

NO ONE IS LOOKING FOR YOU: POEMS

A THESIS IN
Creative Writing and Media Studies
Poetry

Presented to the Faculty of the University
of Missouri-Kansas City in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

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B.A., University of Central Missouri, 2018

Kansas City, Missouri
2022

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University of Kansas City-Missouri, 2022

ABSTRACT

The poems in this manuscript explore the emotional landscape of an emotionally repressed speaker to explore opposing themes of isolation and connection; self-denial and self-discovery; and rage and hope. It is perpetually nighttime for this speaker, and the poems often take place in surrealist, haunting impressions of ordinary settings, mostly in the domestic sphere. This collection features recurring images such as birds, cats, roadkill, long nighttime walks, and light switches which are always being turned off. All of these elements serve to imbue the poems with the sense of ghostliness and invisibility felt by the speaker.

The poems in this thesis have been written in the duration of my time at UMKC, largely over the past year with the intent that these pieces investigate the psyche of a deeply repressed speaker who is attempting to navigate relationships to the people in their life vs her life and herself. I wanted to maintain the focus on the speaker rather than placing focus on one large event. There are threads that exist that make the collection cohesive and direct the reader throughout and inform them with the conversations the poems have with one another. As I wrote, I could see themes and images that kept coming back up which I used in revision to carefully tweak the pieces to create cleaner parallels within the universe of this speaker. Larger concepts at work were things such as repression and self-denial, self-discovery/identity, and rage and hope set to the backdrop of surreal dreamscape versions of ordinary places, especially within the domestic sphere. Repetition and obsession are a large aspect to these poems as well as this speaker attempts to come to clarity. Images like animals and nature (birds, a cat, roadkill, trees, and lakes), lights turned on and off, walking, and trinkets/mementos that punctuate the poems as things the speaker latches onto. It is almost always night for this speaker, highlighting another key feature to the collection which is a sense of ghostliness and invisibility.

The courses I have taken while at UMKC have greatly influenced ways I think about writing and changed the way I write and approach form. Creative non-fiction courses allowed me to expand the way I write poems; reading *Bluets* by Maggie Nelson played big role in a writing exercise I created for myself after studying the book. Sometimes in my writing it's difficult for me to keep my poems grounded in a narrative that guides the reader through what the speaker is experiencing, so I began a practice of freewriting in the style Nelson uses by creating a short series of prose poems that circle around ideas I am working with and see

what other things arise as I bounce between them. I was also impacted by *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* by Claudia Rankine and her use of image paired with text. We studied this in Dr. Christie Hodgen's non-fiction class, and it opened up a lot of ideas for me about the ways a poem can look on the page, or be perceived. I experimented with this in an assignment for class, and was interested in the ways it changed how I was writing and working. The poem from this manuscript "Need with Knife in Hand" came to be because of a picture of The Wound Man I put at the top of the document I was working on which inspired some of the gruesome imagery and the focus on the knife.

After taking many poetry workshops, there have been several poetry collections studied in these courses that have impacted me : *Wunderkammer* by Cynthia Cruz, *Brute* by Emily Skaja, *Obit* by Victoria Chang, and *The Virginia State Colony for Epileptics and Feebleminded* by Molly McCully Brown. I learned a lot about the power of compression and brevity through reading Cynthia Cruz – her language is incredibly precise, and I was inspired by the way she repeats a set of images but uses them in fresh exciting ways each time they occur. After reading *Brute*, I felt a strong connection to its content and landscape of images. Skaja writes about female repression in inventive ways using imagery that contains a lot of grime and dirt–mud, violence, and animals that circle the speaker and narrative. Looking at these elements and how she used them to capture the dissolution of a relationship and the self-discovery of the speaker impacted the way I view these things in my own writing, and how I want to express them . There are series of elegy poems in this collection that inspired me to incorporate something similar into this thesis in the future, These prose poems punctuate the collection as surreal dreamscapes that cross the border between reality and unconsciousness, and I think a technique similar to this would serve my collection and

perhaps aid to create stronger threads throughout by including a series of poems that belong to the same group. Through reading *Bluets* and working on assignments for non-fiction class, I discovered I was able to approach my themes and topics presented in this collection differently through a more prose-y form in a less constricting way. Chang's inventive use of form in *Obit* expanded my mind to the vast possibilities in poetry, that you can borrow forms from other genres, such as Chang's use of the obituary form.

Many of the pieces in this collection have seen quite a few stages of revision. The poem "In the Middle of the Night and on a Loop" began as a poem written in couplets. I noticed the lines sprawling across the page and wrote a second draft as a prose poem, and though that form serves the obsessive nature of the poem, it still wasn't producing the effect I was imagining. Adding the back slashes came to me as I thought about poems in McCully Brown's collection where she uses caesura to create a disjointed and disorienting effect to reflect the speakers' distorted sense of reality. I liked the idea of breaking a prose poem apart in this way, and I had seen the backslash technique in contemporary poetry I had been reading in literary journals at the time I was starting work on this piece. Using the backslashes created this effect in my poem of an inability to catch one's breath, which matches the content and the speakers struggle in the poem. They simultaneously act as punctuation and interruption, and the unpredictable nature of this aids in informing the poems meaning. I worked for a while on the image system in this piece as well, I adjusted and tweaked the images to allow space for religious concepts that are tied to the speaker. It was a subtle nod I wanted to incorporate, but as it existed in the original, it felt random and like it didn't belong. This inclusion felt important to me, and my adjustments to the imagery show a

speaker who is desperate for something to cling onto but at the same time doesn't quite trust it what she is clinging to.

The poem "Ditch" began as two separate poems, the other of which turned into "Holding the Ring in a Dream ..." both of which began with the focus on the squirrel. Roadkill for this speaker is a symbol for their marriage, how its dissolution is so ordinary and yet sudden and shocking and violent. In "Ditch" the speaker starts in the domestic sphere, a place that recurs in the collection with complexity as they want to curate a space for themselves and for this elusive other but continually feels they can't get it right. "Ditch" focuses on secrecy, repression and haunting— the ring is the focus, so it was necessary to break from the original draft and center the ring and the speakers' feelings toward it. This poem focuses on the feeling the ring provoked in the speaker and the one who gave it to them, and that weight. It's the metaphorical moment, walking all night to feel like oneself again, and coming home again to feel like an object over and over. The quintains felt like the right move because of its odd, irregular structure. It began in tercets, but those blocks were too brief, and the regular breaking felt too easy. With the quintains, I was able to capture specific moments in that space that showed the speakers uneasiness. There is something about 5 that is eerie, and doesn't quite complete. It gives a sense of almost an edge, which this speaker teeters on. They want things to make sense and believe that they can make sense, but at the last second, they don't— things twist and turn and never bend to their will.

There are a few pieces that went through extensive editing and revision stages, but one that sticks out to me is "When Facebook Suggests I Send a Friend Request to my Ex-Husband's New Girlfriend For the Third Time This Week". This started as a free-writing exercise in attempts to circle an occurrence that torments the speaker and build emotion that

leads to an outburst in the end. I turned the free-writing into a prose poem which at first felt like the right move and form to suit the piece, but this was too compact, so it became a block poem. Time and place were not functioning smoothly in this way still, and there was something missing that needed to be threaded into the story. In workshop, it was suggested I blow it into couplets, which I found better fit the movement of the poem. Initially, the poem had very minimal allusions to religion until the very end with images of the rosary, statues of Mary, and prayer and they were out of place, yet seemed important and urgent to the poem. I began to think in terms of this collection as a whole and thought back to “In the Middle of the Night...”, and thought that it could function in the same way as it appeared in that piece. As it appears here, there are mentions of childhood/being a child again to show the way this speaker uses religion not as an active practice, but as a way to connect to their childhood self, or this clean slate version of themselves which is an essential component this speaker clings to in their journey toward rebirth.

It’s been a challenging and rewarding experience working on the poems in this thesis and seeing my progress as a writer all laid out (literally, taped to my kitchen wall). Perhaps one of the most influential classes I took during my time at UMKC was the “First Books” poetry workshop with Dr. Hadara Bar-Nadav. I found myself referring back to notes from workshop and meetings with visiting writers to guide me in this process. Hearing from writers on the process of compiling a manuscript was both comforting and encouraging; there are two quotes from writers we met with that I kept returning to in moments of distress that kept me moving. Natalie Diaz said, “ Before you write your book, you have to write your poems”, which felt really helpful in moments I was getting overwhelmed by having an end product. It was a good reminder that all of these pieces I was taking so much time and care

with will eventually come together. Emily Skaja spoke about how challenging it was to put together her collection and how she did not understand her project until late into the manuscript, which sort of relates to what Diaz said – I had to remember that the poems and I were working together and learning from one another throughout this process and to trust myself and my work as well as the sentiments from Skaja and Diaz as their books continue to inform my work.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences have examined this thesis titled “No One is Looking For You” presented by Savannah Bradley, candidate for the Master of Fine Arts Degree, and certify their opinion it is worth of acceptance.

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OVERTURE WITH EVERYTHING CAREENING

In the dream there was an entire spool of gauze
wound up in my eye socket—

when it was safe, and I was alone, I pulled
the whole thing out. Let it all fall out of me like a film reel

as the material collected in neat folds
onto itself at my feet.

A song clicks on repeat, squeak in the ceiling—
the neighbor, pacing.

Sudden symphony.
The piano in the song in tempo with the squeak.

Some candles smoke, blown out and unfurling
toward my neighbors' footsteps above.

I kneel into the pile of gauze and gather
it all into my arms.

I run through a small square-footage, unravel
the pile in large, magnificent loops.

I leap like a flame flickering.
The desperate need to cover every inch

of my new home causes me to whap into the walls,
bruise my shoulder blades. I stagger forth,

trip over my own toes and collapse,
a small heap at the center of the spool.

I look out at how it's laid—
a mess or a pattern, just a pile in its plain form.

I

NO SMALL BURN

Chew on the palm which covers
your mouth, scream through the cracks
in the fingers– they're yours.
The house is crawling with spiders
and prey, you
wait by the door for something
to come feed on you.
What was it that you wanted?
For days, you sat on the couch and watched
the same little wolf spider pace
the far corner of the ceiling.
The same soft glow of the light left on
for someone who has not come home,
front door unlocked.
Dogs and people howl all night
deep from within the city–
when he finally comes home
you remember this is never
what you wanted. He leaves
you asleep on the couch
when he walks through the door,
doesn't even turn the light off
for you. You wake at 5:30 a.m.
blue-light of dawn through the blinds.
Something crawls from your lips–
hand over the mouth.
You start to gnaw,
and your gnawing becomes a devour.
And through devouring, you disappear.

IN JUNE

Driving through the countryside at night,
fireflies meteor shower around us
and they keep dying, flash-splattering
on the windshield like a neon Jackson Pollock.
I wanted it to stop. Wanted them to continue on
with their gold and glittering
mating display in the trees, but things like this just can't be helped.
There is a welling-up inside of me, for those touch-hungry females.
It is there when I watch the cattle swim in the pond all caked
with mud and each other's shit, and it's there when I see you
in the driver's seat not looking at me, again.
What would it take for you to want to want me
like the male fireflies all desperate and showy,
glowing with so much need. I am more
like them. Reckless and lustful and obvious.
You are not even listening. I am telling you all of this
about the fireflies. You said it in the driver's seat, that you loved
me, but it's so dark driving through the countryside at night.

HONEYSUCKLE AT MIDNIGHT IN THE MIDWEST

The sky is fat tonight, belly hanging low
with the threat of rain—
honeysuckle perfume thick in the air,
sticking like dew, lulling the suburbs to sleep.

There was this one summer when I still felt
like I could fit in the palm of a hand.
Piano playing on repeat, running
through misty, early dawn meadows.

Daisies in my hands,
musty- fresh earth smell stuck on my skin
for days— I am in the mood to run wild
through the sprinklers again.

I am just ambling, now, around
the neighborhood as its eyelids grow heavy;
cerulean bleeds to sapphire, pupils dizzy and rolling,
turned black; jolted back awake,

electrical storm. What I needed was for nothing
to change: backyard barbeque smoke, citronella candles,
and the residual dust of fireworks slither memory
into evaporation, left to yesterday's dry heat.

I can smell the houses as I walk past,
how they must smell on the inside, how the people
inside smell, too. It's already half past twelve.
All the garage doors are shut.

I wanted there to be screaming, me screaming
or lying in the middle of the road, melt
into the acrid-damp asphalt, let its smell melt through me.
I wanted to lie there drowning in all of the sky's sorrows.

Sometimes I still want to be tucked in at night,
for the door to be left cracked so it's not so dark.
*By now, everything has happened.*¹

¹ From Sylvia Plath's "The Babysitters".

THE FOLDS IN THE FIRE

Nights when I can't catch my
breath I wander the hushed suburban
streets I look inside windows See the glow
above a stove see myself there small heap
on the countertop amber bottle 5 milliliters
cetirizine hydrochloride The zing of it on my tongue
There's nothing to be afraid of All of the lights turn off
except for the light above the stove My mother's face
shadowed as she waits I was not good I slammed
my fists into the kitchen cabinets Cried my throat raw
The stranger in their house turns off the light above the stove
I pass by more windows same small heap of me
I can't stop I see myself Glowing
Little amber bottle The zing of it
His burning body His body burning His body burns
Tells me I'm crazy *What the hell is wrong with you*
I cower in the corner again cower in the corner
between the stove and the fridge
Still use my fists to rip at my hair
Just swallow it *There's no reason* the bitter zing again
My father always burns in my dreams about him
Still use my fists to pound the side of my thighs
I'll give you something *to be afraid of*
Still the light above the stove
His body always burns when I dream about him.

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT AND ON A LOOP

I can't remember / what I am / who I let love me / who I let
think they loved me / what happened to that girl I was / how did she
get here / socks on cold concrete / escaped from a gaslit bed-
room / I can't find a cross anywhere / the trees sway / an asphyxiated
ache / who have I let touch me / reaching for a rosary
around my neck / beneath my shirt / I liked too much the feeling
of my own bones / did I like that I could trace myself / or did I like
that I was vanishing / if all of this is a lake / I am inside a boat / I do not
row away / I am on my knees pressing / my own head which rears out
of the water / back down into the murk / a bad sacrament / there is a growl
in me that can't get out / if I am quiet I don't need
anything / if I am quiet I am finally reverent / if I am quiet if I am
quiet if I am quiet / enough / a barred owl keeps
its prey / in the crook of a branch / devours it whole and head
first / by night / there are somethings I do know / we are all desperate
for morning to come / I am desperate / for something else
to spit me back out / how many times / have I left
a candle to burn all night

THE ENTIRE WEIGHT OF THE SUN BARES DOWN

on me through the driver's side window—
all this white heat in the smack center of winter.
I could turn to ash if only I let myself, but I grip
the steering wheel though I know
I could still so easily disappear.
This long stretch of suburban highway.
Old dresser, drawers flung open
from the cars rushing around.
One left shoe, laces splayed,
a mattress with its box springs that try climbing,
like ivy. This morning I heard a bird song in a far
echo that almost felt like it was inside my ear.
The sky was a thin veil of a bruise, it was the world
almost showing itself. But the sun just rose
higher and hotter into the sky.
I squint my eyes in the rearview mirror
and note that I am still the same.
The birds seem to pelt straight for me—
I forgot where I was going.
I find that I am not smaller
than I have always been—
I pass all the exits home

HOW THE SKIN HUMS

I give you the box cutter and thought
what if you'd sliced my hands open
right then and a swarm of bees flew out
how would you save me then would you
put as many as you could into your mouth
would you chew them and hum my name
press your thumbs into the gashes on my palms
as you swallow without flinching
what if all my blood got everywhere
would you lick it up from the floor
spit it back into my mouth
is it time consider what options we have left
the air has been so unbreathable between us
and your hands to my skin makes it so
it hasn't moved for hours the air
the air we can't breathe well
and I don't know what to do
you lift your thumbs from my palms
the bees tear through choking
on the pulp of it come straight for me
straight into my eyes and we are gone altogether
stunned someone is saying something someone
is telling me to get back to work

HYSTERICIS WITH UNCOVERED MOUTH

Hitting the steering wheel so hard
like I'll never be able to stop
and I want it to hurt my hands
let me scream
don't look at me like that

I'll hold down the horn if I need to
I'll slam the door on my way out

don't make me more afraid please
of myself

I could smash every wall
tiny fist shaped holes
I could become the ax
my body a cedar stump
cut down the fucking
center firewood

I haven't known what to do
with my hands
I used a razor wrong
I ripped six books into pieces

You tell me I should stop now
I gather at everything

bloodied plaster, fistfuls
of glass and shreds
of beige pleather off the couch

spinning around the kitchen
stomping on a frying pan and cracked tile

dancing my head
hair shooting fireworks across the sky

and oh I think I am so happy now
have you ever seen me this happy

look how full I am
why don't you come dance

HOUSEPLANTS

I'll talk to anything I can find. To the succulent
on the kitchen table I say
Oh hello, good morning! Have you been outside today?

We've been talking for hours
about the sounds of spring about how birds shriek
like they could just rush into the house
like they might just break through the windows
and eat our eyes out.

To the plant above the sink
I ask, *Would you like to hear
about my most recent obsession?*
I tell those lilies I cannot stop imagining
cars hitting me head-on while I'm driving.

Lilies don't listen well; their stamen quiver
like I'm crazy so I wrap my entire fist
around their rotting stems and yank them
from their vase, I shred their petals and toss them out the window.
Then I wipe my hands down the front of my dress.

In my bedroom, there is still a mock bridesmaids bouquet.
I sigh into the dried and acrid baby's breath and greens
Just say my name, please.

The plants don't give me
what I want, so I quantify;
there must be something, must be anything
that will listen to this story.

I place four aloe plants on my dresser without a word.
Close the curtains, turn out the lights.

THE WASP

For Emma

Friday night a wasp heavy-hanging
weaving through the cheap 5-bulb chandelier
I was droopy-eyed immovable
spine melt shaky I left her there
I shut off the light she lives there three days
It's Monday morning she's still in the kitchen
I can't get her out I hover six feet away
cup and paper slow-lurch with a large book
attempted attempts always at almost
I can't decide if I can't get her out because
I just can't or if I am afraid to
It's late May she was hot she thought it was safe
she doesn't remember how to get out
crumple on the floor cold tile my head in my hands
I cry I hear the faint and sudden buzz of her
hit the ceiling the window she grows
balloons fiery fills the entire air around me
I can't tell if I am making this up I can't decide
if it would make a difference I hold a bottle
of Windex I can't kill her so I won't
I hold her buzzing inside my ear

LANDSCAPE WITH SEEK AND FIND

Look as I stand on this hill –
sky loud with cawing and storm-punched clouds,
my lace dress torn, spilling down my body.
I exude blankness while inside the house behind me
hands make and unmake the bed, dust off the mantle
then break it so its pieces are crushed and heavy on the floor.
It is as if I have crawled out from the grave;
stumbling droop-mouthed and bruised
through yellow-burnt meadows.
I have been unastonished for so long
that the awareness of this burns all over.
My brain is this abandoned house hidden deep
by whorling oaks and ivy, front doors creak out:

There is something you have yet to find.

I know exactly what I've lost, but beneath
headless dolls and rusted wind chimes lies
only more neglect. Shouldn't it terrify me
that it's all so heavy and aching, yet I feel
nothing at all? The bloody beating
thing in my chest exhales

I spy with my little eye

something coming from the tree line–
barely intelligible and obvious all at once.
It says, *Haven't you seen me in a dream?*

PASTORAL SHAKEN & EMPTIED OF ITS CONTENTS

on her hands and knees
she bared her teeth to an empty field,
slammed her fists
into the dirt as though a drum
& the quail cry & and fly into
the misted morning
half-beat too late

a great wind shoves her
flat to the ground
brings hush to the evening
& through her nose she inhales
centuries-old dirt—
ripped skirt, rusted spit jack,
sewing scissors, firewood—
deep & cutting all the way into her lungs

she coughs then shrieks
with hands full of grasses
she rolls on her back
reaches toward the sky
& releases the earth
into her open mout

II

NO ONE IS LOOKING FOR YOU

At the window, I drag my fingers down my ribcage,
thumb each crevice and wonder how much sound

I can keep inside myself. The trees rage, a line
of burnt bouquets against a coal-night sky, wavering.

My little dread, my small child crying out,
towel to my wrist. My need for wreckage

dried between the cracks in the linoleum.
The light in the laundry room—

left on, and again, all undone.
Wet sleeves hang from the washing machine

like the arms of an octopus, slither out and kiss
the inside of my wrists, wrap around them twice—

I grin at the ease of this.
The thin cephalopod limbs

slide up my arms, slow and hold me closer,
and I think, almost, they are going to touch my face.

Yanked to the ground, flat and face-down.
I lift myself, embarrassed crustacean.

All angular I scuttle off.
I take a shower. Sit on top porcelain and clutch

a towel to my breastbone. Rub my back raw-dry.
The tenderness in the eyes begins.

Staring into the mirror:
hair drip, drip, drips—

the sad snakes of Medusa.
My blue-blush face, wailing.

PREMONITION OR NOT

In prayer, I was gutless—
I begged God to make me inanimate,
I said, *I may as well be a broom, just make me*

a broom. In the weeks before the wedding,
I dreamt that I couldn't keep
any of the lights on.

Flick one switch and another clicked off.
There is the dream, too, where I sit
by an open window

and when the sun skulked off
I was too afraid to shut it. I curled
up like I was a throw pillow on the couch

then slid off into prayer, fold my hands—
*Oh Lord, like you, I'll love anyone
who needs me.* So good on my knees,

voice ripped right out of my throat
and taken by the wrist, ring placed
onto my finger.

I just wanted to be a lamp,
a light left on. I might have seen
the tear in the train of the dress hanging

from the closet door, the way it smothered
the room, the light shadowed and almost
turned off.

SPACES TO TEND TO

In my fourth apartment
I feel for old doorways
in the dark I have been
whittling myself away
I shouldn't be able to graze
my shoulders against any
doorframes I slink into
rooms they all fold into
each other I forget where
I am sometimes when
he enters it feels like
there are hands around
my throat when he leaves
I expand when he leaves
it's like he stopped
in the middle
of a thought if you
keep enough secrets
you become phantom
wisps of a person dissolved
until you are barely even
a scent untraceable the shadow
of my matchstick legs
makes me feel like I've done
a good job I don't know
how to fill a given
moment anymore
but I want to be good
I don't want to be
this vapor I used to
believe I could grow up
to be a saint one day
I still could be some days
I am reduced
to the thing that I am
when he comes back I have
already cleared the table
I made a big dinner
he said *Do you think
this would be better with less
garlic* and I said yes

SERVICE OF THE LIGHT

Once, I opened my mouth to pray
and a horde of mosquitos unfurled
from my mouth.

They festered there, between my teeth,
for all these years I've kept my mouth
shut bowing before the altar—

I've been baptized once before,
a tiny, unassuming thing you'd thought
would keep this sort of promise.

Have I surprised you, Mama, with my ability
to disappoint you? Last Easter Vigil, I let my candle
drip its wax down my arm

stared Christ in the face while I burned
not for him but for you.
I'm sorry, this wasn't meant to be mean.

I wanted to make you proud so I pretended
to pray so hard that I forgot
the world. I thought that the harder

I pressed my palms together the better
God could hear me. But I wasn't even
saying anything,

and Mama, you never did either.
We are both so good at silence,
aren't we?

WEAK FLESH

Certain miseries, centuries old
caught in the throats of the anxious.
Breath held until nothing passes.
A clenched fist which opens, turns to dust.
Flinging oneself into the garden to pray
like Christ. That blue glow of Gethsemane,
stars burning entire gashes in the night.
The suffocating humidity of it, waiting.
Every edge is so sharp, it is impossible to believe
that anything can be saved, that there is a way
to feel any different than this. We wake
in the morning to find that most things
have not happened, there are still dishes
in the sink, set of keys on the kitchen table.
I know too well of the stillness disrupted by the self,
how to cause that shatter-tingle in your skin
without even looking at anyone.
I've crept so far away from any sort of ease,
I, too, stand in a bed of thorns shouting,
but asking for no help.

HOLDING THE RING IN A DREAM AND ALL THE DIAMONDS CRUMBLED

away from the prongs and into my fist. I close
my fingers around them, tight and sweat-soaked.
I walk for hours on a highway, see-sawing, fiery,

searching for someone to fix it. I barely
wear it; heavy on my finger. I thumb it in its place,
spiral it around like coils of smoke.

Hands on the steering wheel – it's glint a flare in sunlight.
Hair caught in its fissures. One bell note against a glass.
I keep the ring in its box on top of my dresser and wake

in the night to make sure it's still there. The ring watches
me while I sleep. Eyes half-shut, it gets out of the box and rolls down
the hall. Tries to slip into my mouth and choke me in the morning.

Wearing the ring is like a daze down a long stairwell. A throttle
by the shoulders. Rumbling inside someone else's skin. Covered
in a sheet with holes for my eyes.

Slid onto my finger and I start to smolder. The ring
presses its cold head to my mouth when I try to scream.
Slid onto my finger and I am doomed.

My hands in a fist at my side. Smell of smoke.
The sound of something
pacing outside my bedroom door.

DITCH

For nights, I have been walking past the same water-logged squirrel decaying in a ditch, grass stuffed inside of its mouth. Its eyes bulge, almost leaking out of its skull. I tell my husband about the squirrel. I asked him how in some car accidents, if you go flying

what the difference is between hitting the pavement or hitting the earth. If there is a difference and if the difference matters. He looks at me like I am an oil painting of a woman with her jaw unhinged and hanging loose. Clouded look on his face— I am standing there and he doesn't understand.

The kitchen fan rattles its dull whirr between four shots of gin, between washing the dishes, sweeping the floor, taking the trash out— before I leave in the middle of the night to walk 5 miles in the dark, loop around Third Street's short stretch.

Is there any such thing as a softer landing? My body carries me night after night like this, wandering and wishing for someone to answer me. Listen. *What is the use of me. I think I should keep my mouth shut.*

The kitchen fan rattles its dull whirr over the door closing behind me, over the slow scratch of the bottle of gin opening, one more drink— before I crawl into bed with him there, oblivious to the sound and smell of me.

No matter how quietly I lift my shirt he still wakes. Like this is the only thing he has been waiting for all day— *You know that I've been patient, I think I have been patient for long enough.* He eyes me through the dark while I stand, shivering.

THERE IS A CRICKET TRAPPED INSIDE

the stone pillar
at the top of the stairs. It chirps
rapid as a heartbeat.

As if to say, I didn't mean
to get in here. As if to say,
I don't think I have a way out.

I press my forehead into the stone
and whisper, *the way out is very long
even after you've escaped.*

The moon is a crescent
in the sky haloed
by white light.

Something is in my eye.
I try gently for a long time
to rub it out, and when it will not come,

I knuckle nearly my entire fist
into the left cavity of my face—
cleaved skull, moonlight dripping,

tears in long rivulets
down my arm. Something like snow
falls around me in the dark—

I feel my hand at the back of my head
pressing myself hard
into the earth, my fist like a knife

through an unripe
fruit, yanked out my eye
finally clears and it is the cricket

that comes out.
It chirps louder now, quicker
then quiets in my palms.

Slow muted warble
a few more times. As if to say,
I know now that this is the end.

SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER (SUMMER)

Everything bleeds and I am in
a washing machine, banging around, thundering
in circles. I am seeing colors wrong. Green where

there isn't green but it's beige. I mistake
my white walls for a shade of neon purple.
Eyes rattling back and forth in their sockets.

I can't get back into my apartment.
The doors aren't even locked but they are
swollen in their frames.

Some nights are so indecipherable, my skin
numb to the touch. I spent 2 hours pacing
the sidewalk – 2 A.M., sweating but the sun isn't

sweltering. A possum lies dead on a mattress at the curb,
ready to be tucked in. Two shoes slumped on the sidewalk,
as if someone were lifted out from them and flew off. I walk

to the end of the block, pass the possum again, think
of the heat and flies and rot it will become by noon
tomorrow. I go back inside to where I'll stay until dark again.

From my bed, I hear mice skitter in my ceiling– no
they thud, they stomp, they clang,
above my head against metal. That scraping.

My cat runs back and forth against the wall desperate
for resolution, for there to be silence:
the end of it.

I feel my heart beat like something volcanic,
half-drunk and half-dreaming
holes in the walls I need to cover

so my cat won't get trapped but there's so much
noise, the scratching, an infant's impossible cry
too big for its body, the rush of my blood–

I am stuck, pinned to the mattress, curled up
rotten mass. It all pummels me but my brain
is one long blank stare.

These hot months. Sudden storms.
Thundering, thudding, raucous, white
hot flare of the sun.

AUBADE WITH NEED TO BE PICKED CLEAN

The wine in me spills over
into morning. I wake
on the couch in orange dawn,
blue glow in my home.
Three crows cawing, cracking
the collapsible ribcage of a mouse,
ravage an empty tree branch.
I open the window and I open
myself to them, wait to be next.
I beg them. There's still some meat
to me left, I swear, there's
something left here to be gutted—
something to please, please
take out. A single claw, tugging
tendon, strung out and pulled
taut, snapped back. A breeze blows in
and strands of my hair fall around
my face. They hold me
like hands, a thumb's light brush
across my cheeks. When the crows
don't come I slam my hands
against the glass, reach
for my own throat.

A LITANY OF LOST THINGS

The dead lay scattered along Highway P;
barn swallow, deer head.

The cat that made it across the ditch
is wondering where I am going.

*If You Die Tonight:
Heaven or hell?
855- FOR-TRUTH*

This warning is a vortex: I am in the seventh
pew from the altar, fourth grade.

Father Ron says it's a sin
to miss a week of church.

Confess. I'm peeling white nail polish off my fingernails
and watching the shards writhe through the air
down to the tile— awake to the sudden
cold claws of my teacher on the back of my neck,
“Your tag.” A too close whisper,
strange shoulder squeeze. Confess.

HELL IS REAL.

Once, I dial the number on the sign,
biting my cuticles as each ring throbs through my ear—
click

and then nothing. Open road stretches out.

I pass a plastic pink kitchen abandoned
in the interstate median, its oven a vacancy.

It does to me what the car crash gong
of church bells do to funerals. Tongues of sting
that toll around.

*BEYOND REASONABLE DOUBT,
JESUS IS ALIVE!*

Kneeling amongst my fingernails I study the sculpture
that hangs as a centerpiece. The unraveling human;

his suffering painted red on his hands—

I am waiting to drink his blood
and I feel like I should apologize.

He looks so unhappy, there, head wilted
and not looking at any of us.

I think that I have been doing this wrong for a while.

THE NURSERY

At the edge of the living room couch
I hold my grandmother's crystal rosary
in my fist, no prayer. The walls
in my childhood bedroom are now green
and they have never been green before.

On the couch, I cry –
I keep calling it my room
though it hasn't been for 5 years.
It had stayed the same since I left for college,
pink and orange polka dotted walls,

memorabilia stuffed into the closet–
cheerleading bows, disposable photos,
dried nail polish, unfinished
scrapbooks and notebooks,
amalgamation of an entire girlhood–

all the posters gone.
My sister moved back home
to have a baby, so now the walls
are a vegetable green, and a baby wails inside
a crib. It is one year after the divorce.

Spring now. The T.V. is on with no volume.
I sneak out onto the deck to watch
clouds like I used to–
high school, unrequited love, winter. I am
nearly the same. I smoke until the headache

goes and lay on my back on the fake wood.
I'm breathing like the baby,
Quick nightmare-y breaths.
I don't know how to turn off
the living room T.V. anymore.

I press every button on the remote.
My wedding dress hangs
next to my sister and my's prom dresses
in the basement.
I try them on in the middle

of the night, drunk and restless. My parents
are snoring in their room right above me

and I remember how the old cat used to jump
onto the piano and scare us all awake.
She'd walk across it playing awful double notes—

I pretend to dance now to the sound of it
and the baby starts to cry that cry that is too big
for his body. He cries so much that I think
he can hear the cat too
the way I can because he's in my room.

Spinning around in my wedding dress,
the buttons down the spine undone.
Listen to this discordant song:
I am in a beautiful dress.

KULNING

(Kulning is an ancient Scandinavian herding song used by women to call down livestock from the high mountain pastures. The high-pitched vocal technique communicates over long distances.)

In the valley, all shrouded in dusk and pines,
the woman is high-pitched hollering
for the cattle to come home.
The only voice in the world, her half-tone
quarter-tone chants reverberate
through the mountains like wind chimes
before a tornado.

The herd of my nightmares
hears the sound pierce through the mist—
the necks stiffen, cowbells sudden clank,
the melismatic tune excites them toward
the valley. They take off, swarming me
like a horde of whining mosquitos, flattening
me into the mud; this is how it felt when
the whale gulped me whole
while I stood on the beach alone.

Eager to follow the herd, I stand with hoof-
smashed skin, dung and grass in the wounds
and in my hair, limping off behind the rest,
I chase my dad burning alive.
Back on the farm, she pats these ghosts
on the head—
in the lowing beasts' inky eyes, I am in my
bedroom weighted down by the dark

dreaming of me in some kitchen, drowning
crouched in the cupboards, or glued inside
my grandmother's armchair for hours—
no one coming back.
Ask the cattle what this means. Ask the woman
living in isolation, her house the only swirl
of chimney smoke for miles and miles

NEED WITH KNIFE IN HAND

July: not sticky but slick,
the walls distended like breath seized
inside the lungs.

I'm quiet and I keep to myself
despite who I am.
My need is a suppressed havoc.

Serrated blade—
I've placed all my organs out
on the countertop.

From outside, I see my heart; it has too many
eyes. The intestines with their sharp teeth
dig into the granite.

My cat soft-paws at the window
and watches me on the fire escape.
I face him and he crushes his face

into the glass, his mouth ruptures
wide with a cry I can't hear.
He leaves one fang exposed and still

staring I trace my fingers across the grime,
his claw follows—
slow wobbling grate.

A child counts in the parking lot
next door, *1, 2, 3... 9, 13, 10...*
Someone could walk up the stairs.

Someone might be walking up the stairs
so I run inside and put my organs back.
Bite marks and blood down my arms.

Bloated heart as always leaking
out onto the floor and it's embarrassing;
I put everything back all wrong-

I thought I was being watched
The organs cramp in my gut.
Rinse the knife in the sink.

I will have to do this again tomorrow.

III

SWALLOWING

After he leaves, I sleep with my stuffed rabbit each night.
Pink and unclean, begrimed by its slow lug behind me

since childhood, tucked into bed beside me.
When I wake, I stumble down the hallway

and stand at the end of it, the living room wide before me—
the yawn of a cracked open jaw, wide and hot.

The mass of my hands are bloated,
feet slick and stuck to the linoleum.

I hold my rabbit by one paw, it dangles at my side.
My wrists sticky inside of my pajama sleeves.

I realize what's left of me:
bookshelf, armchair, rug.

My small thrift store trinkets glare
from the floating shelves in the wall, pushed closer

to the edge each time the door shuts.
No one, he said, has ever pushed me so far.

I kept myself in a box of old grocery lists
beneath my desk— artifacts.

I read them and realize I have been
somewhere I shouldn't be.

I'll stay up all night again, igniting light after light,
dragging myself around in a gown, reaching out

to rip my knuckles across a stretch of brick wall.
The wind like a hand

up my skirt.
I'll go back into the apartment, step

into the empty mouth of the living room
and sit in the armchair, legs to my chest,

my rabbit on top of my knees, and look out
through plastic eyes.

WHEN FACEBOOK SUGGESTS I SEND A FRIEND REQUEST TO MY EX-HUSBAND'S NEW GIRLFRIEND FOR THE THIRD TIME THIS WEEK

I'm always blaming things on the time of year—
it's September so the merlot-tinged bird feathers splashed

across the sidewalk outside my therapist's office
are an omen, and of course this is why I am hungover,

that ache behind my eyes. The reason I can't keep anything
down, none of my prayers working. A month I'd gone without

my old habits— no glass on the kitchen floor, skin smoothing
over, no vodka in the freezer, stopped walking drunk at 4 A.M.

listening to Ave Maria on repeat— I believed it was finally enough
healing to last a lifetime. It's been

a year now, September again; I woke with a start
on my living room floor convinced I'd just drowned

in the bathtub. Went to the museum and stood staring
into the bronze faces of Segal's *Rush Hour* until I scared myself

into moving along. I wore a skirt covered
in stars to the bar and thought if I danced enough I could shake

them into the sky. I thought too, if I could buy enough
rosaries and statues of Mary I could return to myself—

pretend like I am child praying, but I've knelt at the foot
of my front door begging my hands not to turn the knob.

To get out and run over and over. To buy the red wine
and come home, shatter the nearest glass and wield

the shards inward. I look into my palms open in my lap.
September again, season of your leaving.

So when I see her face, her blonde hair, the freckles
on her cheeks, her shiny bright blue eyes staring at me

through my phone's screen again I want to rip all
that I've put back together apart.

Wish that I could say enough Hail Mary's to close

the wound.

HOW TO LOSE YOUR BABY TEETH

First, you must watch the kitten;
watch him as he gnaws your good linen.
Do you see how he goes at it, unflinching
without pause as they fall out,
dropping one then another onto the carpet.

Pick up the teeth.
Put them in a sandwich bag
and place in the top drawer of the desk.
You might call the vet later,
but you will call your mom to ask

if this is normal. Mom says she read on the internet
that it's okay, but maybe you should call the vet anyways.
You don't. You go on the internet too.
There are many reasons for this
and it should be quite logical.

*Cats, like humans, will have two sets of teeth
in their life. the deciduous teeth—milk teeth, or primary teeth—
appear in a kitten three weeks after birth, a process
which will take your human baby mouth
four to seven months to accomplish. By this time,
the kitten is already losing its primary incisors.*

Tuck the teeth away.
In humans, to replace the front teeth
ceramic crowns are used to be less obvious.
Porcelain crown for strength,
now you too can chew through whatever

you want. Gold alloys for resistance,
and base metal for when there is nothing
left to salvage. Now, open your mouth.
Notice how there isn't enough
room left to spare.

Discomposure

Pre-dawn pitch of my room, a mess
of crickets outside the window, sound

clamoring over sound.
It takes a moment

to remember who I am. It takes me
a moment to recall the walls around me.

I reach my arms up for some force to pull
me out, cradle me in the crook of his arm, pick

the wine bottles up off the floor
and place my body down, steady.

I trace the steps I make each morning
feet mapping out the way to the kitchen, the bathroom—

stand in front of the mirror,
nothing reflected back—

the bedroom, the kitchen again, out the door.
How did the things in my hands get into my hands,

who made this coffee, this leftover pasta,
where is the car that goes to these keys.

Summer's sudden and drawn out end forms around
me, my body a gash through the air.

The Red Bull truck ruins the sunrise on my way to work.
Fat and low and singular in the sky.

Every day I start the same
song as I get on the highway.

Driving out into the sun / let the ultraviolet cover me up
and see nothing as I wait for the part where the singer

starts screaming. This at the top of the list of what
few things I can recognize.

Her screaming fades out into a choke and I am
in the middle of a Wendy's parking lot.

I don't even know what time it is and it takes me hours to remember how I got here.

LONELY GIRL

Lonely Girl drives home from the office and listens to Catholic hymns and Florence and the Machine, takes three wrong turns and pounds her fists on the steering wheel so hard her wrists bruise welts blue. Lonely Girl has a temper, she's got three lighters in her bag and she's not afraid to use them.

Lonely Girl's got a bottle of wine and spends her Friday night in her small studio putting on a full face of makeup just so she can watch herself in the mirror while she cries it off. She puts the hymns back on and loudly and spins in her favorite nightgown; buttercream pink tulle trawling across the floor.

She blesses a bowl of leftover pasta at the foot of the Virgin Mary on her mantlepiece. She takes one of her rosaries and wraps it around her fist tight then unravels it, dangles it above her lips and stuffs it in her mouth. She bites down hard on the glass beads, smiles a bloodless smile.

Lonely Girl gets out the Tarot Cards and asks if he is ever going to love her back. She pulls the Three of Swords as if she didn't already know. She throws the cards across the floor and drinks one glass too many of wine. All the candles in her home are lit and she runs her finger through each and every flame.

Her eyes glisten in the glow of the flames and it's like they make sounds, they're spitting at her, and they start laughing in her face and suddenly she's laughing with them. She thinks this could be joy and the flames start floating through the air, her fingers follow them like they are bubbles she can pop.

Lonely Girl grows wings like a swan and she wants to take flight or otherwise set herself on fire. Lonely Girl needs the bottle of wine taken away. She starts wailing a swansong. Her mouth is open wide and her singing sounds like the guttural creak of a door flinging open

THE WOMAN IN THE APARTMENT ACROSS THE HALL KNOWS SO MUCH ABOUT ME

She can hear me when I am singing or screaming
or when I am throwing my body
against the wall; shattering dishes during an episode,
and I know this because I can hear her
teach all day through her computer while I sit at my own
on the other side of the wall.
Some mornings we poke our heads out
of our doors at the same time to set our trash out.
She smiles at me each times and mouths something.
I hear her in the kitchen heating something in the microwave,
chopping vegetables, or using her blender in the morning.
I know she can hear me while I cook too and I am
sending video updates to my friends and scolding my cat
when he gets in the way. Does she think I am too mean to him?
She knows I sometimes slam my door and that I tend
to stay up too late during the week dancing to loud music.
Can she hear it when I am laughing so hard at my own jokes?
I've seen her smile before, and I wonder
how it would look on her face laughing at my jokes.
I think she is my best friend sometimes
and sometimes when I can hear her watching The Crown,
I want to go knock on her door and ask
if I can join her– we could make popcorn.
She has to have heard me popping some on my stove
the summer I first moved here when it was all I could eat.
I heard her making it too, once.

WHEN YOU AND I RAN WILD

for my sister

Childhood summer:
backyard without time, opalescent wings.

Bubbles floating above starry-eyed faces.
The driveway covered in chalk drawings

of our names. Doodles of the solar system filling the spaces
where I will become absent.

The way heat fell when the clouds turned bruise
and trees rustled their whispers across indigo-ridged skies

beckoning us indoors. Sister, don't you see how free,
then, all of this was?

You hadn't learned to use a razor blade
just yet, hadn't turned fourteen.

Hadn't wanted a way out.
During the Octobers that felt like forever,

we would play in the front yard amongst
inflatable headstones and handmade ghosts

lolling in circles hung from bare branches.
We played like this was real haunting, and that the dead

were there beneath us, clawing for our ankles
as we scurried full of squeals.

I used to be so small.
Now I am even smaller.

We were little candles, sister, you and I, flickering
in and out of this gauzy-aching consciousness.

I didn't mean to be gone for so long. But know:
even all the way from here I felt last night's storm

on the windowpane. I will howl down the neighborhood
streets like suburban winter winds. Unfettered and ugly,

I will tear through the bodies of phantoms in your bedroom,
rip limb from limb as they had done inside of your skull.

And for some reason, I find myself screaming
at them, in your ear:

Remember me, remember me, remember me.

DRESS GHAZAL

At the altar a fly hangs in the air between us, lands on his lapel, grazes my dress.
I dance with the fly all night, to every slow song I hold his hand, the other gathers the train of
my dress.

Past midnight, we are in the hotel— my new husband and I. To take off my dress
I need help undoing it's buttons that run down my back. He eyes my dress

and unbuttons slow, four down and says he's too drunk. While he sleeps in the bed I stand
twisted in the mirror in low light, my hot hands fumble down my dress.

I gather all my things in the morning before he wakes, meet my parents in the hotel lobby
and drink four coffees before my husband comes. Before we leave, I pick the heap of my
dress

off the floor and place it back on its hanger. I zip it up inside the plastic sheath from the store
and send it off to my parents' house to put in their basement because what else is there to do
with a wedding dress?

For months I make my husband dinner, I do the dishes and I go to work and I am very good.
All day he waits for me to be done. I pick up beer cans around the house and he lays in bed
watching me through the cracked bedroom door, wants to rip off my dress.

He breathes down my neck while I stand at the sink scrubbing, pushes against me crushing
my pelvis hard into the counter. In the bathroom, fluorescent, I slip off my dress

and stand in the mirror to stare at myself, purpled and sallow. I picture myself less bloody.
I picture myself a child again running through the backyard in a pink floral dress.

In spring, he leaves. I've walked hours into the night before and I will walk even more.
All there is to do is walk. I circle the pond at the park six times, gather rocks in my dress

and slow myself down with the weight in the fabric. Would my mother be proud.
She calls me every day but doesn't say much. I pace around my empty apartment in my night
dress

while I listen to her. She is tired but she needs me on the phone. I hang up and sleep on the
floor.

In the morning, I pack more boxes. I start in the kitchen and leave my dresses

for last. I fold them tight and neat in one large box examining each one with every four fold.
In my new apartment, I take each of my dresses

hang them up one by one. It is a new spring and I will always be heartbroken for as long
as I live. This world leaves me heartbroken and full of something I might call love. In a new

yellow dress,

I bake a cake. I imagine making space at the table for my friends. I want them to see what I have made here.

I open the door for them, one says to me: *Savannah, I love your dress!*

OMENS

I am done with my omens—
they exhaust me.

Knots, massive throbs through
each nerve. Electro-maniacal laughter
charging the route my blood runs.

The endless loop I curve—
convinced there is some hex I walk
beneath the cloud of. It means nothing
if it rains on your wedding day.

It continued to rain even if I was
smiling in the photos. There is nothing
I do or do not deserve. The divorce
was not the problem, it was what I had
before, then taken, and left with thereafter.

And if I don't take a shower tonight
it doesn't predict tomorrow —
it just means I did not take a shower tonight,
and tomorrow I can still try again.

I've always said that if I say it out loud
it will be taken from me. *I do. I did.*

Outside my brain or not
the world is still happening,
everyone goes on without me.

I am destined for nothing.

VITA

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