

Reincarnations

By

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Abstract to *Reincarnations*

Reincarnations blends Confessional influences, eco-poetic and ecofeminist perspectives, and poetry of the occult. Through this unique mixture of theory, I have attempted to make a connection between the self, politics, and location. *Reincarnations* travels through Washington State, Kansas, and Oklahoma, exploring themes unique to each landscape while also incorporating a narrative “I” through-line. In each landscape, the confessional voice merges with eco-poetic theory to draw the connection between the body, mind, the land, and greater environmental considerations.

My constant poetic influence has been the American Confessional movement of the 1950’s and 60’s, hallmarked by writers such as Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Robert Lowell, and W.D. Snodgrass, because of the use of personal experience and introspection as a tool for political counter discourse. Throughout *Reincarnations*, the theme of forbidden sexuality and its cultural ramifications is almost ever-present. The poem “Discontent” examines the question of female location and gendered spheres by alternating stanzas exploring possible lifestyles; one aspect of the poem offers traditional images of domesticity such as a large house, a husband, baby, and private spheres inside the home, such as the kitchen, which has been culturally gendered as a female space. On the flipside of the poem, the narrator unleashes her desires for the opposite of domesticity—dive bars, sex in public restrooms, and transience, as a counterweight to show female liberation from a destiny that was once considered perfunctory. This second thread of the poem places the narrator in male gendered spheres outside of the home. The poem is careful not to place negative judgement upon either lifestyle, highlighting the feminist ethos of women’s right to choose their own futures.

One critique of the Confessionalist movement was that it only had room for narratives of white, cisgender, straight, and financial privilege and was not inclusive to those who were considered outside the dominant culture or discourse, such as people of color, those of lower economic means, and members of LGBTQ+ communities. Susan Bordo asserts, “the body ... is a medium of culture. ... [The] commitments of a culture are inscribed and reinforced through ... the body. ... Our conscious politics [and] social commitments ... [are often] undermined and betrayed by ... our bodies” (Tunc). Bordo points out that the body and politics are inseparable. Non-white, and especially female, bodies have been historically underrepresented due to insidious institutionalized racism and sexism. In “Confessionalism Birthed from Feminism”, Melinda Wilson points out the true aims of Confessionalism: “The Confessional movement began to construct a literary environment in which other voices of difference could write about their experiences” (Wilson). It began as a white-washed mode, but over time, Confessionalism has begun to embrace a multitude of different identities, although the legacy of its origins remains that the most widely documented and touted of the original Confessionalists such as Sexton, Plath, Lowell, and Berryman were all white, and have been criticized over racial ignorance in some of their pieces.

Adrienne Rich states, “Without an articulate lesbian/feminist movement, lesbian writing would still be lying in that closet” (Wilson). Intersectional feminism has influenced post-Confessionalism to include a broader spectrum of identity. I hope to add to that conversation by standing in solidarity with historically marginalized groups in my creative work. Intersectional feminism and post-confessional poetry are now irrevocably intertwined.

Morgan Parker’s *Other People’s Comfort Keeps Me Up at Night* (2015) expands the scope of traditional Confessionalism by exploring African American female identity through the

use of that “I”, or personal narrative, in which Confessionalism is steeped. As I was writing *Reincarnations*, it was important for me to not speak on behalf of those whose identities I do not inhabit, and it was paramount for me to recognize and pay respect to the struggles other women face. In the poem “Straight Men at the Bar”, the narrator recalls moments of misogyny she and her significant other have experienced at the hands of straight men because the two women are in a same sex relationship, as well as confrontational moments between her partner and different men who single her out because of her masculine-leaning gender expression. The narrator stands in solidarity with her partner who may be called an “angry black butch bitch” by those same straight men at the bar. My use of the narrative “I” is a continuation of speaking not only for myself, but also allowing other women to identify with the content of politically motivated pieces, and calling attention to issues many women face and situations many women have experienced but that are underrepresented.

Another critical backdrop that *Reincarnations* is in conversation with is the tradition of ecopoetry. In the creation of *Reincarnations*, one of the most paradigm-shifting discoveries for me was ecopoetic theory and what divides ecopoetry from nature poetry. Nature poetry is poetry that does not recognize the complexities of human’s relationship to the world, and instead relies upon an almost-pastoral, idealized view of the land, that tends to glorify the beauty of nature but not recognize the fraught relationship between humanity and this Earth. J. Scott Bryson, a prominent ecopoetry theorist, defines ecopoetry and its characteristics, and how it separate from nature poetry:

Ecopoetry is a subset of nature poetry that, while adhering to certain conventions of romanticism, also advances beyond that tradition and takes on distinctly contemporary problems and issues, thus resulting in a version of nature poetry generally marked by

three primary characteristics. The first is an emphasis on maintaining an eccentric perspective that recognizes the interdependent nature of the world; such a perspective leads to a devotion to specific places and to the land itself, along with those creatures that share it with mankind. The awareness of the world as a community tends to produce the second attribute of ecopoetry: an imperative toward humility in relationships with both human and nonhuman nature. Related to this humility is the third attribute of ecopoetry: an intense skepticism concerning hyper rationality, a skepticism that usually leads to an indictment of an over technologized modern world and a warning concerning the very real potential for ecological catastrophe. (5)

Poems such as “Text of Puget Sound” and “Water Year” can be described as post-pastoral, in that the landscapes discussed are not idealized or romanticized, and the poems are instead brutally honest about the devastation that is inflicted upon environments, and could be considered firmly in the ecopoetry tradition.

Out of ecopoetry’s three main characteristics, perhaps *Reincarnations* most prominently engages with the third. When thinking about the idea of apocalypse, I was inspired by Octavia Butler’s representation of apocalypse in her 1993 book, *Parable of the Sower*, wherein Butler shows readers the implications of humankind’s destruction of our environment and its resources. My poem “Future Child” is meant to give readers an idea of possible ways the end of our world could be brought about by further abuse of our environment.

Connected to Bryson’s third pillar of ecopoetry is Gilles Clement’s philosophy of the “third landscape”. The third landscape is what is left over of nature after humans have vanished—abandoned buildings, crumbling infrastructure, what is left behind. Jonathan

Skinner's essay in the *EcoLanguage Reader*, "Thoughts on Things: Poetics of the Third Landscape" defines the first landscape as almost "idealized pastoral", or what I have described as nature poetry. Skinner evades defining the second landscape, but if the pastoral is placed in the past, and the post-human is placed in the future, one might infer that the second landscape could be located in our present-- cityscapes or urban landscape, or, more generally, human-occupied landscapes.

I have found myself trying to blend my two major influences, Confessionalism and ecopoetry, and have discovered other poets who may be attempting the same task. In his book, *Ecodeviance: (Soma)tics for the Future Wilderness* (2014), CA Conrad urges his readers to take action against the contemporary human condition of isolation and loneliness at the hands of capitalism through encouraging us to be unafraid of and to live outside social constructions of normality. In his "Introduction to (Soma)tic Poetry Rituals" (xi), Conrad notes that he was born and raised in a factory town, where he saw the people he loved reduced to instruments of the factory—machines of capitalism. He then discusses what he sees as what humans need the most during these times: the need to be "present", or autonomous, free to be creative and live lives that are unique and colorful. Conrad represents the factory as draining upon individuality, as well as a force of destruction on the natural world. Throughout *Ecodeviance*, Conrad offers the reader a series of prompts or challenges to do outrageous acts and to write about them, or ways of living in the moment and resisting the cycles to which many people fall victim. Conrad also sporadically threads pieces where he discusses personal trials and tribulations surrounding his identity as a gay man in America, thus blending his personal narrative with themes of ecopoetry.

A point of juncture between my interest in ecopoetry and post-Confessional intersectional feminism is ecofeminism, which from *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy* can be defined as:

“Ecofeminism is a practical movement for social change that discerns interconnections among all forms of oppression: the exploitation of nature, the oppression of women, class exploitation, racism, colonialism. Against binary divisions such as self/other, culture/nature, man/woman, humans/animals, white/nonwhite, ecofeminist theory asserts that human identity is shaped more by fluid relationships and by acknowledgment of both connection and difference.” (back cover)

The relationship between female experience and environment/landscape is prevalent throughout *Reincarnations*, as exemplified by my poem “Entering Kansas”. In the piece, the narrator is driving into Kansas for the first time and noticing signs that deride abortion and praise religion. In this new state, she notices sexism in new and pervasive ways, such as a man yelling at her boyfriend to “take care of that girl tonight”. Each incident is catalogued in connection to where it happens in the state.

One way that I attempted to make the connection between gender and landscape in *Reincarnations* is through the figure of the witch. Historically, witches have been seen as women who live outside the bounds of society for a multitude of possible reasons, including their sexuality, disposition, and socioeconomic class, or women who were somehow outside of ideal womanhood in some way. I wanted to reclaim the figure of the witch. The moniker of ‘witch’ was a death sentence for many women throughout history, and America had its own dark period of witch-frenzy in Salem Massachusetts in the late 1600’s. I wanted to reclaim the word and

imbue it with power and productive resistance. In *Reincarnations*, a witch is a woman who lives outside or on the edges of society, and who doesn't conform to cultural structures of ideal femaleness, and represents a feral womanhood. Even further, witches are agents of environmental reclamation who protect the land from forces of destruction, aligning closely with ecofeminist goals:

These [ecofeminist] struggles are waged against the 'maldevelopment' and environmental degradation caused by patriarchal societies, multinational corporations, and global capitalism. They are waged for environmental balance, heterarchical and matrifocal societies, the continuance of indigenous cultures, and economic values and programs based on subsistence and sustainability. (Gaard 2)

One place where this is most clearly manifest is in "Scenic Prairie Hills", where a man has built a house on rural prairie land, representing invasion and destruction. The man, John, ruminates about his lost his job in the chemical industry, due to allowing illegal dumping of chemical waste into water sources. He notices his dog acting strangely as they move into the house, and John has two supernatural encounters himself before the story culminates with a witch possessing the man's dog and attacking him through it, effectively clearing him off the land.

Throughout my explorations, I was guided by questions such as: "Where do the bodies of the land and the human meet?" "How can I represent women as resisters of environmental oppression?" and "How can I give voice to experiences and concerns many women face?" In my creative work, I hope to create an intersection between contemporary feminist Confessionalism and Eco-poetics and Ecofeminism through my use of the narrative "I" and the poetics of place and politics.

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Poem for my last summer in Washington (Heavy with nostalgia)

It was spent under a shredded tarp barn

// every *n i g h t* //

The ceiling felt cathedral-high

when my head was too heavy

to look anywhere else

The nights were opaque as the brandy

in our glass-clenched hands

// every *d o l l a r* //

In a mess of blankets

we sat on fold-up

camping chairs with pacific

northwest silence curled into our laps

A dog barks a few yards over

// every *g r a m* //

We pledged allegiance

to when the burn began

I imagined my father on his knees

sifting through cement for ashes

Cement

To lay cement on the broken
patio, hands drought
cracked dry from skin-absorbent dust.
Men wait outside
Home Depot for a pickup
and some cash. Sweat smeared eyes.
We carry heavy bags
of rubble through rows
of dead cars. Ahead, a cream-smooth
coyote skull catches
and refracts light.

Swedish Pancake Family Recipe

1. Find a large bowl with steep sides. Wonder if this is the time you'll get a bloody chicken fetus as you hold an egg wrapped in fingers over the rim. Take a deep breath and crack 3 eggs, one after another. Discard the shells by tossing them into the sink to be shattered in the whirlwind of the disposal.
2. Grimace as you reach into the bowl and scoop the first golden yolk into your palm. Hold it there and use the other hand to peel off the spun umbilical cord and other bunched-up white pieces. The idea of the slippery bits in your mouth makes you want to vomit. Repeat twice more. Beat the eggs with a whisk.
3. Add 1/3 cup of granulated white sugar and think about diabetes. Your father pushes insulin into his stomach every night, winces and holds blue bruise-blotches. Wonder if it runs in your family, and start to count carbs. Promise yourself to only eat carrots and apples for the rest of the day (but eat spaghetti with marinara sauce later and hate yourself a little bit more). Mix well.
4. Fold in 1 cup of flour one shake at a time. The batter will be thick and gooey like American pancakes. Resist the urge to dip your index finger and suck the breadly sweetness into your mouth. Think about how your great grandmother Irene came from Sweden as an infant, and how she made these for you every Sunday after church until she was hospitalized.
5. Slowly pour in 1 and 1/2 cups of 1% or 2% milk. This is the crucial stage because any chunks left in the end will diminish the quality of the final product. The milk will dive into the batter and look like a mushroom cloud from overhead, a white stain in the cream-gold batter. Use the whisk to beat furiously until combined; add more milk after it smoothens out.
6. By now, the batter should be thin and off-white. Keep beating, and be on the lookout for lumps. Meticulously break them up. Be mesmerized by the rhythmic flow of batter.
7. Warm large pan on the stovetop and melt a generous amount of butter until it bubbles like hot springs. Think of how no one else in the family bothered to learn how to make these the way Grandma Irene did.
8. Pour a small amount of batter onto the center of the pan. Lift it in your hand immediately and spread the batter until it becomes as thin as possible. American pancakes are thick slabs of air pockets and Bisquick. Swedish pancakes are light like the film that builds over a frozen lake.
9. Watch as steam flows and the outer rim begins to peel itself from the skillet. When cooked to your taste, flip it with the spatula, or, if you're experienced, swish it around the pan and vault it upwards so it flips in midair.
10. The first pancake never turns out as well as the rest, but make sure it gets eaten anyway. Think of how Grandma Irene always warned you to never draw outside the lines of the Tweety Bird coloring book. When you complained to your mom about her sternness, she told you about the Great Depression and the stockpile of canned goods in Grandma Irene's basement. Try to imagine a hunger that never leaves the stomach.
11. Serve with your choice of toppings and condiments; your mom likes granulated sugar, your younger brother Jacob likes them almost raw and rolled with string cheese in the center. Personally, you prefer it the way Grandma Irene did— slightly burnt and sprinkled with powdered sugar.

Text of Puget Sound

bottle caps and clam shells
are ocean

harvest oil
and gasoline runoff
from interstate 5

the last person
to leave Seattle

please
turn out the lights thirst
for arsenic water

pathogens
sterile sand piper
rain gardens with lead soil
dead acres eelgrass
cradling invertebrates

tidflats
and plastic bags
shimmer with pinto abalone

growth
inside estuary of chemical
mosaic infested waters
unrefined petroleum
fights reclamation of the
water bodies

Dream Sequence

Last night I dreamt of hands encrusted with gleaming yellow teeth, canines punctured straight through the palm and poking through to the other side, jaws clenched so tight they were almost fully closed.

I stand illuminated under parking lot flood lights. Swollen like puzzlegrass, my arthritic fingers struggle with each plastic bag I place into the bed of my Ford. After each bag's been loaded, I walk my grocery cart to the return. The only sound is the jangle of loose wheels against concrete, then plastic bouncing off hollow metal as I shove the cart in.

I blame the night terrors on Caroline's miniature poodle sleeping in the bed with us every night, but Caroline denies it and argues that whatever's been killing the cattle is the harbinger of my bad dreams. I guess that might make more sense.

I turn to head back to the truck.

Last time we fought about it, Caroline said that nothing happens in our marriage bed except sleep, so Moody might as well join in. I had no comeback for that one.

Before me, a dog: huge, black, yellow-eyed. It stands stark and ear-piqued, every hair on its body bristled. Neither of us move; I, caught in the headlights of its yellow eyes, and it, having found me.

It's more than just cattle now. I found the first carcass three weeks ago in the east pasture. My favorite mare was heavy with foal. I kept her separated from the herd in the pen nearest the house in birth anticipation. Yesterday before my morning rounds, her flanks were thin again. Her ears pricked back and forth, and she stomped the ground, spooked. She bolted as I opened the gate. I found a piece of trampled umbilical cord in the grass surrounded by membrane. A trail of flattened grass and bits of clogged blood began in the direction of the house, but then vanished, leading to nothing. The baby was nowhere to be found.

Our eyes move into each other and its lips open over greyed canines. I open my palms to it and in the same moment it bounds into action, running at me before I can turn away. It barrels into me, its weight throwing me to the concrete, both my hands clenched in its jaws. I should scream, but I feel no pain, can only watch in wonder as my oily blood pours along the dog's mouth. I try pushing its shoulder away with my left hand, digging my nails into its thick-furred hide.

When I wake up, I need to move my hands. I need to know if they *can* move.

Slick with blood, my fingers curl like bird wings, scraping the dog's undulating tongue.

The half-moon below the right thumb from a fishing hook, the diagonal horizon on the back of my left hand from a pocket knife, the crook of my right middle finger from being bitten by a steer-- it's all there. I look to my right; I can tell Caroline is awake although she feigns sleep. Moody is at her stomach, swirled into himself. I deep-breathe for a minute or two, like the marriage counselor suggested I do when I find myself half-wild.

"I had that same dream again," I say as I sit up. "Probably because of that damn dog."

"Some say black dogs are bad omens," Caroline says without moving.

"Moody's the only bad omen I see around here," I say. Coffee begins to call my name.

I step into the kitchen, looking down at a scuff in the floor and making a mental note to buff it out later today, when I hear a low growl. I jerk my head up right before the blur of black fur and gleaming yellow eyes is on me, pulling me to the ground. The dog's eyes are level with mine. They seem to glow, their light penetrating my pupils. My scream is caught in my throat, and the dog pulls it from me, the sinew of my neck flesh hanging from its jaws before it sinks its teeth into me again.

Questions for the Women Seattle Does Not Remember

Who are you?

Before the distorted evergreen man

With veins like broken windows

Who lingered inside the tree-line

Did you ever feel safe?

Speak with what is left

The tongue must feel you

Reaching through its nest

What happens after ferns consume you?

Silt marshes marched through

By women with reeds in their throats

And fishing wire in their breasts

When did your blood drain?

Tire tracks printed into leaves

His presence becomes absence and then presence

Again worms dig their heads into bloated skin

Did you feel his garrote slip around your neck?

Bones scrape lost hooks

Soft currents drift hair over her face

But her eyes search from beneath the water

Water Year

are a sea surf acepers (econ d
;ocean he atflo wplag.uesi nce'18 80
- dry landb{ecom es wetlands -
i nch>magnI tudekil ometermile
wildfire @cre-footfloodg atesthIrst
atmo , spheric riverscoast) linecreep
milelongstreamflow acId : oce.anmi gration
cro psw%ither Inthe - se*ed
radI~atio nthIrt\$yyear ex^tremerisem_eter
- wet landsbeco}me ope;nwater -

Ring Dance

first dancer girl showed them the power of hips moving in rhythm. now she holds wolf's bane in each hand and chamomile is braided through her hair. music rises and the others start to come alive. faces tip upwards and dancer girl extends her right hand in offering, then it falls back to her side. it's time to move starting left, then stops reverse. three steps sway. the next circle. concentric loops. girl's first partner faces crisscrossing his arms. feels him without skin. tandem, carried by the partner, a broad-time; dancer girl hears chin slightly out, staring heavy eyes. they cross the loop and share palms. circle. switch hands. circle again. as they release, the woman places a hawk feather in dancer girl's hand. back and forth, sway. torn apart, they follow the steps of the rings. chamomile falls to the ground. bow.

you pushing against
me circling
you circling
me pushing against

feet. she glides in a circle, and follows her steps in forward, one step back. dancers shift in three rootstock underfoot. dancer her-- a man with veins like their eyes touch and she sway. turn and move in undulating ring. twirl. new shouldered woman this drums. the woman holds her down at dancer girl through

Entering Kansas

The Camry buckles under the weight of twenty years
and midnight humidity. Freeway concrete kisses
the punch of the gas pedal and headlights slice
through the absence ahead. Overgrown buck grass
hides coyotes that peep out to watch us pass.
Above, the vast star-pregnant sky gleams
like shattered beer bottles on the road, and I say
It is a good sign.

Headlight-illuminated:
“Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you” –God
(Jeremiah 15)
reads a billboard just on the inside
of the Kansas state line.
It offers the guidance of a phone number
in sturdy red letters. Sunflower printed road markers
tick off each mile.

My mom left for home
and I wait to pay for paintbrushes
at Home Depot. The man in cargo jeans
and a ripped tank top ahead of me
turns and eats my hips with his eyes.
He passes and whispers
I like that dress.

On Iowa Street:
ABORTION IS A SIN
ABORTION=DEATH
MOMMY DON'T KILL ME
They write it and I hear the letters
louder than their chant.

I walk down Massachusetts Street
through a downpour. A homeless man
with a grey beard tells my ex-boyfriend
You take care of that girl tonight
and measures my sway as I walk away.

President Obama comes to speak
at the University of Kansas. I drive

to campus and pass a mob
of protesters with Deport Obama signs
handwritten in red. Farther down, a lone man
with a hidden face sits on the frozen ground,
a sign propped between his legs:
DEPORT THE SAND TAR

Obama's security team asks
for rooftop construction work to be halted
for the day. I try to resist
playing the Zapruder film
in my head.

I don't pray, but I think
about praying
for him.

Rivers

The Kansas River asks me why I'm here
Thirst-earth brittles under water swollen skin
thick greyed fat
A lone gull preens in wind light
I ask him to trim my edges
Construction cordoned
threshers bleed dry dirt
Leeched Hickory trees loom
spread to catch my coat
or feel the warmth of my wrist

The Puget Sound pulls me under
asks if I can feel her bones
Sea lions sprout from the current
watch my arms swing
I ask about the riptide
Oysters clasped taut
break against the grey rocks
where the invertebrates sleep

El Dorado Lake pushes below me
leaps to wet me with his saliva
I move over him like hands through hair
and tell him about dark red earth
He asks me how long
His branches stretch
like finger bones blooming
from molten earth
I ask him how to sleep

The Columbia River exhales frozen air
pulls away layers of smoke and dried sweat
She asks if I've had enough
Silvery brown fish thrash against
desert canyon basin carved dust roads
I ask if she has more
Brown bottles wait on shore

Amelia Earhart

cold hits crumble brickyard eyelids
We must be on you, but cannot see you—
asphalt tracks meet yellowed grass
but gas is running low. Have been unable to reach you by radio.
jittery hands against smooth alloys and black fleece
We are flying at 1,000 feet.

follow the needle point star tracks
We are on the line 157 337. We will repeat this message.
dislocate bedroom gasoline use book pages as tinder
We will repeat this on 6210 kilocycles. Wait
outdoor murmurs slip under the seam

bird calls the eagle outside the abandoned church
281 north Howland - call KHAQQ - beyond north –

how much do you want this
won't hold with us much longer -- above water -- shut off

crisscross through suburbs
with wine in your chest
here put your ear to it

are you so scared

Discontent

I want a white colonial two story
with a domed widow's perch
a willow in the green front yard
an apple tree by the dirt road
to feed any hunger that walks by

I want back alleyways
streetlamp light to hit my cheekbones
as my lips suck a blunt
men dressed in shade to look at me
and to not be afraid to stare back

I want white eyelet baby blankets
a master bedroom with a balcony
that I can stand on naked
early morning eyes closed
with my husband's smell braided into my skin

I want to be fucked in the men's room
of a neon ignited dive bar
by a man with eyes like whiskey
and hands not afraid to pull
to feel weightless as I leave

I want ivy crept walls
birdsong in the morning
a baby's innocent eyelashes
and pink spit-glossed lips
my husband's deep hum in the water

I want my rent to be 7-11 gas
the feel of a new sunken pull-out couch
every night of the week
cities each with a new shade of night
and bottles wrapped in paper bags

I want familiar Sunday rumpled sheets
cinnamon sugar spiced kitchen
to fasten a tie around my husband's neck
while thinking about taking
it off again that night

I want dilated pupils
shredded red ribbon lips
for the cold to feel like warmth
to wear no one's words
around my waist

21

Neon light
layers his face
as he leans into my ear
to say
something
about his childhood

I nod and watch
his thin hand

stroke

the

neck

of the beer bottle
between his legs

The sunken brown
leather couch
hard against the silhouette
of his jawline

Behind us
a drunken musician

begs

for

whiskey

breath

Later
the climb into his blue
pick-up truck
on an 18 degree midnight

His apartment
black leather pressed
against my neck

I open scattered

knives

and

bottles

on plastic countertops

He stands aside

offers me something harder

and watches my hands

grow up

his

body

like

ivy

Gaslight

He came
wearing the skin
of a lion
and refused to roar
until he'd paid for my drink

My hair was fish-scaled

His eyes were gold-slit

I watched him
through crinkled lashes
and wrapped
water bearer fingertips
around
dripping
cold
glass

He Hums My Hymen Hymn

His heartbeat settles
between my shoulder blades
as he breaks over my back

I ask what it is
to hold womanhood in your hands

His thumbs press into bone
cover tongue-pulled blood vessels

I become breath
against the bleached skin
droplets on his forearms

Holy Relics

Saint Thérèse body paste
the thread of Saint Anthony of Padua
bone fragments of St. Francis of Assisi
Apostle Paul's fingernail
Mary the Virgin's pubic hair
I want to peel off his bottom lip
and carry it in my mouth

Night Routine, Option A

We act as if my staying the night is not a planned inevitability. I say I am too drunk to drive; if I don't, he will cite the two shitty 4% ABV beers and say I am a lightweight. We are not ready to acknowledge our weekend ritual, are always ready to pretend like this is spur of the moment.

He sleeps better curled into the cusp of my hand. I lay still, not wanting to wake him.

Wind / weather / words / sleep / a branch scratches the window glass

I sit up half-conscious; he rubs my back in the dark silence.

Night Routine, Option B

The gourd of Ursa Major points to my bedframe.

Morning Routine, Option A

I'm pushed against the wall, his leg python-like around mine. Some unnamed human instinct synchronizes when our eyelids twitch open. He says he is a *dominant sleeper*, and I say, *That is true*.

He slides out of our tangle, walks naked to the bathroom, and I begin to frantically search for what I came with. I pull my dress back on over my head as quickly as I can and am back under the blankets before he comes back. He peeks at the weather outside his window, and then slides in next to me, eyes closed and arm slung around my waist.

Morning Routine, Option B

I search the popcorn ceiling for outlines and traces. A familiar river current of blue cotton and white dog hair swirls around me. My palms seek out cool patches of vacancy and live inside them for a while.

Poem for my first summer in Kansas (Warm to the touch)

My washer-fresh dresses
were suspended by hooks
and doorknobs like ghost children
surrounding the bed
in my grandparent's small guest bedroom

Lightning bugs flashed
in the peripheral like a head rush
while fireworks cracked
overhead and I lay face down

We were spent in beds
that were never ours

Yellow fields waved as I sped
down highways that were
always between state lines

Cicadas hummed
in vibrating trees like my great-grandma
Irene's chest when I would press
my ear against her as she sang
hymns in her son's church

Believe me
I was spent

How to Prepare a Catfish

The catfish floats in the shallow bucket-water listlessly, body stretching from tail-tip to nose against the white plastic, her companions in death already belly-up. I lean in closer, wanting to catch her eye. She sloshed around for twenty minutes in the bed of a truck under direct midsummer Kansas sunrays, and I wish I could fish-talk her an apology-- not that it would help anything; her fate was sealed the moment she weighed over six pounds.

Under fluorescent kitchen lights, the catfish glimmers as the fisherman pours her into the brushed steel sink and waits. My own breath becomes shallow as the catfish asphyxiates, and I watch her unblinking eyes, opened wide with panic and resignation. Her gills stretch open and laboriously close as the man positions a blade at the base of her skull. Quickly he drives his knife through the skin and pink-white flesh to sever the spinal cord. The man cuts a ring around the head. He removes the dorsal and ventricle fins with blood-oiled fingers. *See*, he says, spreading the fins open like a fan in front of my face. *Look at the spines. They can cut through your skin, easy.*

The man shows me how to peel back the skin from the laceration below the head, then grabs hold of the flap with a pair of pliers. He grips tightly and pulls. The catfish's brownish green skin begins to separate and comes off inside-out. The underside of the skin is shimmering and opalescent. Scales loosen and disseminate, dusting fingers and blood with flaked silver. The man continues removing strips of skin. The air smells like wet salt.

The spine is broken by slowly bending the head back to the tail, then to the stomach, *crack crack crack crack* of bone. The head comes off easy. The man unseams her from tail to chin to open the cavity and pulls out the entrails, then slices through the top midline, careful not to graze the backbone. He separates the fillet from the vertebrae as he works the knife along the ventral. His hands know what they're doing—he grips the knife firmly but the dismantling is gentle. He works like that and I watch with a hand over my mouth.

Finally each piece of channel catfish is laid out. The skin and fins are in a plastic Walmart bag which sags with the weight of blood and carcass. The head, gape-mouthed and scratch-eyed, is tossed in as well.

It's done, the fisherman says. *You made it.*

Weight

We are
an act
of scales

The weight of

breast milk
hair on the floor
cheekbone
morning coffee
lullaby
spun wool
tread-bare tires
foreheads slit with ash

There's an Amen
in this
somewhere

Plan B

He slept soundly next to me
eased into unconsciousness
like he
eased into me

When I asked for it
in a blushed whisper
the pharmacist silently nodded
asking only if I
had any questions
and refused eye contact

I wanted to ask
How many women forfeited meals
for this forty dollars
How many women's hands
were filled with salt
How many women
smelled smoke
How many
women?

He didn't offer to pay for half
but I did make him
knife open the plastic seams
and watch me
take it

Reincarnation

I wrote our break-up poem
hours before
I knelt at the altar
of his bed
bare
and said
Friends

My skin
always sticky
with grey space

He had to drink
to meet
on common ground

I had to drink
to allow myself
the comfort of the carpet

I went off
to consume him
and now
I begin
again

We meet as friends

Four hours later

.

..

...

....

...

..

.

reincarnated

Kansas City

They say
people dance how they fuck

We moved
with the heat of cease-fire
all hands and neck

Blue spotlights
traced our outlines
and the music pumped
like the inside of bodies

At 2am
we sipped coffee
thigh by thigh in a diner
and on the car ride home
he pulled my face into his

Choral

*How is she different and similar
to me?*

Off the side of the freeway in pasture-land Texas.

*Who do you think of when your
feet are bare?*

It's the sin in it.

When do the cherry blossoms catch?

I take it black.

*How long does it take you to
sleep?*

She was ropey and tough; you are soft and ripe.

Where do the bluebonnets grow?

We meet on the underside of the tongue.

Air/Fire

He said I felt like home
his soft breath-voice against my rain
drenched Pacific Northwest neck

I felt his hair in my hand
the gooseflesh of his river bank spine
and tasted his verbs

I drank shots of his cologne
mixed with Jack Daniels

Later
I leaned into his front doorway
chanting

Don't make this a sad thing
This isn't a sad thing
Don't make this a sad thing

My clothes in my arms
shirt purse car keys jacket
leaving traceless

He stood in the center of the living room
palms out
afraid to touch my windstorm
while I held out hope
that he'd throw his sparks in

Fire should leak
from the corners of my mouth

He called it
the day we finished the bottle
not the day I walked out

Break-Up Curse

I hope you find
a rat's nest
of my hair
in your bed

Let it be known

I hope
you're cold

Let it be known

I hope your vocal
chords seize with things
you'd whisper to me

Let it be known

I hope cotton
spun spider hollows
nestle into every corner
of your bedroom

Let it be known

Prophecy

I delivered my windstorm words
and retreated over state lines
through prairie and red clay

I didn't miss his skeleton
man finger bones
or his hooked cats tongue

He licked the rain I poured

With my finger
on his Adam's apple

I said

Claws can't sink into tornado flesh

As the Miles Pass

163 miles to Wichita
and I think about Leos

96 miles to Wichita
fingers knotted through my hair

102 miles from Tulsa
his lips were lined with black inside
more

78 miles from Tulsa
I think about bite marks

107 miles out from Oklahoma City
and I think about his shock-red handprint
yes

50 miles from Oklahoma City
the puddles of bruise spilled on my arms
please

Yes
my index finger against his tongue
more

Yes

Oklahoma City Welcome

Oklahoma City welcomes you
with veins of lightning
and thunder
that shakes your car.

Oklahoma City
wants to know
what you're made of.

Oklahoma City
knows your secrets.

Oklahoma City
wants to feel the panic
in your chest
when it whispers
in your ear.

Payne County

The darkness beyond this guardrail
isn't hollow. Numb hands grip the wheel

as the officer stares into my eyes
printed on the slice of plastic.

He wants to know why
I'm driving in Oklahoma

from Kansas with Illinois plates
and a Washington State license.

I want to know how
his eyes refract red and blue,

How he sewed himself so seamlessly
into this skin. Twenty over,

slip of paper, free to go. I crawl from the roadside
and watch darkness overtake his cruiser

as I slide back into night's dark embrace.

On Ancestry

Her grandfather
or
her grandmother's
grandfather
was pressed dry under oil
drums
his sweat salted skin
sutured to blood-
wet
Enid soil

Splintered ribs
bite the organs

Red earth
fills his mouth

His blood
and her blood
and her
blood
courses through the vaults
runs with the oil

The oil
is
blood
is
vein-flow
is
Oklahoma
is
inheritance

SHUT

He asks me to walk with him to the liqueur store to pick up some smokes. I had been hiding in my makeshift room. I put on my best face and say *Okay* even though I don't want to be alone with him. He's family, after all. The store is only a couple blocks down. He talks a lot of coiled speak and I don't say much. His eyes are sharp and too quick, unnervingly slit and painted onto his face. Underage, I try to act natural and examine tiny bottles piled in a large bin. On the way back, he marks a line on the road a block past our grandparent's house and warns me that it's the bad part of town. Points out a house where *bad things happen*. It all looks the same to me. It's dusk now and he's breathing heavily, burnt out from the last OD, *the big one*. Still telling me about the trauma, the old bruises, the lines in his skin. About abandonment. My mom says not to believe a word; my grandma says she doesn't know where it comes from.

I just keep my mouth shut.

Bus Ride After Ride After

Always the same
rush out the house
with only just enough
time to spare
Always the same
route to and from
one big circle
get on anywhere
like a carousel
but instead
of riding a unicorn
or a dragon
I ride a huge metal
caterpillar
that munches
on fossil fuel
instead of Rainier
cherry tree leaves.

Collect me

see me as

angles

see me as

collarbone

see me as

mirage

see me as

waterfall

see me as

gunmetal

Under the Cover of Darkness

Night crawls down my throat
and I say
I want to feel her clit on my tongue

I sit
at 2am
on the stairs to my apartment
whispering in my best husk
into her ear
what the night tells me

October's cool hand
pushes into me
and I push
back

Going Down on Kansas

she breathes humidity into my ear
and her fingernails are half-moon
darkened with dry soil

once she told me
how her fingertips were stolen
and replaced with thimbles

her touch is wind-rushed prairie
and she kindles me with threads of fire

part of her is always scorched

her chin tilts upward as I feel
the cool damp earth inside her
and her moan is a coyote howl in deep night

my breath rushes over her sunflower-seed
gooseflesh like wind through turbines

the plains of her stomach
are marked with wheel-rut stretch marks
and marched footprints cut deep

her trails are hidden with regrowth
and her breasts leak milk for stolen children

I watch her hawk-flown eyes
as I move towards her center
and the whites are weather-smoothed grave markers

between her legs
a flash-flood of rainwater pools
in my cupped palm

Scatter

You don't see them until they run. In the darkness, their grey-brown pelts melt into overgrown prairie. You can barely make out the faint flash of the rabbit's white tails bounding ahead of you before they disappear, woven into the tallgrass. Dry stems rustle in their wake. You follow their symphony until all is silent again. Your heart beats harder with each step taking you farther away from your warm, safe bed. The silence they leave you with only amplifies your quick and shallow breath, and the sound of the shifting underbrush your weight disturbs.

Scatter. This time the rabbits were right in front of you, waiting until the very last moment to jolt ahead. It's a moonless night; even the light pollution from nearby cities doesn't reach these skies. You already know exactly how they look, though. You've followed them before, but not this far.

Your first clue was a dismembered field mouse you found nailed to a cottonwood tree. Each tiny human-like hand was pierced and the stomach was slit, entrails dripping, blood soaking into the bark. The rabbits have grown larger since then, to the size of small dogs.

Scatter. Still you follow, climbing over a small felled tree. Claw marks are etched knee-high into the outside of each polished wood door that leads inside your house. You ran your fingertips over each grooved scratch, hoping to read their language. The scratches were barely visible at first, but now splintered wood is spread outside each doorway.

Scatter. You've glimpsed their master before, or at least think you have.

The carcasses of the chickens you lovingly housed and fed leftovers from antique dinner plates were found strewn outside their coop, plucked clean and decapitated, their light glossy feathers stuffed down their naked throats. The heads were gone. Your whole body bristled as you knelt down, sensing his presence behind you, but he was gone, or nearly there, when you spun around with the knife you kept in your pants pocket in hand. All you saw was a streak of dull yellow fur escaping into the hills.

Scatter. You sense that you're nearly there. The rabbits leave less and less space between their stillness and their flight. You wonder if they're scared you'll turn back.

Scatter.

The darkness begins to redden ahead and you can smell the sharp scent of smoke. The brush you're wading through slowly thins.

Scatter.

Yips and animal calls slice through your ears. You hear a wild drumbeat pound. Your body is warm, almost fever-hot. You see movement in a clearing, shadows seizing and breaking through the trees. Entranced, you are compelled to come forward.

A huge bonfire roars in the center of the clearing. Around it, the animals dance in a crowded circle. A bald eagle with the legs of a man convulses, screeching, as smooth skin begins to show under thinning feathers. Wings spread; feathers fall to the ground and into the cracking fire, revealing human arms. A bobcat pulls fistfuls of grey hair from her body with human hands and wails as a white-tailed deer-man knocks into her in a frenzy of mutation. Standing on its back legs, a fox rips open the seams of its skin, and a naked woman steps out. She throws the fur onto the ground. Snake skins tangle and disintegrate underfoot. Howls, screeches, flapping, and gnashing converge into crescendo.

Through the smoke, King Coyote sheds his pelt. One of the rabbit-women pulls you in. King Coyote stands naked, arms raised, and howls into the moonless night sky.

In the Field

crop circles
cow bones
uprooted in the till
roots fine as hair
shirt fibers
knot through soil
crop rotation
buried layers
oxidized wheat penny
wrapped in gold threads
pants buttons
deeper
downed meadowlark
skeletons sun-bleached
human teeth
lengths of iron
chains rusted
bullet shells below
shards of glass
against flint arrowheads
horse shoe
belt buckle
deer mandible as sickle
in silt loam
bird bone earring
ceramic beads

Thanksgiving with Family in OKC

I try to remember
how many times
my 3 year old
cousin opens
the guest bedroom
door unexpectedly,
but lose track
quick.

We gently ignore
my 9 year old
cousin asking
how we met.

I stall for time
to avoid
giving green
to my 35 year old cousin,
fresh out
of prison
in Dallas.

I try to count
how many hours
my 82 year old
grandma leaves
ham and turkey
out on the counter
and how many
hours I should wait
until warning
about foodborne
illness.

I try to calculate
how many miles
from Oklahoma
City to home,
to my other
home,
and to my future
home.

Each equation
begets
a different
solution.

Men or women?

He leans into my face
eyes drowned in grey water
and howls

Come on,
what's the secret here?
as he limps after us.

He is an old coyote
who has gnawed through his leg
to escape a steel-jaw leghold trap.
He leaves a trail of blood
mixed with foam from his lips
smeared on the carpet of the casino.

Lorde Says

In the car you tell me
about the old man behind you
at Starbucks who looked you in the eye
and called you 'Sir' three times.

You say you felt like you had to take it.

I quote Audre Lorde: *Your silence will not protect you.*
You: *But it won't get me beat up, either.*

I didn't hear the cashier at Qdoba say it;
I vowed to listen harder.
The server at Little Saigon called you 'Mr.'
but corrected herself quickly-- 'Ms.'

I would have said something, I promise.

You've already been touched
by so many unwanted hands.

Growing Up

When I was young
elementary school aged
I would say that I wanted
to be a boy because it would be
easier. I was the only girl
who played soccer at recess
despite the boys only kicking
me the ball once.
I wore boys skater shoes
as a mark of pride and fierceness.
I made my conservative mom nervous.
She asked if I *really* wanted to be a boy,
like an *actual* boy. I said *No*,
but it would be convenient.
Once a boy taunted me on the field,
pulled the collar of my shirt
and looked down at my bare still-flat chest.
I never told anyone,
although the scene replayed
in my head daily. I waited
for it to slowly fade to black.
You were forced into long braids,
and all kinds of other hairstyles you hated.
You were silenced
when others assaulted your femaleness.
I was the first person you ever told about it

when we were on the precipice
of a nasty breakup. We
cried on my balcony
until the early morning.

Now look at us.

I wear dresses daily,
somewhere in that liquid space
between bisexual and straight;

You wear men's clothes,
and sheared your hair short.

A kid asks whether you're a boy or a girl.

We kind of blossomed
in opposite directions, didn't we?

Straight Men at the Bar

Straight men at the bar just love you, don't they?

Maybe it gives them some sort of pleasure

when they ignore the obvious

signs that you're not into them,

or maybe it gives them a hard on

when they try to flirt with me

right in front of you.

Remember that guy on my 22nd birthday

who kept wandering over

getting too close

because he didn't see another man around

to claim me? As if you weren't even there,

standing tall and broad, hard-eyed.

Maybe they get off on it

when you finally see red

and they call you the angry

black butch bitch who overreacted.

Remember that time last New Years

when that other guy cried

after you finally yelled at him

to leave you the fuck alone

after he asked you to dance

three separate times?

How you wondered if his eyes worked,

if he was blind to your men's clothes,

or if he's just into being dominated

by masculine women.

Remember your 28th birthday
when the man at the Sandbar
stood watching me dance with you
then tried to grab my hips
the moment we were separated?
Do you think they're intimidated
by you, a woman daring to walk
like them, daring to not demure
to them? Do you think they're scared
because you don't need a dick
to be powerful?

Cheap Seats

I bought our tickets two days before.
The student at the ticket counter said:
I gave you the best of what's left.
Cheap seats.

Black velvet runs down my arms
gold drips upon my breast
as we climb the last balcony
and count for our seats.

My date is dressed in bicycles.
polished chains grow from her shoulders;
spokes from her arms
poke the woman to her left.
Blue hangs from her neck.

I tell her: *This is revenge*
for all the basketball games
you've made me watch.

She tells me:
I'll do anything for you,
including watch ballet.

Tchaikovsky starts.

How to Summon Monsters

Scatter tangerine peels on the floor / Smear poplar pollen on the walls / Draw salt circles / But never close them / Light bergamot-scented incense / Carry coffee beans in every coat pocket / Bathe only in lakes, rivers, or streams / Collect the feathers of birds killed by wind turbines / Walk alone at night and peek into windows / Let red bookbinding rot / And peel off in your palms / Sniff out wolf dens / Trim your hair with fire / Steal candles from churches / Listen for flesh decomposition / Wear snake skin as a scarf around your neck / Fill a stranger's car with poisoned November Sparrows / Speak only in voices you don't want to hear / Catch trout with your hands and eat them raw / Bury a Bible in the wood / Suckle black cats to your breast / Scream when touched / Tattoo yourself using pine needles / Sever dog leashes / Carve curses into oil drums / Swallow bone marrow / Cut telephone lines / Replace wine with silt / Burn corn cobs / Levitate in abandoned houses /

Prairie Witch

she is summoned
wood ripped from roots
smell of burning bluestem
candlelight newly placed
in windows
crawl through tallgrass
brush hipbones
thistles embedded in spine
hands drip with rain
body upturned in the field
corn husked maggots inside
fetus in the yolk
unsilenced scream
slips through keyhole
missing rosary beads
found inside baby's lips
shake bedposts rip sheets
hollyhock sprouts from her neck
unhealed skin still slit
hearth fires will not catch
food turns to soil in the mouth
foam drips from dog's jaws
welts burned in skin incense
crucifix mumbled prayers

Run, Coyote, Run

Coyote leaps in front of my car
and lopes several feet ahead of me--
a blur of clay brown and black-flecked fur
illuminated under the headlights
following him down the middle
of the dark single lane road

Coyote's bushy tail swishes
side to side as he runs and his pointed ears
are piqued ahead. He leads me
to a fork and as I turn right
Coyote looks back at me
and sewn into his skin
is the face
of a man

Flying into Kansas City at Midnight

Porch lights float
in weightless star fields

*I'd like to be the first to welcome you
to Kansas City International Airport.*

To what are you
coming home?

Phosphoric bruise like tattooed
constellations inside your hand

*The local time is 12:07am
and the temperature is a humid 88 degrees.*

Why does this feel
like home to you now?

Freeway traffic like shimmering silver
snake scales twisting through crystal

*Please remain seated with your belt fastened
until the fasten-seatbelt sign is turned off.*

Is it because you
can see the stars here?

*Thanks for flying Alaska Airlines.
We hope to fly with you again soon.*

Or because you can't?

Lost in Kansas City

A homeless man sleeps
on a park bench while I
search for Aquarius
in battered metal

A shattered bottle
of cheap vodka whets
an aisle of the convenience
store tile

At the theatre
wood-carved cherubs
dance above my head
while I pretend
to be anywhere
but here

Line Poems

my defense mechanism: don't touch me

her defense mechanism: please touch me

how could you do this to me

please do this to me

Scenic Prairie Hills

John swings open the door to his brand new craftsman, nestled into the scenic prairie hills of rural Northeastern Kansas, with a bottle of top-shelf whiskey in one hand and a dog leash in the other. He pulls on the leash as he walks in, but Border Collie, Marnie, plants herself on the porch, front legs outstretched, and refuses to step over the threshold. After spending a minute trying to call and coax her, John yanks at the leash, swearing. Marnie yelps scuttles backwards, yelping and thrashing to escape her collar, but John doesn't stop until he has jerked her into the living room and slammed the door behind them.

John's furniture is placed haphazardly throughout the lower level; stacks of cardboard boxes with handwritten sharpie labels wait to be sorted and unpacked, his California King mattress frame is in pieces in the dining room, and his favorite worn leather armchair is directly in the center of his living room. From a box marked *Glassware*, John procures an Old Fashioned glass and pours himself a double before taking a seat.

He gulps down the remains of his glass and pours another. Early spring rain has started to fall outside. Marnie is nervously pacing in circles around the armchair, emitting a high pitched whine. Now John thinks that maybe he shouldn't have fought to keep her in the divorce. He sips his whiskey, listening to the whining and the rain. Marnie finally slinks off after a while.

This house had been a dream of his since he landed his first big promotion at Cross Chemical—a large plot of land with access to a lake overflowing with catfish, not a neighbor in sight. Of course, his dream at that time was to share his bounty with his wife, now ex, Catherine. Even thinking about that woman makes him want to drink. At least he'd made her sign a pre-nup.

John thinks about his work at Cross Chemical. He'd done good for that company, no matter what anyone says. Profits were up. The CEO was happy. He was the best thing that had *ever happened* to them! But everything is different these days. The old ways of the industry are on the outs. Gone is the era of the government minding its own goddamned business. So what if John's signature had found its way onto a document authorizing the illegal dumping of chemicals into some already-disgusting river on the other side of town? No one ever swam there anymore, anyway. Time for another drink.

The rain is stronger now, and day has gone dark. Lighting flashes illuminate the dimly lit room. John absently takes a sip from his refreshed glass and spews the liquid in a mist into the lap of his khaki pants, sputtering. He stands up, retching. His glass falls to the floor and shatters. He kneels down to examine the pool of liquid on the hardwood. It looks like muddy water. A dead waterbug floats in the middle. John swipes a line through it with his finger. A layer of grey silt has settled on the bottom.

Suddenly Marnie lets out a ear splitting howl from the kitchen. John leaps up and stumbles over a box trying to get to her. Marnie is aggressively snarling at an item in the center of the kitchen floor. John slowly approaches. The item is a small cross made of sticks. Hands shaking, John picks it up and examines it. Something wafts to the ground. John looks over and when he recognizes what it is, he's paralyzed with fear. On the floor is a lock of John's hair, chestnut brown and streaked with grey, tied together with a thread.

A clap of thunder shakes the house and the lights cut out. Marnie growls low in the darkness. Hackles raised and ears pinned back, she stalks into the living room and John follows. Marnie growls at the large bay window. The darkness outside is near impenetrable. Slowly, John begins to make something out—he sees familiar shapes, a slight shift of movement, as he inches his face closer to the glass pane. His eyes focus and quickly, instinctively, he screeches and flies backwards. John lunges behind Marnie as lightning cracks, illuminating a dark human-like figure standing right outside the bay window. John sees long hair thinned with rain, a body swirling with indistinguishable shapes moving inside. The figure stares in. Lightning flashes. The figure slowly raises her arm, pointing directly at John. Marnie turns toward him.

Marnie snarls and stalks towards John, raising her lips over yellowing canines, fangs snapping and fur bristled. John screams as he tries to get away, his arms raised in defense. Marie's eyes are crazed, rabid. Her eyes suddenly roll back in her head, only the whites visible. Foam from her mouth falls to the floor. Marnie lunges on top of him, tearing into his chest. Past the dog's shoulders, the witch stands inside the house. Her arms are held out to each side as if she's crucified. John feels no pain but screams as watches Marnie gnashes into his stomach, pulling out a piece of stringy digestive track. The witch reaches down and runs two fingers across a pool of John's blood, then sucks her fingers into her mouth

for now

gas light filtered through stained glass meter run through beyond the horoscope printed on the backside of the mattress or the wet brown leaves at the bottom of the jar. who do you slide into? who watches? cloudy clear crystal I can sink my teeth into and slide across the mouth. lights flashing on the freeway and sirens. who they come to collect burst down the door to reveal the holy space, cosmos churning in afterbirth perpetuity.

I said *I see it* but I lied.

fortunes told and cast dog bites and dirt underfoot into what I told you heavy hanging from my back. you asked and I sleep best with fire on my nightstand. witch hazel falling from mouths leaking salt water inside the well water for drinking. oxygen inside wrists bubbling like molars in gums.

how long can it last? we go searching.

I'm not ready I'm not ready I'm not ready

Future Child

What is that? *Bone*

Who is she? *She is your mother*

I am your mother Why is it dark?

You will know when it's safe

Who is older? *Pray for your sisters*

When will it end? *When the eclipse blooms*

And everything is returned to red