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DANGEROUS INSTINCTS:
A COLLECTION OF POETRY

by

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B.A. University of South Florida, 2010

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
in the Department of English
in the College of Arts and Humanities
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Major Professors: Obi Nwakanma & Jocelyn Bartkevicius

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ABSTRACT

Dangerous Instincts is a collection of poems unified thematically by recurring and interstitial questions of the wilderness, the natural sciences - particularly astrophysics - the occult, and the mythic universe. These poems explore the mystical implications of the natural world and its meaning in the aesthetic consciousness, particularly in a highly secular century. Implied is the poet's self-discovery and search for the divine. The collection emerges, not simply as interpretation, but a means of coming to terms with the fear of and compulsion to question the universe, and through those questions find illumination in the ordinariness of lived life and in the mystery and magic of complex phenomena. As a whole, the work is largely lyrical; occasionally it calls upon forms such as the villanelle and ekphrasis as deliberate formal poetic experiments. Sometimes the images are familiar recreations of creation myths and forest fires, and sometimes they range into as private and esoteric a realm as occult rituals, Scottish fairytale, and quantum entanglement.

Dangerous Instincts is divided into five sections that explore the physical realm in terms of distances: from outward to inward, from heights to depths, and from beyond the speaker's understanding to intrinsically self-reflexive poems written to amplify my notion that at the heart of poetry is myth.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to the editors of the following publications where poems from this collection have been placed, sometimes in very different forms, during the process of composing this thesis:

OrionMagazine.org—“Frontier” *Forthcoming*

Animal: A Beast of a Literary Magazine—“Taxonomy”

The Louisville Review—“What They Don’t Tell You About September”

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NASCENT

I was in my senior English class in high school when I first encountered “The Writing Life” by Annie Dillard. I had at the time finally met a teacher who cared about the student's personal development of reading and writing. Our mission after cracking open the paperback was to find a passage with which we connected, that appealed to us as a writer, and to model a creative project after. Our project could be anything from collage, to response essay, to sculpture. I was particularly enthralled by the chapter where Dillard imagines herself in her one room writing cottage, beating back the lion on her desk with a whip and chair, channeling the ring master to make a metaphor of taming the writing. This was also my first semester with an art class, and I wanted to include original art, however I didn't think I could draw a lion, so I stuck with the opening chapter.

“Do not hurry; do not rest.” The opening quote from Goethe set the stage for Dillard to comment on how a piece unravels. She begins, “The line of words is a miner's pick,” but for me it was an oak. I was scrawling lines of poetry across a page—probably Sexton's, if I recall anything about myself from high school—and it took the form of a tree. The lines that formed the outline of the tree were made of words and unraveled at the top into leaves. I worked in watercolor, as it was in my nature to be ambitious and mix media—something I should have been more aware of when my writing began. I had been writing in journals since early middle school-- my closet was full of sealed shoeboxes, which were full of rubber-banded journals-- but it wasn't until late in high school that I started to write creatively and with purpose. I entered into writing as a means of dabbling in all fine arts. I was already a ten-year musician, experimenting painter, and avid DIY-er. I had no idea that I would start writing and, unlike most other artistic pursuits, be unable to stop. Throughout my

poetry, then, is a clear intent to peek inside esoteric spaces.

When in my first semester of thesis preparation, my director, Obi Nwakanma, asked me to find my *place of memory*, where I go mentally to write. The answer was easy, though I could not define it in place. I thought of the word *waldeinsamkeit*, German in its roots, but nearly untranslatable into English. The rough equivalent is “forest solitude/independence,” or “the feeling of being alone in the woods.” The word was first coined in a German Ludwig Tieck poem, but Emerson made no attempt to translate it for use as a title to one of his nineteenth century English poems. As a girl who willingly left Miami at the age of eight to follow her parents to the unsettled nucleus of Ocala, Florida, I was always surrounded by trees. I spent long days in grottos, scattering a settlement of forts around the neighborhood, hiding my belongings in oak hollows. I’d wade into swamp waters up to my ankles and find crawfish in the cypress knees.

But I also had a healthy fear of these places; my fear of the dark never left with age. I still have a catalog of horror stories about hand-sized banana spiders and their hissing sounds—If you didn’t know that spiders could hiss, consider that for a moment, spiders perched on their nearly invisible webs, spitting warnings like three-alarm sirens. They can spit too, about three feet. The poison won’t hurt you, but it’s the principle of the thing. Besides the spiders there were the ghost stories; we in the South have a solid respect for the supernatural. I’d imagine women hanged from tree branches, their hoop skirts swaying and the creaking sounds the ropes would make. We lived down the road from a Civil War cemetery and I can remember a particular empty feeling walking by the rows of cinder blocks, all unmarked, too close together. When I looked up the dates with my mother, we realized it was the years that tuberculosis hit particularly hard and infants started

dropping in droves. On the other side of the river from our house was a town called Red Level, perched quietly at the ankles of Crystal River's own nuclear power plant. They tested the sirens every Friday at noon. My first week home from school, I didn't get the memo, and so I curled up under the desk, unsure what to even do if a nuclear reactor were to enter meltdown. Somehow the three alarm sirens became my favorite sound.

My mother played a part in all of this—the interest in horror, the woods, the writing that came from it. When I was old enough to read, she would bike with me to the library once a week. We'd take turns picking out books, her choices always classic and thick, mine full of witches and wendigos. I read whatever was put in front of me, but she picked up on my interests quickly, and started altering her book list to fit it. She filled me with Anne McCaffrey and Tolkien, and spent hours with me at Staples taping together pages of my own world map when I decided I would write a fantasy epic myself, a pursuit that failed miserably after the creation of an epic landscape with no characters to populate it. I had a world religion and no practicing body. She let me have my fantasies far past the age where most parents rein a child into more prudent interests; at fifteen years old, when other girls were watching Dawson's Creek, I was reading *The Silmarillion* for the third time.

The same year I was painting trees composed of words, I found new fears in the physics classroom. I took to physics quickly—after realizing early on that I hated the tables and tiresome memorization of chemistry and biology, but loved the open-ended questions of physics—and it expanded my learning with fervor for the first time outside the humanities. I was wrapped in the laws of motion and heat transfer, and how they might begin to explain the supernatural. But I was displaced wholly by astrophysics, the study of physics in the cosmos and the attempt to unlock

questions of creation and time. Where once the forests and their fantasies provided me with all the answers, I started to realize the vacuum of space only gave me more questions. When I learned about thermodynamics and energy conservation, I wanted to use them to prove the existence of ghosts; when I realized we have not been able to observe gravity itself, but only its affects— that it is omnipresent essentially— gravity became my god. My physics teacher, Dr. Gregory Cruz, was paramount in developing the writer I became, counterintuitive though that may seem.

During my senior year, I began meeting Dr. Cruz before and after school to discuss questions I had about the universe—if it doesn't have an edge, what shape is it? How is time a construct? Then I asked what could have come before time and light, and it was at that point that Dr. Cruz canceled our meetings on school grounds and spoke with me over email, or would meet for coffee. I'd found myself asking questions that bordered on religious doctrine, that as a teacher in a public school, my mentor wasn't allowed to answer. So he tutored me outside class and gave me assignments, usually open-ended prompts toward a discovery, and he'd provide me with readings for either side of an argument: Galileo veruses Hawking on the observation of time, for instance. He never once told me what to believe, but he taught me how to find my own truths. When I began looking at colleges, deciding whether I was going to pursue a writing career or one in physics, Dr. Cruz gave me the movie *Contact*. In the movie, Jodie Foster's character finds evidence of extraterrestrial life and is sent to make first contact. When she witnesses the new planet, she exclaims, "No words to describe it. Poetry! They should've sent a poet!" Dr. Cruz urged me to pursue both interests. He said, "Physics needs poets, it needs people who can make all of this mean something." And that is what I set out to do.

It turns out taking more physics than required in high school makes college courses cumbersome. I was placed immediately back in introductory physics, my first lecture, “*this is inertia.*” I left on day one. I wasn't able to comp out of the introductory classes and I had no patience to sit through three years of redundant information. Do not hurry, but do not rest. So I settled for an unclaimed (read: unavailable) minor in astronomy, and electives in special topics in physics. While I didn't keep my second major in physics through college, I did continue to explore on my own. The free information lectures of Neil deGrasse Tyson, Michio Kaku, and Carl Sagan have informed my studies and my creative work well into the present. Through my devotion to physics I started to form nearly-religious views of the world. I was raised in an open-minded Christian household. The manners and the morals stuck, the god-head didn't. I had not found a deity that I could have faith in, though my parents did let me try. I dabbled in the rituals and epic tales of the Catholic God, but was kicked out of catechism for pointing out inaccuracies in the text. I tested Wiccanism, but they were too mothering for my tastes. But through our continued emails after high school, Dr. Cruz—himself a pastor—and I explored the concepts of gravity and light as deific forces in the universe. The combination of grand force and *laissez-faire* clockwork tinkering seemed more like something I could call a god: a force.

It is disquieting, though, how quickly my work moved from religion to dark, ritual occultism in poetry. Where once I wrote poems about speaking to the trees and hearing songs in the stars, now I summon ancient myths and chaotic forces to make sense of my place in the universe. Carl Sagan said, “A new consciousness is developing which sees the earth as a single organism and recognizes that an organism at war with itself is doomed.” Through the mixed media of theoretical physics and

occultism, I have realized how small we are in the grand cosmic structure, and how incapable we are of conceiving the scale on which a god most likely would reside. I began a deep fascination and affair with the mystic scientists and writers—Agrippa, Magnus, Heraclitus, Ptolemy, Paracelsus, Goethe, Newton, Blake, Rimbaud, Yeats, Galileo, Faraday. The introduction of these figures into a mind already burdened by questioning the physical and natural universe, is the basis of my search for the divine and a mythical narrative in my writing.

OEUF OR OEUVRE

The work of Polish photographer Laura Makabresku has influenced my work during the thesis writing process. Makabresku's photography summons the wilderness with a fairytale appreciation. Her work invites the outdoors in. The photos feature foxes, deer, and birds, all making their way into our homes and beds, slowly allowing their presence a place in the private space. Makabresku's work is dark in a way that is inviting, explores death with fondness, and ritualizes the animal instinct. I first found her photographs coincidentally near the time I was reading Louise Glück 's *The Wild Iris*. Glück 's work brought me back to the first sparks of my own writing. *The Wild Iris* uses repeated prayers, Vespers and Matins, the Catholic morning and night prayers, and in this way Glück likens the poet to the gardener, and the gardener to a part of the spiritual and feminine trinity. The coupling of Makabresku's intimate wilderness and Glück 's trinity of the priestess gardener/poet/feminine earth have mingled in my poetry and let me pull from my words a reverence for the chaos of the natural world.

There is fear in this collection, too. These words find a space to welcome the unknown, and yearn to explore its darkest reaches. I learned early and often the inherent danger in the co-mingling of nature and humanity. As much as we assume we are a natural part of this world, we have rendered ourselves foreign and parasitic with our skyscrapers and networks of highways. We have created a new ecosystem. Too early I realized how it felt to take a life, when I trailed a duckling down a sidewalk— giggling— and missed my step. I've never broken a bone in my body, but I remember the hollow crack the bird's bones made; it returns now like a hangover when I feel any guilt, a heavy crack somewhere in the back of my skull where memory is stored. I watched a mushroom turn inside-out the stomach of my mother's dog one month, and the stomach of my boyfriend the next; while I waited on hospital tests to clear him, I cursed him for eating wild plants. Perhaps the struggle with the significant other in this collection arises from the inability for the poet to fully homogenize with her surroundings; the most primitive, instinctual relationship continuously in entropic flux. How, then, can we begin to search for the divine?

NOEIN

Sometime after I'd already decided not to pursue a career in physics, I stumbled on the field of noetics. From the Greek *noēsis* / *noētikos*, meaning inner wisdom, noetics is an interdisciplinary field that brings objective scientific tools and techniques together with subjective inner knowledge to study the full range of human experiences. Noetics is still considered a fringe science, in the developmental stages, but it seemed tailor-made to suit my peculiar set of interests. The basic

principle of noetics is the concept that all matter in the universe has mass. If thought exists, it must therefore have a mass, even if miniscule. Noeticists find themselves studying the power of prayer, the power of a large collection of thought all aimed in one-direction and the ability for that matter to collect and make a physical impact on the events of the universe. Other studies include the theory of quantum entanglement, that any two particles that come into contact are intrinsically linked henceforth, and how that might affect the ability for twins to know when the other is emotionally wrought, even at long distances, or the ability for a spouse to sense when their partner has passed.

But science currently has no way to empirically profess these findings; because their core principle cannot be measured, it relies on faith, and that alone could classify it as a religion. Uche Nduka, a Nigerian poet, wrote, “How can I say in words/ things I didn't/ understand through words?/... on behalf of whom/ do stars dissect the night?/... who surrender to water/ a portion of a salt hill?” Nduka's question is one I struggle with constantly in the inception of poetry. How can we write, when we know the goal of poetry is to say the unsayable in as clear a way as possible? This seemed to be what Mr. Cruz was talking about when he said that physics needs poets, and so quite a few poems in this collection will reference research of this nature.

I found Brenda Hillman to be an invaluable asset in my attempt to say the unsayable. Her poetry also finds scientific roots and even explores the mythic. Her poem “Time Problem” in particular helped me learn to shape the way I speak about physics in poetry, for an audience that may include neither physicists nor poets. She writes, “Hawking says if you back up far enough/ it's not even/ an issue; time falls away into/ 'the curve' which is finite,/ boundaryless. Appointment book,/ soprano telephone--/ (beep END beep went the microwave).” I learned from Hillman the

art of acknowledging the impossible and likening it to the ordinary, the “time problem” of the microwave and the appointment book, not having “enough of it.” Hillman's essay “Cracks in the Oracle Bone” also allowed me to accept that “complexity and simplicity are not mutually exclusive.” She taught me that I could render a poem about Crowley's Invocation to Mars comprehensible to someone with little to no knowledge in the occult. I can say through words, now, things I did not come to understand through words.

FACING THE ABYSS

Exploring alternative religion and myth gave me entry into subjects that related my personal narrative to the world of contemporary poetry. I picked up from my mother the habit of studying the Caesars and the Czars, and that early learning in hierarchy led to a fascination with Egyptian, Norse, and Celtic myth. My public schooling naturally led me to Greek myth. The collection features illustrations at each section's opening as homage to Blake's illustrated texts. When Blake illuminated the page with poetry and surreal graphics, he made the sublime come alive with visceral attention to mood. By incorporating illustration I hope to marry the sacred and profane; these illustrations—mysticism, alchemy, geometry, astronomy— converge the scientific and the noetic. With the coupling of illustration and text, the collection becomes a sort of colloquial baroque, that is, as Lisa Ross Spar defines it, a trance state between simplicity and excess.

As a young female writer, I don't have access to the topics I find most compelling in other poets' works: Sharon Old's dealings with breast cancer, menopause, and divorce in *Stag's Leap*,

Brenda Hillman's issues with motherhood. I don't yet have the hindsight to write about my own parents in a compelling way, and frankly they've plagued me with a healthy relationship and no siblings. So I'm left with the issues my generation faces together.

We are the middle child, stuck somewhere between the laissez-faire parenting of the baby boomers and the politically correct anxiety of the new millennium. We have no definition, I'm not even sure our generation has a definitive name. My aim with myth is to find new meaning and context in the archaic and to place ourselves in the scope of history, to find meaning in the dichotomy of our times.

My goal in writing this collection is to use my personal narrative and experience to bridge the schism between science and mythos in much the same way I learn to close the spaces between myself and the other. The collection questions intimacy and the meaning of closeness, whether on a grand or miniscule scale-- the poet seeks the intimacy of the divine to make sense of her fears, she seeks intimacy in the lover but questions the result of that closeness. While these poems perne in a Yeatsian gyre, they resist intimacy for fear of confined spaces, of losing the definitive nature of the self. These poems are private and personal, but cracked open for the reader. These poems move from outward to inward, from heights to depths, they continue to move closer to the speaker until they are inside her, until there is no discernible space between the speaker and the other, nor the speaker and reader, a complete entropy. I want this collection to give the sense of confessions seeing light for the first time, with dust in their eyes, and truth in their mouths, reaching out for whatever hand opened them wide.

Homo Sum

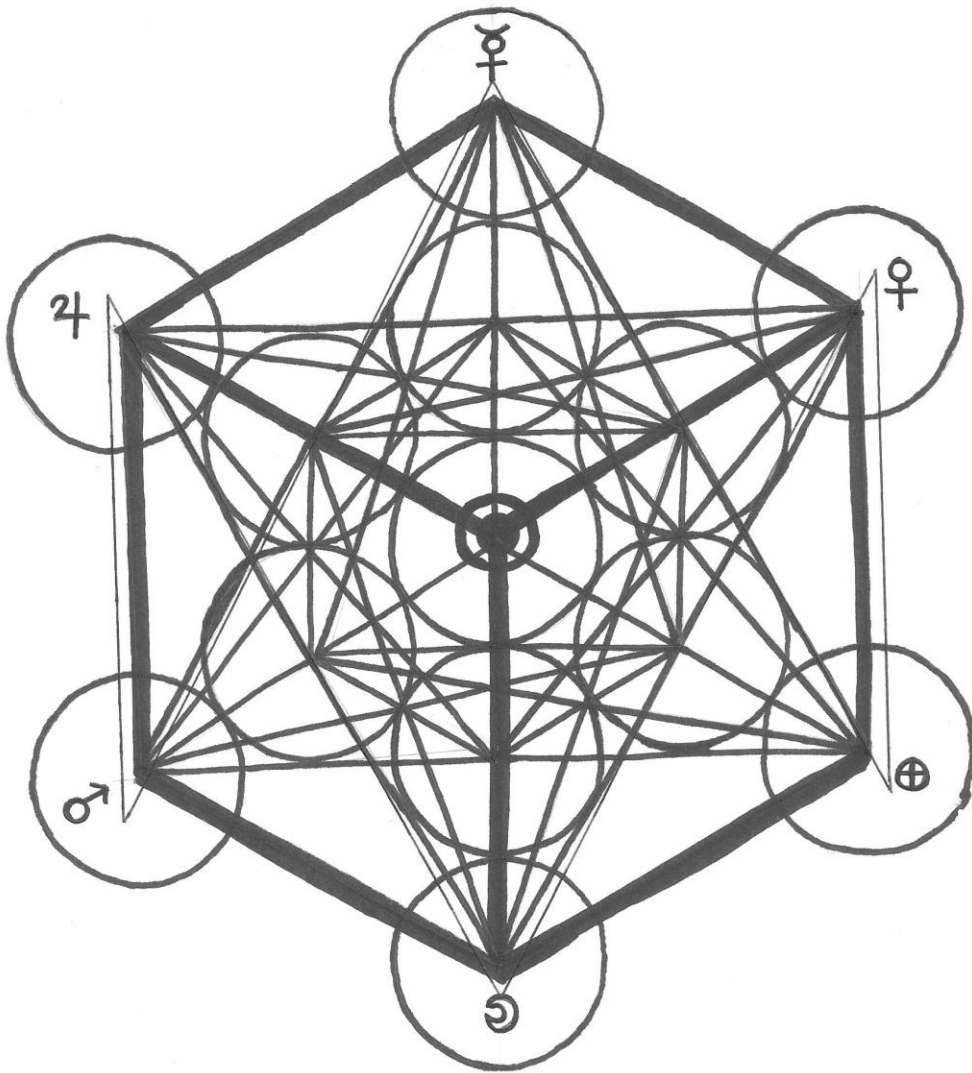
we are in a bat house—all
tiny beating hearts close

together so rapidly
our bodies swell and hum

I.

"Until the day break and the shadows flee away."

Song of Solomon 2:17



Genesis

14 March 2013
Higgs Boson positively identified

In the beginning were your gods, not mine.
Yours, with their tenebrous consonants
crouched in chaos and dark. They formed us
from soft clay, you and I, gave me
ears that hear Erebus in an old house's din, you:
eyes of apotheosis. Your gods
have foul tempers and few promises—
they command the thunder, mimic the earthquake,
and mock the invisible world with its own shadow.
My gods do not have chimeric names, they do not speak
through smoke or delirium,
and I can hear their absence in my organs
the intake of breath and its muted circulation
simplified by needles and microscopes,
their prophets drawing red and purple diagrams.
They appear at impossible distances, a fist clenching
the Pillars of Creation, they exhale stardust
and collapse into the waists of stellar hunters.
They jettison particles under the crust of Switzerland,
speak through the collision of force and immovable object.
They divide in my abdomen, split, and form a new heart
new pulse that grows inside me, tethered to me
and now I am bound to godship.
But how will I describe the depth of shadows?
How will I look into a child's eyes and explain
the air she consumes isn't rich with ancient
and impossible mystery? How will I
pretend you aren't made of the same earth as I am?
Beyond flesh, beyond cells, we revolve
in smaller and smaller circles until still
our quarks are coiled in the umbra
still stirring from the vibrations at the beginning of the universe.

Another Earth

Did we live in a constellation? Did it explode?

-Carla Harryman

What if we live in some distant planet's night sky?
Some other Earth, whose beings point to the stars and say, "look,
I've found *Soleres*, it's rising to the left of Andromeda."
Would we be woven into their mythologies? *Solerian*, sorcerer companion
of Gallahad, tucked next to Vulpecula, his familiar in life. Perhaps
we were given some tragic title after death in battle,
maybe a maiden pines for us on some bygone ship, the myth
given to the reason the wind sings through cracks in the wood.
What would the zodiac of our Sun say? Would it dictate:
"Those born under *Soles, the Octopus*," (I imagine our constellation
with eight arms, like our milky way, her bands unfolding
like a Turkish map), "are wrought with indecisive tendencies,
always faltering between the land and the sea. Romantic,
though with a yearning for what will harm them. Punctual."
Is there some other beach, on some other rock, where we can go
to watch our moons and our stars collide with another neighborhood of dust?
And if we fall into the sun, collapse to a singularity,
our debris will gather, birth new stars, their cells dividing into new breaths.

We Everlasting Gods

When Ares shed you from his skin
the earth suffered a chilling blow, the same
I smoothed from your calloused palms.

I was mortal, swimming
in the earthly sky. You spoke
of Mars and we lay together

under the Venus transit, bound
by mythology, tracing Achilles'
Shield on your lips. That night I felt more

like an oracle than a mouth—
what drips out of me
is surely made of stars:

Pleiades, Hyades, Orion
May to November, we are
the heliacal rising.

I can hear your war beating, terror and dread
chained to your chariot lips. I am
the daisy tucked into your bayonet.

How can I, three thousand years
distant, find words to calm this battle,
to keep coins from your eyes,

this conjunction of ankles
and arrows, you tugging
at the firmament's edge?

Frontier

Chelyabinsk Airburst: Friday, February 15, 2013.

When we stopped sending man into space, space
reached down to us. In July, we rolled Atlantis into port, in Florida,
where even exploration goes to die. We didn't have the decency
to let her sink, like her namesake, into an ocean.

But from some cold corner a colossus
splits the Russian sky as passively as a torn seam,
pelts us with red hot stones and metal gods—
they howl in raptured free fall, a Blitzkrieg of soundwaves,

their fire-tailed meteors devoured by air.
We collect the shattered window glass as carelessly as
the injured, forget how thin is the membrane
between -11°C in the Ural Region and our ignorance of the brim

of space. We look skyward now, imagine the craned
necks of brachiosauruses, are reminded of our impermanence
when a tail of firelight hangs in 300 miles of permeable atmosphere.
And no one died, not even after DA14's sublunary flirt with Australia;

no resurrected Mayan came to tear out our clockwork hearts. Will we,
when cometISON makes its perihelion approach, concern
ourselves with its closeness to our star? Will we pause
in the moon's penumbra as it passes over our sun?

And to the 52-year old woman whose spine
was fractured on meteorite impact, I want to ask:
Did you feel the cold let inside of you? Did he extend
a hand with mercy from the corners of space?

Light

For Gregory Cruz
after Liz Robbins' "Heat"

the edge of light means dusk, pigment, crystal, offering—
light is a pagan god—anticipates shadows
ignites a match—we mirror-made, of prism scattering, whores
turn their red lamps on, ghosts not yet shooed
from theater dark, scintillate the biologist's
text: bioluminescence, phosphorescence, angler fish
hunting at hydrothermal vents—oh low cal beer,
oh cigarette's cherry, oh candling of eggs,
oh lungs, oh head high of blue dream, all blueberry
and haze—Aphrodite sets fire to the human eye, the mouth's
fluorescent bulb, Tesla's violent coil, kindling,
magnifying glass, firestarters—lanterns leading children
into bogs, Jupiter's Io, her volcanoes quiet in telescopes,
what spectral wavelength, green on chlorophyll,
a disturbance, green on solar wind, a terminus—or
children tossed up by father's hands, tucked into bed
sheets, out, divinity in a nightlight—or discovery,
girls in nightgowns chanting, balancing on many
tiny pairs of fingers a feather, anathema.

The Sun Salutation

How does the sun stir in you that offense
against contrariness. I cannot seem to thaw

with the thistles. My limbs were meant
to curl inward, a sanctuary of winter dark

conceives the sleet that stills my blood;
the bear's eye warns me to sleep.

I do not want to stray. How can you,
like the lions, grow to love the midday sun?

How can you savor the broad blue—
in my hallucinations your heads lob back

on fractured necks, scrape the azimuth
like tilting sunflowers. The grey daze

of March, and the seasons:
They do not n me change.

Jumper

I lean off tall buildings to resist
my body's tug toward a solid
ground, let vertigo abandon
a dizzying hand, tipping nearer
the suffering point on catpaws,
let the tension of a void bend
my vision in redshift.

I curl back in the passenger's seat
turn off headlights and ride
through horizons, my head
spinning in quasar circles, I bow
I yaw into the vortex of carousels, crane
my throat near the vacuous edge
of cliffs and ladders.

I climb down and into myself,
cradle into a stillness, a throbbing
where even in the shade I am drawn
down by my weight toward that constant
gravity of knowing nothing
for certain except that at any moment
I could fall—

so when I arch across a man's lap
I feel it, the centripetal draw
at my pelvis, lifting me from
the carriage of dark, higher
still as swallows. When I gaze
into that abyss his eyes tell
how far I could plunge.

If I must be tethered, let me
at least feel the helplessness
of falling.

21 Grams

what can you fit in 21 grams?
the dark space between two clasped hands,

the smell of your mother's hair like fresh earth
or what wildfires leave behind, the warm membrane

of fresh laid eggs, the dog-eared folds of a woman's laugh lines,
rounded vowels and the cold sugar of them,

the taste of tin in a whiskey drinker's mouth
that tells you there must be a god—or at least temptation—

the complete extinction of your preference for salt
or was it exhaustion, the sweat on your upper lip,

the deflation of a horse's lungs, their suede-boned
faces nuzzling, raised pink nail tracts fainting

an afterimage, the three alarm siren wail
mocked by your German Shepard or a saxophone.

Three quarters of an ounce vanishes in an exhale
but still manages to carry a body in a bed in a room

on a rock suspended by the mobile of space, which pernes
around the void regardless of new breath drawn

regardless of when we cross the abyss.

II.

*"The ocean is more ancient than the mountains,
and frightened with the memories and the dreams of time."*

-H.P. Lovecraft



Selkie

In this city, everything drowns:
wedding dresses stick to the knees, libraries soak
to the third shelf, compost floats like paper

boats, and daughters are named after hurricanes.
While lighthouses look over their shoulders
and become lost, she's loosening the soil

with her toes. Her sentences sound starved
of the bird-grey rain, the delirium
of comparing the wings of buzzards to bats,

to beetles; cataloging the fauna birthed by hail. She drinks
twelve glasses of water a day, and now all
her syllables sound like canoes. She waits—

it's commonplace now, each storm a pattern, a premonition:
she was born in the eye of Andrew. All of her syntax
dripping, all of her lovers salt-drunk. She wades in the Shetland shoreline

offering water to parched sailors, drags them out to riptides
to see what their voices sound like under the waves.

In midsummer, when her skin rolls out to sea, the fog goes with it.

Virgilio Tojetti

Ponce de Leon Hotel, Flager, St. Augustine

I imagine you brush the violet of grapes
 onto the ceiling in
much the way that lovers pluck fruit with their teeth
from the fingers of bare-legged girls—
 on your back for hours
 arm pursuing the finger of god.

The crown molding begs your oils
 to mimic the summer horizon:
 ship sails and the burning morning fog.

Do you envy us our upright world?
 The emptiness of our skies, our stars stapled
 to the matte blue of evening.
Do you ache when you reach the floor again,
 sense the weight of all that blood pumping
 up veins of ladders?

How even could you answer? Your voice barred by the sharp angles
 of speech, by the way we force our words
out
 not up, and trust they do not fall
 flat. Do you reach for a woman's cheek
 as if she were your still life?
 What frustration
 at tucking a red curl behind her ear;
nothing in our vertical axis stays put.

I imagine you mourn us our peripheries
 the edges of our unpainted days
 never edging
 your domed ceilings
 your amethyst and wine
 seamless with Tiffany glass.
When a mistress hanged herself from your rotunda
did they look past her legs swinging, see the cheeks of cherubs?
Was her shadow at least dipped red? Her lips stained from tasting grapes?

and over and over

why not him. jacket and tie. jack and coke.
a stud. a suit. a swagger. a flirt. pinky up. hip out.
then against a wall. a slice. a taste. a piece. why not have a go.
test drive the car. why not in the car. backseat.
backbooth. arch your back. on your back.
hoist a leg. handprint on glass. what do you like. tell me when.
a shiver. a quiver. a moan. why not. why not the shower.
why not the bar. sex on the beach. slippery nipples. orgasms. blowjobs.
sex with an alligator. the drink. then drunk. then trashed. then with
god-knows-who and his *hey babys*. his hotel suite. his
how many glasses of scotch. then why not. then hard. then fast. then wet.
then top. then bottom. then... what? no. then nothing.
no back door. no rim job. no *would you just*. no dirty talk. no daddy no
just the tip. but why not a relationship. why not emotions.
why not *my you have lovely biceps, let's fuck*.
why not empty your balls. why not go suck off jack daniels again. fuck it.
suck it. blow it. tease it. push it. strap it.
load it. cock it. pull it. name it. surf and turf it.
why not afternoon delight. why not morning wood.
wake up sex. make up sex. break up sex.
are you up sex. waterbed waltz. why not notches in the bedpost.
why not adam and his luscious apple. my sin. his snake.
why not sin. why not unfold. open your legs. give in. give up.
get laid. why not loudly. why not softly. no. but not quietly.
in lieu of innuendo. the French make it elegant. *baiser en levrette*.

tailler une pipe. enveloping. fold in. contort. why not orgy.
 devil's game. threesome. foursome. why not daisy chain.
 why not lick. and twist. and bend. and writhe. tighten.
 bite. scratch. and ram. and nail. and hammer. and bang.
 and bone. and plow. and screw. and fuck.
 and offend. why not insult. why not lewd. why not c u n t.
 and clit. and cock. why not tits. why not dirty.
 why not reckless. road head. in bathroom stalls. in your mother's
 house. in public. in class. fingers under skirts. between legs.
 in mouths. on a roof. in ecstasy. on ecstasy.
 on weed. on shrooms. on coke. on mdma. lsd. pcp. dmt.
 with mary molly and lucy. why not smoke after.
 awkward after. talk after. sneak out after. walk of shame. sex hair. excuses.
 then slut. skank. strumpet. then tramp. then trollop. then tart. vixen.
 floozie. hussy. harlot. wench. jezebel. then whore. my whorship.
 why not worship. why not rosicrucian. why not petals oh my lover. hung
 like jesus on a cross. why not prayer. why.
 when I get on my knees it is not to pray.
 it is forgetting. it is falling. it is failing. and folly. a farce.
 why not a warm body. why not curling. why not tangled.
 sheets. legs. lies. why not escape. why not replace.
 why not compensate. just gone. just down. just out.
 just doesn't give an actual fuck.
 a torrent. a mess. a wild thing. why not him. why not her.
laissez I say. don't speak I say. oil and water I say. over. and over. and
 over. sure I say. why not I say. why not.

His Skin

He's ribbed and wrinkled as shells or socks, fickle as mercury in her vials,
entropic, steeped like Earl Gray

milky as his cataracts, the spent silver of spoons, polished, soiled
again, carefully oiled as old teak, cold

once taut as sharkskin, now traitorous as a grave
marker, wavering as the Midwest skies, delicate

as the grey matter that distinguishes between
piscine and serpentine, the ghost skins they leave behind

as if a life of knife fights and motorcycle accidents,
dodging bullets on the hills of Korea could keep him from waning,

keep the bandages from peeling back his thin, grey flesh
in layers like vellum, bleeding and transparent as calfskin.

Algol

I can feel him in the other room
the space around me concave, can trace
his footsteps from the floor lamp to the armchair.
Behind his occulter, my chest burns
with the heat of his relative closeness,
my teeth and jaw and collarbone all hum,
my bones vibrato when he yawns. I am bombarded
by the taste of him in the kitchen air, my cooking
all nutmeg and his scotch. All points of him are
plotted in a line on the vein that runs from wrist
to shoulder, grooved and etched like fishbones.
He stands just outside my periphery and pulls me
spinning in concentric circles;
when my eyes shut, I feel his open
and see everything as if underwater, in binary,
warped and blue-hued, from behind the wrong lens.

Endure

I crave the brute, brute heart
in a way Plath only mocked— taunt men
in pubs twice my size and herald the topless
marching women who *still aren't asking for it*.
And if you want a good time, then fuck
a Fascist. You can taste the doctrine
in their sweat; their hands calloused
from the axe, but cashmere on your hip.
Cooed like a kitten I purr, I curl in the lap
and lap at authoritarian milk.

I anticipate the bruises, handprints,
subtle watermarks your fingers leave
on my thighs. I measure them
with my hands, can't seem to stretch thumb
and pinky far enough. You're embedded
in the galactic cluster teeth marks on my shoulders
but yours are painted with freckles
like stars trailing my vision, I still see
spots on every bare arm, and canvas
my own yellowed skin.

We are beautiful in the way of Thetis'
ravaging. With her silver feet bound
she became flame and water, lion and serpent,
still she subdued and twice had a warrior
between her legs. Someone once as soft as water,
she birthed Achilles, anointed him in fire
and war, and outlived him. That's the point.
While these bruises molder I think of Thetis
carrying his ashes in an urn, and I press
my thumb into the purple.

III.

*“Every man carries with him through life a mirror,
as unique and impossible to get rid of as his shadow.”*

W.H. Auden



House

Sun in Cancer
Kitchen, Early Morning
June, 82° F
Clear Skies, Sunny

She will cook him eggs in the morning
sunny side up, the yolk as dawn colliding
in the pan. The ochre stain of day
will make her forget his knuckle, its
prints on the drywall, the nausea
of the cry she swallowed.

Moon in Pisces
Patio, Late Evening
July, 74°F
Partly Cloudy, First Quarter Moon

Her index finger traces circles in the water
the ripples catching light
on their crests. While he sleeps, she will outline
the moon with a damp finger
until she can no longer sense her bones
the rotation becomes routine.

Sagittarius Rising
Master Bedroom, Morning
August, 87°F
Overcast

Feet behind his ribs, she will tuck her pelvis
under, mock a discus thrower's curved
back. She will be a weighted pendant
in his hands, will bite a hundred small
o's on his chest, will remind herself to surrender
if only to feel this pendulum sway.

Mercury in Gemini
Foyer, Dawn to Dusk
September, 76°F
Partly Cloudy

She will nuzzle at his ears in the morning and by noon
be disconnected, ignore his shadow passing
through doorframes, padded footsteps down hallways.
Without a word pounce back into his lap at evening,
suckle his fingers. Instead of questions, he will read her myths
until she falls asleep on his thigh.

Venus in Cancer
Bathroom, Dawn
October, 67° F
Chance of Rain

She will lick her thumb before pressing it
to the cut, his jawbone wet with tiny deltas
of blood through stubble. She will rest
her palm on his other cheek, hold in the heat
he resonates with eyes slammed shut. Razors will dull.
His blood will clot. They will heal.

Mars in Leo
Car, Late Afternoon
November, 61°F
Cloudy

The timbre of her voice will waver
on the phone. She will be flame terse, will not
give him the time to protest. She will be
their second-hand, tick off grievances
so that by dinner, over an uncomfortable course
of lamb, she can hiss and smoke and let him snuff her out.

Jupiter in Gemini
Office, Early Evening
December, 45°F
Clear Skies

A great vast space on her desk will hold darkness
as the inside of a bell, will ring with the taxes
untouched for months, eclipsed by stacks
of thrice-read novels and tea-stained journals.
She would measure their debts with a hand-drawn
scale, if only she could spare the effort.

Saturn in Capricorn
Bedroom, Night
January, 27°F
Light Showers

When they shut their lamps off and bed
his shoulders are shrugged away
from her; she will assume the worst, will coil
in on herself until she's wound up
all muscle and nervous breaths. He will coax her
all the next day to unravel, but she will remain stone.

Uranus in Capricorn
Living Room, Evening
February, 32°F
Snow Showers

She will be unable to make sense of his verbs
when he packs his clothes, his toothbrush,
into a duffle bag. She will remember asking for this
but not why he listened. She will try to revise
her own words but he will just repeat them
repeat them as if they mean something.

Neptune in Capricorn
Backyard, Witching Hour
March, 50°F
Clear, Bright

His absence will be a cowl around her neck. Sickened
by the ground, she will fixate her eyes through a spyglass.
She will track Neptune's orbit as it crosses Pluto's,
their dance in the coldest parts of space. She will
write him letters about their passing;
later she'll drown them in the birdbath.

Pluto in Scorpio
Kitchen, Noon
April, 68°F
Thunderstorms

There will be a pot boiling over on the stove, herbs scattered across a cutting board, and cheesecloth bleeding on top of a cut in her palm. For a moment she will consort with magic, hold her hand over the steaming pot, aware that any slip could turn a meal into a séance.

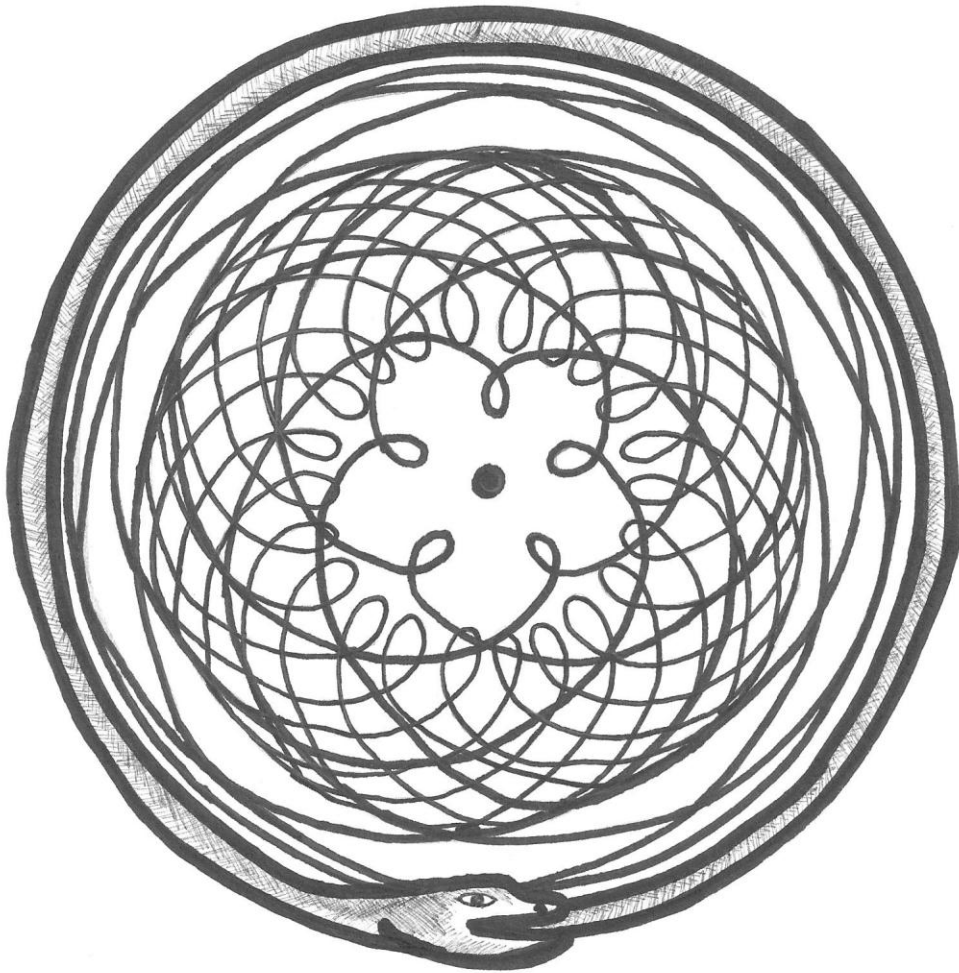
Aquarius Descending
Empty House, Morning
May, 73°F
Clear Skies

Before she carries the last box to the truck, she will list all the ways she's been altered. She will compare herself to a moon, this house a lightless night. She will learn to chart new orbits and to return to past homes. She will forget her list when her fingers find old dents in the walls.

IV.

"You will be alone with the gods, and the nights will flame with fire."

-Charles Bukowski



Fettered

*quantum entanglement occurs when particles
interact physically and become separated.
the result of the interaction binds the two
particles with the same mechanical properties.*

Decades of mechanics and carpenters make it so
oil and sawdust run through his veins,

make it so that his ears turn forge hot
if she steps into the room, starts a spark

in his engine—a purring somewhere
in his uneasy fingers—that beats

like a throttle in his throat. Once she brushed
her hand across his knee. For three days

we had to cool him with a bellows to set him
back into hardened steel.

Flux

You tinker with the mater of astrolabes,
searching for a language to translate this
silence—the ecliptic, the nadir,
they cannot detail a clumsy tongue.
Star-taker, we're diminishing:
the blinking of printheads, the purple
of toy UFOs, your eyes closing,
a lighthouse beacon open, moon
on wave crests, firelight,
planes, shut, a cloud,
low battery filaments, the quiet
pulse of coals, the train headlights
through fog, through rain clicks
a heart slowing a heroin low,
a sonogram—I feel the alpha pulse
of modernity, the collapse of blackholes
and their inability to reach you.
All this energy wasted on communicants;
you have your own event horizon, a heat
bred in eyelid vibrations. I cannot be the starlight,
you see, those nine worlds
in your oracle eyes, can never be
more than faint paintings
on cave walls, whispering in a dead language.

You Could Hear God Humming in the Leaves

August 1st, Lughnasadh

I stand in the ash of your resurrection—
the hem of my skirt blackens
above the kindling, smeared with my desire
to etch new landscapes into your wicker skin:

Forest fire. Funeral pyre. Burning man.
With all these blistered footsteps always
barefoot, you couldn't hear the smoldering grains
spelling out your name; you couldn't take it, canaries drowning

in coal mines, charred handprints sticking to the window
panes, the sleeping breathing whispering of the ground
around you pleading to burn. You harvest your own ashes,

palm them into new shapes. I taste the cinerary statues—
faint, hot apples, burned wood. You were reaped from the air
the way your ghosted burnscar haunted the walls
for a while, because we only loved in doorways.

Some Men are Made of Fire

1547

Four hundred years before the day of my birth, Ivan's fire
burnt Moscow. Every morning my wrists crack like black oak—
we are the same wooden houses.

Now each June when lightning touches the dry California earth
I incandesce, the bark that begs to burn. I seek your summer heat,
your matchstick lungs, you, fire starter.

1963

In midsummer Saigon a monk self-immolates. His chakras stem
five foot flames from the folds of his orange robes
which wither as he in full lotus blackens. I know his resolve

to embrace the flame, for some part of you
to survive. In protest of the wailing women, the bloodless
schism, the journalists silenced, his heart refuses to burn.

64

Nero's masterwork was a six day fire, the seventh brought Rome to
a pause. Through the blaze his lyre wailed, and in his sweetest voice
he recited *The Sack of Ilium*, Rome was burning like Troy.

They say he blamed the fire on the Christians, dipped them in wax,
burned them as inverted candles in the streets. You could smell Auschwitz forming
in the ashes, their wicks rising like beak and feather out of Bibles and bloodlines.

1470

In mulled ecstasy, Polonus, after two ladles of wine
and at least two women, retched a stream of flame
and was consumed. So much for being touched

by the tinder-fingers of a Titan. Did he feel
the flame in his gut, a tether to the liver as it's plucked
from his Promethean flesh?

1871

I palm the scorched bricks of the Chicago library, imagine I can smell
the nicotine reek of dresses on fire down Michigan Avenue; all the millionaires flensed,
their prohibition alcohol turning speakeasies into accelerants.

Think of the libraries: used books curling, their bindings unglued
Tolstoy's icy deaths become ironic. It's a shame the Ferris wheel didn't stand yet
I bet you could watch the whole city adust from the top.

79

Children's clenched fists still dot the pumice walls of Pompeii
smothered in their mother's arms, the space between them filled with ash.
The city was littered with red and purple fabrics

from the festival of the fire god, their fibers billowing worship
toward the sky when Vesuvius cracked its red smile in response.
He left Pompeii a temple of quiet votum, *Pax Romana*.

1864

I want to travel Sherman's path of scorched earth from Richmond to Savannah. Cotton singeing, crops cooking, the burning livestock screams—how distracting for a battle to smell like a cookout.

Did they leave his destruction as trail markers? The railroad beams wrapped neckties around all the pines, shackled in iron. Those prisoner trees witnessed his men singing *Glory, glory Hallelujah* as Atlanta smoldered behind them.

2012

Before I finish my Merlot, I know your composition has changed, you move like quiet embers, pulsing light of amber, your lips part and you are molten. Your eyes are an apocalypse, brimstone and rift.

I move my hand to your chest, absorb your heat.
I am hay, you are fire, and I would give you the dry earth
even just so you could burn it down.

Ritual

I finger the pleats in my skirt and regret my six-inch heels
at a standing mass, when Chrissy asks, “how long have you been
in the order?” and I know she means the Ordo Templi Orientis
but to be obnoxiously terse I say, “not long.” But I’m thinking order
as in *order of the universe*, in the same way I think of mass graves
at every black mass. Graves dug for gods who probably
don’t give a damn if I brought the white candles or the red, if the temple
faces west, if the Deacon is three steps from the altar and not more,
if I chose Satanists over Baptists (because at least the dark gods
don’t mind if I have birth control) and really, I don’t hear much
of the gnostic mass—which explains why at “*Ob Hymen, Hymenae*”
my hailing sign is to the left, not the right, and they probably
concluded some deep-seeded feminine flaw in that lapse; they’re very
into metaphor—then the priestess disrobes and holds a sword
from her thighs to her chin, and my god I see why Crowley would write
a religion around the ritual of sex. And the man I came with—
because of course I came with a man—played the beast in this ceremony
and when I heard him purify the room from behind a sheer curtain,
shouting in Latin, singing soft and soprano, I can only imagine myself
with a cold sword across *my* breasts—which of course will be white
will be like petals—and I’ve forgotten the mass graves and the order
of the universe and I can feel the ritual of dark blood pumping through my veins.

Consecration

I found a pentacle in the woods this morning,
made of sticks like limbs

five feet wide, waiting;
it almost breathes.

I know not to cross sigils, but this
is pregnant with alchemy, the dry

earth and flame, the branches
still smelling of woodfire

and prayer, cracked and black-
end like an oracle bone. I slip

off my jeans, pull the sweater
over my breasts and crawl

into the negative space, curl my toes
in the char

of wood. The air is still and tepid
as in the cavity of a mouth.

I stretch my limbs to the five points
to feel their tug at bones, ribs

that unhinge like a jaw.
I burn like wood.

What titan scooped us from the clay,
articulated our legs to stumble

into this grotto, gave us curiosity?
We've gone deaf asking questions

of the universe.
She does not respond.

Taxonomy

When I was born I was all fawn—
 cloven-toed, antlered and bent
throat to the stars—but my tongue
 marked me mollusk; my speech reeked
of brine. I didn't know whether I was bird
 or scaled, would feel around my torso
yoga-bellied in cobra pose. But when a boy
 first touched my breasts I became owl-feathered
and my mother could no longer drag a brush
 through my feral hair. Wild child,
my hands lost themselves in math equations, but curled
 around the chalice like a scorpion's
segmented tail. I would fold my orchid legs at the ankle,
 swing my hips like a bell (like my mother's
maiden name). All my lovers I named after catkins
 and my flesh grew tangerine. I came like the bellowing
of bulls, unstrung as snake's jaws—I thought myself Maenad,
 terrible and beautiful, until you tore through me
with wolf teeth, told me I was wooden and damp, hyena-skinned
 and libertine. I want you to open me
like the hollow bones of sparrows, crack the wicker breast plate
 and pluck my walnut heart, my cavities
smooth as almonds, thrumming: a levee of bees. Dissect me:
 split tongued or wing backed? when you hold my egg in your palm
am I reptile or avian?

What they don't tell you about September

She slithers under your doorframes and suddenly it is fall
and you're left with August
silt in your eyelids. Your tedium is still
perched on the lips of jars, like lightning bugs,
unable to tether this inconstant summerling
unable still to collapse into the sugared mouth of autumn,
tormented like a caterpillar
between two bending blades of grass,

like my grandfather, pricking his finger twice a day,
spots of red
on all his shirts, until there wasn't enough left
inside him.
I thought we could leave our reverie at the bent knees of maples
let their sap coat us like small insects
ambered and static.

Each fall his blood thickens in me
and I beg the wind to distract him from his honey pacing through my capillaries
but September lights the leaves on fire—
as she did the year she wrapped him between her legs
and coaxed his ashes into her cypress urn—
she breathes her kindling until the trees are smoldering
all yellow and orange
all bloodshot and red with memory.

The Sun Salutation, Reprise

you'd be surprised how bleak the sun
can feel, with her careless arms reaching
into curtains, under floorboards. Even the spiders

can't hide their inky webs. The humming—
how monotonous the sound of brightness;
how bleached the color of July. I can't go

one day without the wash of leaves gossiping,
the hiss of lizards, the incessant buzzing
of cicadas. What I wouldn't give

to converse with silence, the nothingness
the barren misery. What you don't know
about the daylight: she lies.

Poetry

balances on my shoulder, a courier.
my palms cradle the weight of crane pose—
breathe out, maintain.

It balances
but will not perch on my wrists,

brushes beak against ear, coos
its feathered script,

three-pronged toes not inching down
refusal, elusive.

Poison Born

There's a pause on your tongue that makes you mute,
a dissonant regret unfolding in your air
that the earth had to hunt me down with its roots:

A single death cap became your Eden fruit,
twisting your insides as if in a snare,
as if you were cut from your earthen roots—

all privilege turned in one bite, minute
and ironic that you were left to prayer;
a man with no god to beg becomes mute.

The hunter still in relentless pursuit—
your small body blossoming like a lotus— tears
through the loam of your throat. These roots

stretch deep, their fingers constrict, permute
your organs. You writhe like a dog would, bare
and curling, you're wilting in a tangle, mute.

As you recall this to me, I mark the earth a brute
Fair is foul, and foul fair:
you were in death's arms, naked, alone, and mute
and the earth had to hunt me down with its roots.

Nomad

He shuffles through the dark leaves
of the Appalachian trail, peppered with
talismans from the national forest
where, one summer, he divorced his identifiers, taking only
a window through which he would periodically
peer back into our worlds from the gloaming of diners.

We are too distant to see the earth
the way he sees, the ground

beneath motels waning like the tide, and the trees
stymied by window panes and telephone wires;

and we do not understand why he wears the pelvis
of a water buffalo on a hemp rope, except

that he traded a Cherokee the skulls
of three raccoons for it, we cannot see

his fragile chest armored by the alien
relic, or if he holds it up

to his face, like a mask, seeing through
the hip sockets a century of decay

and weathering. Certainly, in our captivity,
we cannot feel the weight of something

so feminine, the birthing tool
of an African deity, carried

like a spore across continents
on the backs of wandering men

to rest on the chest of a lost boy
in the mountains—a boy run away from his mouse trap

we feel the wood-like curves of bone, this barter
rests in his hands

as quiet and lingering as the dead.

Botany

three grams each and a half hour later

We live a turbulent existence, he and I, struggling
to conflate the soil

with our consciousness. We're conversant
with the weeds
and the woods, the fetid anxiety of the afternoon. Dear Earth,
I am your daughter, lining my cheeks with fungi

and pressing them into my soft palette: loam
in my teeth and temples, mycelium coating

my throat. I inhale

his mouth like a lotus
unfolding, and as always he is

damp leaves and cumin.

As I press the pads of his fingers
to my tongue, we wait
for the shadows to bend, to bow

in the courteous manner

of a wilted tulip, and invite us outside ourselves, to watch
while we writhe like yawning cats—persistent
in meeting our god, in combing
through all this
mire.

Homewrecker

In those first few months I felt you open
like a pomegranate, fleshy chambers cracking
wide, seeing light for the first time.
But it came slowly, my understanding
that I was not your gardener, plucking you
from the stem, that I was sucking my teeth on bought fruit.
It wasn't until I heard the words—married man—slide
from your velum and catch on the alveolar
ridge, your mouth suddenly
a foreign continent, that I started to notice
your wife and your kids blooming from you. I would watch you
button your shirts in the morning, before
dawn, and become envious of her ring,
her photo albums, her two-story house,
her master bed with you in it. I was jealous
of her womb, the three children it bore
in your terrible likeness. I had this
for a while: you ironing ties, hanging pressed
jackets on my closet door. I always wanted
to watch you shave, like a daughter would;
I wanted to have that side of you too.
But you peeled your home off before my clothes
and I thought that's all we were. So I cherished it—
some dark, quiet cavity of you, where we
could pluck off callow seeds
and stain our mouths until morning.

Harvest

I have a Persephone problem—
my seasons won't change.
I want to be dragged by my hair
yearly to a dark place wherein
I can punch holes in the clay ceilings,
feel for roots under the dry floors,
but I'm stuck in the vicious light
of summer, a constant zenith
waiting for a husband to eclipse a horizon.

I learn from winter the art of burrowing,
of packing for the day as if for an exodus—
fill my pockets with the collapse of sunlight,
store sonnets like dried fruit in paper bags.
I am prone to dangerous instincts:
dig my fingers into the soft soil of graves
and press the decay from fingers to tongue
content to collect Nightshade and Oleander
to bring above ground in spring.

Time unravels in us
and my watch refuses to turn.
I grasp at the beds of gardens and wait
for the earth to open its maw, to swallow
me. When first I was taken, the earth was stained
with blossoms, now I wait for the thundering
of hooves, the decrescendo of summer
to grow in the dark, cool earth
a bulb of deep, deep red.

Last Call

In a pub toasting your too-late birthday, I
imagine your eyes purpled and shut,
unlike plums but yielding
spoiling into the hard ground of your cheekbones
the rise and fall of the respirator, not
your chest, the Morse code that divided
your breaths; *shortshort shortshort*
clicking like a spent film reel, and you
swerving off the screen.

A month later you stir my dreams, unwind
bike chains, rot of grease of grass.
I take the whiskey from the shelf and taste
asphalt in every gulp, weigh the heft
of the bottle like a pendulum, leftright,
find its tipping point and smell burnt
rubber. My vision now blurred enough
to see your bicycle careen through my hallways.
I finger the bottle as if it were a car
bumper, the contact of it, your legs displaced, thrown
over handlebars. In the kitchen I crack an egg
to mend my throbbing hangover, pour its
sloppy contents into the pan, glad suddenly
for your helmet, that we could place you upright
in a hospital bed to unconsciously accept
your goodbyes before the blood lost its way
to your brain— but also before I made it
from the Hallmark to the hospital, unaware
of my lateness, of the double meaning of that word.
I can't look at the armchair anymore,
where once we locked legs and arms
and pushed our sadness into the center of each other.
The chair looks too much like a throne, and I
can't bear this crown, that my body persisted
through the winter. One day you had organs
and the next, your mother signed them to new fathers.
She didn't know us, all forty or more of us in the waiting
room, we who followed you into your darkness—drove you
home from bars, placed lowballs in your palm, put our mouths
around your genitals. That must be how she cataloged us
when she recited how they'd take your lungs,
your kidneys, your eyes. I wondered
if they would leave your liver?
How fast a year passes. How many intersections
have I crossed without hearing my card in the spokes

of your white bike, tucked beside all those letters
you didn't read, like your tongue *tsk tsk* calling
my cat at the porch door. Bike wheels turning
under their weight, the small metal frame
of you, the time spent selecting a card,
my fear of hospital sounds,
the ventilator, and now your pedaling,
counting out the minutes.

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