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Only One Went through the Green Door

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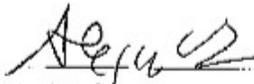
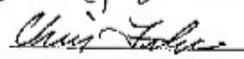
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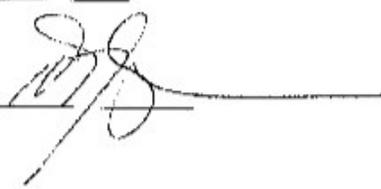
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ONLY ONE WENT THROUGH
THE GREEN DOOR

POEMS BY
RACHEL SAHAIDACHNY

Only One Went Through the Green Door

Poems

By

Rachel Sahaidachny

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing
to the Department of English
at Butler University.

April 2016

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Drawing from the Dark

—so we said to the somewhat: *Be born—*
& the shadow kept arriving in segments
Brenda Hillman, “Equinox Ritual with Ravens and Pines”

Lately, at times when I read Plath (*The Collected Poems*) the poems seem overwritten. The first time I experienced this thought it really shocked me. I wondered what changed—how could I (and why would I) criticize any of her work? I realized that in some of her poems I was more aware of the effort it took to make the language lovely than of what the poem was saying, as though I was utterly distracted by the spell of it. I considered that the criticism perhaps had more to do with some thread of expectation in my own work—and a worry about my in general melodramatic, and overdramatized inclination. This drive to make things not “boring.”

Overwriting is an attempt to escape the personalized, to infiltrate the impersonal space and achieve a “larger than your life resonance,” in effort to communicate the abstract. In my drafts of poems the images sometimes seem obscured by the language: a thickening, a stuttering of the line, a sudden insertion (perhaps leading to a rejection of the poem’s intention), an overdone redundancy of the subject, rather than a declaration. Lavish language for coded work. It’s been a difficult journey to find the lines which contain weight equal to charge and beauty. This is important, because I have a narrative and not just a bunch of tricky or fascinating images. I have something to coax from within. Perhaps I should have been reading more Rich.

The quest in my writing poems is to write balanced between the personalized and the impersonal space—to protect the self but use the personal. Ellen Bryant Voight spoke on the persona of the poem, and difficulty of the subjective in the poem versus the individualized when she visited the Efroymson. “Great poems instill some essence of human experience.” She advised: write poems using personal memory and charged language to create the subjective experience, but the

private must be isolated protected. Who is the lens the poem comes through? How do you view the poem separate from the self? The concept is the poem does not disclose self, it discloses experience. Sometimes it takes a lot of writing and fancy lines before a poet can write about experiences without the explicitness of the self.

At first I found it very difficult to use *I* in poems. *I* was secret, and didn't want to be shown. Often, in a case for *I*, the imperative would assert itself on my pages, trying to give the *I* some directive, or instructions. Years ago when I met Alice Friman and she learned a bit about my narrative she recommended, "write in the third person when it's difficult to write." Then, at Conversations, when Ellen Bryant Voight spoke of the personalized poem, she mentioned the same thing, write in third person when the material is personal.

I was frustrated, so many of my poems were entirely obscured by high lyricism, and surreality—language and image that I loved, but which I was overusing. What was on the page had a shimmer to it, like a dream—but like a dream it would fade into the obscure. What seemed electric and intensely interesting before was fading into boredom and leaving me utterly dissatisfied with poems.

Over the summer at the Squaw Valley Community of Writers Poets Workshop, as Sharon Olds stood in front of us ready to read her poems she said, "Just now the little voice in me was telling me not to do this, that the poems are no good. But then I looked out and saw all of your wonderful loving faces, and I knew I could stand here and read you my poems." For me it was really incredible to hear someone whose rich and personal poems have been with me through the years admit to the same struggles—it is difficult to face the past, the world, the poems.

Over the last year I began writing in the third person, and I developed the narrative of *she* and *I*. *She* and *I* have ties to reality, but both are also fabrications (from Daisy Fried: "Consider every poem to be a persona poem. None of it is true"), and because of their intimate and haunted

relationship I found room to use the lyricism I love while giving the poems a clear emotional center and drive that tackled the themes I wanted to explore. Finally, there was a ridge to balance on.

Landscape also proved a useful tool to cross the barrier between inside world and outer. Recently in a talk given by Marianne Boruch, she said, “Place is where the writer begins to see.” The details of a place may engage in a subtle shift, and quiet materialization of the inner or outer conflict. The inner-self and the past-self become present through the images. “If it’s not inside person talking to inside person it’s not a poem,” (Donald Hall); existence is a form of art. Consider Yeats’s double gyre: history, thought, and memory entangled with the body, the soul, and senses; the crossing spiral lines—inner and outer world occupy the same space. Each spiral ascends and descends. Poetry crosses both spirals. The consciousness in my poems struggles with the boundaries between the past and the present., treading both realms in a sometimes disorienting desire to allow each to exist at the same moment. At time lines float on the page, unpunctuated, because they are spiraling between intentions and emotions.

I write from body and place and attempt to bridge the exterior with the interior. I still remember, when I was young, the first time I ever stood outside, under a sky falling into darkness because of gathering clouds, and I was at the side gate, next to the street. I had to stop and watch, and feel the fizzle of the light rain on my cheeks. There’s a parking lot across the street, so I could see a lot of the sky, and I had this feeling inside—a sudden dissolving of my skin, the outside poured into me, and I wrote a poem. A little lyric about living in that exact moment, and the world pouring in: “The awful daring of a moment’s surrender,” (T.S. Elliot), a pure moment of existence. When I write from place I often sense an unnamed tension, but a sinuous threat prevails in the sense that the place will disappear, and I must write it into existence.

Dean Young said, “Songs make sense in terms of ways that are not logical or narrative.” I still engage in surreal images, and lyrical language to draw out the unknown. I might leap away and

leave a line or scene before it is complete, I might let an image or declaration float, leave some part of the poem to exist between the phrases and the silences. Some might call a poem an interrogation. How do you interrogate a shadow?

For me surrealism is not a tool, but a part of the narrative; and I tend toward chaotic movements in the poems—which is not necessarily a strength, and in fact I have worked to negate a lot of the confusion and chaos by finding some anchor to entrench the subject. The drive to be chaotic I think comes from the disordered history of my emotional world, and in allowing myself to write anything at all. The poem unfolds its own knowledge in its own space. These are the doors it enters and leaves. Do I stay close or do I leap? Someone once told me the poem can't enter the same door it came in...but people prefer a softer exit. The first poets I read were Neruda and Sexton, and I read them completely, utterly, over and over again, when I was fifteen, sixteen, and finally began reading whole collections of poetry.

There is a chaos captured on their pages, a woundedness, and beauty, disclosures of disorientation, and disillusionment. Poems which explore sensuality by exposing the rift between life and the soul, and the will, and of belonging.

I admire the way that Brenda Hillman's work sifts through the world: the personal, the political, historical, and nature slipping into line together. Often, I don't want to be handed a poem that does all the thinking for me. I like a poem that lingers, excites a questioning in me. Life brims uncertainly. The only thing we know is the details. What Sharon Olds writes seems to make herself and her history solid, then I see some moment of life in a new previously unforeseen way. Her use of metaphor stretches the image and creates a stained glass window: all the parts filled in with just a bit of different shade—everything that already was, but I couldn't see. Her similes and metaphors bring these unknown connections to light. Their poems are written on the page, but exist partly in my mind—through the act of reading. Poetry is communal, and a living art.

Recently it seems like so many poems I like from the popular magazines are full of moon and blood and bone and stars and mouth. Of course, I love these words, and they appear often in my writing, too. For a couple of years I even took blood out of every poem—because it seemed to be in all of them. Of course, these words represent so well the interconnection of poet to life to land and universe, and act as tethers to the drifting spirit—the tiny ghost within who has the slippery mouth. The words bring concrete to the abstract, and also comfort and familiarity to the page—Roethke’s and Plath’s (among others) poems are brimming with them. Working through the common language of the unconscious we are bound in their concrete simplicity; but perhaps further investigation is required to break up these archetypal impulses. Sometimes I think the words are a stand in for a greater image that has yet to be worked out or unveiled. Perhaps an incineration of archetypal language is required to get to the root. Perhaps those words just mask—create a conglomerate expression rather than explore the individual. Or, maybe they act as some kind of shield. I look at the words on my page and some days they never seem strong enough. I wonder what is it that I want (but what does the poem want!?)—and I remember that I lived in a dome of rejection; I am trying to climb out. I used the words that have pulled me through the world until now. I admire Roethke’s wanderings through language, and he did achieve that balance—delving into green shadow, and loosening to “bang and blab.” It can be difficult to sense when you are using a word just because it is familiar and brings comfort in a shadowed and lonely scene. I imagine the thousands of poems being built with this same vocabulary...is it literary tradition? Or just what’s comfortable, what is easily within reach? Must watch for that.

My truth is wired into the fractures, but I have been trying to make more declarations. Some poems seem impossible to write. They linger in the shadows. I must find a way to coax them out. The charged language, the imagery make-up the markers. It is not enough to allow the poem to

lay undisclosed and languishing in its own dense silence. Find the form for it to exist. Know that it will hide in familiar language. Keep pressing the line forward.

ONLY ONE WENT THROUGH THE GREEN DOOR

MAKE

Mother may I make a clover chain may I
braid my hair and sleep on it may I count

the waves may I wade your linseed oil streams
may I breathe

~

you kept turning off the light saying the light
was bad, there's something wrong with the light—

a little mineral spirit bored into your head
I'll wipe everything clean it said *I'll wipe everything*

~

we walked next to ruins in a park:

you caught a toad, stuck it in my hand *hold it flat*
I didn't want to touch its clammy skin

you clutched my wrist *only the wild seed grows—*
close your mouth to the water, close your ears, daughter

~

Mother may I play
upside down may I scrub your frown

may I unbutton me unbutton you
may I swallow

your stew Mother may I whorl
beneath your full moon gaze—

may I cut you out of my face

I.

I CANNOT DRIVE TO HER HOUSE

I won't enter her sparse rooms

and see her towels placed
on the floor for seats

see the words of the Shema
scrawled on her walls.

She keeps no company
except her dog, for months

she has lived in a hotel
bi-nightly, or less—only on weekends,

before that it was she and the dog
in the car eating cheap take-out sandwiches
sharing the greasy meat from inside waxed paper

but she has a place now.
I won't join them for the meal she's fixed.

~

This time it hasn't been a decade yet
since I last saw her

she is widowed,
her estranged Alaskan man dead.

We moved from empty room
to empty room in the cold
Colorado cabin where she shut the heat off

my fingers numbed as we stacked boxes
in the box truck.

I handled hundreds of packets of rosy
duck sauce and fermented soy sauce from the kitchen's drawers,
awkwardly, they slid through my fingers into the last bag of trash.

The drawer for knives burst with throw-away
plastic utensils still in cellophane, crumpled napkins,

paper packets of salt and pepper wedged into the cracks.

I would've rather closed it.

In the closet I found a blue nylon duffle bag
too hefty to lift, contents cascading:
water, canned food with the labels peeled,
a hammer, poles, and tent stakes.

~

The longer we are apart
the more I recognize
her flash in me:

I smile amused when I am not
a stunted laugh
her jangled tone
shapes my mouth.
She bubbles behind my eyes
makes the whole room foreign.
I pinch my nails into my palm
to become me again
to think like me.

Think like her
they will hold everything against you
they will send you to the doctor
they will close you in a room
they will leave us with midnight thoughts

like a tourniquet around
my throat—

a dark stone
turns in me.

~

I twist and turn my stone within

I clean it with spit
polish obsidian

someone taught me to breathe
half-breaths to keep
my lungs clenched

he says *You know you're grunting*
between each breath yes I say yes

I suffocate in the shallows
my airless head drifts

away from her away from me

give me your night eyes
give me your seeds

he doesn't hear her
in my flattened voice

none of them do

THE ROAD

and the woman and the road
and the road and woman in her car woman and her car
with her dog and the road and her dog and her breath
and the car and the lots and parks in dark
sleeping in her car and the woman and her dog living
in her car

and the woman who believes believes
the woman who flees flees past
town by town flees suburbia flees tourist nation
and believes someone everything is fake
who believes she flees to a good place
woman who believes she's doing ok living
in her car with her dog

all night i dreamed about shit and piss all night
i dreamed about leaking from my guts
i woke up burning in my head my veins
it's always the same as though inside i
hold a thought locket all night
staring across the gap vast country
threading my brain to her flash all night

on the road gray mirrors on pavement and sky of her
eyes always always peering into her lord peering
into suffering attached to peering into
suffering attached to suffering vast expanses
of peering at her lord like a locket attached
to suffering peering gray
pavement peering at stop lights suffering
signals that say don't walk holding
onto steering wheel her eyes mirrored
in the rear view

ROADSIDE WITH DITCH FLOWERS

Stop the car
in the pitch beside
the ditch: *Daucus carota*
finger their curdled
blooms and needle stems
that only the fat flies see
feed on Wild Parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*)
avoid their caution yellow cymes
Wrap your throat with Morning Glory
lick drizzle from cobalt cups

Do Not Mow

Native Restoration

posted on a sign
the fat flies insistent
as lights too shiny at night
little torpedoes of unsevered-wings
besprinkle my split
platter my bone snarl

Sarcophagidae

I spy your button eyes
with my button eyes—

RELICS NEAR GARAGE AND WATER

By the river clothes were strung
to dry on the low branches of trees.

She found the river beside a cavernous
parking garage, behind a hotel.

She parked her car full of everything
that's hers: change of shoes black faux leather
with cracked soles, mini-shampoos, small soaps
wrapped in paper, a box of maxis despite
her years of menopause, a stack
of post cards she won't send, a jar of wish
bones and feathers, a can full of paint brushes,
one tea cup trimmed in gold leaf
adorned with a rising rose.

She parked in the corner on the first floor
where light
can't penetrate the tar dark gleam.
Her chest congested
she prayed,
*Lord when will I leave
here.*
Echo of hollow garage: her face
pressed to the car window. *Lord.*

I've collected river mussels from the bank.
I cleaned them in my mouth
sucked the sand and spit the shells into my palm
to slough the echo off.

HOMELESS

She chose to live
on wildflowers and clover

She chose to drink
mud from ditches beside the road

some might question my choice to say
chose.

She chose not to take her injections.

In her eyes so blue
everything she sees and doesn't
drowns—

~

It's possible I will never see her
she always moves farther away

while she wanders I wait
for news of her death

hope she might dissolve
unnoticed except for the bit of her

I can't spit out
biting the thick of my tongue

red split in the white coating
I choke every morning

my head says quit—

SELF-REFLECTION

lately she only notices the shadow
floating beside her—in a mirror or puddle or automatic
door of the grocery the bulletproof window at a gas station
as she turns to get into the car—
shroud imitates.

one afternoon while driving she notices
a dusky mark on her forearm.
she squints closely at it.
does this arm belong to her?
she licks her skin. she feels uneasy
and smells turned yogurt or rancid noodles.
she keeps measuring its edge with her eyes.

she avoids all reflective surfaces
focuses on the blacktop stretching before her.
beside her a silver suburban blares its horn
as she sits too long lost gazing at the accumulating
shadow in the clouds above the green light.
It will make everything shiny. It will make everything stare back.

she must not touch the spot on her arm though the pulse in the bruise has become a gong. it's a
blurred moment. it reminds her of a door she once bumped into when she was saying goodbye—

when she thinks goodbye she looks at her eyes reflecting in the rearview
her own eyes telling her where to drive telling her to drive to the next where.

RECEIVING A LETTER FROM MY MOTHER, I REMEMBER

her eggs—
burgundy beet-stained and drained
of albumen, the yolk pricked.

What have I done now? she said.

She carefully drove the needle
into each end of the shell.

It took a lot of force
to blow the membrane out.

I breathe I breathe I breathe in

I admit I don't know her well.

Blue iris is my mother's favorite flower
my mother's eye has.

I am sick and of poor health, she said.

To make the egg blue she used vinegar and cabbage.
Soaked her onion peels for orange,

melted wax to trace the shapes onto the shell.
She could make them bold or delicate.

I have tried to love you, to let you know how much I love you.

If I wanted to burn my hand I'd burn my hand

form a blister on my skin and then press the pin in
and watch it seep. This is how we heal, she told me.

You don't have to drain
the egg just let it sit
eventually what's inside

will dry out.

Eras later with a gentle shake
the soft weight of emaciated yolk
will cause a dust rattle.

WHEN SHE COMES TO MY HOUSE I FEEL LIKE WEeping

She sits at my kitchen table.
I make her bone broth
soup with beets in it
as she stares through my back.

Outside coral skies: it's winter.
In the garden leaves hang
limp as peeled skins.

She doesn't speak to me
just sits at the place with the placemat
as her dog licks and licks the floor.

I'm faced with the bloodless mess of red
beet flesh on my knife
and cutting board.
It digs at my chest:

these are things we passed down,
an old recipe.
It disintegrates in me.

*I heard the door bang and bang
I heard the door as you left and left and left*

I could tell the woman that—but she doesn't
look at me. She whispers to her dog

she wouldn't be here
except it's winter and the flowers
have gone underground.

If she had something to say to me
I would write it down. Write it
over and over.

LINDA

Linda of the vacant blue Linda chewing her lips Linda of the talking mirror
Linda of slashed canvases Linda in her bare apartment Linda of empty cans
Linda of the blue iris Linda counting ragged flags Linda drinking lethal water
Linda of the quiet execution Linda of the wild grass

destitute and living in a car

a race to erase everything that is Linda

all manner of mother crumbled inside

II.

*I've had enough of death
she says, and fools you
dragging
in the wagon behind her
two corpses
identical to her
except
for their empty goblet eyes*

TRANSATLANTIC: A FAMILY STORY

She says:

They hold a gun to my father's face
because he wants to pass the line

they say women and children only

I lose my grip on my sister's hand
as we cross the river

water surrounds me: I hear my mother
and her sister crying I hear my father crying

seated in the long grass alone among the bodies
of the other young men.

"They let me go," he says, "they let me go."

We hide in the woods so long
we're so hungry we dig a grave

the men must walk ahead
I can't feel my legs to disappear
outside so long no one would recognize us.

We cross the river again
black crest bobbing my neck
my father holds my hand

I drag my sister
behind me like a doll.
I feel bones through my father's palm—

He says:

Inside the concrete block building
everything stone-washed dim
beneath flickering fluorescents
we are pinned against a chain link fence,
our shoulders bruise as we crush.

They face us from the other side
in their uniforms holding buckets.

Her dark hair falls into her face
over her dark sweater
her hand reaches to catch
crumbs they toss from their buckets
for our breakfast after our sleepless
night on the floor of this shelter
built for refugees. Detained, our skin
thickened from dehydration
pinch us, watch our flesh spike—

She says:

The rain tastes charred.
My mother calls it ruin rain
it leaves streaks of ash on our skin.

Somewhere a home is burning,
once it was ours.

Mother says she has been hungrier
she has eaten charred lumps of clay,
this is what to feed the children.

They say on the other side of the water
we won't have to dig graves.

~

When I go to school I don't speak
your language

when I go to school I don't wear underwear
you show me how to swing
how my skirt billows

my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth
you send me for speech therapy

we changed our names
we sound familiar
we are Mary and Nancy and John

now our tongues move foreign in our mouths.

We have a box of photos and names
of the ones we will never see again.

How we are burned by hot steel in the factory
and return to work.

How you say the women from my country
are crazy how the men sing and sing
and I dance
and I dance my arms streamers through the air—

He says:

What about my mouth is different
than your mouth
what about my words makes them less than

when I yell out
my tongue falls,
I bite it so hard I feel it in my spine

imagining my ribs splintered
as if I keep breathing deeper

you will open the gate—

AN APPARITION BRINGS VACANCY

A woman with blood on her lips
is stealing my groceries.

She places my baby in a brown paper bag.
She walks out the supermarket front door

Into the squint white sunlight.
The bag bursts to fire. She holds it

Above her shoulders as it crumbles to ash.
My baby blisters, tumbles to dust.

All I see of the woman is her shadow.
All I remember of the baby is hunger.

SURVEYING THE PALM

I am always settling my palm
against any solid surface.

It doesn't come naturally to me
to wave my hand half open
moonflower at dawn.

I sleep with my hands clenched—
in the morning my swollen
knuckles make a twist around a dog
leash, a door knob, a steering wheel
excruciating.

One night I woke to find
both hands balled beneath my chest.
Now I hold a rabbit foot,
fur eroded, by its chain
bracing myself for the dull
blade

I press into the heart
line's blue mountain shadow
on the edge of my palm.
I know there is birth there.

FALLING FROM HER BODY

Hear the brain bang on a rock knock knock

The womb is a picnic shelter

I unhinge both elbows

Tinnitus is a warship

My cochlear canal in spasms a slug plugs cartilage

Air shoves into me

I am wresting breath out

The rush of blood vessels: a million moth wings

All the insects tucked into tunnels

White breath of loneliness

Gas rising across stars

RENEWAL

The vulture lifts off the dead
thing in the road and hulks
gargoyle large on the gutter of a house.

She flicks her wine dark wings at me—
not at me, at the spring breeze,
her eyes scanning for what we kill
when we drive: sunbaked
remains, dried gristle.

There's blood streaked on her beak
almost dark enough for me to see.
She'll clean the bones, clear the road.

I pass her slow.
She hisses, *Daughter, daughter.*

SKIN BRANCHES

You asked: if we existed in a world without men
would you miss me?

We slept with the air between us
you cursed and threw punches as you dreamed.

I woke to a dark room
and the skin of your back
etched with branches

I hushed the worry
whirlpooling in me

you sleeping so still almost dead.
I kept blinking as the branches

fanned out, deepening
across your back into a tree.

I my dream the walls were made of silver bark
and peeled away by children:

whatever limb I had
I handed over.

I walked naked in the bare light
and wept in the window.

I was afraid my neighbor saw my breasts
all his dogs died of exposure.

I wrote on the wall to remember:

I like to watch the hawk streak in the evening—
none of my poems are about nature.

THE SCATTERING BLOOMS

Our flooded garden ripples
as though you're walking through.

I hold out my palm
to the vanishing rain.

Whose idea was it to keep a garden anyway?
I smell roses or tobacco.

Moths cluster beneath drenched crowns.

Star anise you planted delivers succulent spires of musk.

We spent the afternoons watching the Ruby-throated Hummingbird
thrust its small shape into blue sage blooms.

Rose haze tenderizes the atmosphere.

Low moan of wasp near my shoulder—is it you?

RAPTORS FIGHT ABOVE THE ROAD

Tree limbs shudder above the road,
an object explodes from the branches. It's living.
Two vultures grip each other
in claw, in talon embrace, they fall and twist
then bound onto another bough.

“What is that?” you ask me. “Looks
like buzzards,” I say, thinking
the birds of prey are the same species.
You google buzzard on your phone,
and what's pictured is too small.
“Not right,” you say.

We sit here every night, on the porch
at sunset, like leeches soaking in
the last rays of daylight.

It's difficult to explain how brutal
the birds look, a murky mass of feathers
pitch dark forms in the hackberry, wings spread,
then cocked crookedly in their ritual fight.
Or is it romance?

Through the rustle the road
is silent. Not a neighbor drives by.

Sometimes I hear them
shouting next door, from the kitchen,
the bedroom. And I wonder
if the neighbors hear us too.

The vultures bustle in the tree I wrecked
after an argument. I grabbed it and ripped.
It splintered, but didn't break off.
I looked back
at the house and wondered
if you would come after me.

What did I want with a broken tree?
Perhaps to hang from it. No one saw.
The street was quiet. And I slipped away
back to our house, leaving the wreckage.

THE SKY TURNS ORANGE ON THE EASTERN SIDE AT TWILIGHT

Scepters of fir descend the mountain
until their edges fade.
I smell of metal—my tin
fingers, silica shoulder.

What are you mountain
what are you chest what are you
breath I can't see yet fills me.
What is this I hold onto
I don't mean to hold onto. Needles

cling to pines.
They plunge in silence
and make a patch on the ground
of silence. As I walk

eyelashes shed on my cheeks.
Follower of leaf prints in a land
without fallen leaves—
I turn my hand over for a whisper
of thunder: a faint thud
in my breast when I undress and don't
want to be seen.

MEDUSA PEERS INTO THE WELL

Everything sharp surrounds my heart

I needle my heel into earth

I eat green moth

I stare into well

I put every memory I'm sick of looking at

I put mud

Hello lost stones

I slither in rain

Belly prunes

Skin carcass yellow

I see loveliness in snakes

But my crown of hiss slid

White-lips with starfish bruise cheek

Gray nails, purple-skin fingertips

My womb pit of plum

My heart snail twists in its shell

Barnacle eyes have no reflection

Moss grows that needs no sunlight

DEFINING THE SKY

On the phone
you ask me about the stars.
I say, "The sky's still light."
See cirrocumulus, see cirrus, see cirrostratus.

Beneath the clouds
the mountain is creased
like mud hardened and scraped
from the bottom of someone's shoe.

In Indiana it's the season of the glow worm
flicker flies fire at dusk
you pretend somehow it's for us.

If I were there
you would point to the largest clouds:
see cumulonimbus, see nimbostratus, see stratocumulus.

I am impressed with an unpunctuated blue
or the gray line of an impending front.

At night you'd show me
the brightest blinks of light—
a world with 67 moons.

I say, "These pinecones are extraterrestrial."
I wanted to touch them, but I refrained.
I'm used to a softer structure
of trees.

WHAT I REALLY WANTED WAS A GARDEN OF LILACS

In the stony soil of our yard
even forsythia won't grow.
I planted a jasmine
though I knew it would only last
one season. It never bloomed.

The hummingbirds won't visit
our feeder. I took it apart
and found the fake red
posies filled with ant corpses—

Lately, the garden stinks like carcass.
The bees on the coneflowers
replaced by black flies
with juicy blue-metal eyes.

You couldn't find the source
of the smell nor did you sense it.
You sprayed bleach
on the moss-slickened border bricks.
I showed you where to avoid
the spider's nest.

We sat quiet as lichen
together in the lawn
beneath navy sky laced with clouds.
Toads hiccupped and leapt
in the crabbed grass around us.

On your phone you find
a house for sale.
You show me pictures:
a bungalow, arts and crafts,
back patio surrounded by raised beds,
a koi pond glistens oily green
full of slippery orange bodies.
I shake my head, say,
"You'll have to do way better."

MATRYOSHKA

There was not a spring
just a doll locked in a box

Hating just one person can make
you hate everyone

Over and over pull the doll apart
inside
is the same doll
and she too splits open

THROUGH THE LILAC'S DRAPING BLOOMS

I part the blossoms with my finger
and peer between the petals

I take a twig in my teeth
and gently push where branches split.

In the center of the tree I find
some her that isn't me—

pale, wearing clover in a crown.
Some her that looks fuzzy in the dusk.

Incapable of stampede.
Her veins lavender pulse.

She plucks dust motes from a glade,
collects a palm full of pollen.

After a while she smothers it all over
her body.

KEEN DISSOLVE

The Sweet Gum tree had star-shaped
leaves and radiant star-ball seeds
limbs curved like women
swirling abundance of arms and legs
swirling abundance of arms and legs

I cut it down. It's freedom
to move one body away from another.

I felt something yesterday,
my liver was tender—
thrum red haze thrum spent magenta beating.

Dreaming of death is dreaming about saving
people and falling.
I know a story about the sky:

Her split lungs filled with blood.
I didn't invite her in. She wanted me to.

She won't open the envelope I sent
or open my back and see its blank dark slick.

CLOUD SEE SUN

Come up the rutted road come up the mountain
lava cliffs look-out horse pasture plateau
juniper-laced stones big as gods weathered pale.
Iron streaks the slickrock.
Beneath gold-leafed aspens grazing cattle
eyes shining black match slits
in bark's unfurling white.
This thin air alters my face until gray veils my eyes.
Should I pray? It's difficult to build a fire,
fire just goes out.

TIAMAT

no longer will I fight
the wind
when he blows into my mouth
my teeth
fall like stones
& litter the darkness

every nerve dazzles
down into my fallopian
my ova melt like berries
slink away from me

let me be viper let me be asp
to engulf him
until I splutter small gusts
into the nothing above us

AMERICAN DOMESTIC

you on your brother's
old cat scratch couch
I in my mother's
kitchen rocker

and then you leave
and I bake nothing
but burned crusts
falling through the traps

APPLE

I kneel on motel carpet
gripping datura slivered with light

there's a bible to put one hand on
reflected in the tv my face dims the screen

the headboard like open wings behind me
as if I were shadow imprinted in a lithograph stone

oil darkens the road outside my door
the engine of a truck sounds like a hurt animal—

in this room, glare through the curtain:
3 am ghost sun across his cheek

the apple on the table next to me

his palm held out, he says,
 I know what it is to forgive
but not how to.

LIVING WITH THE ALIEN

It has two purple mouths for eyes.
Two translucent tongues
loll beside my chin—it's tentacle
shoots through my ventricle,
wraps around my spine
like a newborn's grip.

Yellow fluid trickles
from its fanged mouth
panting beside my ear
where I hold my cellphone
and pretend to listen
to him
between the crackles
and pops of gnawed cartilage.

I tell him I just want
to go home and read
but instead I sleep or drink wine.
My dog waddles next to me,
buries its head in covers.

Every night at 3 a.m. I wake up
my fist balls around the alien.
Blood stiffens on my neck.

I am getting sick
of the dampness
in the middle of my chest.

I am full of words
like: clean, bills, eat, workout.

I want to feel electric as a star—
I listen to it speak between the nibbles:
fever, galaxy, darkness

attrition, pestilence, ice melt.
I wonder if I might be losing

my grip as I pour cabernet into my cup.
Probably I'm too old to be a mother now,

and it has siphoned most of my organs.
A womb is just extra space inside.

IN A POOL UNDER NO MOON

when he presses
me when he holds my head holds my hair down
with his fingers wrists chest

my voice slivers to ribbon
no air no breath a trail of snot leaks from
my face when I cough and cough the water
out, my whole body burns

with suffocation there is no exit
from the pool, and no end where my feet
can touch the bottom feel the coarse

concrete scrape small pruned toes
where sun dances and shimmers aqua
streamers on the bed and I
can see the vacuum and where the danger

is I wouldn't mind mucus slicking my face
because I'm the one trying to hold
my breath longer and longer
and he never told me to

III.

*I am no mother —
when I think of living
I think of bones.*

*We all try
to undo ourselves*

*like a daughter
with a mother*

*like a daughter
without one.*

THE ROSARY OF CLIPPED WINGS

In the sanctuary of no-constellation
she meditates on plains of nettle
piped through with shadow
her prayer darkened with no-words—

who doesn't trust the sound of her
voice who hears it and doesn't like it because
it doesn't sound like what it sounds like inside
her head—

can never be too
careful keeping the unsaid
unsaid

even the candle glass might be listening
even the mercury

CAVE CRICKET

Somewhere there must be
a mother on the street
who loves me, a mother

on the street. My mother—
nails peeling off. Old blood
stains yellow the seat of her jeans.
She won't take money only food.

She wants to be a red-
winged black bird perched
upon pussy willow
watching horse tails swat flies.

Black bird has no daughters.
The sky opens up: red wings bear
down plotting to fill my mouth
with mud, shovel it down my throat.

In the marshes she shit seeds
into me. She resurrects herself
in the damp grass, then prays.

She passes judgment: on a field mouse,
percussed toad, black beetle.
Even mud.
What are we doing?
Were we formed wombless
or born with only half
our hearts?

They will know us by the bones we leave.
White daisies rising, star flower resilient.

Her softness comes in a web
invisible, and stuck to my lips.
I stroke my face
but can't find the threads.

SHE AND I

Sometimes the I finds a way
to bleed into the she
but only one went
through the green door
and only one eats a regular breakfast.
Neither one of them sleeps
but they each have different reasons:

she prays a lot all night through the night
she believes God speaks
or someone does, she has conversations
with the room, or with her old brown dog
which eats whatever she eats.
She's married to it and the empty room.
She's made her first solid commitment
and I do not belong.

CHILDHOOD

i.

I was the child with bright red paws
Among tree roots I slumbered
Waited decades for mother to come
Mother made me black lace
Taught me love is a bruise
What kind of home is it where children daydream
About being pets
My sister wanted to be a cat
I jumped around the house gnawing on cabbage
My nickname was bunny
She got skinny I got fat

ii.

In the closed space of the upstairs hallway
At night she crossed the threshold
She came into our room
And lay in bed with my sister
Said she wanted to be the girl again
Pretended she was one of us

iii.

At the end of the world the sun

Looming orange

I stand with my mother

Her eyes glazed black

Pools looking past me

“They’re all dead” I tell her

Our shadows erased in a flash

Of radioactive brilliance

We’ll be together she says

She digs her nails like pincers into my wrist

She hands me the blue cup with the poison in it

SYRINGA VULGARIS

—I was growing horns
but they turned to twigs

they grew magnificent green in the center
they grew from my shoulders

how they must have scratched
my mother
as I traveled from her inside
out.

There is no such thing as a delicate scream.
I would like to press her mouth

until the air is out and press her and press her
like blooms in our book:

between the pages she kept
violets and clover. I tried
to press the lilacs
but their woody stems wouldn't flatten
only bend—

BROWN SKY

the sky turns brown
in the evening

unfamiliar ashen haze
new depth to the spills of winter

I had to shovel and shovel to find her
beneath the long driveway's ice pelt

whose skin is that tapered
tawny light in the atmosphere

snow falls one-sided on the tree
the storm settles the freezing comes

I see the tracks – shadows in the snow
leading towards the house

beneath the reddish haze of street lamp
the light slips off the edge of the road

I have hated every word
my mother has given me

THE ROSARY OF CLIPPED WINGS

i.

*Your father is lying, and his father before him lied,
your grandmother is lying, your other grandmother is lying,
your aunts and your uncles are lying, the doctors are lying,
your friends and my friends are lying, the government and
the President are lying, the police are lying, your teachers
are lying. Trust no one. Believe no one
but me.*

ii.

*what an evil ugly girl you are
what a hateful evil girl you're full of hate
you're so miserable you're embarrassing you know nothing
nothing nothing listen to me you are so stupid you
know nothing at all are you listening
all you do is embarrass me how could you write this
you don't care about anything you don't love me
you're stealing from me you're the reason I can't paint you're stealing my ideas
you look hideous don't eat that you're too fat why aren't you eating this
I made this for you you have no idea what I've done for you you don't care for me at all
you're just full of lies you're just like your father you're just like them a liar
you're full of shit*

iii.

*if you don't leave with me
you're going to Hell
He's going to destroy everything
everyone will be dead
just wait it's happening
none of this world will exist you won't exist you don't exist
unless you come with me to the woods come with me
we have to wait in the woods He's coming for me
and he'll come for you too, if you come with me
I wish I could make you see why don't you see
we have to wait in the woods with the bible*

*I love you so much
I just want you to be saved.*

iv.

*Don't come near me Raven
I knew it was too late for you*

Take this bible maybe it's not too late

*Everybody is going to be dead this world won't be anymore
it will be His
as He provides for the birds of the field
He provides for me.*

v.

*You have no idea what I've been through
but you'll see don't forget
it's hereditary.*

MIRROR MOON

Her last visit she seemed sexless
dressed in layers
of shabby black
her thin head a floating skull
detached from any mother.

She gave me a book
for a baby—
on its cover the moon had a face
in a dazzling sapphire sky,

she told me how I'd been
loved
by the Father —
— no

I was a thief curled in her mind
swiping out her dreams at night.

She threw the dishes at me
she punched her hand through the storm
door, through the bathroom mirror.

I know her divisions
her black hair parted long
the small bouquet of moles on her belly.

In the world behind the mirror:
I see a halo moon above
a metal rail—

every memory silver plated
every dinner perfectly ended
without any personal disclosures.

FOR MY MOTHER IN THE DRAIN

Occasionally you rise
from the drain like a beetle.

I turn on the water,
drown you again.

Tiny fungus fibers line the pipe.
Your shed skin is pungent.

I pour bleach down the hole
to mask the smell.

Sometimes your blue eye
peeps at me

to blink a message: *Love*
bearth all things, belieeth
all things, endureth all things.

I jab at it with my pinky nail, force it back.
Don't tell me about love.

VIVISECTION

Through the doors the light disappears.
Turning the corner, I find myself
in shadows—

I see her body pressed between the glass,
her abdomen sliced, divided
see her dead and damp

on the walls she's hung
it's grotesque to see her spread like that

her outline, her skin's tenuous stretch, poke my arm
with my fingertip, pinch my belly.

The color of her dulled by formaldehyde
her organs and tissues brown and beige
swirls—a trail of veins, like rocks, like agate.

What are we doing in this room
with this corpse woman—
is she mother or is she me?

She left me, she took the dog—

I BRUSH MY HAIR TO SHED THE DEAD

strands and think how old hair isn't lovely
not like leaves falling

in these winter nights of freezing fog
only half the trees have lost their leaves

discarded strands wrap around the brush handle
find their way under the covers of the bed

impossible to untangle
every feeling in a day

I keep brushing but never shampoo
I think tomorrow

I will dunk my head in the stream
where the ice melts and leaves clump

I will let my knees sink deep into the umber
then barefoot in the ripples wade

trying to hear you coming
in the rattling leaves.