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At the sink a knife is a tool and other poems

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AT THE SINK A KNIFE IS A TOOL AND OTHER POEMS

A Thesis

Presented To

Eastern Washington University

Cheney, Washington

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

By

Elizabeth Dunham

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MASTER'S THESIS

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“The term category ultimately derives from the ancient Greek word *kategoria*, meaning ‘accusation’”

– Mimi Marinucci

“it has often been observed that when a knife or a nail or pin enters the body, one feels not the knife, nail or pin but one’s own body, one’s own body hurting one”

-Elaine Scarry

“it is erotic when parts exceed their scale”

-Lyn Hejinian

**AT THE SINK A KNIFE IS A TOOL
AND OTHER POEMS**

press

i carry my poetry with my hands not
my voice sleeps in your palm

i hear

such moments built on words
built on silence

lingers

and lingers in the room
briefly words could inhabit
the quiet

the room records my sleep

for three years i slept in a music box and thought my dreams as song heard down
every
hall of the apartment if anyone

fortunately they were not i was trying to be bigger
than i was a recording studio for anything
but music

a room like the ear
has no choice

in who it holds

Roommate

While peeing at three in the morning, Lily met a ghost. It did not have form, as if a heavy wind had condensed itself into a body harbored before her. Never taking her eyes off of the ghost, she wiped and shakily pulled up her underwear. Quickly standing she stared before it, half naked and it naked, the kind without a body, an emptied one.

Lily stood tip-toe to the ghost's eyes, clumpy air she tried to close with her fingers, passing through him without touching at all. The air felt thick and it warmed her fingers; she decided the ghost was a him, he reminded her of her father. Her bare fingers stiffening back into the usual chill, she knew the ghost was not her father. Suddenly it occurred to her, *what if ghosts aren't dead?*

Lily took a few more hesitant toe-steps toward him with assurance. When he did not react she continued to step into him. He was smaller than she thought, her cheeks flushing, the back of her ears tingled listening to him say nothing to no one at all.

may i

unkiss
you my lips

miss words
whispering

out my mouth
comes my soul
gushing

hello
it's nice to meet you

what if we are all

running out
of language?

writing is
a breed

of
listening

at the
bottom
of the poem

overwhelmed

with my
self

i dreamt
my breasts
drowned

my body

forgave
and decorated them
with eyes

framed white

nothing
 except a pink
tulip (lingers

alone
 proudly petals
unfolded)

before me
my grandmother

painted
 what she
 loved

before me
every sunrise

trepanation

thoughts
are cavities

filling the nights
of a brain

with questions

a god's
eye view

drilled

with questions

a cave
spreading
empty

with paintings

seasonal sijo

our bodies do what they can together: create
friction, cook breakfast each morning, endure the tender rain
inside the wilderness of our selves (hides a path to spring)

chicago

whispers curiosity
into the quiet
of your body
never sleeps
windy city chews
your nerves
dream buildings
taller than
your faith

the monotony
of each word
and bone
bumping
into another
who is
a body? so
soft and
questionable
amongst
the sky
scrapers

how they
become smaller
when you're
inside them

back home where everyone dies

tunneled with maggots
hatch sound
you are rooms

infested

with pupils
open and
purging

lonely
is possession

in a morning
wake looking at

you who
is no longer
i

my brain starts rumors

once i studied the brain
now i swim in it

i owe my voice
to these
eyes

do not know
the difference

between ears
and throat:

the body of a word is *voice*

to screech
or sing

foggy mouth

i am all
around me
makes me sick

hand language

lamp rusts
light
tarnishes
skin
amber-peach
heavies our
bodies
trying to
be more
than

with fingers
bending
into an/other's
hands
carry language
better than

a mouth
with
holds my

bony home

my hands warmed a bowl full
of blood can i lick your fever

into alone with such momentum my tongue

caged
 inside/this people

unbearable

cinquain 1

you lie
damp on your ears
a bell hanging in your
throat ringing i will never let
you sleep

breath is the verb of a sentence

crowded
with anger

i turn
your head
miles away

words
wear
me

//with resentment

i hear you bite
your tongue

open
your mouth
with my fingers
dig out

the throat
your nerves
have sewn
shut

bat gardens

you took me
to my new
home

garden
of tulips
 look closer

bats
slowly petals
unfold

 fangs

we were eating apricots

on your front porch in june, we talked about work and how bad i was at sex.
it's been a few years since i last tried it, not sure
but i really think that i don't know how to be naked
in front of a man, to be some ornamental sleeve.
i guess it's warm in there.
the juice of the apricot trickled down my throat.

compromise

do you
ever find
your self

sitting
in front
of a wall
(a page)
a wall
(a page)

a locked
door

two-step

my fist was once
the language I
spoke to you
then not at all
until texas
your absence
a fondness
after

almost a
decade
between
us dancing
for the
first time
your feet

guide my
feet step
sometimes
on yours
following
a new
familiar

our hands
touch
my fist
holding
your hand

bone
is gesture

possession:

a crow (eats your skin and sings
it back to you

a pearl) learns
to cry

learns
to learn

this nest of spit
and blood

for years

in the hand
of an
other

i touched myself

my fingers are lips

holding
teeth
in the order
of my
particular

desires:

oceans beyond
we
are
absence

organized into
dreaming

meat

contaminated

in all language

wet with
intimacy:

the water *runs from the shore*

Rituals

There are only two things Hunter hates most of all: burnt toast, and doing laundry. Because the list is so short, she is always reminded of burnt toast as she folds Jade's boxer-briefs; which makes for an unpleasant every Wednesday morning. However, Wednesday afternoons always compensate, Jade makes fish tacos and they spend the day watching Godzilla movies in their freshly clean underwear.

When they finally migrate to bed, it is late and springtime. Hunter sits on the bed, looking at the moon in the window, "I wonder what springtime is like on the moon."

As she elbows Hunter off the quilt, Jade counters, "I wonder what springtime is like on the rings of Saturn."

"Oh c'mon, Saturn doesn't have seasons." And she turns out the light.

On Thursdays Hunter goes to work in her kitchen, she lifts the blinds and lights a cigarette. She only smokes when she is inventing maps, it makes her feel sophisticated, which she thought made her maps sophisticated. Next she scours search engines to ensure that her ideas did not exist, and then she spends all morning illustrating them in charcoal. After a long day, Hunter ribbons the map and places it in her purse.

One peculiar Thursday night, Hunter is walking downtown with the heavying sun; at the edge of 8:30 and summer, when a disheveled tourist approaches her and asks if she has a map. Enthusiastically, Hunter hands her recent illustration to the woman, "I designed this myself."

The woman, bewildered, not finding her current or destined location on the map, asks if Hunter would guide her. Hunter opens her morning's work and hesitantly leads them out of town to a cliff, takes the woman's hand and jumped.

we are all little

rocks that climb the sky
footprints

just as black
sound of the river:
in a hurry

a bone sleeps

alone
another dust

just as black

enjoys the company

cemetery a park for dead names

am i this paper? with
my name on it i am

my
possess
deteriorating

voice
taught to speak

my hands

once baskets
brimming with
language
carved

i am
my cage

(plumage)

a ghost rests
atop a black
lampshade

lightens

skeletal (architecture

inside architecture
slowly hardens)

you (a tomb)

shackled (into
your
 self
 varnished)

in turpentine
and tar

little bells once lifted
 your fingers
 now (silent

 in mine
 a skull
 empty)

seasonal occurrences

summer goosebumps itch
your

knuckles a means

never stop falling in the long run

spec in the sand

his face a black cat rubs the paper

of production) eventually gets bored

which is longer than you

(whiskers tickle

the pinecones

another

occasionally used as a litter box

returning home in winter

empty prairie

haunts the
sky

swallows
it self

inside

the nowhere
i saw

my
breath

brain chokes poet

all this
convulsing is
an awful lot
 of work
 kind of like

the poem

barely surviving
 my brain

 (meanwhile
 a man guards a woman
 from her
 self

cries

please
 just let me die

in the calm
of medication)
eyes opening rage:

 humble me
 a body
 no different
 from a rock

ars poetica

fuck me everywhere is a bed sentence

without punctuation
the tongue a familiar cage

empty

 hands cry
to hear what it sounds like

notes on driving through south dakota

patchwork of abandoned-sized towns
where people exist with blades
of grass cloaked mountains
that rise and trench
before them

buffalo and cattle
wander steeping
pines to a prairie
grass glowing a yellow
that looks alive

as the pale faces
carved into stone
the colors the same
as the road that winds
with billboard reminders

that christ died
for our sins:
interrupting
evidence left
in the view
of an eye

thursday tanka

tree frog perching on
a leaf of basil my tongue
so useless the sound

a post man waves me hello
while i clip my toenails

?

next to me a sunny spring day comforted
by the otherness: cold star monotony

if question could be praise
what is a sun
but a self

i fed a flower-faced bison my

hand disappears into picking
bark off a green
forest of stars

disembodies
the stillness

(my veins
a shredded sky

for a moment
forgetting)
how to die

mostly i am pages anxious with turning

don't tell me how to read
a poem

 i found
in my bedside table
 my teeth

 sealed
jaws
warm
 with opening
 the usual

desolation

 an empty bag
 of words

at the sink a knife is a tool

how do you use
a language

i never had one
before

now

the neurons
in my fusiform
gyrus

tell me this word is

(blood
remembers

its face
even)

outside of skin

the knife's
reflection:

a mouth
moving

bone broth

now your body is your absence hardened
a little more each day I scavenge

for intention for embrace

with the broth
 of your bones soaking
 into my skin

after two years

on the phone i

hear my mom
smoking and/or
dying she

doesn't know
the difference
patiently

i think

about what
she'd think

if she ever
read how
she dies

steady and with
intention

i watch

mountain sijo

dreary june morning: the window blinds drape sun lines
across your nipples pebbled against a cotton sleep-shirt
mountains that soften when warm or forgotten

Birthday Party

Who the fuck actually eats Raisin Bran? Mona dealt with her distaste by biting her lip which began to drip blood down her chin. The woman paying for her groceries coughed with intention and refused to make eye contact with Mona, who proceeded to bag her blood with the groceries.

Her mother's favorite food was red grapes. Growing up, Mona would watch her pick one at a time off the vine and swallow it whole. She stared as each one crawled down her mother's throat into her stomach, the last place Mona was alone. Upon the lump disappearing, Mona wished she was a grape.

Eventually the bleeding stopped and out the window had become dark. After turning in her name tag and apron to her manager she began to walk home. The double sliding doors opened to air not as heavy on her cheeks as she expected, a mistake Mona often made at night. Her eyes bored with the path she always took, counted houses draped with icicles glowing from nearby streetlights.

When Mona was only three or four years old, she used to wander the hallways of her house confused and looking for her home. Her father often found her lying on her back below the triangular window in the attic. When he asked her what she was doing up there all alone, she would continue to stare at the sunlight held in the window, her pupils' gaze lighter than the dust hanging lazily before her. When she did not get up, he would shoo the particles away with his hands and fold her knees to her chin, carrying her like an empty basket down the stairs.

Almost slipping coming up the eroded concrete steps to her door, Mona let herself fall inside, immediately kicking her shoes and socks off before walking into the kitchen, annoyed. Opening the fridge, she grabbed an orange and began to peel it with her fingers.

Her hands, new to the orange, forgot the fridge door would not shut itself. Before returning to close it, Mona looked at it skeptically and walked off into the dining room leaving behind her a trail of skin. She sat on the decrepit mahogany floor holding the orange in her left palm, closing into a fist. The orange, at first, resisted her fingers burying themselves inside of it, juice crawling down fingers with gradual acceptance.

i am my body is a poem

drowning my way into this
mouth opening
an ocean

i collect

words and have nothing
to do with them

karate taught me voice

the brain is
a muscle

unconscious
a ghost

writer
cannot be tamed

negotiate body into
hearing
the touch

of not
just my own

words
blackening

a page like
the eye

of my fist's
desire

teething tanka

i lick the bones that
i can grinders we forget
how primitive our needs

peel my skin into the trash
climb into this pulsing cave

in the window seat of an airplane

anonymous glowing
gently below who
are you
hope?

looking down clouds
remain clouds
from below

the isolating in
between-ness
of flying
over
whelming
hope that
stars also
glow

below
you

i kissed a log

citizen of nowhere
 hidden
in the rockies

my wooden bones
rot me softer

the culture of form through the eyes of a body

lick the pupil

taste me: flavor
of light

ultraviolet at best

i am flailing sound

your ears
like

but don't know

why

the poem like the body

swallowed
in form

raking the white

into
clot

sleepy with intention the roots

are neatly folded ground the winter eats
you

is a condition of
eyes

that given the choice
would disappear

slowly
mouth
it out

weave
your self a word
like digging

VITA

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