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Rose Born Wilted

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Preface

This collection contains the following trigger warnings: childhood sexual abuse & pedophilia, human trafficking, domestic abuse, animal death, emotional abuse, verbal abuse, allusions to gore & body horror.

1

Art Museum

We went to the art museum last year. I remember.

Actually, my love, I was

the art museum last year. I was every exhibit in that damn museum, and I was good at it, too, I could've played that part in my sleep, or with

my hands tied behind my back, or every turn of phrase that means this is easy. Nothing about surviving can be easy, but I still took it upon myself to try method acting:

here I am in love with you, here I am in the art museum posing in marble

and having my skin faded by old men ignoring the sign on my chest that says

NO FLASH PHOTOGRAPHY. I loved you and I loved the way that the curtain bled into the colors of my hometown when the show was over & the audience left. He played his love like he believed it

was going to save the world. Every scene felt so real, like the actors were really in love, or could be in love if they lived in different circumstances.

Five stars.
You're drawing out five stars
on my cheeks with a silver pen, and I'm yours, you're marking
me as
yours until the museum closes for the night & the sculptures
start to take their
first breaths of the day. And hopefully by morning
we'll be living together, and my muscles won't ache with a
sickness
that can only be cured by escaping into the next plotline.
I like to think I was the roof, but I was more like the doorway
through which you dragged in today's dead bird to drop into
my hands. We're
pretending that this bird is alive, right? I remember. The bird
is alive, that's how the game works.
The bird is not fallen prey, it is a beating heart. Its two little
fluttering wings
like my hand holding yours. I can't do this anymore, I can't
make every death you give me into a gift.
I can't be the museum. I'm sorry that I can't
be the building for you, and I'm sorry that I can't be any kind
of masterpiece. I'm sorry that I plucked the end of us
like taking stars out of the sky, like scrubbing ink out of skin
until it turns red and raw
and sorry just like me.
I'm sorry, baby, but this bird is dead.

Verses & Versions

I laugh and ask the depraved, sick version of me that is reflected in the mirror, each tooth sharpened to the breadth of a needle, if he would swim through Lake Michigan trying to reach the man he loves.

(Occasionally 'the man he loves' refers to himself, other times the world in its own personification, yet it eventually always loops around to the ultimate intangible experience. The harrowing ability to crave. This other me in the mirror is struggling with a love that has strangled the humanity out of him, and this is not true of the person facing the glass. This is very important to know. This tells the story, this grew the trees that would one day form the paperscrolls of his mythology. I've always believed that the most beautiful thing about mythology is the fact that someone out there will inevitably accept it as the truth, and then the lines begin to watercolor-blur between dimensions, obscuring the poles of the situation. Belief in something will make that creature real, animate it in the fleshbone. It isn't worthy of anything, and I don't know what happens after that. The mirror fuses like

bone? The two versions of me exchange realities and subsequent wounds? The universe finds its balance again?)

"I would," he replies, his words muffled through his brittle teeth. "I would," he says, his hand magnet-drawn over his heart like the confirmation of truth, "and I would drown in it for him, too. I would sink myself down to the garden of fish, the final resting place of each blessed seacreature, if it meant I could give him a cradling shred of safety."

My own heart's rhythm flutters. "Is that really a good idea?" I ask him. "Is it virtuous to hollow yourself out for another? To remove everything that fuels your life for a transplant into a body that is permanently sewn shut? Is it damning to place each holy cell that composes you around the one man who will never love you back like a shrine, like a memorial?"

"I don't know," he says. The admission has created an agony that is visible, that forces his body to resemble the fading consciousness in the eyes of a dying man. The light is there and it's dimming, and he's losing function, shutting down, and the body of suffering twitches before it stiffens. Then he adjusts his tie, and places his hand against his side of the glass. "But it's worth it. I couldn't survive watching him suffer. Could you do it? Could you live with yourself, could you live without devotion, could you bear to be alive knowing you could've saved someone, if only you were brave enough to admit it?"

My hand is forced over by the ghastly, divine force of my own mind to rest against his.

My smile feels like reanimation, like necromancy, like foretold resurrection, and I do not answer him.

Contradiction

I'm fragmenting again like I'm announcing a union, like I have gifted new life to the crumbling space around us, like it is possible to stop both me & the cosmic seams of our planet from decomposing. This love dismembers me & places the severed pieces of my body around me on the floor, mimicking my old form & I'm fragmenting again — the world, in its eternal existence, has no constants beyond these two statements. Everything fluctuates, our atmosphere in a nauseating flux — saviors and the inevitable decaying of all that is, the remains of our bodies floral-patterned from aerial view.

(My grandmother had a man place flowers on her husband's grave every month until she, too, became just another body & I imagined her lifeless in the crematorium, each layer of her body burning off like roses being torn apart, each metaphor in mourning, each petal a skin, a muscle, a bone. They did not cremate my grandfather — his body lies within the Earth, forever reaching out for a body that is no longer a body, something that could almost be adoration but that died on the tracks, before it could reach the line of completion. This love is entirely unlike

my love for you, my love for you like resurrection, like dying, like resurrection.)

(I often wonder if the man tasked with symbolizing her sorrow became desensitized to the concept of death. Every day in the cemetery, another grave, another flower picked from its human position in vanity to die upon the representation of dying. Every flower dies when it is removed from its growth; even the ultimate gesture of love and grief loses its flavor eventually.)

I love you. I am always in a destroying love. I crave the ability to love in a way that does not fragment me & instead enhances reality, vivids the surroundings, the painted world. I wish I could love you in a way that does not elicit suffering, I wish I was able to love you without breaking apart, without my hand slipping from the embrace of lucidity.

(I love you transplanted. The people I used to be loved you. How can I not love you? I love you like surgical recovery, the knowledge that my life will be as eternal as death. I love you. I cannot imagine a persistence that does not involve your blood inside of mine.)

I love you and I want that to be something that keeps me alive. I want to get there.

Pluto

i.

I don't know, I like to think I'm lonely because I just haven't figured out / how to navigate this virulent world and its disguised misery yet but I honestly think it's more like a divine punishment,

like I did something wrong in my only existence / and I must suffer to atone. I like to think loneliness doesn't exist inside of seashells or within strips of driftwood or in the guts of a fish or in the water itself despite its lack of stability but I know better, I do know better, I know consequence more than my own reflection, blurring in my gaze— I am a person too lost, burnt metaphorically beyond recognition, burnt literally

by their own hands. I like to think these dreams of stars engraved into walls

by the secret moonlight & of soft hair curled around fingers & of anatomical hearts carved into

wood with two letters in the middle, me + you, to symbolize the eternity of love—

I like to think dreams like this are viral, or perhaps they are a

controlled substance,

high risk. Feeling hopeful, my love? You might as well crucify
your lungs

with cigarettes — —

same reaction, same addiction,

same inevitable cancerous end. Dreams cannot be dreams;

instead they must be dreamed for,

the foundation of our desire to be loved, the one universal
experience that lies horizontal waiting for everyone in their
utmost vulnerability. So maybe

I'm lonely because I am flawed. Aren't we all? Isn't hope
inherently flawed, its statistics roaring wild, the odds etched
against it? So maybe I'm lonely because there is an aspect of
my personality that bears a demonic body, so maybe I'm lonely
because I don't know how to fix myself, to mold my essence into
something that other people can bite into without a shatter or
sickness. Yes, it always circles back to hope. I can't keep it up. I
wish I could be proud of myself,

I wish I was skinnier

I wish I had light streaming out of my posterior plane, wings
that could propel me out of the water and atmosphere, the ability
to be satiated

I wish I wasn't broken, I wish my body didn't resemble my
dyingfrail grandfather in his hospice bed

I wish I could climb up the mountain for you, I wish I could
get my body to move in harmony with itself but

I wish I was sick enough

I wish my body was strung across the clothing lines, each limb
draped over the cord, bloodless dry, and I wish I could put myself
back together, I wish I could reinvent the physical parts of me /
like I reinvented my mind's cycle. I can't keep it up. I just can't

keep this

up.

ii.

Let me tell you a secret. I don't know who I'm writing this to. I want to say something fantastical, something that cannot be touched, like: I'm writing this

to my lover, to the singular person that possesses
my trust, to the craved and crazed.

I'm writing this to the rare stone,
to the shining polished presence I'd shell out billions for. I
don't think I say that
enough.

In contrast, I also want to carve my words into clay tablet
curses: if you're reading this, baby,

I'm dead and I'm going to take you with me, if you're reading
this, you have to get here yourself,

baby, and this world is living on borrowed time, anyway, we
both know that, we understand the inevitable perishing & we
skip through phases of grief like shreds of music. We're dead
already, so in a way this is merciful;

otherwise suffering as the one static aspect of my life, other-
wise loneliness pounding underneath me like gravel or pulse.
There is always another way out.

Maybe it's multiple people. We talk about dreams of stars but
last night I dreamed about

the first person to slither inside my rotting reviving core. We
were at

a carnival, on the ferris wheel together and I wasn't wearing
my glasses

so the lights in the dusk looked like the entrance to Heaven
melting and collapsing into itself & he described it to me,

the cityscape I couldn't see, the imperfect lines of sunset,
points where colors met. Then we were at
the animal shelter and he held a puppy up to my face & as I
looked into its eyes I despised it for its innocence so he guided
my hand over its soft patterned fur,
the texture reanimating, the feeling of its
little budding trust in me enough to hold the jealousy under-
water. Then we
were in the afterlife and I told him that my love for him
was like clinging to the living world but I know
dreams are defined as such for a reason.
I still like to think that we can meet in the sunset. Maybe it
can be fixed.

Maybe he's the one who can fix me, who can fade my lack of
value into something truly
desirable.

iii.

Shoot me in the chest and the smoke trickles out. Shoot me in
the heart. Go on,

do it, don't be scared. Shoot me in the heart & watch the
gravedirt crumble down like a child's sandcastle, like micro-
scopic shards of fate. I really, really want to deserve it. I really
want to believe

that I'm unworthy and I scathe anyone who dares to view me
as tangible, that there is something / in my coding or soul that
malfunctioned upon creation because I'm terrified to face the
real truth:

I'm just not good enough. I get it — you're tired of the
story about the outcast, the tragedies of difference. Sometimes
people are just not enough to satiate this world's ancient
hunger. Sometimes people have microscopic shards of fate

that puzzle-piece together to form something monstrous, some representation of a loneliness that expands celestial. I wish this poem wasn't about loneliness. I wish I counted as poetic.

iv.

The climax of the movie and she's tied to the train tracks, they're pouring gasoline over her bound

frame, she's dangling off the roof and praying that there's someone who will save her — a superhero, a knight in shining armor, a cliché, an odd thing to imagine

when you're about to die but I doubt people are very creative when they're about

to die.

Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe those few moments before death do not involve recollection but rather revelation & we finally understand

how to bring forth a peaceful love but we don't live to tell the tale because—

well, you should know this by now: life can never be balanced with peace. There is a strict line

between worlds like sunset blurs. Have you ever wondered what it would be like

to extract the light from someone's body? To watch through their eyes

as the life inside of them

is extinguished? No, that's not right — to extinguish implies fire, and humanity's destruction devours more like a tsunami—

very few structures survive fire,
water suffocates and leaves everything behind whole, the meat still on the bone. I know most people say otherwise but it's possible

to push me into the deep end, to force me into evil, and if I am
so easily corrupted—
perhaps my loneliness was injected to keep other people safe.

Dog Divination

I was with you on the shore that day, when we watched the palm lines of the trees behind us read our paths into obscurity. I told you: yes, I can pray for a future, but I just don't know if I can believe. I just don't think it'll ever happen, I just don't think I'm worthy. She scribbles that part out with dark ink. I just don't think it'll ever happen, I think that these timelines, these frail embodied what-ifs that have infected us beyond salvation, are too dark for anyone to see through. You step in and there's no light, no stars littered amongst the skies, a nothingness—space as a swallowed void, the end of it all, the universe's final breath. You step into another timeline like you're playing some kind of game with the fabric, like there is something that you want, something that you're going to get no matter what, even if you have to carve inwards for it. Even if you have to vomit up the guts and stuff the plush back in to keep it all in place, all quiet, entirely resilient. The point, of course: I have no future. You don't need divination to figure that out. The question is: what are we going to do about it? What is there to do? You claw and claw and claw and claw and claw and claw and claw and claw

to be let out of the cage, to be released from your inferior body into the greater world, the world where you can walk and you can talk and they all like you again. You're just breaking your nails off, and those wounds don't heal pretty. I'm the prized animal, the most popular exhibit at the place, they'd hate to lose me. They feed me microwaved pizza crust and they pat the top of my head and they show me off to their neighbors: look how extraordinarily grotesque this beast is! But no one can truly be convinced, so they stick their hands in. Silly them. Silly me. Who am I to talk about futures? I'm too many someones to talk about futures, too many potentials souping around in the body's soul. Well, fine. If you won't say it, I will—I was with you in the bedroom that day, when we watched the car drive out of the driveway and into the gray loveless distance. They'd hate to lose me and they're going to pay me double just to sit and stay and sit and stay. The treat's coming—they point and they throw, look, over there! But there's still nothing. Silly me.

CAPITALIZED FOR EMPHASIS

the forest i met you in was layered in ice & i stumbled behind you through the pressed dirt—my dragged-along 12 year old unskinned vessel placing myself into the prints of your shoes, my unholy body becoming your unholy body flickering through your unholy life—i want it back. my childhood integument, that is, the open-book innocence of an untouched body. we all live / with an aching desire to be stared at & what is the world useful for

if i never find the path back to instinct? the exhibit of me as a wild thing caged up & tied down is for you & i'll give it to you all for free—the inside of my body like the tooth-gums of a big bad, the sidewalk gravel of every wrong road, the lion with its teeth bared and body bare.

i don't blame you, he says, for giving up—the auto prefix bleeding out through our bedsheets made that decision for you &. i just don't blame you. maybe it's because want-ing means two different things to us; a representation of a bright bright bright fire, set by a lightning strike with the shack that was Me and I and Myself burning to dark, picture frame ash / the

fire turning itself into the mythological snake that pulls me back to you cyclical—two sliced off fingers rotting through the joint gaps of my femur; a forest in the middle of the fucking white-hot Midwestern star-depths—the outline of the door between the trees pushing into the body of Us & fragmenting It into scattered aspects—in which i find a way to love, every year, hiding underneath growth of character.

god i keep saying i'm too big to fit into this love now—my height just too colossal to work correctly underneath—underneath—underneath the muscular heat of craving—but i feel young again! i can move with tact! i can strategize! i can dig deeper—love harder—feel through the raw! i do not know how to find my way through the mist so i breathe fire & i transform myself into the purer way of feeling emotion & i am the lover lost in the flame. getting rid of this hunger means / getting rid of the god that supposedly rests in the cells that supposedly compose me but i dont know. i dont know what constitutes living—what constitutes a healthy love—what constitutes a wholeness of connection but / i think i have to find a way to crawl out of this.

7:18 AM

Here is the whole truth swallowed: the only thing that survived the fire was my idea of a perfect love & the world's all burned around me as I watched my family burn around me, cusp of winter against my lucid eyelids & I don't know how to swallow it; twenty-four hours melting hot against my skin and hot hospital coffee melting against my tongue and he's never going to have another cup of coffee because— -well, you're old enough now— -dead people don't

drink coffee, dead people cannot work the coffee pot because ashes simply aren't able to touch things. My parents, I whisper into the hot January weather, the skin of my face pressed against my lover's chest, they loved me— -

It helps to dream. In my dreams: my father comes back to life as something redeemable, says that Heaven changed him, and he learns how to love us again, eyes buried in the literature of family, the building-blocks of the perfect home— -a mother and a father and a son and a dog, functional gears like wind-up dolls, moving us

towards one another without our consent, and in this dream

we want to care, we do,

we want to love each other and leave each other, we want to eat the abundance of those that came before us & it's still too big for me to swallow. My heart works right again & the cancer blossoms in my grandmother's lungs, bright flowers spilling from her pale mouth & I place them all

inside the box that contains my father's ashes. We keep my father in the garage now, the scars

on our bodies are too disfiguring & still hold the painted-over ghosts

of what we looked like when we were born, when my parents met for the first time. I don't know if he feels guilty now. I like to think you are enlightened when you die, that spirits

have their sicknesses drained—or beaten—out of them.

I pour his ashes into the coffee pot & drink his body. And I become him, in every sense; my body a sewed-together unholy being, my nightmares projected right onto my skin & the whole world sees me as what I truly am: a desperate, wolfish construct, bruises from fighting against the claws of immortality. A mural, painted in names. The mirrored figure of my father's deeds, standing in the doorway, waiting for the next opportunity to feed.

Hysterectomy

Did you know that I'm having surgery in about two weeks? Did you hear me when I asked you to look at the organ they will tear out of me & pity it, our fingers entwined like an astronomical collision event? Did you hear it when they forced the scream out of me? The person who consented to this surgery is lost at sea. Probably long dead, by now. Bones. That's kind of what happens when you drift out too far, when you stumble out of humanity, when you're so clumsy, silly you. It's to be expected, but I never thought you were the frankenthing, instead I thought of you as the last one in the room untouched by me, escaping the struggle to grasp innocence. After they cut my uterus out of me, they will incinerate the rotten thing. I will wake up, or I won't wake up, and either way I won't be able to rewrite that old poem of yours, the one you sent me that doesn't quite make sense, for a very long time. They're going to use a robot, small cuts in my abdomen as I become the damsel, the helpless specter, scrawled over the operating table, unconscious, my belly open to any predator that may be hunting nearby. I can't remember the words to that poem anymore. That kind of makes this whole

thing futile, doesn't it? Doesn't it? Answer me. The truth is I just can't stomach it. I'm terrified my stomach is going to fall down into the gap and all of my hunger will spill out of me, the acid from it infectious with intolerable craving, enough to kill a man, enough to blow up the whole block, so stand back before I press the button and end it all before they can cut into me just for my spirit to bleed out. Do you remember the words? I'm sorry, I can't quite remember the words, I'm just so scared.

Yous

Yous

i.

Here is the eternal dream, darling, the one desire I have for us: one day I want to be gray and weaker and I want it to be your fault. The curves and sags pulling my flesh magnetized downward—because of you, carved in your name, trying to reach you in the grave. No, I hope it doesn't end like that. The eternal dream is really just another way of saying here is what I dream about at night, the steam swirling and pulsing through me as I sleep. Here is the eternal desire, arguably universal and factually omnipresent in humanity: in my fantasies I am seen whole. Pitted, hollowed, and reinvented. I think that I deserve to be witnessed, but woe! To be witnessed is to shroud yourself in the funeral garb of Vulnerability, to invite in evil tongues, to practically beg on your knees for criticism, for someone to be loyal to, and I don't know if I can handle that yet. I don't know if I can handle that at all.

O, to be handled, to be something held - or, in another definition of the word - held back, restrained, kept tame. O, to be kept tame—to be kept in someone's grasp, leashed, strictly cherished until my elderly years. O, to be pet. Keep me in my purest form. Keep me stripped to the barebones—this disgustingdisgusting vehicle of abhorrent need I am now—but don't look at me, don't you ever look at me. I cannot be seen, or invited in, because I might strike—I wasn't lying about being dangerous, about the eternal dream being rooted in fear. I won't tell you what that means.

ii.

I made you a grilled cheese and we laughed because the light of the fireflies glowing against the sunset looked too much like the fire that claimed his body—we have to laugh about it because there's nothing left to do, no other way to mourn. On my father's side, we have a hereditary allergic reaction to commitment. I am fighting this like he fought the flames but the contrast is clear: this time I am the victor.

I made you a grilled cheese and we cried because this didn't really happen. In my dreamscape I made you a grilled cheese and you came back to life to thank me for my hospitality and you're sorry but you do have to die again, you're already breaking like fifty heavenly laws by being here, but you just wanted to meet me. I get that but I don't think I can let you go. At least smoke with me before you leave—you can give me that much.

iii.

You are the one I love, the one I have coiled my soul around. I'm warned not to love the world too much or I might get distracted but it's so hard when the world has given me you. You are the one who redefined it for me—the concepts of wholeness and individuality—the harbinger of light. I am whole in myself,

I am my own being, and my mind extends to the parts of me that I have grafted onto you. Symbiosis. We talk about that a lot, but I think togetherness can create an entirely new sense of individuality. An epiphany. The stars inside of my mind only reflect you into the imagery of the sky when you look upwards at night. At daytime, the sun peeks through the clouds that form bubbled up only in the shape of our memories. Our first conversation. Our first confession. Our first hope, ignited in the air like the fireworks that blew her hand straight off. It won't be like that for us. I will kneel for you. I will

kneel for you.

Eulogy

i.

I hope this is my most beautiful poem; I am going to make something beautiful for my beloved. I am going to suck the weaponry out, peel off the infected flesh with my teeth, and I am going to make myself useful. I wasn't molded into something that attacks with precision; God would not gift me with breath if I was destined to waste it, to carve the air into little sharp arrowheads for my just-in-case crumbling paranoia. I'm not dead yet, for God's sake.

I am going to make myself useful, after I fight my way out, and write a beautiful poem, but for now their teeth are scraping up my heels and gnawing into the tendon. I can't remember what you smelled like, but I don't think it was gasoline or smoke or the disaster that blurred into dark spots of more disaster, like shaky inkblots on parchment, suffocating us with the scent of charred flesh. Smoke, smoke, and more smoke until it kills you, but I can't die before I figure out how to reverse our hearts, each valve and ventricle visible on the research table as I reach

across the cool metal

and touch you for the last time—No, darling, that's the opposite of beautiful. No, darling, that is beauty, stripped of its clothing and deception. Enlightenment is unattainable until you find someone who is willing to hollow you — to scoop your essence out, turn you into a raw defenseless mess of creature — and nurture you into life again, forever altered.

ii.

The artist missed a few details on the painting, but I don't know how to explain it. I don't think he painted you beautiful enough. I don't think it looks like you. I don't think the being that you are will be satiated with a painted existence, or maybe my neuroses are ruining the picture again, too out of place for the rigidity. Too controlling. On the other side of the glass, the artist is exaggerating the other details, inverting you into that terraformed, mirrored version of yourself where you're consumed by envy and it's safe to be just like my father.

I think I've fallen back into it, the reprehensible shadow puppetry in which I animate you into something that you will never be, because I don't want to feel guilty for leaving. The truth is that I do love you, but I don't know how to make up for it. In the holy books I've read, there is always a test of faith. I love you and I always come back after the bite gets stitched up.

iii.

I think I might have rabies but my doctor says I haven't seen the animal in nineteen years and this is what they call a delusion. I don't think so, because I hear Him, you know. He whispers to me at naptime. I tricked my body into forgetting how to swallow and now I choke on everything I eat and one day it's going to kill me if the paranoia doesn't get me first. I'm scared of dying but mostly I am scared of dying before I go to my first wedding.

I'm not sure what I'd wear if I make it that far. I don't want to overshadow the bride, and I want the bride to be my mother and I want the groom to be someone my father's unsteady mind would despise, and I am telling you all of these things very bluntly, with my bare flat affect and run-on sentence, because I want someone to recoil at the sight of me before I die but I just don't think it's working.

Hypothetical Explanations for the Paradox

Healing is rare. Some scientists have argued that the conditions needed for healing — for example, a safe environment, a calm and equally weathered voice, a warmth extracted from something celestial, that loving quality in the humans we center ourselves around — are so rare that they are nearly impossible to attain. These researchers posit that frail, newborn hope cannot last very long if, from birth, it is pulled in unsavory directions and forced to submit to apathy.

Forgiveness has not yet evolved a fear of predation. Many attempt to study how emotions form in the human brain, but a developing theory questions the overall capability of emotions to integrate into one, singular personality. In simple terms, no one has ever truly been able to pinpoint why some people become prey and others end up lurking as the opposite. Forgiveness is another species of hominid entirely, and it is not predicted to survive past another few centuries as it always ends up submitting to its fate, never running away, lacking any indication of fear.

Those who have healed are too far away. True recovery may exist somewhere in the universe, but at a distance so great that reaching it would be nearly impossible. Divine miracles exist, and we, as a society, have seen them, but it seems unlikely that we're destined to evolve into safety any time soon.

Those who have healed are deliberately avoiding us. The hypothetical individuals perceive themselves as a contrast to humanity for any reason, and therefore refuse to contact the struggling despite being aware of our existence. Some suggested reasons for this avoidance have been that we are not useful to them, our existence is too primitive compared to theirs, or we're simply too unpredictable for their tastes.

True healing does not exist. This controversial explanation of the paradox insists that healing can never truly manifest in a human being, because our skin scars too easily and we don't get a new one unless we're lucky enough to have it burnt up, our bodies manifesting as suns above the flames. Humans can be stained, and irreversibly so. It's more common than one may think.

It is the nature of intelligent life to destroy itself. Solace is too busy desecrating its own potential to gaze upon what has already been desecrated.

The Spirit

There are things in this world, in this universe's pulsing fruitpit heart, that cannot be explained, they tell you, in reality there exists phenomena so celestial in their obscurities that the closest translation it has to our lives is a matryoshka of parasitism with the sole mission

of disassembling you
through love.

Beat, pit, beat! Push the holy essence of love through our body, lull our traumas to sleep and cradle them! They tell you that it will get easier, that the sweet apricot flutter in your chest, once used to craft the one sacred space in all of eternally unfolding existence

where your love enters pure, and exits pure, and froths around inside of you pure, pure, pure,

can be replaced. It won't be easy, they tell you, but this, to you, is a universal divinityspoken truth; nothing on Earth comes without struggle. It is different in space. You have no way of

knowing, but you know. The nebula remains untouched by humanity, and therefore remains untouched by humanity's visceral, skinning hatred, and humanity's visceral, skinning love. It's always love. It's always about what Earth takes from you. It's always Earth and love and love and Earth and love & within you there is a prayer singing the hymns of a connection so alien to humanity that it becomes more human than any other concept. Beat, pit, beat. Beat, pit, beat. Watch the feast in your chest rot untouched. It's not the same now. Beat, pit, beat. Watch your sheltering armor. Watch the security in constant companionship fall from its place among the heavens into grassy fields and rise from the ashwreck something entirely new. It's not the same now. Beat.

Pit.

Beat.

You were going to pull the pit out yourself with your own hands in the meat of your own chest, but this is not very conducive to continual life. Instead your hardened heart softened and flew away, like a bird, like a spirit, amen! Instead your hardened heart broke the teeth of the only being that could ever truly hold it, and now, well, it's not the same! It's not the same! The others watch you gaze into the stars and pity you but They Don't Know! What It Is Like!

To Lose!

A permanent component!

Of their soul!

To have the knowledge of having someone!!

To have a harmonious eternity promised to you like a half-eaten meal to the starving!

To love something shaped like you!

They! Don't! Understand!

The intimacy of sharing every fragmented aspect of your existence with someone else! The intimacy of being witnessed & chosen & witnessed & chosen & witnessed & abandoned! ! ! ! !!!

They gaze into the stars & see stars. You gaze into the stars & see possibilities; each shining light a potential entrance to their home, each light a potential pathway disguised as a star. You gaze into the stars &

see yourself in the face of every one. You gaze into the stars and one star catches your attention; it is shining a little brighter, and at a more vibrant blue, than any of the others,

& when it reaches down to illuminate your entire body in its warmth,

the heart stops being a pit & starts being a heart and only a heart,

the malignant emptiness within you

is successfully defeated with your calm armies of yearning, and,

for a moment,

you can feel their presence inside of you again,

a metamorphosis

of their entanglement.

Floridity

So: floridity. Can we talk about that today? You know it all already—

the cataclysmic lack of composure that coils around its sad little

goddamn prey, and then you're just out there in the cold-lack-of-shiver

like some goddamn cannibalism show

puppeted on that old home entertainment set we left out on the scorch

of the Phoenix curb I am still chained to by the links of my collar,

a strangling, a mangling, a lightning strike touching its plane wheels down

over something already scarred, the love already branched out in its pale spirals,

the floridity we can't talk about

spilling out of the side wound because you know this

all already, you are here on repeat like a trapped divine omnipotence,

you'll get over it, you always do, and don't give me that
not this time crap because you always do. It's kind of annoying,
 actually,

how many times you have gotten over it, and we haven't even
 reached floridity yet.

We're still, unsuccessfully, having a conversation. Stop
 stalling, or your trauma

will have itself a fully developed brain before you commit to
 coping—and then, well, who knows?

Too late, lost cause?

Game over?

I get it. When we adjust the phrasing,
 it comes out too multifaceted; the print is just a little bit too
 off,

only a *little* jarring,
 only a little jarring of my soul to sit out on your shelf,
 but we won't go there yet, we can still adjust the text, polish
 it up,

sell the story. When we fix it up, tune it into another frequency
 &

unravel its familiarity into some unmusical instrument strung
 with severed cords,

it does not have two contrasting definitions, it reads
we cannot get endure this & remain.

Wake up! You've been in a coma for twenty years,
 and while you were out your entire family died in a fire and
 also

there was a zombie apocalypse and also
 all the birds disappeared and the outdoor silence is too over-
 whelming now.

Some say if you lean into the absence far enough you can hear

the answer to every dilemma

the universe will ever etch up for you, but I'm just not very superstitious. Besides, I think we're just unsewable, anyway, too thick to penetrate. Wake up, please.

For the love of God, wake up. In the name of God, wake up. I'll do anything. I'll

embrace the floridity if it gets you to bring her back. So I can't control myself anymore—

so what? They pre-planned the excavation, made a whole binder

and everything, cremation orchestrated
down to the last tabbed & laminated page. It was always
going to happen like that. I'll do anything, I've embraced it.
I'll do anything,

I'll even ask the Unspeakable Horror to move if it's still alive,
and then I'll ask

the Unspeakable Horror a favor, and then I will tell the
Unspeakable Horror every truth

the universe will ever etch out for me— see, I'm selfish and I
know too much and I see what

cannot be seen—and I know the Unspeakable Horror will
never love me back—

there will be no grand union-decimating gestures even if the
delusion sounds convincing

when I'm off my meds—

I probably shouldn't call it or you an Unspeakable Horror,
but what else is there to call the haunting? I'm sorry, it's just
all too much, it's just all blurring together. I can't say it. I'm
a child's rhyming poem, or you are: Unspeakable Horror #1
holding hands with Unspeakable Horror #2,

swirling in circles on the playground, overjoyed. In the

original tale, if you look closer, between the texts—if you read too much into it like you are so very skilled at doing—

they're not dancing, they're actually sparring. The first Unspeakable Horror has a knife to

its counterpart's chest. The second Unspeakable Horror is planning another heist. It's

going to strike soon and then I don't know what will happen, I can't see *that* well. All I know is that

one of my inner worlds wants me to adore it all,

even if it hurt, a cinematic extracted torture scene,

but I'm only halfway there. I've completed every level

& now here is the last battle: I am just too good at adoring the beautiful parts, because it is so easy

to adore the horrors when they take on that particular false frame, the daydream

I'm devouring, and I am *not* very good at adoring the unsightly parts,

the ones they sent back to the creator. I don't think anyone is good at that part. Go ahead and prove me wrong.

Resin

But I tried to think of love

as something other than a body abandoned. As something
other than foreign skin

underneath half-torn amber fingernails. As something other
than the photograph of my knees and head stapled to the ground,
now used to bait the fire. I melt with the scorch of passion & the
forsaken remains of me find a way to beg—

Think of love as reanimating the body. Think of love falling
from the edges of vessel wings

and into your hands, safely kept.

Can you trust yourself? Can you hold yourself back?

Could you stop yourself from deepening the wounds
with the hidden monstrosities we all know you have?

I have buried myself in the tangible destination: the garden
plot, in the afterlife where everyone finds the missing pieces,
the crucial aspect of their desires—and I find myself gasping

for someone to touch, something to feel other than the
hardened ground / in both states.

I DO NOT HAVE A BODY. I am a body. I do not have a body. I am

a body. Push this into me, attached to your love. Push me into the wall. Tell me I'm a good body, satisfactory flesh. Tell me you love me and give me a reason to stay, hurt me and give me a reason / to stay until I can think of love as something to build on. A castle, a home among the galactic starbodies, a safe place to rest. A platform on which I begin the new beginning. Tell me that this is not the end of the story, tell me that I'm going to suffer immortality, give me your secrets to burn. These muscles / have reached their limit. This skin / has reached its ultimate potential. I cannot be hurt anymore.

Figures

Take me to the place where they pull the eyelids back, he says.
Take me to the garden where it all rings true. Take me to the
graveyard

where our bodies lie entangled underneath the ground, my
stone-hardened hands
resting on top of yours,
a measure of time—
how large I have always been—
a building with thirteen floors to jump from,
glass windows & your body placed skeletal
against every one of them.
The frailty of you endearing, the frailty of you
a torn-off wing.

I'll admit it if you touch me. I did it, I did, I found the end of the
wind and I buried you there. I dream about being exhumed, I
dream about gentle giants. I want you, I take you back but you
don't want me back. I don't feel remorse until I feel the remorse

slam into the hollowness of me, the cottages in the forest, the birds' nest, the fractures inside of me
that should house you.

Take me to the hallowed lake, the old school that dried you out & hung you over the dimming porch lights like a hide. Take me to the church service in which you pray for the Old Me, the unfashionable skinned figure with the sunflower in her hair, the open-book test on the liturgy of humanity while the purer girls don their uniforms & ruinable flesh & judge me as I take you back. The dead gods that consumed me, lost to time.

Imagine if devouring was difficult; I'd be a good man. There are so many ways to hold divinity, and here, let me show you how to fake it, let me take you to the garden, let me find you

a new place to stay. I wish I could undress the wounds of needing you & you're still a loosening thread, opening up my seams to stuff the Good in, the right second chance to strip me of cruelty. You, the ocean-pit blue rarity, stuck buried beneath. You, statuesque, holding the past in marble like a book, a children's fable.

I dream about wishing. Instead: only falling stars, carving craters into the land.

The Storm

During the storm,
the empty swingset rattles with fury in the air—the same
discordant sound
the malignant liquid in her body made before the mercy,
the same clawing sound
of a frightened beast's nails against the raw of its captors.
There was a child in it
two hours ago, the little one,
her feet dangling over the gravel, her mind
fixated on the soaring and nothing else,
the sensation of being only a pendulum to the universe,
divined back and forth over the fallen bits of tree
that the sky spit out when the rain stopped.

Before the storm
there is a blanket of warm red light
spread over the yard. This happened in Arizona
too, back when I was that child—I used to think it meant

THE STORM

Mars was going to crash into the surface of the planet
and take all life with it, the final deserved cataclysm,
my family reduced to bitter, cherry-tinted meat floating alone
in the cruelty of space. I was told, of course,
that my imagination was going to get me in trouble eventually,
that I was ticking down the days until impact, that my self-
destruction
was inevitable.

After the storm

I watch the pink skies, the clouds darkening
to a blood as they flutter across the atmosphere, closing in on
me,
tracking me down, ready to pour the spilled-over stew of my
scattered mind
all across the land. I try
not to compare it to anything else.

Excess Loneliness

I'm trying to proselytize my loneliness
out into the world. I take the tools I do have—
the words— -the punctuation landing in my chest
like bouquets of bullet holes—the grammatical errors
splattering up against the wall—my primary sources,
my persuasive essays—and I carve an explanation
out of the table scraps. I tell them
the amount of things I haven't done
nearly exceeds the amount of people I've been,
but they just don't understand.
I don't either, honestly. I want to be witnessed in
good faith but I am witnessed, instead, in small faiths—
little gasps of gratitude when the speeding cars
beaming up into the streetlights miss your vehicle
in their ascension—little gasps of gratitude
when you start choking and eventually cough up
the culprit, safe and sound— -when things are scraped away,
when they grind sparks against destruction just to give
a last-minute cinematic dodge away, sending the fist

into the ice—I am witnessed and I am witnessed,
 chewed up to taste, regurgitated. The world
 doesn't like the flavor. My lover tells me
 I taste like old infested meat
 wrapped in artificial strawberry
 to keep the redness in, to keep the illusion
 of freshness from spilling out. My father tells me
 I don't taste like anything at all. Everyone
 in this situation is dead, and let's not kid ourselves,
 I'm not being witnessed at all, I'm being glamoured
 into invisibility, my frame turning transparent
 as I reach into the bookstore shelves. They still don't under-
 stand.

How can I make it any clearer? This isn't my best poem, I
 know that,

but I was always too scared of the leeches to dip into the lake,
 even when mama said we can always salt them off, don't be
 scared,

I know it's cold, honey, but you have to jump in now
 or it'll dry up soon. Global warming—even when the girl
 begged me to join her

underneath

the water, forever preserved by emerald and seafoam,
 even when I saw the unfamiliar tranquil presence
 reflected outward in the daylight, the holy version of me
 rubbing my face in this world's cruelty.

I want to walk through the hospital curtain
 separating me from the deranged sphere
 we call the real world and enter the Real World—
 the world where that holiness is tangible, not despised—
 but I never really walked until I was three years old

which made me a factory reject and now I
can't even walk at all, so these dreams
of a swift stride into a purer existence are a bit
unrealistic, don't you think? But I just can't kill the hope, I
just can't stop
loving.

Snapshots

i.

Every moment I am falling in love with you and not realizing it until the pin prick, until the fall, the prayer before the airplane push. Every moment I am falling in love with you & feeling it visceral, if you extracted my incisors you'd find the code of you etched into the inside walls, into the places in my mouth that make me monstrous, the places where your presence, only your presence, could tame me. Every moment I am falling in love with you like a stomach ache, like a hollowing out. I place my hand around my throat, curl a fist into it, as if it is possible to choke you out of me, as if I can spit you up onto the floor, as if you'd melt through the floor acidic, and then we'd finally be together in the crawlspace of my home. A similar position: your hand over my heart and my hand over yours. Here we are: together. Here we are and I'm tired of writing this already.

Here we are, and every moment I am telling myself to stop giving myself over to men who will never read the names I have written into the metallic flesh of armor that grows over my body where the skin should be, in the places that vulnerability cannot

ever reach. I don't know how to stop. Every moment the stages advance beyond control & eventually it will become terminal, eventually my love for you will slither into my lungs and clot there. My dad died like that, you know; a love too intense for morality.

ii.

I still don't understand dreams, I tell her. It's too complex, the science doesn't

add up, the solidity too close to its collapse. So maybe I dream of him and

the way he'd fit perfectly in my museum immortalized devotion, as if he was made for it, solely to be loved by me, and

maybe I dream of every person I have been in the past, but like my body it carries

something incurable, and I don't want

to be the shredded dream, I don't want to be the dream

that gets caught between your bottom teeth like old shreds or behind the covered streetlight

above my house or underneath the roots of the tree, destined to halt our growth

and expansion. Why does it matter? I'm a man now, darling, I can deal with

things like this.

iii.

You're rewriting my personality, fingertips digging into the soil of it, into the horrible

infinite fragile foundation, encoding my malleable form with

a singular desire & a disregard for the danger that rests on love's shadowed side, the phases of the moon that we don't see

in our skies because she hid her sorrows from us long ago. Oh, the moon and

her pity. Do you think she watched over us prehistoric? Even back

then? Do you think she wept

when the asteroid hit?

Do you think she tried to stop it?

I am trying to eradicate my love for you in a way that would spark planetary despair but I am finding that you seem to exist in every part of me. In my shadowed side. In the aspects of me that I have stuffed in the morgue's lockers, in the autopsied pockets of our corpses.

iv.

Illness strapping me to the ground with branches of enchantment, leaves and vines

entwining my limbs to trap me here,

to keep my love safe for eternity.

I've tried to shoot my love away, to pull back the bow & release the toxin into

us, the little deer body quivering with its arrow stuck—close enough

to his heart that he suffers, too far from his heart to be deadly, so now we're stuck in limbo, in the higher dimensions, between moments of home.

The Difference

Lately I have been living only in my subconscious, occupied by dreams— - my mind forging perfect recreations of buildings I haven't been in since my father died & it feels as if it has been centuries as opposed to the reality-drenched three years that have passed but — and I find this very hard to admit despite my bruise-crowned forehead, despite the fingernail marks — I wanted him to die so it doesn't matter. Does it matter? He isn't the one I see embedded in my sleep; instead I find myself dreaming about her, only her, always only her. It makes me sick. You hear it in every historical poem— -love is the force of history, love inhabits every good poet's mind or so they say, like a pest, we all fall in love and it makes every single one of us ache, it personally makes me frail & sends me in search of belief, I want it to make sense, I want love to make sense, but I don't really think it's supposed to? I don't think anyone has the answer that I'm looking for. I want my father or God to tell me that I can stop living here. I want to be told that the ache will subside. I want someone to tell me that love can make sense when you look at it under a microscope— -this is easy, I am good

at analyzing information, I am good at being studious and I am good at viewing everything with a scientific mind but love is a different beast, love is an unethical experiment on humanity & I cannot love my capability to love. That means: I don't think you can study it, I don't think you can turn this into something palatable and easy to compartmentalize. Honey, baby, your endless unbearable desire is due tomorrow at midnight. I hope she gives you a good grade, I hope

she loves you back but don't get your hopes up. It's too abstract. I keep wanting to pull apart love & feast on it. I keep thinking maybe if I eat love like I eat everything else I will understand what it means to be a worthy person but I don't think that's getting me anywhere & I don't know how to be healthy in any sense of the word— -I fuck things up, I hurt people, and I don't know how love is supposed to work but I think love feels like wanting to be healthy. I think love feels like wanting to introduce love to those who have never felt it & love, in this way, is indeed a kind of religion that must be spread, even to the creator of the universe since they have so obviously forgotten it. I believe, I believe, I believe it's possible to love like healing, that you are the one thing I must find in order to achieve happiness and a pathway to the unscathed—

So, I don't know how to be a writer anymore, and I don't know how to miss my father, because I keep falling asleep just to see her. I don't have the time for it. I fall asleep and I dream about her, or I dream about every bad thing that has ever happened to me, and these dreams are all so tragically identical.

Deleted

I think that the universe was built on four limbs in a position of prayer. Endless in length, they melt and transmute into the shape of words when your name is invoked. The words, of course, are *I miss you* — these words hold no strength but they're enough to be the bricks of the universe's composition, inherent in the structure of all that is. I miss you in every organelle, in every cell that was implicit in the crime of creating me. I have carved these words into my outward appearance to draw attention away from the ghastliness of my body, now exposed chest-open, every sickly organ extracted by a mission in your name, in God's name, in the name of all that drenches my belief; I miss you and this is the truth, I miss you and I am speaking the ultimate and original lie, and I will never face the salvation I don't deserve—

The notion of salvation we all have is the idea that it gives you what you want. I think that paradise gives you what you need, and therefore I will never see it; I need too much, I am greed itself, desire is encoded in the wiring of me. I only know that I need you, and you cannot breathe in the aura of these skies, I cannot be oxygen for you, I cannot be flowers of plasma

nor neuron, which is enough to kill someone, enough for my decaying hands to reanimate and pull my own chest inside-out again. Aren't you so enamored with the pinkness of it, how the body looks the same on the inside no matter what?

I miss you. Look, I'm tired of metaphors and I'm tired of the ink bleeding out, can you just open the door, can you just let me in already? I can't hurt you anymore, remember? I have learned how to declaw myself, so that I am in the pure image of you, your presence the basis of my composition, the world burning up from the sight of your wholeness. I can't hurt you anymore, I have learned

how to keep myself from hurting people. I can do it this time. I'm going to come in, now, okay? I'm going to open the door. Don't move, this is a hostage situation. I open the door and I press the gun to my own head. We all have to make this choice at some point.

I don't want to die. I told you I don't want to die so save me, put your hands on my chest and sew me back up, replace the emptiness with light and stitch. I am ready to love you in the way you wanted — it takes a while to warm up to the idea of being a monster, but I guess I always have been, I guess

at the core of monstrosity there is only the concept of desire, the lust for something greater than yourself; and I am okay with it now. I'm okay. I think we'll all be okay eventually. I think one day I will be deserving. These thoughts are more like hopes, but I cannot see into the surroundings of reality. I only know how to want. I only know that I miss you, and

that I'm dying whether I want to or not. Will you eulogize me? Will you cry at my funeral, will you run up to my casket and press

your damp face

against my chest, and feel for the stitches, the lines of bump and scar on my body that exist only in your past? Will I leave a legacy? Is anyone going to read this when I'm gone?

AT OUR OLD HOUSE IN ARIZONA

...there was a statue in the front yard. An angel, playing her harp, finding harmony in the truth of the planet and its heavenly skies. Growing up, whenever I went outside, I tried to be her; something worthy, truly crafted in clay and historical marble. Melodic. I held my hands out in front of me and, with the foolish optimism that every young child has bursting to blossom within, I attempted to mimic her harp. I made the music, the soft noises coming from my throat no longer a sign of struggle. I knew that it had no effect on my divine fate — whether or not I was going to go to Heaven. I knew that I would never find the same kind of purity that she cradled in her arms. Purity in being frozen, statuesque. I like to think that when I die they'll make statues of me too, for the wrong reasons. I won't die a poet, I will sacrifice myself for love and burn in golden amber & then I will compare my suffering to sunlight. The sun and punishment are the same in their fires. What is the sun, if not a beautiful, revitalizing side effect of eternal fire?

I used to hum music under my breath, tunes that I didn't know the source of, and days later I would hear the same unholy sound

on the car radio — this is dangerous to the developing mind, this kind of hope made me believe that I had been given some sort of gift wrapped in a choice, an understanding that I can be capable of good if I try hard enough, if I let myself exit my own mind and move towards the emerald light of safety. In reality I had simply been gifted with a thunderstorm. Eventually, one day, there was a thunderstorm. There will always be a thunderstorm, at some point, because thunderstorms are a natural part of life, a natural unsavory omen. My father went outside in it; the grapefruit was beginning to grow on the tree he had planted, the gift of oxygen and production entirely unlike the curse that rested between my incisors. Through the wall-length windows, I watched my father disappear into a hue-shifting light that I could not pin down or force into conformity. The next day, the angel was missing a wing, and the strings of her harp had been torn out.

Cervidae

The insatiable part of you
licks itself like an animal. Its paw,
its trembling hind legs, its little beating heart;
these bodies don't know anything about love. Here, I'll teach
them:

love is an open book
with blank pages, love is
shaving off parts of you
to make your skin thinner. Love is
taking everything dark out with an old syringe,
replacing it with family dinners,
replacing it with soft colors,
replacing it with baby teeth,
replacing it with tiny hands.

I've got my work cut out for me, I found my work torn from a
carcass and now I'm telling you, or God, or both of the bodies,
how to love with card games, without traps, with a knife sheath,
without defenses. Now there are no little beating hearts, and I
use my words, my inside voice. This is enough to satiate you.

I am enough for you, I am strong enough to stop biting into corruption. I stop feeding the insatiable part of me and it

doesn't go wild, doesn't kill needlessly. I want to say that I'm not capable of murder.

I want to say every life has a purpose, that we aren't just bodies,

fingerpuppets on each of God's hands. I want to say these things as bedtime stories, soft phrases to suck your nightmares away. We both know it: I'd kill for money. I'd kill

for the hell of it. For revenge. To be satiated.

Here, teach me about love,
tell me that I can keep my teeth
tied to a doorknob, never shutting.

Tell me that skin grows back,
never scarring.

Tell me that I can keep feeding
on illness, never healing.

Tell me that they died in their sleep, never in pain.

Lie to me,
tell me that I can be satiated,
that there's something good
caught in the bear trap of my body.

Ossification

Where does it hurt? I felt it in the middle of my chest, actually: one day she will float up into the air, creaturewinged. There is a strict line drawn between our bodies & I am buried breathing underneath it, the bare struggle with its hands on my face like feather pillows, like how I always crave

a way out but can never dig myself into one & there are two hollow women, a forest of knit-together trees & I press myself against the wood and they both fall out tangled, I grow them in my womb and I rip them from my womb and I am a monster hiding under the blankets of human skin. No, says human skin, you can't keep hiding. You've got to find your feet. The world isn't as bad as it seems.

I'm a beast standing on its hind legs, I am an amputated lover and the ache is spreading malignant. I only have knives, my hands like knives and my limbs flying away like paper birds and my innards

melting into wine for her consumption. It's nice, out here in the wilderness, where my body is heavy and the middle of my chest is a resource for expansion. I'll be better, I'll love less, I'll

replace my heart

with ancient space and old, old fossils and then I'll be the big ugly monster, the killer of our narrative. I said I'd take a life and I'm not going to back out now. We can both play the dead body, we can both move our forms around like we mean something and make it a show, a luxury of theatrics. If I die first, our kiss will decay

into vampire dust. If she dies first, she becomes a big exhibit underneath

my cheap bed sheets. I wanted to be loved like purification & the world gave me a lesson in toxicology, where I swallow her whole like poison, or maybe I am the poison, or maybe I was born into a cage, a big glass bottle. What lessons could possibly be woven into the space between fingers? In one version of the story I am a little trembling deer; in the other, I am starving, I don't know how to do anything besides starve & life

belongs to anyone who can take it. I'll do it, I'll burn her house down, just watch me; I sacrificed my body like an animal and became the altar & they turned me into a construction site, a big light in the sky. Not a very fitting end. It's the kind of bad ending where everyone in the story dies, and you know I've been carved into

enough already.

Colorblind Cattle

I don't believe in destiny, but we were born on the same day. I try to sacrifice myself for the greater good but the bull refuses to attack. Do you think it pities me? Do you think it knows I am so close to it? Do you think it understands that I am an angry thing by nature that is choosing kindness out of some mangled sense of morality? Do you think it sees itself reflected in the fragile glass of my sculpted body, or is it refusing to give me what I deserve because I am a sad thing by nature that is choosing not to be sad? Do you think it knows I have decided to reflect, to radiate all that is myself into the air around me for everyone to witness? Does it value me? Am I asking too many questions? I'm projecting. Of course the bull does not feel any particular way towards me, except that maybe I am not worthy of dying.

Instead, he says, think about breathing! Think about the way I loved you! Endless possibilities, but you always find yourself stuck on the memory where you stop loving yourself and interpret that as a loss of empathy for the world. What is the difference between an individual and the entire universe? Endless interpretations, endless unique perception, swirling

around in each coffee cup we drink, in each terrified palpitation of the heart, in each pulpit they dragged me to. What are we doing here, instead of out there, beyond the invisible screen separating us from our humanity?

They say God will not love me back but I'm starting to think if they exist at all God's love is found mainly in handshakes and the cinnamon rolls my neighbor brought me last week, because they made extra and why not, and also in the free coffee they handed out at the flea market because it was just a little bit too cold out to bear. I'm thinking about breathing but I'm stuck analyzing the process; it's too automatic, too mechanical, to be trusted. One day the gears flicker into stillness and I won't know until it's too late. That's the funny thing about it all; from the moment God forms your body from the tea leaves, it's already too late. The good part has already been consumed, and the leftover carcass is just a sad pile of used-up Earth.

Fragments

I.

We're living in a small apartment on Washington street that I bought with the elegance & luxury of my lover's body & the way the gold dripped from the blood that dripped from the unsewn wounds which rested symmetry underneath his eyelids. I stole a little coffee cup & inside I put every soft piece of my body that I ripped off to keep the lights on, to keep the heat from seeping through & sifting through the lukewarm sands of the time we spend together. I spit out the cherry. All clean now, like mother and child. I want to find love in the moving parts of the body, the hinge joints as cherry-stem nooses wrapped around the neck of the unlovable beast. I want to find love when the liquid evaporates & leaves me with the bare structural concept of living but love just attaches our muscles to our bones & forces the rest of our anatomy to write storybooks on what it's like to be loved, my phalanges curling around the meat of his thorax.

II.

I watched my family grow older & captured it in the golden hours. I like to think my ancestors know that the future they made has roots in hope and glass-shard peace but they're watching us fight against the barriers of sickness, those animals uncollared, with their eyes set preying on any shredded humanity left uneaten. We're living prehistoric, we're living good. Amen.

III.

The open sign flickers out and my heart closes for the night. They try to take me to church but they'll take me with their rifles & the tumors behind their eyes, they'll take me with one hand wrapped around my neck & my teeth, now extended, embedded in the skin of the man who thinks he's scripture transplanted into a human body. I keep fighting for air, trying to swim in the seas of hopelessness.

IV.

I'm young again and they're pushing me out of the big tree in the garden. I ask my teacher how they found a tree big enough to hold 18 children & he smiled and told me I shouldn't question the divine.

V.

When they took me to the hospital I saw a fire truck in my feverdream & then the house burned down. I asked the open air what the future is like & it whispered back the winning numbers, the golden star sticker, the blue ribbon on my old dress. I don't want to die. For once I just don't want to die.

VI.

That boy's on fire, she says, her heart blessed & she doesn't recognize me anymore. She's holding her cigarette between two fingers & my hair in her other fist. I don't feel sick; I feel enlightened. The heart continues to beat / me with its brass knuckles & fractured limbs & I jump out of the airplane for her. Goodbye land, goodbye love, goodbye holy fire.

