Rain in Stills

by

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altering what was once mother
melon-belly

Even back then I could feel it. The sweet inevitability. The rise of firmness below my shift. Hips breaking, rearranging. I could hear each cell gather in my depths; feel each rebound of little fists against my lining. I try not to pause on these delusions, give air to alveoli nestled in incomplete lungs, the idea of lungs. Each time loss hits me as blood between the legs, I rub my knees into forehead and I mantra:

*Someday I will hold a small myself gauzy in vernix and blankets and me.*
**sheep’s cheese**

after Jane Hirshfield

*The wheels are only sheep’s milk, not ripening souls,*
the man says to himself then leaves through the hatch.

Closing us in our cloth cocoons to crust and ferment.
We know he will come next week and the one after
as he has since our birth. To lift us and turn us gently
in our homes. No one knows our needs as he does,
our laborer. No one values our rising but he

of closed eyes. Our mould ripens and matures; soon
he will carry us out of this dark enclosure, one by one,
to be consumed, and inside new beings we shall stretch.
**do-over**

A girl drags a rope in a snake shape, speaking to it. A boy sings with no sound, standing still against the red gymnasium walls, unsure of the motion sequence needed to become unseen. I see my twelve year old self no matter how I wish I could forget—

I thought that people could look at my book's cover and know what I was thinking so I tried not to think much. Some kids have solidified a presence by nine or ten or twelve. A way of walking through the halls. Sidestepping and weaving with reason. It's difficult to map my own walks, the moments when awareness settles. Time, glazed with a mist that's me.
If I could do one do-over in this life of mine, I'd become myself sooner.

I'd still be a child, but the kind who knows how to smile with the teeth she has. A child who brushes her hair each morning, believes entirely in parents, in the rules governing cooties, how classrooms work.

A child who asks for help, and then for honors. Who can feel her arms and legs and thoughts and all of their connections. Catch the pass, run.
In a study of babies around the world it was found that their laughs hold marks from their countries, imprinted before speech comes into the equation.

The girl, eight-or-so asks if I'm accented, where my family's from. I fumble, hasn't speech class erased that? Reading lips grants the wielder access to language,

but what of it's unveiling nature, knowing how each letter begins to form. Same words with an odd twist to the mouth, *rodeenya maya*. I guess I twist my mouth wrong, bend

lips, bare teeth to a different degree. I've felt these habits of the mouth, how I pull the lip down left when speaking. I always thought that those who spend their lives

chasing the perfect sequence of words do this: Tally, time, obsess. This girl questions, others look on, unsure. One little girl reads me better than those who hear my syllables roll.
molting our child-skin

A chameleon reaches with his ridged lip to pull at toes and lift the the cover, the taffeta glaze, clear and yet binding.

He peels, then eats translucence. The new skin underneath is itchy, itchy and ready for extraction. If only it worked

like this for human-born— we’d hold toes first, then grip edges of the fitted sheet, dragging self upwards

like glue left to dry. Next, we would blossom from the cocooned growth we wove ourselves. We distance ourselves

from our animal brothers— forget that we were born with two sets of teeth, fighting through gums. This distinction

leads to never knowing the moment of our transformation. Knowledge to mark the when. So we get bar-mitzvahed,

as stand-in. Rituals centered in calendars— not when we each become man. Look, you can see changes, how we embrace

them. How we became this, and now are fully this. Braid our neurons, twine our tendons. Crosshatch the self, connected

in shadow until we are webs. No, not webs, spiders, who look at the weavings and say: I have made this; this is me.
If we were more base, we wouldn't need
this confirmation, we'd not search for clues
in armpits or pelvic bones or markings

on the inside of door frames.
If we had a hive mind, there would be but one
flicker of

\[
\text{change, in live live live}
\]

and it would be easier to learn
all we need for growing
and how completion feels.
fish spine merged to mouth roof
   Tanya, age 2, homecountry

Dad comes home, throws rusty
bucket with the day's catch in the tub
& in she climbs, folds etched
in her cherub legs. Sees fishies, size
of goldfish, and in she climbs, closer.
Pops in her mouth, the fish,

& shocked, it opens
gills in a panic, blue eyes pop too,
stretching her mouth out open ‘til
she stops laughing, and watches
the spiny projection, traces fish-bones
against roof, taste of supper or sea.

In Russian, fish sleeping is the same
as a passed fish, a still becoming dead
fish. Dad stuck his fingers in her mouth
past the gills and tickled against fish spine
until it fell asleep. Or was it the girl
that fell. Soundless

& still, always this place, inside her.
When the noise of a new country
threatens, red-faced, back she goes. Into
the place built of fish vertebrae, curved
language, fear weathered walls,
she goes, finds quiet.
nostalgia-trap hinges

She’s not a character yet. Not even half of one. Not even half of me, her head barely reaching the bottom of my ribs. Her face so small that a scowl can easily consume it, leaving no space beside for teeth-sprouts or nose-freckles.

The best way to wake is also the worst, because you know what is coming, the waking. Little child-limbs and child-belly burrow under your blanket like a chipmunk, and deposit child-cheek against yours. Eyelash kisses. Again & again, incessant eyelashes. It's time to wake!

So you wake, somewhat, drag self upstairs in a wool blanket; the littleness of her convinced you. She cannot reach the cabinet with cereal bowls herself, nor the fridge for milk. And when she pours, it pours past the lip.

Her favorite Shopkin is Tippy Avocado; they come in plastic purple shopping bags—tiny food figurines with anime eyes and eyelashes. She lines them up in combat rows all up and down her carpet, crowning those she likes.

She can’t spell Hermione. The houses are Gr-eye-findor and Sl-eye-therin. Crabbe and Doyle aren’t very nice. She’s wanted the sixth Harry Potter for about a month, asking for it each evening before bed, from each of us in turn. We say again, you’re too young. Then, she gets the flu, and we grant the book as a distraction.

Her reading light on and flower quilt pulled up to her shoulders.

Haven’t seen her today, or had a chance to test her reading comprehension, to explain once more that someone can be both good and bad, that Prince Zuko really was transformed.

She says I can’t call her munchie. That came from chipmunk, buru buru, burunduk. I can’t call her my silly goose. I can’t call her Sophie or Sofa or Sophoullaki. That’s not my name!

I can’t write poems about her. She forbids it, scowling.
not my boys

I wouldn't send my sons. I wouldn't let them go. I'd rather bound and gag their mouths that look so much like mine, and keep them in the hallway closet among the towels and hotel soaps. I would bring them soup for substance of body, but no meat in the broth to bring strength for escape. I’d put cotton in their ears, push it in as deep as it can go—holding back all words of blood, of discourse in the news.

I’d be left cradling the solidifying outline of their deaths. I'd rather hold them then give them the sliver of thought-freedom needed for a little voice to whisper it's OK. Sent off with the promise of a medal for doing good. Not my boys.

If only there were no trains, no planes, no boats— they couldn’t be taken from me. They'd never hear a call to arms to join a fight where young boys have no place or reason to be. The place outside the home, the picture of family. If only we all lived in a house made of mud or logs or cobb. They would stay of their own accord. No radio, or TV, or agendas. No life beyond our table, our town. They’d marry their neighbors, their classmates, build a home on the same cul de sac as mine, or even one over. They’d be happy. I’d rather they be woolheaded and quiet than clever enough to hear the Earth's unending cry as it turns.

Each place has their own boys. And each boy has his own mother. But some boys listen to their mothers. Others grow and listen to other voices that breed contempt for the sex so below their own; they learn to spit. If only boys everywhere would love their mothers. Love, and then listen.

Listen to me, asking you to stay.
in preparation of crossing the ocean

My dad wears the cross of another religion. His father worked at pulling teeth, checking decay and filling spaces.

Personal wealth was not allowed, and still, they wanted to give their only son assistance towards his new life.

*Deda* Voloda used angles, pressure, & metal pliers to wrench out my grandmother’s fillings. The pliers in her shaky hands.

To the government, he labeled them lost, swallowed; had fillings made into a cross. Marked, my dad wears it on a yellow chain.

It’s this we believe in: clashing, mom’s *zefir* leading to cavities, pressure, and molding to a country like gold being poured and set.
Anatoli

The Russians wanted his land so
off he was sent, North in a cattle car,
crowded, destination Altai.

This was before the Holocaust,
and my grandfather's grandfather
was not Russian-bred, but Romanian.

So, it was easy to make up a lie,
call him part of the resistance
for gains. What neighbors.

There was no difference
in skintone nor religion nor wanting best
for own families. They were neighbors

for many years ‘til he was removed
from house with wife and son. There were
always ones that take and ones

that have no choice but to give.
Would you not push down others to stand
taller on their backs, taller yet

stacked with the bodies of children?
This is not a new theory; coming out on top
is not an old cause. So, the neighbors

tattled—jealousy over his son's bike, over
the taste of stuffed peppers with meat
they were served when invited for dinner.
learning to spell, again

A
Forgive me for turning to English.
It was the language of Sesame Street.

It was easy to loose the lilt from my speech,
harder to learn to make strange shapes

with my mouth; i’ve never held my teeth
like this before. Three was always free.

One two free the long stands
my babushka braided each morning.

Lose the elastic, thread pointers through.
*Why do you play so rough, that elastics break?*

B
My mother tongue betrays me.
It is not my mother, nor my country.

The language I think in, vowel-threaded-silk,
lords over me it's history, leaving

me squinting at maps to learn who owned
us when. Pointing to explain why

I cannot
speak it.

C
I left the braids, the skirts, the sounds. In time,
I lost the bug-like ж, the first letter to beattle,

the  ivory to my юбка, skirt. At eight, I wanted most
to not be *other*. At twenty-three I chase my alphabet.
cycling hate

When your passport is says Jew

you have little choice in the matter.
She even grew to believe that she’s dirty; No matter
how many times a day she demands pride, she clenches
to the reasons she was bruised for.

For whom she was born. She holds no Torah,
lights no candles. She eats challah & apples dipped
in honey for the sweet new year sans prayer.
She sits in the Sukkah but calls upon no spirits to join.

Inside she is purpled and boiling, ready to spew out
her insides, and after that is done, flay each antisemite
for gloves and a raincoat of translucent skin.
**baboushka**

a play of translation

babushka
babochka

крыло one wing
крыла the wings

**baboushka**

my mother's mother

**babachka**

butterfly

wing

крылья бабушки grandmother's wings
heeshnaya pteetsa

this predatory bird she waits [for mistakes]
unyielding poised poison-me gaze wrought
iron silhouette against the redwood

you say I drink your blood
for breakfast in a champagne flute

but it’s also yours this krov that stains
before it stains

before it does again let’s drink together
the vulture only stays away so long
breakfast, spoiled

I
Dip it here, the craterless moon,
into the clouds of milk
froth, playing above the deep energy

Cup the egg within your thoughts of lunch, too loosely and it may roll

The cool delicate porcelain will encircle to spoon
the dusty orb. Drop it here—the whiteness—let it settle
down among the purple muck and blood leeches
of the stomach

and the yolk, the bloody vein, tear it out
tooth by tooth
it will root into the glass grains and then [nothing]
a rounded watermark of ‘what there once was’

II
A turtle lies in the sun, head drooping from the weight
of rain the scent of soggy polyester, plastic eyes
dull she sees heavy film, and beyond her—
the empty nest

further still, the pond,
the golden smear
the maple fest

we turn this screw into your side
the kinder ones a drill faster
comes the pain faster pain will lessen

we push apart bark to splice the spongy core
for the innard displacement children gather,
grandparents dogs arching yellow

we take turns with the handheld device deeper
deeper in the side a joyful day it is today
the snow has mostly settled

and the time has come to rape the ancients
drill a space for a stick a spout a hook
for bucket

we wait all spring for you to bleed
on cold days frost stitches closed the lesions
on warm days the indents drip

and then we pour your life blood
into metal buckets hooked on outer bark
the outsides die but you still feel it

we boil it this very essence of you
and then sit to feast
on flesh you weren't offering
how I came into being
  or how I fed from your hate

my roots    my life
now    centered in the living
room of your rib pocket

a colony of ants inhabit your abdomen
each ant is me    feel my thousand
pincers breach        what was once

your fat is a 5 star spa
I lay there    intoxicated just
as you    when you fell

must have
to have bashed your body for my feed
to compost    mush

to have let your mind
swell with mushroom spores    the depth
of your nasal cavity says much:

this is where I lost you    this is where
I lost myself, so that your roots can drink
of me and for many moons return
fruit bruise

I, pretend-shadow on the stairs,
follow your feverish unloading
the spill

clementines like marbles the ripped red net
they travel

Then you bend to lift each fruit
and place into our bowl
where the indent sits atop the pear, the dark

mark spreading out
the yellowing of edges

My skin dreams
of purple swirls the perfect bruise

yellow curls
round the edges now it’s painful
to the breath the bared teeth

You offer me the pear the grained flesh
the path of juice from chin to neck to blouse

Instead, I crave five bursts
on each thigh

a mark high and red and winking
first morning of frost

The ray of light and how it hits the kitchen wall just so and the solitary hair in the brush wait for us, the astute observers, to transcribe the everyday into the everyday somewhere else. This somewhere else being a different plane where everything is the same but off.

Successful stories have a basis in the familiar, We recognize the mother, her bureau, the wooden brush. We recognize what it is that she wants as the writer leads us through the house, to the shoebox on the back shelf of the closet where she keeps an old corsage and gun.
gunner pool

At first, we could see the bridge
imposing, arching, puddle

of moonlight, the blue illuminated
Mimosa closed off from night,

her leaves curled in. The moon
with a double outline, moon ring

can't see too far. We throw the rock,
hear it splash down below.

Flashlights in the fog, the beam of light,
lights droplets—magic

pulp rolls in air, any way I point,
careening among

the branches. We’re in
this at all times, he says, only now

we can see the moisture. It's simple really—
as if magic is something to scoff at.

It’s just the tilt of shade tonight—
I redirect

the flashlight— rain in stills,
moving black and grays
old hangar

So many folks out enjoying the settling dusk in their bi-planes above the cornfields & flat roads that swerve into hills then back into flatness. Hill country. Cattle country.

Hill country. We’re looking to order novelty catfish on a Boeing 737 & milkshakes too. We roll up but the kitchen's closed. Across the way, an airplane hangar. Instead of hours, says Open 

but lights are out. Our footsteps echo on tin. 
An overall-man shakes our hands, says hey I’m Hal holler if you got questions. He asks what brings us here with our accent and glances at our car.

Chuckles shakes his head whilst we rave admiration for the countless airborne tricks and twists of folks out enjoying the sky. 
Eh, cropdusters here, most fields got 'em

people do their own nowadays. He turns on lights for us alone and the radios. The walls are graced with photographs of Walnut Ridge’s own homegrown pin-up girls and the letters Sally wrote Samuel, hand dated and signed. Stitching on a jacket. Old canteens. Whole lifelines & even a plane I climbed inside—kid-size like Nellie Bly Park has. Invented for pilots, but scooped up by amusement parks seems the norm.

Even so, the plane feels solid, alloy, like people who wear overalls each day, sow the fields and shake hands real well.
in the desert
  containing Stephen Crane’s In the Desert

Once again, I say I prefer being in the sea to in the desert. We’re walking there, Lucy & I, then, round mid-day I saw a creature, reclining hungrily up on the rocks naked, bestial, who wasn’t quite there— I found myself squatting low upon the ground trying not to be seen, held myself so still and breathed in silently for ten. To be sure that his heart in my head was a lie, was rock. His hands, only heatwaves. And the cactus I ate of, it must have gone bad. *Great.* To Lucy I said “You sure that there’s nothing else here? Is the road near?” The map, creased. It’s not a good place to cut loose, friend so I’ll take us elsewhere. It is bitter, thinking on choice had when none exist now. I heard a caw, “bitter,” he answered but only to me. The sky spun, I spun, and the sand tasted like sand again. It is different at the sea because it is always expected: water is to be wet, vision blurry through & because salt water, it dehydrates you slowly. It is tricky, the way tides tug at body same as sun. My heart beats quickly as I turn.
winter fish

Скажи мне, мальчик,
how can you grasp the moonlight?
So still, silver-trout.

Серебро. глаза
на ладони твое сидат.
Gaze up, center-stare.

Tell me, young boy,
можешь поймать серебро?
Eyes are big, silver

as the fish wriggles,
wripples, swims away deeply,
далеко, далеко.
somewhere outside roswell

Birthed of two sinkholes & then  
water fell & joined two pools into one.

One offered salt, the other freshwater;  
one offered life, the other salt.

380 flattens out in a line before us  
& straight back from where we came;

the landscape lets our eyes pick at weather  
while we drive past the purple clouds.

I never knew you could  
see lightning but not be in the rain.

Once, cowboys had thrown down ropes  
to measure the depths of the two pools  
& came up empty handed.

Cars slow. I throw my Old Milwaukee  
in the backseat & smooth  
out my hair. Prepare a smile

for the Sheriff —my partner is frowning  
& the last town we passed had no gas  
much less a town center—

Did the ground quake in 1947? Soil accepting  
spacecraft, minds accepting the unseen?

Or was it easier to accept  
that the ranch hand had smoked some grass  
& the weather balloon was just that?
Cowboys still belong here & sheriffs
stride through sepia & in between
the growths of prickly pear & desert
thistle. So many towns with one food joint each
with zebra striped booths
and one beat-up Pacman machine.
A man slumped against his steering wheel
& the woman who hit him in her Sunday
dress, frame broken, the 8 friendlies
pulled laneside to help. & Here you
have to wait for the Sheriff to canter over
from the closest settlement 60 miles away
out of the books or the natural history
museum where we’re sure good naturedness
and faith and wonder had gone to die.
alamogordo

planes split and lift and curve apart
leaving white sand with the after-roar
in this merging, we’ve no capacity to hear

desert wine, salt lake, dead fish, us,

this tent, littered shot gun shells,

ribbons pour
down sides and from knee-pits

F22’s above,
they break and form
apart to four then one

the mountains surround us &
the grapes taste cool, sweet
of home, of desert and wine

I can't tell my love
from your sweat from our tongues

to our sand, to the splitting
I can't tell the water from the wet

shells from shells
sand from imprints or nails
in the tub, I zap my legs

Below and above each of my knees wet circles are starting to grow, the burns they drip.

I hold fluorescent one inch by one-third to my knee-flesh and press the trigger.

Bright light, screen flash, smell of burning hair, a shock to the skin, to the follicles.

I dream I have no hair. I am naked, seated cross-legged on the sea.

I dream I drop a dish, my body jerks before it shatters. There is no echo.

I dream my body is the dish, my self the sea.

I dream my eyes are closed, my knees are gone, and what is left of me peels easily from bone.
almost there

When he takes my lips
into his mouth whole
of me
I am not his nor am I a body

I am the play of light leaf
tracings dance gold amongst a scattering
of freckles honey-toned back

I am feet dug within the damp
warmth of the fern moss

I am the Quabbin Reservoir
all tributaries lead in newts twist on the edges
lichen stones trace boundaries of 4 towns
that once dotted the inward slope

I am the lone fisherman
who brought his far-seeing-glass today
The line that is getting no bites

I am the cracked wooden sign for
Almost There Farm
Lyndeborough, New Hampshire
Two hundred and twenty-eight miles

With conte crayon I attempt to recount
collarbones the curve to our form
the scent of the earth after sex
    after rains

I am the mosquito that dotted your thigh
with love marks what else
to call this sweetness I drink from your skin
sun cover

the clotted cream that is
the cloud darkens

native grasses bellow
whipped against against

each other's nimble bodies

they are stripped bare

the cloud
is held

to the void not with the farce
of gravity but

by water droplets solid-form
frames the rounded edges

pom-pom trim
to a couch throw

orange and thunder
the dust and the rain

the flowers
sunfaces turn down

no call to arms a bolting
of doors

grasses blaze
the horizon

waits, quivers
and waits
namaste, let us begin

Even the armpit cusps cannot cup
the rain as it spills in this sauna

Child's pose my third eye
melded into the mat before me

I still feel her more than my grounding
my balance my line to my breathe

Salt that left is now returning
fleeting journey carved out on her cheekbone thigh

this twist
of flesh stretch the nylon

The lotus is rooted
down but god does it shake

Let me trace your body’s taste
from behind your left earlobe the blue

of your wrist Let my tongue dart
at the darkness in between each toe

so I can draw on each touch from memory
not flesh but the space it yields the shadows
mosquitos

two heading home from their honeymoon
stomachs full of veal and blood-red
blood, proboscisi spent &

hung; the promise is ahead, a pinprick
through the darkness, they fly
a corner, then

it opens up, svarovsky
dazzles, glitzy plum
suite awaits —

two smears on glass,
the reddened
bursts
the moon & the snow

The moon does not judge
you, who frees your body from under
your lover and steps slowly away

The moon moon-lights
on the pale parts of you, gingerly
cressing yet only

skimming to avoid drawing
your eye. The moon is tired
of this. Of being gazed at.

The snow is tired of this, of bells
and of sleds, of being on order.
Snow settles in eyelash-spaces

hoping for fools enough
to cry.

[or]

The moon does not
listen to coyotes howl
nor to you.

Snow falls with no intent
of falling gently. It doesn’t care
for the fence it topples

or the hip it breaks,
and all that follows. It settles
over the openings to burrows:
orphaned groundhogs
are made. The cold comfort—
a trap, one with a soft bed.

The moon just hangs.
The snow falls, settles in.
old man

Old man on a stalled lawn-mower
cigarette drooping down from his mouth,
ash-tip suspended on its fall.

Time was not the only agent
of his aging. The ash fell. The day burnt
orange: the trees, an open corner of sky.

Earlier today, he watched his wife
watching the birds: land, lift, then fly,
roost on the crooked satellite dish.
ghostbeat

within the spheres of memory,
you need to wander far; to catch just one,
spread over a thousand fields of grass.

to capture the light or form
as what they appear, you must first grasp

the idea of who they were, before
there was a

before

you can untwine the bandages
holding together these echos—

tee tree oil, smooth, soothing.
grapefruit spray, when the rind
is peeled, half smile.

—they had ribs protecting the pulse
in their chest cavities. now, a lack.

if you catch scent of them,
within memory, try to graze
their membranes.

their colors may reach back
towards your searching, if only to feel
the contours of your disbeliefs.
after words have left

The fine net of his sutures lift up below the surface,
so fine the endless possibilities of choice had
at 17, ruddy cheeked, chipped front tooth and kind.

He delivered mattresses, set up hot tubs, scooped each fallen pine
and cone from the rippled surface. He used to be a pool boy
and now he is a poor excuse for a whole boy.

Broken blue the only part of him—that invisible breathing—is his life-line that fell from his mouth lifted
up as he lay there, below, his body betraying

itself: doing the drowning. Mucus, blood,
tuberculosis, lone figure on linoleum, drowning,
drowned.

He tries to argue but there is no one to argue with.
He tries to yell but he has no lungs no mouth.
He tries to stand, but he has no legs, no knees or calves.

All he is: a net of icy sutures, a membrane
that remembers. He sees with feelers not eyes;
each time the membrane brushes against those he knows,
he makes them shiver, those little hairs rise.
displacement

the surgeon has never dealt with this before:
the wilting organ, the organza sheets

of skin, the delicately laced air   gloved about the body.

he can visualize peeling reds from the suncatcher prism.
he perspires: but how can I grip this fog, this mist?

   how can you unfurl a body  that is not a body?
a body of cold    the loneliness

left on this earth and no one can see it,
but this surgeon, his wife, the neighbors dog.

   how can you carve open a ghost?

the skin of this life?   to fish
out dejection   stitch in a pacemaker to keep time;

the battery will drain   the motor putter out
and this body

   will it still be   a body

if it is not seen?    if there are no vital memories
in the hearts of those who scattered soil,

snuffed the candles and left them smoking
time-lapse

buried in the sub-sub-reddit
circuits torn
and threaded through
one another

memory
pulsing
lit

from within, we
know it fades, over- laps
up the sweet yesterday,

rhubarb tart
milkweed seeds

spit spit spit
text to a page

i can only chronologue
your pain not ease it

ah, to thread your wires
through my fingernails

to spark when a switch is hit
hold down power

restart
rewrite
restart
**stencil deep**

The mushrooms are starting to spore, to grow from the dank cave where the Water Moccasins, Egyptians, swim. The venom pools around—not maroon like you’d expect—but corn oil, milky white and flaccid.

The flat heads move in unison. They say no to the taking; they grieve the loss of their anger; without anger, only salt water can drip from their hollow grooved teeth. The girl pays no mind, she dips the stenciling brush in the clear pool and then to her paper.

There’s a loose scorpion on the ceiling, she dusts for its tracks.

We see in her—the old man, the one who revives our shoes, breaks apart sole from heel, stretches tanned leather. We see in her, at 11 years, him, as she cocks her head *I can promise you, it will not, it cannot work*. His face swims in her pigtails, her childish chin, moon shaped tear near her right eyes fold, those wise crazy eyes are his.

This is how he spent his days: twisting the stems off, pink and peach and rosemary, placing each spore-side down. The shrunken people with their marble eyes watch him do the work, their four legged cousins hung by the claws, hairy pink snouts still twisting.

Is it pleasing to smell their full-bodied struggle? Bristlecone brush scratches against naked ankles marking its place on the page in the bodies salt—they are lost lost but they run through the forest, still.

The dream turns itself inside and out; the snowy marble continues to spin.

She draws each one, as he did. Then she burns them, and offers us their essence, to taste.
red balouga, shallow lake

Red balouga, shallow lake
to wade in. I see his fin, red glow,  
bit of his back. No volume, sand, sand  
& depth. I have a shovel for an oar.

The metal tip drags down  
the ship. Blue whale, ringing.
praise for the three poems
that come when I call

1.
papaya centers like black caviar
gecko’s dart through torn window mesh

weaving ti
like the haole I am

2.
scattered freckles abstract ways
your lips raise goosebumps where there shouldn’t
be any your skin
to mine

promise roots into our hairs

3.
try to capture the darkness in her side
when she twists the range the values

brush the page with water color lilac
soft full paint—

—words can wash this better
than my hand these days at least they try
wild thing, I spoil you

I fill the breathing-bowl of pebbles,
crave the wrapping of your roots.

The orange lip to this window sill must sustain
you, the whisker of your orchid must be left untraced.

The stem has not grown nor shootoff growths
in the past two years and still I hope,
I press ice cubes onto dirt every 2 weeks.

Sometimes I can feel the roots shift after a raw feed;

Or is it only my hands shaking
from holding the dropper poised just so?

Forgetting water on the stove— it will boil;
Dreams— they will spread across
the paper: I will wake with charcoaled palms.

Papers full of swallows, swirls
on the bedroom floors, charcoal that slipped
onto hardwood from the edges.

When brush breaks the circle of water,
the drifting of the ink,
the magenta lends itself to rose to lime—
My god, my pictures paint themselves—

But you, wild thing, why do you refuse
to grow? Should I plant you in charcoal?
Fertilize with ink? Water with silence?
Close my eyes to you, and dream?
each year

Moons have passed since this chicken wire
was wrapped around our legs— the flesh has bloated since,
with forced upon impressions of the outside world.

We had to grow outward so we grew around, we took in.
But even so, with each breath we feel collectively,
we hold to silence, only to have the wind move us.

Footprints multiply in snow: deer, rabbits, those that carve
us with tattoos. Younglings question: Where is she who paints
us into existence? Adds color, shows our face?

I wait for her to correct the younglings, teach them
to throw off weight, teaching them that limbs
should reach upwards, and days are not long to wait.

We will stay clothed and stark until she comes unwinding
our bandages, to rustle and shake out our manes.
tradition heeling to today

Blushing feels a secret thing, to be done
in dimness where no one can see
it weave up my neck, emanate out

from areolas. A veil could offer a muted
view of him, he who shall be there, eating
eggs across from me each morning.

The blushing bride has passed. No longer
wears cathedral train, showing collarbones
in lieu of shoulders or wrists.

Instead magazines propose another
dip to a deep sweetheart, mermaid shape
gathered to highlight the legs and ass.

Even the veils are small, birdcage
obstructing a top-most corner of forehead;
tiaras stepping in to replace the veil.

I imagine, when men turn to leer
they’ll know what he intends to do with legs
and arms and fingers, please a bit of privacy—

Of course, they’ll see me pinken.
It’s beginning. But not better than to hurry
down horse-faced, exposed

grin like a sailor in spotlight? Gloves
are no longer tradition. Delicate buttons—
garden roses in shades of delight.
why I wake
after Mary Oliver’s *Why I Wake Early*

Good morning the goldenrod says to the lillies,
opening their arms out to the day, all that is
over and done, rejoicing in the first
day of sunlight, of spring’s beginnings.

My case is simple. I’d like gardening gloves & a woven
old basket— skin fed by the suns rays— somedays
raindrops to linger. There is in the world
nothing as honest as this:
indigo drops on the vine, plucked by hand & eaten. &
now, each day begins in happiness, in kindness.
Good morning my flowers, good morning my vine.
we saw him first, then his violin

from our picnic blanket, where we lay out
goldenrod bursts, teas, a carton of cherry tomatoes.

We thought that he would play nearby,
when he saw us, three girls, our newly-shapely

legs with toes of blue polish, curls with queen anne's lace; no, he continued past without slowing.

Our interest caught by where his shorts exposed
a stripe of light skin, touched with dark curls.

He must be shy, embarrassed of being unwound,
desiring to play to no audience, if not to us.

He walked by the walled garden then into the herb circle that always smells of lemon balm & mint.

After a bit of blackcurrant pie, lips purpled & giddy—
we began to hear notes from where we lay—

The flowers winked, cruel as they are,
as a voice, high and sweet joined in. The irises

and draping wisteria held little of our jealousy.
—not a violin, but a ukulele. A woman's voice

rose ever higher to his strumming. It’s all we could do
to keep the deep heat inside our bodies and clear of face.

When will we be touched
like lambs ear? Breathed in like rose?
**translation through another us**

One late night you'll wake up to my heavy twisting. I'll be mouth-breathing, sprawled across both sides of our bed. And you’ll realize

you're smarter than me— finally, you’ll understand our standing. You say something, you do, and I hear the rustling of words. *The two wires fuse to one*

*at a set point* and *then, probe reads temperature of the vat’s insides.* It sounds like language to me. I can recognize they’re leaves, but I’m lost

on the overall shape of the foliage, and the way the greens move as one. I flutter, repeat the words back. It is only motion

of lips, vibration at throat, sentences peeled for backbones. Strange how *this* is speaking. How I was what your body chose. And so what

if when you ask what I’m thinking right now, I say Nothing, which keeps you unsatisfied, so you push, and I hate that more. Perhaps

on one plane, shadowy versions of us do speak. And our minds turn by the same gears, turned by the same music. We merge, we find this place

on this version of earth. We work on the level of scent and comfort. We have a chance together because another version of us once touched.
on choosing the next step
when you wanted to apply to MarsOne or be a navy engineer

I love you but I want to love you here on the earthground in the dirt
the cornfield on the entrance stone the skin rug
by the wood stove you tend to me to our loose embers

I want to live
here not on Mars or on an aircraft carrier
that circulates metal air \ causes salt-crusted lungs

On the earthground I can shake off summer
blackberry taste feathers soft strung lace
you can open up my back untwine the veins & sinews

the mountain scent wafting it ventures— I breathe in before it leaves
smells of scratches the coming rain
smells of earth of linen
Я так люблю тебя  я так боюсь тебя
I so need you  I so fear you

I
Rafiki-like I dip my fingers in
the paste, smear
a sphere on your eased brow:
   the circle of life

ends here; your cream
escapes clenched thighs— I catch
you in frantic cupping, hold all
that fingers can.

You are left plastered
in my blood, mud
-like color, dried in clusters,
grasps of five

II
Mademoiselle can do little
to mask you, pervasive and nutty

wrapped up in the kinks
of my hair, the spades

of my eyebrows
are you. The point, of course:

I can taste, tonguing the buccal
cavity where I bit hard, you reeled

kneaded flesh
as if I were moonsand

and I— to hold to the script—
crumble; non-Newtonian
essence hardens to the tight
vee of snipping. Roll

me in a ball and watch me turn
to puddle.
altering what was once mother

The dress touches water and like candy floss melts. Wedding lace touches water, no lace. Chiffon disintegrates, separates mother

from each pearl button, plucks age spots from organza and the stiff underskirt. She’d not think she’d cry, watching

the sleeves she despises, the outdated heaps where shoulders get lost, simply vanish. She searched for the cardboard box,

and when she lifted the lid, the dress wilted outwards. She thought on its story and settled on whitening, a few places that could lose

beading, perhaps. Bouquet of her mother's hair. With the first thread snipped, seam eased from seam the modern dress emerged:

less cloth, more skin. A piece carved out to a sash for the new. In the black and white she sees mother’s gums. Exposure’s weakened

the image and the glue on the silk carolina blue shoes. She vows to unbox them, let them feel light and a woman’s foot for a second time.