foremother

by

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________________________________________

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Abstract: Foremother is a collection of free-form poems exploring the nature of gender identity and relationships amongst generations of matriarchy.
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this is not an entrance.

on the edge of a black hole radius.
how wide is it?
(how wide am i?)

in a still pool my reflection genuflects
to absolve my sins. and apologize
apologize for what i’ve been.

what if
i exist mostly inside my skull. eating
a healthy portion of dura mater shaved thin.
but i confused
your cranium-walls for mine and made
a space where i was uninvited.

read the lines off your skin
before i heard you speak. lifted
them off the page and wore it like
a charm to ward off certain spirits.
(from trying to hold my wet-hands)

but i drank them anyway.
all of them. from a pewter tumbler
because i am not sure
how-much-longer-i-can.

i know that:
i am more and less a novel-loss.

wound around a telephone wire to
catch the first ring.
(i was scared, so i dropped it)

i have a working tongue. for saying
how fine-i-am and tracing patterns on skin.

held the hand of a woman who was
not-my-mother for far too long.
(i am always forgetting to let go)

my real-mother told me to leave a place
cleaner than i entered it.
(the place or myself?)

have littered my wasted-selves all over
someone’s friendly glance. over a
gutter flame.
(over you)

didn’t mean to
couldn’t help: but let you indoors.
and let myself all out.

i am made of stained glass
and missing colored-panes in
all my favorite places.

sorry i am dizzy and unable to
walk a chalked-out line.

(sorry i am iced and so much wanting)

so full of perigee
of apology
and nauseous thank-you-very-much.

fantasize about dissolving.
about volumetric flasks.
about not being around to see
the disappointed faces.
(some-of-your faces. or maybe my own)

i wish you’d think less of me.
and then wish for that wish
to crawl back inside.

i am still an angry little punk
who is sad sad sad about what was for-the-taking.
(and the leaving)

have never left.
but
i am not sure how to stay
right here.
What do you do?

Someone asked me what kind of poetry I write. I had to think.

Bosonic string theory suggests the number 26. And all-possible-options.

A queen bee can live for several years. If everything-goes-well.

Electricity has been discovered, uncovered, and revealed several times over.

Oxford commas are optional, occasionally.

Sexual dimorphism is not a human-trait.

A scarf can make a decent tourniquet, when pressed.

A bat flew past me, while I was sitting on a bed of thorns in Tuscany.

Not-my-mother.

I said: you know, angry feminist stuff.

They smirked, and laughed at my joke.
dendrology
	hey say that trees
can remember their childhoods.
    if i am sitting in a wooden chair      on this wooden porch
am i sitting on some poplar-adolescence.     or it is birch and oak
and anyway they have forgotten
    how to tie their shoes    how to use an acorn cap to whistle

when it all falls down     you said,
    concavity and spun from words.   worldly creatures.
lonely creatures with hair-for-worms.    for cutting,
to trim and trace back.      we left a lot on the floor.    because
    i heard someone say this is a dust pan life    and it sounded romantic.

i have always wanted to be gallantly southern.
slinging another scale of wet and viscous.    not a body-fluid,
    not enough for sharing.    i too was collected on a petal.
should have stayed in my aluminum fort        in a highway forest five feet across.

in the east is a cavalry of revolutionary soldiers. a civil soldier
takes his feet.      shoeless. takes his hard-bread,
    chicken soul for soup rations.
i learned how to use a lathe by sculpting all my fingers.

the surface area is littered
with death receptors and hydrophobic faces.    and it all finishes
    with a brilliant cascade of caspase.    i think i grew up
in my grandmother’s kitchen drawer.      the one furthest
from the stove.

the one
with rubber circles, knotted twist ties, and a tire pressure gauge.
    the house isn’t the same    but the drawer is always there.
the smell
    full of black-cap pens, an empty address book
        and me.

    i’ve begun talking like the trees.    under soil.
with my fingertips and toes stretched out.

yes, my friend,    i have fruited strangely.
    never hung by my neck,
only a tarsal bone, or my left nipple between stranger-teeth.
you said,    it wouldn’t
couldn’t    be like this.
whenever I see a lit cigarette on the ground  
i wonder  
who has died for me this time.
i don't know why i-am-so

i think i am searching for
the mid-ocean ridge

the middle-of the night
still

will you wait with me
just for a little while

the sea floor is dominated
by echinoderms:
  sea cucumbers  brittle-stars and sea urchins
they far outnumber us

maybe we can be friends

the male angler fish is mouth-wed
to his wife
he drinks her blood
and she collects his sperm.

but what if they don't die
at the-exact-same-time

i keep checking my stomach
for teeth and suction cup lips

would you
take my hand

eventually all the used sunlight
ends up somewhere

ends-up
at the bottom of the sea

there is something to be said for being
so easy-to-love
My mother left me at the zoo

On the second day, I still believed her.
   It wasn’t how I imagined it would be, with trees and little moats.
To my surprise, it was only a theatre lined in velvet.

I met the zookeeper.

A scarlet tanager told me
   not to smile, that it’s not what they pay for.

What do they pay for?
She said
   I was in the next act, and I’d better hurry, because the lion
   was almost finished eating the painted gazelle.

On the fifth day, I made opening act.
   I pretend I am at a ball and I know how to waltz. Know how
to sever all my toes and walk the red-carpet.

While I am head-dancing my body removes one button at a time.
Occasionally, the audience is many, on bad-days, rain-days,
one.

I only ever saw the birds.
   Speaking tongues, singing silent-riddles. I rebuild the night sky
   from all I remember in a book on celestial navigation.

   Are all the stars animal-shaped? Or am I once again mistaking
   mirrors for constellations.

It can be lonely at the zoo, and there aren’t nearly as many
balloons as I had hoped.

If I could choose my life I would never sleep indoors.
   Lay myself along the tundra and wait for purple-blossoms
to climb my throat, root in my garden-dense lungs.

   I want to be furthest-North. Want to be alone when I
   touch my own skin.

I wish I knew how to grow fur. How to crawl on all fours and snarl
with my carnivore-mouth.

Wish I could see in the dark or land on all of my feet.
Yesterday, the zookeeper told me
  I was looking worn out. I said, I am still a little girl
  making wreathes out of daisies, and I swear I didn’t smile.

Onstage I bend forward and hold my own ankles like a manacle.
Can rest on my knees and touch my forehead to the wet-floor
  in prayer.

The elephants were sent back to Africa without their ivory teeth.
Will I go home too? I have already lost a tooth
and something else entirely.

Tonight I will stun the crowd.
  I am mercurial and a hydrogen star. Collecting roses between
  my legs instead of at my feet. A brilliant display
  of dead-light.

Bravo, they will say,
  Once more.

On the first day, my mother said, wait here.
By the gift shop, next to the broken fountain.
  She said,
    I’ll be right back.
If anyone

Let’s assume you did. And we rode one of those woven, broken carousels moving counter-to-my-hand or not at all. The horse is a ribbed-fish flailing, inhaling my watery breath. Mother taught me one word. I never even had to use it. Oh we made-it-last, that is, to savor. Sudden victory is slang for when- we-play-pretenders after light. I will trade my luminescent quartz for synonyms of violence.

*Act your* oldest-age. I know you like things well laundered. We are out of starch so instead I will hold very-very-still. How should we celebrate? Call ahead. Tell the hostess it is our anniversary. Not cotton, or gold. The pruned-fingers one. The one spelled with crushed peonies and rodent teeth. I want to ask some things first. Have you ever owned a boat? If not, why do you keep that anchor under your mattress? That isn’t what I meant.

*I’ll be at* your country house. I never went-too-far, stopped choosing the fastest line. Personally I think you might be confusing cruelty for small particle acceleration, for divine intervention. Maybe you went first. It started in the Triassic, started in the parlor. Which would explain my harder-cartilage and crooked lips. I told you headless rabbits aren’t the same as poultry. You will have to make your own concentric circles, eat your own fur-coated son.

*Must be so beautiful* to begin here. Begin-again right here. The coastal sun is not the same as mine. Except for the glow behind my soft-shell body. Let’s go look at treasure with an x. There is a room, or a loose rope, or a piece of fossil that would have changed the sermon if only I had not left it in my other-skin. I rode a bus all the way to the pier, by myself. How do you know the earth isn’t round in one place and flat-on-the-bottom? I must have written some things down, for the service for the after-parted

for

when I am grown, when I am very grown.
[pedigree]

They say:
You should have been a boy

Only I swallowed all the oranges and set them
five-sliced on a Seder plate.
  I know what I am
  made to want.

They know:
That I am made to want
I think I am in love, or considering the idea
I might never have left my mother’s house.

They call me:
A garden of wet-soil and lion’s tooth
I feel a thumb beneath my chin, while I am lying
in a meadow of delicious, love-me-not petals.
  Should I be grateful?
  For the time allotted.

They tell me:
It will be over soon
Someday I build a room
where time is stitched with thread
  that I can cut to fit.

My thoughts are U-shaped,
cowering from this flame
  like plastic wrap.

My birthstone is amethyst and I
wish it was pearl. Not to be iridescent
  but to live in a calcium forest.

I’d like to be far away.

They say:
Now you will never be alone
  And they’re right.
Photon-lit, I am afraid of the vessel, not the air inside.
  Am I really so lovely with grass in my teeth
and bark under my nails?

They swear:
The queen must die
  I laugh.
  She died a long time ago.
On the walls,
in that bathtub.
  Under my magnifying glass.

They claim:
You are a flower
You always were a flower
  Am I?
Cock-or-cunt-borne into blossom.
I should have been a boy
and the petals.
    Should have taken my head-trophies,
    taken myself right home.

They say:
You could have been a nun, at least
    I smile, without any teeth to start.
    I am confessional,
        and the cloister,
            the lotus dismembering itself.

They coo:
You have so many bones to give
    Not so many as you might think.

Sometimes I wake up
    with my head still attached.
Abridged, again

The history of street painters consists mainly of old men and birds. I am obsessed with growing-old and becoming a bird.

Supposedly the Atlantic Ocean contains 82 billion gallons of water. That's almost-enough. I'd like to walk the ocean floor. Greet sleeper-sharks and live on a mountain.

I cannot digest plasma. Neither can you. The blood alcohol content of my extremities is a constant-variable.

Skewered myself on a sharpened stick to toast over the fire. The one I built to keep warm and can't stop walking into. It requires oxygen or. I require oxygen.

How many times have I wanted to be swallowed by a snake. Slowly inch down its throat, feel my belt buckle slip past its lower jaw. I am unhinged and ready-to-go.

Wishful thinking is that I will last through the previous-sentence. That you'll use your teeth on my inner thigh. Or that the Everglades might make-it in the end.

I covered all the statues with make up and graphite. Hauled them to the center-square. Is it too late to say I-am-sorry for not saying it sooner?

Sooner-than-later coyotes eat all the lambs. Stay up all night cradling a rifle against my bare skin. Listen for the dogs, to tell me if I am awake.

The buzzards taught me how to clean my plate. We debated Aristotle's view on eggs and came to no-conclusion. I learned to whisper from the dandelions who knew how to end-on-time.
I harvest ground cherries all day,
on my hands and knees. Listen for the mail all day
on my hands and knees. Prayed for the right to bleed,
all day, on my hands-and-knees.

At-night.

Physicists spent a long time searching
for evidence of charm. They knew it existed
before they found it. Before they knew
how to look. It even has a color.

You’re fine. You're just fine-fine-fine.
So fine that I forgot what shade of corsage
to purchase. I'm fine. So fine and feather-spent.
The more I say the word. It's going to be fine.

Now, the after-show.
The procession and the main-event were late.
I filled in. Fell right-into-shape,
swing sets were made for astronomical observation.

So much for the greatest-of-escapes.
Wormholes and chewed-through holes
have nothing on you. By the way,
you left something in the previous room.

It is taken-of-breath. This is what it means
to be devastated:
I'm still not a bird.
Exhibition of dolls and other body parts

Is there a verb for vulnerable?

I am a gross-violation.
Grossly violated. Or violator of:
something-new.

I bought these
hot air balloons
and then ran out of breath.
Am floating somewhere over
Chicago in 1893.

Have a metal notch in my hips.
For setting a straightened-spine on the shelf.

Some deep sea squid travel towards
the sun at night. Crimson-wrapped
in tentacles, the females struggle
to swim back down.

Swim home:
I am still prying loose your
red-fingered
loving embrace.

Let's visit the mid-ocean ridge.
We have 28000 miles to explore.
So we can take our time
in the public pool.

If you were looking for silent-but-pretty you should have
asked my porcelain cousin.

I am wooden with a grainy voice
and swell-in-summer.

I too
might be discovered
in artificial
light.

Radio galaxies
exist at perpendicular angles to our
wholesome-eyes.
Admission is
not-so-much that you can’t afford.

I spent my years
in the body of a dead jellyfish.
Just floating by.

Will you be there to welcome me?
When I come home for winter.

It is after-hours
and you should go.

This is the part
where none of us
come back to life.
I begin to hear voices

Not all at once. Sometimes whispers in the morning from curtain-light. At dinner, the chorus of shiny soldier-toys. It isn’t
that I’m listening so much as waiting. Here in the never-silent.
How is it possible I forgot how to whistle small works
and my breath? (You named it Masterpiece.)

Are you curious about time? I am. Awake, holding
a bowl of slippery marbles. I think I’ve left stone-crumbs in every lost
place. (Could we please start walking?) I want to go where the monarchs
heavy-rest in trees
and disagree about how to grow wings

I’ll go butterfly, eyes like pentagons and my forest home
silver-cut at slim ankles.

Dearest-

I wish I were born a pool of absolution. Even a puddle. And shimmering
guppies, whose mouths open. Wide. Or, won from a fair and, please, let
it all end in a glass bowl. (The same one I slipped from without any
ceremony at all.)
I am mostly-rose water, or made of regret. Not any more than you, at
least.

Listen. Don’t worry,
I am river-edged and self anointed. With my own pockets full of coins.
Antique, petty cash. I have water-washed all of my sins, and lined
them on the window sill. (It didn’t seem to matter.)

I’ve checked out of that room.

Now
I am planning a lunar expedition. I’ll bring a drill. Build a well and grow
French lavender. (Because I read that it likes the height.)

I am going somewhere in a riverboat and looking for the stolen ocean.

Would you do me a favor?
AmericanHealthCareAct

How I've gone this long without knowing that a soft-pack of cigarettes costs less than the-hard-one.
One foot

This summer I became a cannibal.

Or
I was born a cannibal and inherited
a legacy of skin between my teeth.

Maybe it's because I bite my nails.
And chew the edges
of my fingertips.

Watched a honeybee consume
its own foul-brood.
I also ate a close-relation.

My boss told me it counts
even if it only happens once.
I disagree.

I am a lover-of-flesh because
I always eat the person
standing next to me.

Standing too close.
Out of habit.

The radius of my mouth is growing
by the year.
At my fourteenth birthday

I could fit the entire cake
in one swallow. With the candle
still lit.

When I turned twenty I started cutting up
certain-pieces of myself. And handing them out.
As favors.

I read an article that claimed the only danger of cannibalism
comes from eating the brain.
The rest is just a refined-palate and meat of varying quality.

Yet people still shake their heads at me. Still avert their eyes
from my reddest wet-lips. Still say:
How could anyone live like that?
Then turn away before I can respond:
But I can't.
How to be

I have a couple questions left.
Had to ask someone what
the date is today.

What it was when I woke up
in just-my-jeans
without any socks.

A man walks over to assure me
that I read it wrong. That I don’t
know how to say my own name.

Says: Post it, I dare you.

Complain to my wife
that I am not
doing-enough.

She says: but this is what-you-do.

My contribution is an ink stain
on the sofa and wildly gesticulating
while holding a drink.

Have told so many women
that it isn’t, couldn't possibly-be
their’s alone.

All while tightening the cilice on my thigh.

Take one sterile blade from me
and I’ll just find
a glass to break.

Will wear a tie
and lecture you on the importance
of the honeybee.

Will quote Virginia and Simone
and make a clover with my tongue.
Or hitchhike to the nearest-station.

All while trying to hide
the underwear I did not remove myself
in a backpack.

Walking with my head held way-up. So I don’t have to see the fingerprint bruises.

Tilting that same head back to laugh, just like everyone else.
To Be Queen

It was my birthday and I killed my sister. 
Now 
every time I blow out a candle 
I see her. We are abdomen-linked. I think 
I held her too close. Too long. Think I inhaled her white-blossom self.

Did you know: 
You only get one flight. The trick is to fly up. 
Straight up.

Of course there is dancing. At the gold-soaked coronation. 
At the winter-feast.

You can’t back out now. It’s only a matter of sticky-proteins 
and losing your eyes.

Run, don’t fly.

I never wanted to be Mother.

Yes 
I have sinned. I was born in the dark. 
My six-walled sister, still so sweet on my tongue. 
There has never been a virgin queen. Only war-spoiled and 
making wishes in an old death-language.

I watched all the pretty kings fall.

Somewhere along the way I gave birth to my own end. 
I hope it is wax-winged and falls into the sun.

My sisters have come for 
their mother. My daughters have come for 
their unborn sisters.

Tell me: 
How do the flowers taste? 
I never learned how to spell my name.

I can see through heavy-dark: Let them come. 
I will die in a woven-crown, 
against my sisters’ naked bodies, 
smelling honey-breath, 
smelling sex.
While they lick my cheeks, my eyes,
fill my mouth.
Darling,
they will whisper, live,
Long live
If you were

I don’t lie down because
I have to.

I have to:
breathe at certain-intervals
(maybe sleep-a-little)

I’m not putting everything down
for you-or-me.

Or her.
Or even him.

A woman got pregnant
from a one night stand.

She asked the world and widened web
whether the father deserved to know.

Of course, it wrote back.
He deserves the truth.
(she deserves-it-all.)

She began:
if you were the guy—

I began:
if I were the guy—

And then dropped my half-burnt cigarette
into a glass of wine.
Discussing god with pigeons and other ornithological pursuits

Let's be radiant
stars.

Or cosmic blips
winking slowly out
of existence.

Come on:
    live-a-little.

I didn't say it would be easy.
No one said:
    it-would-be-easy

Some bright lights
imitate copepods.
Or fired-up hydrogen.

I can't stop repeating
the last thing I said to you.

Claim that I'm not needy
but I need a lot of things:

- an exit-strategy
- a way to describe planetary motion
  with my counting-fingers
- for you to drag a paring knife
  across my collarbone while we fuck
- more

My grandfather once drove Albert Einstein
up and down a mountain.

I'd also like to be
followed-through
carried to and in pursuit
of a higher-purpose.

Can stand to be outside.
Can't stand the way you
check your phone
and write me more-than-off.
You are speaking in our-voice
and forgetting to leave the
spot for breathing.
For hearing anything but hum.

There is a CPR kit available:
   see the bartender

Have lived several dozen
lives between slow drags
of something tightly-rolled.

I think I am supposed to know
whether this is:
   sleeping-or-awake.

Will you share a drink with me?
Even though I spilled the
last one on your shoes.

I’ve been asking birds
what they believe in.

It isn’t much.
How to meet someone

A Nigerian man introduced himself to me on the train to Empoli by pulling out my headphones.

He said: My name is Francis.

He asked me what my name was and I told him because I couldn't think of anything-else.

He told me he would like to get to know me better. I told him I have to work. I’m meeting a friend.

He didn’t understand. And then: you should come with me to Pavia.

I told him: I have-to-work.

He asked for my number. That maybe we could talk-more. I didn’t understand.

So he smiled and signed my notebook underneath a poem I was writing about kidney disease.

He said: Where is your friend now?
Panthalassa

I met a god on the vast supercontinent.
It was small in my unread-palm, with round ears.
I asked it to tell me why I am lizard-hipped and still polar inside.

Before it could share the word for afternoon, for my dry-birth,
I squeezed. Felt its thimble-heart slip under thumb.
I am sorry.
I am sorry
I forgot how to make myself cry.
The ocean is slowly splitting me. Soon I will fit your island-shape.

On Saturday I took a break, missed the coral reef being built.
I am struggling with what you said
about clipped-wing birds and how we should snap their necks instead.
For love. Of us. Or them.

If I could build the earth I would use chains.
To keep things from getting too far away. Take away the sun
so we would have to lose everything but our socks.
And crawl under the table. When did you change your cold-blood?

Perhaps we will swim like eels. We will curse
our rotten gills and die in the sand.
Will you still meet me on the soft-ash beach? I have been
collecting shells for all these years. Spirals and seaglass clouds.

There is a rift in my ocean-self, pulling me by the toe
into a new world. I am dolphin-bodied with a long mouth.
Were my teeth too hard for the siliceous stone? I have turned
so many warmer-bodies into tundra-grass.

There is only one ocean.
The last time we spoke you said, we will be home soon.
You said please,
this time,
don’t turn around.
Reconstructive

the stairs only get smaller
tighter

i am a cycloid
gripping the edge of this circle
as it tells me which face to make
at each planet

touching the walls and imagining
every hand that slid across
the stone every hundred years

touching pinkies with a florentine monk

i am claustrophobic
not just in tight-places
but in every lung

the open sky closes in around me
compresses my softest-flesh
into pretty ribbons of
shaken-cells

need an astrolabe to tell you
where i am this very-minute
this month

non parlo
i-don’t-speak

which language?

all of them
except the one with fingers
and no nails to grip the rail

my organs play a marching tune
play a sombre-swell of days
i refused to keep on
keeping-everything-on

when do i grow up?
to reach the next shelf
out of this next-phase
have been floating
to a hymn of
picture this:

a still pool next to a walking-river
set myself down on a floor
on the roof of a cathedral
on the roof-of-your-mouth

where it is wet and fading-frescos
brunelleschi painted the grooves
your tongue feels when
the tea is too hot

mine is just a rough sketch
that someone walked away from
in 1482

restoration implies
that there was something worth-us
in the first-place.
WE WILL JUST DO IT. WE ARE BETTER THAN THEM

I.
I am so very thirsty
thought I was giving birth to a snake but became one instead
just like that irish myth

was told to breathe
to try not to hold on for too long you are doing fine
breathe deeper

i chill my hands for structure
too cold for snow to melt so it is powder-keg
waiting to be crushed and snorted

[wind whistling]

never look directly out a window
always glance acutely
they say you’ll forget what you dreamt

so I made a bed of plated glass and waited for it to fill
sometimes my radium-body is still translucent
and slowly cooling

i can do anything
anything any thing
any one thing

can fit a working-hour glass between my clavicle and chin
who do you think
you are

guttered and holding in soft-sides
hands opening my plastic mouth to gobble marbles
and wag my shortened tail

[snow crunching]

II.
i inked the map to your house inside my elbow
everything is miracle
it is all miraculous

in the banquet hall my cheeks are full of royal jelly spread on toast
pulling out my lashes
and littering unripe wishes on the stained carpet

tell me about your god, and what he likes to drink
i would like to be able to say everything is clear to me now
everything is so much seen and sighted

i bought a park for my own amusement
you are tied to your partner
so for god’s sake don’t fall here

the rope can be something
crawl backwards through the taiga
and pull the sun back into green

[wind whipping]

the northern me is drifting into stratus clouds
while my southern tip builds ice in sheets
glides into conjuring-ships

they carry sharp-flags and shoot their dogs on strips of ice
this chunk of frozen water says its name is shackleton
the rest is blind-white horizon and patches of black fur

we are ducks on a frozen pond crowding the last patch of icy water
i am out-there-on-my-own
giving it all you’ve gotten through me

took apart a crate to save space and flattened all the mason jars
for trapping birds
welded the letterbox shut because no one ever wrote back

[wind howling]

III.
i am extra virgin olive-oiled into place
arms set at smarter angles
and can hold a pose for longer

visit the tallest tailor to make sure it all fits
soften button holes with saliva
or puddled-water

my wire door has acquired a squeak
but i’ve traded dinners for some whiskey-diet
this metal bracelet is for friendship
steal a priceless urn and replace it with a weighted die
read a book
feel the gentle breeze

[both panting, both laughing]

I guess I thought: I would rather it have been you
sort of dreams

marry me younger
i’ve been sleeping on a bell
been carrying a tower
on my hunched shoulders
been ringing for days

i’d like to kiss the
inner wrist of the first man
to buy my mouth
perhaps link pinkies
and thank him for my standard-value

plum-hearted and not so sure
which street to turn down
ask the gardener
where he keeps the square shovel

some bulbs you plant in winter
i came up under frost too soon
lost my ice-burnt leafy limbs

my gums are full
of wet pine needles full
of toffee-burnt seeds full
of you

i said i moved on
but i’ve lived myself into country
and deeper roots

when people talk about proud
they mean you are unlike me
and i named my
fear awe

do you imagine lots
of conversations or
do you still get to dream about the ocean

is it strange
i remember the veins in my foot
twisting and blue-swelling
under pine cones
under cold air sinking
i am somewhat puzzled can render
all my scars but three

you are
always there
always on-the-list

as soon as i
tell you that thing i’ve been meaning to
tell you
the wedding theme was adultery
and off white but not quite taupe

married for a decade content
to spend my nights
with my princes-charming

i pulled a thorn out of a caterpillar once
and wondered
if i was doing the right thing

kept it in a box
let it go in my milkweed plot
i wish i’d died on a leaf
on that one under my tongue

making my breath smell
like nitrogen
like phosphorous

would you like
to meet my parents i
relied on a stranger

to tell me
who i could-have-been

i visited the planetarium in a room
with more birds than clouds
in a field with more clouds than people
and somehow
still too many hands

have you ever been held
in melting wax
i painted portraits of them
and showed them to a friend
she said
why have you spilled all these candles
don’t you know it’s dangerous
The Ethical Use of Animals

My brother was devised
out of wedlock
and he turned out just-fine.

I am bastard born
at someone else's wedding.
Or ill-conceived.

A rough sketch
on parchment that
should have
should-have-been.

Some vows are retroactive
and occur only in hindsight.
Most living organisms
produce biophotons.

I can only see faces
when I close my eyes.
Waxy faces
that I can't tell apart.

Identify too closely
with nematodes.
I collected pill bugs
for summer camp.

Mine gave birth in a plastic bottle.
Thought they were in-love.
But I confused gestation
for conception-of-it.

And named the baby
after its mother.

There are huge savings
on mattresses,
all of the time.

I build perfect circles
out of smoke
and ruin them with my fingers.
Just like you taught me.
Relax.
Breathe.
Turn around.

It is partially about how I think everyone around me is using one megaphone. And I am whispered into not-so-pretty-shape.

I deserve what I deserve because of who I've been. How I've been. Or who I've been with.

I keep a blackened-book of thoughts that I ran through the washing machine. By accident.

Am still uncertain about what comes-from-the-heart. Was the way you came to-me, on-me, heartfelt?

Or heartened on the thought of. I have taken so many baths and can never get the temperature just right.

I am not sure I have taken a stand. Taken-the-stand and claimed some portion of innocent.

Let's say this is the one thing we won't use for evil.
Wien-to-Firenze

Not sure where I begin
(And-occasion-to-end)
But I hope it's in France

Would like to be a catacomb
With decorative skulls
And a spiraling-stair

Someone I love said:
I need space
(From-you-from-me)

Said: I'm sorry you think-

I thought:
Me too
(Space from-myself for-myself)

Space I can't find
Due to the lack of oxygen
And not-quite-silent

Have pre-existed the conditions
For being called: alive
(Just for one-more-day)

I am sure it was a girl
Because that is how-it-goes
Another body to live my same life

To take the same fall
Spill herself in every glass
To take after-me

The same way I know she would
have my smile and the opportunity
Not to wear-it-well

Not to wear it at all

A woman on the train said:
Mama Mia!
To my red-rosy drippings
To the once-white sheets
That might have been used
To store raw steaks in styrofoam

Cut me open to find:
A fistful of dried dandelions
A spatter of violets

Watched a pigeon fly
Off a ledge I can't fit on
And went-so-green

Saw another in the distance
And felt sorry
For my loneliest wing

Learned the word for pregnant
In three languages
And then none at all

Left the lining of myself on the tracks
Like sticky ashes

From:
(Here-)
To:
(There-)

grin and bare-it

(nicht)/nicht-schwanger/: 

(my daughter)/i used to love long train rides. ¹

(intimate)/immediate/: 

(a queen bee)/i will emerge fully formed in a matter of 14-16 days.²

(pre-)/post-/: 

(______) being the operative word.³

¹ the first (practical)steam locomotive was built in (1804)/1812. The first train related accident occurred in (1830)/1832. (39)/37 years later, the transcontinental railroad was completed.

² the (average)worker bee requires (21)/22 days to hatch, despite her smaller size.

³ sometimes (you)/i fall asleep with an analog clock against (my)/our ear.
Meteorological Dispute

I think I might also have been born a dinosaur.
Tasted greenish leaf and some amount
of flesh.

And then you.
And I wanted to not be
so much more extinct.

But I walked closer to the comet.
The ice age made me very comfortable.
I latched on
to your smallest offering.
Of fresh roots and something closer to tenderly.

So when it happened.
At-the-end.

I practiced all the poses for my fossil.
So lovingly. So comical.
So-much.

I held your hand and smiled
the way I'm not supposed to.
in case-of-emergency.

Smiled like I only had one.
And I do.

Then it hit.
And the heat and the light
and all the darkest clouds of smoke.

My scaly skin slipped off.
In the valley of the puddle
of viscous fluid and melted fats

we might have touched too closely.
Because I can still taste the shape
of your bones against mine.

So I'll continue to die against you.
In a prehistoric fashion.
Trade my softest-lungs for a lasting-breath.
When we are carbon-dated
they will call the year, yours-and-mine.

I carry a book in my back pocket.
Just in case
you ask for one.
To my friends

On which day am I supposed to breathe through my mouth?

My calendar fell between the fridge and counter. January is coated with boric acid and eggshell-dust. I haven’t a heart to check the others.

Consider stepping on the daffodils.

I would let Caligula eat grapes off the vine and claim my whole-mouth. And then

This is what it means to be a student of history. Study the classics and learn about soiled-vessels. Collect shards of bone-glass.

When the archaeologists get to my life they will sweep it all into a cardboard box and seal the lid. With tape. All the past is stacked one hundred deep in a warehouse off a freeway in Ohio.

You keep asking if I’m ok and never waiting for my lips to close.
I do know some of it. How to tie my hair back
   How to kill a guttered-snake and cross-stitch my ribs.
Now they read
_Home Sweet Home_
in Easter-pink and green.

I’ve never finished a quilt. But I wore enough laced-shifts, enough underwire to outlast myself.

I don’t know why I am waiting. Only that I am weighted, waiting for.
Why do people say paper cranes are so lucky? I’ve had one in my pocket all this time.

I suspect I am a building, with doors that shut and a small café. One day I will replace my awnings. And if I never make it back, tell everyone

   I am sorry for the shorter-notice.

The place across the street is just as good.

   Tell them that I am not unhappy.
Tell them

   I have gone fishing.
I forgot to say thank you.  
Forgot to tell you how grateful I am for everything.

Is it strange I can see your tongue  
on the gap in my smile and still can't  
remember what color your eyes are.

(Were. Because things change)  

I have changed.  
Have molted and shed dirty feathers  
in loose-places. Am penguin-winged  
and much better at swimming deeper  
than flying up. And out.

Why don't we ever send  
each other letters in the mail?  
There is so much I want to say  
and I have all the paper  
but not-your-address.

There is a goldfish swimming  
through my kidneys.  
I wouldn't have known except  
for your boots on my caged-ribs.

I appreciate your concern.  
Ate your self satisfied lips  
and have been hungry since.  
So thank you. For the fish.

(And the boots.)  

Am so full of hate but no-no-no.  
Not towards you.  
Never you. Hate the way I run.  
As if I learned to walk second in-life.

Hate the smell of human skin  
because none of it is yours.  
Imprinted or underdressed.

I am not so unhappy
that I have forgotten how to smirk
in corners. Of my mouth.
Of yours around my boney hip.

Goldfish should not be kept in bowls.

When will I be old-enough to feel real-pain?
People keep telling me:
I have all this time and
I want to ask: what watch are you looking down at?

So very glad I am young and cut-apart.
Instead of old and looking for thread.
I keep telling myself how happy I-must-be.
Marine ice-cliff instability
et.stark

I tell myself it is genetic. That I can't
help-myself. That everyone feels
so-and-sad sometimes.

That everyone prefers the color
of their own ruptured cells.

You can excuse anything in the name
of art. Mutilation is a performance.
Can buy all the components for

a percolator bong, including the glass drill bits,
at Home Depot. Self-loathing is a ladder
I use to reach the top-shelf bottles.

My mother tells her friends
"my daughter is an artist." I tell
my mother's friends

"yes, I live in the city."

It's funny because
we assumed we had-more-time.
theWarOnMen

it started in the forties,
according to scholars.

my blue-bonnet
is labeled hand-wash
only.

so i soak my fingers
in lye and
steady-myself.

in school i gave
a speech on polishing my
father’s boots,

unironically.

it started in the
backyard. against an elm
with my height
carved into the side.
according to the talmud.

i’m so tired of trimming
the grass and knowing how
to walk-in-water. have

sobered up
to the timeline of
what really happened.

it started with the
rape of persephone,
according to

her chilled irises on
coronation day. according to
my own cold-eyes.

so we keep it
on. even in
the holy-ocean.
i’m jealous of
the roaches in the walls,

eating cotton-candy poison
cakes and touching
bare wires.

or
it started underground
with the flightless owls,

with our underwear turned
inside-out and no socks.

with one of us
whispering:

how did i get here?
Underwater

Everything looks blue
Some shade of something-blue
Didn't know I was supposed to
Work through the blue-summer
Come up with something better-blue
I am writing in ink that is blue
I am blue
You are
She said don't be so small-and-blue
It is sunny and blue
It is rainy and dark-blue
I wish I were blue blue blue
I am purple and shrinking and not-so-blue
Washing my reddest-hands in blue
I have a blue-thumb and
Am eating flowers that are violent and blue
A spectrum contains every color
Except for real-blue
Most cards are red or black and not blue
Wonder how I came to be quite-blue
Watched the sunset over the water
which is
Self-Dissection: The Lemniscate Phenomenon

1. I thought I was sitting by a lake in the woods but there are all these cars circling me. A geyser is spouting the wants I would have made, if I knew it was my birthday.

2. Pretend to remember conversations I never had. Of course we talked about my health. Of course I said: I would fix-it-neatly. The way I don't wear enough clothing for the weather.

3. Sunset is in four hours, but I went down days ago. I split my rib for the man with his back to the water. He says he is fishing. But I am full of barbed hooks and no lines. In winter, it was still. And now there are fountains.

4. So I don’t know where to set my eyes. On the horizon. Or the words. Am so afraid to be unsaid. So my hand made a shape that said: I love you.


6. Lied about how long I can hold my breath. Nod my head and say yes-yes. I know when I am and who I was just-now. But all I can recall is the structure of aldehydes and hand-drawn ether.

7. How much energy it takes to break: a hydrogen bond. Part of the reaction is absorbed by the environment and the other-part is me.

8. I know the plane landed safely in a river. But can’t help thinking about all those birds in pieces. Sometimes I wake up at night in a pool of feathers and hollowed-bones.

9. I can grip the perch with talons that are red red red. Treading water and trying to set the wings back in place. There is wet and bloody and feathered.
I worry I would have saved the birds instead.

10. There is a Canadian goose staring at me and asking me why I can’t make a V.
Why I don’t know how to fly lower-than. So I raise my arms overhead and it laughs and cries and honks and flies away.

11. An open circuit can be measured for potential. The moon is far behind me. Between the trees I can see the price of gas. Per gallon consumed. Per person. At night there are lights in the water so: you can see the height of the fall before you go to sleep.

12. I think I might be crazy. Fucking crazy. I’ve been smoking and drinking to collect receipts for: what is missing.

13. Maybe I am just fine-enough. Maybe I can even wear it home. Stopped imagining a helicopter and began tracing my important notes. I am exceptional at: titration. At getting just enough to make the palest pink.

12. Am egg-hatched and looking for a calcium home. Why aren't there any more shady places to rest-awhile? You asked me to write true. I am not sure what is true without trying anything on.


10. In a movie theater with sweating palms. On an examination table with my paper shirt above hardened breasts. I keep asking to go home and everyone keeps rolling their eyes. Keeps telling me: not yet.

9. So you don’t know. So you shouldn’t know. So you cant so you might-not-maybe-could. But won’t. So there are a lot of spaces to say no. And twice as many for saying: yes, I would like that.

8. Please and thank you tell me about your family. How much do you love them how much do you love me.
How much do you. Yourself wing-tipped and I can’t say:
I remember all the names of plants that went extinct this year.

7. But I know how the garden looks without them.
I bought sod and wood chips and tiny stones
to cover the gaps. There are so many gaps.
And fistfuls of dry leaves.

6. I am all but here.
All but broken open and licked clean.
Tell you something real, something honest:
there are enough electrons for everyone to be lit-up.

5. I am not enough sub-atomic something to jump rings.
I wish I were still myself and am lacking certain wires.
Quantum entanglement dictates the orbit of my charged particles.
Pull back. Pull yourself up-by-your.

4. Their is still a certain height you need to be.
And if I’m not alright. If I am somewhat-less-than golden edged.
I do apologize for the wait-time. For: the time-lost.
Would you still like to make believe?

3. Pretend we are the same and coming into our one self.
Act like we are wholesome and wholly-here.
I’m not sure what else to say except:
I didn’t mean for it to take-this-much.

2. Forgive myself: for living-so-long.
There might be another word for see-you-later
but all I know is that the letter H is almost always silent.
I am telling truth with a dishonest tongue.

1. Hold perfectly still:
Imagine imaginary numbers doing innumerable things.
Know that:
It’s never going to be the same.
Not this time.
Song for Sadists

So many supercharged particles
collide to form a smiley-face against your sinking retina.

Solar flares and sunspots are simply a skin condition.
Satan is not-to-be taken so seriously.

Survival is a superlative
with suppositories of sandy tundra
against a backdrop of sudden-shifts.

So what if you cannot summon
the necessary air for seeming-error.
Self-fulfilling sermons suffer somewhat equally.

Supersedure is an equation for replacing the supreme order.
Septum piercings serve a leading line to supplication
and fucking-surety-of self.

So many s-hooks in a single swarm-cell.

So then.
So-there.
So lovingly superscript against a satin sheet.

Sing louder.
Send word home.
Sell-out your softest self.

Switch hands, I am still swimming in this steamed milk sea.
Separated by swathes of swallowtail butterflies.
Still sight-unseemly seen.

Sycophants unite across every sketched borderline.
Suckle from the same mother-breast.

Suppose there is a soliloquy that doesn't end at supper.

So-long, sweet-one.
Exit Interview

Did you try to—?

I don’t know:
There were all these trees trying to hold me up.
Polite trees I hugged too hard.
    Suddenly I am trailing my great-grandmother,
catching loose feathers and learning how to scalp.
Everything is red. Red. Red-feathered

I can’t see faces that melt like wax and drip onto my thighs.
At night we are old-friends. Maybe this time we will hold hands.
    This time they will look in my eyes,
wipe my nose, help me find my right-shoe.
I don’t have a favorite. Not a color or a house or a person
I have never met. Why do I eat so much soil?
    For the same reason I stone myself:
    Practice.

    The best thing about tights is how easily they rip. I can say:
    I must have caught a loose nail.
Thank god I am just-a-body, just
    a piece of lavender-scented shortbread. Sweep away the crumbs
    with sweaty palms, with the wet-edge
    of my shirt.

I think I am talking but I am only spitting up dogtooth violets
and pulling earthworms from my throat. Sometimes it is
    instrument error.
Or my shaken-hands trying to subdue the horizon. Still, I call myself sailor.
Standing on my flat-world looking out at your-flat-world.
Pretended I was Dorothy. Apple-buried and gingham wrapped.
    I was:
after-eve swallowing the seeds because no one told me not to.

    I missed the window to buy self-cutting knives, collapsible
    measuring cups: Half-off.
    I don’t think the wet mouth woke her. But maybe sleeping
    kept her from remembering tongues on her teeth, fingers under-
    skirt
    and above.
    For every flinch they add another page to the bible.

So careful. So:
Next time. So
I write an open letter to the master of ceremonies,
to the next next-time girl.
I am waiting by the phone for your in-touch. Next. Time.  
I will carry a note, will play-for-dead.  
More importantly, should I still call if I remember  
anything?

My favorite poem is: “You Can Say It With Flowers,” 
I read it off the side of a truck.
Perihelion

My lonely epitaph reads:
famous last words.

Pardon:
my inappropriate gestures.
I am only moving my hips
in time with your restful-fingers.

So what if I'm ashamed:
I covered all the mirrors in
black silk. To save time.

At my communion:
I eat the body and the mind
not-of-god. Poured menstrual blood
back into the soil.

Forgive:
the unforgiving
lies I've told.

That was 12 years ago:
and I am still finding dry-crumbs
between my teeth.
In my throatiest of throats.

I am closest-to:
a. your angry father
b. declaring myself unfit-for-service
c. the sun

Whenever someone asks me:
a question about time
I check my wrist.

:When is your birthday?
—I lost my watch.

:How old were you when you first had sex?
—I think I left it at someone's house.

:For how long have you been like this?
—I still don't have a watch.
Unwashed/Unfettered

I have come to believe
That not all good things happen to good people.
And the reverse.

It turns out: it's a novel idea.

I also think Jesus can talk to rabbits.
Not just the white ones in dapper hats.

And that eating marshmallows shaped like small birds
is one-part of a satanic ritual.

Maybe candy corn is fucking disgusting.
So I'll eat it color-by-color.

There are holes in the center of my palms
and I have a confession:
I have never filled a notebook.

Have never meant a word I said
without taking someone's name in vain.

There is an issue with the server.
And no one can log on today.
It's quite global.

I repent for my sinful thoughts and relish
every devious planetary motion.

Am not sure what it means to be devout but
I like the idea-of.

There is a missing piece to the puzzle that my grandmother
is hiding in a far-off place.

In a box made for jewelry.

I think G(-)D would understand.
Paradiso: an epic in one-part

Tell me your darkest fantasy and
I will tell you how I cry looking at
Blue herons on a river

Touch yourself and point out
The place where Sisyphus gave
Up

Let it all roll backwards

So I lost my tour guide to the asphodels
In my hair
I thought they were pretty and

You said
Poison poison- poisonous
For two

Or twelve or there are arachnids whose
Legs twitch when the terms of war are
Brought to the light

I want to go inside only I am
Already rooted to the sofa pulling dust
Notes from under my tongue and

Testing air quality to retrieve a
Perfect sample of polluted breath that
Fills the atmosphere and melted

The glacier preserving god
And the wooly mammoth

In the Cretaceous era I swig whiskey at
The saloon next to a layer of snake skin

That someone said I sloughed off so
Would I mind, really-mind

Picking up after myself and shouting
Last-calls into the mouth of something
Quite divine

I wrapped clothesline around your wrists
And strung you up to dry in the white sun
Because I am a domestic bird

Preening my tail feathers and ingesting a virus that
Shrivels my flight-muscles

Black and white white feathers on the still-water
Mark the place where I swam down and
Away

If there are Twenty four vibrating strings between
Us how are there not twenty five

I can’t stop repeating the traveler’s prayer
For good luck and safer-passage and the electrical equivalent
of purchasing too much propane for me to swallow

I spent all my eyelash wishes hoping
To be contained by the orbit of a charged particle

Someone once described an atom as plum pudding so it makes sense
that I want to run
A fork into your stomach and pluck

Your electrons to wear on my fingertips like
Black olives

Perform the piece in whole
Wholly perform the piece
It is holy you are holy
I am

Divine in the sense of unbaptised pagans and women
who wear practical shoes

Condemn my violent inclinations to cut myself while
you’re inside me and shove a wafer against my tongue between
your hardened nipple and my

Wolf-teeth
The ones that founded Rome and have found a place in
your skin to build a greater-cityscape

I deserve
A slap on the wrist, across my face, against,
Your bruised knuckle or a ruler that has measured
The distance from one savior to another
It should be a thousand years but sometimes

It skips a few the way I skipped school
And practiced blood-letting
Instead

I fell asleep in a public park and woke
With another head in my lap
With my fingers tangled in mud streaked hair

I said
Are you a god?
At the same time it said
Please
Do you know any other songs?
very soon or not-soon-at-all

i’ve been too open with my dislike of g-d
have really tried to cover my mouth when i yawn but
failed at that too and a man gave me a dirty look for suggesting how wide it might be
all living things dream of being lost-to-sea but
mostly the gulls

not all coyotes are the-bad-ones i spent
my summer living with sheep in a far-pasture spent my summer
on all fours pulling grasses by the root the good ones ask for just-a-few and
leave you the night to say-regret
in the morning i follow the birds to the altar

how many ways are there to kill a house-canary without
revealing the number of stones we used i said
hush pretty-thing it said hushhushhush and wouldn’t stop until
i smothered it with the hand i meant to use on my own mouth

so this is it i hear one lamb say while we stumble towards a river so this is it
my mother says so this is
it my lover says
as i shrug and swallow another tiny-blue and whywhywhy
as i flicker-in-place and i can’t understand why
they don’t understand the arctic is cold enough for me-alone that i learned to sail
only to find another way to go
my skin sticks to blocks of ice out of affection not adhesion

so i rebuild the earth out of fur-and-feathers and all the wool i can carry i
have always wanted to be soluble to be solved against an axis of growth
on a plottable curve but i answered every question with imaginary-figures and i’m sorry
i have grown tired of talking myself into shapes
without-names
am chronically apologizing for the mess i made of dinner i prefer
earthenware dishes because i am always wearing the soil
as a shawl just covering the tops of my ears

or that
all i wanted was for you to place me in a tidal pool and tell me yes
this is the ocean
List of excuses

So then I
Because someone said
There was a long pause
But I was following this
So then they
And I felt
So I took a
Because what else
How much can you
I am sorry I
For the record
Partially it was that
Because I couldn't
I didn't mean to
Then I
You said
They said
I would
never
But
How come
My mother said
My father was
In the end
There was a
One day

I don’t intend
To survive-this-surviving
But people get upset
When you say that or when you
Wake up
In a pink bathtub
With lines through all of your
Most important paragraphs
Someone-I-loved says:
Just don’t let me find you
There-again
The trouble is I never left
The way the arctic circle
Is not-so-circular
And I have been lost in
The taiga crushing Vicodin and
Cheap generics for
Photoemissive cells that light-me-up
It isn’t always like this
Isn’t always a production of
Bioluminescent fish creating puppets with
No fingers to open their mouths
It is unlikely
That I make my way out-of-here
With all of my clothes on every limb
Still, on the subject of
Classifying red stars, Me-stars
I can’t stop reading the forbidden lines
As necessary-admissions
I am not an astronomer so
Am unable to answer in the affirmative
I guess

But will continue buying postcards and
Wishing-you-weren’t-here
To see it live.

Collectively, physicists agree that time is slowing down and I’m sorry-so-sorry for an inability to
Recall the constellations of your birth for the
Cold weather or
The tub or

Mostly I just wanted to tell you that,
Unfortunately,
I am unable to attend