

# What to Pack for the Apocalypse



Nina Corwin

# **What to Pack For the Apocalypse**

**Nina Corwin**

Locofoco Chaps

Chicago, 2017

Copyright © Nina Corwin

Locofo Chaps is an imprint of Moria Books.  
More information can be found at [www.moriapoetry.com](http://www.moriapoetry.com).

Locofo Chaps is dedicated to publishing politically-oriented poetry.

Chicago, USA, 2017

## *Darwin's Telescope*

In a carved-up corner of the Amazon, an old gardener keeps her cabbages and cucumbers apart. Shaking her head, she explains – they will kill each other if given the chance.

A panel of scientists votes to strip Pluto of planetary status. The grumbling opposition asks: how round is round?

In second grade, my best friend makes me clean her room. Alleging friends in nether places, she threatens to hex me if I refuse.

Pretty soon, belief becomes suspension bridge.

Not long after, I take Underdog, with his little white U and blue cartoon cape, to be my psychic savior. In private, I stick pins in Polly Purebred's voodoo likeness.

Teeth bared, a pair of dogs grapples for the single bone between them. The victor marks the hydrant of his choice.

Bullies of every stripe and paw print swagger through the eco-system. The sniveling little guy bellies up.

I, too, have my hungers. The hunter-gatherer in me. The need to name on the table of my tongue. The need, the need, the need.

Every week, another contestant is voted off the island.  
Implanted at the base of my brain, my survivalist  
microchip is ticking.

## *Chemistry Lessons*

1. Chemistry reduces the mysteries of life to their lowest common denominator.
2. Opposite ions are magnetically drawn to one another.
3. When oxygen and friction collide in sufficient supply spontaneous combustion will occur.
4. The body employs anti-oxidizing agents to neutralize those free radicals that threaten to upset the status quo.
5. Life is simply a matter of molecules that can be reproduced in test tubes and petrie dishes.
6. Love, like any other toxic substance, has its half-life, and in due time will be flushed out.
7. Sooner or later, every thought or passion will be traceable to the firing of a detectable neuron pathway.
8. A laboratory animal has generally exhausted its useful scientific life after a single experiment and will then be put to sleep.
9. There are no monsters. There is only Man. This is the truth.

## *Telling Time*

In 1965, somewhere between a saddle shoe and a penny loafer, a classroom of third graders computes how old they will be in the year 2000.

Last night, I dreamed I was 53 and I woke up screaming –

*who will do the bridgework on the mouth of a thousand years?  
how many pieces of piecework make a sweatshop hour?*

We open our eyes to find ourselves out the back door of one millennium, at the oven door of another, wondering when our turn will come.

*do you believe that biding your time comes at no cost at all?*

Sometimes I dream my credit cards shovel holes in the earth to bury me. First year interest rates, like oak leaves, offer safe shelter till after a season of spending the digging begins.

I awake to find my IRAs become leg irons; my bank accounts, anchors; and managed health insurance, an inescapable choke chain.

*do you insist there is no price for following?  
I tell you there's always somebody counting.*

I dream an old saxophone stooped with osteoporosis stops me on the road and whispers: If you want to save your shoes you have to walk through life on your knees.

Before long, I find a wealthy woman floundering  
in over-priced artwork. Spattered canvases stretched  
as far as cerebral will go. She tells me the candle is lost  
to its own wick.

*how many pins will prickle the heads of angels  
before the coming of a more effective insurrection?*

*do you believe that keeping your hands clean comes tax free?*

Last night, I dreamed that wisdom gnarled me into Bonsai:  
my limbs, once reaching their full spread now twist  
into branches condensed and autistic.

At 6 am, I wake to the clatter of dumpsters  
four stories below, the rhythm of workers clearing away  
our earthly waste; daily news:

a soiled baby on the Welcome mat screaming for a change.



## *Awaiting the Subsequent Shoe*

Dear Whippersnapper,

There are those who contend that Sisyphus savored a great whoosh of breath at the boulder's rolling. Baloney! They are existential Scrooges who need a good screw. Ditto for Shakespeare, whose slings and arrows turn to dust in the mouths of moonstruck youth. Love, I submit, is a blade of grass stubbornly capable of cracking cement. Coitus is bound to prevail for the greening of the species and the populist principle of the 13th Step.

Life beats us down, I'll grant you that. But note how the mavens of martyrdom flavor our beatings with radishes of glamour and near-vegan virtue. A snaggle of survivors will testify that pissing in the wind strengthens several intestinal muscle groups.

There is a certain sound track to the above. Most frequently, we think of strings or brass, though with time a full symphonic complement follows. From well-endowed avatars to survivor show hijinks, the lemming imperative is adroitly embedded in the software. Deep down, we know there are better paths to self-improvement.

*Apostasy!* holler the tear-jerking colonels of sturm and drang. *Oh Great Athena! Oh Aeschylus!* they rant, with lunatic thrashing, *have you not heard of wisdom through suffering?*

But for every whack of the strap that's connected  
with my backside, I can safely say I've known better  
back rubs at the sulfur baths of Big Sur.  
Before you leap, be sure to purchase flight insurance.

As to the matter of martyrs in the garbage  
economy: Road Kill will always be among us.  
Whether the corpse is indeed exquisite is a question  
for the scavenger's appetite. An orifice is more  
than merely another hole. It is a portal to opportunity.  
What matters is not what you step on  
but what steps on you. And from which quadrant  
the other shoe will drop. Always drive defensively.

There are those who insist that misery's an addiction.  
Ask the damsel on the railroad track as she sweats out  
Dudley Do Right's last ditch rescue. She will tell you the  
best thing about pantyhose is when you take them off.

*After Whitman, After Hoover*

*I CELEBRATE myself, and sing myself,  
And what I assume you shall assume...*

4

People I meet...my early **REDACTION** or the  
**IMPROPRIETY**

and city I live in, or the **REDACTION** in its place,  
The latest dates, **EXPUNGED FROM THE RECORD**  
discoveries, inventions, **BLASPHEMIES**, authors  
old and new, **CENSORED**

...Battles, the horrors of fratricidal war, **TRIGGER** the  
eyes

they **TRIGGER** suspicion

the **REDACTED** events;

These come to me **SUSPECT** and go from me again,

But they are not **GARBLED** the Me myself

**REDACTED.**

Apart from the pulling and hauling stands

what I am, **IMPROPER, REDACTED,**

**BROUGHT IN FOR QUESTIONING**

...Backward I see in my **GARBLED** days where

I sweated through **CODE-SPEAK**

**CENSORS, SPIES**

I have no **IMPROPRIETY**, I witness **EXPUNGED**

**PROPOGANDA**

**I SUSPECT, I WHITEOUT, I BLIND**

## *When The Ladybugs Invade Chicago*

*"They're taking over... infiltrating...this attack is anything but lady-like."*

– Brian Janosch, [idsnews.com](http://idsnews.com)

It's a ho-hum morning throughout the ant hill office buildings, where overdue assignments spill out of in-boxes. Above the cubicle maze, one can hear the rhythmic click of fingers on keyboards racing to keep up. Accountants count, bosses boss and nodding psychologists proffer the usual insights to ease the waves of misery that break upon their shores. On floor after floor, custodians manage the fragile ecology of high rise life. After the autumn harvest, a friendly species of beetle, having fattened on the aphids in the soybean fields, doubles its boisterous numbers many times over and sets out to find suitable lodgings for the winter.

On the day the ladybugs swarm over the city, flying in through open windows, swinging doors: solid objects begin to move. Heavy oak furniture and elevator walls throb with armored beetle bodies. The points on exclamation points crawl off to join more poignant conversations and teachers everywhere lose their tenuous hold on lesson plans. Even the sweetest apples of their eyes forget their homework and speak out of turn. Soon, dogs begin to snarl and bite the hands of their masters, while house cats are infected with cabin fever. Secretaries spill coffee on memos and cover letters, and the crowd at the water cooler can be seen swatting at specks in the quivering air.

A cloud of disquietude hangs low over the Loop and spreads down the long fingers of the Elevated into the neighborhoods. There is an outcry among the citizens and the aldermen declare the itinerant arthropods a public nuisance. Regulations are written and re-written.

Phalanxes of janitors armed with aerosols and surgical masks are dispatched to every floor and lobby. Stalking the hallways, Curmudgeon Bill, the building engineer with the buzz cut, shakes his industrial-size can of insecticide. Intent on restoring order to the cubicles, corridors and elevators under his watch, he mutters, *that's the way it is with these pests – if one gets away, a hundred more are born*, every inch an unrelenting scowl.

## *Stuck*

There are cattle prods everywhere.  
Cattle prods & carrots. Playing  
their parts. I know, I've seen them.

Heard the freight cars rattle  
with echoes of empty. French kiss  
of the mantis. Nothing to stop it.

I have witnessed the cunning duet  
of lure & hook. The catch, all  
flesh and scales. I've calculated

entries & exits. The number of keys:  
who keeps them; which side the lock takes.  
Check the math if you don't believe me.

Something ancient is playing  
out in the theater of spider & fly.  
What makes a sticky situation, for starters.

*Look!* What's that  
up ahead? Some sort of shed,  
stink of livestock, corrugated ramp.

*Hey, wait. Quit pushing me.*

*the human organ*

a bell wakes to find its tongue  
extracted. echo with no prime

to move it. on a blackboard sky,  
a star erased by storm.

trajectory of YES  
suspended. a cry peals

from silence. grief: the human  
organ sounding. now

behind a pair of tinted lens,  
a shroud of fog.

alone, a soldier's mother opens  
the package after

the fact. *I sobbed and still*  
*I sob. like an animal. no use*

*for your gift,*  
*it's only your letter*

*I cling to. grains of salt*  
*from the sweat of your hand.*

in a distant clearing, the many  
tongues gather

waving. stipple of salt.  
arc of sun. peal of bells.



## *What to Pack For the Apocalypse*

A faceless man runs down a pitched roof,  
gladiators at his back. The dreamer wakes in free fall.

A little help from erosion and the precipice approaches  
at the buzz rate of killer bees.

When heads of state play chicken  
on a cliff, the speed of the hotrod is everybody's business.

What we have here is more than a failure to communicate  
or a sloppy lot of rowdies butting heads in a mosh pit.

*Winner With The Most Toys* dukes it out with *Can't Take It  
With You*. Or are they running neck-and-neck?

If the life boat leaks, what to pack for the apocalypse  
(iPad, change purse, teddy bear) is *not* the operative  
question.

A father-to-be boards a jet, suitcase bulging with worries.  
At cruising altitude, he opens his tray table and the plane  
flips

upside down. Outside the window, a banner flaps.  
Quit fussing, it says, you're going one way or another.

*epilogue no. 8*

and what's *this* we're left with?  
greasy memory with membrane  
corrupted elastic lost

and foundering? what's that?  
anatomy of shadow or perhaps  
a blackboard over-writ

in afterbirth complete w/gene map cast  
aside; a 13 gallon cinch-sack cinched.  
the hat: a mere receptacle, w/emblem obsolete.

then comes the day we learn  
the blue bag thing was all a scam  
were you surprised? the sham

recyclers split  
(along with endings 1 – 7)  
soon as Karma turned its back.

what's left? after  
caution is tossed a muddy palette or  
a well that's never done with gushing

pocketful of pigment hued and crying.  
in hindsight, the umbilical was cut  
too quick for horse & barn & open door.

no angels evident just  
creatures breached and straggling with  
wings awash in rainbow slick.

## Acknowledgments

Earlier versions of these poems first appeared in *Evansville Review*, *Forklift OH*, *Harvard Review*, *Kettle Blue Review*, *Matter*, *Nimrod International Review*, *Parthenon West Review*, *Poetry Across Borders*, and *Whiskey Island*.

## Locofo Chaps

2017

Eileen Tabios – *To Be An Empire Is To Burn*

Charles Perrone – *A CAPacious Act*

Francesco Levato – *A Continuum of Force*

Joel Chace – *America's Tin*

John Goodman – *Twenty Moments that Changed the World*

Donna Kuhn – *Don't Say His Name*

Eileen Tabios (ed.) – *Puñeta: Political Pilipinx Poetry*

Gabriel Gudding – *Bed From Government*

mLEKAL aND – *Manifesto of the Moment*

Garin Cycholl – *Country Musics 20/20*

Mary Kasimor – *The Prometheus Collage*

lars palm – *case*

Reijo Valta – *Truth and Truthmp*

Andrew Peterson – *The Big Game is Every Night*

Romeo Alcala Cruz – *Archaeoteryx*

John Lowther – *18 of 555*

Jorge Sánchez – *Now Sing*

Alex Gildzen — *Disco Naps & Odd Nods*

Barbara Janes Reyes – *Puñeta: Political Pilipinx Poetry, vol. 2*

Luisa A. Igloria – *Puñeta: Political Pilipinx Poetry, vol. 3*

Tom Bamford – *The Gag Reel*

Melinda Luisa de Jesús – *Humpty Drumpfty and Other Poems*

Allen Bramhall – *Bleak Like Me*

Kristian Carlsson – *The United World of War*

Roy Bentley – *Men, Death, Lies*

Travis Macdonald – *How to Zing the Government*

Kristian Carlsson – *Dhaka Poems*

Barbara Jane Reyes – *Nevertheless, #She Persisted*

Martha Deed – *We Should Have Seen This Coming*

Matt Hill – *Yet Another Blunted Ascent*

Patricia Roth Schwartz – *Know Better*

Melinda Luisa de Jesús – *Petty Poetry for SCROTUS' Girls, with poems for Elizabeth Warren and Michelle Obama*  
Freke Rähä – *Explanation model for 'Virus'*  
Eileen R. Tabios – *Immigrant*  
Ronald Mars Lintz – *Orange Crust & Light*  
John Bloomberg-Rissman – *In These Days of Rage*  
Colin Dardis – *Post-Truth Blues*  
Leah Mueller – *Political Apnea*  
Naomi Buck Palagi – *Imagine Renaissance*  
John Bloomberg-Rissman and Eileen Tabios – *Comprehending Mortality*  
Dan Ryan – *Swamp Tales*  
Sheri Reda – *Stubborn*  
Aileen Cassinetta – *B & O Blues*  
Mark Young – *the veil drops*  
Christine Stoddard — *Chica/Mujer*  
Aileen Ibardaloza, Paul Cassinetta, and Wesley St. Jo – *No Names*  
Nicholas Michael Ravnikaar – *Liberal elite media rag. SAD!*  
Mark Young – *The Waitstaff of Mar-a-Largo*  
Howard Yosha – *Stop Armageddon*  
Andrew and Donora Rihn – *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*  
Reshmi Dutt-Ballerstadt – *Extreme Vetting*  
Michael Dickel – *Breakfast at the End of Capitalism*  
Tom Hibbard – *Poems of Innocence and Guilt*  
Eileen Tabios (ed.) – *Menopausal Hay(na)ku For P-Grubbers*  
Aileen Casinetta – *Tweet*  
Melinda Luisa de Jesús – *Defying Trumplandia*  
Carol Dorf – *Some Years Ask*  
Marthe Reed – *Data Primer*  
Carol Dorf – *Some Years Ask*  
Amy Bassin and Mark Blickley – *Weathered Reports: Trump Surrogate Quotes From the Underground*  
Nate Logan – *Post-Reel*

Jared Schickling – *Donald Trump and the Pocket Oracle*  
Luisa A. Igloria – *Check & Balance*  
Aliki Barnstone – *So That They Shall Not Say, This Is Jezebel*  
Geneva Chao – *post hope*  
Thérèse Bachand – *Sanctuary*  
Chuck Richardson – *Poesy for the Poetus. . .Our Donaldcito*  
John M. Bellinger – *The Inaugural Poems*  
Kath Abela Wilson – *The Owl Still Asking*  
Ronald Mars Lintz – *Dumped Through*  
Agnes Marton – *The Beast Turns Me Into a Tantrumbeast*  
Melinda Luisa de Jesús – *Adios, Trumplandia!*  
Magus Magnus – *Of Good Counsel*  
Matina L. Stamatakis – *Shattered Window Espionage*  
Steve Klepetar – *How Fascism Comes to America*  
Bill Yarrow – *We All Saw It Coming*  
Jim Leftwich – *Improvisations Against Propaganda*  
Bill Lavender – *La Police*  
Gary Hardaway – *November Odds*  
James Robinson – *Burning Tide*  
Eric Mohrman – *Prospectors*  
Janine Harrison – *If We Were Birds*  
Michael Vander Does – *We Are Not Going Away*  
John Moore Williams – *The Milo Choir Sings Wild Boys in Trumplandia*  
Andrea Sloan Pink – *Prison and Other Ideas*  
Stephen Russell – *Occupy the Inaugural*  
James Robison – *Burning Tide*  
Ron Czerwien – *A Ragged Tear Down the Middle of Our Flag*  
Agnes Marton – *I'm the President, You Are Not*  
Ali Znaidi – *Austere Lights*  
Maryam Ala Amjadi – *Without Metaphors*  
Kathleen S. Burgess – *Gardening with Wallace Stevens*  
Jackie Oh – *Fahrenhate*  
Gary Lundy – *at / with*  
Haley Lasché – *Blood and Survivor*

Wendy Taylor Carlisle – *They Went to the Beach to Play*

Melinda Luisa de Jesús – *James Brown's Wig and Other Poems*

Tom Hibbard – *Memories of Nothing*

Kath Abela Wilson – *Driftwood Monster*

Barbara Jane Reyes – *Nevertheless, #She Persisted, Number 3*

Maria Damon, Adeena Karasick, Alan Sondheim –  
*Intersyllabic Weft*

Barbara Jane Reyes – *Nevertheless, #She Persisted, Number 2*

JJ Rowan – *so-called weather*

Jared Schickling – *Donald Trump in North Korea*

Eileen Tabios – *Making National Poetry Month Great Again!*

Allison Joseph – *Taking Back Sad*

Nina Corwin – *What to Pack for the Apocalypse*

More information on Locofo Chaps can be found at  
[www.moriapoetry.com](http://www.moriapoetry.com).

Jared Schickling – *Donald Trump and the Pocket Oracle*  
Luisa A. Igloria – *Check & Balance*  
Aliki Barnstone – *So That They Shall Not Say, This Is Jezebel*  
Geneva Chao – *post hope*  
Thérèse Bachand – *Sanctuary*  
Chuck Richardson – *Poesy for the Poetus. . .Our Donaldcito*  
John M. Bellinger – *The Inaugural Poems*  
Kath Abela Wilson – *The Owl Still Asking*  
Ronald Mars Lintz – *Dumped Through*  
Agnes Marton – *The Beast Turns Me Into a Tantrumbeast*  
Melinda Luisa de Jesús – *Adios, Trumplandia!*  
Magus Magnus – *Of Good Counsel*  
Matina L. Stamatakis – *Shattered Window Espionage*  
Steve Klepetar – *How Fascism Comes to America*  
Bill Yarrow – *We All Saw It Coming*  
Jim Leftwich – *Improvisations Against Propaganda*  
Bill Lavender – *La Police*  
Gary Hardaway – *November Odds*  
James Robinson – *Burning Tide*  
Eric Mohrman – *Prospectors*  
Janine Harrison – *If We Were Birds*  
Michael Vander Does – *We Are Not Going Away*  
John Moore Williams – *The Milo Choir Sings Wild Boys in Trumplandia*  
Andrea Sloan Pink – *Prison and Other Ideas*  
Stephen Russell – *Occupy the Inaugural*  
James Robison – *Burning Tide*  
Ron Czerwien – *A Ragged Tear Down the Middle of Our Flag*  
Agnes Marton – *I'm the President, You Are Not*  
Ali Znaidi – *Austere Lights*  
Maryam Ala Amjadi – *Without Metaphors*  
Kathleen S. Burgess – *Gardening with Wallace Stevens*  
Jackie Oh – *Fahrenhate*  
Gary Lundy – *at I with*  
Haley Lasché – *Blood and Survivor*



Wendy Taylor Carlisle – *They Went to the Beach to Play*

Melinda Luisa de Jesús – *James Brown's Wig and Other Poems*

Tom Hibbard – *Memories of Nothing*

Kath Abela Wilson – *Driftwood Monster*

Barbara Jane Reyes – *Nevertheless, #She Persisted, Number 3*

Maria Damon, Adeena Karasick, Alan Sondheim –  
*Intersyllabic Weft*

Barbara Jane Reyes – *Nevertheless, #She Persisted, Number 2*

JJ Rowan – *so-called weather*

Jared Schickling – *Donald Trump in North Korea*

Eileen Tabios – *Making National Poetry Month Great Again!*

Allison Joseph – *Taking Back Sad*

Nina Corwin – *What to Pack for the Apocalypse*

More information on Locofo Chaps can be found at  
[www.moriapoetry.com](http://www.moriapoetry.com).

Locofo Chaps