

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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COVER DESIGN // ALBAN FISCHER @ BLOWNFONT.TUMBLR.COM  
INTERIOR // NATE PRITTS

H\_NGM\_N BKS 2011  
a H\_NGM\_N portable document format chapbook  
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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.

I am thankful to Malena Morling and these generous (& alphabetical) people who contributed to the development of this piece— Joanna Penn Cooper, Lauren Gordon, James Harms, Brian Henry, Ilya Kaminsky, Sara Lefsyk, Erika Lutzner, Paula McLain, Rena J. Mosteirín, Jillian Mukavetz, Eleni Sikelianos. And much thanks to Nate Pritts.

For Moe.

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