


Fall 2021

The years in stained glass

Heather Tillery

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The Years in Stained Glass

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

Heather Tillery

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Thesis of Heather Tillery Approved by:

Christopher Howell, Graduate Study Committee

Date_____

Jonathan Johnson, Graduate Study Committee

Date_____

Julia Smith, Graduate Study Committee

Date_____

*-for my husband Justin, and my daughters
Charlotte, Lucy and Rose*

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Two Meetings in Blue

-after Matisse's Blue Nudes

I.

*This has already happened.
You met yourself once
in a hospital parking garage.*

*As you drove up the concrete ramp
your future self
drove past you—*

*circling downward
into the blue light
of afternoon.*

*Through windshields
you could see lines
under her eyes, like rain.*

II.

*You will remember this
many years later
as you walk the curved trail*

*after your own visit
to that hospital.
There, you see your past self*

*weaving toward you
through frozen forest grass.
Vapor will rise from your lips,*

*curling into blue runes.
You will cross each other
in a place where the skies*

*are parted by trees.
Your eyes will lock
in the blue light of recognition.*

*This time
you both will tip your heads
and you will smile.*

*You will understand then
how everything has already
been written—*

*and how each idea is waiting
somenhere in a blue room.
You will believe, then*

*in this world
written in blue circles and loops
in a tender hand—a blue world*

*which has never once asked
to be
understood.*

I.

Spheres, Creation

spheres in red

*soft sadness of a belly
and roiling center of earth*

*globule of something
on the edge of your lip*

*lightning reflected
in that dark window of your eye*

*inside a translucent bead
crushed seeds of pomegranate*

*crimson suspension
inside the rim of a glass*

*rings on a tree like ripples
falling outward*

pearls

*your dripping spoon
my open mouth*

*a wafer placed
upon a patient tongue*

your open arms

vermillion planet

distant nipples

*a sunrise like ink
spreading out slowly*

*onto a blank expanse
of silk*

Fourth Day of Creation

Where my mouth should be
there is an apple
and inside it,
the sweetness of a myth.

Yesterday I floated
across dark cerulean waves
that spiraled into whiteness
before sand and rocks
pushed themselves up through water
cushioning and pressing
the soft pads of my feet.

I felt how it feels to walk
under the light all day.

When darkness falls
stars explode
from their compression.
I pull my feet into socks
woven from words
and walk into the night.

The Orb Weaver Spider Speaks in Gold

I.

What is forever, but
a latticed web: golden, unbroken
and nearly invisible? A web
wider than emptiness.
History passes through each
other string I pluck
with my small legs.

II.

I remember the shadows,
the ice,
and each disappearance.
I am witness
to this world woven
in small arabesques of silk.

I remember what I have taken
yet, I do not repent.
I pick up the brokenness;
hold the threads of it
in my mouth
and begin to weave again.
Penance is not spoken in words,
but in continuing
creation.

III.

Lately, somehow
I have begun to hum,
have begun to feel the music
on the coarse hairs
of my legs, just underneath
the roaring notes
of the cicadas. Look,
after all this time, I
have learned to sing.

IV.

When the time for loss arrives,
I feel what is plucked
from the web.
The vibrations travel
to the very edges
of thread and light.
Farther. They follow
submerged slopes
of sand, travel upward
through the underside of ice
and then
they return.

For a moment
I vibrate too. I match
my small body
to the loud song
of the earth,
as it crescendos, rises, hums
in the unstable song
of everything.

In the Clutches of a Hawk, the Mouse Rethinks Her Life

I am caught, and now
in the slight pull
of my neck, I lift.

Gravity I know
in the fall of berries
to pleated earth

and water that drips
from everything.
This is not gravity.

I do not fall
in the direction of
berries or all that meets

the earth.
I rise into stratus —
endless perimeter of sky.

This,
after such narrowness.
All my life

I saw only the earth's
belly, the pink underside
of nose. I kept to it, hidden

like the smallest secret.
Now, the naked crowns of trees
push through snow

and a slip of stream
parses the loam.
This land is divisible

like the seeds
I sectioned out,
carefully feeding my own.

Two possibilities.
To be consumed by what grips
my neck, or twist free

and plunge
all the way down
knowing this.

Below, a the stream narrows.
Blue trails like capillaries
seen through a transparent

ear. Sand. Pillows of air
parted now by my own
smallness.

So much of it reflected
against the darkness
of my eyes.

The Raccoon

Its not that I wanted to see the pink
across the asphalt
or the odd singularity
of the curved form
like the back of a whale;
or even how a thing appears to be captured
with a good lens,
but I cannot help but notice
how it stays just so, every hair sharp
and no one
cleans it up, a body
we swerve around, even
while feeling quite
sad. We gather
our children, buy apples,
and the thing remains.

//

We may become upset
passing the thing by and by
the open mouth
the open eye—
as if we were worried
it had some questions
since no one
is taking the evidence away.

The Raccoon II

In the next life
 the raccoon comes back
 as president —
 campaigns
 to put a great deal of money
 into infrastructure,
 mostly roads—
 not building them,
 but putting in walls along them
 to protect wildlife
 and installing those arches
 over highways
 where creatures might walk
 to safety.

The raccoon imagines
 a spectral procession
 over the bridge—
maybe two by two.
Why not?
 Birds of paradise
 alpacas, those zebras
 with modern lines,
 lion and lioness
 trailing their connotations
 like musk.

Penguins totter across too,
 as if the road did not
 pass under them like a shadow
 as if they were walking instead
 down clouds
 to a tendon of land
 for the very first time, together,
 and as if what they were about to discover
 could remain.

//

The Raccoon is pleased
 at the progress
 but his approval rating
 plummets.

He resigns himself
to the fact that some things
can be helped a little
and some things
cannot be fixed.

He smokes cigars
most nights and speaks to the stars
blurred at the edges
by city lights—
now that the animals
which parade are fewer—
now that the ice cannot help
pulling back
into the sea.

Extinction in Purple

I spend my mornings
scouring huckleberry
for surprising variations—
purple thistle, sweet clover.
Shadows overweb the holly.

Two ravens are hungry, cawing
on the lowest branch.
Somewhere below them, a pool
of gathered rain.
A wind like a doe
whistles into the cup of my ears.

There is a new heaviness
in the old footfall
approaching.

There is no choice—
I unfold from
the hollows, exit the clover
and run with the rest
through heliotrope
and gathering shadows.

We are the deer
and it is we, always,
which do the leaving.

In a World Where the Giant Sloth Didn't Go Extinct

Just outside the parking lot
of this megachurch,
almost hidden by a grove
of aspen, there is
a Megatherium.

It is almost nine
on this Sunday morning
and church members
begin to arrive in cars.

This sloth abandons its meal
of leaves and swivels
its head, languidly
toward the sounds
of car doors closing,
and the blip-blips
of activated car locks.

He blinks slowly —
once, then twice, his eyes
lobbing between humans
and their cars.

This mystified Megatherium
is not meaning-making
but simply witness
to the quick movements
of limbs and stampede
of shoes.

The congregants funnel
through the vast entrance
and for a moment
all is quiet.

And there is our Megatherium,
claws of forelegs
grasping an aspen branch,
hind legs and tail
a tripod, all of him,
unmoving
except for the fluid arc
of his enormous eyes.

Elegy for the Blue Earth

What is inside each day
that is left, but a batting
of an eye, and a closing
of the heart?

But listen—
beneath that, the song.

It comes from the book
carved from obsidian.
From the core of the earth—
the song of dirt
and grass, rain and muck.

This song—
first, the silence of geometry—
an egg which shatters.
The river which curves
in a new direction.

It is the music of salmon
eye to eye with a dam—
the drumming of impermeable ice
sloping down into phosphorescent brine.

A world that is dying—
the palest shade
of glacial blue.

The most beautiful notes. Pain
like wind against our cheeks.

visitor to the land of discontent

bending each day to the rhythm
of time which falls
in granules
through the narrow waist
of the glass

waiting for snow to stop falling
in Texas smoke
to disperse in California

waiting for a world I can place
inside the open palms
of my children

I used to carry faith on my back
a cross on my thigh
but I seem to have misplaced
them both

dear world
that smells of pine
world of elephants
of iguanas
of the smallest mice

we are both shattering
like the cracked face
of a mirror

We may Not Have as Much of it Left as We Wish

-In Conversation with Salvador Dali's "The Persistence of Memory"

A face like an iridescent smear
of paint spread over the emptiness of sand
like the face of a mime. Or
is it just our collective face that frames
the closed eyelashes
dark as the feathers of an eagle
and the thin night which surrounds it?

The golden threads of eyebrows lacing above
like the retreating flight of a sparrow.
The memory of lightning.

It was only a matter of time.

An old fashioned clock lays upon the cheek
and time seems to be softening
like a warm pat of butter.
From a wooden box a tree grows
like the grey trunk of an elephant.
An ocean beckons. Another clock wilts
like the hopeful face of a violet.

We are closer to dying than being born.

Time is triangulated by clocks deflating
like punctured balloons that sink
under the scrim of the ocean. A lid of blue
with a rim of umber.

We are not invincible.

We are in a gulf surrounded by sunlit cliffs,
the golden hour illuminating our faces
in each shade of blue and brown, a world
filled in shades and painted
with each hue of what melts away.

The Earth Replies after the Human Have Left

The elegance of your shadow,
slim ampersand of your spine—
they fade. So does the punctuation
of concrete and geometry of steel.
The floating islands of milk jugs
and concentric circles of cans—
the rings that held them together.

What was it you wanted?

Did you feel when I bent
to your touch, how
I sank and then rose, imperceptible
as opening lips
or the sound of eclipse?

Did you notice how I held
your small feet
upon the softest part
of my cheek?

I continue to blossom.

Refusing you that
would have been my own
disappearance.

Nobody, but Nobody is Going to Make it Out Here Alone

-Maya Angelou

Outside, the wind
is a whistling passage
that carries sound like notes
from the viola, music
pulled along an ancient passage
of air that is parted
then absorbed by the open leaves
of young cherry trees.
Breathing in. Breathing out.

We parents continue
to open computers
bungle passwords,
slice apples.

We are so frayed.

Meanwhile
fruit trees continue to exchange sunlight
for food and soft cherries
are born from this exchange.

The losses are invisible—a wrist
that forgets the hand—a hand
that forgets to touch
the open fissures
of a tree.

The unfurled leaves,
the young children that understand

so much.

On the news, protests dot
the map of our country
like constellations, like an old anger—
a wild subterraneous reaching
of that ancient tree.

-May 28, 2020

wings and scales

in the news again
 things are dire
 a bubbling heat
 an onslaught of ash

//

near the river's bowl
 through a window of stones
 you can see pike-minnow
 going about their day

it could be called
 a miracle
 if one believed in such things

//

on the right
 a landfill
 on the left a church

patient blue symmetry
 you could just about fold in two

the church
 the mound
 the ash

//

above
 a swallowtail butterfly
 blooms
 in its own translucence

the only fire today
 will be here
 seen
 through membranes
 of paper-thin gold

light fanning downward
 in tongues of flames

II.

Purity & Glass

Some Would Consider it Rape

Psyche lies on a roof reading a worn copy
of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. An afternoon
to herself and the air is ambered
with pollen. On her face, warm light
of mid afternoon.
In her relaxation, her thighs part.

*Gregor, now an insect,
attempts to open his door.*

Beside her, a glass of lemonade with prisms
of ice. Water beading like opals on her glass.
A sudden breeze thick
with spores goose-fleshes her arms.

Psyche sneezes
turns a page, goes on reading.

*Gregor is injured; an apple
has cracked his shell.*

She barely notices
when the wind touches her
like the soft hands of a god. Then,
something enters her
under the bright light
of the afternoon—something
that has pushed all the way
to her brain. An invisible hand
on warm skin.

Psyche drops her book
and pages blow back and forth
in the gathering wind.

Gregor, the insect, dies.

then, flutter—

Gregor awakes.

Psyche's neighbors go on clearing
a space by the fence for roses, their knees
covered in rich soil.

Cars drive past, oblivious to
Psyche, who arches her back
on the rooftop
under the invisible pleasure of Cupid,
who has come home from work early.

Psyche reaches out into the air;
topples her glass. Golden liquid seeps
into the space around her
and onto her book, now sodden—
and gathering transparence.

Again, Sacajawea

I read about you everywhere.
See your likeness
in the unlikeliest places.

Here, a picture: you are carrying your son
strapped to your back—
there, with bee-bitten lips

on the face of a stamp.
In one painting
you hold out your arm, pointing

two fingers vaguely east
toward a sunlit valley of trees.
In this book here, your breasts

are rendered like river-rocks;
rounder and heavier than clay cups.
Who is telling this story?

Before you gave your son
then later, your daughter away
and before you slipped back

into that water,
did anyone share your grief?
Was there any measure, at all, of relief?

I say water,
but I mean history
which leaves faint ripples like runes

and we read you
by faraway light—
by a distant moon.

Intelligence / Eve

1.

Full of a thousand seeds;
 apple, primarily. Volumes in red,
 deep vermilion
 or tigers eye yellow.

I am thinking about the minds
 of women
 and then of Dante,
 and men like him
 who find arsenic
 inside the mind of every Eve,
 then withdraw their hands as if
 from a snake.

2.

Sometimes
 I mistake air for song
 marveling at the exchange of notes
 on the upstroke of wind.

The world outside
 is swallowed
 by small indentations
 of the margins,
 just like I began shrinking
 from the moment I stood up.

What will sink
 and what will surely burn. Always,
 the apprehension of a finger
 pointing through the ivy gate
 and past sacred trees
 where the earth
 will grate our heels.

//

My secret:
 outside the gate

not all is lost. Outside, intelligence
cannot be contained in seeds
or the red sweetness
of pomegranate.

Song is more porous than iron.
Think of what it means
to be a woman outside the walls
of Eden
in a place
where rows of trees
grow heavy not with knowledge
but with understanding.

The Dress Remembers / The Purity Retreat

I. The Dress Remembers

*I remember what I have held
in my folds
the way I hung loose
around her slender waist
like an ocean
of milk.*

II. The Retreat

The pastor's wife leads the girl
away from the cluster
of the others, who scatter popcorn
like constellations
on red carpet—
walks her to this room,
and to that dress.

The girl pulls off her shirt
and shorts, her body
curling shyly into the blank expanse
of satin. The pastor's wife
secures loose fabric
with safety pins she pulls
from the puckered flower
of her lips.

The girl sees herself now
in the cool expanse
of mirror.
How she wished for clairvoyance—
how she wanted to see the bright
plains of her future,
but sees in its reflection—
only paleness.

III. The Dress Remembers

*I remember that woman
and her pins —
I remember once holding
her curves like petals,
cupping
the softness of her hips.*

*I was pulled from darkness
now to hear
these girls practice saying
no, I can't
over and over again
until these words echo
around their internal landscapes
gathering in tight coils,
knotting.*

IV. The Retreat

The pastor's wife's hand rested
upon a constellation
of the girls' freckles —
innumerable endings
written on a shoulder
of milk.
*How do you feel
seeing yourself like this?*

V. The Retreat

This girl pledged
purity along with the others—
sealed herself
inside the envelope
of her own small body.

Until her own wedding
she wore the purity ring
to remind her
that she belongs to another —

jesus curved
around the pale bone
of her finger.

VI. The Retreat

The pastor's wife holds up
a camera—
a flash of light
bounces off the mirror
and refracts into shadow.

Is that image in the mirror
really her?

No.

Is that her body to own?

I can't.

VII. The Dress Remembers

*I housed the slip
of each girl pulled away
from popcorn and games
one after another,
in a succession
like the shutters clicking.*

*You are special, the pastor says
later to the girls
after I was tucked away.*

*You are beautiful—
then
the list of don'ts
piercing the smooth lines
like exposed threads,
gossamer.*

The Body /Subject/ To Interpretation

I read a story of a woman
shamed outside an art gallery
for nursing her baby.
She, surrounded by nudes
in various stages
of repose
and some man
misread the cues,
saw sex
in the mauve beacon
of her nipple.
He didn't see
what her baby's lips drew
from the plumpness
of her breast;
forgot that he, too
once knew the sweet
language of milk.

Sex?

There was a poem
you wrote when you were young
about spring
about the dampness
and the unfurling.
Then, Oh. Sex.
A wild purple iris budding
and nothing more.
Or maybe something more.

The innuendos don't even try
to hide.

You read once
how the *amorphophallus titanum*
takes ten years to bloom;
how it pushes its stamen
through petals
like the silk folds
of a dress and also smells
of meat.

I mean, come on.

Remember the way
you suspected sex
as a child
when you climbed a tree
in the backyard, and clung to it
with tender thighs:
a white butterfly
flitting upward
in blue relief.

The Iris Teaches Visibility

Mostly tucked behind trees
and blurred, you have tried your best
to step where even you
cannot hear it, not a twig
askance. A gauzelike film
of your own life. Goddess or ghost
walking on wet forest floor,
collecting fronds of bracken
under each pale heel.

When you step in front of the moon

you pause

shadow

then fracture.

It was not until you encountered the iris

in all her sexual whiteness—
the one who was waiting beneath you
all winter
with knotted hands—
not until then, did you learn
to answer.

Here she is now, opening
her bridal petals and silk,
following the summoning of thaw
toward the visible world.

I know a Lady Who Swallowed the Earth

You float in the bath —
pale breasts
suspended like canoes
upon the water.
Your belly is an island
of sand.

The wild acre of your body
is more than halfway
submerged.

Sometimes, you open
like a flower, your thighs
becoming two petals.

What remains
inside yourself, submerged
in the pink cavern:
your husband,
your children,
the concern for snow leopards
and those three toed sloths,
the hungry bears.

You receive them
like warm rolls
in a basket
lined with cloth.

Inside, you house the honey bees—
and one thing
always leads to the next.

You are pregnant
with the world.

When you dip your face
under the water
up floats a mask
like a pale lily pod
with the imprint of your skin.

Pre / Menopausal Myth

Brown nothing of fertility
 and that familiar fist of pain.
 My husband drives off,
 returning with a box
 of those pads with wings
 nestled in tidy rows
 like origami doves.

Just in time.

As I open the box
 they emerge
 from their plastic cocoons, unfurling
 gauzy wings, twitching them
 with shy ambition.
 Some land on my thigh
 the others on the grey tile
 of the floor.

My mouth, in the mirror
 forms that small O of surprise
 as they tentatively lift,
 then stream
 through the open window
 in the most perfect V—
 cavorting like pale starlings
 in cerulean sky.

//

Someday in five years
 or ten,
 I will reach out a window
 just like this,
 open my own
 cupped palms
 and release my last egg

my oldest possibility—
that final relic of my body
into the open light
of afternoon.
It will unfold its gauzy wings
then rise up at last, free
to join
The Great Murmuration.

lost eggs & *hyacinths*

leaning
into the light

their youth
spent

soft orbs of coming
and going—

departing
discreetly

now, acrid
return

into subterranean
milk

the hyacinths—
muted

in the space of a week:
and all of it on my desk

fragrance of purple
ellipsis

a song
in faint floral tongues,

into cloudy water
murky as a slip

*was what little you had
enough?*

Christ Remembers the Womb

In me (the child)
there is no salvation

but to live in this world
and not yet know

of how much can be turned
to ash. I am

*unintimidated by multiplicity
of magnified beauty—*

I never wonder
about my Father, but

wonder what will be asked
of me, the Son of Man— blossoming

in this dark cave. I don't yet know
of the faces sick with thirst for the merest

sip of salvation.
My world is still a crimson curtain, whole

and sealed. I am carried rocking
in rose-light, sweet parasite

in the valley
rooted

to those for whom
I don't yet have language.

CHRIST DIED

The church is covered
in enamel slabs

like rows of unbrushed teeth,
but what interests me most

is the sign. Darkness, then
lime green swirling CHRIST.

After a beat,
twirling DIED.

I drive away before I see
what happens next

to this cartwheeling Christ.
Is he having a good day?

Maybe feeling a bit peppy?
If I stayed, I wonder

what would have pinwheeled
onto the blackness?

Maybe CHRIST DIED
FOR ME, like usual

or perhaps this time
he just died.

No golden streets
or the heaviness of salvation.

Perhaps he is relieved,
even elated

to share this
in two pixilated words.

*Earth Gods**-after H.D.'s "Sea Gods"*

They say you will come in a flash of light
 from clouds and pull up the forgiven
 as if by a string.

They say there is hope for those who
 let repentance fall from their lips
 like unblemished plums, which break open
 torn with the sorrow of it.

They say you are good
 and are standing
 just behind the ragged curtain, almost
 within reach.

But we have found we prefer
 to touch the gods.

We begin to gather the hyacinths
 slipping into this world like lavender tongues
 murmuring into our ears—
*Look, here is love one can touch
 with fingers, mercy that falls
 from the mouth of a mother.*

The body is the first to respond
 to what it has always known.

We gather hyacinths in our arms; shielded and tender,
 blinking like a distant awakening
 in the open field.
 We tug them from our lawns and clip them
 from beds of river rocks. We gather armfuls
 of grape hyacinths, tiny and strong
 with skirts edged in lace.

You will come in a flash of light—purple
 petaled, and looking up.

Interlude: Poetry as Butterfly

Each curl of wool that has grown
 this year has cupped sorrow.
 Each pinning of ice
 on a cold line, evokes rue.
 Mine,
 and I'm guessing yours.

Then you swirled in
 like a skylark
 from a blue cloud. Jazz
 and the offering
 of invisible bread.
What a surprise I thought
 while you danced
 with your wings flapping
 on the rim of my nose.

Once, I found you
 under the mirrored scale
 of a fish, then folded
 like a letter in the chalky pith
 of a mandarin.
 You pooled on the silt path,
 a mirror cupping
 a phosphorescent moon.

You became my surprise,
 my friend who sung in measures
 of pearl.

With you, hats dissolved
 into azure clouds.

I chased you
 flying through the air
 with a wheel between my hands,
 and meters of silvery air
 beneath my feet.

I think I was looking down
 the mechanical neck.
 But it was you
 whom I seized
 and flew with, sideways
 wing in arm, dancing the tango

slipping into the wind—
tearing it open
like the thinnest paper.

You were the dream I had
as a child,
the running water, the music
of yes,
a dream of indigo night
and milk-teeth dipped
in gold.

I ran across wet grass
with you around my neck—
you, as soft as rice.

Do you remember
how together we traced
the circumference of sand,
the lucid rim
of an eye, the base of a beaker
filled with amber light?

I pour you now
into the open lips
of my future,
into each blank hemisphere
of my book.

I will hold you
like soap
between fingers
laced together
like a fragile nest.
I will tap you
gently against a window
that has not been cleaned
for years.

III.

Fractals, Diamonds

*Fractals**- for Justin***1. Prisms**

On my left ring finger,
a shimmering—
fourteen pinpoint diamonds
on a silver ring.

Sometimes
they surprise me
like the blue of my husband's
eyes seen through the rising
steam of tea—
two geothermal pools
of concentrated depth.

2. Diamonds

About diamonds:
Time and pressure can teach
a certain luminescence
and a certain kind of death.

Inside each small diamond,
a marriage:
inside each marriage
a fractal—always,
what is lost
then, infinite expansion.

3. Sea Glass

On my right ring finger,
my own skin.

On my palm, a story
written in creases.

Now the map: my life
written on innumerable
grains of sand,
in driftwood
and bottle green glass.
Where to go, and where never
to return.

4. Air

Some people say
I have changed
but they are wrong.
I travel
in the direction
of my release:
over the same ocean
by a different pattern
of flight.

I travel inside the
transparent spirals
of wind —
unstrained suspension—
a life
written in salt-spray
and loss.

5. Sapphire

On this empty finger,
a new ring, one
I found in a daydream.
Sapphire, and inside it —
the earth.

Here, an orchard in Spring,
a row of pear trees—
their ownership
written and then, rewritten.

The resistance of an orchard
is quiet, but if you listen,
it groans.
Its green mouth folds
into itself everything,
becomes a graveyard,
and against all odds,
remains hungry.

The earth writes
the end of every story
with chartreuse tips of leaves
and tiny green pears.

6. Dragonfly

On my palm, luminescence.
In Summer, I set the table
outside for lunch. Peaches
soft as the pads of fingers,
a wedge of cheese, bread.
Inside me, another table
where I keep those I love.
A kitchen without loss.
A hearth. The heaviness
of iron,
the aroma of bread.
Dark cherries in a white bowl.

My husband slices bread,
offers me a plate.
I reach out my hand
and on the wide open palm
alights the glistening body
of a dragonfly. The stillness
of its wings! The green
translucence
of it all.

Thinking of Walt and Emily

*-in conversation with Emily Dickenson's "Hope is the Thing
with Feathers" and Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass"*

I.

Inside the unclenching spirals
of ferns, in green elbows
of grass, ferocious hope
is pushing through the pale comberover
of dry winter grass.

Normally, here I would laugh
as I imagine
this blond toupee and green
crew-cut competing for real-estate
like a large family bumping elbows
and spilling soup.

But today I wonder if this grass
stops to ask itself
what this winter has cost—
as it pushes each sharp crown
upward with such eagerness.

II.

At such a clear bisection
of seasons
and the longitudinal lines
of approaching middle age,
I walk the woods behind my house
asking my soul
what comes next.

The grass continues to stretch
into a world
that promises nothing.

III.

Today, my soul feels painted
in umber. Intelligent clouds

spin a spotless veil
 over my head. I lay down
 in such vividness
 trying to remember the entrance song
 to my own life.

Meanwhile, chickadees descend
 from nearby aspen
 and perch, gently
 on my chest. Hope weighs almost nothing
 at all. Fourteen sentinels
 press like feathers
 against my body, which becomes a branch
 answering
 with the smallest viridescent
 blossoms.

Three notes.

Twee-twee-twee
 (and a decibel lower, in a minor key)
Twee-twee-twee

IV.

Each year we have been married
 I gather time in small clusters
 like snowberries.

Twee-twee-twee
Twee-twee-twee

A calling out
 and always, the answer:

Twee-twee-twee
Twee-twee-twee

Green cattails in sun and emerging shards
 of misgiving. A scrape of velvet antlers,
 pretense falling
 like bark. Underneath,
 the muscular persistence of green.

Therapy, Rendered in Fauvism

I share how one identical twin pulls away
 from the other
 while the oldest
 is often unreadable
 like a bride next to a shadow.
Sometimes it feels that sad—
 like emptiness on a plain of ice,
 unyielding.
 Even the birds
 have muted their feathers—
 dark wings cutting through a blank horizon.

//

We swam through the deep hues
 of grief
 then so many
 crumpled white tissues
 before the colors around us
 became scents—
 filtered hues of lilac. Once, a hint
 of the most spirited orange.

//

Not until therapy
 did I learn that in distress
 I spin plans like knotted threads
 and for you, my dear one,
 the lights flicker to dark. We have spent
 so much time
 outside that narrow spectrum of light
 and color
 where we can touch each other
 with warm fingers
 and say —

Against Entropy

*-in conversation with Lucia Perillo and her poem
"Long Time Too Long"*

I think of nightshade
winding its arms around your tomatoes' soft throat
while you stop to remember the body
of your beloved under a familiar quilt. You say that
is work.

That *was* work,
and so is this. Today I remember
two flattened birds in the road, a possum. To be a human
seems to be half traveling
down windy roads, hair trailing behind us
and half feeling like shit
about animals.

I remember
to water my twins' pea plants that are in that delicate house
between wilting and thriving; their own small tendrils
stretch for something in the direction of blue
for something to hold.

My husband ordered a pillow
and we spent the morning worrying
it was delivered to our neighbors.

What isn't work
in its own way, really? The quilt, the tendril
each demand attention.

This morning we cried together standing
by the kitchen sink.

It has been a year of struggle
in every way we can remember.

Lucia I will think of you, when I put on
the silky thing
spread liberally with peonies—
when my husband and I
reach out to each other, our arms.

V.

Brightness without Borders

A Moment Alone at a Campground: AQI 150

The sun is sherbet and it shouldn't be
beautiful, but it is.
The campground is nearly empty.

I spend so little time alone.

My three children who this weekend
have eaten mostly bread and blackberries
are visiting their grandparents.

How little time there is
to know anything at all.

My husband told me yesterday
about the mother tree—
how it knows when to start giving—
How they tolerate (*choose?*) a life
of slivered proximity.

I am not that good.

The tent poles are shaped like ribs,
the long interlocking spine.
A helicopter overhead
is trailing smoke—
the size and perfect shape
of a dragonfly
resting for a moment
on a bruised leaf.

Identical Twins

- for Charlotte and Lucy

1.

I had no choice.
You came through me
and I became a canyon—
splayed open
like the soft
belly of a fish.
Is it love
that echoes you
perpetually?
What is given,
and in the brief
space after,
what is returned.

2.

You cannot be contained
in the length
of my body.
So, I build my life
around the curls
of your hair,
and the rise
of your breath.

You are a brightness
without borders.

I hold the husks
of outgrown haloes
in my arms,
string them like
golden beads
and wear them
around the softest part
of my throat.

3.

My belly carries
the memory of you
like a fountain
without water.
What remains
are wishes
pressed into the round
center of coins.

What is submerged
is not forgotten.
I build my home
on the ground
of perpetual release.

4.

You are built
with the soft bricks
of each other.
I have only given
what I had —
my meagerness.
When I wish
it was more,
I listen.

Between you —
a conversation like harmony
I cannot follow, a dance
in sunlight, wild curls
of gold. Your arms
wrapped around one another,
your small limbs
form an unbroken circle.

What Heather didn't See

Today her sinuses ached
as she drove her kids to school.

She could not remember the sun
or a happy time when children

were not fighting in the
back seat of some car.

She could not remember
when this car did not smell of

hand-sanitizer and string cheese.
Nor could she hear the swallows

as they released their music
into the listening ear of winter.

She could only hear
her children's dissonance—

the sound of disappointment.
She began to feel

like disappointment,
itself. Outside,

evergreens began to gesture
in tufted impatience-

a thousand fingers,
pointing wildly to sky!

Up, they tried to shout
but could only sign.

She drove by maples,
waving in every direction

like ecstatic children,
shaking birds from limbs.

Look up, the trees seemed to say—
There is the sky

*that was just a bruise
and now, again,*

*past those clouds
is the unbroken shell of morning!*

Condensation as Witness

She drives up this hill
each morning
in a mini-van humming
with the major and minor
notes of her children.

I have grown fond of her.
Today, clouds lie low
on the earth,
and she drives through snow
that falls like ash,
and through a single
ribbon of sun.

Today, she curses
because she is late,
and because she is limited.
When she is alone,
she wonders
if she has been anything
other than liquid,
frozen
then fissured.

I drive with her each day,
her car full, then empty.
I gather in silent
transparence,
witness to her.

I am there when she
lets out a measure
of her grief, small
drops in a great ocean.

I wish to teach her
the lesson of liquid:
the clarity I have gained
each time I fall all the way
to bladed earth —
each time I am broken
anew by the sharpness of it —
then each time I rise
again and again,
toward the sun.

Mothers of Twins, We are not so Different

I guess you are just like me—
building towers with
frozen bricks of milk,
singing lullabies
threaded with light.

You are like me—
you conceive in pairs,
when you look outside
you place palms
against cool glass.

Sometimes,
you find yourself dipping
your hand into the fountain
of your youth,
carrying memories like tadpoles
in cupped palms.

You wad convention up
like paper, fill your pockets
with swollen figs.

And like me,
when you dance
you prefer to do it
in the nave, with hands
splayed open like a
minor constellation
of stars.

Crossing before you, the poems

wild-haired and barefoot
ascend a maple — look,
while you were writing,
the poems smeared peanut butter
on the arms of the tree, balanced
a birdhouse on one limb,
which they painted themselves
with pale acrylics.

Are birds anxious about where they sleep
or what they eat? This particular evening,
what we know
is that poems worry about birds.

Clockwork of midnight
and where are the poems?
Invisible inside of darkness, folded
in dreams of a thousand wings beating
translucent and silver, the ones
that alight on your shoulder,
like forgiveness.

When the birds wake, *look*
they breakfast on the cool
smears of peanut butter beaded
with dew, while the poems
are still asleep
tucked like bookmarks
between sheet and duvet. One poem holds
a stuffed owl. Another grinds her teeth.
The third poem dreams of flight.

Charlotte's Dream

Inside our house grew a tree
between carpeted stairs
and IKEA bookshelf, brushing
the velvet blue of the couch.
It grew there through the years
jutting and gnarling and we
wound around it with vacuums handles
and plates in our hands.

There was an olive tree that stood
in the bedroom of Odysseus and Penelope,
strong and unfailing, pinning
their bed, their story
to the earth.

This is not that house.
Everything here has the habit
of changing.

Now, fungus has covered our tree
like scales, and it has grown dark
and speckled with age. Soft rot
winds around its trunk
like wounds and we sweep bark
from the floor like skin.

One day, she realized
what needed to be done:
Charlotte gave it
permission to fall.

Sick with time and age, the tree
let out a sharp and bright final breath,
then like Zeus's lightning, fell thundering
into the brown arms of earth.

*Six Spheres of Autism***I.**

There is a seed
of dormant sadness —
green and small
that I hold
in my mouth.
Sometimes, I roll it
into the soft pouch
of my cheek.

II.

The world
of children is found
under upturned stones,
and once, pulled
from the darkest pocket
of my body.

III.

The sphere
of quiet discomfort
presses on my tongue,
a wafer, a world. Often,
there is nowhere
to set it.

IV.

Charlotte and Lucy
love to sing —
open palmed and tender,
raising their faces
to the green pulse
of their lives.

V.

There are bees
that bruise
diaphanous petals—
paper thin jasmine
or rose. My Rose
can feel this and
each thrumming vibration
of song.

VI.

There is a garden
in which I kneel
beside her,
then Charlotte, Lucy
in turns. I plant
a seed in the darkness
of earth
with bare hands,
bracing, shoring
the soil around us.

*Sensory Swing**-for Rose*

There were onions in your soup tonight—
devastating and innocuous
like jellyfish:
like Man-of-War in your minestrone.

I think Poseidon—
of tide and salt.

Now, you climb into the folds
of your swing, and I ask
how it feels.
You say that finally
it feels
like you are being carried
without discomfort.

Your small body, now,
is a pendulum.

The last time you were wrapped
like this was in the pink swaddle
that spooled your tiny limbs.
Before that, the womb.
I would walk with smallest you
inside the growing country
of my body.

The swing droops down, empty
after you, slide out.

In this world that requires
socks, shoes, this world
which serves you onions—
we see your relief
just for a moment
in this woven flight.

Only Child Loses a Dog

It was silence and damp earth and invisible smoke
that filled my pockets with ash. How long did your ghost
visit me through my life?

At seven, the lines between that world and this
still slid down in unexpected paths like rainwater.
At seven, Peter Pan still visited my window, and you
wrapped around my arms like a cloak woven of midnight.

You, my tender shroud of belonging.

What happened?
There was happiness—and then there wasn't.
Grief buried in a place underneath voice.
My hands became the hands of a child, disappearing.

Hats

-for Catherine

Now, we wear hats stacked
like temperamental origami
and folded like loons or clouds—
proverbial and plenty.
Sometimes,
to make my own children laugh
clean underwear
from the laundry pile will do.

//

Do you remember
how we wore woolen hats
while wandering with a map?
We were twenty and still learning
the world laid in grids
and spoken of in variegated movements
of the tongue.

//

For that short time, in Estonia
we carried our warmth, simply—
in clay bowls of borscht, and under hats
still smelling of sheep.

My Body, Remembering Yours

Maybe it is just that my body
hasn't yet learned
of your departure,
but I keep thinking of you at your desk—
with that little name-tag—
and how you dip your spoon
into your carton of yogurt
trying to keep that little swirl on top
intact.

I wanted to enjoy
Netflix more than this.

Instead, I am swinging
the umbilical cord
like a lasso, trying to gather
your little body
back to my own.

The parenting books say
I have to let you go—
feathered and far,
but where was the warning
about how memory
would move through me
like air, whispering grief
through each buttonhole
of my shirt?
How, through each roundness,
there would be the same shadows.

Where was *that* book?

It always surprises me
when I miss you like this.

Later, you run out of the school,
throw your backpack to me,
tip your head to display
your paper hat shaped like a turkey.
You are adorable,
and I really hate holding
your backpack.

Later, I drive you home
and you begin to trace the lines
of sleeves
on a piece of blank paper—
and my body remembers you.

Releasing the Orchard and Letting the Kids Grow

-after H.D.

Lately, it has been hard
to breathe.

This year I let the pears darken
on summer branches
I have had enough—

I let the apples cling
to their cords and I
have had enough—

of cutting back of shaping the thing
in the right way, of training in clean lines
the branches.

Every way leans wild, each pathway
edged with light and heading the direction
of fray and I have had enough.

Clipped cuttings scattered on grass
and I promise the tree
no more.

Reply to the Above Poem after Some Thought

Of course I do prune the tree,
and it produces armfuls of pears.

And the child will go on that medication.
I *will* go to therapy, and then

I will go on that medication too.
Diagnoses grow like apples, and we claim

these labels: *Neurodivere. Twice*
exceptional. Send that child

to school. Home-school the other.
Autism. ADHD. Occupational

Therapy for everyone? I run in the woods
with the dog into cool mist.

Occasionally I send everyone away—
even the cat. Sometimes

I don't make them wash
their earth streaked feet

before bed. We make sushi. We ignore
that fart, and join the loud

and open mouthed laughter,
writing a new and outrageous song.

I question most
of my decisions. On weekends

we let the curls of the twins' hair
go unbrushed and somehow we continue

to let what needs to grow
grow wild.

One Japanese Dagashi Yaokin Ninjapo

*The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.*

- Ezra Pound

1.

On the tongue, sweetness and the aftertaste of salt. Something in the grit that makes my daughters spit the candy out and make me want to keep it in my mouth like a small parcel of tobacco. Smoky, sweet and tasting of somewhere else. Something of plum, something of pearl. I imagine plums infusing my errands for days; turning my own particular anxieties to musk.

2.

To dissolve like rainwater on the rim of our lips: this candy given to my daughters from their Sensei. To have my girls who are suddenly all elbows spit it from their mouths; then hand it to me on their open palms. *Hitsotsu: to live a plain life*. I find a tissue, begin to tell them they may like the taste when they get older, but they are too busy practicing their punches in the car.

3.

Even tied correctly, the ends of their beginner belts lift at the ends like Hebe's hands, lifting ambrosia to eager lips. The belt is ungrooved like a nubile body stepping out of an oyster's shell. I think of miracles coming from the water; from the pried open shell of my own. Here we are. Them, learning groin punches, and me trying to sneak out to buy strawberries and those little cheese crackers, then to return in time to pick them up.

4.

They bow to the dojo like they bow to life itself. It is the force in which they spring from their beds each morning. Two heads like sunflowers, rising and rising toward some distant star.

5.

Antonym of cherry blossoms dotting a black bough; the faces of the young pulling back their feet from an imaginary swipe, then letting out a bright white, *kiai*. Lucy volunteers do

do the Dojo Kun. *Hitosu: Take care of your health. Hitotsu: Be calm and swift.* One candy placed upon each chair. *Just one is enough,* says their Sensei, but then with a smile, *not really.*

6.

How to live in this world? Our souls plummy inside a paper-thin a wrapper decorated in characters which look like small huts, rivers and trees heavy with fruit. To push our finger all the way through, prodding into whatever is on the other side: some other mouth, some other tree with some other fruit. With palms full of sugar. Like petals, we exit the dojo.

flight

sometimes it seems i don't know you at all
one day a cocoon is marooned and empty
on a stalk
the thing having flown

you are already halfway gone
the cup of the earth is emptying

isn't that how it goes
to watch our sons and daughters
opening like books
then feel them clicking at a certain lock
with a shining lake behind it
belonging to just them

you come back
from your grandparents house looking older
you have made a book of airplanes a notebook
in lined paper diagrams of your own flight

If That Mimus Polyglottos Don't Sing...

I.

If I could steal for you
happiness green and curved
and mostly forbidden,
I would grasp that pear
in the pincer of my beak,
deliver it to you
right from my throat.

If that hunger still
grew in your belly
scarred and empty
I would carry you
to the wormed underground.

II.

You should know this:
I keep something to myself—
songs, stolen like rubies
from the crown of a king.

If was a color, I would unzip
my grey suit,
then choose them all.

If you, my little bird, cannot sing,
I hope to teach you
how to come out of your own shadow
to let song
(you can call it yours)
blossom from your throat
like light
refracting from a diamond ring.

Figs

I meant to go back to sleep,
but in a blue bowl there was a mound
of ripe figs.
I ate three of them in thick black
of night, and sweet grit
filled my mouth.

This morning, my Father-in-Law told me
he believes everything
happens for a reason.

I think of the red ribbon of traffic
we passed last night
the kindness of a gas station attendant
bent over a map—
the car last summer
that almost killed my husband, how
all went black for the driver
just a few yards behind him.

What can one make of this?

This morning I learned
that bowl contained the last
of the summer figs, but I plan for more,
heavy and plump, sometime late in July.

I want to tell him that “everything
happens for a reason” only works
if you are the lucky one, and we—
so far, we
have been the lucky ones.

Day Job

Some days
I lurch empty inside the clay basin.
Wayfair, Target, Pinterest—
I am guilty of them all.

Shall we add a hint of fern,
wing of gold?
Let us string up curves,
twist them into a gallery
feathered skylark!

Each pop of color
is a dry scoop of earth.

To love beauty; to bring it indoors
means
to always question
the cost.

The Hardest Thing

This is what we signed up for.
 The child who says
I love you, and we say it back,
 without thinking,
 because we do. Oh, how we love them
 and sometimes
don't tell them this
 we miss our shapes, our waists and
 glossy hair, and God, sometimes
 our dovelike breasts.

The trees are heavy
 with apples. They are more generous
 than I, who pauses
 considers.

Once, I drove
 a pick-up truck
 lined with a tarp and filled
 with soapy water —
 camp counselors bobbing like fruit
 in the bed of it.

Mad with youth and chastity,
 we trailed our fingers in phosphorescence,
 cold and bright
 our swimsuits
 smelling of smoke.

It is what I would want for my kids.
 The soot
 and some of this recklessness.

I don't even let them climb trees
 without warnings burning
 in my throat. I never thought I would become
 such a mother. How I worry
 and how heavy that worry is.

Because death can only come once
 and it is so sudden.

But my God, I want to love them enough
 to let them go—
 let them live.

Wake

*You began a poem in your youth
about a duck swimming*

*through a still pond—
parting the surface*

*with measured strides
under dark water*

*and the downy mass
of its own body.*

*You didn't know then
how this poem should end.*

*You didn't yet see
the rhythm of partings*

*or know
how your own body would*

*work to bring wet life
in its own wake—*

*You didn't know yet how living
is one long wake—*

*a constant sea
of parting.*

*what comes first
to or fro*

toward frozen earth the ice
but beneath it looking up
pale shimmering of paler sky

think of all the feet
claw and hoof that depend
upon circles and webs
distant crags
encrusted with ice the sun and stars
they seem constant but like parents
they age

my children look at my wrinkles
worry in their small fingertips
which press on my skin
they don't want my hair to grow white
and disappear the glaciers' ice

it is aging all of it
and to live anywhere in it
means to carry something
in our pockets
a stone of clarity and grief
for as much time
as we are given

Vita

Author: Heather K. Tillery

Birthplace: Oahu, Hawaii

Undergraduate School Attended: Whitworth University, Spokane WA

Degree Awarded: Bachelors of Arts in English, 2005, Whitworth University

Professional Experience: Internship, Triceratops,
Eastern Washington University 2020
Internship, Willow Springs Magazine,
Eastern Washington University, 2019-2020