dust.

(The accounting department is
leptons. The marketing depart-
ment is neutrinos. The sales
department is electrons.)

On a night of sincere
stillness one can
hear the universe
pull from herself—

as staple & staple
remover.

EPILOGUE

For All You Mummies and Scribes

New York City is holding her
breath (but kisses): breasts
against the flat unbreakable
glass—the corner office is hers.

Outside, the lit city—
The unsetting sun.
Your silhouette is
sycamore—a woman

and her cat *Papyrus*.
Watch the eyes watch
the belly— something is
breathing.

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For Moe.

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J. Hope Stein is also the author of poetry/humor site www.eecattings.com and editor of www.poetrycrush.com. She is a member of the faculty at the Chicago School of Poetics and earned her MFA at New England College. Her work can be seen in various anthologies and journals including *Poetry International*, *Ping Pong* and *Scapegoat Review* and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize twice in 2010 and once in 2011.

<http://jhopestein.wordpress.com/>