

BOUNDARY

STREET

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A Carnegie Mellon | CAPA Collaboration

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Introduction

This chapbook is the result of a collaboration between students in the Advanced Poetry Workshop at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) and literary artists at Pittsburgh CAPA 6-12. Throughout the Spring 2013 semester, CMU students and CAPA students exchanged assignments and worked together on poems, meeting both at CMU and CAPA for workshop sessions and discussions. This collection of poems celebrates this collaboration. We all learned from each other, and we are all better writers and teachers because of this project. We hope you enjoy reading these poems as much as we enjoyed working together.

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Jim Daniels, CMU
Zachary Harris, CAPA

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Because You Watched *The Notebook*

if I could direct our lives
like a film I'd write our script
dress our set & block
our smallest steps

I wouldn't be alone
in soaked sweats without a bra
as rain pours on my fire escape
I wouldn't be waiting for you

our film would be a period piece
so my legs would be shaven & swathed
by silk stockings & red on my lips
when you'd come knocking

in this scene I'd be dry
& you'd be the wet one shouting
honest clichés over the din
of the downpour

you'd fix it all with a stunt
with serenades & sweet stalking
I'm talking some lukewarm pestering
mild like Johnson's for babies

I'd have planned it all out
from the anguished declaration
of love to the now-or-never kiss
to the happily-ever-after because

everything I have learned
about love I have gleaned
from films based on books
by Nicholas Sparks

so I can't fall in love bra-less
& drenched on these slippery
stairs because my heart
is Hollywood's hostage

spirits

papa told me i would never fall in love with a real man
the way he never fell in love
with anything but his bottle
and the way that mama never fell in love with anything but the bruise
(so i asked him to let it go,
but he preferred forever)

i asked you to never let me go
so you told me you never would
the way that you never let go
not of the pen
not of the knife
and not of the gas pedal
in the old grey car
and i asked you to let it go
and you told me you never would
(never never ever)

you asked me to never let you go
when you told me you do
and we recited poems
and the priest told us
til death do us part
(but you preferred forever)

people say you speak like necromancers
and sing a wagner symphony
and you told me i would never understand
you live in an egyptian tomb
but nobody else could ever love me
(and you told me
i could never let you go)

so i took your pen and your knife and the gas pedal of the old grey car
and congratulations you got your wish
(i will never let you go)

Museum Trip #2

I.

I really like this photograph with the deer, I said, it makes me want to go into the desert and find a deer just like it and take all kinds of pictures with it. I'm imagining the two of us stuck in a desert and we stumble upon this deer and we take it with us everywhere, everywhere, and we get to this point where we're down to our very last sip of water, and you're kind enough to let me have it. You're very stern with me, and you tell me, "This sip is for you and only you," and then you turn around for a second, and when you turn back to me, I'm feeding the water to our companion, every drop of it.

II.

"Look at all these people
taking pictures
instead of enjoying the moment.
I'd hate to be a tourist
with a big camera around my neck,
I just want to see the art,
and maybe see you next to me,
not waste my time here like
some of these..."

"Excuse me, would you
mind taking a picture
of me with that painting over there?"

"Yes," you said,
"yes, I would."

III.

You called me a bowl of mashed potatoes and I
asked what you would be, and you said,
"Hot sauce."
I said you were more like a nice cold bottle, crisp beer,

and that took us to the desert without even a sip of water,
but you found me a peach cocktail and let me try
a gulp of your frothy beverage, and together we dove
into a warm bowl of polenta.

IV.

You said you wished we had started on top,
but

“I like something
about the fact
that it all got better
with time.”

Memory Assignment

I saw the stroke of sky and horizon of houses
that were oblivious to our presence.
Even in an unknown land, I was the same country
girl, and was barefoot in blinks. Separating us was
a weedy barrier. We snuck through, with the overgrown
grass and flowers caressing my thighs. Fetus
flower attracted my eyes like cake in a co-op. The cursed
buttercup, a fantasy to gaze upon, an
oxymoron. The tiny topaz bloomed like
fairly sized suns, scattered in the leafy
skyscrapers. Avocado colored anemones. Emerald
tentacles reached up and tickled me. Lit
darkness behind my eyes, I whispered
“Lead me”, and thought to your lips. I could
solely hear wind dodging through the jade straw and
his voice. I felt his hand clasp around mine as he
lead me through the invisible. I felt my
phone vibrating tight in my pocket, the boyfriend
that I didn't have enough respect to stay
faithful to. My foot twisted in a crater of the earth, he gripped my
forearm , saving me, he led me to his lips. They tasted
like neglected teeth and Newports. He smiled and said
that mine tasted like peppermint. His snake
print hat which he said was real made me wonder
what other ruthless animals hid in this euphoria.

Life According To Lord Tennyson

Do you remember
sitting sheltered
under the maple tree?
We lay criss-crossed,
teetering on the hammock,
fondling Fuji apples in our palms,
juice staining our finger tips.
The crisp white rays of the sun
streaked between rusty leaves
to highlight the auburn
veiled in your curls.

Do you remember
the crusty dishes
swaying in the sink?
Window panes moaned
in the screeching wind
as we tower squared up
against one another across
the cool linoleum tile.
The TV echoed from the corner
while our shouts vibrated
through the kitchen cabinet.

Do you remember
taped cardboard boxes stacked
chest high on the bare floor?
Dust bunnies and lost hairs
swirled in the draft of the door.
A frame of faded wood varnish
marked where our rug once lay.
Our footsteps stomped in circles
under the weight of overburdened
until we each finally abandoned

our keys on the bare kitchen counter.

Enter Her Mind

Can you think of a time
when lights danced greater than stars,
burning bright like the fireflies in summers heat?
I can imagine the flashes of memories
jutting through the cracks
of sleepless nights, forming slanderous lies
and quarter-truths that entice reality.

You lied to me once
that you mutilated a nightmare. Dreams
within horrors, within happiness,
that aggravated enticing memories,
destroying the fantasies that you
once stifled. Anonymous insignificant girl
speaking to monsters under her bed with a thousand legs,
pulling back those terrors that ripped
each thought from thought that you fought
so hard to forget.

Can you breathe, child,
can you? I used to think of bliss,
and when it arrived I would evolve,
and the world would swirl into violet.
And you,
you would imagine false dreams,
while mine sink,
a proud moon grimacing at the monstrous sun.

The History of Love

We were forbidden from the thick of the thicket.
We called it a forest. We were small.
My mother worked all and all night, but never forgot my birthday.
His mother forgot lunch, but she let him have a newt.

The forest was nothing more than a clump of trees and untamed
hydrangeas by a Victorian mansions split into wood-floored bedrooms and
narrow kitchens.
Snooping down creaking shadow-stuffed halls and conjuring new
narratives, the house swallowed up our small selves.

Small in the house, but bigger than the ants we herded
onto the great expanses of paper plates
in the overgrown garden.

★

I am working on a project called the history of love.
It begins with my mother
sitting in an over-stuffed yellow chair
and sneezing into her shoulder.
I am working out the ending.

★

We were royalty, sometimes, observing the garden
on a stroll about the grounds. We both had parents
that had married other parents, and both knew
you could love someone on Monday
and yell a lot Thursday.

We knew about swinging on vines and storming the castle.
At school together, kneeling in twigs and mud,
we built cities and tunnels for worms.
I dug the tunnels; he found the worms.

After school, what did we do with all of those ants
milling about on the smooth expanse of paper
to which we had enticed them?

★

Of course, love comes in many flavors, which,
if eaten too quickly, cause brain freezes, et cetera,
and so, in an attempt at sagacity, I lap it up slowly.

The childhood-version, I inhaled
in desperate tablespoons,
which, I believe, has bred me
insatiable.

I burrow my nose in affection.
I demand to be encircled.

★

His newt was dull.
When no one was looking,
it went elsewhere.

I dreamt of newt-dug tunnels
undermining the thicket.

★

We children of weekend fathers with townhouses and community pools
are quick to forget the two-of-everythng melancholy, how good
the rain smelled when we slept with the windows open,
how good it was to have a small light to read by at night
and thin sheets to make up the roof of your fort, how important
a once-a-week friend could be, and how easy it is to lose touch.

★

My father's garage was stuffed with adventures,
boxes to crawl over and under and rearrange.
There were entire shoeboxes of pens to disassemble,
there were bits of rope to turn into lassos.
He boosted me onto the rusting bicycle;
I showed him the shining trombone.

★

I bought a leather jacket for ten dollars.
It smells like short-story fatherhood, the sixties, et cetera.
I take its dinginess and faux-familiarity in stride.

I toe the dirt, feigning chagrin.
The mud packs arounds the tip of my boot.

I am thinking of building
stick bridges and digging
tunnels for newts and worms.

The Juniper Tree

Ossified, calcified, he was slowly becoming
horrified. He was a boy again but he wished
he still had wings. Immortalized
by his cleverness, he found letters on his
doorstep addressed to the boy who had flown.

His bones had been buried underneath
the tree that his sister and father danced around
but nobody talked about that.
Their footsteps pounded inside his body still.
The rhythm they danced in celebration
for his return, singing hymns and thanking
someone the boy had stopped believing in.
The boy felt it in the blood that coursed
through his alien body.

And the same tree he had been prisoner under flourished.
Flightless, he watched in the summer months
as the tree grew thicker, all the branches entwined,
and the birds sang until the woods
resounded with a lullaby that only the boy could hear.
Sometimes, motionless, he stood before the tree.
His father and sister told him
he was blessed over cold soup, but all he felt
was the magnetic force of
the soft ground beneath him.
The worms and the beetles children stomped
on all looked familiar, and a voice
called to him, telling him to join her once more.

Two of Us in a Messy Room

You're curled at my side on top of navy sheets,
next to the large windows, which let the creeping
 sun slide up to greet us – or maybe just me,
 as your eyes are hidden beneath their lids.
You sleep so calmly and neatly,
 your chest strewn with freckles and your auburn hair awry.
The room around us mimics your skin, speckled with clothes and bags,
 stuffed animals and colorful flyers,
 empty boxes and fencing swords.
But while I sit here, waiting for your return,
it all confines me, makes me anxious and afraid.
I want to clear it all away:
paint a god of beauty,
 sign a story into life,
 swirl the patterned lights of my hula hoop,
anything to distract me from the remnant worries so wound up in every
inch,

but instead I lie next to you,

 I take your cue to breathe.

The sun illuminates the floor,
the clothes which conceal the brown, boring tile beneath.
I pull myself in closer to you, away from my obsessions, and close my eyes.
I hate dust and grime and mess,
 I hate what it's done to my peace of mind,
but here, in our sanctuary,
 I won't care if we make it dirty.

3 Months

It was similar to a Sunday morning.
Kind of quiet in the refined way.
Sort of like a Ouija board on Wednesday night,
the way your fingers moved the pointer,
they did I swear to God.
A simple long
bus ride home,
between the awkward silences
and comforting quiet.
The way it always
took 20 minutes for you
to be able to speak,
searching for something interesting to say
or maybe remembering last Tuesday night.
Your interest was different
and so was I after that show.
A girl there told me
“You’re so pretty.”
You said nothing.
Didn’t notice
my limbs falling off
or my stinging eyes.
It wasn’t love, but it was plenty.

Courtesy of Your Local Travel Agency

Surprise! We've booked you a honeymoon.
You can thank us later. Maybe send a postcard?
Just a reminder, Albania is all stop signs and wishing wells--
Pack accordingly.
Might we suggest knee-pads and a coin purse?
Their bike lanes are decomposing with change.
It might be something to do with the air
up there, but we've also heard the Albanians
have terrible aim. Got a spare umbrella?
We've already booked where you'll be staying--
How does your wife sound?
Well, we can accomodate that just fine.
Just be sure to keep the door wide open
at night; you can hear the shrill screech
of coins falling into fountains,
and the sweet musical plop of car horns.
Or is it the other way around?
We've forgotten the vibrations of Southeastern Europe.
What we do know, however, is the food.
Oh, the food! Any problems with seafood,
shellfish, lobsters on leashes?
Don't forget, the Albanians
have a deep appreciation for bio-luminescence.
Glowworms all around!
And did we mention the entertainment?
All Albanian restaurants feature a six-fingered keytar player;
What a lovely treat for the new Mrs.!
We should warn you though, we have heard some horror stories.
So, we've compiled a list of two traditionally Albanian ways
to protect you and your beloved on this joyous vacation:
If being harrassed, paint your face red like an octagon.
If that fails,
close your eyes, throw nickels at your attacker
and wish for better days.

I Paint My Face Just Like You

Woman, you dress yourself in lies
and yet you expect me
not to ask you to change.

Just to see what all the hype is about,
I have also stood in front of the bathroom
mirror for hours, painting a new face.

I don't understand your mascara,
with its thorny wand that gauged my eye,
making me spew tears like a sprinkler.

I would rather burn myself on the grill
than on your evil beauty products:
curling irons, straighteners and crimpers alike.

Imagine, living a life of hairless legs,
a clean-shaven face,
regular waxing treatments!

Have you ever dreamed of what a
five minute shower
feels like?

Woman, you say you are unlucky because
you can't find a lipstick shade
that matches your eyes.

I am just as unfortunate,
because I can't find a single
color that matches my beard!

Woman, empty bottles of this
black magic do not decide on
a person's character.

Listen. Remove your makeup,
let it fall off your face,
let it drip into the sink.

One Player's Basketball Game Script

Check underfoot
boundaries observed by left stands
and surrounding bleachers.

Drive down the blocked layup lane,
trucking populated strips
to clear dunk jumps,
or don't break the pack, stacking bodies
for the arc.

Angle for the rebound to box out reaching hands;
body block right-place, right-time, under hoop opps.

Secure air space intercepting travel.
Stay active on the board.
Assist.

Fake determined intentions to bolt.
Rehearse floor slip grips.

Mouth, mumble regrets
and under breath confess
the inadequate set-up,
mistakes, and failed completion.

Backpedal and jog
from faults that lost possession.

Sprint to defend turn over regret break
seizures. Explode
passes from upset chest heaves.

Running onto projected moves,
give and go in groove.

Bank the backboard square sure hit or back rim focused swish.

Bench tough three-point shot satisfaction
for two-point, no glory but point
run-up, accumulating baskets.

Guard strong hand, priorities to force weak side dependence.

Anticipate misdirection respecting the threat of lying
shoulders and loud messengers.

Map the defense to the O and switch.
Protect gains with planned, predicted, ephemeral structures.

Tired, disrupt contact with underhanded shirt pull fouls.

Choke wanting breath
and grab cool towels or water
for graceful basketball
fever sweats.

Uranium Blues

“Do you believe in fate?”

“No” “But you believe in love, right?”

“Yeah,” his lip twitches into a smile. “I guess.”

“Well if you believe in love, you gotta believe in fate man.”

He would talk with his hands in wide overwhelming gestures that look like he’s holding the world and shaking it.

“Let’s just make some money,

& just drive man! Like,

let’s just drive,” and he sat back looking

infinitely

into that space.

I want to be good at putting things together.

Movies & music & people & art & words.

What went wrong, you ask?

Everything went wrong & as overplayed as that sounds

it did & I wish I wish

I wish I wish

I had a better reason for it.

“Darling, you’re too pretty to walk around so sad.”

Love Preservation

I

What is it to be naked
in a room with two pairs
of familiar eyes—
mine: critical
yours: jaded

I slather my body with honey to
ease the slow-spoil of all good things.

II

Under covers
one you and one me, us escaping
the thirsty thieves of things like:
my hands, your eyes,
time

& in abandoned parking lots
our bodies spin until
our senses are laughing
senseless, like the run-in
of all colors before it all
turns to mud.

III

The empty hands of the loneliest ones
beg for quick-fix-company and grip at
my throat to squeeze out
my Everlasting Gobstopper—
but I've hidden it
under my tongue.

IV

What is it to be naked
in a parlor of Roman statues—
stony eyes, cold limbs
set in alabaster skin.

Stagnant Habitat

I was born into the world raw,
crying, and soft-skinned
with plain fingernails and
slicked hair that stuck to the nape
of my neck.

What does it mean to crave?
To be someplace your skull cannot
grasp?

My mind takes
me to places my feet cannot
travel.

I find foreign soil
or broken rock wedged under
my toes or between my ears.

I imagine myself plastered, stuck
against blue sky, jagged, filthy,
naked.

What does it mean to be untamed?

I have natural bruises that grow
and tangle together on
my flesh.
I am knock-kneed and sometimes, somewhere
I am flying.

Inside me a jungle grows,
feral and wild.

Pathetic Fallacy

Deep beneath the mulberry tree
Bonnie the cat is laid to rest in a box

That used to house shoes
—size nine, leather upper, slingbacks.

Shoes now sinking inches into mud,
Mother sinking in the rain

With the children gathered ‘round,
Bobbing like white chickens pecking

At mulberries crumbled on the ground.
She sings words that sound biblical

In their rhythm of Heaven and Earth
And He’s got the whole world in his hands.

Bonnie the cat has gone rigid with the calm
That that comes from being wept over

In late spring showers beneath limbs
That slough angel tears and berries

To be gathered in children’s palms.
The box is wet and caved with dirt,

With mud and storms.
Amen.

Bench Man

there is this man
who sits on the bench next to me, between
Blue Basket and Buchanan

and bucks his head like a mad cow.
skin splotched and brittle, spots curling
up to his eyes, where he tears his fingers

through and through.
he breathes like he is pushing icy
iron rocks. and he whispers in rhythm,

gorge gorge gorge
lips wet, eyes caught in lost
hazy gazes.

as if he whispers an omen to our gluttony,
guttural and long in the back of his throat.

i make for him a place,
alone. his thin body draped weakly,
wearily over the bench's back.

gorge, gorge, gorge
until his voice sputters and gives
and i listen in his silence.

he is done for the day.
coconut shavings trailing gently out of white paper flags
of surrender. he knows how fragile it all is.

crack our candy bones and we all fall down.

Brutus

Departure

Fires smoulder in the city – structures, hovercars,
government. The rage of civilization unleashed
against the dying of the lights, the virus of despair.

From my hermit's retreat on the mountain
of history and wisdom, I see the Seed Ships
docking, saving the last suppliant masses 5

from their own sown sins. There is no escape
for me; my secret abode, self-sustaining
(established since before the discovery of Satan's
Sickness) shall save me – 10

– but the Seed Ships scan for any scraps
of fuel, and my supply of salvation –
salves, seeds, stored food and my holy symbol –
are discovered. The scourge suck up the lot of it,
unconcerned with the scraps-of-the-scraps, 15
among which my skin is not sorted.

Suds of sterilizing slime assail me
as soon as I am stepped onto the ship,
but the dosimeter does not slide 20
into despair as fast as I.

Strange, that a screen and a number
are able to so easily sway my certainty
in the salvation I had thought to discover
in my shelter. Or was it the syringe? 25

Initiation

Several times each cycle, I stir
the algae-swamp racks (my assignment),
second, I stew them with celerity,
concoct a sumptuous feast of slime.

Soon, making soup is subsumed 30
into my nature, and I celebrate
the seaweed, certain of its symbiotic
sustenance; we are sustainable,
feeding upon soy, lentil, green algae!

How simple were my seeds, 35

I now see. Surely, science has surged ahead,
solved all the shortcomings, saved civilization.

I am reconciled with homo sapiens,
my fellow space-goers – the swift ark
supplies endless company, 40
and I soon am paired with another animal,
never to sleep or despair solo.

The sense of my silly survivalist whims
descends upon me during end-cycle
exercises – I am stronger, self-sufficient 45
on this ship; I shall worship the sod no more!

My own hours are now spent in Babel,
at Alexandria, the smallest space
on the ship, where shelves
are stuffed with histories and guides; 50
I search for a treatise on space-survival

but – ! Slipped in among the scrolls
a speaking-scope, still supplied with speeches
of secrets, logs from our Captain:

“...still bleak. Scanners still have not scryed 55
a safe sector, a planet to support we sapiens.
Scientists said ‘odds are significant’; but still –
space is large, and our supplies small...”

My scrolls of choice switch, to concern spaceships,
navigation, and one on Caesar – my soul 60
cathects with a certain Marcus Junius.

Return

Our speed increasing, we civilians
are asked to sleep, to count the nine-pins
as we sink beneath the leaves and the seasons,
slip past centuries, concede anno domini 2525 to time. 65

But I am sly, and secret myself among the supplies:
like the scores of other space-farers,
I too become a mummy, but my sarcophagus
is strands of gauze, remnants of salves.
Three days I wait before rising, searching for sustenance 70
and sliding the circular supply door from its rest.
Safe in my hand is my weapon of salvation,
a heavy, silver symbol from before the flood
of sterilization and syringes.

A sword in my shaking hands, it slices 75
silent slits in the throats of our newly red-shirted
overlords, and sings a two-syllable ring
on the slick deck as I spin the ship’s wheel:
et tu?

El Matador

Charge, Minotaur, let them feel the ground
around you tremble
with *allegro* force.

Bellow from the caverns of your nose.
Theseus, the red cape of the labyrinthine ring,
will not slay you this time.

Break free from Sant'Agata Bolognese,
for Spain is calling you home.
These streets that you prowl
offer you not food, but a hunger
that leaves your ribs biting your abdomen
like vinegar on a reed, singing.

Cry, your manufactured soul
pounding into dust.
Beelzebub grows from your head.
Underneath, the sweat of charcoaling gravel.

Burn like sulfur on aspen,
calling Ferruccio father,
a humble master
who bore you from infancy of the mind.

Exhale exhaustion black like your eyes'
beaded taxidermy, your shells polished
as wax, let Edison envelop your head lights
and lead you to that red target.

Show no mercy.
El Toro blazes on
leaving all the regret,
a polluted haze, immobile.

Rev your engine,
succubus slinking on the pedals.
Epinephrine infests your motor,
roaring on the open road.

Adulterate Goodwill

Past the visitor's center selling beetles mummified,
beads and spurious hides, there's a shack
where a bored native charges to brush corn silks
on your willingness to pay for renewal-- blows
Marlboro drags into dusty tourist hairs and naivete.

Not without beauty, his five dollar blessing belies
nevertheless that wonder I worshipped under
pines and that magic I wished for with my mastery
of energies, calculable in joules and otherwise.
When he's through, he nods to let you know.

Fish Heaven

My surroundings
were cold and distant
and at the flush of the porcelain toilet
I realized everything was gone.

The suction of water and the backwashed slurp
made me cringe but deep inside me
I believed he was thanking me because his life would be better
in the endless blue ocean.
Swimming for a liquidy lifetime
seemed better than living in my world.
Even though I knew he enjoyed running into glass
gill first just as much as I enjoyed shaking the last sprinkles of food out of
the can
and into the fuzzy tank... Mama said to feed it just two shakes
but as a child my ears weren't fully grown in,
so I did what I wanted.

I couldn't come to terms with death.
I knew it only as a deep sleep, and I knew he'd be better off sleeping
because I was eight and I loved nap time.

I hope he made it to Fish Heaven.

Maybe there he got the care I never gave and
traveled back to the home I never could give him.

Farewell Deluni

May is here, so time to pack up already—
Can I say goodbye to my roommate Deluni?

Her smile's always bright on face number one,
On the other it could fit a nice looney with a gun.

Bashful like bears, she's just as sweet and kind—
Her sour hour-tantrums seldom boggle my mind.

So I listen to her sing with such self-claimed talent,
Her shower wails without fail deliver me to torment.

And as for dear Deluni's three-quarters of our room,
It's scented with aging dinners all rotting into prune.

But she's a bit obsessed when it comes to tidiness—
Clothes go on the floor, trash behind the mattress.

Still her heart is so pure I can't get it into my head
That she invites tired souls to sleep on my bed.

And she turns off my alarms if I ever feel beat,
If I lie down with a book, she'll tickle my feet.

Time does hardly fly in my Deluni's clutch,
And I can surely wait to keep in touch.

Grace's Blinds

Eyelashes to
her windows.

Softly breaking in the morning, I listened
to you love my sister's touch.
I treasured your secrets in sepia prints I'd tuck into
my mind.

You lit me on fire.
Let the teeth of the sun sink
deeply, softly shredding your pink shoulders.
I peel and scab, but you bleed cranberry juice.

Little, windy wasps swarm
and bite stinging, so your lips
curl back over the windowsill.
You keep your throat engulfed in
the cracks of my ceiling, swallowing
their maps.

With feet of invisible roots and
toes stretched, pinned to the garlic ground.
You are asleep, body orange from the evening.
I tug on your sleeves often
but no time more often
than the time of the sun and star's
exchange of milky clouds.

You only dance for my sister.
Rolling like water, like a shade should.
For me our buzzing honey brains lose
themselves in the forest of perplexity, so
I surrender and keep you in the creases of my brain
between rice paper smiles and winks.

Leg-Lengtheners' Benediction

I.

I believe in the cream-cracked
walls of the cosmetic ward,
the new and fluorescent cathedral,
under whose lamps and in whose
latex stench was conceived my second,
longer self

And in the osteopathic-plastic surgeon
devout beady monk,
pioneer of the adipose tissues,
aqua-scrubbed

I believe in the holy surgical mallet
recycled from old
lobotomous rites
held steady above the pinned-back
skin of my open shins
and above the wedge-edge

And in the understated snap
of my bones when the wedge
splits them each simply
at the tiptap of the mallet
and pink-yellow marrow juices
into the cavity
past the ragged edges

I believe in the irritum that was inside me—
the emptiness in my endoskeleton
the inadequacy of god's inches
the analogy to crooked children's teeth
the necessity of altar-ation

And in the extensible rod
thrust into the hole,

clicked longer by millimeters
10 times/day in tortured
ankle-twists; I descended to hell
on 80-thread sheets,
tibias encasing and encased
by steel

And I believe in the emergence
And in the extension
the regeneration
the new aspect ratio

II.

I was the cream-cracked
4'8 reminder
of a liar-joker
who picked a broken sacral hook
from the flesh-bag on his desk
and crocheted the quilt of my being:
guanines to cytosines, etc,
missing loops along the way

But I have become the holy surgical mallet
the means of my own
emergence,
extension,
regeneration,
new aspect ratio,
defective by birth, repaired
in repoussé-agony,
pounded thin,
long, metallic,
ideal.

And I have become the imposed biology,
charge of a new god,
bought and paid-for:
the science-self

Credo in Physical Therapotheosis

Ergo

Credo in vitam aeternam

Et

Ego extendam crus meam

Amen

Sukkot

When we are breathless from mud-fights
and laughter and other such childish delights
we take turns dancing through hose-water,
spraying the dog too because his tongue
is dry with summer. I miss running naked
with you, our little rosebud breasts, before blood-
surprised panties and sex-poisoned conversations,
when clothes were just an option because we hadn't
learned to be ashamed of our bodies yet.

We lay under the lulav, fingertips touching,
dead grass tickling our bare skin,
watching the sun redden through gaps
in the palm-frond roof. A soft wind
picks up the dusk and barbecue smoke
and swirls it around our faces, my long
hair flaming gold on the makeshift floor—
I've never felt so sacred.

John, Christian and goateed, recites the blessing
over the etrog fruit, yellow and raw
but sweeter than lemon. There's only one, though
so I don't get to eat any, just pray
which I'm no good at. Even then
I couldn't understand God.

Angels were much more relatable,
like human dragonflies, a magic you can touch.
I dreamed of angels; I dreamed of being an angel
with you. So we lace hands like couples do—
because love is love and sisters
can be in love too—
and gaze up at the latticed patches of sky
like the stars are just big lightning bugs

that will swoop down and carry us away
if we only wish hard enough.

California Treehouse Peafowl Safari

You didn't expect that, did you? Didn't expect to see peacocks
lazing about in the shade of the only tree in sight, stalks of yellow grass
tickling the royal blues and jade greens of their breast feathers.

Well, gather up your binoculars, press their black rubber eyecups
to your tender eyes until they leave red circles on your skin, because
those peacocks are real, those peacocks are there.

They watch you with their beady eyes, heads swiveling
with your every motion. Watch out! Get too close
and they'll bite—those pointed beaks aren't just for show.

Look to the right folks! Note the regal male surveying his territory
from the observation deck nestled in the branches above.

They've staked their claim on those precariously balanced slats of wood;
don't ask me why—how should I know why a flock of immigrant birds
has gotten so attached to a shoddily-built house in a tree?

It's not even an actual house, really—I guess those boards must
be nailed down somehow, but from here they just look like
they've been placed strategically at the apexes of branch A and branch B,
of branch Y and branch Z, and the whole thing tied together
with a mess of rope, now frayed beyond repair by the scalding stiff air and
the beaks of brightly-colored birds. Here—take this towel,
wipe your sweat, drink some water from your canteen.

Soon, the sun will disappear past the edge of this hill,
down beneath the suburbia below, and the birds will scatter,
will hop-skip-jump to their nighttime roosts. Then you'll be free
to climb up to the treehouse observation deck, have a look around—
although of course there is nothing to observe but
terracotta rooftops lining curved roads in perfect residential rows.

Feet

A shadow cuts through the hill
where my feet were.
I don't care to remember
how slippery
the rocks under the bridge were
or the way they'd make my ankles bend,
starting a fire by rubbing the bones
in my feet together.
The only relief was my back against the cool wall,
the blue paint chips
sticking to my skin and falling
behind me when I walked.
There was a harsh line
across my feet that summer,
a mark the sun had given me.
I know where my line is,
she said as she burned into my skin.
Do you?
She placed my feet where the shadow
met her face
and showed me how to walk
between darkness and light.

