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# Three for a girl

Danielle K. Weeks

*Eastern Washington University*

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THREE FOR A GIRL

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A Thesis

Presented To

Eastern Washington University

Cheney, Washington

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

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By

Danielle K. Weeks

Spring 2016

THESIS OF DANIELLE K. WEEKS APPROVED BY

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## MASTER'S THESIS

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**THREE FOR A GIRL**



I.  
GIRL

## Lot's Wife

Some say it was the unfiltered sight of God, or angelfire  
burning out all her water, or maybe it was just her looking back,  
wanting what she was supposed to forget.  
It's hard to say. Yesterday I wanted to find her in the new city,  
maybe waiting at a crosswalk, maybe feeding  
a meter downtown, her hair pulled up. I wanted  
the time we sat in her car and talked about what else we could make  
out of living. She lit another cigarette.  
*I wish people didn't need lungs*, she said through the smoke,  
and we talked about whether it was better  
to die young or end up made of metal, the worn-out pieces removed.  
Think about how much a day burns. Think of the body: nine gallons of water,  
a three-inch nail, forty teaspoons of salt. We never knew  
what to make of it all. Each morning  
I have to drink two glasses of water before I can even speak,  
my back turned to negative space, still memory. I wonder how long  
she stood on that hill, skin sloughing off a little more each hour,  
worn down by the weather. Here is my body that wants to be nothing,  
simplified to salt and iron, water washing down the lost.

**Proselytizer**

Offers thin green testaments  
to any open hand. Says nothing,

shapes the air with wanting:  
*take it, take it and understand.*

A woman shifts her plastic bags  
to one hand, reaches out to him,

tucks a book next to the shadow  
of eggs and bread half-crushed.

I should take one, too, and say  
I know what it is like to want

someone, anyone, to take away  
this inherited human heaviness

thin brick by brick. I would cut  
my body down, bind my stories

to a hundred spines, hand myself  
out to anyone who might believe.

### **Tortoiseshell Woman**

Outside the grocery store, red coat closed with tortoiseshell buttons, tokens of a life that opens only when lifted, dropped from a great height. No snow this winter, just trees wearing silver-ice sleeves. Sometimes I dream my arms break clean off for no reason, drop to the floor like sleeves, and I tell myself this is just the way the world is. One winter, she stood outside the garage in her red quilted coat and grieved nothing she could name. The next hour she was back inside, wearing her smile and everything tucked behind it. I want to ask her if she believes that suffering always has a purpose, or if she too struggles through the morning, carried along by a body that means to break her open, consume the dark she keeps.

## **Edible Daughter**

Steam-bodied mother, water hissing hot  
into the sink whenever she washed her face  
heaven-soft with almond oil and raw honey,  
the kind that crystallized when cold.

Her buttery hair, slick-dark as my guilt  
for the chewing gum and abandoned creed  
I pressed behind her ears while she rested,  
her knuckles and eyes red from shaping  
and watching dough that never rose right.

This is my body, given to wrong heat; this is  
her lips sticky with black flecks from the ruined  
toast I made and she made better by scraping  
its face clean over the sink. Quietly consumed  
before I could try again, make it right or nothing.

## Sewing for You

You must not have learned it from your mother,  
her nurse's hands a cat's cradle  
of blood and thread, tied to fixing others.

Or your father—who am I to say  
that he had less to mend than she, or never  
felt a broken thing give way

to needles: all under, over, under, over, neat  
as language never spoken.

What can I say, now—on the couch, your feet

across my thighs as you sink to sleep.  
How else can I explain the way my skin and blood  
complicates with you, a deep

pulling at my seams. I can't even see your face,  
can take up only your damaged coat,  
thread a needle, sew the missing button in place.

## Omnivore

Just your basic omnivore, skin and stem  
on the tongue, blood-and-nectar feeder.  
Call me all-eater. Call me devourer  
of the dead, eater of hearts, crocodile  
smile and lion-wild hair. Don't you worry  
about a thing, here, take and eat my eyes,  
which count as both meat and plant  
if you think about it, that seed-black center  
searching for light. I'm all about giving  
as much as I get. Let's take a look at you.  
Let's share what we have, leaf-thin skin,  
sighed-out sap, the salt on our fingers.

**Two for Joy**

I have an appointment with your collarbone  
connects to the breastbone connects to ribs, cracked  
too much to laugh or breathe last year but now  
let me tell you about never going home again, lost  
in pulse bend move breathe. Show me reflex,  
kick all my glass against the wall and I'll line myself  
with that crashed refraction, weave green  
and blue and clear hard edges into my hair, tuck  
your warmth around my twig-thin body.  
There's always other tissue holding bones together  
ligament tendon space to keep them from ruining  
each other as long as they can. I can't vow myself metal  
eternal but it's better than nothing, better as two  
beaks in the maple laughing off each other's noise.



**August**

Even now I think she was sacred, grease  
running down her wrist, dark underneath  
her fingernails where she tore sugary strips  
from what I carried: plates full of poutine,  
mozzarella sticks, a cinnamon elephant ear  
almost golden under the fairground sun.  
Both disfigured in the heat, our sweat ran  
new tracks down our temples, lips, chins.  
I should have known our memories work  
this way, too, the old reborn every seven years  
in sugar and oil. Both of us always searching  
for impossible fullness, pretending our rituals  
of salt and oil were more than an ache to survive.

## Trash Day

Two knotted garbage bags  
on the corner, lumpy-soft  
with old toys: ripped feet  
spilling calm white beads,  
years of skin cells and sleep.

I've already tried the obvious,  
shook them all over boiling water  
and waited for a young girl  
to rise, a homunculus holding  
my soul in a green-bound book.

She would be all leadlined color,  
stained glass waiting for light.  
If I cupped her next to my ear,  
she could spell every god's name  
backward and forward, easy.

She might have even known why  
I have to close the blinds when  
the garbage trucks start collecting  
or why the dog down the road  
barks at every noise without a face.

## Outdoor Education

I've lost all the names: flower, tree, bird,  
constellation where a woman is trapped  
upside down, her supernovaic pain bent  
into language. There used to be songs

for naming how we hold the living  
in our mouths. Unfiltered water tasted  
like sanctuary, summer; picking stones,  
toads, and goose feathers from the trail.

How many girl hands have folded up home,  
found a new shelter in something porous?  
How many stars have shivered their last  
as girls connected the dark between them,

made one timeless body? There's a reason  
I loved the night: all turning, still chorus,  
moon with only the shadow side of light  
to give, star-blue belly stretched wanting,

too empty to touch. Camped in the woods,  
restless, I heard our counselor call *who* raw  
to barred owls that echoed only *who* back  
as her flashlight burned blue on our tents.

Even at night, the mosquitoes found us  
in our dark clothes, our second skins.  
We got used to the itch: blood as being,  
as proof a body is full enough to give.

**Io**

Jupiter's fire-skinned moon:  
ugly as an orange left too long,  
molded white and green, her reds  
stirring new flesh from brimstone  
under the planet's furious eye.

Better to be a turned into a cow  
and cursed with a swarm of biting flies  
as she wanders some old earth

than circle slowly in this nothingness,  
everything in her  
burning for grass, slow moving skin,  
water in her atmosphere.  
Just another lonely body  
hanging in the dark, molten  
metal heart wanting.

How awful to be someone  
else's heaven. How awful  
to be always caught  
in your own remaking,  
forced to keep turning brightly  
to the weight that holds you.

## Lexington Horse Mania

The Starry Night whirled across a horse  
of fiberglass and paint. Another bore the ocean  
on its iridescent hide, a mane of cresting waves  
that never crashed. *This is the saddest thing*,  
my sister said as she traced its jeweled eyes,  
its body frozen in rest without release.

My favorite horse was bolted down  
and wore a coat of junk, brass and steel,  
glued-on gears and washers, hinges, wrenches,  
the number seven from a forgotten door.  
All this extra other collecting, guarding  
a hollowed middle and a metal heart.

The horse's shoulder under my hand  
trembled with traffic or the longing for home  
that thundered hot in my bones  
like phantom hooves in the street.

The white-fenced lawns of Lexington  
were not where we belonged, my sister  
with her dreams of water, my body  
already too full of running in circles.

My sister brushed her hands along a brick neck,  
mortar painted blue like lines on a map  
of a world made easy: all straight roads and corners,  
the beginning clear and painless as the end.

## Obituary

This paper-thin woman, pulped down  
with yellow notes, old birthday cards  
kept in a shoebox under her bed, essays  
and drawings once taped to her mother's  
kitchen cabinets. Obsessed with bones  
when she was eight—a penciled report  
about mammal skulls explains how some  
creatures learned to grow horns from hair  
instead of bone, their rough points separate  
from the skeleton. Who knows, now, how  
she used to practice braiding her hair without  
a mirror, so she could shift skins, pretend  
to weave hair-hard horns down her back.  
No soft rope for her, no way to drag her back  
by the roots. She dreamed of oxen, woke  
hauling on her chest those dry summers  
on the porch with her mother, the snick  
of trimming scissors, curled clippings  
brushed into grass with a weathered broom.  
Who knows which bird or crawling thing  
made something of it all, in the end.

## **Anniversary**

The farmers' market, strawberries and salt,  
a rain of longing on the back of my tongue.  
Two girls, eleven or twelve, somersault  
along the booths. Dust in their hair, young  
enough to never be alone, one pair of shoes  
between them while they run to find the band.  
Harmonica and banjo twang the blues;  
ain't no sunshine when I reach for her hand  
and find it gone. Those days we used to dance:  
her shaky laugh wet with sweat and lime,  
our bodies caught in a tarantismic trance  
as if a drum were the cure for losing time.  
And I know, I know the slow fall of sound,  
girls who make dust-angels in the ground.

## **Kids' Guide to the Universe**

Girls of a certain age always tear and bite  
each other's shoulders, arms, hands, hair.  
This time, they're made of candy, dyed sweet  
and corrosive colors. Last time, they were alligators,  
growling like dogs while I stopped myself  
from telling them alligators don't growl.

I try to read them a book about stars,  
but they're turning their arms  
into marker-red peppermint sticks,  
busy building their washable selves.  
Smart, to make yourself something  
you can wash down the sink and forget.

I try to read from page twenty-seven,  
which talks about how the sun is a star  
that will one day collapse, burn itself out.  
Sometimes I think about burning down  
my house, going dark. But the sun lowers  
its aching red chest so gratefully into the river  
each night. Maybe water is the way to go:  
call down rain, open taps, block drains.

I turn to a page about the size of the universe  
and try to think how I might explain  
something like this, so they understand.  
Think of the world as a swimming pool,  
think of yourself as a drop of water,  
think of yourself as a grain of sugar,  
think of black, think of everything else opening  
a hundred thousand empty mouths.



## Philomela

Three a.m., the baby in a knotted bag  
in the kitchen. How could she forget?  
How could a body unhappen and stop  
just like that? She digs through trash

but it's only chicken, after all, the same  
old night trick. Every sleep for months  
haunted by a body that never existed,  
owls outside her window turning wings

into impossible fingers, shedding to pink.  
Ten years ago, this might have been God  
sending her a message, something about  
the next step she was supposed to take

or where she'd gone wrong. But now night  
is full enough without that kind of thought,  
hours made neverending, her mind looping,  
back and back until even the smallest pain

is her face trapped in the table's polished  
juniper grain. Nothing else moves. She wants  
just one myth to turn true, prove that women  
can be cursed into birds, forget to be human.

## Groundwave

Yesterday I was a groundwave,  
hovering but never touching the gray  
stretch of sidewalk outside my house.  
Something like a soul crawled into my ear,  
called out to my brain, and moved on  
when no one answered.

When I was five, my mother wrote my name  
and address on clothing tags, shoe tongues, inside  
my backpack so at least someone else might know  
where I belonged, if I forgot the number of turns,  
if I forgot how to spell out who I was.

She said don't be afraid to ask for help  
if you get lost. Try a policeman, a pastor,  
one of the better strangers. Now they'd find  
an empty neck, my tags cut out. I wouldn't know  
where to start. How do you ask someone for absolution

for being alive? How do you say, Stranger,  
there's been a mistake. I'm not supposed to be here.  
Do you know where I go now? Can't you see the red  
horizon, the curvature of the earth bending away  
from me like breath rising off glass.

## Oil Portrait

Red curl at the temple, dip into black  
to drag down the jaw. It's an old game:  
create a thousand faces until you find  
the one that makes your name worth

something. This one can't stop laughing,  
this one clutches pearls to her throat  
as though hers is the shell that shapes  
slow beauty. Water alone cannot clean

my hands—these strange yellows, reds,  
and blues I always try to make familiar.  
Rub baby oil and salt across my palms,  
the painted patches of another woman

covering my skin. There is something  
in me hanging on the wall, her body  
of quick, jagged color that makes sense  
only if you step far away and look back.

### **Recovery Strategy for the Magpie**

After a day of small salvations: blue glass bottles  
on the windowsill, willow charcoal ground into the carpet,  
smudged on her heel. Brain-to-body, she should know  
herself well in the mirror, scratch out her lips and eyes  
on butcher paper, smear the shadows on her face.

It's not right. Try paint, graphite, ink.  
How do you spit out the human voices  
caught in your throat like a cough? Do you drink tea,  
take purple medicine, swallow a grass-wreathed bird?  
Outside, the panic grass moves like a scream.  
She wakes on an April night clutching  
a new self, silver as moon-slicked bone.

## **Glass Girl**

I am twinned in the window  
across the street, one body  
ghosting the in-door and one  
body out. She belongs to me,  
both, although I feel nothing  
when I raise her glass arms  
to tie back her hair. As last

November, when I ran ten miles  
in the negative dark. Other legs  
must have ached, other hands  
gone shiver-sweat numb  
while I ran out, almost nothing  
on my body. It was only later  
inside morning that I owned  
my blue hands, rough throat  
raw and real enough to lose.

How can I move from here,  
watching myself open, shut  
from this distance as other  
hands reach, pause, touch.

**Persona**

The other half of your face  
is sleeping somewhere else—  
the abandoned bus station,  
a cheap motel, on the rocks  
by the river. You are missing  
her like a mirror misses silver.  
How can you know anything  
without her, fierce and simple  
as teeth in a mouth. She will  
not come back on her own.  
You have to starve her out.  
Turn all your food to water,  
drink your blood to a river.

She'll wake to each muscle  
growing its own stomach  
and know that, once again,  
you've forgotten how to feed  
without her. *Stupid child*,  
she'll say, and put herself  
inside your hands, open  
every movement's mouth,  
make you swallow white  
sugared sun, the meat  
carved from human touch.  
She is the one who laughs.  
She is the one who knows

you couldn't do this alone.  
She'll come. You can let go.  
She'll use your legs, walk  
outside. People will notice  
something about your face  
has filled itself in—not  
as obvious as a glass eye  
where there was none, not  
even something as small  
as a healed cut—your face  
like a newlywed's. Someone  
always waiting. Someone  
who shares your name.

## Glass Delusion

For two hundred years people knew they were made of glass  
and wouldn't sit down on marble or brick, the unyielding  
surfaces of the world. Ask Tchaikovsky or King Charles VI  
about the fear of being touched, your head cracking off  
in looping visions, fearing everything that moves. Yesterday  
I stayed in my room when I could, dressed myself in three layers,  
drank hot water and light. I couldn't tell you about my body,  
how I kept waiting for flesh to fall from cold mirror bones,  
how the air felt flat, pressed dry in a book, no water left  
to keep the dead away. I couldn't think of a way to tell you  
I've condemned myself for waxing dark, turning outside  
my satellite self, looking down to see if this bending finger  
is mine, this structure is one I've had for years, red rot and air.  
Ask the glass woman who pointed to a hospital window  
and said *Like that—I'm there, and I'm not there* to explain  
how the body makes itself disappear, how the opening up  
and closing shut is in someone else's hands, out of control.

### Three for a Girl

Gone evil, gone out the morning  
gold door without a body, all bird  
angles and red glass riot. Let her  
be light. Let her leave the pink legs  
on the bus, on the street,  
on an elevator going sky-close.

In sixth grade all the girls gathered  
in one room to talk about what makes  
a body. Someone asked how do you know  
it's the right time, someone asked  
what happens if you get pregnant,  
someone asked what if the blood  
never stops. What I have to say is not

an answer. Go to sleep, shed inside  
out of yourself for seven years until  
the cells build a new girl, maybe she  
will know, maybe she can tell you  
about the real layer:

powder-pink eyelid folding open  
and the young star exhaling gold  
out of cold black, carrying no sound.



## II. BODY

## **Holiday Song**

Now the lights coiled white in dogwood trees, the graying father at the door,  
now the wooden angels on the walls.

Now the suitcase in the childhood room, the glow stars dead on the ceiling,  
now the dog that barks at nothing.

Now the forsythia shedding its opposite leaves, the sky lifting its hoary lid,  
now the cardinal blushing the maple.

Now the groceries in unfamiliar places, the bent faces on the refrigerator door,  
now the recipe unfolded like a prayer.

Now the cornbread casserole between us, the empty hands unclasped,  
now the wine without its blood.

Now the sleepless midnight, the firewood breaking black and white,  
now the glass burning.

Now the Sunday morning under sleep, the mother's song outside my door,  
now the hymns a half-step down  
from the notes I remember.

**Piano Recital at New Harmony Church**

No God here tonight, just black-dressed girls  
and a piano pressed under a hundred fingers.  
Its black back yawns open, hammer to string,  
hammer to blue pines shaking out their voices  
in their sleep. My sister climbs red-carpeted stairs,  
steps on stage to build a song about a dream.  
I can fit into her clothes. We are nothing alike.  
All of us here become wooden-backed people  
with gold-lit lips, metal mouths. Her song asks  
what listens at the altar, what circles the church  
with polished teeth. Imagine trumpets, mutes  
shoved down bells, trombone slides locked still.  
No God-bright brass, just hushed breath  
like violet sand, water foaming out of sight.

## Mother Tongue

Here is one character: summer Pacific sewing itself up your blue jeans one sighing stitch at a time, ink-dark body marking a jagged white line on your thighs, above your blood.

Your blood in the heartland,  
landlocked mother and father singing hymns to a spirit of restlessness  
note by note, wind on the sea of scarecrow fields, stitched-up mouths.

Here is another: your body coaxed up the mountains by roots climbing over themselves to awaken into words. The sun a note holding whole as it scrolls over your blood.

Your blood calling from yesterday,  
your parents three zones, three notes down. Jagged song in the ink-dark  
sea between us, stitched-up mouths climbing over themselves for words.

**Small Talk**

Across the country, father is all voice,  
wooden air chipping out the same old  
*how was your weekend, did you see  
the pictures your sister sent, anyway  
I flew again yesterday, got sunburned  
mouth-pink.* Let's talk about normal  
living, mother, or how today I thought  
about growing out my ink again, full  
as it used to be when I was a kid, but  
there was that winter, mother, when  
we pinned God to the basement wall  
and tucked our tongues under carpet.  
What if we cracked open everything  
the way other people do, new cellular  
talk, not afraid to say, today I thought  
how the remaining years seem circled  
already, another ring not worth living,  
and what do you think, father, about  
leaving our small hometown with its  
same old bluish day, coiling up again  
and around itself, running out of air.

**News**

You took the meat off the clothesline  
and buckled it in the car, drove it home  
to me. Dipped in salt and sun-cured,  
it shrunk itself into a hard shape, refused  
to speak although we draped a blanket  
across its shoulders, made it a cup of tea.  
What did we do wrong, you said  
as I chopped vegetables for dinner,  
boiled water until it sounded like the dead  
talking to one another without tongues.

**Don't Say**

My sister came home with blue lips  
one day after biting a pen to breaking,  
and the color took two days to wash  
off. In the meantime, she was dead  
around the mouth—sometimes still  
the same blue shadow stains her lips,  
now, when she tells me about her day  
like an optimistic pamphlet unfolding  
in a patient's hands. How careful we are  
not to wound each other with our own  
breaking. She tells me about a recipe  
for butternut squash soup, not the small  
triumph of cooking again. I tell her  
about the new blanket a friend made  
for me, not the ten pounds sewn into  
the fabric to weigh down my nerves  
when they start to burn and drift  
like ash. One day we might talk about  
the toxic red limb that grows inside  
a brain, keeps growing back even after  
you amputate and eat it every morning,  
grows back into its space of shadowed  
phantom pain. She might tell me how  
every morning feels like a trial;  
some law has been broken, but no one  
can tell you what it is, only that you  
should be ashamed of what you've done.

**Cargo**

*This one is always empty*, she says,  
wiping sweat from her chest  
as outside her bedroom windows  
the two a.m. freight's braying  
hollows the pines.

Cargo train schedules taped to her walls,  
the moon turning black with  
what's supposed to happen

whenever train wheels  
scrape along her sleeping bones  
and twist into her  
fear of tornadoes, knowing  
the two sound the same.

Nightmare rust and shriek link up—  
inevitable branches clack and rattle, close.



## Cure

Her gaunt cheeks said sickness,  
some parasite silvering her skin  
in its hunger. How much color  
can you take from someone  
before there's no returning it?  
We lowered her in a bath of  
steaming honey, red beads,  
anything with color that runs.  
Outside: still afterworld, snow.  
Tired weather buried itself on  
roofs. We appealed to candled  
saints, burned wick and water  
for her. At night, she walked  
alone through the house,  
gathered glass bottles, hand  
mirrors, broke ice off the front  
steps and made a shivering nest  
with the rest of the nothing,  
rubbed it into her legs and feet  
like a painter with dirty brushes  
driving out leftover oil with oil.

## Tornado Alley

Between two disasters: limp-necked rabbit  
on the doorstep and green-lipped funnel  
in the northern sky. I didn't know

what to do with death, yet, how to hold  
a cold body long enough to let it go  
without taking into yourself its nothing.

The rabbit was only cat's kill, a gift,  
but I searched for meaning in anything animal,  
blood against the door as a kind of prayer.

Checklist: emergency survival kit, distilled water,  
ten glass-jarred candles, all burning vanilla.  
Maybe I needed be a first-born son for blood to work.

Maybe this was God—a sky-long arm  
that chooses destruction over loneliness, drags  
the living over a rough gray carpet, into his room

like the room I had as a child: smooth gray walls,  
shadows twisting away, soft blue light  
while my brain hallucinated into a new day.

A friend once told me your brain can't dream faces  
on its own. It strips them from people it passes over  
during the day, gives them new names and stories

like a child playing pretend. How many nights  
have I torn apart his face apart in sleep, searching  
for an unknown question. All I can do for now

is put on sunflower-patterned gardening gloves  
and bury the rabbit in the backyard,  
watch all night until the sky howls itself to sleep.

**One for Sorrow**

From Steptoe Butte, the palouse is a ruined thing,  
paper left out in rain, buckling as it dried.  
Standing on four hundred million years  
makes a nothingness in air, an empty weight—  
no traffic murmur, no insects sawing their legs  
in the dark, combed hills weak enough for the wind  
to chisel their gentle rise and fall.

My brain keeps trying to fill in the blank hills  
with ghosts of pine trees and bright geraniums  
like how I still have dreams about the dead woman  
from four years ago running parallel to me  
through even lines of red trees.

Mountains bruise the horizon, unearthly  
rows of windmills watching, blades turning  
an unknown wind, and I wait for them  
to move in sync, just once. Down below,  
a lone magpie folds herself into a scrubby tree  
and somehow lives this way.

**Chromatic**

Say a vodka cranberry yes plastic is fine  
kind of sentence today, nothing that risks being  
misunderstood. Outside the office's smudged glass  
door, where last week a heart attack black bag body  
left in strangers' hands, a dog waits to turn to stone.  
The carpeted halls swallow words before they sound.  
No one else seems to notice the nothing-blue spilled  
down the door like a warning or understand why  
a person might need to sing scales in the bathtub  
up and down for hours just to wear out the pieces  
patterned into a throat for good. Washed in echo,  
reverberated perfect. Nothing will ever end.

**First Beach**

Sister and I, salt in our teeth, sighing  
backs against skeletal ash,  
its washed-up trunk carrying more rings  
than anyone could wear.

Sharing brown beer bottles  
tilting emptily in sand, the beached red buoy  
down the shore  
waiting for sun to drown  
in a flash of green.

Something dark tethered in the belly of the sea:  
hair-clumps of waving kelp  
or seals undulating their smooth bodies  
like women spilling out of themselves,  
water and shadow rising white,

horse-maned waves  
tumbling to their gray knees  
at our feet.

## **Claustrophilia**

Sunday morning: worshipping with a program  
playing on the home improvement channel  
about building tiny houses, folding  
a person's living down and down  
to fit inside one hundred square feet.  
Every space is meaningful there: sleep  
stacked above wooden bookshelves, a chair  
for dreaming in the light of every window.  
The kitchen's single coil burner, salt  
and oil glowing on the windowsill,  
the walls of nested drawers, eggshell white.  
This is where the body boils away  
too small for feeling anything too deeply.  
This is where to go for wholly being:  
a finite space, a ladder to the ceiling.

## Paintfree Dent Repair

Call now if you've noticed  
violence left in your metal,

a rusting scar in your skin.  
By now you're surely sick

of the usual wash-and-paint  
evening routine: steam off

the slick brushed-on body  
where no one can see you

prime your surface in layers  
of practiced reds and blacks

tracing the same old shapes  
you've memorized: almond

eyelids, snapped-bow lips.  
Well, have we got a solution

for you. Come in, take a seat,  
and show the face you're tired

of fixing, bent-down mouths,  
sun-scored cheeks that cost

too much to maintain anymore.  
We'll melt you down to carbon,

oxygen, and the rest, shape  
your old damage into diamond

or steel—simpler being, nothing  
that's ever known its own face.

**Four for a Boy**

Youngest of four, named  
after my father, so why not  
be boy, be a bald mountain  
fire-stripped and clean.

Here's my head  
pinned to the ceiling, carved  
with orthodox metal,  
my furred jaw yawning  
to its yellow root.

I'll spit out the headsick  
clippings of girl like cut grass  
caught in my teeth, summer  
smell of distress. When I walk,  
I'll keep my hands stone still  
so no one hears my wrists  
clinking in thin red chains.



### **The Allowable Body**

When the starved dog turns inside out  
to find meat. When the table's wooden  
grain pulls apart to spell its own name.  
When the beginning curves. When ice  
gets tired of zipping up steam or rain  
for company, wants to ring around God  
in peace. When the blueprint is finally  
approved and the materials have been  
waiting under the earth this whole time,  
sprouting eyes and knotted limbs, beaks  
tapping at shells. It is not what anyone  
expected, in the end, not made normal  
even with metal and heat. When each  
state of being fakes its death, runs away.  
When the ending. When ice steam rain.

## Reynaud's

Bells came down heavy  
as gold in water running  
away from dead-blue

fingers. Winter disease,  
my mother calls it, white  
fingers and toes when

weather drops its burden  
into human bodies. Put  
your fingers in your mouth

if they start to die. Take  
and eat the blue weight  
of coming back by blood,

white turning blue turning  
red until no one could tell  
anything had ever been

wrong. Baptism by heat,  
any kettle-hot whistling  
waters of a body, bells

clang inside a brain  
only when the dead  
come back into color,

not when they should,  
not when the numbness  
first takes a hand, finger

by finger, bends each  
joint white as if looking  
for information hidden

in a body losing hold.

### **Five for Silver**

There is some silver-lined space in fives and tens  
if you know how to talk to it, know each second's  
name, like how yesterday I wouldn't leave the house  
until 6:31 became 6:32 because you know what happens  
when you leave any left over—have to divide it out until  
you find its fractured name, no place to keep it except  
your mouth like your last breath before drowning.  
See how the equation for peace never stays still, hides  
in hours and elements and steps, and if you don't  
keep up, it might crawl into an air duct, never find  
your mouth again, so here's to ninety-seven steps  
to the doorway, here's to six o'clock being divisible  
by three and two, here's to another pretty pattern  
maker caught in their own sharp stitch.

## Leaving Prayer

Lock and bolt the door, ask the dead chimney's crows  
if there's a word for the feeling of forgetting something  
as if they would know, anyway, every day's iridescence  
tucked to the breast.

Walk through cold white sun, your skin shivering out  
oily blues and violets feather-pointed behind your step.  
Crows cross over. Know there isn't a word for forgetting  
that devil who spells

its name dark down your neck and back, hanging  
on your spine when you wake, hollowing out color  
from your sunless mouth. You never could name  
something's absence

when absence was everything and that devil kept  
calling like a crow for your ghost. Know light keeps  
the named and dark the nameless, the ones you always  
keep forgetting.

### **Animatronic Methuselah**

Let's talk about the time you visited that museum themed on the creation of the world, and all around, automatons dressed in animal skins moved metal jaws, repeated recordings about sin and death as if they had any idea how a body falls apart. Adam and Eve couldn't speak, their lips painted plastic, tongues never made inside their mouths. A damned shame, you said, since you wanted to ask them how God fit four and a half billion years of decay into a body just six thousand years old. You said you wanted an argument—and that was all—but I remember sometimes in the middle of the night I'd find you upstairs in the red armchair, your movement rusted still with feeling like you were a thousand years old, like someone tried to program your body younger but forgot about your brain, its dark oceans boiled to nothing, patiently waiting to collapse into light.

## **Animal Grief**

You want to leave your body  
the way you leave your face  
in the mirror every morning,  
silver-backed and specular  
light-print hitting the glass  
again and again and again

like a bird cracking its neck  
against itself, leaving quick  
and necessary as blinking.  
You want to leave your body  
the way an animal abandons  
its sick young, for the good

of everyone, a healthier dark  
bending down to swallow you  
full. They say living is a circle  
of breaking down and reflecting  
back and you want to leave  
your body, this mirror-being.

They say you should leave  
the body for others to touch  
death silvering hard and cold  
or else they won't understand  
what you've become, won't stop  
searching in circles for you.

**Beginning**

Stripping off hard-wired sleep, I say  
bring into my board, oh little one, a brick  
with all the colors

overwhelm this voicing skin  
in the corner. Stack a new city  
in walls soft enough  
to ask the fried yellow wheel  
about the turn of legless bodies.

Fever child,  
don't you know  
about the million red  
sand-small bones morning  
out a metal heart.

## **Good Morning**

This morning I cut the devil off my neck  
and watched him drip into the sink limb  
by viscous limb, his face still inscrutable  
after all this time, his gray sludge still real  
enough to clog the drain. So I scooped up  
his eye with a floral-patterned paper cup  
and drank and drank the lips, the fingers  
tapping down my throat, my stomach full  
and barren as a grave. This is how it goes.  
Two summers ago, the boy allergic to bees  
kicked rotten crabapples until the stings  
in his feet stopped closing up his throat.  
No one believed him. But I saw the violet  
pins in his ankles, his hard-won bare feet.  
I saw the re-ordered air open around him.



III.  
GHOST

## The Love Lives of Trains

Outside the window, like a phone call  
 from a friend who walks home  
 at the same time each night, giants  
 whistle through the lonely  
 precise hours. No need  
 for arms when all their holding  
 happens in their chests, no legs  
 except the blurred bridges  
 they borrow, thighs tagged  
 with neon-yellow lost loves.

There is no one out there  
 for them. No algorithms made  
 to match them by common interests:  
*I like moving inexorably  
 along the same paths, over  
 and over, I like short runs  
 above the beach, I like  
 when the knees rust out,  
 drop me spineless into the river.*  
 There is no one like them.

Sometimes their noise  
 is self-conscious, as if  
 they are embarrassed  
 by their necessary howls,  
 their artificial breath  
 disturbing the cold.  
 Mouths full of stone,  
 steel, nothing that knows  
 how to rot. They never wanted  
 any of this.

They would trade  
 their hollow organs for hands,  
 trade a renewable body  
 for lips to blow warmth  
 back into their fingers  
 when the cold comes down,  
 when no one else will look  
 at the man who tries to pay fare  
 with a fish, his rattled eyes  
 pressed under too much slow weight.

## **Twin Bridges**

Three a.m., summer warm and sleepless, driving  
to the Twin Bridges, where last month an old woman  
parked her car and jumped. They found her  
on the rocky edge of Indiana, water pushing away  
her ghost, name stitched to birdbone, spirit trapped in dust.

I could have asked her about evening meditation, sweating out  
the morning, dusting off whatever light would listen.  
It's come to this: driving from Indiana to Kentucky,  
sifting the devil through the latticed metal bridges.

Maybe I'll pull off to the side and try to find  
that shadow pacing at the dirty water's edge, give a shape  
to the dust scraping through my blood. Tell me why water  
won't keep the dead. Tell me nothing is what it believes.

**Selkie**

You'll have to keep a bucket  
by her bed, let her dip her hair  
in seawater every hour

lest she turn to air  
for freedom, string herself  
from the ceiling like dried flowers.

To keep her, you'll have to hide  
her coat somewhere dark and latched.  
She'll ask, *Do you ever feel*

*you were supposed to be born  
as something else? And you  
will not know what to say*

unless you, too, have woken  
to the weight of wrongness,  
needing a skin you can't find.

### **Knuckled Months**

I am going to disappear in July  
so I tap out the months on my knuckles,  
thirty days hath September, April, June,  
and November, trying to figure out  
if I have one day left, or two. I might leave  
my shape in the air, on the carpet, memory  
as buried skin, that old ghostly fear left  
for someone else to find, keep as a reminder  
of what has been or a warning  
of what still exists. I throw out the milk,  
bread, and eggs left in the refrigerator  
because I am afraid of the red stitching  
and slow growth rooting down, closer  
and closer to the deep earth every day.  
What have I become, bones yawning, wanting only  
to lie down inside a silver-plated mirror.  
I want a body like the first feelings  
of sleep, caught between  
weightlessness and hallucination, the last  
pieces of living close enough to lose.

**Wisp**

Someone left a light in the trees  
so I followed it, let my ribs turn  
to salamanders, my skin to rustling  
wings. I always wanted someone  
to tell me where I was going. Before,  
I started each day lifting gray eyelids  
from where they dragged on the floor,  
combed dead leaves from my lashes.  
Say some are blessed with blindness  
and I'll say curses are what make  
the living. Now I am the light and its lamp,  
a blue body hung in the air, calling lost  
eyes to the root, the water, the dog's mouth.

**Inheritance**

White ceramic girl  
on the shelf her hollow head  
filled with dried eyelids  
papered yellow-pink. Black stems  
from her mouth grows ceiling-still.

**Process**

You're pulled up to the red curb  
even though you know it's for firetrucks only  
and you'll get towed away soon, but  
    you don't move  
even after ten minutes  
even after the mountain slides down into itself  
and the song on the radio stops playing  
    goes dead silent  
no other cars on the road  
not even a crumpled fast food tumbleweed crossing  
    the sidewalk's broken places  
know your cold body  
but no one has found it  
    and this stillness  
is the reason you can't pull your hands off  
    the steering wheel  
carpets itself over your hands,  
zebra-patterned, and the leather seats have taken  
    your skin  
a yellow wound like the worn-down road  
trying to close over itself, old enough  
that the normal processes shut down  
    your body's waiting  
to know whose hook is caught  
through your voice, and why her hungry mouth  
has yet  
    to open  
her hand and drag you up  
by the neck.



## Ceiling

Not even night yet and your ghost gets caught in the ceiling fan. That's what you get for standing on the bed, the way your mother told you never to do, your mother probably making tea in her socks downstairs and not getting caught in her own fixtures. You just wanted to reach up and press a planet to the ceiling. Pull matter here, the only thing you can do like living. But then chaotic arms, black feeling in your gut, you disentangling your eternal soul from mid-space spinning on and on in its mechanical circles. No time to even change the flickering bulb. Star-sputter, spin. Plink. A burning out. Your eternal soul turning green. You know you need to get it down, might need it later if you ever leave the house again. The news says four car crashes in the last hour alone. You think about driving. Black turning, snagged breath, plink. Good thing there's nowhere to go.

**Other Girl**

She is always biking over the red bridge  
in my brain, sun-peeled shoulders  
soft pink as a newborn's dress.

She leans on the rail for shadow, to darken  
purple like a scar. Pain knits  
itself, eventually,

into some knotted thing to wear.  
She waits. Sweat pools on her lip  
like so many words  
the bridge's fingers lace  
into a rusty prayer. I want to feel how  
her dark hair falls  
on her raw shoulders.

I would be anything for her,  
her deep water  
dancing down bones,  
sweating out poison,  
rushing too fast  
for the dead to touch.

**Ghost**

Her sea-flicker mouth leaves a stain  
on windows and glass cups, wine-blue  
sighs kiss me awake every eight a.m.  
This old house wood warps apart  
and makes space, invites her in  
to the thin, dark places. I wash my face  
and wonder if she wore button-downs  
or leopard print, if she sat feet on the floor  
or knees tucked to the table. She slips under  
my shirt collar, bites with a brushing touch  
like eyelash teeth. Sometimes I ask her  
if I should move away, change my name,  
donate all my clothes and paint  
a second skin. I want someone to say  
I'm alive enough to change. She takes shadows  
off the shelf and knits their metal  
through me, crosses over and over.

**Wrong**

Bleached hands,  
steam-cleaned lungs  
hung on the clothesline.  
Looks like a question  
you don't remember  
asking to grow here.  
Wrong species. Maybe  
should have been cotton,  
sun-kept, simplified,  
harvested. Today  
let all sheets be stripped  
from their beds. Let us  
shake out threaded ghosts.

### **The Emperor's New Body**

In the winter I folded away my clothes  
and hid them under the bed, walked emperor

through the house, searched for deliverance  
at the hand of some common god:

the hour-long shower, the comb and mirror,  
the tea kettle screaming out its metal belly

until I emptied it into my cup. I opened  
a window, let the cold in so teeth might rattle

my own metal belly awake, might shake  
from my throat the answer to what runs

inside a body besides water and blood,  
or what devil lies down beside me slow

in the morning, yawns a gray mouth  
down my shoulders, breathes my iron

bones to rust in his cup. I might be  
a self-deceiving organ tricking itself

into having a name. I might be  
the memory of something larger

crumbled and sealed in a pale skin,  
small enough to drink. Whatever god

will take me back: leave me here  
as steam on a colorless window pane,

boiling out bright from a hollow skin.  
Let me split open as water and light.

## Laugh

Sunday knows what it's like: red at the morning edges  
noising into my brain, two gray halves lit up, scribbling  
themselves like dogs barking, neon green signs blinking  
outside the closed window. All I wanted was blank rest  
after everything that was supposed to happen had already  
gone, the natural architecture opening and closing itself  
just fine without these fingers I'm trying to belong to.  
Crack ankles, knees, hips, wrists, open the window to bird  
mouths waiting. Yesterday I found an old string of beads  
spelling out my name and hung it around my neck to see  
if it made sense. Say a word or live a body until it loses all  
meaning and you have to just throw back your head, laugh  
or starve. Today I'm back in the mirror-habit, rinse wash  
rinse the hours I stayed up pretending I'll never have to go dark  
to wake up. Get dressed, wear a pink leopard jacket for the hell  
of it, coin a joke to get going out the door. Today's white hot  
throat waits to either choke me with laughing or swallow me gone.

**Light**

Mother lost her face  
opening the mirror's cage  
spindle-locked gold necks  
found mouths ground her bright color  
her dark corners between teeth

## Lantern

In the waiting room, a kid picks up  
a year-old issue of *Camping Life*,  
asks his mother to define *fluorescent*  
and *lantern*, so she tells him about  
the dark that grows when lights  
are nowhere to be found, for miles,

the dark of a heavy rain or snow  
shorting out the power, remember  
how they used a lantern to find  
the basement stairs, the furnace  
and the breaker, how she pressed  
switch nineteen to bring back

the light? She looks over at me  
as if she knows I'm thinking  
about last winter, how my mother  
took the extra lantern from  
the basement and packed it  
in my luggage before I went,

and I was careful to say *back*  
*West* instead of *back home*,  
in case it mattered to her  
that I belonged somewhere  
else. When the doctor calls  
my name, I don't get to hear

whether the mother tells her son  
how the unexpected becomes  
sacred at the atomic level,  
luminescent, which is another  
good word to know, how light  
is only borrowed, passed down.



### Seven for a Secret

Come here. I'll show you  
where the bees have gone  
if you give me the receipts  
and silver gum wrappers  
in your pockets. Look:  
see the sweet pea clinging  
to the clothesline poles  
where your mother hung  
bright skirts you gave away  
years ago? Either tell me  
the names of the bodies  
that wore them after you

or give me these strands  
of your hair and your faded  
shoelaces, if you're the kind  
who still tries to remember  
the exact way your mother  
removed her rings, set them  
on the windowsill before  
washing her hands, as if  
meaning burns spell-deep  
in everything. Give me  
your eyes, down to the root,  
and I would give you

in answer only a room  
of corners, every surface  
the same to the touch. Give  
me your tongue and teeth  
and I would seal them tight  
in a jar of honey, say,  
Listen. I want to tell you  
the secret to surviving:  
it's easier to pretend  
you were never young  
enough to have a mother,  
that there were never any bees.

**Axis**

There's no name for the moment  
everything grows a silver sheen,  
as if to say the game is up, break  
open anything and all you'll find  
is television snow, Styrofoam core  
showing through its painted color.

Today the roof shook off its shingles  
and lay down in the yard. Women  
turned like weather vanes standing  
in the ruin, waiting for the next  
violent push. Red morning, sailor's  
warning too late, stretched down  
a hand and lifted their metal limbs.

**Out**

There is no room cold enough  
to keep her insides from rotting  
so she does the next best thing,  
throws forty pounds of eggs out  
into the street. A blue face plays  
in the background. Gridded sky,  
like paper, oranges itself careful  
box by box. Wires went down  
hours ago. The food on the stove  
is getting cold. She walks outside  
and grows down, plants herself  
by the fence. When it falls down,  
no one will pick it back up, cut  
out the softened parts, dig new  
holes for its posts. Power lines  
snap and feed the starving air.

**Final Hour**

I was nothing special,  
born inside a bird's ceramic mouth.  
Mother watched over water  
for the living, kept her stone wings still  
while others bathed. She watched the sun  
bruise, bleed, lay its red liver on the edge of the world  
for us to eat. Stars crawled out, clicked their teeth.

Down the road, the white bridge  
wrapped close over the earth's open vein.  
The rails allowed an arm to stretch all the way  
up to the shoulder, up to the lung breathing out ice.  
Below, the water furred over white with frost,  
closed grass eyelashes. Church bells called like crows  
at the hour, never stopped to wonder.

## Six for Gold

First was a grinding blush of light  
coming from the kitchen, someone  
already awake at six a.m., switching  
on every bulb, crushing coffee beans

small enough to bleed. Still in bed,  
your blanketed body a dome amidst  
the blue sun on the walls. Then teeth

falling into the earth like wet seeds,  
the impossible task of gathering them  
together, your neck's sudden snap

into eyes. Wait. If you let there be a day  
and a night, you will turn the sun  
into a hungry mouth snapping after

itself. You will have to fill the world  
with meat—feathered and temporary.  
But there is someone in the kitchen,

although you don't know their name  
(you've never been good with names)  
and the weight of their living brushes

itself on the walls like gold. You try  
to speak, but your raw throat cracks  
in its own kind of language. Somehow  
you have let all of this happen again.

## VITA

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